A Seed Found Its Ground: John Dewey and the Construction of the Department of Education at Beijing Normal University

LIU Xing
Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
liuxing@bnu.edu.cn

Abstract

Education did not exist as an independent field of studies in Chinese universities before Dewey's visit to China in 1919. Dewey's support accelerated the establishment of the Department of Education at Beijing Normal University (BNU), which was the first one in China. Dewey's book *Democracy and Education* was used as a textbook, encyclopedia, and introduction to this modern discipline during his one-year BNU course, “Philosophy of Education.” BNU survived the 1922 Act and its education department became a stable and growing institution where Dewey's ideas were studied and taught, which helped to keep Dewey's influence in China strong and long lasting.

Keywords

John Dewey – Beijing Normal University – *Democracy and Education* – Chang Daozhi

1 Introduction

It is undeniable that John Dewey has greatly influenced Chinese education ever since 1919, when he and his wife Alice began their 2-year visit to Japan and China (Tian, 2013: 185). Dewey's time in China is constantly being discussed in historical and educational studies (Peters, 2019; Wang, 2007; Zhang, 2013).

In the mainstream education discourse, it is said that Dewey and his pragmatic educational theory to a great extent have “an anti-traditional and

---

1 This project was supported by China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (No. 2018M641232).
progressive character” (Tian, 2013: 184). If there is a so-called “new–old” spectrum of education, Dewey will undoubtedly be placed at the “new” end of the spectrum. Most studies of Dewey’s Chinese stay also view his educational influence in China from this angle; i.e., the narrative of Dewey’s influence in China is always presented from “anti-” or “pro-” perspectives. In a widely read textbook, e.g., “Dewey advocated an American democracy of capitalism, criticizing the feudalist system” in China and “he went against any dogmatic education, emphasizing the importance of combination of education and society” (Tian, 2013: 308–310).

This prevailing idea is partly correct because education was not a formal discipline in China before Dewey’s arrival and his educational theory had no rivals at that time. More importantly, Dewey contributed to the founding of the first education department in a Chinese university and of education as a discipline in China. Based on this starting point, this article will offer a different narrative of Dewey’s influence in China.

2 The Emerging Idea of Education as a Discipline in China

In 1901, Japanese scholar Tachibana Sensaburo’s (立花铣三郎) book, Education, which was translated by Wang Guowei (王国维), was published in Shanghai.2 This event was generally recognized as the starting point for the introduction of foreign educational ideas into China. In the next year, the Imperial University of Peking was reestablished after the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901)3 and comprised a Normal School (师范馆) and an Officials School (仕学馆).4 The former school, which is the predecessor of today’s Beijing Normal University (BNU), was the earliest teacher training institute in China. Some Japanese professors were hired to give courses on education and psychology. It is worth noting that these education courses were only supplemental courses at the Imperial University. History or physics students only attended these courses to learn some basic educational ideas or methods to assist their future

2 Recent studies have observed that Education was also a translation into Japanese of Swiss educationist Hans Rudolf Rüegg’s (1824–1898) German language book. This will be an interesting tangent for further studies in educational history from a global perspective.

3 In 1900, Beijing was successively seized by the Boxers and foreign armies during the Boxer Rebellion. “The dormitories of the Imperial University of Peking were occupied and used as barracks by the Russian armies, while teachers and students of the Imperial University were scattered, books and experimental instruments either destroyed or lost. This caused the two-year suspension of teaching at the Imperial University” (Hao, 2013: 242).

4 The Officials School was “in fact an accelerated training class for government officials” (Hao, 2013: 269).
teaching work (Hao, 2013: 226–227). Even in 1908, when the Normal School separated from the Imperial University of Peking and became an independent institution of higher education, this curriculum structure did not change at all.

There may be several reasons for this lack of change in the curriculum structure, but the most important reason might be that education had not yet been recognized as a field of professional studies worthy of an independent major or university department. At that time, “few intellectuals recognized the value of educational studies” (Hou, 2009: 110). Chinese classical scholars who received strict academic training for several decades and enjoyed a great reputation among intellectuals always disparaged education as a kind of less-prestigious “practical” knowledge. In her excellent monograph, An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research, Lagemann (2002: 7–17) described a similar story in the United States during the 1890s. Education scholars in this time had to struggle very hard to obtain respect for their identities and positions among their university colleagues. The Teachers College at Columbia University played a pathfinding role in this process and its most iconic figure, John Dewey, gradually became famous in educational studies since about 1902, when The Child and the Curriculum was officially published. In the early 1900s, Dewey emerged in the fields of logic and the philosophy of education “as a leading progressive intellectual and a national figure” (Rockefeller, 1991: 223).

