



*Filósofos de viaje: Dewey y Russell en China*

*Travelling philosophers:  
Dewey and Russell in China*

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is a reconsideration of John Dewey's stay in China, an experience abroad that influenced enormously in his intellectual and human development. Our approach will be comparative, assessing his model of cultural dialogue through a contrast between his attitudes and actions in China and Bertrand Russell's ones. We think that, thanks to this thorough comparative research, we make much clearer their respective conceptions of the role that intellectuals could play in international political sceneries. One hundred year after they arrived to and thought about China, we think that this often-unknown chapter of the history of intellectuals can be particularly relevant for ensuing surveys of cultural studies and sociology of knowledge.

*Keywords:* Dewey, Russell, public intellectuals, cultural dialogue, China and the West..

## Resumen

En este trabajo se lleva a cabo una revisión de la estancia de John Dewey en China, una experiencia en el extranjero que influyó enormemente en su desarrollo intelectual y humano. Para ello utilizaremos un enfoque comparativo, evaluando su modelo de diálogo cultural mediante un contraste de sus actitudes y acciones en China con las de Bertrand Russell. Creemos que, gracias a esta detallada investigación comparativa, aclaramos mucho más sus respectivas concepciones sobre el papel que los intelectuales podrían jugar en los escenarios políticos internacionales. Pasados cien años de su estancia y reflexiones sobre China, creemos que este capítulo de la historia de los intelectuales, a menudo desconocido, puede ser particularmente relevante para ulteriores estudios de crítica cultural y sociología del conocimiento.

*Palabras clave:* Dewey, Russell, intelectuales públicos, diálogo cultural, China y Occidente.

**I**N this paper we propose to reopen the debate about two of the most influential philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Dewey and Bertran Russell, but not by a decontextualized examination of their diverse opinions on science and truth, society and morals, modernization, and tradition, evil and good, life and death, and so forth. We rather consider very relevant to compare their travels and their experiences “out of home” (their “foreignness” —we could say—) and suggest that their respective stays in China discloses information about their respective intellectual temperament and political thinking.<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt, both Russell and Dewey overcame the limits of professional philosophy and engaged in politics and education, local and international affairs as some other intellectuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sartre would be another one.). They both were engaged intellectuals and encyclopaedic minds, but each of them understood commitment and knowledge in diverse and even opposed ways. They had some common “enemies”, but this fact would not make us to ignore how complicated is the mutual understanding between “friends” or “allies”.

Of course, the roots of the antagonism were essentially *political*. Since 1918, in books as *Roads to Freedom*, Russell defended a sort of decentralized cooperativism (what in England was labelled as guild socialism) which, according to interpreters as Alan Ryan, it was not far from Dewey’s model of socialism.<sup>2</sup> However, after the War, socialism acquired a new dimension and although Dewey ferociously criticized communism in 1952, Russell maliciously simplified Dewey’s model of science and compared it with a Marxian model of science (see *The Impact of Science Today*). Of course, Russell was not the only one that, as far as Cold War emerged, propagated the false idea that Dewey’s political philosophy was just an American variety of European idealism. As many voices

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<sup>1</sup> In previous pieces I have tried to provide similar comparative analysis of Dewey and some other thinkers (see in references my “Espectros del idealismo: Santayana y Dewey”). I would like to thank José Beltrán Llavador (University of Valencia), and Edgar Cabanas who read some drafts of this paper with great interest. I have also to express my gratitude to Daniel López (UNED) for exhaustively revising and improving the final version, and for revealing to me a priceless review on Russell’s *The Problem of China* written by Ortega y Gasset. Last, but not the least, my gratefulness to *Bajo Palabra* editorial board and committee for the positive evaluation and acceptance of this work.

<sup>2</sup> See Ryan, A., *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, New York, Norton, 1995, p. 30. Russell attacked Socialism *since* 1890, when he visited Germany and wrote *German Social Democracy*.

proclaimed, only neo-empiricist, logical positivist, and “scientific” philosophers could help to save the world from new waves of irrationalism, horror, and totalitarian regimes. It was time, in consequence, to vindicate science against ideology, and attack any variety of Leftist Hegelianism, including the American one. The only and true problem, however, was that John Dewey had also vindicated an alternative interpretation of *scientific* philosophy, and that he had even tried to collaborate with some positivist philosophers. Russell knew these facts very well, but his description of Dewey’s idea of science as an ideological practice was more emphatic after the War.

Since both Dewey and Russell travelled all over the world, the question is why we should concentrate in their stay in China, and why a specific place and time could reveal us something unexpected. There are some reasons, I guess, but before to explain them, let me to remain some facts about the debates between Russell and Dewey trough years. It is known that in 1939 and 1940 Russell criticized Dewey’s *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry*. But as earlier as in 1919 Russell had yet criticized the “psychological” approach that Dewey gave to logic in his *Essays in Experimental Logic*. In 1922, Dewey decided to counterattack with pieces as “Pragmatic America”, after Russell provocatively affirmed that mercantilism and pragmatism (its philosophical expression) had destroyed the love for Truth in America. In consequence, when they met in China in the 20’s their differences were evident, despite their mutual respect.

From the beginning Dewey seemed more sensitive to Russell than the reverse. It was with Dewey’s help that Russell finally comes to China, since Dewey thought that Russell could have a different influence in the intellectuals than he himself had, probably thanks to Russell’s reputation as a radical. Dewey and Alice were also the only ones who welcomed Russell in their house, after Russell was pushed away by a community who disapproved his relationship with a young mistress and one of his former students at Cambridge, Dora Black. “However warmly he was greeted by the Chinese radicals, Russell had miscalculated the effect of Dora’s presence on both the American community in Beijing and upper-class Chinese. Both welcomed him but ostracized Dora”. But “If I can accept Bertrand Russell—Alice Dewey asked—, why we can’t accept Dora Black?”<sup>3</sup>

The Deweys were also worried about Russell’s health when after an eventful and cold trip from Peking, he suffered a severe bronchitis and later a double pneumonia, with heart disease, kidney disease, dysentery, and phlebitis. The Deweys took Dora into their apartment, and John spent several days with Russell

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, J., *The Education of John Dewey*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 324.

in the German Hospital. He was, indeed, impressed by the humour, excitement, and passion with which a Russell lying on bed designed a peace program for China, and specific plans for debates with the Communists. According to some narratives Russell dictated his last testament to Dewey and saved Russell from death thanks to some providential medicine. But as Russell said: “I probably owe my life to the Rockefeller Institute in Peking with provided a serum that killed the *pneumococci*. I own them the more gratitude on this point, as both before and after I was strongly opposed to them politically, and they regarded me with as much horror as was felt by my nurse”.<sup>4</sup>

If Dewey interceded and asked the serum to the Rockefeller Institute is something that I just ignore. (The nurse, by the way, was a deeply religious woman that “when I began to get better, she had seriously considered whether it was not her duty to let me die”). But since being salved by Americans was not exactly comfortable for Russell, it is not surprising that he also attributed his salvation to a Soviet diplomatic mission, whose kind members “had the only good champagne in Peking, and supplied it literally for my use, champagne being apparently the only proper beverage for pneumonia patients”.<sup>5</sup> Even if Dewey had something to do with the precious serum, the Russians eventually provided the providential lot of champagne. Although some newspapers proclaimed that Russell died on March 28, the true is that he and Dora left China six weeks later, after he gave his lectures:

John and Alice Dewey had no acknowledgment of gratitude from Russell or Dora, only a brief note from Dora saying she had been ‘too busy’ to contact the Deweys. John seems to have felt no ill will. Even later, when Russell blasted pragmatism or instrumentalist, Dewey never took his opposition personally but, as he [...] attributed I to Russell’s anti-Americanism and wish to ‘smear the US rather than a particular philosophical position’. He said of Russell: “*I think I can hold, with a minimum of prejudice, that he never has made a serious attempt to understand any view that is different from his own*” but instead “*trusted to his natural brilliancy to improvise*”... Lucy (Dewey’s daughter) had a different explanation, believing that “Bertie realized that... father was smarter than he was, and this never set right with Mr. Russell”. But John didn’t agree, and when Russell needed defending years later, Dewey was quick to help.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Dewey treated us both with singular helpfulness. I was told that when he came to see me in the hospital, he has much touched by my saying [...] We must make a plan for peace, at a time when everything else that I said was delirium”. Russell, B., *Autobiography*, London & New York, Routledge, 1998, pp. 359, 365. See also Clark, R., *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, B., *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, J., *The Education of John Dewey*, *op. cit.*, p. 324-325. My italics.

