

Mao Zedong and John Dewey: A Comparison of Educational Thought

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The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that although Mao Zedong (1893-1976) and John Dewey (1859-1952) grew up in different countries and in different cultures they held very similar ideas in their educational thought. Similarities in Mao's and Dewey's educational thought were rooted in maternal modeling of benevolent action. The social transitions of their time provided them opportunities to expand this idea to solve social problems through education. Exposure to common philosophical sources also resulted in similarities in their philosophical thought.

Le but de cet article est de montrer que même si Mao Zedong (1893-1976) et John Dewey (1859-1952) ont grandi dans des pays et des cultures différentes, ils tenaient, dans leur pensée éducative, des idées très semblables. Les ressemblances dans la pensée éducative de Mao et de Dewey trouvent leurs racines dans le modèle maternel de l'action bienveillante. Les transitions sociales de leur époque leur ont donné l'occasion de mettre à l'épreuve ce modèle pour solutionner les problèmes sociaux par l'éducation. La mise à jour de leurs sources philosophiques communes les a amenés à développer des ressemblances dans leur pensée philosophique.

Because Mao Zedong and John Dewey were born and raised in different countries and in markedly differing cultures, their educational thought might also be expected to differ considerably. However, analysis of their respective lives and philosophical influences reveals that their philosophical and educational thoughts were similar.

Mao Zedong

Family and time. Mao Zedong was born in Shao Shan village, Xiang Tang county, Hunan province on December 26, 1893. He was the eldest of four children in the family. His father, Mao Jen-sheng, a peasant with two years of schooling, was a strict and formidable man.

Mao's mother, whose maiden name was Wen Chi-mei, was a thrifty and illiterate peasant woman. As a Buddhist, she gave her children instruction in that religion. At the age of seven, Mao began going with his mother to Buddhist ceremonies and learning to sing Buddhist hymns, which left a deep impression on young Mao. He recalled: "My mother was a kind woman,

generous and sympathetic and ever ready to share whatever she had. She pitied the poor and often gave them rice when they came to ask it during famines" (Mao, 1949, p. 4). Her action taught Mao to help the poor, and influenced Mao's later life. Mao loved her very deeply; he wrote about her and spoke of her with deep emotion, even decades after her death (Han, 1972, p. 18).

Social influence. Among the major social events prior to Mao's birth were China's constant defeats in different wars. After Mao's birth, Chinese society continued in chaos. Although Mao worshipped in Buddhist temples with his mother, both his belief in the secular monarchy and his faith in Buddhism had been deeply shaken at about the age of 12 by various social events (Chu, 1980, p. 6).

The developments of Mao's intellectual and social thought were deeply and intricately related to social events during his Normal School years of 1912 to 1918 and his stay in Beijing in 1918. Witnessing the resignation of Dr. Sun, the first President of the Republic, and the occupation by Japanese troops of Tsingtao in Shandong Province, Mao's inspiration toward benevolent action developed into patriotism, and he wanted to save China from being partitioned, as the Western powers and Japan seemingly conspired to do.

Mao's stay in Beijing was crucial in life and work. In Beijing University, he had the opportunity to read books about various Western social theories and to contact famous scholars such as Hu Shih, Chen Duxiu, and Li Dachao. During the winter of 1918-1919, he developed a special interest in Marxism, due to the influence of Li Dachao – a professor of Beijing University. Mao studied, with curiosity, and increasing interest, the need for the Chinese peasant-proletarian revolution advocated by Li. In the summer of 1920, Mao himself said that he had become a Marxist (Snow, 1968, pp. 155-157).

Philosophical sources. Mao's philosophical sources were complex. In brief, he was first influenced by traditional Chinese culture in terms of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Then, he was exposed to and influenced by many Western ideas. Finally, Mao adopted Marxism-Leninism and combined it with other ideas to form his own thought. The present discussion is limited to philosophical sources which are similar to Dewey's philosophical sources.