In this sense, it is quite difficult to say whether there were any “old” ideas or schools of education in China when Dewey arrived. Nevertheless, education was always a hot topic for public discussion. In particular, “in 1905, the Chinese Government abolished the Imperial Examination (科举), which brought a burst of articles on education” (Zuo, 2017: 22). Nevertheless, there was no institution for educational studies and education was not treated as a problem that needed professional or systematic analyses, i.e., education discussions were conducted solely at the practical level. The emerging idea of education as a discipline had not yet fully developed at this stage.

3 Dewey and BNU

The five institutions that officially invited Dewey to China did not include BNU. A leading higher education institution in South China, Nanjing Normal
University (NNU), played a more active role in this process in cooperation with National Peking University (NPU) from the very beginning. These institutions invited Dewey to China mainly because the president of NNU, Guo Bingwen (郭秉文) and a leading figure at NPU, Hu Shi (胡适) were both Teachers College graduates from Columbia University who had studied with Dewey. However, most BNU professors of the time had graduated from Japanese universities. As Dewey discovered himself, the returned students from Japan were “all at loggers with the returned students from America” (Hickman, 2002, no. 11757). These two former students of Dewey invited him to come to China when they learned that he would be visiting Japan. Dewey “entertained the idea of visiting China in the summer before returning to the United States, but he did not know how long he could stay” and “needed to evaluate the prospects in China to make an informed decision” (Wang, 2007: 3). In a letter to his adopted son, Sabino, Dewey expressed his mixed feelings: “the only trouble is that I shall have to lecture all the time to help even up. I don’t know the program exactly, but I know it calls for lectures in Shanghai, Nanking and Peking and I assume other places. You look up your geography and you will see how far apart the places are” (Hickman, 2002, no. 03892).

However, history intervened with its own dramas. Dewey encountered the May Fourth Movement in China, which was the climax of the student movement in China. He was greatly impressed and moved by this movement and felt that there was a possibility of democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” in China. He then decided to extend his stay (Liu, 2016: 26–29).

In some BNU professors’ eyes, Dewey’s coming was probably a ray of hope because the education field was facing a serious identity crisis. In the 1915 National Educational Meeting, some delegates questioned whether a normal university deserved to be an independent institution and should not just become a school of education in a comprehensive university. Not only was education as a subject disdained, normal university, as its matrix, also faced a similar situation. A fierce debate had raged since 1915 and finally after the 1922 Act

---

6 “On May Fourth, 1919, the date by which the May Fourth Movement took its name, more than three thousand students in Beijing held a mass demonstration against the decision of the Versailles Peace Conference to transfer German concessions in Shantung to Japan. With their dream of world peace shattered by this unjust treaty, the students were mortified and outraged. To protest against Japanese imperialism and government corruption, they took to the streets and even burned the house of one corrupt pro-Japanese official. The students’ expression of patriotism and zeal for reform triggered similar demonstrations throughout China over the next few weeks” (Liu, 2016: 21).
A Seed Found Its Ground

beijing international review of education 1 (2019) 695-713

(壬戌学制), all six national normal universities were abolished or combined into comprehensive universities, with the exception of BNU. The president of BNU, Chen Baoquan (陈宝泉), fought a lonely battle in his painstaking efforts to help his university survive the reform. One of these efforts was to found a new Department of Education because Chen (1996) realized that “our graduates were trained to teach subjects; but without a department of education, our educational academic would have no progress” (p. 91). This department was set up to prove the value of modern educational studies and the value of the normal university, which should be considered equal to any other universities. Chen probably had this idea in 1915 when he tried but failed to establish a preparatory department of education (Zhang, 2011: 113). Therefore, when Dewey became a nationally recognized icon of education in China, Chen did not hesitate to take this opportunity to strengthen BNU’s status.

Dewey arrived in Shanghai on April 30, 1919. After a 1-month stay in South China, he came to Beijing on May 31st. It is hard to date when the BNU faculty first contacted Dewey. Since the focus of Dewey’s first lecture in China (Shanghai, May 3, 1919) was on education and a nationwide Dewey fad had formed in a short time through the media, it is reasonable to presume that the BNU faculty were aware of Dewey’s presence in China. The earliest record related to Dewey and BNU is that he visited BNU on July 4th at the invitation of “the head of the industrial department” to celebrate the students who had built “three new school buildings” by themselves (Hickman, 2002, no. 10769). On November 12th, Dewey wrote a letter to his American friend William A. Wirt, who...