Irritation, in consequence, rather than mutual admiration, seem a more likely consequence of the encounter between Dewey and Russell. Russell always scorned on Dewey's political creed (seeing it only as a screen for a new wage of American imperialism). And probably Dewey mostly disliked that "being constitutionally in opposition [...] Russell could write a wonderful critique on either heaven or hell after a short stay in either".<sup>7</sup> As Clark says references to Dewey in Russell's long letters from China are as conspicuous by their absence as the barking of Holmes's dog in the night. A letter to Ottoline reveals why. "The Americans sprawl all over this place, all convinced of their own righteousness... The Deweys, who are here & who got into trouble in America during the war for their liberalism, are as bad as anybody –American imperialists, hating England as Maxse used to hate Germany, & unwilling to face any unpleasant facts. In 1914, I liked Dewey better than any other academic American; now I can't stand him". But the dislike was mutual. "Dewey's feelings about Russell" –Sidney Hook later wrote— "began in China [...]" What concerned Dewey was Russell's insensitiveness to other people's feeling. He believed that there was a streak of cruelty in Russell and an aristocratic disdain for the sensibilities of other human beings outside his class".<sup>8</sup>

The true is that Dewey took neither blindness nor oppositional character as a motive to deny Russell help and recognition. Dewey, indeed, helped Russell again in 1940, when Russell was censored in the City College in New York. After all, as Alan Ryan says, it was a noble attitude by Dewey.

### *Luo Su, or the Libertarian Aristocrat*

BETWEEN 1921 AND 1922, after his stay in China, Russell wrote a series of articles that were used as materials for his book *The Problem of China*. As Ray Monk has observed, in this book China seems to illustrate a dilemma: Why the power of science can serve to civilization but also threaten it? Why modernization is a triumph over barbarism but also a destructive force? The war had showed that something was wrong with Western civilization, but the Chinese —Russell said in the book— "have discovered and have practised for many centuries a way of life which, if it could be adopted by all the world make all the world happy. We Europeans have not". China —he also said—, is the most civilized nation on earth, a "civilization superior to ours in all that makes for human happiness".

<sup>7</sup> Russel, B., Letter to Albert C. Barnes, Beijing, December, 5, *Correspondence*, 04113.

<sup>8</sup> Clark, R., *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, New York, Knopf, 1976, p. 388. See also Monk, R., *Bertrand Russell. The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921*, New York, The Free Press, 1996, p. 591.

They are gentle, urbane; they love wisdom, literature, art, music; they have an exquisite code of manners, and a smart sense of humour. However, did not China fall prey to the dominance of Japan and Western Powers by their lack of science, technology, and industry? “Can Chinese virtues be preserved? Or must China, to survive, acquire, instead, the vices which make for success, and cause misery to other only”. China had problems “that demand Western Science, but they do not demand the adoption of the Western philosophy of Life”. Could Western Science, then, give its benefits to China without importing some of undesirable values that characterized Western culture?<sup>9</sup>

Since this question presupposes a whole philosophy about the relation between science and values (Russell’s ones, of course), and since to answering it would require not only an examination of his book on China but of many others,<sup>10</sup> let me come back to the beginning, that is, to his travel and experience in China 1920. I think that many remarks from his autobiography and his letters of this period reveal not only how he saw China but also how he performs his own identity as a radical western intellectual.

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<sup>9</sup> Russell, B., *The Problem of China*, Nottingham, Spokesman Book, 1993, p. 10, 13, 17, 251.

<sup>10</sup> It would be however important to understand the diagnosis of Russell. He recommended to China to seek salvation in its own force “and never more in the benevolence of any outside power”. But Russell’s attitude toward communism and capitalism as alternative forces of transformation was complex. He astonished the Chinese (specially the radicals who had idealized the Bolsheviks in Hunan) when he attacked Communism and distinguishing among different forms of socialisms. When he was still in Peking he and a young Chinese Journalist, Chang Tung-sun, roused a violent controversy “by contending that the root of all China’s misery lay in its poverty and low productivity, and that this could be alleviated only through industrialization and not through empty discussions about this or that ‘ism’, and that however much one might object to capitalism on ethical grounds, it appeared that only capitalism could achieve such and industrialization”. Schwartz, B., *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, quoted by Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical*, London, Unwin books, 1957, p. 119.

By the time he returned to England and wrote *The Problem of China*, he seemed to move his views more in the direction of Socialism: “there are many arguments for State Socialism, or rather what Lenin calls State Capitalism, in any country which is economically but not culturally backward”. He, indeed, vindicated State ownership of railways and mines in China. However, as Alan Wood suggests the point between Socialism and Capitalism was still not important for Russell as the belief that industrialism was essential one way or the other. “Russell saw China’s problem as twofold: On the one hand, it had to make itself strong enough to resist aggression, without becoming militaristic. On the other hand, it had to apply scientific methods to conquer poverty, without acquiring the vices of Western industrialism. He doubted whether either would be possible; but he gave his own suggestions for solving the second problem—that of combining scientific techniques with a respect for human values—in *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, written in collaboration with Dora Black” (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

The true is that Russell was inclined to compare the Chinese Revolution of 1911 to the Glorious Revolution in Britain of 1666, and he pinned his hopes to the moderately Socialist, nationalist Party led by Sun Yat Sen. He compared him to old-fashioned liberals, saying that he aimed a diminishing poverty, but not at an economic revolution. He also described Sen as the only exception to the rule that “the Chinese war lords are merely ambitious brigands”. Russell said that “in a time when the British Foreign Office was backing Sen’s rivals and doing its best to discredit him”. Russell (and John Dewey too, we will see later) had the hope that, in spite Mao’s scepticism, that Socialism might struggle for power and established without a violent revolution (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

RUSSELL AND DORA BLACK travelled from London to Paris, knowing that they will have to wait his boat, the *Portos*, in Marseilles for two weeks, since it was delayed by plague. During these two weeks “Bertie” prepared for press a book, *Theory and Practice of Bolshevism*, that disliked many of his friends and was applauded by people that Russell hated (Winston Churchill and Lloyd George).<sup>11</sup> The long voyage from Marseilles to and Shanghais took five weeks, through Suez Canal, Red Sea, Ceylon, Singapore, and Saigon.<sup>12</sup> Such adventure could push someone to some travel novels or travelogue writing, but Russell demonstrated certain indifference to this literary genre. It was Collette the one who was following Russell’s route on a large map bought especially for the purpose, and the one who, in some letters, invited enthusiastically Russell to visit and recall places and sceneries from Conrad’s life and novels. However, as Ray Monk observes, Russell’s description of Saigon as a nightmare place is just uninspired and when he says that “the impression is like the *Heart of Darkness*” he seemed to show a pose rather than expressing any influence by a Conradian prose.

However, I think that the most relevant about the travel in the *Portos* is how Russell combined provocation and carnival. He considered British on board as *vulgar*, Frenchmen to government appointments in the East, *superior*, and Chinese, just *learned*. And He gave a talk praising some aspects of Bolshevist Life, with the consequence that some of the British passenger on board “cabled ahead to Peking urging the consul to prevent a figure so dangerous from setting foot on Chinese soil”.<sup>13</sup> In any case, giving provocative talks was not the only strategy. Of course, such a long travel also required some relaxing activities...:

One evening the captain held a fancy-dress party, and Russell dressed up as a Chinese philosopher of 2000 BC. Fu Ling Yu, wearing a pair of white silk women’s pyjamas, a scarlet embroidered robe, a fan, and Chinese slippers. On his head, he wore Dora’s... basket, upside down; on his chin he glued a swatch of black hair, borrowed from the ship’s barber. Dora, in peasant clothes, even a newly born Bolshevik Russia, which infuriated the passengers even more.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Clark, R., *Russell and his World*, *op. cit.*, p. 109 (Spanish edition).

