Dewey and Chinese Education in 500 words or More

Confucianism and Deweyan Pragmatism: A Dialogue on Becoming Persons

Perhaps the most important international relationship in the twenty-first century is that between America and China. Given the often delicate and sometimes underproductive history of the relationship between America and China broadly, American pragmatism might serve as a vocabulary to promote a positive dialogue between these cultures at a moment in history when such a conversation is imperative. Said another way, were the US and China able to realize a relationship of mutual trust and accommodation, the twenty-first century could be secured and its problems could be addressed with some real confidence. In the search for shared values and a common vocabulary needed to give them expression, there are clear reasons not only for the US and China, but for the world community broadly to promote a Confucian-Deweyan dialogue. There is a set of complementary and interpenetrating conditions that has set the stage for a conversation between a newly revised Deweyan pragmatism and a Confucianism that is returning to prominence with a growing Chinese self-esteem and pride in its traditions. In comparing these two traditions, we can identify some productive resonances. These commonalities provide us with a language that we can appeal to in introducing Confucian philosophy to the Western academy, and also, in the spirit of Kipling's mantra: “What knows he of England whom only England knows,” with an external perspective from which to examine the presuppositions of our own worldview and commonsense.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, on anyone’s measure, the two centers of culture in the world were Europe and China. Over the past generation we have witnessed a sea change in the economic and political order of the world. After two centuries of silence, China's voice is again joining the conversation as we move toward a new world cultural order. The liberal ideology of individualism that presently has a monopoly on human consciousness is a model of winners and losers at a time when the human predicament requires collaboration among all stakeholders to either win together or lose together.
The pressing issues of our day – global warming, environmental degradation, food and water shortage, pandemics, international terrorism, income disparity, and so on – can only be responded to effectively through the concerted effort of the world community. In our own historical moment, a default ideology of liberal individualism prevails both within Western cultures and among Asian urban elites. This individualism is an ideology to the extent that, in our post-Marxist, post-collectivist era, liberal assumptions about what it means to be a person have come to have a monopoly on human consciousness that does not brook any influential alternatives. Confucianism and Deweyan pragmatism would both reject any suggestion that persons are autonomous individuals that, on the basis of their autonomy, can be accurately described, analyzed, and evaluated independently of their contextualizing environments. They would both contend that persons can only be measured first and foremost, by their dealings with other human beings and the quality of the bonds they are able to grow in these interpersonal relationships. Indeed, I would argue that perhaps the most important contribution these two traditions have to make to our contemporary philosophical discourse is their robust alternatives to individualism – that is, Confucianism’s conception of the relationally constituted “consummate person” (ren 仁), and the neologism Dewey develops and deploys to challenge what he denounces as a “new individualism,” that is, his notion of “individuality.”

Both the Confucian and Deweyan notions of person begin from the fact of association. Everything we do as human beings – physically, psychologically, socially, environmentally – is transactional and collaborative. Nothing and nobody does anything by itself. Persons are radically embedded as narratives nested within narratives, and are “events” rather than individual “things” – are intertwined histories rather than marbles in a jar. A corollary to this fact of association is the primacy of vital relationality. Relationships – our roles in family and community and as participants in the natural world as well – are first order, while our putative discreteness is a second order abstraction. This shared doctrine of internal relations means that persons are particular configurations of relations and are thus themselves constituted by these roles and relationships. As irreducibly social, we humans are in the business of quite literally “making” friends, where the friendship is first order and the persons as discrete “individuals” are second order abstractions from these relations. Such a conception of intrinsic relationality stands in stark contrast to external relations – that is, the idea that we begin as discrete, autonomous individuals who then establish relations between ourselves and other separate and independent individuals, and that when the dissolution of such relationships happens to occur, we still retain our initial identity and integrity as individuals. The sui
generis moral vision of Confucian role ethics shares with Deweyan ethics the centrality of moral imagination, and both philosophical traditions have on offer the idea of a human-centered rather than a God-centered religiousness.

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Humanity as Humaneness: The Creative Task Ahead

But are we not human already? What can it mean to say that being human is a ‘task’? Who could a writer be addressing with such an assertion, if not fellow humans? Isn’t it inhumane, if not unhuman or even anti-human – not to mention morally arrogant – to suggest that humanity is a work in progress?

