

Cultivating Intelligent Citizens: The Implication of Dewey's Intelligence Concept for the Chinese Civic Education

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Abstract

“Intelligence” is the core concept of Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy. On the basis of his empirical philosophy, Dewey introduced the concept of intelligence. He believes that intelligence is the uttermost central moral character of a citizen. Promoting civic intelligence is the central task of the philosophy of education. Due to its unique social background, the lack of intelligence is one of the important factors that undermine the effect of civic education in China. Therefore, fully absorbing the essence and methodology of Dewey’s intelligence concept and introducing them to the Chinese civic education will crucially promote the development of Chinese civic education.

Key words: Intelligence; Civic education; Dewey

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INTRODUCTION

“Intelligence” is the core concept of Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy. Dewey argues against the traditional metaphysical concept of “reason” and proposes a new concept—intelligence. Unlike the traditional concept of reason, the concept of intelligence is rooted in experience.

When discussing experience, Dewey overcomes the binary opposition—he believes that experience is neither a conceptual way for a subject to view an object nor an independently existing spirit, but rather an interaction and a basic existing form between subject and object as well as between organisms and environment, such that the mind-body problem in the modern metaphysics no longer applies here. At the meantime, Dewey expanded the methodology of experience from the domain of science to every aspect of life. The methodology of experience thus bears the standards of cognition and value, as well as the hope of the living world. In this sense, the mission of philosophy is not to provide explanation and classification for the world, but rather to examine and reflect on the explanation and classification of the world.

1. THE ANALYSIS OF DEWEY’S INTELLIGENCE CONCEPT

In explaining the concept of intelligence, Dewey said,

Only action, interaction, can change or remake objects. The analogy of the skilled artist holds. His intelligence is a factor in forming new objects which mark a fulfillment. But this is because intelligence is incarnate in overt action, using things as means to affect other things. Thought, reason, intelligence, whatever word we choose to use, is existentially an adjective (or better an adverb), not a noun. (Dewey, 1958) It is an inclination of action, a character of action, and such action can predict the result of the current situation, and use such prediction as a plan and means to manage things.

In his book *How We Think*, Dewey further elaborated on the relationship between intelligence and reflective thinking. He believes that intelligence means reflective thinking, and such thinking is important in monitoring and guiding the process of experience. Dewey distinguished pragmatic logic from formal logic, claiming that intelligence is linked to pragmatic logic. One of the basic missions of pragmatic logic is to convert an uncertain situation to a certain one. Under this premise, pragmatic

logic bears characteristics such as caution, carefulness, thoroughness, definiteness, exactness, orderliness, methodical arrangement. These are the traits by which we mark off the logical from what is random and casual on one side and from what is academic and formal on the other. (Dewey, 1997, p.57)

From the above analysis, we can see that intelligence, through reflective thinking, takes the responsibility of assuring and guiding the improvement of human practice and experience. Dewey believes that the application of intelligence should not be limited to the domain of science, but also in exploring social and moral domains. It can be applied to every aspect of human life.

Gao Lai-yuan, a Chinese scholar, gives the following comment on the concept of intelligence, "Intelligence is not a transcendental reason, nor is it a mythical spirit of Dewey's philosophical theory. It flourishes under the practice of life and has a practical capacity." The pragmatically intelligence proposed by Dewey is a living art in an overall context of a beautiful life (Gao, 2011).

2. CULTIVATING INTELLIGENT CITIZENS: THE APPLICATION OF INTELLIGENCE IN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The aim of education is to cultivate excellent characters. In Dewey's philosophy, such excellence is a character of reflective thinking or a habit of intelligence. In a democratic society, people with such character and habit can be considered as an "intellectual" or an "intelligent citizen." Dewey's philosophy of education emphasizes on cultivating intelligent citizens.