<sup>12</sup> See many more details on the voyage and the passengers (including the Chinese translator of Russell’s book on Russia) in Turcon, Sheila, “China”, *The Homes of Bertrand Russell*. Bertrand Russell Research Center, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Russell’s opposition to the war had not endeared him to the British diplomatic service, and British diplomats in Peking were unpleasant with him, especially if one considers his attitude to the post-war politics of the Western powers toward China. “Russell wanted America and Britain to rescind the treaties that gave them a humiliating degree of power over the Chinese in such port cities as Shanghai and to renounce their various monopolies over Chinese exports and imports. Russell also insisted they should repay the profits they had made from their lopsided trading relations with China and return the Boxer indemnity, the money extorted years before after the Boxer Rebellion” (Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 205).

<sup>14</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life*, New York, Viking, p. 322.



But the travel was not exactly a party. The Red Sea was near to the hell. After arriving in Singapore, the cook died of the heat, and two soldiers were mad. Saigon was waiting, but it had also something of a nightmare, where “the whites looked ill, cruel, and half-mad. The place surrounded by mosquito swamps”. In any case, Russell founded it a mixture of Paris (maybe because women were superbly dressed) and Piccadilly (maybe because it was transited by motor cars).

Hong Kong was something else. They arrived on October, 8, and soon were captivated by the rainy and cool landscape of wooded hills and islands dotted around the water. Three days their boat docked in Shanghai.

### *An Ancient and Great Civilization: Landscapes and Furniture*

IN THE FEW DAYS he and Dora were at Shanghai, Russell received innumerable visitors, Europeans, Americans, Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese, in some cases people that were not speaking terms with each other. But Russell and Dora invented forms of attending their guests at separate tables, a move round from table to table (For example Japanese and Korean Christians exiled for bomb-throwing). During a grand banquet in his honour organized by his hostess, he is surprised by:

various Chinese that made after-dinner speeches in the best English style, with exactly the type of joke which is demanded of such an occasion. It was our first experience of the Chinese, and we were somewhat surprised by their wit and fluency. I had no realised until then that a civilised Chinese is the most-civilised person in the world.<sup>15</sup>

However, rituals do not reveal the whole story. *Landscapes* provoked the definitive impression and seemed to confirm Russell’s ideas about the beauty and deepness of Chinese civilization, but in a very particular way. Their hosts had planned for them to begin the sat with some excursion, and Russell and Dora were taken up-country to spend three days in one of the best landscapes in China. The Lake was surrounded by densely wooded hills, concealing temples and pagodas, and one day, Russell and Dora were carried by sedan chair to a temple in a mountain of bamboo groves:

This place is wonderfully beautiful on a lake where poets and Emperors lived for 2,000 years, each adding some element of loveliness...The country is even more humanized & ancient than Italy –the landscape exactly like Chinese pictures—the people all gay and delightful, more full of laughter than any other people I have ever known, & as witty as 18<sup>th</sup> century French people (Letter to Ottoline, quoted in Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 387). [The Western

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<sup>15</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography, op. cit.*, p. 359.

Lake] was marvellously beautiful, with the beauty of ancient civilization, surpassing even that of Italy.<sup>16</sup>

It was the Western Lake, then, the first place that induced in Russell the impression “that China was a kind of idyllic pre-industrial version of eighteenth-century Britain, a sort of Whig Paradise”.<sup>17</sup> The long letter to Ottoline, in fact, published in *The Nation*, January, 8, 1921,<sup>18</sup> makes clearer this point:

Since landing in China, we have had a most curious and interesting time, spent, so far, entirely among Chinese students and journalist, who are more or less Europeanised. I have delivered innumerable lectures —on Einstein, education, and social questions. The eagerness for knowledge on the part of students is quite extraordinary. When one begins to speak, their eyes have the look of starving men beginning a feast. Everywhere they treat me with a most embarrassing respect. The day after I landed in Shanghai, they gave a vast dinner to us at which they welcomed me as Confucius the Second. All the Chinese newspapers that day in Shanghai had my photograph. Both Miss Black and I had to speak in innumerable schools, teachers’ conferences, congresses, etc. It is a country of curious contrasts. Most of Shanghai is quite European, almost American; the names of streets, and notices and advertisements are in English (as well as Chinese). The buildings are magnificent offices and banks. Everything looks very opulent. But the side streets are still quite Chinese. It is a vast city about the size of Glasgow. The Europeans almost all look villainous and ill...

From Shanghais our Chinese friends took us for three nights to Hangchow on the Western Lake, said to be the most beautiful scenery in China [...] the Western Lake is not large —about the size of Grasmere—is surrounded by wooded hills, on which there are innumerable pagodas and temples. It has been beautified by poets and emperors for thousand years (apparently poets in Ancient China were as rich as financiers in modern Europe)

[...] Apart from the influence of Europeans, China makes the impression of what Europe would have become if the eighteenth century had gone on till now without industrialism or the French revolution. People seem to be rational hedonists, knowing very well how to obtain happiness, exquisite through intense cultivation of their artistic sensibilities, differing from Europeans the fact that they prefer enjoyment to power. People laugh a great deal in all classes, even the lowest.

[...] I would do anything in the world to help the Chinese, but it is difficult. They are like a nation of artists, with all their good and bad points. Imagine Gertler [Mark] and [Augustus] John and Lytton [Strachey] set to govern the British Empire, and you will have some idea how China has been governed for 2,000 years. Lytton is very like an old-fashioned China-man, not at all like the modern westernised type.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Monk, R., *Bertrand Russell. The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921, op. cit.*, p. 591.

<sup>18</sup> See on details of this decision, *Ibid.*, p. 592.

<sup>19</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography, op. cit.*, pp. 369-370, 374. He refers to painters of Swansea, and one member of the Bloomsbury Group. Compare those remarks with Wood’s compilation of opinions: “China and Chinese are most

As Monk also remarks: “the opposition that [Russell] had dwelt so much upon in prison between the Victorians and the Bloomsbury Group, between the vigour and the energy of the one and the listless artistic sensibility of the other, was now mirrored in his mind by the contrast between Russia and China. The Bolshevik regime showed one the dangers of ignoring altogether the refined pleasures of a contemplative life; the Chinese showed one the corresponding danger as developing those pleasures to the exclusion of all else”.<sup>20</sup>

So, to as great extent Russell was not exactly out of home, despite travelling until the other corner of the world. China is assimilated to his spiritual geography. Or more exactly: he used China as a mirror of *his* Britain, and this explains how emphatic he was when he described the “other” British “visitors”. During his visit in China and after it, Russell represented empathically the character of an alternative voice of Great Britain...:<sup>21</sup>

The Englishman in the East, as far as I was able to judge of him, is a man completely out of touch with environment. He plays polo and goes to his club. He derives his ideas of native culture from the works of eighteenth-century missionaries, and he regards intelligence in the East with the same contempt which he feels for intelligence in his own country. Unfortunately for our political sagacity, he overlooks the fact that in the East intelligence is respected, so that enlightened Radicals have an influence upon affairs which is denied to their English counterparts. MacDonald went to Windsor in knee-breeches, but the Chinese reformers showed no such respect to their Emperor, although our monarchy is a mushroom growth of yesterday compared to that of China.<sup>22</sup>

However, if I headed this section as “landscape” is because I guess that Russell did *not* actually assimilate an Eastern landscape to a Western one. He could rather

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delightful”. China is “an artist nation, with the virtues and vices to be expected of the artist” [...] We have quite as much to learn from them as they have from us, but there is far less chance of our learning it” (Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical*, *op. cit.*, p. 118). Russell also said: “The Chinese are gentle, Urbane, Seeking only justice and freedom. They have a civilization superior to ours in all that makes for human happiness... They are the only people in the world who quite genuinely believe that wisdom is more precious than rubies” (Russell, B., *The Problem of China*, *op. cit.*, p. 166).

<sup>20</sup> Monk, R., *Bertrand Russell. The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921*, *op. cit.*, p. 593-594.

