

## Reading Dewey's *Letters from China and Japan* (3): A Study of Dewey's Surroundings During His Shanghai Days

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On April 30th, 1919, the Deweys arrived in Shanghai by liner Kumano Maru (熊野丸). This event is repeatedly mentioned in articles of nowadays, while, few have asked why the Deweys took this liner and why he came to Shanghai, rather than any other city. In fact, there were some interesting historical reasons that influenced Dewey's choices and his experiences during his time in Shanghai also reflected many of the characteristics of the time, and these characteristics had a significant impact on Dewey's subsequent two years in China. This study will focus on some social surroundings of John Dewey during his Shanghai time.

### 1. Shanghai: Dewey's entrance into China

The Kumano Maru, on which the Deweys sailed, was launched in 1901 and served for the Japanese Navy at Yokosuka Naval District and Sasebo Naval District until 1918. Then it was converted to civilian use, and on October 26th, 1918, the 2,873-ton Kumano Maru officially started its service between Kobe and Shanghai (via Moji). Thus, when the Deweys went aboard, it was a brand-new and luxurious liner that had only been in service for about six months.

At that time, the routes between China and Japan were mainly the Shanghai and Shandong (Dalian or Tsingtao) routes (Matsuura, 2020, p.2). 1919 saw the end of World War I, and during the war, Japan and Germany had just fought a fierce war in Tsingtao and the political situation in Shandong was not at peace. According to the records of Japanese maritime history, there were also several incidents of Japanese ships being blown up by German fish torpedoes even until 1918 and a freighter named Tokuyama Maru(徳山丸) sank on August

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This paper is based on my presentation given at the session "Reading Dewey's Letters from China and Japan" at the 1st International Symposium on Global Citizenship Education "Restoring Learning to Daily Living: Global Citizenship and John Dewey" (22 October 2022, at Soka University) . This research has been supported by the 14th Five Year Plan of National Education Sciences Youth Foundation of Ministry of Education (EOA220549) .

2nd, 1918 (Wakimura & Yamagata, 2003, p.128.). Considering the situation mentioned above, the only suitable route for the Deweys is the Shanghai one. They departed Kobe on April 27th 1919 and arrived in Shanghai three days later. Two years later, when a famous Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (芥川龍之介) came to visit China, his experience aboard was almost the same. It took him two days from Moji to Shanghai and according to Akutagawa, it was so fast (Akutagawa, 1925, p.1.).

Therefore, Hu Shi needed to go south early from Peking to wait for the Deweys in Shanghai. According to Hu Shi's letter to the president of Peking University, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) on May 3rd, 1919, "Dr. Dewey and his wife arrived in Shanghai at noon on the 30th. Jiang Menglin (蔣夢麟), Tao Xingzhi (陶行知) and I met them at the pier and sent them to live in the villa of Cangzhou. I asked them to take a look at Shanghai in the next few days. Last night, I gave a lecture on the basic ideas of pragmatism at the Educational Association, which I took as an introduction to Dewey's lecture tomorrow. He has two lectures, today and tomorrow. On the 5th, he will go to Hangzhou for a visit, and Jiang accompanied him. Mr. Jing Hengyi (經亨頤), a representative of the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association, came to welcome him yesterday. Dewey will stay in Hangzhou for about four or five days and give only one lecture. After returning to Shanghai, he will stay for one or two days and then go to Nanjing. He will probably stay there for about two weeks and then come to Peking." (Pan, 2018, p.358)

Hu Shi's plan was largely realized. It is noteworthy that from the very beginning, Shanghai was reflected in Dewey's eyes as a modern and big city. In his first letter to his family from China, Dewey said that "We have slept one night in China, but we haven't any first impressions, because China hasn't revealed itself to our eyes as yet. Mamma compares it to Detroit Michigan, and except that there is less coal smoke, the description hits it off. This is said to be literally an international city..." (Dewey & Dewey, 1920, p.147) From then on, Dewey was going to be greeted with a huge wave of welcome in Shanghai, while all of them were under the organization of a local educational association.

