

**In your opinion, what are the primary aims of higher education? How far are they from the actual historical development of higher education we have learned in the class? How much does reading historical cases change your thoughts and visions of higher education?**

### **Introduction**

Studying the historical evolution of educational thought from Emile Durkheim on moral education in 19th Century France to Max Weber on science as a vocation in early 20th Century Germany, John Dewey on pragmatism and education in the United States and Liang Shuming and Tao Xingzhi on rural reconstruction in mid Republican China traces a story of radical educational thought situated within periods of acute societal uncertainty, often in war or periods of reconstruction. This essay argues that the primary purpose of higher education is to develop a language of possibility and inclusion that counters the increasing calculation and compression of communal life under modernity. This essay explores to what extent education is understood today as moral formation and as a language of possibility and inclusion or whether the corporatisation of higher education and anomie of late modernity has diminished the idea of education as a moral and collective project to an understanding of education as a personal transaction of career, identity and urbanity.

The rise of the research university specialising in certain technologies, apparatuses and methods further complicates Durkheim's 'moral education' as questions of the individual and community are increasingly embedded in technologies and their use. Reading a diversity of historical and geographical cases of educational thought and reform has the capacity to shift the perception of education as transactional and personal to a geographically vital project of inclusion, community and creativity in solving recalcitrant problems of society in and across borders. Weber's fears in 1917 of *Wissenschaft* (specialised knowledge) eclipsing *Bildung* (moral formation) would financialisation not be anachronistic today and might further play a part in how education is understood and evolved through the 21st Century as the financialisation of higher education, internationalisation of study and what Weber termed a 'naive optimism' in science's ability to master the problems of life and lead to the road of *happiness*, collide.

### **'Vital Charges'**

In *The Evolution of Educational Thought*, Durkheim writes of vitality, energy and the genesis of the educational institution as a seed of moral forces, he writes of 'a curriculum [that] could not develop and transform itself on its own and automatically, if nothing had spurred it on to do so and it had received no vital charge overflowing from somewhere outside itself sufficient to set in train such

transformations' (Durkheim, 1938 / 2009, p66). Weber would locate vital charges in modernity and in the increasing 'Americanisation' of German universities saturated by the 'spirit' of American capitalism (Weber, 1917 / 2004) For Weber, in contrast with Durkheim's secular vision of a moral education, intellectual work (*geistig*) held a spiritual dimension, entailing forming but also being formed in accord with moral exemplars and ideals given form in practices and rules. For Liang Shuming and Tao Xingzhi, vital charges lay in confronting China's decades of peasant suffering, in a moment when intellectuals were questioning the futility in imitating the urban industrialised civilisation of the West and were turning toward China's countryside.

Durkheim writes of an 'accumulation of vitality [...] seeking an outlet' and 'intellectual effervescence.' Liang Shuming too would draw on a vitalistic imaginary in locating China's rural reconstruction movement as an awakening, of "numbed nerves suddenly becoming aware of the pain", and of the emergence of a 'new consciousness [...] to the special character of [China's] original social structures and to [China's] inevitable future" (Alitto, 1979, p194). The sense of seeds scattering and of 'bamboo shoots' emerging 'after spring rain' to describe the sudden convergence of intellectuals on rural education in China in 1927 focalises the idea of education as a moral and psychological reconstruction energised by the vital charges of war, uncertainty and unease about the 'brave new world of unlimited technological salvation' and 'modernisation', in this case a 'spiritually polluted' Western industrial modernity emblemised in the vast network of foreign concessions and treaty ports along China's eastern coast (Alitto, 1979, pp 9 - 10).

If dispersal and geographic expansion was one movement of evolution in education, Durkheim, writing of the emergence of the Ecole de Paris in Medieval Europe, also describes a counter-movement of concentration and of energy and vital force drawn into a single but stable location, a 'womb', where the 'original seeds' of educational innovations were focused (Durkheim, 1938 / 2009, p72). In reading historical cases of educational thought and reform - the origin of the research university in Germany (Clark, 2007) and the United States (Veysey, 1970), the French university (Bourdieu, 1998), and the national university in China (Weston, 2004; Merkel-Hess, 2016), a sense of this tension between the concentration of vital energy in certain educational institutions and its dispersal across society emerges.