<sup>21</sup> Russell represented China as as a mirror in which to look his own world. When he sent to his editor, in London, the lectures he gave in China on philosophy and mathematical logic he added in the preface that the lectures “were written before I had been in China and are not intended to be taken by the reader as geographically accurate. I have used ‘China’ merely a synonym for “a distant country” when I wanted illustrations of unfamiliar things” (*Ibid.*, p. 594).

<sup>22</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 362. Sir John Alexander Macdonald, (1815–1891) was the first Prime Minister of Canada. Years later, Russell still represented the character of the good Englishman, the aristocrat who criticized the British Empire and was really sensitive to Chinese’s perspective and problems. When in 1926 the British troops fired on unarmed crows of Chinese students, killing and wounding many, he wrote a denunciation, avoiding that the indignation of Chinese endangered the lives of all Englishmen living in China. According to an “American missionary in China—he himself declared—the English in China owed their preservation to me, since I had caused infuriated Chinese to conclude than not all Englishmen are vile” (*Ibidem*).

express an unconscious love for “Anglo-Chinese gardens”, an exotic image of the East within the West, result of a Colonial Age.

Russell arrived at Peking in the autumn of 1920, after to take part in a Conference on education at Chang Sha (where Dora spoke about art and education in Russia and about women’s education, and where they met the Deweys (we will later come back to this meeting). When arrived at Peking they only spent one night in a hotel. “Peking is beautiful –Russell wrote to Colette– with many wide spaces, tress, temples, gates, and ancient walls. The weather is Indian summer, very delicious, crisp with bright sun”. With these feelings, he and Dora were determined to find “a Chinese lodging, not a flat among the expatriate community”,<sup>23</sup> and it was his interpreter, Chao Yuen re, who looked for them a single-storey house built round a courtyard in the eastern part of the city, an empty house at n° 2 Sui An Po Hutung, with a veranda and a roof of grey tiles. They had joined Chao Yuen re in Hangchow, just back from ten years in America, and since he was to be Russell’s interpreter for his lectures, he also lived in the same flat that he found for them. He was not the only assistance. As exactly –Russell reported– they had “three rickshaw boys, one each, a cook, & a boy who acts as parlous-maid, & housemaid”).

According to Alan Wood, in Peking Russell shook himself for a time “out of the remains of his subconscious Victorian belief in progress, and the assumption than a new idea must be better than an old one. He found himself, for the first time in his life, a conservative. That is to say, he found himself adumbrating a civilization which was passing away, and whose disappearance he regretted. He complained that his Chinese friends were too ready to have shoddy Western furniture in their homes and copy Western ideas”.<sup>24</sup> “We had to furnish our house which we did from the very excellent second-hand furniture shops which abounded in Peking –Russell wrote–. Our Chinese friends could not understand our preferring old Chinese things to modern furniture from Birmingham”.<sup>25</sup>

The fact is that he and Dora decided to mark a difference, making and they spent many afternoons bargaining old Chinese cane stuff and silk for cushions in the junk shops the city walls, “coming home one day with a day with a dark brown redwood sofa, of a kind used by opium smokers. On the floor, they put straw mat-

<sup>23</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 371. As Schwartz said, “many of the advance guard intelligentsia were exasperated by what they regarded as his perverse tendency to find values in traditional Chinese civilization”. Russell himself gloomily become to predict —Woods adds— a time when “the only difference between East and West will be that the former is more Western” (Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical*, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

<sup>25</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 360. In a letter of October, 28, 1921, he also said to Ottoline: “the country houses are equally hospitable —one is shewn round and given tea. They are just like Chinese pictures, with many arbour where one can sit, with everything made for beauty and nothing for comfort —except in the grandest rooms, where there will be a little hideous European furniture.”

ting, covered with hand-woven rugs”. They really spent a lot of money for matting 55 yards. In addition, “Dora filled the house with yellow jasmine, and put little fruit tress in pots in the courtyards. She had bought a Shanghais and began to send photographs home to her family and friends”.<sup>26</sup>For the evening, they install long Chinese robes, where “to read aloud from books by early travellers to China”. Russell himself reported more details:

We have old wiggly Chinese bookshelves, heavy black Chinese chairs, a big diva of the sort they used to use for smoking opium, lovely square tables, all black—we get bright colours for curtains & rugs—the sun shines in & makes it hot, although it is by way of being cold now here. We have stoves, which are the only thing not beautiful. We found lovely things in stack of lumber, not appreciated. Our Chinese friends are amazed at our not wanting European rubbish! Rugs & silks are lovely here—as is heavy old furniture”.<sup>27</sup>

The fact is that they felt at home, their love grew, and both wrote to friends saying how happy they were. “We live in horrid and disgraceful luxury... Dora said— four menservants and my maid for sewing and mending. Delicious rooms, warmed by sun lined with ermine. I look like a Queen in it...”.<sup>28</sup>

### *Religion, Morals, Gender*

THERE IS ALSO another way of understanding Russell’s idealization and assimilation of China as the greatest civilization in terms of his own cultural patterns. Religion, customs, and humour could be considered here.<sup>29</sup> On religion, for example, he says:

Chinese religion is curiously cheerful. When one arrives at a temple, they give one a cigarette and a cup of delicately fragrant tea. Then they show one round. Buddhism, which one thinks of as ascetic, is here quite gay. The saints have fat stomachs and are depicted as people who thoroughly enjoy life. No one seems to believe the religion, not even the priests. Nevertheless, one sees many rich new temples.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life, op. cit.*, p. 325. Wood remarks that “his Chinese interpreter saw his purchase [of furniture] with disgust and said ‘It smells Buddhist’” (Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical, op. cit.*, p. 118). However I was not able to check this irony by Chao Yuen.

<sup>27</sup> November, 17, 1920. Quoted by Clark, R., *Russell and his World, op. cit.*, p. 388.

<sup>28</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life, op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>29</sup> In the same letter to Ottoline in which he praised China to a pre-industrial Britain, he says: “Chinese religion is curiously cheerful. When one arrives at a temple, they give one a cigarette and a cup of delicately fragrant tea. Then they show one round. Buddhism, which one thinks as ascetic, is here quite gay. The saints have fat stomachs and are depicted as people who thoroughly enjoy life. No one seems to believe the religion, not even the priests. Nevertheless, one sees many rich new temples” (*Autobiography*, p. 371).

<sup>30</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography, op. cit.*, p. 371.

Wood formulates the relation between religion and the traditional virtues for which Russell praised the Chinese:

Tolerance... importability and dignity ...apparent absence of passion, and preference for understatement—all of which are English virtues, and the last of which are particularly associated with the English aristocracy. He noted that the Chinese had an English love of compromise; that “disputes can always be softened by a joke”; and that like English aristocrats, the Chinese believed in etiquette rather than in ethics. They had no dogmatic religious doctrines, but they had firmly fixed codes of conduct.<sup>31</sup>

The funny thing, however, is not how much he praised Chinese religion (as far as he understood it) but how fast he used the opportunity to criticize Christian missionaries. When the Young China Association organized some lectures on Religion in Peking, Russell proclaimed that it was possible for some men of the highest moral principles to be an atheist. Morality, he added, often become hypocrisy when it is too dependent on, and too closely related to religion. However, the scandal among missionaries was provoked by his opinions about the education of women. “The missionaries also thought it regrettable that, just in a time when Chinese women were learning Western ways of life, they should have before them Russell’s journey in company with Dora Black as an example”.<sup>32</sup> In fact, what Russell probably enjoyed was to provoke missionaries<sup>33</sup> not with the example of Dora and himself, but rather with the attitude of some emancipated Chinese women of the time that did not need too much encouragement from foreign liberal educators and whose spirit of free inquiry “would horrify most British headmistresses”.<sup>34</sup> Russell’s description in his autobiography, in fact, seems to highlight the twofold character of the problem:

The gulf between the old China and the new was vast, and family bonds were extraordinarily irksome for the modern-minded young man. Dora used to go to the Girl’s Normal School where those who were to be teachers were being trained. They would put to her every kind of question about marriage, free love, contraception, etc., and she answered all their questions with complete frankness. Nothing of the sort would have been possible in any similar European institution. In spite of their freedom of thought, traditional habits of behaviour had a great hold upon them. We occasionally gave parties to the young men of my seminar and the girls at the Normal School. The girls at first would take refuge in a room to which they supposed no men would penetrate, and they had to be fetched out and

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<sup>31</sup> Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>33</sup> When Russell was at the ready to die, one missionary paper had an obituary notice of one sentence: “Missionaries may be pardoned for heaving a sigh of relief at the news of Mr. Russell death”. “I fear —Russell added—they must have heaved a sigh of a different sort when they found that I was not dead after all” (Russell, B., *Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 365).