Kant was one among the most significant influences for Mao who was exposed to Kantian ideas through his teacher at the First Normal School, Yang Changji (Yang, 1991, p. 94). Yang a confirmed admirer of Samuel Smile, T.H. Green, and Kant had studied Kant at a German university before

returning to China. When he taught ethics, Yang selected as a text a Chinese version of *A System of Ethics* by Kant's disciple, Friedreich Paulsen. Mao spent two years on this course and made extensive, marginal commentaries on Paulsen's book (Womack, 1982, p. 8). Mao was inspired to write the essay "The Power of the Mind." "Like Kant, Mao Zedong divided the universe into two existing worlds to support his dualism" (Li, 1989, p. 61). In 1964, in a speech on philosophical questions, Mao recalled "at that time, I believed Kantian dualism and particularly in idealism" (Vladimirov, 1981, pp. 46-47).

Mao was also influenced by Hegel. When Snow revisited China in 1964, Mao informed Snow that before 1937 he "had read Hegel" (Li, 1989, p. 27). Shortly before his death in 1976, when Mao talked to a German delegation, he indicated that his thought had been strongly influenced by "four Germans: Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Haeckel" (Starr, 1979, p. 42). Mao was exposed to Hegel by reading *A System of Ethics*, *Western Ethics* and the *Outline of Philosophy*, and Hegel's influence was obvious in Mao's thought. Wilson (1977) noted, for example, that "Mao thinks, as did Hegel, that knowledge must not aim to seize a static truth: truth is constantly made up by gradually approaching it" (p. 161). Indeed, Li (1989) observed that "Mao never gave up the study of Hegelian philosophy" (p. 28).

In his ethical class, Yang Changji also talked a lot about T.H. Green's self-fulfillment. From Yang Changji, Mao Zedong encountered, and accepted, Green's view that society is the necessary prerequisite of self-fulfillment. Mao asserted that "the utmost purpose of human beings is self-fulfillment. The method to reach self-fulfillment is to combine human beings with the society" (Li, 1989, p. 151), an indication that Mao was in agreement with Green.

According to Yang (1991), Mao particularly favored T.H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (translated by Yen Fu), which introduced Social Darwinism (p. 92). Wakeman observed that

Social progress ... means a checking of the cosmic progress at every step and the substitution for it of another which may be called the ethical progress. Just as human art runs athwart the cosmic progress in horticulture so does human morality run athwart the cosmic progress. (1973, p. 154)

In Mao's view, Darwinian evolutionary theory could be used to bring changes in Chinese feudal society (Yang, 1991, p. 93).

Importantly, Mao was both directly and indirectly influenced by John Dewey. Mao first encountered pragmatism from his teacher, Yang Changji, who was a close friend of Dewey's representative in China, Hu Shih. Yang Changji introduced Mao to Hu Shih in 1918 at Beijing University. Mao

attended a series of Hu Shih's lectures at Beijing University regarding traditional Chinese philosophy and pragmatism; Mao accepted his viewpoint ardently (Li, 1989, p. 37).

When Mao went to Beijing for the second time in 1919, he attended Dewey's guest lecture on "Three Contemporary Philosophers" (William James, Henri Bergson, and Bertrand Russell). Mao was enthralled by Dewey's ideas and resolved to study Western philosophy by using "Three Contemporary Philosophers" as a textbook (Li, 1989, p. 26). When Dewey later lectured in 1920 in Changsha, (the capital of Mao's province, Hunan), Mao was involved both in organizing the presentation and in producing the official record. After each lecture, Mao consulted thoroughly with his close friends. In these ways, Dewey's lectures exerted considerable influence on the development of Mao's philosophical thought (Li, 1989, p. 26). Mao believed that pragmatism could constitute an effective weapon to fight against feudalism.

Philosophical thought. To further his endeavor to save China from colonial and feudal oppression, Mao continued his search for a philosophy which could serve as an ideological guide toward the resolution of social problems in China. Ultimately, Mao embraced Marxism-Leninism, believing that Chinese revolution should take the road of the "October Revolution" in Russia, that is, to use violence to acquire national power.

Mao combined the general principles of Marxism with his assessment of the concrete situation of Chinese society to form his own thought, including both the theory of new-democratic revolution, which deals with the analysis of the anticolonial and antifeudal revolution in China before 1949, and the theory of class struggle in socialist society (or the theory of continuous revolution), which deals with the mode of socialist development in China after 1949.

Mao saw mid 20th-century China as a semicolonial and semifeudalist country. The Chinese people at that time suffered both from imperialism and from feudalism. Thus, he believed, Chinese revolution needed to be targeted to fight against both imperialism and feudalism, which in fact became the explicit goals of the Chinese revolution.

