

## 路易·艾黎——近代中国职业教育的最早开拓者对我们的启示

### The inspiration of Rewi's pioneering work in vocational education in China

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When Rewi arrived in China in 1927 he never imagined that he would spend the rest of his life in this country. It is also very unlikely that he ever thought he would leave a legacy behind which would serve as an inspiration for others well beyond his own lifetime. Yet he has done just that. This paper describes some of the many ways in which the legacy of Rewi Alley has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and continues to influence the lives and work of many people today.

#### Rewi Alley's Legacy in Vocational Education

When Rewi Alley and George Hogg established the Beilie School they had a number of very specific objectives in mind, all of which involved contributing to the establishment and strengthening of China and improving the lot of the common people. They aimed to promote rural development and economic growth by promoting the development of cooperative industries. The Beilie School in Shandan was started with the express aim of training young people in practical skills necessary for working in and managing these cooperatives. They aimed to shape the characters of young people so they were not afraid of hardship or hard work while at the same time instilling in them a spirit of serving their communities and their country. They wanted to give impoverished families an opportunity to develop. The educational methods they developed were aimed at training people who could solve problems rather than simply fill a position in a bureaucracy.

In pursuit of these objectives they developed a unique approach to education and training involving combining training in theory with the practical application of this knowledge, the two elements reinforcing each other. They recognized that training in theory without any immediate, practical application would create the risks that students might acquiring knowledge that could not be applied to solve practical problems. At the same time, practical skills could be strengthened and improved by application of ever more sophisticated levels of theory to expand the range of solutions that could be devised to solve problems.

They developed a system of combining classroom training in theory and practical, hands-on training in workshops, with students spending half a day doing each. That system created the opportunity for students to apply the theory they learned to solve problems faced in production.

The combination of theory and practice can also be understood in terms of Rewi Alley's view on the respective roles of teachers and students. His view of education was that teachers should create the opportunity for the student to explore, providing students with guidance and the opportunity to learn independently. In his view a teacher is one who provides guidance, support and encouragement for the student to learn for themselves, rather than simply disseminating knowledge in the form of lectures and classroom teaching. In Alley's biography he quotes a passage from the *Book of Rites* (礼记) to illustrate his view of education:

*When an understanding man realizes why some teaching methods succeed and others don't, he*

*can teach others. In teaching, he leads, but does not drag; strengthens and does not discourage; opens the way but lets the student carry the work through. Leading but not dragging produces the right spirits. Encouraging rather than discouraging makes it easy for the student to succeed. Showing the way and then letting the student find his own way along it, makes him thoughtful. If a teacher can get good spirits, successful work and thoughtfulness then he can be said to be a good teacher.”*

(君子既知教之所由興，又知教之所由廢，然後可以為人師也。故君子之教喻也，道而弗牽，強而弗抑，開而弗達。道而弗牽則和，強而弗抑則易，開而弗達則思；和易以思，可謂善喻矣。)

His concept of education was one of cultivating talent in students by creating an environment conducive to learning and encouraging students to learn through experience. By its emphasis on guiding young people through the process of learning rather than just transferring information, it also involved preparing people for a lifetime of learning and problem solving that did not end once their schooling was finished.

### **Continuing the legacy of Rewi Alley**

Today Rewi Alley’s legacy lives on both through the continued existence of the Shandan Beilie school and also through the ongoing work of the International Committee for the Promotion of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (ICCIC), more commonly known as Gung Ho International. In 1937 ICCIC was created to support the work of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (CIC) in building a production base to supply basic necessities for those parts of the country starved for supplies due to the occupation of the Japanese. In 1951 CIC was absorbed into the All-China Federation of Cooperatives and in 1952 ICCIC was disbanded. In 1987, with the encouragement of Rewi Alley, ICCIC was reconstituted with a mission to continue supporting the development of Chinese cooperatives.

In 2014 a branch of ICCIC serving north-west China was established. Its aim is to support the development of rural cooperatives in the northwestern provinces of Shaanxi, Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang by providing training and support services. The ICCIC Northwestern China office continues the Rewi Alley legacy in a number of ways.

With the support of the New Zealand China Friendship Association and through a generous grant from Mr. He Wanying of the Shaanxi Binxian Coal Company in Xianyang, Shaanxi, the office has been able to provide training and support for cooperatives in Gansu, Shaanxi and Qinghai provinces. The NW ICCIC office has also worked with the Economic Management Station of the Shaanxi Department of Agriculture to provide training to a select group of highly motivated, experienced cooperative promoters identified from within the department.

More recently it has also started to collaborate with the Lanzhou City University, training young people on business and management knowledge, enabling them to initiate their own business or launch a cooperative. Lanzhou City University itself is also a legacy of Rewi Alley’s work in Gansu province. The university traces its origins to the Beilie Oil Industry Training Institute which was established in 1953 when the Beilie School relocated from Shandan to Lanzhou.