2.1 The "Intelligent Character" of an "Intelligent Citizen"

Dewey opposes to the idea of having an external prescription as the purpose of education. He believes that such education is oppressive. Dewey argues that, if there is indeed a purpose of education, it must be intelligence expressed in the form of reflective thinking. The process of education serves to intelligence. Dewey once criticized traditional education for oppressing people's intelligence. He believes that the main content of traditional education is formal logic, which is a paradigm and cannot truly cultivate intelligence. Dewey believes that, indubitably, "The purpose of the whole intelligence education is to form individual (citizen) character of exploring logical thinking"; however, in the current education, there is

a false conception of the relation between the psychological tendencies of an individual and his logical achievements. Logical training is inevitably regarded as something foreign and extraneous, something to be ingrafted upon the individual from without. the mind becomes logical only by learning to conform to an external subject-matter. (Dewey, 1997, p.57)

Dewey uses a geology class as an example to illustrate that the mind does not only need to acquire knowledge, but also needs to be accustomed and acclimated to the existing logic definition, abstraction, and classification of the prearranged text, and gradually acquire a logical habit, which is not approved by Dewey as a cultivation of intelligence.

Dewey opposes the idea of separating a moral life from an intelligent or a scientific life. He argues that an intelligent life includes a series of moral characters. In order to develop an intelligent habit, one needs to develop a series of characters first. He believes that education should cultivate reflective thought, which includes a series of habitual aspects of intelligence. Dewey further elaborates the habits and characteristics of intelligence, saying they include "wide sympathy, keen sensitiveness, persistence in the face of the disagreeable, balance of interests enabling us to undertake the work of analysis and decision intelligently (Frankena, 1961, pp.146-147)," besides "straightforwardness, flexible intellectual interest or open-minded will to learn, integrity of purpose, and acceptance of responsibility for consequences of ones activity." Dewey believes that there are some habits linked to the cultivation of intelligence, including "justice, objectiveness, and tolerance." Meanwhile, he also believes that an intelligent citizen, when facing difficulty (situation), should have characters such as "courage and temperance, sociability, sympathy, benevolence, love, social concern, or regard for the common good."

2.2 The Cultivation of Intelligent Citizens

Schools should design classes to cultivate intelligent habits in citizens. They should organize a real studying situation for students, because it is in real circumstance that intelligence will happen. It happens "based on the problem, resulting from the problem, and for the problem." Dewey lists the sins of traditional schooling based on the above premise, namely: (a) traditional schooling instills standard answers but not intelligence that can be used as method; (b) traditional schooling organizes the curriculum by departmentalization and emphasizes on the logic and formal structure of knowledge or curriculum, rather than organizing the curriculum on the basis of the mind; (c) traditional schooling sets a series of unreachable rational characters as its educational purposes, such as believe in supernatural, authoritarianism, worship the past, and depend on instincts. Traditional schooling has limited trust in experience and science; (d) traditional schooling depicts school life as a mean or preparation for students' future lives, and etc.. Dewey believes that if schooling cannot provide students with real experience situations and train students through such situations, the cultivation of students' intelligence character will never be achieved. Dewey stresses that it is the real problems that the students truly care, but not imaginary

or academic activities. Therefore, except for writing and in-class discussion, in a typical public school, students should have “active inquiry and careful deliberation in the significant and vital problems” that confront their communities. Dewey comments that textbook knowledge and in-class discussion rarely connects to the decisions that will influence the community, traditional schooling is often “foreign to the existing capacities of the young... beyond the reach of [their] experience... the very situation forbids much active participation by pupils.” (Zalta, 2011, p.36)

Dewey believed that school education should be into daily life in a democratic society. Generally speaking, school cannot be far away from the ivory tower of social life, but should be “prototypical society”; school life cannot to be the preparation of social life, but should to be the extension of social life. Thus, Dewey attempted to overthrow tangible or intangible barriers between school and society. In such a prototypical society, school provides students with the real situation of learning. Main form of school curriculum is activities. Activities contain the context of problems, and problems in the context must be solved by means of reflection. Activities must be able to inspire students' interests and be of certain challenging, but within the scope of the students' ability. Dewey held the view point that the atmosphere of certain freedom and democracy must be formed in the process of activity. Dewey analyzed the formation of democratic cooperation atmosphere in exploration activities. He said that the reason why exploration activities need democracy and cooperation, an important reason lies in exploration activities themselves are cooperation democratic activities, and the atmosphere of democracy and cooperation mainly includes freedom, openness, objectivity, tolerance, cooperation, rational joint, and fair.

Dewey opposed taking doctrinal purpose as educational one but taking a kind of method and means as the educational purpose. Thus, a citizen image of an ideal democratic society is becoming rich. This kind of ideal citizen is not only different from the “moral person” described by Aristotle during the period of ancient Greek, but also different from the “natural person” with the romantic color described by Rousseau. Dewey's ideal citizen is the “rational man with scientific exploring spirit and democratic qualities”. Thus it can be seen that Dewey's education philosophical thought is trying to build up an inner relation among actual logic, reflective think, rational character, political life, and school education.