---

7 The 1922 Act was a national school reform act issued by the President of the Republic of China in 1922. Using learnings from the American experience, a 6–3–3 system based on 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high school, and 3 years of high school was introduced into China with the 1992 Act. This 6–3–3 system was a great achievement of this Act and is still in use today. The 1922 Act allowed two ways for the development of normal universities: 1, to continue as an independent institution; or 2, to become a school of education in a comprehensive university, similarly to Teachers College at Columbia University. However, most normal universities could not obtain enough financial support and were at a serious disadvantage, which meant that the 1992 Act helped comprehensive universities to absorb most normal universities.

8 NNU (南京高师) closed in 1922, Shenyang Normal University (沈阳高师) in 1923, Guangdong Normal University (广东高师) and Wu Chang Normal University (武昌高师) in 1924, and Chengdu Normal University (成都高师) in 1931. Chengdu Normal University was the last because it was far from the central government’s control (Wang, 2005: 91–97).

9 This department head was probably Samuel M. Dean, an American professor of industrial training program (ABNU, No. 1-0086-0001). His Chinese name is “丁蔭” (Ding Yin). He also worked for Yenching University (燕京大学) in China.
was the superintendent of public schools in Gary City, Indiana, to introduce the BNU president, Chen Baoquan, who was visiting the States to investigate American education (Hickman, 2002, no. 05021).

Three years later, on April 3rd, 1922, when 16 graduates obtained the first bachelor degrees of education in China, Prof. Deng Cuiying (邓萃英) from BNU said at the graduation ceremony that “dystocia happened quite a lot of times before our department was born,” and he added, “before that, President Chen discussed with me about the department of education quite a lot, and Mr. Dewey lent us a hand” (Huang, 1922a: 32).

As stated above, Dewey did not have a clear program for his lectures even when he first arrived in China. His great fame brought him numerous invitations to speak. Dewey was exhausted by delivering numerous speeches to unknown audiences out of politeness. While his affection for China deepened during the May Fourth Movement, the unsettled situation of this great student movement also caused difficulties for his series of lectures on “Philosophy of Society and Politics” at NPU. In an August 1, 1919 letter to his Colombia colleague, Wendell Bush, Dewey complained that “it still isn’t certain under just what auspices my lectures will be given” (Hickman, 2002, no. 05019).

Against this background, Dewey had sufficient reason to accept BNU’s invitation to give a one-year course on the philosophy of education from 1920. This would have relieved the economic pressure from having to accept invitations to deliver exhausting public speeches.10

On November 8, 1919, the new Department of Education at BNU was approved by the Ministry of Education as the first education department in China.11 In December 1919, BNU published a new journal called The BNU Educational Record (《北京高师教育丛刊》) (Figure 1). The opening article of the first issue was BNU President Chen’s “A Plan to reform Normal Education”

---

10 Dewey’s family budget was insufficient even before going to Japan. “In fact, he could not have afforded the trip to Japan if his close friend, Albert C. Barnes, had not offered financial support” (Wang, 2007: 4). While in China, Dewey actually was not paid by NPU after he gave lectures there. In a September 12, 1920 letter to Barnes, Dewey said that, “last year I was paid by private societies, but this year by the Government University” (Hickman, 2002, no. 04102). Dewey continually asked about the status of his stocks in his letters to his family (Hickman, 2002, no. 03910), which was probably because of his financial concerns.

11 NNU provided a junior college degree of education (教育专修科) from 1918. In 1921, however, NNU was folded into National Southeastern University, which was a comprehensive university with five departments, including an education department. This was the second Department of Education in China. The third was established at Chengdu Normal University in 1929. The three other national normal universities did not have independent education departments.
in which he emphasized that the newborn education department would promote educational studies instead of pedagogical training for particular subjects. Following Chen's article, half of the remaining articles in the first issue of the journal were about Dewey’s thought. Some articles introduced Dewey’s ideas on vocational education (“Dr. Dewey’s opinion of vocational education,”《杜威博士对于实业教育之意见》), while one article translated a note from Dewey’s lectures in Japan12 (“Dewey’s Lecture: The Objectives of Science Education,”《杜威演讲理科教育之目的》), which was originally published in Japanese. Although most of the

---

12 This note was originally produced by Professor Yoshida Kumaji (吉田熊次) at Tokyo Imperial University. The Chinese translator was Chen Jianshan (陈兼善), a student at the Department of Zoology, BNU.
BNU teachers were trained in Japanese higher education institutes, this journal showed that they were anxious to innovate educational studies in China with the foundation of the new Department of Education and the active introduction of Dewey’s educational theory.