‘Yes’ is the answer to the query whether the assertion is problematic. But ‘no’ is the answer to the question whether the title of these remarks is thereby merely rhetorical. For a thinker like Confucius, humaneness (ren) is not a natural or innate orientation for human beings. Care-taking is: parents care for children, friends care for friends, the community cares for the community. But humaneness marks out a capacity and willingness to care for those outside our immediate orbit. The concept also reminds us that not everyone in a local care-taking role in fact does care. Confucius is not denigrating humanity in conceiving humaneness as an ongoing ethical task. We are indeed all human. But, in his view as I understand it, part of being human is the necessity of becoming humane.

Humaneness becomes an accomplishment, yet one that has to be continuously re-won in the vicissitudes of life. It marks out an attitude, an orientation, a steady commitment. It’s depth and breadth can widen throughout a life, but can also (fatefully) narrow if the person loses ethical concentration and/or loses support from others (community remains central). Here are some ways Confucius refers to the notion that I find particularly illustrative: “The humane man puts difficulties first, and success in overcoming them second” (6.22). “The failure to cultivate virtue, the failure to put into practice what I have learnt, hearing what is right and being unable to move towards it, being unable to change what is not good – these are my worries” (7.3). “Firmness, resoluteness, simplicity, and reticence are close to humaneness” (13.27). “Is humaneness really so far away? If we ourselves wanted humaneness, then humaneness would arrive” (7.30; all translations are by Raymond Dawson in the Oxford World Classics edition).
John Dewey also has a demanding yet compelling understanding of humaneness. I picture him centering the concept around, among other things, the importance of approaching life as an active student. The concept student, here, conjures inquiry, modesty, tenacity, openness, and joy in being alive in the first place. The concept active emphasizes that the student is also a teacher, if not in name, helping others see themselves, one another, and the world in critical, imaginative, and hopeful ways. Persons are born with these capacities, but they do not blossom on their own. People must ‘become’ them. And, in a manner comparable to Confucius’ thought, Dewey suggests people must continually re-win them until they constitute the structure of habit itself. We might say that, for Dewey, the most crucial habit of all is the habit of re-examining habit, at both the individual and societal level.

Readers will remember the title of one of his most famous essays: “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us.” In this piece, Dewey fuses humaneness with an organic notion of citizenship. He concludes by contending that “the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute.”

To be sure, Confucius and Dewey differ in their framing of humaneness. Moreover, thinking about what it might mean to bring their ideas to life in our current, convulsed world, is no simple matter. But the ideal is not a rival of the real. It is a guide, a source of direction, a compass. Conceiving the ideal is itself an ongoing task.

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Why do we Need to Study Dewey?

为什么要研究杜威?

自中国对西方开放以来，除马克思外，没有哪一位哲学家像杜威那样，在中国思想学术界产生如此巨大的影响;也没有哪一位哲学家像杜威那样，在中国遭受了如此戏剧化的对待。从上世纪初的被热捧，到上世纪中叶的被鞭笞，再到上世纪末的被重新发掘，杜威在中国的命运可谓一波三折。今天越来越多的中国学者意识到，研究杜威，对于今天的中国，意义重大。

为什么这么说？

第一、和其他西方哲学家相比，杜威的思想与中国传统哲学具有更大的亲和性。杜威曾被称作“孔子第二”。他的自然主义哲学观、实
践哲学出发点、反二元论思维方式等，与中国传统哲学的天人合一、内在超越、伦理关怀等思想，有着十分相近的旨趣和追求。研究杜威，有助于从另一个视角重新理解中国传统哲学的内涵和价值。

第二，杜威的思想与马克思的思想在很多方面遥相呼应。在今天的中国，马克思的思想已经成为“中国的哲学”的一部分。要了解中国，不能不了解马克思哲学。研究杜威，可为理解马克思的思想提供一把钥匙。杜威与马克思在一系列重大哲学问题上有着基本相同的哲学立场，他们从同一个方向批判西方传统哲学，又从同一个方向为未来哲学的发展指明了道路。他们携手并进，共同完成了西方哲学从认识论向实践论的转型。他们的分歧当然不可忽视，但与他们的基本哲学主张相比，分歧是次要的。

第三，中国的发展走到今天，进入到一个新的历史阶段。下一步该如何走？

这是中国人所面临的重大问题。历史的教训使我们认识到，无论是先验主义、绝对主义，还是虚无主义、相对主义，都是行不通的死路。在为这一重大问题提供解答方面，杜威有关第三条道路的相关思想，可以为我们的思考提供一些有益的资源。

第四，澄清杜威哲学的真实涵义，是中国学者应尽的义务。杜威曾经在中国遭受了极不公平的批判，他的哲学被粗暴歪曲。长期以来，在中国学术界，“杜威”是个极具贬义的名字。今天，当非学术的因素褪去之后，我们理应还杜威一个清白。正本清源，拨乱反正，将杜威身上的污水清除，可以说，这是中国学者欠历史的一笔债务，理应偿还。

杜威曾经将中国当作他的第二故乡，中国人对杜威也有着不同寻常的感情。自本世纪以来，中国学术界研究杜威的热忱大大超过以往，《杜威全集》中文版已经问世，一系列的研究成果正层出不穷。我们有理由期待，随着中国的进一步融入世界，“杜威在中国”一定会有一种新的气象。

陈亚军

Since China opened up to the West, no philosopher, other than Karl Marx, has had as much impact on China’s academic thought as John Dewey, nor has any other philosopher been treated so dramatically in modern Chinese history. Dewey has been viewed in three different lights over the last century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he had many fanatical followers, in the middle of the twentieth century, he was harshly criticized and rejected in mainland China, and since the end of the twentieth century, he has attracted renewed attention from Chinese intellectuals. Today, more and more Chinese scholars are coming to realize that studying Dewey is worthwhile.
Why is this so?
First, Dewey’s thoughts are more compatible with traditional Chinese philosophy than those of other Western philosophers. Dewey has even been called “the second Confucius.” His naturalist philosophy, practical orientation, and anti-dualism thinking are all similar to the ideas presented in traditional Chinese philosophy, which includes concepts such as the unity of heaven and humans, inner transcendence, and ethical caring. Studying Dewey helps us to understand the meaning and value of China’s traditional philosophy from a different perspective.

Second, Dewey’s thoughts correspond with those of Karl Marx in many ways. In today’s China, Marx’s thoughts have become part of Chinese philosophy, and thus to understand China, we have to study Marx’s thoughts. Studying Dewey provides us with a key to understanding Marx. Dewey and Marx shared a common stance in relation to many important philosophical questions. They criticized the tradition of Western philosophy from the same perspective, pointed to the same direction for the development of philosophy, and encouraged the transformation of Western philosophy from epistemology to practice. They surely also displayed significant differences in their thinking, but compared with these commonalities, the differences were only secondary.

Third, China’s development has now entered a new historical period, and the Chinese people are faced with the significant question of how to take the next step. The lessons provided by history help us to realize that transcendentalism, absolutism, nihilism, and relativism have no future in China. In answering this significant question, Dewey’s thoughts regarding a “third road” might provide us with some useful resources.

Fourth, it is the responsibility of Chinese scholars to clarify the true meaning of Dewey’s philosophy. Dewey was once treated unfairly in China. His philosophy was harshly misinterpreted, and for quite a long time, Dewey had a bad reputation in Chinese academia. Today, despite having abandoned the non-academic ideology on Dewey, we need to give Dewey a fair hearing. It is necessary to reveal the truth and clarify the misrepresentation that occurred. This is a debt that Chinese scholars owe to history, and it is time to repay that debt.

Dewey once considered China as his second home, and in return, the Chinese people displayed an unusual affection for Dewey. Since the start of the twenty-first century, there has been renewed academic interest in Dewey in China. A Chinese version of The Collected Works of John Dewey has been published, and numerous studies on Dewey are emerging. We can be confident...
that “Dewey in China” will reach new heights as China becomes increasingly connected with the rest of the world.

