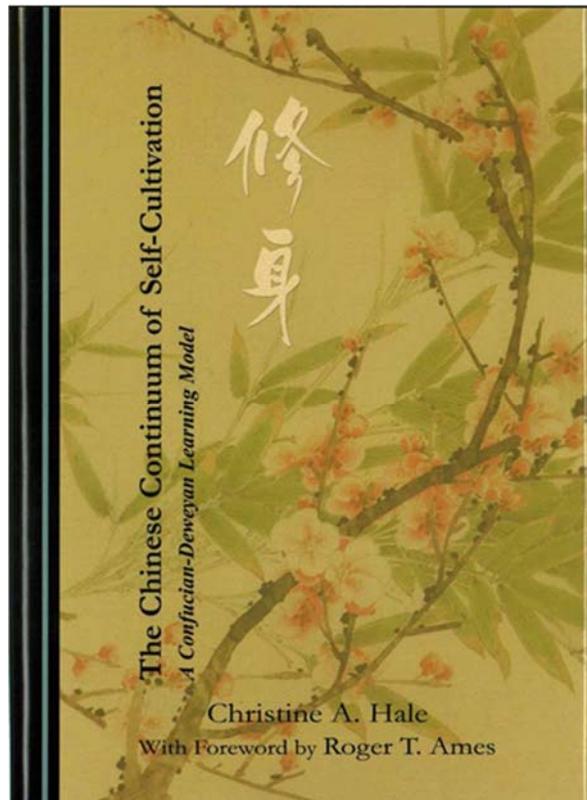


Book Review

A Confucian-Deweyan Learning Model

“The Chinese Continuum of Self-Cultivation” by Christine A. Hale

By Colin Everett



China and the United States will continue to be world powers in the 21st century and their views toward education will shape the future of both nations. Both these countries have a role in shaping culture, policy, and societal values beyond their borders. Approaches and beliefs about the individual and public policy present a tension between these two nations. American education often emphasizes the betterment of the individual and empirical methodologies, while China has traditionally focused its

education system on Confucian philosophy and preparation for civil service exams. Christine Hale attempts to bridge education in these two cultures by merging the ideas of John Dewey and Confucianism.

Hale dedicates a fair amount of *The Chinese Continuum of Self-Cultivation* to preparing the foundations for the presentation of her synthesized learning model. Ontologically, American and Chinese traditions are starting from different spheres. Western philosophy traditionally defines the self as an isolated Cartesian conscious. The self in China is tied to Confucianism, where the self is “inextricably connected to the other” (26). For Hale, the bridge between these disparate worldviews is American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. For Dewey, the self is a “mutually informing shifting of inner-outer landscapes devoid of dualism and the separateness of phenomena” (26). In Dewey, Hale sees a connection between respect for the individual and a concern for communal values.

Chinese and American traditions contain differing outlooks toward the mind and knowledge. Hale has the difficult task of presenting a coherent summary of Confucian philosophy while balancing divergent approaches and beliefs within Confucian thought. In Confucian metaphysics, knowledge is not “information or facts,” but rather “the inner apprehension of meaning relative to the self and others” (32).

As a pragmatist, Dewey was not consumed with questions of metaphysics and does not explicitly define the self. Hale deconstructs a Deweyan definition of the self that “to be united, it must be interconnected with the other empathetically” (65). The betterment of the self is essential to the betterment of the community. For Hale, Dewey is the ideal synthesis of American and Chinese intellectual traditions and a foundation for a future beneficial pedagogy.

During a lengthy visit to China in 1919-1920, Dewey saw a new nation eager to modernize. From his university lectures and courses, he was an influence on the progressive New Culture Movement. For Western-inspired reformers like Hu Shih and Liang Shuming, education should depart from a traditional study of Confucian ideas and focus on more practical concerns. In a letter from 1920, Dewey wrote to a friend that “it was not theories and free thought...China needed, it was teaching the people how to improve agriculture and cotton and silk” (81). Dewey has had an influence on Western-inspired reformers throughout 20th-century China. These reformers, however, were not the ones to shape Chinese education in the 20th-century during either the Maoist era or the era of modern educational reform.

This short book, 149 pages (including the index) is supplemented with 14 info-graphic charts that give a visual reinforcement of the author’s main points. These charts would make good presentation aids to anyone looking for a summary of the text in a class on comparative education, the influence of Dewey, or Chinese educational reforms.

Much of this book is dedicated to establishing the context to Hale’s vision of a philosophy of education based on a Deweyan-Confucian hybrid. While the context is necessary, the model itself would benefit from more explanation, including its applicability to a global context. The author’s suggested pedagogy

for implementing this model (Problem Based Learning) is given only a cursory five paragraphs. This is an area where the author could have more fully developed her learning model. Some consideration to an implemented Deweyan-Confucian learning model, whether from the organizational, curricular, or classroom perspective, would have helped move this model from a theory into a potential practice.

“The Chinese Continuum of Self-Cultivation: A Confucian-Deweyan Learning Model.” By Christine A. Hale. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4438-8525-6

About the Author

Christine A. Hale, PhD., is an independent scholar in the fields of Yijing studies, Neo-Confucianism, and the philosophy of education. She received her PhD from the University of Sydney in Australia.

About the Reviewer

Colin Everett, Ed.D., is a public high school teacher in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts, and a visiting lecturer in the Accelerated Post-Baccalaureate Program at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts.