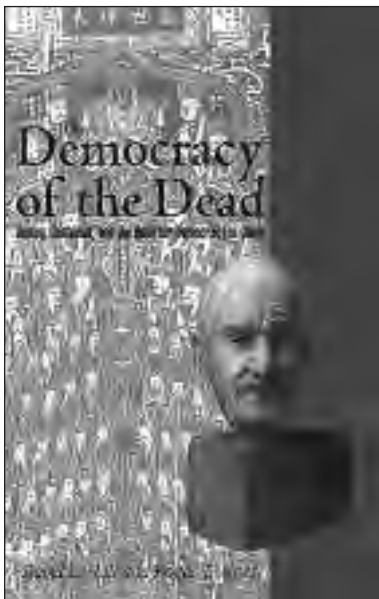


The Democracy of the Dead *Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China*

BY DAVID L. HALL AND ROGER T. AMES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, LASALLE OPEN COURT, 1999
267 PAGES
ISBN 0-8126-9394-9 HARDBACK



David Hall and Roger Ames rely upon a very useful and adaptable source in John Dewey in making their case for the possibility of democracy in China. From their point of view, any chance of a democratic China depends upon China's reaffirmation of Confucian philosophy, especially as outlined by Confucius himself in the *Analects*, and the engagement with Western social thinking on democracy. John Dewey is a perfect choice for this engagement.

Dewey's denial and rejection of any intrinsic link between democracy and capitalism takes a first, and important, step in initiating a true dialogue between China and the West. This denial of any link between democracy and capitalism was, of course, never a concern for Confucius or any subsequent Confucian. However, the second step taken for the invocation of Dewey is most relevant and necessary in light of Confucian philosophy, and is found in his recognition that capitalism presupposes an independent, monistic conception of the self, which is so prevalent in Western considerations of identity and social arrangements. Against this trend in Western thinking is Dewey's conception of democracy. Deweyan democracy requires that individuals recognize, and ultimately value, their interdependence. There are numerous references in the *Analects* that support such a relational and interdependent self.



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ESSAY BOOK REVIEWS

The authors' suggestion for China that the possibility of becoming more democratic without necessarily needing to embrace capitalism is a most radical suggestion in light of contemporary opinion—even though, at least from the pragmatic point of view of a person on the street, there is not much difference in practice between capitalism in the West and economic reforms in China.

Ultimately, Confucius's thinking on the self becomes definitive of the Chinese cultural narrative. In chapter 9 ("The Chinese Individual"), Hall and Ames carefully reference and discuss the Chinese sense of person as being "something that one *does* rather than *is*" (190). Their discussion is framed by an analysis of two important Chinese terms—*qi*, which they translate as "vital energizing field," and *xin* ("heart-mind"). This discussion is executed through a focus/field model "in which the individual is not considered a part of society to which he or she belongs, but a productive *focus* of the experiences and interactions constituting that society" (191). Their "focus/field model" is most instructive for Western readers, and especially teachers, in making sense of the self in Chinese culture. Throughout this chapter, Hall and Ames continually compare their model with the Deweyan assumption that the individual is dependent upon "definite social relationships and publicly acknowledged functions" (197). Dewey's understanding of the individual (as is Confucius's) is in direct contradistinction to most Western conceptions of the

individual. The argument of *The Democracy of the Dead* ultimately hinges upon this conception of self.

The authors' suggestion for China that the possibility of becoming more democratic without necessarily needing to embrace capitalism is a most radical suggestion in light of contemporary opinion—even though, at least from the pragmatic point of view of a person on the street, there is not much difference in practice between capitalism in the West and economic reforms in China. The link between capitalism and democracy may be an issue "of face" that will make further dialogue between China and the West possible, but as the authors correctly point out, is this anything more than ideological?

Hall and Ames take great pains in Part 1 to locate the roots of contemporary Chinese culture in Confucius's thinking and to establish fertile ground for fruitful future discussions for the hope of democracy in China. In the first chapter ("The 'Myth' of the Han"), the authors argue that the myth the Chinese are *hanren*, or the people of the Han, must be rejected. In the subsequent parts of the book, Hall and Ames argue even more radically, at least from the Western perspective, for a rejection of the "Myth of Liberal Democracy" in the West. The philosophy of John Dewey provides most of the grist for this mill. This cultural critique of both sides is essential for their final conclusion.