### **The Fate of Moral Education in Advanced Industrial Society**

Situating the works of educational reformers in their specific historical and geographical contexts generates a novel terrain for understanding education as a geographically vitalistic project of dispersal and inclusion. Reading historical cases in this capacity has the ability to shift present perceptions of how higher education exists in the world, not as a bounded system but as deeply imbricated in modernity - both as a cog and a revolutionary site of resistance and transformation of the path of modernity. The project of education as moral reconstruction was often a question for early 20th Century reformers of how to situate the university in

a rapidly changing society. As early as the 19th Century in Prussia, educational reform emerged in response to a devastating defeat from Napoleon I. For Wilhelm von Humboldt, a key reformer of the time, education should focus on academic freedom for students and teachers and a unification of research and teaching. von Humboldt advocated for humanistic ideals, free thought, and knowledge formed on the basis of logic, reason and empiricism rather than authority, tradition or dogma. In the Humboldt ideal, education's purpose lay in the development of reasoning, self-determined individuals who were also world citizens focused on fundamental questions of peace, justice, the exchange of cultures, human nature and the natural world<sup>1</sup>. von Humboldt would press for the University of Berlin to 'operate according to scientific, rather than market-driven, principles in curiosity, freedom of research, and internal objectives' (Anderson, 2004 pp. 112 - 113).

In a sense it was von Humboldt's vision and a feeling that it was in a state of collapse that formed the world Max Weber spoke to in 1917 in his lectures on *Science as a Vocation* and *Politics as a Vocation* in Munich.<sup>2</sup> The student president who had invited Weber wrote at the time: 'is it possible to devote oneself completely to the unending task of intellectual work (*geistige Arbeit*) and still remain in this world? Is intellectual work still possible as a vocation?' In a modern world characterised by the division of labour, constant economic expansion, accelerating technological change and the reduction of all goods to economic and political utility, could universities sustain a morally robust and socially distinct way of life?' (Wellmon, 2017). In *Science as a Vocation*, Weber too feared for the fate of moral education in the research university and the cultural anxiety that *Wissenschaft* (specialised knowledge) was eclipsing *Bildung* (moral formation). For Weber, *wissenschaft* was 'meaningless' because it could not answer the most basic questions: 'What shall we do and how shall we live?' The broader context of Weber's speech is significant, speaking at a time of war as German and British scientists were developing poison gases for use in the trenches, the fears of technology eclipsing questions morality were prominent.

Weber also warned of the 'Americanisation' of German universities and the effects of advanced industrial society on a moral education. In 1904, Weber had toured a number of American universities and colleges and observed that the primary purpose of American universities was not, as in Germany, *scholarship*, but rather the 'development of personality such that students can learn to assert themselves among equals, grown adults, the development of a disposition that serves as the foundation of the American state and social systems' (Wellmon, 2017), the creation of hard-working gentleman capitalists. German universities, in contrast, aimed to create scholars and trained professionals in the Humboldt ideal to which Weber hesitated Germany would soon be unable to compete with such 'productive power.' In Weber, this sense of state formation and its deep, recursive imbrication in education was felt. Weber would not witness the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm's brother, Alexander, in many respects embodied this ideal. A geographer and naturalist, Alexander travelled extensively in the Americas, seeking to unify diverse branches of scientific knowledge and culture into a holistic perception, and is considered today an early thinker on the phenomenon of human-induced climate change.

<sup>2</sup> In *Max Weber and German Expressionism*, Mary Shields (1999) argues that Weber's sense of disintegration was shared with many creative writers of his time; all were in some way aware that the social and intellectual framework which formed their heritage was no longer sustainable, resulting in an overwhelming sense of cultural crisis — *Kulturkrise*. Indeed in 1914, Walter Benjamin as president of the Berlin branch of the Free Student Alliance (FSA), wrote 'the historical vocation' of students and the university was to 'liberate the future' from its deformation in the present.'

national socialism in Germany decades later. Louis L. Snyder writes how Hitler promulgated ‘two basic educational ideas in his ideal state. First, there must be burnt into the heart and brains of youth the sense of race. Second, German youth must be made ready for war, educated for victory or death. The ultimate purpose of education was to fashion citizens conscious of the glory of country and filled with fanatical devotion to the national cause.’

The danger of politics in education was known to Weber and a part of why he delivered his Science and Politics lectures separately. In a sense too the idea of ‘education as a moral and psychological reconstruction’ as advocated by Sun Yat-Sen in 1925 is problematised. If education is a ‘reconstruction’ effort, for whom and to what moral universe? A broader question raised in the idea of education as a psychological reconstruction is the sense that problems of education should be solved by broad, radical and sweeping measures. In this, the responsibility of language emerges in framing how we understand the evolution of education, whether in waves of subtle change or cataclysm, and with what effect.

The notion of ‘collapse’ some scholars might argue was part of a particular era and school of grand theory Weber himself was a part of that today jars with a more pragmatic, problem-solving paradigm of education reform. On the inverse, an argument could also be made that the extreme conditions of higher education today require a return to radicalised, grand visions of reform. In this sense, a key question for education practitioners today is how to re-embed educational institutions in the idea of evolutionary adaptation, radical transformation and historic juncture without losing sight of the lessons of the 20th Century in how state formation, political intention and a zeitgeist of international competition and darwinism co-opted and rationalised education reforms into what Weber would term the ‘steel casings’ (*stahlhartes gehäuse*) or iron cage of capitalist war machines.

### **Education as a Project of Geographic Vitality**

Reading historical cases of educational thought and reform opens up how education breathes its world, and vice versa. In particular, a sense of geographic vitality emerges in reading educational thought in the Progressive Era United States and Republican Era China illuminating how evolutionary adaptations to education emerged in distinct geographies as educators learnt from experiences abroad. <sup>3</sup> In *American Colleges and German Universities* (1880), Richard Ely, a Germanophile trained at the University of Heidelberg, alludes to how intently American educational thinkers looked to Germany to develop its research universities. Johns Hopkins, America’s first research university was founded in 1879 known locally as the ‘Gottingen in Baltimore.’

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<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to note linguistic and rhetorical differences, in the U.S, there is a sense of an openness, a plain-like horizontal quality as to the possibilities of education that is less present in the complex forested Goethe-like up-down rhetoric of Weber.

For Ely however, a different perspective emerged to his contemporary Weber that appeared to warn of the opposite in the Germanisation of American universities. In Ely's argument, the emergence of *Lernfreiheit*, Humboldt's imperative of academic freedom, in Germany had led students to 'exercise their freedom to choose what to study (*Lernfreiheit*) as the freedom to choose a career', rather than 'following their intellectual inclinations in a process of self-discovery and self-formation (*Bildung*). From this, Ely called for American educators and government to learn from the experiences of Europe and the dangers of a too freed up academic system of choice. In contrast to von Humboldt's Prussian reforms of *Lernfreiheit*, the French *grandes écoles* system stressed a prescriptive curricula, and discipline and control on the awarding of degrees.

The United States would imitate elements of various European education models in the Progressive Era. From 1865 to 1868, Ezra Cornell and Andrew D. White would work to build Cornell University with White travelling to France, Germany, and England 'to visit model institutions, buy books and equipment and to collect professors.' White returned from Europe to be inaugurated as Cornell's president in 1868 (Veysey, 1970, p98). Similarly, Charles W. Eliot who became a key figure in the transformation of Harvard from a provincial college into the pre-eminent American research university travelled widely in Europe from 1863 to 1865. As Henry James (1930), nephew of the novelist Henry James would write in his biography of Charles Eliot, 'his approach to investigating European education in exploring the role of education in every aspect of national life, in the relation between education and economic growth, and in the interdependence of education and enterprise. In a letter to his cousin, Eliot would note the value to the German chemical industry of discoveries made in university laboratories.