According to Marxist theory, China lacked the requisite economic conditions upon which to found a proletarian revolution, in as much as China was a semicolonial and semifeudal society in which the peasantry formed the majority. The only way to seize political power, therefore, was by armed force, building rural area bases first, which could then be employed to take over

the cities. This constituted the method of the Chinese revolution (Pan, 1975, p. 17).

After 1949, Mao held the view that

the class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between different political forces and the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. (Fraser, 1967, pp. 17-18)

To strengthen the proletarian national governance, Mao believed it was imperative to continue fighting the bourgeoisie, thus the theory of continuous revolution or permanent revolution.

Educational thought. Following the tradition of Chinese culture and influenced by the social thought of his time, Mao emphasized the significance of education in creating a new social order. As early as his student year at the First Normal School (1912-1917), Mao ran the Workers' Night School with his schoolmates, and later the Hunan Self-Education College, endeavoring to realize his goal of creating change by running schools. After embracing Marxism-Leninism, Mao continued to regard education as a powerful weapon to reach his political goals, asserting that "to overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere" (*Peking Review*, Nov 15, 1974, p. 19). Mao wrote in 1957: "There is the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road We must heighten our vigilance. We must conduct socialist education" (Mao, 1971, pp. 350-87).

Based on Marxist-Leninist thought that education is part of the superstructure of society, Mao formulated his definition of the nature of education. In Mao's view, educational programs were outgrowths of economic and political systems, and knowledge was an instrument for accomplishing certain tasks, especially problem solving. Education, in Mao's view, was also a fundamental vehicle teaching and disseminating political ideas. Education is the state highway to transform China into a new Sinocized communist society – that is, to develop and make a new China (Chu, 1980, p. 65).

Based on the political necessity to maintain and create a socialist society, Mao believed that the supreme aim of education was to serve proletarian politics through winning national governance before 1949, and training millions of successors to carry on the cause of proletarian revolution after 1949. In his legendary February 27, 1957 speech, Mao asserted: "Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to

develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist conscientiousness and culture" (Mao, 1971, p. 459).

According to Mao, the preeminent principle in education is to "put politics in command," meaning that ideology is central to Chinese life. Mao proposed that ideology be always the "commander-in-chief" (Ye, 1990, pp 102-109) of all other work. Proletarian politics must be the basis of all educational works, and each educational implementation, such as the school system, administration, curriculum, and method of teaching and learning, must be permeated with political thought. Moreover, Mao believed that if proletarian revolution was to be successful, it had to educate and re-educate people to new ways of thinking and acting in the world.

However, politics in command was not enough to bring up proletarian successors. Mao strongly opposed the traditional way of learning, believing that this way of learning was not suitable to the goal of cultivating proletarian successors. On numerous occasions Mao pointed out that Chinese education had failed due to the separation of schooling and productive labor. As early as in the First Normal School, Mao stated that "Chinese education is not related to real life. What students learned in school can not be used in society. As a result, students don't know the real problems in society, and society does not welcome those students" (Li, 1989, p. 268). He suggested that one "abandon the parts of old education which are not related to real life and production" (p. 269). In 1957, Mao said: "The book learning of the intelligentsia, if it is not combined with practice, remains incomplete, even grossly inadequate" (Vladimirov, 1981, p. 153). In Mao's view, education must be connected with real life and cultivate people who can use their skills to serve the society rather than being bookworms.

For Mao, the spirit of serving others was the highest morality. He wrote:

Our point of departure is to serve the people whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from one's self interests or from the interests of a small group." (Mao, 1965, p. 1096)

According to Mao, moral education was most important because no matter how intelligent and how healthy one is, if one is not willing to serve the people, all is in vain.

But being "red" (or loyal) in terms of willingness to serve the people and the country was not sufficient. Proletarian successors should master certain knowledge to do the assigned job, which is related to intellectual education. In the Opening Address at the Eighth National Congress of the CCP in 1956, Mao said: "In transforming a backward agricultural China into an advanced

industrialized country So we must be good at learning" (Fraser, 1967, p. 304). In order to engage in national construction, science and technology were needed. The "poor and blank" aspects of China's economy and culture must be thoroughly transformed by means of modern science. Thus, "students have to study not only liberal arts, but also engineering, agriculture – science" (Mao, 1965, pp. 817-818).