Dewey, like many Western thinkers, especially American thinkers, insists on the worth of science and technology. This insistence, in light of the appeal to the ancient thinking of Confucius, will seem somewhat at odds with the authors' project. Hall and Ames, however, are able to make clear that this insistence is not simply born of Western infatuation with the new and improved, and highlight Dewey's call to rethink, and to revise, the relationship between individuals and how they fulfill their daily needs. Again, this is another fundamental link between Dewey and Confucius's thinking. If we are truly working on the assumption of excess rather than scarcity, the practical implications for social reorganization are revolutionary. What may be missing in both a Deweyan and Confucian account, however, is the acknowledgement of the numerous criticisms of technology as a panacea for the ills of personal, social, and environmental estrangement faced by the world's population, and recognition of its ability to enslave and destroy as well as to emancipate.

In order to bring together the communication Dewey finds necessary for the realization of democracy, to avoid the cultural imperialism of forcing upon China the Western ideal of rational discourse, and to recognize the traditional importance of the aesthetic in Chinese life, Hall and Ames read together two of Dewey's most influential texts, *Art as Experience* and *Freedom*

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and Culture. While their very sympathetic, and clear, reading of Dewey presents a quality of community—one that many of us would desire to live in—this conception of community in practice represents a crisis (*weiji*) for the Chinese and is dangerous (*wei*). There was, and still is, much tension and potential for personal revenge in the traditional (and current) Chinese community, with its formal modes of organization and justice, as there is happiness and the displays of personal integrity emphasized by the authors. Still looming large in contemporary China are the effects of the Cultural Revolution. Chinese students know very little of their cultural heritage, or have an appreciation for the aesthetic lifestyle encouraged by Hall and Ames. With the introduction of democracy, China will require a reintroduction to some of the cultural practices the authors find so valuable. In this respect, *The Democracy of the Dead* provides as much for contemporary Chinese readers as it does for Western readers and should become required reading for all Chinese university students.

Many Westerners who teach Chinese students experience that very few even recognize the name “Kongzi,” let alone identify themselves as Confucian in their daily lives, or even in some aspects of their daily living. Most Chinese students do not admit to any religious practices, or philosophical inclinations, although many of them do admit to wanting to “make much money.” The Cultural Revolution may have done more than all the Western intervention in the last 100 years, and even more recently, the promise of “the good (read material here) life” has created a nucleus of good consumers in China! Unfortunately, the Cultural Revolution also created a cultural vacuum that marketing and consumerism may be far better at filling than the radical and passionate appeals of *The Democracy of the Dead*.

While Hall and Ames wish to focus on the family as a source of stability and value acquisition, they do so without much acknowledgement of the tension surrounding the idea of family in contemporary China. Although a mere drop in the expansive historical bucket, China has had some fifty post-Cultural Revolution years of identifying “putting the family first” as a bourgeois activity practiced by class enemies. Although many Chinese students express much love for their hometowns, far too many express a familiar Western (and non-Confucian) disdain for their parents, and older people in general. At the same time, however, they live seven to eight in small dormitory rooms, fetch their own drinking water, bathe without hot water, and have limited electricity and no flush toilets. They endure these conditions in a very Confucian way: without physical fights, verbal arguments, or the loud invasive, and often violent, music of the West. Certainly, the Chinese have adapted ways of living, some of which resonate strongly with Confucius’s original project, that would make the adoption of Deweyan democracy much more palatable than its other democratic forms practiced in the West. This is the other side of China’s *weiji*—its opportunity (*ji*).

The Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China is an extraordinary book in many ways. Its radical discussion will appeal to and challenge readers from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Beyond its appeals

U.S.-XINJIANG English PROGRAM

The Ulan Bator Foundation and the Department of Education of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (western China) are now seeking applications from persons wishing to participate in a conversation English language program. This is the first year of the program. Teachers will be placed in Xinjiang middle schools, technical and professional schools, universities, and private colleges.

Requirements. Those selected must be 21 years of age, U.S. citizens, and native speakers. There is no degree requirement, but those with bachelors degrees or with experience in teaching English as a second language are preferred.

Terms of employment. Terms of 6 months or one year (one or two semesters). You will assist credentialed Chinese teachers of English in oral exercises with their multi-ethnic Xinjiang student body. The Xinjiang government will provide, at its expense, an apartment with TV, stove, kitchen, bathroom, all utilities, balcony, and a monthly stipend. Students must pay for their round-trip air fare (about \$1,200) and medical insurance.

The Ulan Bator Foundation is a non-profit private charity (501C-3 and non-sectarian), one of whose purposes is to promote people-to-people exchange between California and Xinjiang, as part of a Regional and Sub-Regional educational initiative.