Eliot's educational vision would incorporate elements of von Humboldt's ideal with an Emersonian ideal focused on character development. Veysey (1970) notes how Eliot a Puritan of the Boston elite saw education's purpose as facilitating the conditions for individual and collective realisation of its students unique capacities. Like the Union victory in the Civil War, triumph over the 'moral and physical wilderness' and the establishment of mastery required a joining of industrial and cultural forces, and a clear focus on social utility developed within the unique Emersonian capacity of each individual. Eliot would propose the reform of professional schools, the development of research faculties and a huge broadening of the curriculum in an elective system adapted from the German *Lernfreiheit* system.

In a similar pattern, Chinese educational thought developed in the 20th Century as a project of reconstruction drawing on multiple education models gleaned from the experiences of Chinese educators abroad: in Tao Xingzhi's case at Columbia University under John Dewey's pragmatism, for Y.C. James Yen at Hong Kong University then Yale, France in World War One as part of the Chinese Labor Corps, and Princeton after the war. The extent to which western models should be imitated had been a large question in China as early back

as the Self-Strengthening Movement. In 1861, Feng Guifen following the Second Opium War would argue for *zhōngtǐ xīyòng*, Chinese learning as Substance, Western Learning for Application.

Chen Duxiu in contrast in an article titled 'Warning the youth' in September 1915 would argue against old beliefs and Confucian substance, instead promoting six values: 1. Independence instead of servility; 2. Progressivism instead of conservatism; 3. Aggression instead of passivity; 4. Cosmopolitanism instead of isolationism; 5. Utilitarian beliefs instead of impractical traditions; 6. Scientific knowledge instead of visionary insight. An interesting question from reading Ely, Weber and Duxiu together is to what extent a sense of collapse in the old order of beliefs, a *Kulturkrise*, drove each program of educational reform. For one, a similar sentiment of *Wissenschaft* (specialised knowledge) eclipsing *Bildung* (moral formation) appeared to form a large part of the fears of western learning eclipsing Chinese essence in 1915 as Weber feared an American capitalist learning eclipsing a German essence in 1917.

At the same time, different conceptions of the individual, the community and the state in education predominated creating divergent evolutionary tendencies in the development of higher education in each country. Reading historical cases of educational thought and reform in this capacity has the potential to reinvigorate present educational debate with the ideals and ideas of key early reformers. The power of hindsight also enables a judgement of their relative successes, pitfalls and path-dependencies of thought and practice set in motion. What is more, the significance of overseas experience, and cultivating an open sensibility to learning from different education systems beyond one's own, is stressed, a facet that might be explored further in a geographically vitalistic way of how experiences at the Yenching Academy of Peking University and of broader Chinese education might be compared, contrasted and developed within the educational ideals, ideas and systems of each of its students' home regions or countries.

### **'Toward Real Life'**

In *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929*, Timothy Weston draws out the significant role of Beijing University in steering the New Culture Movement and New Life Movement and later the Rural Reconstruction Movement against the commercial deprivations of Guangzhou and Shanghai. In *The Emergence of the American University*, Veysey explores the diversity of utility-minded academic reformers, like White and Eliot, in post-Civil War America and the growth of diverse institutions on the east and west coasts driven by different idealisms, experiences and sensibilities. A key dimension was the conception of 'real life' with potential implications for how we understand education today in growingly virtual and digital spheres of interaction.

For utility-minded reformers of Progressive Era America, 'higher education, it was hoped, might affect the conduct of public affairs in at least three ways. First, the university would make each of its graduates into a force for civic virtue. Second, it would train a group of political leaders who would take a knightly plunge

into “real life” and clean it up. Finally, through scientifically oriented scholarship, rational substitutes could be found for political procedures subject to personal influence.’ In this sense the university emerged as a revolutionary site to solve problems of corruption in business, labor and everyday life. Henry Carter Adams, a Professor of Political Economy and Finance at the University of Michigan where he would work alongside John Dewey, would state that he had two main purposes in the classroom: “to portray social problems to men [sic] as they will find them to be when they leave the University; and to lead men [sic] to recognise that morality is an everyday affair.’ Whether such a statement would fit or sound out of place at the University of Michigan today is an open question.