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Reinitiating Studies of Dewey’s Educational Thoughts in Their Complex Historical Contexts

尽管中国的杜威教育思想研究已历百年，尽管杜威在中国教育学界无人不知、无人不晓，但平心而论，中国的杜威教育思想研究仍处于初级阶段。在一定意义上甚至可以说，百余年来，中国的杜威教育思想研究鲜有实质性的进展。

之所以如此妄言，是因为现有的大多数研究在思想方法上存在着严重的弊端，其显著标志就是把杜威教育思想抽象化、孤立化和非历史化，即脱离具体的、复杂的和丰富的历史关系，仅仅停留在研究者对杜威著作本身的解读和主观阐释，既缺乏对前人相关研究成果的梳理与总结，忽视对影响杜威教育思想的各种历史因素的挖掘，也未能深入和充分地探索杜威教育思想与其所处时代的广泛、复杂的关系以及杜威本人教育思想的演变。在这种情况下，不可避免地出现对杜威教育思想的“神圣化”或“妖魔化”或“庸俗化”。不论何种情况，都不是研究杜威教育思想的科学合理的思想方法。只有透过复杂的历史关系，从杜威与其前人、同时代人以及后代人的思想联系中，从美国社会、思想和教育演变的全部历史中，才有可能真正深入把握杜威教育思想的真谛。而这就首先需要将杜威教育思想真正作为客观认识的对象而非崇拜的偶像。

张斌贤

Although Chinese studies of Dewey's educational thoughts are now a hundred years old and Dewey is well-known in Chinese education, I still consider these studies to be in a primary stage. Furthermore, Chinese educational scholars have not made solid progress in Deweyan studies to date because of their many methodological errors. In addition, these studies tend to present
Dewey’s educational thoughts in abstract, isolated, and nonhistorical contexts, and they are often subjectively interpreted without considering their concrete, complex, and rich historical contexts. A literature review of previous Deweyan researches is also often lacking. Historical studies of the development of Dewey’s thoughts are ignored; such as the relationship between Dewey’s educational thoughts and the broadly complicated relationship he had with the society in his time, as well as changes in his own thoughts at different periods of his life have not been explored sufficiently. Therefore, Deweyan studies of his educational thoughts were inevitably sanctified, demonized, or vulgarized, which are not rational or scientific approaches. Only by building relationships between Dewey and earlier generations, his contemporaries, and later generations of thinkers in their complex historical contexts, is it possible to grasp Dewey’s educational thoughts; thus, these studies should be objective instead of idolizing.

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Inquiry on Dewey in Relation to Chinese Education

1981年，我因迷上陶行知教育思想，知道他有个直接影响他的老师杜威。当时对陶行知的研究就像做“地下工作”，到很多地方查资料依然不敢直说自己做陶行知研究，只有对对方有更多了解，知道对方不反对的情况下才能说出真实意图。而对当时还被普遍视为立场对立的杜威，更不敢知道更多。但要研究陶行知，就不能不知道杜威，我便私自找到当时可以找到的王承绪先生编译的《杜威教育论著选》读起来。可几十年来，我总感到杜威是中国教育中的未知数X，它的值多少不只决定于杜威自身，也取决于中国教育发展的状况。当初未曾想到求解杜威如此之难，如此之慢。所以三十多年来写过不少文章、也出过一些书，却从未写过以杜威为题的研究文章，原因在于自觉对杜威的已知部分远少于未知部分，不能贸然为文。而这未知的又不完全是杜威，还包括我自1983年以来一直做调查的中国教育。从客观的历史看，1919到1949年杜威思想无疑是中国教育思想的中流：1951年杜威与他的中国学生以及自由教育思潮都受到批判，它们对中国教育的作用与角色并未完全消失。极端的批判使批判者走向极端和弊端便是作用的表现之一。杜威先生已经故去，中国教育还需要
走向未来。中国教育能走向什么样的未来，在不小程度上取决于如何对待杜威及其思想，取决于创造什么样的条件给杜威教育思想赋值。这个值的高低在杜威而言是已经确定的，在中国教育而言依然是未定的。或者说，能不能给杜威恰当赋值，显示出中国人教育智能的高低。提高中国人的教育智能当然不是为了给杜威恰当的评价，杜威先生也不需要这个了；它的终极意义在于中国的教育变得更好，未来在中国生活的人能够享有更好的教育，并通过它过上更幸福的生活。

储朝晖

In 1981, I was immersed in the thoughts of Tao Xingzhi. Then, I discovered John Dewey, who taught Tao at Teachers College at Columbia University. At that time, studying Tao could not be mentioned in public, let alone articles published.¹ Hence, my work on Tao’s thoughts remained private. When I went to libraries to search for material on Tao, I would not reveal my real intention, unless I was sure that I would be understood. During that period, Dewey was considered to be a rival of the communist ideology, and so my interest in Dewey needed to remain firmly hidden. However, to study Tao, I needed to know more about Dewey. Fortunately, I discovered Wang Chengxu’s edited book *Selection on Dewey’s Work of Education*, which he translated it into Chinese.