Dewey's concept of reason profoundly affected the citizenship education in the United States. Even today, inquiry learning which centers on the problems as well as cooperative learning and negotiated learning that modified on the basis of inquiry learning, has become the basic form of school education class teaching, and the symbol of American citizen education.

3. LACK REASON: TWO NOTABLE PHENOMENA IN CHINESE CITIZEN EDUCATION

The concept of citizen originated in ancient Greece. In ancient Greece, citizen is referred to “people can be able to attend the popular assembly and be for the right on jurisdiction”. Since entering modern society, great changes have taken place on both the connotation and the extension of the citizen concept. In the process of long-term development, citizen or citizenship includes three basic dimensions: First is the emphasis on citizen's political participation, namely positive freedom of citizens; second is the emphasis on citizens of individual rights, namely the negative freedom of citizens; third is the emphasis on citizen's personal qualifications and political identity. On a worldwide basis, the modern citizen education is carried out under the background of democratization process in the countries all over the world after the democratic system and democratic ideals common gradually established throughout the world.

“Citizens” are foreign goods in our country. The generation of citizen education in our country is based on the social background in two aspects: On the one hand, China established the state system called a socialist country under the people's democratic dictatorship. China confirmed people's main body status in the constitution. Therefore, cultivating citizens who participate in and talk about politics is something inherent in the modern education; on the other hand, took the world over, building up civil society and cultivating citizen politics are basic tasks of modern countries. China cannot be detached from the process. Chinese Communist Party pointed out that

strengthen citizen consciousness education, establish socialist democracy rule of law, freedom, equality, fairness and justice. In the 17th National Party Congress. Report of 17th National Party Congress established the direction for citizen education in China. However, “what is a qualified citizen?” “What kind of quality does a qualified citizen should have?” For these problems, academic circles and general social groups lack the basic consensus. *Moral and Social Curriculum Standard* in China stipulates: this curriculum aims to cultivate socialist qualified citizens who have the ability to participate in modern society. However, “what ability that must have to participate in modern society lacks specific interpretation and deep analysis, design and presentation, having direct impact on the rationality and consideration of course design.” (Wang & Huang, 2008). At the same time, as long-term omission of citizen education in Chinese basic education, so that education decision-making departments and theory researchers have been unable to fully recognize the urgency of the citizen education so far.

3.1 “Reasoning” of School Citizen Education Is Not Enough

Although citizen education in modern countries is quite different, but on the whole, citizen education in modern

countries was born under the guidance of democracy, cooperation, freedom and scientific rational spirit. The ultimate purpose of citizen education is shaping people with scientific spirits and democratic quality as well as citizen personality. However, as the citizen education in our country was carried out under the background of industrialization since the founding of new China, we copied the mode of Soviet education, made education activities technical and procedural, and made education have a relatively strong technical rationality color. In a sense, education came down to megaphone or tool of politics in a long period of time. At the same time, due to the influence of examination-oriented education, school education paid attention to the memory and understanding of the teaching contents, and paid less attention to creating real experience situation for students by activities, letting students think and solve problems of reality. School education spent a lot of time and energy on students' academic performance with paper and pencil test as the main form, but it was lack of real citizen personality shaping. Although Mainland China added contents of the implementation of citizen education in *Ideology and Morality* and *Ideology and Politics* in the new curriculum reform, we still failed to build up citizen education system integrally; although citizen education also appeared in the curriculum standard, how to cultivate citizens' rational characteristics through school education has not formed a basic consensus.