<sup>34</sup> Wood, A., *Russell. A Passionate Sceptical*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

encouraged to associate with males. It must be said that when once the ice was broken, no further encouragement was needed.<sup>35</sup>

Dora wrote in a letter that they were “treated like and Emperor and Empress”. But probably she and Bertie praised much more that Chinese honoured “their love out of wedlock by promoting what was called ‘Russell Marriage’”.<sup>36</sup>

### *Humour and the Interpreter*

A SPECIAL WAY in which Russell expressed his *empathy* with his Chinese hostess was humour. Humour in China is a topic as complex as religion or politics, but in a letter to Ottoline that we have already mentioned, and in some passages from the autobiography, Russell had no problem to describe varieties of Chinese humour, from the more intellectual and ironic to the most mundane and absurd:

*They ma[ke] speeches full of delicate wit, in the style of the 18th century France, with a mastery of English that quite amazed me.* The Chinese Chargé d’Affaires said he had been asked to speak on Chinese politics—he said the urgent questions were the General Election, economy and limitation of armaments—he spoke quite a long time, saying only things that might have been said in a political speech about England, and which yet were quite all right for China—when he sat down he had not committed himself to anything at all, but had suggested (without ever saying) that China’s problems were worse than ours. *The Chinese constantly remind me Oscar Wilde in his first trial when he thought wit would pull one through anything and found himself in the grip of a great machine that cared nothing for human values.* I read of a Chinese General the other day, whose troops had ventured to resist a Japanese attack, so the Japanese insisted that he should apologise to their Consul. He replied that he had no uniform grand enough for such an august occasion, and therefore to his profound sorrow he must forego the pleasure of visiting a man for whom he had so high an esteem. When they nevertheless insisted, he called the same day on all the other Consuls, so that it appeared as if he were paying a mere visit of ceremony. The all Japan raised a howl that he had insulted the Japanese nation.<sup>37</sup>

Chao Yuen-ren, the clever, efficient, and funny interpreter who accompanied him and Dora wherever they went, translating his lectures and speeches into Chinese, exhibited just the type of humour that Russell liked to praise. Chao had spent ten years in the United States and he was trying to translate into Chinese nothing but *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, Russell laughed with Chao’s puns in English. When Russell

<sup>35</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography, op. cit.*, p. 361.

<sup>36</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bernard Russell. A Life, op. cit.*, p. 323.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography, op. cit.*, p. 374. My italics.

showed Chao an article that he had written titled “Causes of the Present Chaos” (later the first chapter of *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*), Chao remarked: “well, I suppose, the causes of the present Chaos are the previous Chaos”. Of course, such a mind could induce a special favour by the libertarian aristocrat, and Russell removed some difficulties that impeded the marriage of Chao with his Chinese girlfriend. In another passage of the autobiography, however, he described general traits of Chinese humour, or at least, a pre-communist humour...:

The Chinese have (or had) a sense of humour which I found very congenial. Perhaps communism has killed it, but when I was there, they constantly reminded me of the people in their ancient books. One hot day two fat middle-aged businessmen invited me to motor into the country to see a certain famous half-ruined pagoda. When we reached it, I climbed the spiral staircase, expecting them to follow, but on arriving at the top I saw them still on the ground. I asked why they had not come up, and with portentous gravity, they replied: “We thought of coming up, and debated whether we should do so. Many weighty arguments were advanced on both sides, but at last there was one which decided us. The pagoda might crumble at any moment, and we felt that, if it did, it would be well there should be those who could bear witness as to how the philosopher died”. What they meant was that it was hot, and they were fat [...]

Many Chinese have that refinement of humour which consists in enjoying a joke more when the other person cannot see it.<sup>38</sup>

The joke that Russell did not see for a time was that when He was leaving Peking, a Chinese friend gave him a long classical passage engraved by hand with exquisite minuscule calligraphy on a small surface. As his Chinese friend knew, Russell had always refused to give advice to the Chinese as to their immediate political challenges. When Russell finally deciphered the small text, he discovered that it was *The Consultation of the Wizard*, a fable in which a wizard merely advises his clients to do whatever they like.

### *The Quiet American*

DEWEY DECIDED TO TRAVEL from Japan to China, when received an invitation to lecture at the National University in Peking during the academic year 1919-20. Finally, as we will see later, he spent two years there. On April, 28, he and Alice took the steamer *Kumano Maru*, and arrived at Shanghai on April, 30. Former Chinese students of Dewey at Columbia made possible the travel, raising money to finance the project.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.



Twenty years later, in 1942, after America went to war against Japan, the State Department convinced of John Dewey's still immense influence, asked him to compose a message to the people of China. Thousands of leaflets with a Dewey's message were scattered all over China by U.S. airplanes in an effort to encourage the Chinese to keep fighting against the Japanese. "Your country and my country love peace and have no designs on other nations. We are alike in having been attacked without reason and without warning by a rapacious and treacherous enemy... We are now comrades in a common fight". Dewey was invited to visit China, and he was determined to go, but he eventually never arrived, even after physicians inoculated for pox, typhus, typhoid, cholera, yellow fever, tetanus and plague, and the Ministry of education of Beijing sent him 5000 \$ for travelling expenses.

In 1942, conditions were too different, much more unsettled than decades before, when Dewey left China. After his departure, his influence on philosophical circles was not lasting, and his opinions on technical philosophical issues did not result in stabilising any school akin to pragmatism. Hu Shih, a former student of Dewey's in Columbia, divulged among youthful Chinese minds some ideas associated with instrumentalism, but when he shifted from technical philosophy to cultural politics and become himself a leader of reformist movement, Dewey's philosophy left a strong campaigner.<sup>39</sup>

However, Dewey's educational theories were congenial to teachers and people involved in educational instruction and their influence was much more enduring. In Japan, the control of the authoritarian regimen made not successful Dewey's allegiance to free education, meanwhile in China the deficiencies of the government gave Dewey's models more room. The proof that his work was influential is that thirty years later, he became object of suspicious and target of Maoist rule since the Chinese Communists establish The People's Republic of China, October, 1, 1949. "If we want to criticize the old theorists of education... we must begin with Dewey. The Educational ideas of Dewey have dominated and controlled Chinese education for thirty years, and his social philosophy and his general philosophy have also influenced a part of the Chinese people".<sup>40</sup> Ironically this Communist remark was more sensitive to the core of Dewey's legacy: to open the door to education is to open the door to a way of seeing politics, something that nowadays,

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<sup>39</sup> Hu Shi had received a scholarship from the indemnity funds of the U.S. government to study within Columbia under the tutelage of Dewey.

<sup>40</sup> The virulence of the attack is better illustrated by the forced recantation of Ch'en Ho-ch'in, one of the most devoted among Dewey's followers. "Ho was Dewey's poisonous Pragmatic philosophy and his reactionary educational ideas, and through his lectures in China preaching his Pragmatic Philosophy and his educational reactionary thinking, namely, Columbia University, from which thousands of Chinese students, for over thirty years, have brought back all the reactionary, subjective-idealistic, Pragmatic Educational ideas of Dewey... As one

however, many philosophers tend to ignore, artificially separating Dewey's technical philosophy from his travels as just "an educator".