Over the past few decades, I always felt that Dewey is the “X-factor” in relation to Chinese education. The value of Dewey’s thought is not only determined by Dewey himself, but also by the condition of Chinese educational development. Initially, I did not realize that research on Dewey was so difficult and time-consuming. Perhaps this is why, despite publishing numerous articles and books over the past three decades, I have never published any articles related to Dewey. I have always thought that what I do not know about Dewey is far greater than what I do know about him, and so it is difficult for me to write about Dewey. Moreover, it is not only Dewey who is unknown to me; the Chinese education system that I have studied since 1983 is also largely unknown to me.

Historically, Dewey stood at the center of Chinese educational thought from 1919 to 1949. However, from 1951 onward, Dewey and his Chinese students, with their liberal educational thoughts, were widely criticized, although the effects of these thoughts did not completely disappear from Chinese education.

¹ Though the Cultural Revolution had been officially ended in 1976 and the open-and-reform policy was initiated in 1978, it took another few years for Chinese society to discuss western thoughts in a scholarly way.
Radical critique from the critics made many radical minds. It turned out to be harmful for Chinese education. Although Dewey is no longer alive, Chinese education must continue into the future. The direction in which Chinese education will proceed will, to some extent be influenced by our attitude toward Dewey’s thoughts and the degree to which we accept the value contained in those thoughts. Dewey’s value might already have been understood, but his value in relation to Chinese education is yet to be determined. In other words, whether we come to value Dewey’s thoughts will demonstrate the intelligence we bring to the reform of Chinese education. Of course, Dewey does not need this re-evaluation by Chinese educators, but the ultimate aim is a better future for Chinese education, so that the Chinese people can obtain a better education and lead a better life as a result.

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Discovering Modern Educational Wisdom from Dewey’s Work

从杜威著述中汲取现代教育智慧

美国著名哲学家和教育家杜威是当代最有影响的西方教育大师。他既注重教育理论，又注重教育实验，创立了一种具有新颖性的并产生世界性影响的教育思想。从1919至1921年，杜威在中国待了两年多时间，因此，无论在最熟悉中国的西方教育学者中，还是在对近代中国教育影响领域最广、程度最深和时间最长的西方教育学者中，当首推杜威。2019年，当我们在杜威来华访学100周年之际举行研讨会或发表文章表示纪念时，更希冀从杜威著述中汲取现代教育智慧。39年前，我国著名教育史学家、华东师范大学教授赵祥麟先生在《华东师范大学学报(哲社版)》1980年第2期上发表了《重新评价杜威实用主义教育思想》一文，率先提出对杜威教育思想进行重新评价，引领了我国改革开放后对杜威教育思想的实事求是的评价。当然，重新评价杜威教育并非言必称杜威。通过对杜威教育的理性思考，杜威著述中确实蕴藏着现代教育智慧。这里仅以课程教学领域为例。在心智与经验上，杜威提出“认识过程植根于心智活动”；在课程与教材上，他提出“在课堂上拥有新生命”；在知与行上，他批评“批量生产造就了埋
The American philosopher and educator John Dewey was one of the most influential educators in the world, emphasizing both theory and experimental work and developing numerous creative and influential educational theories. Dewey spent more than two years in China from 1919 to 1921, and thus it can be said that Dewey is the Western educational scholar who is most familiar with China, has influenced modern Chinese education in the broadest and deepest ways, and whose influence has extended over the longest period.

2019 is the centennial year of Dewey’s arrival in China, and numerous seminars have been organized and articles published to commemorate this event. However, I think it is more important to focus on the modern educational wisdom that is derived from Dewey’s work. Thirty-nine years ago, the famous Chinese educational historian Zhao Xianglin (赵祥麟), who was a professor at East China Normal University, published an article titled “Re-evaluating Dewey’s pragmatist educational thoughts” in the Journal of East China Normal University in Philosophy and Social Science (no. 2, 1982). In this article, Zhao proposed the idea of re-evaluating Dewey’s educational impact on China. This article led to other studies on Dewey after the opening up and reform that commenced in the 1980s. We need a more objective evaluation of Dewey’s work, although this does not mean that we must strictly adhere to Dewey’s ideas.