As Veysey notes, in 1898, in a post-Civil War Progressive Era United States, the President of Stanford, David Starr Jordan would state that ‘the entire university movement is toward reality and practicality.’ No separation should exist between the scholar and the man [sic]; knowledge should be judged by its ability to harmonise the forces of life. The college years are no longer conceived of as a period set apart from life. The college has ceased to be a cloister and has become a workshop.’ In this, a sense of education emerged as a moral and psychological reconstruction of the idea that the academic cloister and ivory tower were above or apart from the town, the railroad or press-house.

Veysey however qualifies this noting how class and difference still operated within the field of education. Veysey notes how Charles Eliot at Harvard saw ‘educational reform as a means of preventing social engulfment and annihilation’ from below, and that, ‘like the English Tories of his own day, he was willing to give the lower classes a kind of franchise in order to avoid revolution.’ In this sense, the idealistic vision of education ‘harmonising the forces of life’ might be tempered with the work of writers like Bourdieu who see power operative often subconsciously and systematically. A key question applicable to today’s education system as then was how individually moral people produce a systemically immoral system of educational inequality. Just as the railroad held a democratising vision of geographic and social mobility, the rail lines were also built on hard labour and exploitation of poorer and migrant communities.

A further significant dimension of the new geographic vitalism of education reform and railroads emerged in the northern, southern geographies of the Progressive Era United States and Republican Era China. In the former, tensions emerged around the funding of agricultural colleges in the south. In Republican China, a similar geographic tension was experienced between Beijing and Shanghai and Guangzhou in the south. As the Northern Expedition of Chiang Kai-Shek surged northward, an exodus of Peking intellectuals including Liang Shuming and Tao Xingzhi moved out into China’s countryside seeking rural educational reforms. The psychological effects of war in this respect on educational reform in changing sensibilities to geographic terrain and possibility might offer an important further comparative study.

An interesting related dimension opened up by Veysey concerns the relation of railroads with visions of utilitarian educational reform.<sup>4</sup> A comparative study of ‘harmony’, the idea of ‘sacrifice’ in its spiritual and practical intergenerational sense, the ‘harmonisation of education’ and the conception of ‘real life’ between different educational systems and modes of thought might further spring from this. ‘Harmony’ in the Confucian moral universe and harmony in the Progressive Era U.S. held divergent but also converging sensibilities in such a way that might reopen a story of shared educational ideals, with implications for the present and further dialogue. Reading a comparative literature on U.S. and Chinese educational thought from Veysey (1970), Weston (2004) and Merkel-Hess (2016) draws out some interesting comparative avenues in this respect: how was ‘real life’ framed by educational reformers in the American and Chinese contexts? What were the similarities and differences in the search for the nation’s soul and its ‘original structures’? How did space and time flattening in railroads and modernity, urbanisation and industrial war drive ideas of educational reform? What were the unique conditions of each in relation to education and its distribution to rural areas?

## **The Playground**

For Durkheim, the evolution of a moral education held a secular meaning, seeking to counter the Church’s hold on education in France’s Third Republic. Education’s purpose was to ‘arouse and develop in the individual a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which were demanded of him [sic] both by the political society as a whole and by the specific environment for which he is particularly destined’ (Durkheim, 1938 / 2009, p88). For Weber, the idea of a ‘calling’ and ‘vocation’ however both maintained religious undertones, suggesting that education was more than Durkheim’s ‘methodical socialisation’ into society but also a spiritual pursuit of the world<sup>5</sup>. In Weber, there is a psychological undercurrent suggesting education as an ethical odyssey of lateral discovery and a journey downward as much as upward of self and world. To what extent Weber’s rhetoric grew out of the linguistic world of Goethe, Nietzsche and other lyrical philosophers of the German language is an interesting dimension to compare with the more pragmatic, plain-like language of American education reformers. The role of linguistic complexity in early Chinese education reformers is also an interesting line of inquiry with potential implications for how we understand education today.