Additionally, according to Mao, a strong body is the first condition for the whole development of people. In his 1917 article, "A Study of Physical Education," Mao maintained that

When the body is strong, then one can advance speedily in knowledge and morality and reap far-reaching advantages Physical education not only enhances knowledge, it also harmonizes the sentiments Exercise over a long period of time can produce great results and give rise to a feeling of personal value. (Li, 1989, pp. 276-277)

In Old China, a majority of people had no chance to learn how to read and calculate. In Mao's view, by teaching them how to read and compute they would understand why they had suffered, and would therefore support the Chinese revolution. Mao held this idea throughout his life: As a young man in Changsha, he ran the Worker Night School, while during the Cultural Revolution he suggested workers, peasants, and soldiers enter institutions of higher learning.

The doing-knowing-doing system was also important in Mao's educational thought. According to Mao, all human knowledge comes first through the senses, and perceptions thus gained evolve into rational knowledge; these two types of knowledge form an integral whole, and though seemingly diverse, are interdependent.

Mao believed that education is a lifelong process and that all activities and total working experiences can be educational. When he spoke of education, he meant far more than the schools which were considered only one of the many agencies of education. He thought of society itself as a big school. Villages, cities, and each of the farms and factory plants could be considered education labs. Based on this notion, Mao suggested a diversified pattern of education. He wrote:

In our education we must have not only regular primary and secondary schools but also scattered, irregular village schools, newspaper-reading groups and literacy classes. We should not only have the new school but also utilize the old village tutor system and reconstruct it. (Chu, 1980, p. 80)

Also, self-study was one of the most important concepts in Mao's thought. As we know, Mao himself was a self-educated person. Even during the First

Normal School, he only attended the lectures he was interested in. He spent most of his time reading his own books. He regarded his six months in Hunan library and another six months in the library of Beijing University as the most valuable time spent in his learning career (Vladimirov, 1981, p. 152). As early as 1923, Mao established the Self-Study College. After 1949, he ordered the "spare-time study," "half-work and half-study," and various other forms of educational programs (Chen, 1970, p. 173).

John Dewey

Family and time. John Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont on October 20, 1859. He was the third of the four sons of Archibald and Lucina (Rich) Dewey. Dewey's father, Archibald Dewey, a north Vermont farm boy who became a reasonably successful town grocer and later a tobacconist, was a handsome, outgoing, witty man.

Dewey's mother, Lucina Rich Dewey, had come from a prominent and well-to-do Vermont family. Lucina seems by all accounts to have been an unusual woman. She seldom hesitated to assert her will in the affairs of the family. In addition, she did not limit her attentions to her own family. Noted especially for her work among the city's poor and her skill as a counselor to young men at the University of Vermont, she was a leader among the women in the church who dedicated themselves to benevolent philanthropy. She sought, as she put it, to "make Burlington a temperate and moral city, a safe clean place for young men, a city of virtuous and happy homes" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 4). His mother's philanthropy may well have exercised a formative influence on Dewey's social conscience and, at the same time, shaped his lifelong antipathy toward "do-gooders," whose altruism, he felt, betrayed a particularly subtle form of egotism (Westbrook, 1991, p. 4).

Social influence. Like Mao, Dewey was born in a transitional society. The year of Dewey's birth was a momentous one in Western intellectual history, witnessing the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* as well as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and Karl Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*.

During his childhood, Dewey experienced the devastation and privations of the Civil War. According to Sidney Hook, "Dewey's youthful impressions of carnage were an important reference point for his later reflections on the futility of violence in the achievement of human purpose" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 3).

As the Civil War came to an end, there appeared other social problems in American society. In the South, there still existed great social tension, aggravated by disease, hunger, and intense suffering. In the North, the triumph of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration caused tremendous social problems. With these social changes, the traditional role of the family and the church were lessened greatly.

In 1886 Dewey married Alice Chipman. Alice's direct and intimate urging of Dewey to bring his Hegelianism down to earth reinforced the less direct influence of T.H. Green. Dewey took from Green not only a metaphysics that secured religious belief but also the understanding that this metaphysics and faith enjoined a life of public service (Westbrook, 1991, p. 36).

Dewey's idea of doing good gradually developed into a democratic form. In his rebuttal to Sir Henry Maine, Dewey expressed his view of democracy: "Society is an organism. Democracy is not merely a form of government: it is a way of life" (Perkinson, 1976, p. 202).