3.2 “Ex-Intellectualization” Widespread Ideological Trend in Folk Level

Since modern times, liberal thought began to surge in China. This kind of idea started from abstract human nature freedom, infinitely stretched and exaggerated the importance of citizen freedom, and evaded the citizen's social responsibilities and social obligations through highlighting the publicity of individuality and the importance of individual rights and status. The result of overflow of liberalism is extremely outstanding the status and significance of individual territory when the public affairs or when individual territory has conflicts with public territory. In civil society and even in the academic circle in China, the ideological trend of regarding the citizen education as equal to personal rights education and generalized free education is no less significant. Dewey expressed his concern about liberalism spreading in the United States. In his book *Liberalism and Social Action*, he said that liberalism played an inhibiting role of social organizations for individual power, meanwhile, he expressed great concern about its lack of power in the face of social problems. He thought that beliefs and methods of early liberalism in the face of related social organization and social integration problems are invalid. However, a person with rational citizen personality must pay attention to the overall interests of civil society and the well-being of the whole political

community. Dewey's concept of reason is both technical and value. Through the having rational personality of citizens, Dewey attempted to keep a necessary tension between citizen's personal freedom and public interests of community, so that a democratic society respects the individual freedom rights without losing the base line of ethics and value.

4. POSSIBILITY OF COMBINING DEWEY'S CONCEPT OF “REASON” AND THE CITIZEN EDUCATION IN CHINA

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) criticized the “oliticized phenomenon” of the education in the book named *Learn to Survive*. UNESCO thought that “just talk about political education instead of educating in politics, content to inculcate political thoughts again and again instead of cultivating people to understand the structure of this world they lived in, and doing the real mission in life.” At present, China is carrying out the construction of political civilization. In this process of construction, the system that set up by surrounding civil society must be delivered to citizens who have healthy personalities. Therefore, under the background of socialist democratic society, the citizen education in China cannot be satisfied with the infusion of political dogma, in that case, the citizen education in China is still in the old way of “subject education” actually. Citizens must form intellectual qualities that suitable the socialist political civilization: They should not only have rich citizen knowledge and skills, but also learn how to use these knowledge and skills in different social situations and in face of different social problems, and take the formation of these skills and knowledge as the carrier and learn to form natures of democracy like cooperation, tolerance, responsibilities, concerns about public welfare, etc.. Anyway, citizen's political ideas will become the main content of the education.

It can't be denied that, the intelligence concept of Dewey was put up based on American pragmatism and western scientism in modern times as well as traditional background of Darwinian evolution, but our civic education was carried out in the background of Chinese traditional culture and socialist modernization, so there was a big gap between the two cultural backgrounds. Is it possible that we combine Dewey's “intelligence” concept and its pragmatism tradition with our civic education? Would we make mistakes just like “take oranges to another environment” or “cut the feet to fit the shoes”? Researchers believed that commensurability existed between Dewey's intelligence concept and Chinese traditional culture and reality to some extent, which made it possible to combine it with civic education in China.

A) There exists compatibility between Dewey's "intelligence" concept and Chinese social tradition and reality to a large extent. Hu Shi once said that Dewey was the ideologist who had the largest impact on China in the 20th century. As early as in 1920s, China's social thinking field had been affected deeply by Dewey's liberalism and democracy. After new China was founded, due to the influence of ideology, Dewey's pragmatism idea was out of favor for its bourgeois ideology. Since the reform and open policy, Deng Xiaoping started a discussion on "truth criterion question" in thinking field, and determined that "Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth", so that people got rid of the thinking tendency of "book only" and "authority only" when confronted with reform questions. Nowadays, due to the development of socialist marketing economy, continuous awareness of subject consciousness, and the gradual improvement of democratic politics participation consciousness and ability, all kinds of social problems, political problems and ecological problems emerge in endlessly, the solutions of which shall require the public to participate and use their wisdom. Therefore, realistic spirit of Dewey's intelligence concept is right consistent with the urgent pursuit to solve realistic problems in China.

B) There exists high commensurability between Dewey's intelligence concept and marxism epistemology that is used as guiding thought for ideology in China. Although there're important differences between Marxism and Dewey's pragmatism idea in matter of principle, but their attitude to reality and methods of solving realistic problems are consistent to a large extent. Marxism epistemology emphasizes that theories should be checked out by practice, which is identical with the thought that puts hypothesis in experience for testing in exploration activity; Marxism epistemology emphasizes the decisive effect of practice activities, which is also consistent with the thought Dewey emphasized that experience context was the source of formation of knowledge; Marxism epistemology emphasizes theory's guidance effect on practice, which also has a high similarity with control that intelligence Dewey emphasizes has over experience. It can be seen that, from the perspective of epistemology, Dewey's intelligence concept is almost identical with Marxism epistemology. Actually, from the establishment process of China's marketing economy, we put forward that we shall abandon the argument on "capitalism tendency" or "socialism tendency". Solving problems according to the result that whether it's beneficial to market economy, to a large extent, happens to coincide with the basic principle that "turn uncertain context into a certain one" in pragmatism exploration activities.