When the Deweys arrived at China, they spent most of May visiting Shanghai, Hangchow, Nanking, and Peking, and they visited mills, factories, schools, and temples. They also visited in Peking the "Forbidden City", an exotic world of old palaces, shrines and museum chambers, and audience halls. However, they also "jostled with the crowds in the streets, the Deweys found the people easygoing, good natured, tolerant, noisy, and extremely courteous. This way of life, Dewey believed, had developed not despite the dense crowds but because of them. 'Live and let live is the response to crowded conditions. If things are fairly well off, then let well enough alone. If they are evil, endure them rather than run the risk of making them worse by interference'".<sup>41</sup>

Dewey was not only romantically impressed by the agency of crowds. He was also at the extreme poverty they saw in some quarters, a situation he said he had no idea until he came to China, as he felt distressed when he saw many children having to work and to take on responsibilities at an early age, grown up too soon, forced to looking and watching on the streets, wise before cultivated and educated, however, reasonably cheerful by in other sense old and serious beyond bearing". Dewey wrote that he would like to donate "a few millions for playgrounds and toys and play leaders".<sup>42</sup> Four days after his arrival, he also probably understood that many Chinese teens were too adult. The student revolt of May the 4<sup>th</sup> was the first event about he wrote, but among what he wrote was the confession that "to think of kids in our country from fourteen on, taking the lead in starting a big cleanup reform politics movement and shaming merchants and professional men into joining them. This is sure some country".<sup>43</sup>

After this meeting Dewey began his lectures in National University in Peking, 16 in social and political philosophy, 16 on philosophy of education, 15 on ethics, 8 on types of thinking, and 3 on contemporary philosophers (58 of them was published in Chinese as a book, and many other were only know to non-Chinese readers until they were published in English translation, many years later). Howe-

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who has been most deeply poisoned by his reactionary educational ideas, as one who has worked hardest and longest to help spread his educational ideas, I now publicly accuse that great fraud and deceiver in the modern history of education, John Dewey". Quoted by Dykhuizen, G., *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1973, p. 204. See also Hu Shin's "John Dewey in China", p. 766, and the original quotation from *People's Education*, Peking, October 1959.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195, from Dewey's, "Chinese Social Habits", included in *Character and Events*, first published as "What Holds China Back?", in *Asia*, 20, 1920.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, J., *Letters from China and Japan*, with Alice Chipman Dewey, edited by Evelyn Dewey, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1920, p.176.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

ver, meanwhile he was teaching in Peking he also was in a school established by American Boxer Indemnity funds (Tsing-Hua College, ten miles from Peking). In July, 1919, he left Peking for Nanking where also gave 10 lectures on philosophy and education, 10 on history of philosophy and 3 on experimental logic.

And since he continued his stay another academic year, 1920-1921, he continued delivering more lecture in some other provinces. He visited Manchuria, Shansi, Shantung, and Shensi, but after his lecture in Nanking in May, 1920, he decided to have a circuit round the Yangtse provinces. In the spring of 1921, he departed to the southern provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, where he gave four lectures for the provincial elementary and secondary school teachers on spontaneity and learning, habit and thinking, the relation between natural and social environment, or between industry and education. He also talked on political democracy and self-realization and on teachers as social leaders to college instructors and to students of Normal School. Before the Provincial education association, he spoke on the influence of American Educational Organizations on America Society. He also talked about democracy for students of law and administration, and for different intellectual associations.

Alice Dewey, also spoke in Funkien Province to the same audiences, emphasizing other aspects of democratic life: the need of education for Chinese women, the history of the American Woman's for voting rights, and the education of girls in America, the parallels between the struggle of American and Chinese women for co-education, and the ways in which women could help to develop a democratic society.

Although democracy in China "was articulately held only by a comparative handful who have been educated" –Dewey said "yet these few and the dumb masses *feel* that it alone accords with the historic spirit of the Chinese Race" ... "no one can understand the present idealization of the United States by China, who does not see in it the projection of China's democratic hopes for herself".<sup>44</sup>

### *Russell, Dewey, and Politics*

THE MAIN DIVERGENCE between Russell and Dewey is very well summarized by an extraordinary biographer of both personalities, Alan Ryan:

Dewey was, moreover, more easily assimilated by a Chinese audience than was Russell. Dewey's liberalism was holistic; it stressed community values, emphasized the child's ties to his or her local culture and community, and saw the school as a natural extension of the

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<sup>44</sup> Dewey, J., "The International Duel in China", *New Republic*, 27, 1919, p. 110.

family. To an audience brought up on Confucian ideals of family and community loyalty, Dewey's liberalism was much more attractive than the fiercely individualistic liberalism of someone like Russell, who struck his Chinese... host as a very distinguished creature from another planet entirely. In the Far East, just as in America, Dewey brought off the delicate rhetorical trick of investing his views with the mystique of modernity and science, at the same time that he persuaded his hearers that they were firmly linked to tradition and the ways of everyday common sense.<sup>45</sup>

As I have said, Russell came to China thanks to Dewey. In a series of lectures on "Three Contemporary Philosophers", Dewey did not only talk about Russell. He also vindicated the relevance of James, and of Bergson. But whereas James could attract to the liberal camp, and Bergson to the traditionalist, Russell was indisputably a potential hero for the radicals. Dewey's introduction to his philosophy paved the way for Russell reception in the fall of 1920.

Later, Dewey admitted to his friend Alfred S. Barnes (December, 1920) that Russell got on to the weak points of the Chinese in much shorter time than he did. For example, Dewey declined to give the typical lecture on religion that some Chinese were demanding but Russell was more explicit and gave an interview in which he provocatively said that in the Western world no one had any faith longer in the "wise man" able to settle any difficulties and questions.<sup>46</sup>

It can be that Russell got on to the weak points of the Chinese in much shorter time than Dewey, but probably his own impatience avoided him to understand things that Dewey eventually did. Russell considered some Chinese delightful, but four months after being in China, he began to feel bored and showing impatience with his students. As he said in a letter to Collete (January, 6, 1921), "they are friendly and enthusiastic ... but don't work hard and have not many brains... most of them are stupid and timid". What they need is "board-school teachers, not eminent professors".<sup>47</sup>

Dewey travelled extensively through China, but Russell stayed primarily in Beijing and ended thinking that if he had stayed much longer, "his mind would be retarded".<sup>48</sup> Dewey extended his stay from a few months to twenty-six months; whereas Russell shortened his visit from one year to nine months. After Russell recovered from his pneumonia, he decided it was time to abandon China, and on July, 11, 1921, he departed after giving a lecture with the diplomatic titled: "Chi-

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<sup>45</sup> Ryan, A., *John Dewey and The High Tide of American Liberalism*, New York, Norton, 1995, p. 206.

<sup>46</sup> Ching-Sze Wang, J., *John Dewey in China. To Teach and to Learn*, New York, University of New York Press, 2008 p. 25

<sup>47</sup> Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life, op. cit.*, p. 326.

<sup>48</sup> Russell, B., *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years. 1914-1970*. London, Routledge, 2001, p. 192.

na's Road to Freedom". Dewey and his wife also left Beijing just the same July, the month in which the Chinese Communist Party was founded. In fact, they departed the very same day that Bertie and Dora, but with a very different experience.

Dewey did not write a book on China. But Russell did it, despite of what he once said: "I don't think that I shall write on China—it is a complex country, with an old civilization, very hard to fathom" (he wrote to Colette, Beijing, January, 6, 1921).<sup>49</sup> While Dewey was in China some editors and even Walter Lippmann asked him to publish a volume on China, but Dewey declined because he thought that what he needed to say about China had been said in dozens of his articles. In China he wrote a lot, and by the time he left the country, he had delivered more than 130 lectures and written nearly forty articles on politics, culture, education, and psychology of China. After his stay in China, more than a dozen of his books were translated and published, and a volume of his Chinese lectures sold 140,000 copies in two years and continued to be reprinted until the 1950s.<sup>50</sup> By the time Dewey returned to USA in October, 1921, he was glad to get back to philosophy. "I did no philosophical reading at China at all", he told to the British pragmatist Schiller.<sup>51</sup>

On close examination—Ching-Sze Wang remarks—Dewey's decision was consistent with his will to interpret China on its own terms: "knowing that China was going through rapid changes and that the terms employed to interpret China at one time might seem superfluous or irrelevant at others, Dewey was modest and wise enough to not assume the role of expert or prophet".<sup>52</sup> "In his look toward the future of China, Dewey was willing to remain a sympathetic observer and an eloquent defender, rather than an authoritative expert".<sup>53</sup>

Dewey's own opinion about Russell's view of China in his book from 1922, could reveal information about his own perspective. Russell's exposition of the external, political, and economic problems of China—Dewey suggests—was just lucid. And emerging from an obscure world, such lucidity must be close, as it is with Mr Russell, to irony. However, Dewey's decision not to write a book on China (less one that expresses ironic distance) reflected the unwillingness to use a portrait of China as way to define Europe. Russell portrayed China as "an angel of light to show up the darkness of western Civilization", but probably he was blind to understand the problems of China's internal transformation. "As a good European, he

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216. According to Roland Clark, Russell wrote the book when he returned from China, because he needed the money to support his new-born baby.