Dewey became eager to spread his idea about democracy beyond the classroom as early as 1890. At Michigan, Dewey tried to expand his democratic idea through a pilot newspaper called *Thought New*. In Chicago, to "test and exhibit in actual working order the results of his theoretical work," Dewey founded what came to be called "the laboratory school" (Brickman, 1959, p. 16).

Philosophical sources. Like Mao, Dewey's philosophical sources were diverse. Dewey's ideological sources originated mainly from four parts: empiricism, Hegelianism, positivism, and Darwinism (Novock, 1975, pp. 55-66). However, there were other forces, too, which affected Dewey's outlook: for example George Herbert Mead's social theories, and Thorstein Veblen's socioeconomic ideas (Rippa, 1983, p. 207). Although Dewey's philosophical foundation was eclectic and variegated, the present discussion of his philosophical sources will concentrate on the influences of Kant, Hegel, T.H. Green, and Darwin.

Dewey's philosophy teacher at the University of Vermont, Professor Henry A.P. Torrey, was the first influential scholar. Torrey was best known as an expounder of Kant. Dewey was deeply influenced by Kant through Torrey, as Coughlan notes: "Certainly during the year that he studied privately with Torrey there was very little detachment in Dewey's view of the older man" (1975, p. 17).

During his time at Johns Hopkins and Michigan, Professor G.S. Morris, Dewey's philosophy mentor, was the greatest influence for Dewey. Dewey

took all of Morris's courses and quickly became the idealist's favorite student. By the end of his first term at Johns Hopkins, Dewey was already committed to "a theory which admits the constitutive power of Thought, as itself ultimate Being, determining objects" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 14). Although Dewey ultimately shed idealism, he acknowledged late in life that acquaintance with Hegel left a permanent impression in his thinking. This could be seen in the amendments he made to traditional empiricism.

T.H. Green was another influential person. Dewey took from Green not only a metaphysics that secured religious belief but also the understanding that this metaphysics and faith enjoined a life of public service. The philosophy of Green's school could also be found penetrating every part of Dewey's writing and teaching until the early 1890s and fertilized his initial ventures in social reform. In 1889 Dewey argued that the impression many Americans held that Green's philosophy was remote from life, was profoundly mistaken.

Both theoretically and personally, the deepest interests of his times were the deepest interests of Professor Green. The most abstruse and critical of his writings are, after all, only the attempt to solve the problems of his times – the problems which meet us in current magazine discussions, in social and political theory, in poetry, in religion, and in the interpretation of the higher results of science He saw in what is called philosophy only a systematic search for and justification of the conviction by which men should live. (Dewey, 1969, pp. 15-16)

In search for the solutions to social problems, Dewey found that Darwinism was the most useful ideology. In Dewey's system Darwinism became a weapon against conservatism in thought and deed, since it highlighted the readjustments required to respond to new needs and conditions (Novock, 1975, p. 66). In the book, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, Dewey wrote:

Old ideas give way slowly; for they are more than abstract logical forms and categories Doubtless the greatest dissolvent in contemporary thought of old questions, the greatest precipitant of new methods, new intentions, new problems, is the one effected by the scientific revolution that found its climax in the *Origin of Species*. (1910, p.19)

Philosophical Thought. Like Mao, Dewey tried to find a way to solve social problems. However, Dewey found that democracy, not revolution, was the ideal way to deal with the social problems in his society. According to Dewey, democracy is a shared, co-operative life. Varied and often conflicting individual interests are synthesized into more complex common purposes which relate individual interests to one another organically. Democracy calls

forth thought, imagination, and intelligence, and gives them the fullest opportunity of expression; at the same time, these qualities are essential to the democratic process.

Democracy, Dewey believed, is also the necessary condition for continued growth and creativity. The terms growth and creativity should caution us against any development that puts an end to growing. They remind us that life is organic and a continuing process, that each day, each epoch makes its own peculiar demands upon life. The ideal of growth requires that our varied interests and purposes and our more specific ideals form an organic synthesis in which each tends to maintain, support, and promote each other, thus achieving integrity of character.

Dewey believed that means and ends are a continuous process with no final ending. What means, then, are appropriate to our particular circumstances? The means appropriate to further extend democracy and to remedy our specific ills are intrinsic to our end, which is growth. Among these, education plays the most important role.

