

## A Brief Analysis of Chinese Philosophical Thoughts in Hu Shi's Works

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**Abstract:** Hu Shi's philosophical thought does not lie in the academic viewpoint put forward by himself, but in his originality in the history of thought and its profound influence. Hu Shi was the first person who made Chinese traditional philosophy step into the modernization process. The Chinese philosophical thought in Hu Shi's works has many enlightening meanings, and it provides us with a new angle of view to re-evaluate Hu Shi's philosophical thought. Based on the author's learning and practical experience, this paper systematically analyzes the Chinese philosophical thoughts in Hu Shi's works, and respectively studies the self-consciousness of subject consciousness, the guidance of experimentalism, and the importance of scientific methods.

### 1. Introduction

Hu Shi (1891 - 1962) was regarded as one of the most representative and influential thinkers in China in the 20th century. Since 1917, when the New Youth Magazine put forward the program of the literary revolution, Hu Shi has gained a great reputation [1-2]. He has been a giant star in the Chinese ideological and cultural background for his extraordinary life activities, extremely wide range of ideological fields and unusually rich writings. He published the outline of the history of Chinese philosophy and became the founder of the history of Chinese philosophy. He has published a large number of English speeches and papers on the history of Chinese philosophy and the history of Chinese thoughts, which have exerted great influence on the English world [3].

### 2. Consciousness of Discipline

Chinese academic history originated in the pre-Qin period, and it has gone through several stages of development, such as Confucian classics in the Han Dynasty, metaphysics in Wei and Jin dynasties, Neo-Confucianism in Song Ming and plain science in the Qing Dynasty. The Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy (Volume 1) is the first work of the study of the modern History of Chinese Philosophy, which is closely related to Hu Shi's complete History of Philosophy and mainly includes three aspects: First, the object of philosophy. In the introduction to the Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy (Volume 1), Hu Shi introduced the concept of philosophy at the opening stage: "where one studies the ball of life, one must find a fundamental solution for the fundamental consideration; this knowledge is called philosophy." Second, the relationship between philosophy and history theory and governance. On the one hand, Hu Shi defined the object of philosophy within the scope of man [4]. According to Hu Shi, cosmology, nomology and knowledge theory, philosophy of life (formerly called ethics), philosophy of education, philosophy of politics, and philosophy of religion are the most important problems in life. At the same time, it can be summed up as the content of the history of philosophy. Therefore, the concept of history of philosophy is "various research methods and solutions of various philosophical problems" formed by many philosophers from ancient times to the present day who have debated among themselves the important problems of life, and by the full-time philosophy workers according to the order of time and school system recorded in order [5].

On the other hand, Hu Shi defined the purpose of governing the history of philosophy: The first is understanding change. The most important task in the history of philosophy lies in the fact that

scholars know the clues of the evolution and changes of ancient and modern thoughts. The second is to seek cause, to find out the reason for the evolution of thought; Third, it is necessary for scholars to understand the value of various theories, and to judge objectively according to three different criteria: the influence on the history of thought, the influence of custom and politics, and the influence of personality. Hu Shi further pointed out that in order to complete the task of changing, seeking causes and judging the history of philosophy, we need to do a fundamental effort called narrate learning, that is, "with the right means, scientific methods, sophisticated mind from all the historical data, to find out the philosophers life act, the origin of thought and the true face of theory" [6].

The construction of Hu Shi's research system of History of Chinese philosophy is the main symbol of his conscious sense of discipline: Firstly, Hu Shi made a comparative analysis of Chinese and western thoughts and cultures, which answered the fundamental question of "what is philosophy" and reflected Hu Shi's consciousness of questions in the research process of the History of Chinese Philosophy. Secondly, Hu Shi attached great importance to the problem of methods, and defined the contents of the history of philosophy as "various research methods and solutions to various philosophical problems", which embodies the consciousness of methodology in the research of Hu Shi's History of Chinese philosophy [7]. Thirdly, Hu Shi respected the objective facts and paid attention to the objective evaluation. He pointed out the three purposes of governing the history of philosophy: clear changes, seeking causes and evaluation, and the steps of reviewing and sorting out the historical materials, which reflected Hu Shi's consciousness of history in the research process of the History of Chinese Philosophy. Fourthly, Hu Shi predicted the future trend of world philosophy by dividing the boundary between Chinese and western philosophy, which reflected Hu Shi's consciousness of modern consciousness in the research process of the History of Chinese Philosophy. It is on the basis of the above consciousness of problems, the consciousness of methodology, the consciousness of history, and the consciousness of modern consciousness that Hu Shi's discipline consciousness in the research process of the History of Chinese Philosophy is highlighted.