<sup>50</sup> Jay, M., *The Education of John Dewey*, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>52</sup> Ching-Sze Wang, J., *John Dewey in China. To Teach and to Learn*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem.*

was perhaps chiefly interested in European culture and what Europe has to learn from Asia; in comparison the stupendous and marvellous problem of the intrinsic remaking of the oldest, thickest and most extensive civilization of the world does not attract his attention”.<sup>54</sup> As Ching-Sze Wang observes, unlike to construct an elevated image of Chinese virtues against the vices of Western world, Dewey did *not* think that the distinctive merit of Chinese civilization was “a conception of the ends a life”, a conception that clashed with the distinctive trait of Western Civilization, industry, and scientific method.<sup>55</sup>

However, being a sympathetic observer, rather than a charismatic, eloquent, and ironic expert, requires diverse sort of arts. Ching-Sze Wang suggests that Dewey’s view was not retrospective, but mainly prospective. But what Dewey called *reconstruction* just required both retrospective and prospective views. Dewey, indeed, tried to avoid the assimilation of Chinese standards to American ones (an attitude, by the way that some other ironists, as Rorty, ended un vindicating many years later). But he did not also propose in return that the best way to learn from China was to surrender his own standards in favour of Chinese ones. Ironic assimilation and tolerant acquiescence are poles apart. And without doubt, Dewey tried to navigate between them. “I envy, up to a certain point, those who can write their

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<sup>54</sup> Dewey, J., *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*. Electronic Edition, Edited by Larry A. Hickman, Charlottesville, VA, Intelex, 1996. *Middle Works* 15, p. 218.

<sup>55</sup> Russell, B., *The Problem of China*, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Ching-Sze Wang ends to suggest that Russell was just a little bit opportunistic in political terms. In his first lectures on Bolshevism “The Bolsheviks and World Politics”, Russell said that he did not approve the Bolshevik because of their authoritarian and violent methods, something consistent with the thesis of his book *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism*, in which he claimed that Bolshevism, as it had been developed in Russia, was peculiarly inapplicable to China.

Dewey himself attended the lecture, and he became to insinuate that some of the organizers didn’t want the audience to really hear what Russell said, covering up the translations. Two of Russell’s contradictory remarks on Bolshevism, did not appear in the Chinese text. Independently if Russell shifted his mid fast if the translation of his lectures was intricate, the true is that his lectures provoked the reaction of Chinese as Chen Duxiu who became the secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, secretly founded in May 1920, and that asked Russell a public clarification of his views about Communism. Curiously, in some other further lectures Russell was no longer critical of Bolshevism, and he even gave a positive portrait of it in lectures as “Bolshevist Thought” and “China’s Road to Freedom”. Consequently, as Russell moderated his opinions trying not to agitate radicals, he was attacked by those who associated him with anarchism (the same people that considered Dewey’s too institutional and political, for example Zhensyng who labelled Russell as an anarchist scholar. See Ching-Sze Wang, J., *John Dewey in China. To Teach and to Learn*, *op. cit.*, p. 46).

The fact is that “fervent socialists were disputing among themselves about which school of socialism Russell truly endorsed: anarcho-syndicalism, guild socialism, state socialism, or Bolshevism. Contenders on different sides of the debate used evidence from different speeches, or even different parts of the same speech, to claim that Russell agreed with them. In fact, for the most part, Russell was himself divided in his own attitudes toward Bolshevism. As he described in a letter, “my disapproval of Bolshevism, in so far as I do disapprove is on the ground that I do not think it can achieve the ends at which it aims. I regard the Bolsheviks as ‘knights of the impossible’, and the whole development of Russell during the last three years concerns me in this view. It is a practical man, not as an idealist, that I object to them”. When Russell spoke negatively about Bolshevism, he was being “practical”; when he positively spoke, he was being ‘idealistic’” (*Ibid.*, p. 29).

intellectual biography in a unified pattern woven out of a few distinctly discernible strands of interest and influence. By contrast:

I seem to be unstable, chameleon-like, yielding one after another to many diverse and even incompatible influences; struggling to assimilate something from each and yet striving to carry it forward in a way that is logically consistent with what has been learned from its predecessors. Upon the whole, the forces that have influenced me have come from persons and from situations more than from books— not that I have not, I hope, learned a great deal from philosophical writings, but that what I have learned from them has been technical in comparison with what I have been forced to think upon and about because of some experience in which I found myself entangled. It is for this reason that I cannot say with candour that I envy completely, or envy beyond a certain point, those to whom I have referred. I like to think, though it may be a defence reaction, that with all the inconveniences of the road I have been forced to travel, it has the compensatory advantage of not inducing an immunity of thought to experiences—which perhaps, after all, should not be treated even by a philosopher as the germ of a disease to which he needs to develop resistance.<sup>56</sup>

Rorty was wrong when he said that Dewey was a hedgehog rather than a fox since he spent all his life trying to articulate a single vision.<sup>57</sup> But in the twenties, he was neither a hedgehog, nor a fox. The point is to know how exactly the chameleon was influenced by the Chinese environment. Dewey's attitude in China, indeed, combined distance and engagement, caution, and participation, in a composite way. He never tried to represent the detachment of an expert, or the superior prose and pose of a wise man from the West. But he was not the candid man that empathises easily with an environment.

He said that his stay in China was “the most interesting and intellectually the most profitable thing I've ever done”, “a worth while experience *not so much for things specifically learned as for the entirely new perspective and horizon in general*”.<sup>58</sup> This point is important, since Dewey associates understanding with a

<sup>56</sup> Dewey, J., *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, op. cit., *Later Works*, 5, p. 155-56.

<sup>57</sup> See “Dewey's Metaphysics” in Rorty, R., *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minnesota, Minnesota University Press, 1982, p. 78. Rorty refers to I. Berlin's distinction in *The Hedgehog and the Fox. An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. Phoenix, 1993. The fact is that Dewey did not consider himself neither a hedgehog nor a fox, but rather a sort of chameleon. See my prologue to Bernstein's book on Dewey.

<sup>58</sup> Dewey, J., *Letters from China and Japan*, op. cit., January, 13, 1920, my italics. As his daughter Jane said: “Whatever the influence of Dewey upon China, his stay there had a deep and enduring influence upon him. He left feeling affection and admiration not only for the scholars with whom he had been intimately associated but for the Chinese people. China remains the country nearest his heart after his own. The change from the United States to an environment of the oldest culture in the world struggling to adjust itself to new conditions was so great as to act as a rebirth on intellectual enthusiasm. It provided a living proof of the value of social education as a means of progress” (“Biography of John Dewey”, in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, The Library of Living Philosophers, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, vol. 1, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1939, p. 42).

change of *frame*, rather than focusing on a specific *object* of study<sup>59</sup>. But this perspective is also interesting because it operates under a general assumption that Dewey also made explicit: “Whether I am accomplishing anything as well as getting a great deal is another matter. China remains a massive blank and impenetrable wall when it comes to judgment. My guess is that what is accomplished is mostly a way of ‘giving face’ to the young liberal element. It’s a sort of outside reinforcement on spite of its vagueness. Other times I think Chinese civilization is so thick and self-centred that no foreign influence presented via a foreigner even scratches the surface”.<sup>60</sup>

If we move back, we can better understand another important difference between Russell and Dewey. On October 6, 1920, Johnson Yuan, Secretary of the Chinese Anarchist-Communist Association, wrote to Russell:

