Why Did Hu Shi Introduce Deweyan Pragmatism to China as Only a Method?

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Abstract

Before and during John Dewey’s visit to China, Hu Shi, who was one of the most famous and influential Chinese intellectuals of the time, intensively introduced pragmatism to China. Hu stressed that pragmatism was only “the scientific method applied to philosophy.” This interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism not only caused insufficient understanding and even misunderstandings of Dewey’s philosophy (including his philosophy of education), but has also been considered by many Chinese scholars today as a kind of transformation of Dewey’s pragmatism. This essay explores why Hu introduced Deweyan pragmatism as only a method in China. Hu’s reception and interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism was a complicated process; thus, it must be investigated from Hu’s worldview, the particular sociopolitical context in China at the time as well as his life history. The paper concludes that labeling Hu Shi as an advocate of the total Westernization of China is not accurate.

Keywords
Dewey – Hu Shi (Hu Shih) – pragmatism – philosophy of education – social reform – educational reform

1 Introduction

Before and during John Dewey’s visit to China, Hu Shi (or Hu Shih), once a Dewey’s PhD student and later one of the most famous and influential Chinese

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Hu Shi’s Interpretation and Advocacy of Pragmatism as a Method

In the spring of 1919, Hu Shi introduced pragmatism in general and Deweyan pragmatism in particular, to the Chinese public by delivering a series of lectures at the Ministry of Education in Beijing. In his lecture titled “Experimentalism,” instead of translating pragmatism as “pragmatism” (实用主义) as used today in Chinese, Hu used the term “Experimentalism” (实验主义) to translate its name. As Hu (1998 [1919]) argued, “pragmatism” only stresses “real effects” in its meaning; however, “experimentalism” not only pays attentions to “real effects,” but also highlights that “what this philosophy cares about most is the experimental method” (pp. 208–209, emphasis added). Hu claimed that “the laboratory attitude of mind” is the overarching attitude of the different pragmatists within this school of philosophical thought. Hu further stressed that experimentalism is the result of the progress of both natural science and the influence of Darwin’s theory of evolution, both of which developed...
in the Western world in the 19th century. Thus, Hu (1998 [1919]) described experimentalism demanding both scientific and genetic attitudes, and concluded that “experimentalism is simply the application of scientific method to philosophy” (pp. 212–213). In 1921, Hu (1998 [1919]) also delivered an address at the farewell party held for Dewey and his family in Beijing, claiming that “he (Dewey) leave us a philosophical method, which we use to solve our special problems. This method is experimentalism, and it can be further categorized as historical method and experimental method” (p. 279).

Not only did Hu (1998 [1919]) apply the pragmatist method to his academic project and to his conception of social reform, but he also considered that Dewey’s philosophy of education could mainly be seen as a method for reforming the traditional education system. For Hu (1919; c.f., Zhang, 2013), a key role of the pragmatist philosophy of education is to cultivate “intellectual individuality” through the experimental method. In his lecture titled “Dewey’s Philosophy of Education,” Hu (1998 [1919]; 247) suggests that Dewey’s philosophy of education could be a method for reforming China’s educational system. A key principle of this philosophy of education is what Hu called “experimentalism.” Hu then commented that the experimental method was beginning to work very well in the Chinese education system. As Hu (2003 [1919]) wrote, “His [Dewey’s] advocacy of the experimental method in education has shattered our belief in a rigid and uniform educational system, and challenges us to carry on innovations and experiments without which an educational system is lifeless” (p. 253).