An interesting further avenue of Weber’s ideas on moral formation might be applied to primary schools today and the hardening boundaries for children of work and play. As urbanisation, parental anxieties, social media technologies, intensive child and school performance monitoring, teacher salary and work pressures,

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<sup>5</sup> In *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* William Clark more broadly contextualises the emergence of modern state-administered research institutions in Protestant Germany in the 18th and 19th Centuries, tracing a tension between Enlightenment thought with its drive for rational bureaucratic principles and management, and Romanticism with its focus on the individual. In *Critique of Education: Educator in the Work of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe Named Faust I*, Baykan (2012) explores this tension through the figure of Faust. It is notable that Weber ends his lecture on *Science as a Vocation* with an allusion to Goethe: ‘we must go about our work and meet the “challenges of the day” - both in our human relations and our vocation. But that moral is simple and straightforward if each person finds and obeys the daemon that holds the thread of *his* life.’ This might also be where Weber is a more complex character than Durkheim.



and private tutor and commercial education companies have emerged, the time of childhood has become more closely managed and surveilled. Several authors have explored the effects of the diminishment of free time and space for children to creatively interact, laterally discover, and morally experience perspectives and lives different from their own. One of the primary aims of education, from primary to university and beyond, is learning how to encounter and navigate different perspectives. In primary school in particular, developing a sense of selfhood and community, and the generation of an inner experience and dialogue with the world is important.

It is interesting to observe in this capacity the predominance of a productivist logic in primary schooling that frames the playground and play as non-productive. Weber's fears of specialised training overtaking moral formation in this capacity might relate to present arguments on the de-physicalisation of children's education and the over-psychologisation of childhood. In *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* and *Guanxi and School Success: An Ethnographic Inquiry of Parental Involvement in Rural China*, Laureau (2000) and Xie, Ailei and Postiglione (2014) respectively apply a comparative lens to the operation of social and cultural capital in parent - teacher interactions in the United States and China.

An interesting further study from this might explore how work and play are constructed. For one using satellite imagery might enable a comparative study of playgrounds in different neighbourhoods, regions, or nations, in design and size - green or paved, large or small, urban or rural. Such a technique might intersect with broader fieldwork exploring distances to school, work and play outside school and broader intergenerational dynamics. An interesting dimension might be exploring Bourdieu's field in relation to 'geographic capital' and its intersection with social, financial, cultural and other forms of capital in the production and reproduction of educational inequality. A broader set of questions might concern how young children experience difference, and how work and play are perceived.

### **The Fate of Moral Education in Financial Modernity**

In *Seeing the world: how US universities make knowledge in a global era*, Stevens, Miller-Idriss and Khalid Shami (2018) explore how, 'despite the endeavours of U.S. research universities to be cosmopolitan places, many prestigious academic departments still favour research and expertise on the United States. The authors argue that 'intense competition for tenure-line appointments encourages faculty to pursue "American" projects that are most likely to garner professional advancement.' At the same time, constrained by tight budgets at home, university leaders eagerly court patrons and clients worldwide but have a hard time getting departmental faculty to join the program.' In this sense, the globalisation of education experiences counter-movements of maximal connection, minimal interaction.' At the same time, much research has explored the financialisation of higher education. In *Corporatisation of the University: Seeking Conceptual Clarity*, Henry Steck (2003) defines the 'the corporatised university' as an 'institution that is

characterised by processes, decisional criteria, expectations, organizational culture, and operating practices that are taken from, and have their origins in, the modern business corporation. It is characterised by the entry of the university into marketplace relationships and by the use of market strategies in university decision making. Often there is also an intrusion of political forces seeking to direct academic policy.'

In *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, Pierre Bourdieu notes the emergence of a functionalist market logic in relation to education where resources are allocated by the state to institutions on the basis of 'return on educational expenditures for society as a whole (the social rate of return) or the contribution that education makes to "national productivity" (the social gain of education as measured by its effects on national productivity)' The extent to which financial modes of thought and practice impinge on the values and moral obligations of the university is a significant question that also concerns the compression of higher education, the compression of childhood, the compression of space in urban living; the marketisation of curricula, staff and students and the de-physicalisation of mental experience. As financial concerns have eclipsed broader concerns for faculty and students, a key further question is to what extent temporal anxieties have diminished the sense of geographic possibility and vitality in education.