## 2. Freedom of Association, Another Factor

Dewey's first lecture in China was the *Education of Democracy*, which he delivered to his Shanghai audience on May 3rd, and it was organized by the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association (江蘇省教育會). According to Hu Shi's letter mentioned above, Hu gave an introductory lecture for the members of the association before Dewey's. As an eager discipline, Hu "took a thirty-six hour trip from Peking to meet" (Hickman, 2002, No. 03898) Dewey, but he needed local people in Shanghai to help him plan Dewey's activities. This is the reason why the

educational association played an active role during the whole process.

Founded in 1905, the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association was a famous local educational society which was to promote modern education in China. It emerged from the rising tide of freedom of association in the late Qing Dynasty, whose participants, such as Zhang Jian (張謇) and Tang Wenzhi (唐文治), either had great wealth or high academic reputation and were powerful celebrities not only in Jiangsu Province but also across China. The younger officers of this association, such as Huang Yanpei (黃炎培), Shen Enfu (沈恩孚), and Yu Rizhang (余日章), were in their prime and were very capable of handling this kind of affairs. The freedom of association was admitted only in the late years of Qing Dynasty and most of them were commercial societies at first. As *the Law for Local Autonomy* (『城鎮鄉地方自治章程』) was issued in 1909 by the Qing Government, these societies enjoyed more autonomy to develop themselves. Although at first this association was only considered as an educational administrative auxiliary group, as the social environment changed, especially after the Republic of China, the social atmosphere became more open, the influence of the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association reached its climax and its influence spread to the whole country.

It is worth noting that the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association was located in Shanghai, the most international city in China (Bergere, 2009, Chapter 7), and its members focused on international collaboration after the Republic of China. On October 9th, 1914, the Association set up an “Intercultural Department” within it, which was responsible for contacting foreigners in Southern China, including people from the YMCA, the Protestant Churches, and some from the secular school system. Since 1912, members of the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association organized several overseas educational visits, including, in 1913-1914, Yu Ziyi (俞子夷) went to the United States to join Chen Rong (陳容) and Guo Bingwen (郭秉文) to study education in Europe and the United States; in 1915, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce organized an industrial visit to the United States, and Huang Yanpei accompanied the group to study the industry and education there; in 1917, Huang and others went to Japan and South-eastern Asia, focusing on the education in the American colony of the Philippines. It is well known that Chinese education since the late Qing Dynasty has basically imitated the Japanese system, but also introduced western educational ideas such as Johann Friedrich Herbart through the writings of Japanese scholars. Members of the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association had always considered those Japanese scholars as second-hand and low-quality, so they wanted to cross the Japanese medium and introduce European and American educational ideas directly. This is the reason why they did so many overseas visits. As early as 1913, Huang Yanpei wrote a famous article entitled “*The Adoption of the Educational Ideas of Pragmatism*”, expecting to improve education with pragmatic ideas, strengthening experiments in elementary

schools, enhancing students' hand word abilities, etc. Of course, this "pragmatic" approach of Huang Yanpei was probably not an original one of Dewey's and he mixed it with his own ideas about vocational training. In other words, it was quite far from Dewey's theory (Liu, 2022, p.215). However, at that time, Huang was already ahead of his time. And it is not hard to imagine how excited Huang was when Dewey finally came to Shanghai, China in 1919. Dewey was absolutely supported by the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association, and the strong strength of the Association would undoubtedly provide an important guarantee for the far-reaching spread of Dewey's ideas. From this perspective, one has to admit that it was Dewey's great fortune that he started his Chinese tour from Shanghai.

### 3. Newspapers and Magazines: The Power of Modern Media

One of the most important guarantees that the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association could offer is the modern media. Dewey could be considered almost a favorite among the Chinese newspapers, magazines, and journals during his 1919-1921 visit. *The New Education* (新教育), Vol. 1, No. 3, is a special issue on Dewey, introducing Dewey's philosophy, educational ideas, and various other related fields. It was basically a collective work of Hu Shi and Dewey's lectures in Shanghai. This was a very early and comprehensive introduction to Dewey's ideas. But what is more noteworthy is that *The New Education* was supported by the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association.