Many scholars today have mentioned the issue of Hu’s mere focus on the method in his interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism. Zhao (1996) observed that Hu fragmented Deweyan pragmatism and transformed it into part of his own thought. Deng (2001), a distinguished philosopher who is specialized in Western philosophy in today’s China, noted that Hu accepted Deweyan pragmatism as only a method, that is, experimentalism, instead of receiving it as a philosophy as it is. Deng considered this a kind of “cultural malposition,” that is, to interpret a Western philosophy mainly from a Chinese cultural perspective. Liu (2015) also expressed a similar point. Wang (2003) showed that in introducing and interpreting Deweyan pragmatism, Hu turned Dewey’s empirical ontology into simply cognitive experimentalism. These scholars all believe that Hu transformed Dewey’s philosophy to support his own academic ambitions and his conceptions of sociocultural reform during a particular historical period in the Chinese context. Tan (2004) also argued that ever since Hu began to study Dewey’s philosophy in America in the summer of 1915, “[w]hat would occupy a central position in his thinking and practice in the years to come was actual application of Dewey’s method of thinking” (p. 46).
demonstrated that “[t]hough his interpretation of pragmatism as method has considerable support from Dewey’s writing, Hu sometimes exaggerated Dewey’s own emphasis on method” (Tan, 2004:51). In a similar vein, Wang (2007) noted that Hu “understood and promoted Dewey’s pragmatism as a method of social inquiry” (p. 34).

For a long time, Hu’s interpretation of Dewey’s philosophy as merely an experimental method caused other aspects of Deweyan pragmatism to become invisible, which led to numerous misunderstandings of Dewey’s philosophy in China. In philosophical circles, Liang Shuming (梁漱溟), who was a contemporary of Hu, criticized Dewey’s philosophy for merely focusing on changes without paying due attentions to certainties and moral principles (Liang, 1934). Qu Shiying (瞿世英) blamed Dewey’s philosophy for its sole concern on the “process” without caring about “ideals” and “purposes” (Qu, 1940). In the field of education, Huang Yanpei (黄炎培), based on his understanding of Dewey’s lectures in China, tended to read Dewey’s philosophy of education as a somewhat utilitarian view of education and stressed its linkages to vocational education (Huang, 1921). Then, from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s, with ideological attacks launched on Hu Shi, Deweyan pragmatism also suffered from severe political criticisms. Although these misunderstandings of Dewey should not be solely ascribed to Hu, what cannot be neglected is that Hu’s mere focus on introducing pragmatism as a method is one of the sources that led to those misunderstandings, not least because Hu was a very important figure in China’s intellectual field and a very early interpreter of Deweyan pragmatism. It was not until the early 1980s that Deweyan pragmatism came to be understood and discussed more openly and respectfully in both the fields of philosophy and education.

3 Deweyan Pragmatism: Only a Method?

Without doubt, Deweyan pragmatism is not simply a method; otherwise it can hardly be called as a philosophy. Apart from stressing the pragmatist method, Dewey actually developed pragmatist theories of knowledge, pragmatist metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics. Although some of them were fully developed after Hu’s interpretation of Dewey’s philosophical ideas in China, we can still find traces of them in their formative period before and during Hu’s interpretation of Dewey’s pragmatism. While Dewey indeed regarded “pragmatism as primarily a method” in his early article “What pragmatism means by practical” in 1908, this does not mean that he considered pragmatism as only a method. In fact, Dewey’s claim concerning pragmatism as a method, that is, what he
often called the scientific method, should be understood in the context of Dewey’s theory of knowledge and his framework of pragmatic metaphysics.

In the modern history of Western philosophy, the question of knowledge is understood in the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, viz., a dualistic scheme of an inner mind and matter “out there”, but both are separate from each other and exist independently. In this scheme, the question of how mind gets in touch with the “outside” world to gain knowledge of that world has become a branch of philosophical studies, that is, epistemology, ever since Descartes. Dewey attempted to challenge this philosophical tradition. In rejecting this dualistic scheme, he developed a transactional approach to the question of knowledge, which he considered could not be formulated as “epistemology,” but rather as “theories of knowledge,” “theories of inquiry,” or “experimental logic.” In his book Studies in Logic Theory, Dewey (1903) provided a detailed analysis of the process of inquiry using an interactive naturalistic approach and he categorized his theory of knowledge as a kind of pragmatism, though he sometimes also called it “instrumentalism.” This is when pragmatism as a method began to take shape. In the years that followed, Dewey continued to develop his theory of inquiry by exploring the process of the intelligent inquiry, and finally produced another book, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (Dewey, 1916). Dewey contended that we should reject the “spectator” theory of knowledge, but consider a transactional theory of knowledge, or in today’s language, transactional constructivism (see Biesta and Burbules, 2003:11–12). In this theory of knowledge, the object of knowledge is created by the process of inquiry and is known in and through experience; that is, through the transactions between human beings as agents and the world. Therefore, knowing is a mode of experience, which Dewey called cognitive experience.