The NW ICCIC office is also carrying on the legacy of Rewi Alley in pursuing the same goals

which he pursued and applying the educational methods he developed. The aim of the NW office in its work with cooperatives is to support economic and social development in the poor rural areas of the country. The support is primarily provided in the way of training for cooperative members, cooperative leaders and cooperative managers. Like Rewi Alley, particular attention is given to training of young people. In 2014 with the support of the NZCFS a training program was supported which was designed specifically for young people in cooperatives.

The training approaches used also carry on Rewi Alley's legacy of combining practice and theory in training, guiding participants to apply theory to solve practical problems in effective ways. The training involves classroom training where participants are introduced to cooperative concepts and management ideas. But the training is not confined to lectures and presentation. Participatory training approaches are used which build on the knowledge and experience of participants in the training. This is very much in accordance with the concept of "leading but not dragging" the trainees. Rather than simply lecture on techniques for managing a cooperative business and expound on management theories, the training provides participants with concepts and tools which enable them to analyse their own situation, giving them a framework for doing a systematic and in depth analysis and then providing them with tools to devise solutions to the problems they face.

This approach means that the participants are actively engaged in the training, rather than passively and uncritically absorbing information imparted by the trainers. The training makes extensive use of case studies and examples collected over more than 10 years of delivering cooperative training in China. Case studies are primarily based on Chinese experience, but international experience is also included when relevant examples are available.

The training uses simple concepts and tools common to international business and cooperative management and makes them understandable and accessible to cooperative members, managers and leaders. For example SWOT analysis is a technique commonly used by corporations and organization as part of their strategic planning process. It provides a framework to help cooperatives identify their specific strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats in the external environment. Based on this analysis cooperatives can begin to prepare a realistic and achievable strategic development plan in full recognition of the opportunities and challenges available.

Supply chain analysis is also a framework commonly used in business, but which is generally unfamiliar to cooperative members and leaders in China. The aim of the analysis is to understand all the stages involved in getting their products to the final consumer. In English this is frequently referred to as understanding the flow of a product "from field to fork". Traditionally in China farmers grow crops or raise animals and when their fruit, vegetables, grain or livestock are ready they either sell them to an itinerant trader who comes to their village or take their products to the local market. Farmers don't generally think in terms such as consumer preferences and the implications of consumer demand for such things as quality, food safety, packaging and so on. They are also generally unaware of the rapid changes taking place in the markets for their products resulting from improved transport and logistics services, competition from other regions or countries, better access to information etc. By helping them think in terms of supply chains they gain an understanding of the wider environment in which they are operating. This in turn helps them to identify opportunities that can be seized or constraints that must be overcome to run a

successful cooperative enterprise.

Most importantly farmers are generally unaware of cooperative business models and how these differ from the business models of an investor-owned enterprise. This is a problem which exists today and was also a key issue for Gung Ho, the Bailie school and the work of Rewi Alley in the 1940's. In his biography Rewi Alley notes that in 1939 George Hogg was pessimistic about the prospects for developing cooperative enterprises, saying that "In his opinion, the idea of expanding Gung Ho on any large scale would have to be temporarily abandoned, as it would only lead to the endowment of small capitalists calling themselves "cooperative" and factory managers using the Gung Ho name to evade taxation." Then, just as today, training for cooperatives must emphasize the unique nature of cooperative enterprises and help people understand the types of management and business practices which can produce strong, sustainable cooperatives. It is essential to realize that the aim of a cooperative enterprise is for the members to work and prosper together, sharing both the benefits and the risks of the enterprise and that, while cooperatives must operate profitably to be sustainable, they must work to improving the welfare and well-being of their members.

The training done by the Northwest ICCIC Office is in the form of periodic, short term training sessions for cooperatives. This doesn't allow for using the model of the original Beilie school of doing a half day of classroom training and a half day of practical work. It has been necessary to devise new ways to combine theory and practice. This is done by providing the training through a series of sessions over an extended period of time, with participants carrying out practical exercises between sessions.

For example the training for cooperative promoters for the Shaanxi Agriculture Department involved a series of 5 training sessions over the course of one year, with each session lasting four days. In the first session participants were introduced to analytical tools including SWOT analysis and supply chain analysis. During the session the participants made an analysis based on their own experience. After the training session they were tasked with carrying out a SWOT and supply chain analysis together with a cooperative in their area before the second training session. When they came to the second session they had gained important experience in applying the analytical tools.

Likewise in the second training session the participants were introduced to a method of assessing cooperative performance developed by the Canadian Cooperative Association and known as the Development Ladder Assessment (DLA). Between the second and third session participants carried out an analysis of a cooperative using the DLA. In the third training session the participants shared among themselves their experiences from doing the DLA analysis.