The organizing group for *The New Education* was the Chinese New Education Society. This society was founded in 1918 and it seemed to be a national society because it was named "Chinese", and it was under the auspices of the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association, Peking University, Nanjing Higher Normal School, Chi-Nan Institute (暨南学校), and Chinese Association of Vocational Education. While in fact, Cai Yuanpei, the president of Peking University, entrusted Zhang Jian as his agent in this society, and the representatives of the other organizations were all members of the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association (Xu, 2021, p.142). Therefore, the Chinese New Education Society was essentially an expanded organization of the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association, which aimed at some national reforms in education. In February 1919, the Society launched a journal *The New Education*, with a slogan that "stands for individual development and social progress". Its editor, Jiang Menglin - a graduate of Columbia University - was also a member of the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association. Thus, when *the New Education* launched its special issue on Dewey, it was still essentially the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association's support for Dewey.

The social network that extended from the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association was much broader. Members of the Association, such as Bao Gongyi (包公毅) and Zhuang

Yu (莊俞), had already been employed in institutions such as the *Shanghai Times* and the Commercial Press (商務印書館) in Shanghai. And Dewey's activities were also very close to these institutions. The next day Dewey arrived in Shanghai, he was taken to the Commercial Press, and Dewey was told that it is "the biggest printing house in the east", and it "prints most of the textbooks and everything else, including money for the Republic" (Hickman, 2002, No. 03898). The Deweys also took a picture with Hu Shi and Tao Xingzhi at *Shun Pao Newspaper* (申報), and it has been reprinted quite a lot in recent years.

Almost one year later, in an April 22nd, 1920 letter to John Jacob Coss, Dewey said that "Suh Hu and a few others are very anxious to modernize the university and to do means not only getting teachers but material in shape. He is anxious to have me give a course in the interpretation of the history of western philosophy, which can become for a while a kind of standard basis for that subject. The largest publishing house in China has recently made arrangements by the way for extensive translations, rather specially in philosophy. Suh Hu and Monlin Chiang, a Teachers College man, and Chancellor Tsai of the University are the board of editors." (Hickman, 2002, No.04884) It is evident that Hu Shi had a much larger academic plan at that time and the cooperation with the Commercial Press was very important, although, for various reasons this plan has not yet been realized, Dewey's contact with the Commercial Press continued.

One of the central benefits of having these extremely enthusiastic people occupying key positions in Chinese media was that Dewey's speeches often appeared in full pages in their original form in various newspapers and magazines so that ordinary readers were not only aware of the visit of an American philosopher and educator name Dewey but were also able to directly appreciate his ideas when just picking up a piece of newspaper. This was very rare at that time. For example, on May 4th, 1919, the first lecture of Dewey at the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association was comprehensively introduced in the *Shun Pao Newspaper*, with special emphasis on the need to promote both science and democracy in education, and the second lecture of Dewey was reported in details in the following day's *Shun Pao Newspaper*, introducing Dewey's pragmatic education, which aimed at enabling children to adequately cope with the realities of society. In addition to this, the magazines in the hands of these younger scholars, such as *the New Education*, published Dewey's speech in a comprehensive manner, regardless of the length of the article. This made Dewey's ideas available to most people. This is the reason why Dewey made a joke to his family that "can you wonder I hate to leave a country where educational lectures are treated as news?" (Hickman, 2002, No. 03964) before his final departure.

An interesting and contrasting example is that despite the official invitation from the

Japanese side, the content of Dewey's lectures was never made public to the general public, but was confined to the small circle of philosophical studies at Tokyo Imperial University. This made Dewey's influence in Japan very limited during the same period.

#### 4. Conclusion

No one can doubt the magnitude of Dewey's influence on modern education in China, but it is worth noting that this great influence was promoted by several historical factors. From the moment he arrived in Shanghai, there were a lot of factors that influenced his visit to China, directly or indirectly. The global and open environment of Shanghai, the positive development of the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Association, and the burgeoning of modern media in China at the time created space for Dewey to broaden his influence.

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