Parallel to the same period or perhaps a little bit later, Dewey developed his philosophy of metaphysics for his theory of knowledge to fit into. Metaphysics is the philosophy of characterizing existence or reality as a whole, or studies on ultimate origins or traits of the world. Shook’s (2004) interpretation of reasons why Dewey worked on metaphysics is that after Dewey built up his theory of experience, he started to “seek a naturalism in which existence possesses traits similar to those of experience” (p. 740). This is echoed by Gale’s (2010) interpretation that Dewey’s later work on metaphysics in Experience and Nature (1925) is a “transcendent argument for what nature must be like if it is to be possible for inquiry to take place in it” (Gale, 2010: 57).

Congruent with his theory of inquiry, Dewey rejected traditional metaphysics that assumed that only an immutable, unchangeable, stable, and reliable object can be real and hence be a foundation for knowledge. Traditional metaphysical philosophers consider these qualities as “ultimate traits” of the world.
Dewey took a naturalistic approach to shape his philosophy of metaphysics. For Dewey (1905), the reality is a world of interaction between organism and environment, and what is real is the result of our experience gained by and through such interaction, as he argued, “things are what they are experienced as” (p. 158). In the years that followed, Dewey developed his metaphysical ideas in a series of articles, including “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” (1905) and “Does Reality Possess Practical Character?” (1908). In his essay, “What Does Pragmatism Mean by Practical” (1908), Dewey argued for an empirical basis for his metaphysics. In “The Realism of Pragmatism” (1905) and “Brief Studies in Realism” (1911), Dewey expressed his metaphysics as a kind of “naïve realism” to be distinguished from what he called “presentational realism.” In his 1915 essay, “The Subject-Matter of Metaphysical Inquiry,” Dewey (1998 [1915]) asserted that “irreducible traits” of the world are “specifically diverse existences, interaction, change” (177). And he added, “the evolution of living and thinking beings out of a state of things in which life and thought were not found is a fact which must be recognized in any metaphysical inquiry into the irreducible traits of the world” (Dewey, 1998 [1915]:179). This article anticipates his claim in his later book Experience and Nature that “metaphysics is cognizance of the generic traits of existence” (Dewey, 1925:50). In this masterpiece, Dewey fully elaborated and clarified his own metaphysics by offering discussions on the problems of traditional metaphysics. He proposed to understand the human mind as a result of communication among human beings and as a result of interaction between human beings and the natural and social world.3 In describing this worldview, Dewey preferred naturalism to materialism because the latter still hints at the world view of the dualistic scheme.

Despite the rich discussion on metaphysics in Dewey's work before Hu introduced Deweyan pragmatism to China, little about Dewey's philosophy of metaphysics can be found in Hu's introduction of his mentor's philosophy in Chinese. Hu should have read most of Dewey's works published before and while he introduced pragmatism to China(see Zhou, 2010). However, Hu surprisingly did not choose to introduce these philosophical ideas to the Chinese public. Dewey's metaphysical principles are employed in his theories of inquiry, aesthetics, ethics, and religion, but these principles were all absent from Hu's introduction of Deweyan pragmatism. Clearly, Hu's introduction of Deweyan pragmatism was selective and partial. Thus, the question arises: Why did Hu Shi introduce Deweyan pragmatism to China as only a method?

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2 Dewey's view of realism is also described as transactional realism (see Biesta and Burbules, 2003: 13), although the word “transaction” was used by Dewey relatively later in his life.