In the spring of 1920, 18 students\textsuperscript{13} were enrolled in the BNU Department of Education. Their program of studies was recorded on their official transcripts, which were collected in Box No. 1-0123-0001 in the BNU Archives. A model student is Chang Daozhi (常道直) who later became a famous expert on Dewey in China. His courses included Philosophy, Philosophy of Education, Aesthetics, Educational Theory, History of Education, Modern Education, Sociology, Educational Hygiene, Elementary Pedagogy, English, and Biology. These subjects were marked with an asterisk, which referred to an interesting marginal note in his transcript: “* means before June 1921, those courses had no examinations. Therefore, these credits were given directly” (ABNU, no. 1-0123-0001).\textsuperscript{14} Box No. 1-0124-0001 belongs to the 1923 Alumni and clearly shows that all courses adopted the centesimal system. Considering the crisis of legitimacy that BNU was facing in that period, it can be reasonably presumed that the BNU Department of Education was established in such haste that its curriculum was not prepared fully, in particular, the method of evaluation. The BNU faculty did not establish a fixed evaluation system until the following year. Chang took the Philosophy of Education course taught by Dewey in addition to Elementary Pedagogy taught by Alice Dewey (ABNU, no. 1-0087-0001), with only two asterisks in his transcript. We can imagine that Dewey’s audience at his formal lectures from September 1920 at BNU (ABNU, no. 1-0087-0001) comprised a group of young students\textsuperscript{15} from the newborn education department.

4 Democracy and Education

Dewey was fortunate in having Chang as his student at BNU because Chang took notes from Dewey’s lectures and serialized them over almost a whole year

\textsuperscript{13} Two students discontinued their studies; therefore, only 16 students graduated in 1922.

\textsuperscript{14} It might be useful to note that Chang’s other courses of History of Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Psychology, Educational Psychology, Psychology of Children, Psychological Measurement, Applied Psychology, Educational Sociology, Educational Administration, Educational Statistics and Principles of Teaching had relevant scores, ranging from A to C. Those courses were taken in his second year. It helps us to understand those graduates’ knowledge structure.

\textsuperscript{15} Chang Daozhi was born in 1897; therefore, he was 23 years old when attending Dewey’s BNU course. He possibly could not even imagine in 1920 that his career would be very closely tied to Dewey for the rest of his life.
in a BNU journal, *Democracy and Education* (《平民教育》) from December 20, 1920 to November 10, 1921.\(^\text{16}\) Those notes were assembled into a book and published in 1922 as *Democracy and Education* (《平民主义与教育》)\(^\text{17}\) similarly to Dewey's most famous monograph, originally published in 1916. Dewey (2016) wrote an introduction and thanked Chang “for the pains he has taken in reporting his lectures and in translating them into Chinese in order to make them available to a larger audience” (p. 11).

In his preface, Chang clearly explained that Dewey used his 1916 *Democracy and Education* as the textbook for his course. Most records of Dewey’s teaching style suggest that his teaching method was somewhat dull because he just read the prepared materials to his audience in most instances (Rockefeller, 1991: 353). Therefore, we may reasonably assume that Dewey also read his book during his BNU course, but with additions or deletions corresponding to the Chinese context. Therefore, Chang’s notes (Figure 2) were closely derived from Dewey’s original 1916 English work and Dewey’s teaching at BNU did not stray far from that text.\(^\text{18}\)

Why did Dewey choose *Democracy and Education* as his textbook for BNU? Was it chosen randomly or with some specific considerations?

While we will not summarize Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* here, the contents of the book were shown in Table 1. These contents indicate that this book was very close to being an encyclopedia of education for the time. Statements can be found for nearly all of the current theoretical or practical educational topics and problems. Both traditional and hot topics, such as Plato’s educational ideas and vocational education, respectively, were also discussed. As used in university lectures, this encyclopedia becomes an education textbook because it introduces the whole field of education. In addition, *Democracy and Education* was originally published as a textbook. The first edition of this book was published in a textbook series\(^\text{19}\) edited by Dr. Paul Monroe with the assistance of the publisher, Macmillan.