How can ideas be experimented in the world collectively if time in education is being compressed? How can students find their 'calling', in Weber's sense of the word, if education is reduced to a conveyor belt or elevator logic? How different education systems have experienced this process has been widely studied. Educational institutions today are also increasingly transnational. For one, the Tao Xingzhi-founded Nanjing Xiaozhuang University today holds strong ties with Indonesia with a large Indonesian cohort of students and it might be intriguing to explore how educational thought moves in practice against broader abstractions of capital, modernity, tradition, nationhood, individuality, independence, collectivity, rurality, urbanity, sociality, religion and morality.

Reading historical cases of education opens up a novel perspective in this capacity as to how educational thought and its evolution emerges from outward-looking perspective alchemised with the sense a nation holds of its 'inner' or 'original structures'. In the UK, there is a sense today of intense insularity and of not looking outward to what might be learnt from other national education models, particularly non-western ones. In the UK, the vast educational reforms of the Education Act of 1946 emerged in the reconstruction period after World War Two when societal constraints and class were temporarily less determining. On the inverse, after the global financial crisis of 2008, no similar vast redistributive reforms to education emerged.

In contrast, university tuition fees in the UK rose to £9,000 per year, disadvantaging students from poorer backgrounds and increasing the pressures on students to secure debt-paying jobs and for faculty to meet ever more financialised models of publish or perish. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, a similar dynamic of an education system squeezed by financial logics may diminish further the ideal of a moral education and

the university as a time for creative and lateral expression. On a more positive view, the pandemic may also re-energise the perspective that education is a physical artform, the contours of the social fluid, and the possibilities for a cleaner, greener, more equitable society not apart from but achievable by an education system that re-appreciates the privilege of human contact. Reading historical cases of education re-energises the sense of what might be achieved.

## **Conclusion**

From Humboldt's ideal of holistic cultivation, higher education's primary purpose is to open time and space for thought, feeling and practice to develop into a moral sense of the world, community and agency in its transformation. Reading historical cases of educational thought and reform opens up how education breathes its world, and vice versa. Durkheim's 'vital charges', Dewey's 'we are within experience' and Sun Yat-Sen's project of a new people (xinmin) attend to education as a moral and psychological *reconstruction* from something which has or is perceived to be collapsing. Processes of state and nation-building, morality, class, social distinction, mobility and the geographic transfer of educational models and ideas are all part of the idea of education as a project of moral formation as much as specialist or technical training.

Reading historical cases has the capacity to change thoughts and visions of higher education today, in particular in relation to Weber's fears of specialised knowledge eclipsing the moral formation of education. An important question further arises concerning whether education today is framed in the geographic vitalism of the Progressive era United States or Republican era China where a palpable sense of learning from other nations' experiences is felt in the literature. To what extent educational reform is driven today by a sense of collapse and crisis is an open question, particularly as the strains on education systems today are closely related to political and financial crises. If one of the primary aims of education is the moral instruction of individuals toward the world and community against the compression of communal life, a connected and broader creative project might lie in re-locating higher education within the imbricated logics of modernity. The university in particular emerges as a cog and a revolutionary site of resistance and transformation of the paths of financial modernity.

A larger lesson to be drawn from reading and discussing historical cases is furthermore in the language we use to frame education. Should education be understood in gradualist or cataclysmic terms? With what effect? How do we harness the technologies of the 21st Century with the moral instruction of learning to live and thrive communally? How is morality related to time and space and their compression through anxieties of career-hood? The closeness in an *-ism* between a national education model and a nationalist one further strains at the emergence of close ties between university institutions and vast military industrial complexes, particularly in the United States and China but also other education systems. In this, the responsibility of those who are able to travel or study abroad is in deepening a sense of communal life against the

compression of political ideas and boundaries. Bourdieu's analysis on the reproduction of class and status in education offers an important qualifier on Humboldt's educational ideal of the world citizen student in asking which individuals are able to study abroad and how. Reading the works of early educators and reformers further reinvigorates the sense of education as a lived experience and process of moral creativity and as a physical artform that can still move and vitalise a sense of communal life beyond the anomie of cities.

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