3 Dewey's metaphysics is also regarded as metaphysics of presence (see Biesta, 2012: 35).
Why Did Hu Shi Introduce Deweyan Pragmatism as Only a Method?

As above, the immediate question that emerges is why Hu introduced Deweyan pragmatism to China as only a method. This question is certainly important given Hu’s relationship with Dewey, but it is surely also complicated because of Hu’s highly complicated role in Chinese and international modern history. However, this question can be answered from at least three interconnected aspects: Hu’s philosophical position, his sociocultural concerns, and his academic inclinations.

4.1 A Philosophical Divergence: Metaphysical Differences

Although being an ardent student of Dewey and calling himself a pragmatist throughout his life, Hu had his own worldview which differed to his mentor’s worldview. This difference largely led Hu to only choose pragmatism in terms of method in his introduction of Dewey’s philosophy. Basically, Hu can be metaphysically seen as being materialistic because he holds a view of naturalism with a strong emphasis on scientism and natural laws, which differs from Dewey’s empirical naturalism or metaphysics of experience.

In 1923, Chinese intellectuals engaged in a science–metaphysics debate (科玄之争). In this debate, Hu strongly opposed the metaphysics of idealism and took a scientific position. At the end of the debate, important essays on the topic were collected and published in a book prefaced by an essay written by Hu. The preface is titled as “Science and the Philosophy of Life,” in which Hu claimed that his view of the world and life “is a hypothesis founded on the generally accepted scientific knowledge of the last or three hundred years. To avoid unnecessary controversy, I propose to call it, not ‘a scientific credo,’ but merely ‘the Naturalistic Conception of Life and Universe’” (Hu, 1998[1923]:164). In this article, Hu(1998 [1923]) claimed that “In this naturalistic universe, where every motion in the heavens has its regular course and every change follows laws of nature, where causality governs man’s life and the struggle for existence spurs his activities – in such a universe man has very little freedom indeed” (p. 164–165, emphasis added). In Hu’s later English essay, “My Credo and Its Evolution,” which was published in 1931, Hu(2001 [1932]) insisted on the same materialist-oriented naturalistic view.

Clearly, both Hu and Dewey hold naturalism as their worldviews, but they have very different rationales. While Hu’s (2001 [1932]) naturalism stressed the natural laws, or what he called “absolute universality of the law of causality” (p. 254) in the world, what Dewey (1929) tried to elaborate is the “metaphysics of event,” a world of “interaction” between organism and environment.
taking place in nature, and nature itself is understood as “a moving whole of interacting parts” (p. 232). For Dewey (1915 [1998]), the world is not characterized as purely physical and when things “are brought into more and complex interactions, they exhibit capacities not to be found in an exclusively mechanical world. To say, accordingly, that existence of vital, intellectual, and social organization makes impossible a purely mechanistic metaphysics is to say something which the situation calls for” (pp. 179–180).

There are also different understandings of the role of human beings in relation to the world. In Hu’s materialist-oriented naturalistic worldview, the human being has “little freedom” and is forced to find and use the universe’s natural laws to adapt to the natural world and exert technical control over it. In contrast, the importance of communication, of the human experience resulting from the interaction between human beings in nature, as well as between human beings and their environment, is emphasized in Dewey’s transactional realism. Dewey also stressed the role of human mental activities, which can transform experience to create new knowledge, rather than representing the “reality” out there. For Dewey, the knowledge about the relationships between human actions and their consequences does not stand for certainty, but only possibility. Knowing is just one mode of human experience among the diversity of modes of human experience, including practical, ethical, aesthetic, and religious modes of experience. In his later works, Dewey called his naturalism “cultural naturalism” (1938), while Gale (2010) characterizes Dewey’s naturalism as “anthropomorphic or humanistic naturalism” (p. 55).