---

16 Before going back to America, Dewey once joked with his daughters: “Can you wonder I hate to leave a country where educational lectures are treated as news?” (Hickman, 2002, no. 03964).

17 The Chinese name of this book is *Pinminzhuyi and Jiaoyu* (《平民主义与教育》), *Jiaoyu* means education, while in modern Chinese, *pinminzhuyi* is a little distant from “democracy,” but closer to “education for the poor.”

18 Unfortunately, the available space here does not permit a detailed comparative study between Chang’s notes and Dewey’s original monograph. However, it is worth noting that both of them actually share a similar structure. See Table 1.

19 The front page of the 1916 edition of *Democracy and Education* shows that the other contributors to this textbook series were Ellwood Cubberley, Edward Elliott, Ernest Henderson, and Willystine Goodsell.
Writing a textbook differs from writing a scholarly monograph. The style of writing in most instances is strictly regulated and the author is expected to write in a more structured way to offer readers clear ideas and a complete structure for a particular field. From this perspective, Dewey’s writing style in *Democracy and Education* is understandably a little different from his other works. For example, every chapter ends with a summary, which makes it a more reader-friendly textbook. Finally, it was a large book at over 400 pages. Thus, Dewey obviously wanted to cover nearly all educational topics in this volume.

Several years before writing *Democracy and Education*, Dewey was invited by Dr. Paul Monroe to contribute to *A Cyclopedia of Education*, which was published by the same publisher, Macmillan, from 1911. Dewey contributed lexical
| Chapter | The Notes (1922) | Corresponding Chapter | The Book (1916) |
|---------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| I       | Education and Life | I                      | Education as a Necessity of Life |
| II      | Education and Environment | II                  | Education as a Social Function |
| III     | Education as Growth | IV                     | Education as Growth |
| IV, V   | Criticisms on Different Educational Ideas | V                   | Preparation, Unfolding, and Formal Discipline |
| VI, VII | Democracy in Education | VII                  | The Democratic Conception in Education |
| VIII    | Aims of Education | VIII                  | Aims of Education |
| IX      | Natural Development as Aim | IX                   | Natural Development and Social Efficiency as Aims |
| X       | Social Efficiency as Aim |                      | |
| XI      | Culture as Aim |                       | |
| XII     | Interest and Discipline | X                    | Interest and Discipline |
| XIII    | Experience and Thinking | XI                   | Experience and Thinking |
| XIV, XV | Thinking in Education | XII                  | Thinking in Education |
| XVI     | The Nature of Method | XIII                 | The Nature of Method |
| XVII    | The Nature of Subject | XIV                  | The Nature of Subject Matter |
| XVIII   | Play and Work | XV                    | Play and Work in the Curriculum |
| XIX     | Geography and History | XVI                  | The Significance of Geography and History |
TABLE 1  
The respective chapters of Chang Daozhi’s note on Democracy and Education and Dewey’s Original Book (cont.)

| Chapter | The Notes (1922)                          | Corresponding Chapter | The Book (1916)                          |
|---------|------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| XX      | Science                                  | XVII                   | Science in the Course of Study           |
| XXI     | Educational Value                        | XVIII                  | Educational Value                        |
| XXII    | Labor and Leisure                        | XIX                    | Labor and Leisure                        |
| XXIII   | Intellectual and Practical Subjects      | XX                     | Intellectual and Practical Studies       |
| XXIV    | Physical and Social Subjects             | XXI                    | Physical and Social Subjects             |
| XXV     | The Individual and the World             | XXII                   | The Individual and the World             |
| XXVI    | Vocational Education                     | XXIII                  | Vocational Aspects of Education          |
| XXVII   | Philosophy of Education                  | XXIV                   | Philosophy of Education                  |
| XXVIII  | Epistemology and Ethics                  | XXV                    | Theories of Knowledge                    |
|         |                                          |                        | Theories of Morals                       |

(Dewey, 1916; 2016)

items, such as accommodation, activity, adaptation, and adjustment. One example is presented here. “Adaptation” was defined by Dewey as:

the maintenance of life requires an adaptation of the organism to its surroundings, of the human individual to the natural and social medium in which he is placed. Disturbance of adaptation means disease – physical, mental, moral; and though the capacity of human beings to adapt themselves to abnormal condition is very great, maladjustment, if extreme and long continued, results in death or arrest of growth. The entire process of EDUCATION man properly be regarded as a process of securing

---

20 Dewey’s writings in *A Cyclopedia of Education* can be found in volumes 6 and 7 of the middle works of John Dewey, *Collected Works of John Dewey*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston.
the conditions that make for the most complete and effective adaptation of individuals to their physical and moral environment” (Boydston, 1978, MW, Vol. 6: 364).