As a result of a comprehensive intellectual study of Dewey’s philosophy, I can confirm that Dewey’s work is full of modern educational wisdom. Here, I present some examples of his thoughts on the curriculum and teaching. Regarding the mind and experience, Dewey claims that knowing is embedded in the activities of the mind. On curriculum and teaching materials, Dewey suggests that students should “have a new life in the classroom.” On doing and knowing, Dewey states that “mass production leads to mass education, which kills personal skills and personal capabilities.” On learning and thinking, he proposes that “learning is to learn to think,” while “teaching is to stimulate and advise reflective thinking.” On creativity and criticism, he claims that “development means active creation.” These are just a few examples of
Dewey’s work. However, even from these brief thoughts, Chinese educational scholars and teachers can surely obtain some wisdom to guide China’s educational modernization.

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Dewey and Chinese Education

杜威与中国教育

100年前的美国教育家杜威的来华活动,使中国人第一次与杜威的哲学理论和教育理论有了近距离接触。杜威哲学是一种实践哲学。认为哲学是可以影响社会、人和教育的。如果一种哲学理论对教育活动毫无影响,这种理论必然是矫揉造作的。哲学理论是教育的一般理论,教育是使哲学理论具体化并受到检验的实验室。

杜威教育理论的本质是强调儿童发展与社会发展的统一。在杜威看来,儿童是教育的起点,儿童的意志、欲望、儿童的心理等是教育的基础。社会是教育的目标,社会是儿童发展所要达到的方向。教育是从起点开始,利用各种资源培养和教育儿童,使儿童的发展与社会发展方向一致,成为社会的合格成员。

杜威的教育理论之所以在今天没有被遗忘,不在于他提供了多少有关教育学的知识,而在于他所提供的教育理念和方法论的财富。在教育过程中,儿童的发展不是被动的,不是对固定环境的静止适应和朝着一个固定目标的运动。如果儿童在发展中其活动的机能被忽视,使他们变得顺从,对新鲜事物缺乏兴趣,害怕不确定的事情,教育必定是被动的、机械的和失败的。杜威的方法论注重试验的作用。试验的意义是,只有试验才可以有“知”。“知”的结论也不是一成不变的,一切结论都具有假设的性质,都有待于证明和改变它。

反思杜威的教育理论及其对中国教育的影响,可以更好地认识杜威与中国教育的关系以及现代中国教育发展的逻辑。

郭法奇
The American educator John Dewey visited China in 1919, bringing his philosophy and educational ideas to the close attention of Chinese scholars. Dewey’s philosophy is a philosophy of practice, and he believed that his philosophy could impact society, people, and education. If a theory or philosophy has no impact on education, then it must be hypocritical. Dewey claimed that philosophy was a general theory of education, and that education provided the laboratory in which to test the practice of theory.

The core idea underlying Dewey’s educational theory is based on a harmonious relationship between children’s individual development and the development of society. In Dewey’s view, children’s development is the prime focus of education. Children’s will, desire, and psychological status are the foundations of education, while society is the objective of education. That is, society is the object into which children need to develop. Education starts with children, who are educated by various means so that their development remains consistent with that of society. Children become qualified members of society through education.

Dewey’s educational theory is still remembered today not because of the educational knowledge he provided, but because of the educational thoughts and methodology he contributed. In the process of education, children do not develop passively. They do not mechanically adapt to a fixed environment, nor do they grow toward a fixed goal. If we ignore the active nature of children in their growth, force them be obedient, and lead them to fear new experiences and uncertainty, then education is passive, mechanical, and doomed to failure. Dewey’s scientific methods emphasized the role of experimental learning because it is only through experimentation that knowing becomes possible. The results of knowing are also changing. All conclusions contain the nature of presumption. They need proving and are ready to be changed.

In summary, I suggest that research on Dewey’s educational theory and its impact on Chinese education will enable us to better understand the relationship between Dewey and Chinese education, as well as the logic underlying the development of Chinese education.

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