Although Hu’s naturalism may partly come from Dewey, the different rationales of their naturalism suggest that Hu’s naturalism has different sources. In 1925, in a speech titled “Difficulties Encountered by Christian Education in China,” Hu pointed out that “ever since the introduction of modern Western scientific thought to China, the naturalist philosophy inherent in Chinese ancient philosophy gradually came back into view. The combination of these two thoughts brings about the current naturalist movement.” (freely translated, Hu, 1998[1925], p. 636). As a matter of fact, since his childhood days, Hu was deeply influenced by the Chinese ancient naturalist ideas advocated by such great philosophers as Lao Zi (老子) and Fan Zhen (范缜). Lao Zi, the founder of Taoism, is a naturalist who believes that everything follows the law of nature independent of human subjectivity. Fan Zhen is an atheist and materialist in the Southern and Northern Dynasties in Chinese history and his thought made Hu become an atheist from his very early years. Hu found that ancient Chinese naturalism was in great congruence with the spirit of Western modern science; therefore, he tried to integrate them. In his biographical essay “My Credo and Its Evolution,” Hu (2001 [1931]) wrote: “My slight knowledge of the
evolutionary hypothesis of Darwin and Spencer was easily linked up with the naturalism of some of the ancient Chinese thinkers” (p. 239). Noticeably, despite the fact that Hu was famous for being critical of some ethical principles of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism emerged in the 12th century as a school of philosophical thought drawing upon ancient Chinese naturalism had a deep influence on Hu’s belief in atheism, as Hu (1998 [1933], pp. 59–60) recalled in his autobiography.

The Eastern and Western sources of Hu’s naturalism can explain why his naturalism is mixed with scientism and positivism, and metaphysically speaking, why Hu is even materialist-oriented. Dewey clearly rejected the term “materialism” because it still assumes a dualistic perspective of mind–matter. Although Dewey stresses the scientific method in his works, he maintained a critical attitude toward scientific rationality; therefore, he cannot be considered as being a positivist (see Biesta and Burbules, 2003:14–16). Although Dewey was took a critical attitude towards traditional metaphysics, he did not give it a total “overthrow” and simply suspended it. However, Hu (1998 [1919], p. 228) claimed that Dewey considered questions of traditional metaphysics as totally worthless and can be completely eliminated from philosophical discussions. Here, Hu misunderstands Dewey. Thus, the differences in worldviews between Hu and his mentor led Hu to focus only on the method of Deweyan pragmatism.

Others may argue that the practical reason for Hu’s neglect of Dewey’s philosophy of metaphysics might be that Dewey did not give a systematic clarification of his pragmatic metaphysics until he published his book Nature and Experience in 1925, whereas Hu’s introduction of Deweyan pragmatism to China was intensively concentrated between 1919 and 1921. Nevertheless, Dewey’s thought on metaphysics developed over years and was published in a range of articles since early 1900s until the early 1920s. Therefore, Hu’s ignorance or negligence of Dewey’s pragmatic metaphysics can still be seen as an optional activity.

4.2 A Sociopolitical Concern: The Need for Social Inquiry
Hu’s introduction of Dewey’s philosophy as a method is clearly motivated by his practical concern with Chinese social needs. After the 1911 Revolution, China became a republic, but it only had a de jure democracy rather than a de facto democracy, and the Chinese people suffered hugely from severe social injustice, political turmoil, and military harassment. Hu was deeply aware of this social malaise ever since he studied at America. After he returned back to China in 1917, one of his ambitions became to save his country from the terrible social conditions.
Thus, in his social inquiry, Hu conceived a new way to reform Chinese society into a real democratic society. Alongside his colleagues, he advocated the *New Cultural Movement*, a nonpolitical movement, to lay the cultural foundation for a future democratic China. Meanwhile, before Dewey started his great tour of China in 1919, Hu and his colleagues had invited Dewey to deliver lectures to the Chinese people. Apart from his philosophy of education, Hu hoped that Dewey would also bring his sociopolitical philosophy to China, and thus inspire new ways to save China and ameliorate its society. As early as 1914, Hu (2001 [1914]) had already expressed his great concerns about methods in his diary: “What our country urgently needed today is not novel theories, not profound philosophical ideas, but methods that can be applied to pursue knowledge, to observe things, and to govern the country” (p. 222, freely translated).