The third session provided participants with some basic tools and frameworks for doing financial analysis and financial planning for cooperatives. Prior to the fourth session participants worked with one or two cooperatives in their areas and used the tools to undertake a financial analysis of the cooperative performance and investment plans.

This way of combining theory and practice means that participants gain experience in using the analytical tools, deepening their understanding while at the same time carrying out work which is useful and relevant for the development of the cooperatives they are supporting. In this particular

instance the trainees are part of the Economic Management Stations of the Department of Agriculture, which has the responsibility of supporting cooperative development. It is expected that they will use the same training methods in the future when they are working directly with cooperatives.

This is not the traditional teaching approach which involves imparting a body of knowledge to trainees and then testing their grasp of that knowledge. The aim is to provide trainees with relevant knowledge and analytical tools, and to encourage them to use the concepts and tools to help find effective solutions to problems faced by cooperatives. This in turn engages them in exploring and understanding the actual problems faced by cooperatives.

To enable trainees to support cooperatives more effectively sessions have also included topics like improving communication skills and conflict resolution.

### **Challenges faced in continuing the legacy**

In modern China the usual approach to education from primary through to senior middle school has largely become one of rote learning and preparing students for the all-important university entrance exam on which their future so much depends. This approach has become somewhat divorced from reality and practical application of their knowledge. It is now recognized that the continuing economic development of the country will to a large extent depend on innovation. Innovation in turn must be driven by people capable of innovating. To promote innovation the effective combination of theory and practice as an educational approach developed by Rewi Alley is essential.

Writing in the 1960's Rewi Alley noted that "If there is no proper relation of theory to practice the result will be study for study's sake". Unfortunately this describes very closely where today's educational system has led young students. The primary aim of education at junior and senior high school has become preparation for the university entrance exam. Schools and teachers are assessed on the number of students achieving high scores on the exams. Parents also encourage their sons and daughters to exert all their time and efforts to preparing for the exam. They are neither encouraged to put ideas into practical use nor to discover knowledge for themselves.

If theory is taught without attention to practical reality there is a risk that theoretical solutions to problems will be proposed which may not work or be of any practical value. But relying solely on practice without adding a background in theory means that people are unable to find the conceptual framework to leap from existing practices to new ideas. Training in theory provides students with a wider perspective and deeper knowledge when formulating ways to overcome problems and challenges.

Since the 1940's when Rewi Alley and George Hogg first set up the Beilie School in Shandan China has developed beyond the wildest dreams that anyone of that era could imagine. However there are still poor parts of the country and people living in poverty. According to the World Bank poverty in 21<sup>st</sup> century China is predominantly found in rural areas, and is also more prevalent in the northwestern parts of the country. These are areas with unlocked potential for development. Unlocking that potential requires the efforts and energy of the local residents. Self-reliance and local initiative are needed and the development of successful, well-functioning cooperatives can provide a key for unlocking that potential and improving the incomes and lives of the rural poor.

Using the practical “hands and mind together” approach to education and training is highly appreciated by trainees. As a training method it is also highly suitable for training adults. Adults in rural areas, with only limited levels of education, are not used to sitting passively for hours on end listening to lectures. They also become impatient if they cannot see the immediate practical value of the training. There is no doubt that the training methods used are effective, but they are also labour and time intensive. Training using lectures can address 50, 100 or even 200 participants in a session. Participatory training is generally most effective with a maximum of 30 participants in a session. Giving participants the opportunity to apply the training material to their own circumstances involves group discussions and exercises, which also takes time. For these reasons the training approaches are not often used by government agencies. Government agencies are measured on their achievement of targets, and they prefer to use their allocated training budgets to achieve the maximum “person-times” of training. Their targets are achieved, but the impact of the training may not be great.

When Rewi Alley and George Hogg were building the Shandan legacy the types of innovation that were most urgently needed, and that they were working to encourage, were largely related to technical innovation. The urgent task was to solve problems arising in an economy rife with shortages: how to build production machinery which couldn't be bought, finding a local substitute for some chemical or raw material which was not available; how to produce something with the resources on hand. In today's modern economy the most important innovations which are needed are not necessarily physical or technical. Innovation in the “software” of production and management is needed. Innovation is required for improved management methods and techniques, marketing methods and strategies, use of information technology. Innovative ways must be found for organizing people and resources, for raising capital. Practical, workable solutions to the problems of production and value-creation are still required. Regardless of the type of innovation required, training to enable innovation is still necessary.

The legacy of Rewi Alley and his approach to education, his spirit of contributing to the economic development of rural areas and his concern for cultivating the talent of young people are very much needed today. That legacy is being continued through the work of the Northwest Office of ICCIC.