Since 1919, the student’s circle seems to be the greatest hope of the future of China as they are ready to welcome to have revolutionary era in the society of China. In that year, Dr. John Dewey had influenced the intellectual class with great success. But I dare to represent most of the Chinese Students to say a few words to you: Although Dr. Dewey is successful here, but most of our students are not satisfied with his conservative theory. Because most of us want to acquire the knowledge of Anarchism, Syndicalism, Socialism, etc.; in a word, we are anxious to get the knowledge of the social revolutionary philosophy.<sup>61</sup>

Dewey himself had promoted of Russell as a radical, so why exactly his philosophy was considered “conservative”? As Jessica Ching-Sze Wang remains, on October, 19, 1919, six months after he and Alice Dewey arrived to China, a banquet was held in Beijing to celebrate Dewey’s sixtieth Birthday. Seizing in the fact that it was the same day as the lunar birthday of Confucius, Fai Yuan-pei, Chancellor of Beijing University portrayed Dewey as a modern Confucius. Curiously —as we saw— the day after Russell landed in Shanghai their hostess also gave to him a vast dinner at which they welcomed him as Confucius the Second. Probably comparisons with Confucius were a question of etiquette, rather than a motive of serious debate. Probably “in terms of temperaments and thought, Dewey was far more congenial to Confucius than Russell, who actually favoured Daoism over Confucianism and found Confucius boring”.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Something, by the way, that it should not only associated with to travelling experiences, since one could develop the same sort of experience “at home”. Or it could be associated to travelling experiences, but then transforming the local knowledge into a sort of foreign perspective.

<sup>60</sup> Dewey, J., *Letters from China and Japan*, *op. cit.*, January, 13, 1920.

<sup>61</sup> Russell, B., *Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

<sup>62</sup> Ching-Sze Wang, J., *John Dewey in China. To Teach and to Learn*, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Supported by Moorehead, C., *Bertrand Russell. A Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 342. In this paper I cannot go further into all the criticisms that Russell’s



However, it seems that things were not so easy, since —as Ching-Sze Wang also remarks— what Chinese actually expected from Dewey is that he would take the place of Confucius and offered a reformist program in which democracy and science displaced old tradition. To say, as the Chancellor of Beijing University did, that Dewey and Confucius were both “educators of the common people”, or that they shared the same faith in “education as a vehicle for social”, it was a polite way to praise Dewey that, however, did not cancelled the difference between a name associated with ancient wisdom, monarchy, hierarchy and tradition, and a name which seemed to embody the values of democracy, science and transformation. Even if Dewey sounded “conservative” to Johnson Yuan, Dewey was not exactly any Second Confucius.<sup>63</sup>

On May, 12, 1918, just in the first days of his stance in China, Dewey was invited at Shanghais to have dinner with Sun Yat-Sen who, one year before, had surrendered his post as general and was working on a reform plan. One month before Dewey began to lecture at Peking, the May Fourth student riots took place and the New Culture Movement erupted against the traditional Confucian tradition. Dynastic system collapsed in 1911, and some attempts to restore Confucianism and the Emperor had also crumbled in 1916. When Dewey arrives, Sun Yat-Sen was in fact incubating a revolution, and students claiming a more than a cultural revolution. Writers, intellectuals and thinkers did attack tradition and appeal for modernization. In a letter to his children from Hangzhou, Dewey said on May, 4:

In one sense this was a king of Hallowe'en students spree with a somewhat serious political purpose attached. In another sense, it *may* be —though probably not— the beginning of an important active political movement, out of which anything may grow... no one will guess which way things are going to turn, whether this is a temporary excitement, or the beginning of the new political movement China needs.<sup>64</sup>

In September, 1920, he also told to his friend Barnes:

The whole temper among the younger generation is revolutionary, they are so sick of their old institutions that they assume any change will be for the better —the more ex-

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cultural chronicles received. Nevertheless, I would like to mention one written by none other than José Ortega y Gasset. In reviewing *The Problem of China*, the Spanish philosopher recognized the merits of Russell's analysis about China's past and future relations with Japan, Russia and, above all, with the United States. However, Ortega also criticized Russell's prejudices (“typical of post-war Englishmen”), and his simplifications about the Chinese temperament, which was, according to Russell not warlike or capitalist (as the Western one), but cruel, greedy and, to a large extent, comfortable and cowardly (Ortega y Gasset, J., “El problema de China: un libro de Bertrand Russell”, *Revista de Occidente*, septiembre 1923, p. 157-162).

<sup>63</sup> See Ching-Sze Wang's books on how complex is such a comparison.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Jay, M., *The Education of John Dewey. A Biography*, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

treme and complete the change, the better. And they seem to me to have little idea of the difficulties in the way of any constructive change... [This] is a wonderful chance to study the psychology of revolutionary idealism.<sup>65</sup>

As Jay Martin himself recalls, during his stay in China Dewey, without missing an opportunity, criticized Marxism and Bolshevism, making it quite clear what kind of transformation he was willing to defend: “Revolution that was evolution”.<sup>66</sup> In his view, the solution for “the Chinese problem” was not going to be achieved through Communism, nor did it require a radical change inspired in the Soviet Revolution. But clarifying the details of his socialist and reformist alternative (as well as his proposal to reconcile tradition and modernization) would take us too far, and it also would demand more space than we have here, so let us leave it for another time.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem.*

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<sup>67</sup> Among the pieces that Dewey wrote on China, the following should be highlighted: “On the Two Sides of Eastern Sea”, *Middle Works* 10, p. 260-265. “The Student Revolt in China”, *New Republic* 20 (1919), p. 16-18, *Middle Works* 11, p. 180-85. “The International Duel in China”, *New Republic* 20 (1919), p. 110-112, *Middle Works* 11, p. 192-98. “Militarism in China”, *New Republic* 20 (1919), p. 167-169. “Transforming the Mind of China”, *Asia* 19 (1919), p. 285-287, *Middle Works* 11, p. 205-214. “Chinese National Sentiment”, *Asia* 19 (1919), p. 1103-1108, *Middle Works*, 11, p. 215-227. “The American Opportunity in China”, *New Republic* 21 (1919), p. 14-17, *Middle Works* 11, p. 228-34. “Our Share in Drugging China”, *New Republic* 21 (1919), p. 114-117, *Middle Works* 11, p. 235-40. “The Sequel of the Student Revolt”, *Middle Works* 12, p. 17-21; “Shantung as Seen from Within”, *Middle Works* 12, p. 28-40. “The New Leaven in Chinese Politics”, *Middle Works* 12, p. 41-50. “What Holds China Back”, *Asia* 20 (1920), p. 372-377, *Middle Works*, 12:51-59. “China’s Nightmare”, *New Republic* 23 (1920), p. 145-147. “A Political Upheaval in China”, *New Republic* 24 (1920), p. 142. “Is China a Nation?”, *New Republic*, 25 (1921), p. 220-223, *Middle Works* 13, p. 72-78. “The Far Eastern Deadlock”, *Middle Works* 13, p. 79-85. “The Consortium in China”, *New Republic* 26 (1921): 178-180, “Old China and New”, *Asia* 21 (1921), p. 435-45, *Middle Works* 13, p. 108-120; “New Culture in China”, *Asia* 21 (1921) 581-586, *Middle Works*, 13, p. 108-120). “Hinterlands in China”, *New Republic* 27 (1921), p. 162-165. “Divided China, Part I”, *New Republic* 27 (1921), p. 212-215. “Divided China, Part II”, *New Republic* 27 (1921), p. 235-237, *Middle Works*, 13, p. 127-38. “The Tenth Anniversary of the Republic of China: A Message”, *China Review*, 28 (1921), p.17, *Middle Works* 13, p. 147-48. “Federalism in China”, *New Republic* 28 (1921), p. 176-178, *Middle Works* 13, p. 228-32. “China and Disarmament”, *Chinese Students’ Monthly*, 17 (1921), p. 16- 17. “China and the West”, *Middle Works* 15, p. 215-18. “We Should Deal with China as a Nation to Nation”, *Middle Works* 15, p. 185-88. “America and the Far East”, *Later Works* 2, p. 173-75. “China, Japan, and the U.S.A.: Present-Day Conditions in the Far East and Their Bearing on the Washington Conference”, *New Republic Pamphlet*, nº 1, New York: Republic Publishing, 1921.

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