These sentences evoke the first chapter of *Democracy and Education*, “Education as a Necessity of Life”:

As long as it endures, it struggles to use surrounding energies in its own behalf. It uses light, air, moisture, and the material of soil. To say that it uses them is to say that it turns them into means of its own conservation. As long as it is growing, the energy it expends in thus turning the environment to account is more than compensated for by the return it gets: it grows. Understanding the word “control” in this sense, it may be said that a living being is one that subjugates and controls for its own continued activity the energies that would otherwise use it up. Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment (Dewey, 1916: 1–2).

Dewey’s fundamental concepts, like “adaptation,” had already been shaped at least since 1911 and he had been training himself in the writing style we can find in *Democracy and Education* by contributing to *A Cyclopedia of Education* before 1911. Thus, *Democracy and Education* combined both a textbook and an encyclopedia. In this sense, a contemporary philosopher of education, Biesta (2006) is correct when he says:

I have to confess that when I first read the book [*Democracy and Education*] as an undergraduate, I found it quite boring. In its attempt to cover almost everything there was to say about education past and present, the book didn’t stand out – or at least not to me and not at the time – as making a particular point in the educational discussion or taking a particular position in the educational field (p. 23).

However, Dewey was drawing on a blank canvas at BNU. He was teaching at a newborn education department, which was the first and only one in China. Therefore, when Dewey began his lectures for the first freshmen in educational studies, he was not eager to peddle his own or pragmatic ideas. He used *Democracy and Education* as a textbook to give his students a bird’s eye-view of the field of education instead of “taking a particular position in the educational field.”
The structure of Chang Daozhi’s notes published in 1922 left some clues. For example, chapters v and vi of his 1916 book were rearranged into one chapter in the notes with a clearer title: “Criticisms on Different Educational Ideas.” Dewey introduced six kinds of understanding about education and their relationship: “Preparation,” “Unfolding,” “Training of Faculties,” “Formation,” “Recapitulation and Retrospection,” and “Reconstruction.” Froebel, Hegel, Locke, Herbart, and Hall21 were also introduced as representative theorists.

Another of Dewey’s obvious revisions in the notes was that Chapter IX of his book was split up into three chapters. Thus, Dewey could have one independent presentation at BNU to deal with Rousseau under the title of Natural Development. In addition, Dewey had more time to introduce two prevailing American ideas to his students, i.e., social efficiency and culture.

In brief, Dewey attempted to ensure that every important theory and topic was introduced to his Chinese students during his one-year course. Therefore, Dewey did not teach his books with more Deweyan or pragmatic characteristics, like Child and Curriculum or The School and Society, nor his latest lecture at Tokyo Imperial University, Reconstruction in Philosophy.

This was the first time that Western educational theories were systematically introduced and educational problems were expressed and analyzed in such a systematic way in Chinese universities. The lexical items of Accommodation, Activity, Democracy, Experience, Education as Preparation, and Education as Reconstruction became critical concepts for those Chinese students when dealing with educational problems in China. When one of the students at the BNU Department of Education, Huang Gongjue (黄公觉), began to use what he had learned to write some educational reviews, he admitted that “for anyone who wants to study modern educational thoughts, it is better to start from Dewey” (Huang, 1922b: 8).

Thus, Dewey did not intend to advocate his own theories or oppose any traditional education models as the flagbearer of a new education model, as assumed by many. Dewey was introducing education as a modern university discipline to China, which is why he chose Democracy and Education for the BNU course textbook.

21 Stanley Hall (1844–1924) was mentioned in the notes, but not in the book. Dewey probably wanted his Chinese students to learn about this famous contemporary psychologist.
5 The Significance of the Department of Education

On June 30, 1921, before Dewey returned to America, a big farewell party in Beijing was attended by about 80 people. Hu Shi and Liang Qichao (梁启超) gave speeches appreciating Dewey’s contribution to the communication between Western and Eastern philosophies and cultures. However, the BNU representative, Prof. Deng Cuiying talked from a different perspective. He said that “Mr. Dewey is an educator, while BNU is a university for pure educational studies. Therefore, we cooperated very well.” Another adjunct professor at BNU, Wu Zhuosheng (吴卓生) observed that:

Chinese people used to respect education, but they only respect teachers, instead of the profession of education. They thought teaching is a job with low professional status and everyone can do it. When I studied education in America, some people in China even suspected: does education need any study? (Hu, 2003: 329–333). 22

Dewey’s work at BNU changed some people’s bias about educational studies. Different people comprehended Dewey’s influences from different aspects. However, Dewey’s most important contribution at BNU was the construction of an education department and building the idea of education as a modern discipline.