The first interview will be held in Long Beach, California, in September 2001. A second interview will be held in April 2002.

For an appointment and/or further information, please send a letter of application to:

Professor Arnold Springer
Ulan Bator Foundation
PO Box 3059
Venice, California 90294

ESSAY BOOK REVIEWS

and challenges, *Democracy of the Dead* is a prescription for many Western social maladies as well as a discourse on, and with, China. We would do well to read this work by David Hall and Roger Ames carefully, and live more accordingly to what it argues—that we must reassert, and ultimately reaffirm, the communitarian aspects of our respective cultural narratives and foundational philosophies so we can develop a “richer sense of ‘we’” and arrive at a “mutual recognition of full humanity” (239).

In *The Democracy of the Dead*, Hall and Ames move beyond the setting of Chinese thought common to their previous collaborations. Implied in their earlier work is the idea that Chinese thought could change the way we think today—that thinking through China rather than around China helps us see alternatives to our own intractable problems. It is in this latest work, however, that they show us exactly how. The apparent simplicity of comparing Confucius and Dewey thus reveals this work’s radical nature and singular importance. While we can argue about particulars and fuss over whether Hall and Ames have gone too far or not far enough, the most significant aspect of *The Democracy of the Dead* is that the authors have propelled us along a new path, the existence of which they only formerly suggested. In blazing such a trail, they do us yet another service: in their demonstration of why comparative philosophy is so critical and vital an enterprise for our personal, collective, and environmental welfare, they provide us a model for our own future work in comparative studies as well as presenting an authoritative standard for excellence. Hall and Ames weave together apparently disparate threads in their creation of a new social fabric. This fabric offers opportunities of improved social and political layering for those of us aspiring to more communitarian styles of democracy. While donning this new and old array of governance and social organization is fitting for the Chinese, it is also of pragmatic value to those in

the West who wish to free democracy from the stranglehold of capitalism.

We have grown accustomed to reading books crafted from the Hall and Ames partnership and have come to appreciate their service to scholars and non-scholars alike. They have made China’s wisdom more accessible and pushed the boundaries of our thinking. Their extraordinary collaborations have created a common anticipation among many, and we have come to expect regular collaborations from these two distinguished thinkers and talented writers. Most regretfully, this will be one of their last works because of the death of David Hall. Working until the time of his death, one can hear Hall’s voice resonating in Confucius himself: “How would I dare to consider myself a sage (*sheng*) or an authoritative person (*ren*)? What can be said about me is simply that I continue my studies without respite and instruct others without growing weary” (*Analects* 7.34). Although this will not be the last book to appear from the professional relationship and personal friendship of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, it will remain a beacon of hope in this new century as the Chinese struggle with their problems of an inherited dialectical materialism, and as we attempt to render our own democracy at home more human. ■

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DAVID JONES is the Director of the Center for the Development of Asian Studies, a Southeast regional center of the Asian Studies Development Program at the East-West Center in Honolulu and is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the joint Asian Studies Program at Kennesaw State University and Southern Polytechnic State University in Atlanta. Professor Jones has published numerous works on Chinese Philosophy.



U.S.-China Teachers' Exchange Program

The American Council of Learned Societies is now seeking applications for an exchange program for teachers in American and Chinese schools. This is an unusual opportunity for schools and districts wishing to begin or to strengthen Chinese language and culture programs and for teachers wishing to live and teach in China.

During the first six years of the project, we have had American teachers from across the country in “key” secondary schools throughout China—in Beijing, Dalian (Liaoning); Hohhot (Inner Mongolia); Luoyang (Henan); Suzhou, Changzhou, Yangzhou, Nanjing (Jiangsu); and Chengdu (Sichuan). We anticipate that many of the same schools on the Chinese side will participate in the next year of the program.

The American teachers in China teach English as a foreign language. The Chinese teachers, all of whom teach English as a foreign language in China, will be prepared to teach Chinese history, language, and culture and/or English as a second language at participating American schools. ACLS sponsors orientation programs for participating teachers in the U.S. and China during the summer before the exchange year.

ACLS pays the salary of visiting Chinese teachers and the transportation of American teachers. Participating American schools continue the salary and benefits of American teachers during their exchange year.

For more information and an application package, please send a letter to the Education Office—China Program, American Council of Learned Societies, 228 East 45th St., New York, NY 10017.

The U.S.-China Teachers' Exchange Program is funded by a major grant from the Freeman Foundation.