### **3. The Guidance of Experimentalism**

In an Introduction to My Own Thoughts, Hu Shi pointed out that his thoughts were most influenced by Huxley and Dewey: "The former teaches me how to doubt, and teach me not to trust everything without sufficient evidence; The latter taught me how to think, how to look at current problems everywhere, how to think of all academic reasons as assumptions to be proved, and how to look at the results of thought everywhere." Before the formal return to Dewey's Experimentalism, the academic thought formed by Hu Shi was generally inclined to Huxley's Scepticism, but some ideas were at first passive and piecemeal.

First, Hu Shi understood two fundamental concepts of Experimentalism: (1) The attitude of the scientific laboratory, that is, experimentalism does not recognize that the so-called truth is eternal and unchanging, and does not believe in the existence of an empty, abstract and general "absolute truth" in the world. It only recognizes that all "truths" are applied hypotheses. (2) The attitude of history, that is, to study how things happen and why they exist in this period of history. From these two aspects, we can say that experimentalism is only the philosophical application of scientific methods [8].

Second, Hu Shi introduced two basic methods of Experimentalism: (I) Historical method: the "method of the grandsons", he never regarded an institution or doctrine as an isolated thing, but always regarded him as a middle section. (II) The methods of experimentation: (1) Start with concrete facts and situations; (2) All theoretical ideals and all knowledge are just hypotheses to be proved, not just natural; (3) All doctrines and ideals must be tested by practice. Therefore, the significance of experimentalism in Hu Shi's mind lies not in its Theory or Philosophy, but in its methodology.

#### **4. The Importance of Scientific Methods**

In 1915, Chen Duxiu put forward six Suggestions in the Youth Magazine (renamed as New Youth since the Second Volume No. 1 published in September 1916), the sixth of which was Scientific Rather Than Imaginary, and gave a simple definition of Science. In 1923, when Hu Shi summed up the status of the word Science in the late 19th century, he pointed out the concepts of "blind superstition" and "blind worship" caused by the abstract concept of personalization. The result is to turn science into the object it wants to knock down, instead it becomes unscientific. Therefore, Hu Shi adopted a different attitude to explain Science in a manuscript written in his later years. The so-called scientific method is not only the question that Hu Shi has tirelessly liked to talk about all his life, but also the most important and most strenuous direction in the course of the study of Hu Shi's History of Chinese philosophy, and the nature and function of scientific method are summarized [9]. Hu Shi summed up the three main points of Scientific Method: (1) Focus on facts. No matter "what Confucius said, Plato said, Kant said", travel, survey, statistical materials belong to a specific fact, and can be used as a scientific method to start research; (2) Focus on hypothesis. The scientific method is not merely the study of facts, but the observation of things, the drawing of many presumptions, and the resolution of every difficulty which arises; (3) Focus on confirmation. Not every hypothesis is truly applicable. Without a layer of verification, all hypotheses are to be proved and cannot be regarded as the truth. Only after "experiment" can they be identified as "true" and can they be applied.

Hu Shi paid attention to and emphasized the Scientific Method, which was not limited to the induction and summary of "method". In his opinion, the history of western philosophy is the history of the change of philosophical methods, and the construction of philosophical system must rely on the innovation of methodology. Therefore, in a sense, it can be concluded that Hu Shi's History of Chinese Philosophy is based on the Scientific Method, which is manifested by a breakthrough in the form of philosophy and the renewal of the connotation of philosophy: First, the level of philosophical form [10]. The Dewey philosophy that Hu Shi chose to accept is a part of the philosophy system of experimentalism, so it has the nature of scientific methodology in the form of expression. On the one hand, Hu Shi pointed out that the "historical method" in experimentalism and the whole set of operating procedures of "hypothesis" and "verification" are not only similar to the methods of textual research in China, but also superior. On the other hand, Hu Shi further consciously combined the organization, and expressed as a new form-the method of new textual research; Second, in the level of philosophical connotation. Experimentalism emphasizes the "spirit of doubt" and advocates "positive attitude" [11]. Through in-depth study of Chinese traditional culture, Hu Shi not only excavated the "spirit of skepticism" and interpreted the "positive attitude" of philosophers from ancient China to modern times, but also affirmed their connection with the scientific method in western philosophy of experimentalism. Hu Shi claimed to be "a methodical worker" and made a meaningful link and explanation between Chinese epistemological tradition and western philosophy through "method".

#### **5. Summary**

Hu Shi had a wide range of knowledge, including political theory, literature, history, philosophy, education and so on, which belonged to the history of Chinese philosophy. However, its significance does not lie in quantity, but mainly in contribution: To arrange the heritage of Chinese philosophy from the modern point of view, and to promote the communication and communication between Chinese philosophy and western philosophy horizontally; Based on culture, it created the paradigm of Chinese philosophy, and displayed and completed the process of internal modernization of Chinese philosophy.

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