Educational thought. "Like Jefferson and Mann, Dewey recognized the crucial significance of public education in a democracy" (Rippa, 1983, p. 209). He wrote: "The public school is the willing pack horse of our social system; it is the true hero of the refrain: Let George do it" (Johnson, 1949, p. 107).

What is the nature of education according to Dewey? Three of the more important qualities of education are (a) education is autonomous, and thus it has no end beyond itself; consequently, (b) there is a blending of means and ends so that the processes and the products of education are intermixed; and, (c) finally the intermixing of means and ends suggests a continuous or cumulative nature of education (Emerson, n.d., p. 13).

Dewey's educational theory is closely related to his other ideas regarding democracy, growth, and experience. According to Dewey, democracy is a way of life most congenial to human nature, a way of life which is necessary to the "best, the richest and fullest experience possible" (1916, p. 87) for people. Dewey saw in his conception of democracy a compelling demand on education; and, in a passage that has since become famous, he stated the theme of his work: "Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education" (Dewey, 1916, pp. 101-102).

Growth is another important notion in Dewey's thought. Cremin (1964) observed that "ultimately, it is the conception of growth that ties Dewey's

theory of the individual to progressivism writ large" (p. 123). According to Dewey, growth is a continuous process of reconstructing or reorganizing experience through action upon the environment.

Although education should be based on experience, not all experiences are equally educative. An experience that distorts growth, or generates no further growth experience, is either miseducative or noneducative. Experience must be qualified if it is to become a part of the growth and educative process. First, it must be experience of a certain type, and second, it must be reconstructed through a reflective process that involves the individual as an active participant in the growth process.

What are the aims of education? Although there existed no single answer because Dewey constantly used different terms in describing his view about the aims of education, he believed that there are three aims of education: social, moral, and intellectual.

Among these aims, the social one was of preeminent importance. In his *Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, Dewey wrote

fruitful and creative participation in society is the end at which we aim education; the child as he is when he comes to us is the point from which to start; and the school is the bridge linking the child and his society. The business of education is to help the child walk across the bridge and become a useful, contributing member of his society (Clopton, 1973, p. 198).

According to Dewey, education has to meet the needs caused by social change in any society. Industrialization and urbanization brought great change to American society. Now, the school had to perform the functions previously performed by the community itself. Thus, the function of the school was explicitly social: to train "each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self direction" (Perkinson, 1976, p. 212). This, Dewey claimed, "was the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious" (p. 212). Dewey also held that a major aim of education was to make the child morally responsible so that as an adult he can help to create new rules and become reasonably self-sufficient. When Dewey spoke of the moral goodness, he meant the common good, which included a good life for both the individual and society. He wrote "or more simply, the moral end must be not only the good for all the particular acts of an individual, but must be a common good – a good which in satisfying one, satisfies others (Dewey, 1969, p. 261).

For Dewey, "interests in intellectual matters" was the outcome toward which education should proceed (Dewey, 1933, p. 226). He held that "without conceptualizing or intellectualizing, nothing is gained" that "counts, educationally speaking" (p. 153). Further, he believed that no educational question is of greater importance than how to acquire intellectual good out of what persons and books have to communicate.

Reflective thinking or reflective inquiry is the most important idea in intellectual growth because the aim of education is the development of reflective, creative, responsible thought (Archambault, 1974, p. xviii)..

In modern society, a person must count on others for support, and he or she must do something to support those who depend on him or her. To fulfill this necessity of life, every person needs to develop some kind of vocation (skills). As Dewey cogently put it, "all of us have callings, occupations – only the luxuriously idle and the submerged idle, only the leisure class of fashion and of pauperism, violate this law" (Ratner, 1939, p. 52).

How are social, moral, and intellectual growth facilitated? According to Dewey, the objectives of instruction must be postulated on the basis of students' purposes, local conditions, social demands, and that skill and knowledge which are needed in order to complete worthy projects. The methods of instruction must be flexible to meet various needs. Students should be looked upon as willful, purposive, curious, and active. The teacher should be considered a guide who helps the student to achieve his or her own purposes. The subject matter of instruction should be completely redefined in terms of those facts, ideas, and objects that are helpful in fulfilling students' purposes. The classroom should be looked upon as a total environment where physical and social conditions, as well as abstract intellectual materials, are essential features that affect the learning process. The school, in sum, should be child-centered.