C) Dewey's intelligence concept emphasizes the attention on public welfare, which is also consistent

with China's collectivism tradition. Extreme centralized rule and individualism are both not suitable for China's development, but Dewey's intelligence concept is based on western individualistic-atomic, and aims to establish community and maintain its goodness and welfare, which in basic values, is consistent with our collectivism that we preach for a long time.

CONCLUSION

The possible ways of combination of Dewey's intelligence concept with Chinese civic education.

Establish a decent civic and social action environment for civic education. From Dewey's point of view, an intelligent citizen forms a exploration context for a realistic problem, including five steps: Firstly, an appreciable problem situation; secondly, this problem can be clarified and defined per analysis, previous experience and existing knowledge; thirdly, form a tentative hypothesis; fourthly, proceed logic deduction to result of hypothesis; fifthly, test the hypothesis in sequent experiment if possible. When students walked out of the school, and turn potential citizenship and civic ability to citizen behavior, a rational, open and tolerant environment is needed where students have the opportunity to put the "intelligence" ability and spirit they acquire at school into effect.

Compared with traditional political ecology, nowadays China's political life is getting more and more open and transparent. On the one hand, it's because of the awareness of civic consciousness of Chinese citizens; on the other hand, the continuously emerging economic problems, cultural problems and social problems are more and more in need of citizens' participation to solve valid solutions. Thus, implementing the intelligent education not only requires schools to be "prototypical societies", but also, education should be a test field, more importantly, society should cooperate with schools, cut-through participating, practical, cooperative and reflective social spirits between societies and schools, in order to provide powerful democratic promotion for civic education in schools.

Establish school culture based on problem solving. Dewey pointed out in *School, Center of Society* that, the most urgent and meaningful thing was to make schools the center of society, which was a realistic, not a theoretical thing. What we need to do was to make schools a complete and proper center of social service, and get involved in realistic affairs. I believe it should be the matter of worth public concerns and giving rise to ponder. Dewey tried to tell us here, if school education broke away from social context, and turned to formalize study materials irrelevant with realistic life, it would be harmful to students' intelligence in fact. In this meaning, schools should be the center of society, so as to establish contexts concerning social problems for students' intelligence. (The

pressing thing, the significant thing, is really to make the school a social center; that is a matter of practice, not in theory. Just what to do in order to make the schoolhouse a center of full and adequate social service, to bring it completely into the current of social life—such are the matters, I am sure, which really deserve to be attention of the public and that occupy your own minds).

In modern China, Chinese Communist Party put up the social vision “China Dream” as a political idea. Its realization requires the boost and promotion provided by school education. Only in this way can this political ideal grip pulse of times and cohere the will of the people. Therefore, school education should establish school culture based on problem solving. Form intelligent and pragmatic life and social attitude through the training of students’ ability to participate in and solve social problems as well as problem solving, so that look at the idealistic relations between individuals and society, individuals and politics better. To establish such kind of culture, schools should proceed a series of reforms, such as initiate the exploratory and cooperative study methods; transform the teacher-student relationship that puts too much emphasis on teacher status, and establish cooperative, democratic and equal teacher-student relationship; reform the curriculum organization form centering on discipline knowledge; break the old space idea of schools, and facilitate the communication between schools and families, schools and locals, schools and society. And so on.

Cultivate teachers’ cultivation ability of civic intelligence. Since intelligence ability is the basic quality that citizens possess, and public rationality is the basic quality that citizens will possess, thus, to cultivate civic

quality of students, teachers shall be required for the cultivation ability of public intelligence. The formation of civic intelligence takes students’ exploration process and experience process as the carrier. The process is open, which requires teachers not to consider themselves as the owner of knowledge and truth, but to become the guider and helper of the exploration process; this process is cooperative, which requires teachers not to act completely based on individual benefits, but to learn to listen to appeal of different students, and establish the relationship of negotiation, communication, democracy and equality with students; this process aims to acquire educational experience ultimately, which requires teachers to rethink and improve the methods and direction of facilitating the development of students’ experience under the background of students’ growth and social public goodness.

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