One of Dewey's key pragmatist ideas from the “Lectures of Social and Political Philosophy” presented in Beijing is the piecemeal reform of society to improve the community by gradually resolving all kinds of social problems. For Hu, this means that people need to reform the society incrementally; that is, specifically, people need to study concrete social problems and find methods to solve them “drop by drop.” This is why Hu insisted on reforming society by studying social problems and issues; thus, Hu focused on methods to be formed and used for solving these problems instead of talking about many different kinds of “isms” or doctrines as different theories in efforts towards wholesale way of social and political revolution. Hu was clearly inspired by Dewey's pragmatist method of thinking, which he linked to his conception of reformation of China's sociocultural fabric, for example, Chinese language renovation, in order to lay a new cultural foundation for a future democratic China. Hence, the method Hu stressed is exactly the method of five steps of thinking in the process of inquiry elaborated by Dewey in his works, particularly in his book, *How We Think*. This partly explains why Hu chose to import Deweyan pragmatism as a method to China, that is, to meet China's urgent need for social reform at that time. What Hu could not do is to announce pragmatism as a doctrine because this is exactly what pragmatism is trying to overcome; therefore, this is also why Hu took up it as a method.

Hu started his social reform by applying the pragmatist method to the Chinese language renovation through experiments with writing poems in vernacular Chinese. Taking a cultural approach to social reform also led Hu to acknowledge the importance of education. Thus, following Dewey, Hu also considered education as a means, or we may say a *method*, of social reconstruction. This further led Hu to believe that educational reform should proceed...
before political reform, and hence it is necessary to separate education from politics. But what Hu seemed to neglect is that for Dewey, the claim of education as a means of social reconstruction should not be taken as a dogma, but rather as a hypothesis to verify through action.

4.3 A Biographical Element: An Enduring Academic Inclination

The third aspect that explains why Hu only focused on the method dimension of Deweyan pragmatism can be found in his life history or his biography, in particular, his academic life over his lifetime. Hu grew up in an area of China that kept a long academic tradition of working on kaojuxue (考据学), that is, roughly in English, textual research or textology. This field of learning is considered as a Chinese academic discipline with a tradition of nearly one thousand years; it is the academic study using texts or documents to check, verify, and explain the documentary and historical problems. Hu grew up in a family in Jixi (绩溪), a town in southern Anhui Province, which is where he received his complete training in Chinese classical texts. Hu spent 9 years reading and memorizing Chinese Classics in one of the nine village schools in Jixi. It was not until Hu was 13 years old that he left his hometown for his secondary education in several modern schools in Shanghai.

Hu’s father, Hu Chuan (胡传 1841–1895), “was a classical scholar and a stern follower of the Neo-Confucianist Rational Philosophy of Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130–1200)” (Hu, 2001[1931], p. 232). The school of Neo-Confucianism in the 12th Century adopted much Chinese ancient naturalism, and advocated ge wu qiong li (格物穷理), that is, investigating the truth by approaching materials thoroughly, which is an idea that is very similar to the scientific attitudes and skeptical spirits in the modern Western world in Hu’s understanding. Through his contact with Neo-Confucianist thought and memorizing his father’s Neo-Confucianist work, Hu became an atheist when he was 11 or 12 years old (Hu, 1998[1933], pp. 59–60). Meanwhile, the classic Confucian texts that Hu studied were interpreted by Zhu Xi (朱熹), who was an outstanding textual researcher on the Four Books of Confucian Classics and developed his own method on textual analysis during the Song Dynasty. Following this tradition, during the Late Qing Dynasty, Jixi, where Hu grew up, became famous for its Qianjia School of Textology (乾嘉学派). Thus, many outstanding scholars in this area were big names in textology. Hu was socialized and educated in his early years in a milieu pervaded by textological tradition. This exerted a significant influence on his academic inclinations. As can be seen, although Hu received a systematic education and training in Western philosophy, his major academic work was largely drawn upon his expertise in textology. Throughout his life, Hu’s main academic achievements were predominantly reflected by his linguistic
and historical investigations into the evidences for particular understandings of classical Chinese works.