Comparison Between Mao Zedong and John Dewey

Mao and Dewey were from quite different families. However, interestingly, both of them had strong ties with their mothers, though each exerted different but powerful influences on them. From their mothers, both men learned about doing good. Although the sources of the idea of doing good were from different religions, with Mao's from Buddhism and Dewey's from Christianity, the real meaning of this idea was almost the same – to help the poor and the weak. This idea constitutes foundation of the similarities between Mao Zedong and John Dewey.

Also, both Mao and Dewey lived during the same momentous century. The social transitions of the 20th century left a deep impression on both young Mao and young Dewey. Thus, with the expansion of the idea of doing good, both men tried to find a way to solve their respective social problems, though Mao was more radical than Dewey.

Exposure to the same ideas may lay certain foundations for the similarities in their philosophical and social thought, as well as social practice in terms of education. For example, both Mao and Dewey emphasized the social function of education, arguably related to the influences of T.H. Green. Both men viewed the world as problematic and tried to make certain innovations in education to meet diverse needs of their changing societies, which may trace back to Darwin's influence. In addition, Mao's epistemology bore great similarities to that of Dewey, which in some measure can be attributed to Dewey's direct influence on him.

Besides the similarities in their philosophical sources, both men experienced a similar progression in their philosophical thought from idealism to realism or pragmatism. Mao wrote: "I should point out that my own history is one that leads from incomprehension to enlightenment, from idealism to materialism" (Vladimirov, 1981, p. 48). During his time at the First Normal School, Mao learned Kantianism from Yang Changji's instruction, while at the University of Vermont Dewey received it from Torrey. Interestingly, both of them were exposed to Kant's ideas as young adults (Mao entered the First Normal School at the age of 19), and embraced them ardently: Mao said, "At that time, I believed Kantian dualism and particularly in idealism" (Vladimirov, 1981, p. 47), while Dewey expressed his regards for Kant in a letter to Torrey. But idealism did not last long for either of them. The social realities of their lives revealed that idealism could not help their social practice. Both of them changed from idealists to realists or pragmatists.

The exposure to the same ideas may thus account for the similarities of their philosophical thought. One of the central themes that permeated the thought of both Mao and Dewey was a belief that change characterized the nature of reality and knowledge. In his writings Mao (1968) remarked "changes do take place in the geography and climate of the earth as a whole and every part of it, but they are insignificant when compared with changes in society" (p. 27).

In his writings on the distinctive qualities of nature and experience, Dewey (1929) described reality as "a world which is an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies ... ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, and processes going on to consequences as yet indeterminate" (p. 47).

Both Mao and Dewey perceived a material world that is constantly changing and dynamic rather than static in character. Mao seemed to believe that a communist society could be the result of historical change and because of its classless character, more progressive than previous societies. Dewey believed that, in general, changes in nature were evolutionary and progressive. For Mao, nature was propelled by internal and external contradictions. Dewey's biological view of nature assumes an evolutionary process that can be explained only in terms of change and development. It would seem evident that this conception of change is owed to the influence of Darwinism.

Hill (1981) points out that the similarities of epistemology of Mao and Dewey were apparent. They both critiqued traditional rationalist and empiricist positions for being too one-sided and narrow. They postulated a theory of truth that demands a return to practice for empirical verification. On both accounts, practice was both the source and verification of knowledge. Truth was also seen as being relative to time and place and context. Further, the truth of knowledge claims lies in its correspondence to the reality of the world, not merely by logical continuity (pp. 238-239).

According to Mao, there were two outstanding characteristics of his philosophy – class nature and practicality. By practice Mao meant social practice in form of class struggle. As Mao said "it is only with class struggle that there is philosophy – it is useless to discuss the theory of knowledge apart from practice" (Mohanty, 1978, p. 141).

Dewey also emphasized the need to put philosophy into social practice in the form of education. Dewey asserted that "philosophic theory has no Aladdin's lamp to summon into immediate existence the value which it intellectually constructs Education is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested" (Johnson, 1949, p. 47). Although the forms of social practice were different, they both emphasized the social function of their respective philosophies, which seemed to be related to the influence of T.H. Green.