Dewey himself also had similarly warm feelings about his time at BNU. Eight days earlier, on June 22nd, when Dewey delivered his last speech to his BNU audience, he said:

I will keep those students from the Department of Education at BNU in my mind forever. I feel very lucky, for I had a chance to teach them for more than one year and had close connections with all of them. They had rich teaching experience, while now they are promoting educational scholarship. They come from different provinces, or we should call them representatives of their provinces. Their experience at BNU will make them the core force of the future reform (Wang, 1921: 51). 23

---

22 The Dean of the NPU Department of Education during the 1930s, Wu Junsheng (1976) claimed that “Hu Shi himself did not view educational studies as important as it seems” (p. 55).

23 Dewey’s words were retranslated from Wang Zhuoran’s Chinese note.
Thus, Dewey also expected his BNU students to realize their ideals as educational researchers in the future.

On April 3, 1922, a solemn ceremony was held at BNU to celebrate the graduation of the first 16 students to get a bachelor’s degree from the Department of Education. After their graduation, most of these students did not disappoint Dewey and became pioneering Chinese educational scholars and practitioners, like Chang Daozhi who became a professor of education at East China Normal University, another leading Shanghai teacher training institution. Hu Guoyu (胡国钰) became a professor of educational psychology at Northwest Normal University, which still plays an important role in educational studies and teacher training in western China. Fang Yongzheng (方永蒸) was appointed as the principal of the High School affiliated with BNU and greatly influenced the way this high school was run. These graduates were the first generation of Chinese educational researchers to receive academic training in education in China.

1922 also witnessed a new Act, which led to five of the six national normal universities to close or be combined into comprehensive universities. This period was a great shock to Chinese education, particularly teacher training programs. Only BNU survived. The BNU Department of Education, as President Chen foresaw, contributed much to the academic reputation of not only educational studies as a discipline, but also the perception of BNU as a normal university. The BNU Department of Education also became the only stable and lasting institution where educational studies were taught and conducted in this period. Therefore, Dewey’s efforts to introduce education as a discipline at BNU were not in vain. Not only did the first graduate generation from this department, but also their successors, continue to read Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* as their first textbook, and used Dewey’s core concepts, like “experience” and “learning by doing,” to analyze Chinese educational problems. More generations of educational researchers were trained here and consciously or unconsciously spread Dewey’s ideas.

---

24 An independent normal university is not necessarily better than a school of education in a comprehensive university, but considering the situation of twentieth century China, the 1922 Act shocked Chinese education with the closing of normal universities. With government support, normal universities used to be free of charge, which attracted a lot of excellent students from poor families to become teachers. However, fewer people were attracted to them after the reform and teacher professionalism was delayed greatly (Liu & Xie, 2002: 99–100).

25 For example, Chang Daozhi was still studying Dewey’s theory even in 1960. He guided a graduate student to write her dissertation under the title of *A study of Dewey’s Learning by Doing* (《杜威“做中学”理论研究》). However, political changes disturbed the writing of her dissertation (Chang, 2018: vi).
6 Conclusion

Education did not exist as an independent field of studies in Chinese universities until Dewey’s visit to China in 1919. Dewey’s fame accelerated the founding of the bnu Department of Education, which was the first education department in China. Dewey’s book Democracy and Education was used at his one-year bnu course “Philosophy of Education” as a textbook, encyclopedia, and introduction to this modern discipline, which greatly shaped Chinese people’s knowledge of education from the very beginning. bnu survived the 1922 Act and its education department became a stable and growing institution where Dewey’s ideas were studied and taught. Thus, Dewey’s influence in China was kept strong and long-lasting.