When Hu came into contact with Deweyan pragmatism, he was attracted and convinced by the modern scientific method elaborated in Dewey's work. Hu considered that what was severely lacked in China's academic research was exactly scientific method. In his PhD thesis, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, Hu (1998 [1917], p. 8) claimed that the reason why China was in a serious shortage of scientific research is simply because of the problem of method. Therefore, Hu advocated using pragmatist methods of thinking in China's academic fields. Inspired by Deweyan pragmatism, Hu asserted that the methods used in Chinese traditional textology bear a great resemblance to modern scientific methods, which had not yet been noticed by modern Chinese scholars. Later in his life, Hu recalled:

He [Dewey] helped me [understand] the research methods of classical science and of the historians from the last one thousand years – in particular, the last three hundred years – such as ‘kaojuxue,’ ‘kaozhengxue,’ etc. I translate these into English as ‘evidential investigation,’ since it is an investigation on the basis of evidence. There were at this time only very few people (virtually none) who notice these commonalities between the principles of modern science and our classical kaoju, kaozheng method. I was the first to have expressed these statements. And the reason why I could do so was really thanks to Dewey’s theories. (Hu, 1959, cited in Schulte, 2011, pp. 86–87).

By combining textology methods from Chinese academic traditions and the modern scientific method clarified in Deweyan pragmatism, Hu created a method for academic research. In his short autobiography, *My Credo and Its Evolution*, Hu claimed that:

Dewey has given us a philosophy of thinking which treats thinking as an art, as a technique. And in *How We Think* and *Essays in Experimental Logic* he has worked out this technique, which I have found to be true not only of the discoveries in the experimental sciences, but also of the best researches in the historical sciences, such as textual criticism, philological reconstruction, and higher criticism. In all these fields, the best results have been achieved by the same technique, which in its essence consist of a boldness in suggesting hypotheses coupled with a most solicitous regard for control and verification (大胆的假设，小心的求证). (HU, 2001[1931], pp. 246–247).
Conclusion

In this essay, I have shown that Hu Shi received Deweyan pragmatism as only a method, which causes insufficient understanding and even misunderstanding of Dewey's philosophical and educational ideas. Many Chinese scholars today have taken note of this; however, the reason why Hu's reception, interpretation, and even advocacy of pragmatism only focused on Deweyan pragmatism as a method has not yet been analyzed systematically or adequately.

As has been shown, Hu's reception and interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism was complicated because Hu was influenced by his materialistic naturalism, motivated by the need for sociocultural reform in China, and determined by his academic inclinations cultivated during his early years. Hu's introduction of Dewey's philosophical and educational ideas again shows that any foreign ideas or thought are very likely to be interpreted in a way that is different from their original meaning. This transformation of ideas may be caused by the interaction between receivers and the context they are in, by the cultural differences encountered in this process, and even by the urgent and practical needs in a particular sociopolitical situation. In particular, the important people interpreting those ideas into their local contexts are surely key "filters" or "floodgates" in this transmitting process. Nevertheless, through this process, the refraction or deviation of those ideas occurs (Schriewer, 2012).

Although there might be some misunderstandings caused by Hu's interpretation of pragmatism, that is, his partial reception of pragmatism as only a method, his contribution to introducing pragmatism to China at that time for cultural, social, academic and educational reform cannot be ignored or underestimated. Although Hu's endeavor to conduct social reform through pure cultural and educational reform failed because of unsuitable circumstances of China at the time, Dewey's philosophical ideas had greatly influenced China since then and are still working even today in China, particularly in the field of education. As Wang (2019) says, it is "an unfinished task" (p. 34). Finally, Hu's motivations to bring pragmatism as a method into the early republic of China indicate that it is inaccurate to label Hu as a pure advocate of the total Westernization of China in contemporary Chinese history.

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