In his book *Continuing the Revolution*, Starr (1979) stated:

The theory of knowledge described here is one which ... bears striking resemblance to that of the American pragmatist, John Dewey, whose thought exerted considerable influence on the Chinese intellectuals with whom Mao had contact during the May Fourth period. Like Dewey, Mao sees ideas growing out of practical experience and in turn, shaping that experience. For both, the world is regarded as a series of problems, which are the occasion for both theory and action. Indeed, the

resemblance was clear to Mao, since he on more than one occasion, described himself as a pragmatist. (pp. 70-71)

Both Mao and Dewey recognized the function of education in society. Both men emphasized that education should be closely related to society and that education should meet the changing needs of societies. In moral education, Mao wanted to cultivate children who would like to serve the people whole-heartedly, and Dewey advocated training children to serve the common good. Although the terms were different, both of them actually meant to serve the majority of people, which reflects their common inspiration for doing good. In intellectual education, they both wanted children to learn skills to serve society. Mao's concept of total education, in particular, is strikingly similar to Dewey's idea that education be continuous and cumulative. Also, Mao's doing-knowing-doing system, in terms of learning from practice, is similar to Dewey's learning by doing. Actually, Mao's early educational thought was closely related to Dewey's educational thought (Li, 1989, p. 257).

There are also important differences between Mao and Dewey. In Mao's family there existed tensions between husband and wife as well as between father and son, while Dewey grew up in a harmonious family. From the conflict with his father, Mao learned to rebel and fight against authorities. Mao's inclination to solve problems in violent ways may be related to the conflict with his father. By contrast, Dewey's methodological moderation may, in part, be accounted for by his family influence. Knowing their respective family situations provides us with an understanding of some of the determinants of their differences.

The society Mao lived in was more chaotic than that of Dewey's, and thus differing social situations influenced the direction of their respective ideas of doing good. In solving social problems, Mao chose a more radical way of socialism, while Dewey selected a more moderate method of democracy.

Also, there existed differences in their philosophical sources. Before Mao's exposure to various western ideas, he had been deeply rooted in the philosophical, ideological, social, and ethical ideas of traditional Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese culture left upon him a prominent influence in guiding his social practice, because Mao was first a Chinese, and then a Marxist. In other words, Mao's sources were both eastern and western, while Dewey's sources were primarily western: empiricism, Hegelianism, positivism, and Darwinism.

Their views on class, class struggle, and revolution are quite different. As we know, Mao was mostly a politician. From Karl Marx, Mao learned that

there existed different classes and class struggle was a character in any society. People were divided into different classes according to their economic situations. From Lenin and the Russian Revolution, he came to believe that the only way for the proletariat to take national power was by means of violent revolution. From his own practice, he learned to maintain governance by continuous revolution. In other words, class, class struggle, and revolution were at the core of his thought.

Dewey was not a politician, but a philosopher. He suggested a classless democracy. In accord with his view that economic conditions and class relations do not determine the essence of political phenomena, he did not approach democracy as a historically-produced and materially-conditioned mode of government. He was the champion of a pure democracy "which never was on land or sea" (Novock, 1975, p. 212). Dewey argued that

the keynote of democracy [is] ... the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together All those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them. (Ratner, 1939, pp. 400-401).

In Dewey's opinion, civilization proceeded from routinism to science, and from brute force to intelligence – a process best embodied in American democracy. Humankind has reached this point not through class struggle but through the solidarity of social force, not by conflict but by cooperation. "To say that all past historic social progress has been the result of cooperation and not of conflict would also be exaggeration. But exaggeration against exaggeration, it is the more reasonable of the two" (Ratner, 1939, p. 445).

In accord with the above views, Dewey was not in favor of revolution. For him, revolution was no longer a live option for Americans. He would not admit that revolutions have any lawful or necessary place in the progress of class society. He argued that revolution in the United States was antiquated, wrong, and harmful.

In addition, Mao and Dewey had different views about their educational aims. For Mao, the aims of education were closely connected with his political task – to serve proletarian politics, and to cultivate successors for the proletarian cause. Dewey's educational objectives were more congenial to the social needs of the society – to help the child to live an effective social life, to teach them common good, and to provide them with such skills as reflective thinking and scientific methods in order to solve social problems.

In summary, although Mao Zedong and John Dewey represented different cultures, political perspectives, and ethical groups, they had very similar

views in educational thought, and these similarities may be seen as comprising the major components in their educational thought.

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