References

Archives of Beijing Normal University (abnu), Beijing: Beijing Normal University.
Biesta, Gert (2006). “Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful”: The Communicative Turn in Dewey’s Democracy and Education. In Hansen, D.T. (Ed.). (2006). John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect: A Critical Engagement with Dewey’s Democracy and Education. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
Boydston, Jo Ann (ed.) (1978). The Collected Works of John Dewey. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
Chang, Daozhi (2018). Educational Writings of Daozhi Chang. Shanghai: East China Normal University. (常态道直︰<em>大夏教育文存·常道直卷</em>，上海︰华东师范大学出版社，2018年版。).
Chen, Baoquan (1996). Educational Writings of Baoquan Chen. Beijing: People’s Education Press. (陈宝泉︰<em>陈宝泉教育论著选</em>，北京︰人民教育出版社，1996年版。).
Dewey, John (1916). Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. New York: The Macmillan Company.
Dewey, John (2016). Chang, Daozhi (Trans.). Democracy and Education. Fuzhou: Fujian Educational Publishing House. (杜威︰《平民主义与教育》，常道直译，福州︰福建教育出版社，2016年版。).
Hao, Ping (2013). Shen, Yuping (Trans.). Peking University and the Origins of Higher Education in China. Beijing: Peking University Press.
Hickman, Larry (ed.) (2002). The Correspondence of John Dewey [CD-ROM]. Charlottesville: InteLex.
Hou, Huaiyin (2009). The Path of Chinese Education. Hefei: Anhui Educational Publishing House. (侯怀银︰<em>中国教育学之路</em>，合肥︰安徽教育出版社，2009年版。).
Hu, Shi (2003). *The Collected Works of Hu Shi*. Hefei: Anhui Educational Publishing Press. (胡适︰《胡适全集》，合肥︰安徽教育出版社，2003年版。).

Huang, Gongjie (1922a). The first Educational Bachelor Degree Conferral Ceremony in China. *Democracy and Education*, 51: 25–32. (黄公觉︰《中国第一次授教育学士学位典礼纪盛》，《平民教育》，1922年第51号，第25–32页。)

Huang, Gongjie (1922b). The recent Trends of Educational Thoughts. *The Chinese Educational Review*, 14(9): 1–8. (黄公觉︰《最近教育思潮的趋势》，《教育杂志》，1922年第14卷第9号，第1–8页。)

Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe (2002). *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Liu, Jie & Xie, Weihe (2002). *Inside and Outside of the Fence: A Reflection upon the 100 years Chinese Normal Education*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group. (刘捷,谢维和︰《栅栏内外︰中国高等师范教育百年省思》，北京︰北京师范大学出版社，2002年版。)

Liu, Xing. (2016). *How History Created its own Dramas: A Study of John Dewey’s Experiences in his 1919 Visits in Japan and China*. *The Journal of Northeast Asian History*, 13 (2): 9–31.

Peters, Michael A. (2019). 100 Years of Dewey in China, 1919–1921 A-Reassessment. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 1 (1): 9–26.

Rockefeller, Steven C. (1991). *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tian, Zhengping (ed.) (2013). *General History of Chinese Education, Volume 12: Republic of China*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing Group. (田正平︰《中国教育通史·第十二卷︰中华民国卷》，北京︰北京师范大学出版社，2013年版。)

Wang, Dongjie (2005). *Interaction between State and Intellectual on the Basic Level: Nationalization of Sichuan University (1925–1939)*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company. (王东杰︰《国家与学术的地方互动︰四川大学国立化进程 (1925–1939)》，北京：生活・读书・新知三联书店，2005年版。)

Wang, Jessica Ching-Sze (2007). *John Dewey in China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Wang, Zhuoran (1921): Dr. Dewey’s Farewell Speech. *Gazette of Education*, 8(7): 47–51. (王卓然︰《杜威博士之临别演讲》，《教育公报》，1921年，第8卷第7期，第47–51页。)

Wu, Junsheng (1976). *My Sixty Years in Education*. Taipei: Biographical literature Press. (吴俊升︰《教育生涯一周甲》，台北︰传记文学出版社，1976年版。)

Zhang, Huajun (2013). *John Dewey, Liang Shuming, and China’s Education Reform: Cultivating Individuality*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Zhang, Xiaoli (2011). *The Historical Situation of Education Research Section in Beijing Higher Normal School*. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 7(4): 111–120. (张小丽︰《北
高师教育研究科的历史境遇》，《教育学报》，2001年第4期，第111–120页。

Zuo, Songtao (2017). *Rivalry between private schools (sishu) and academies (xuetang) in early modern China*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company. (左松涛：《近代中国的私塾与学堂之争》，北京：生活·读书·新知三联书店，2017年版。)