

## On the Liberal Spirit of Hu Shi's Method

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**Abstract:** By expounding on the connotation of Hu Shi's method and liberalism spirit and starting from the background and social environment of the liberalism spirit, this paper compares and analyzes it with radicalism and conservatism and then profoundly expounds on the essence and value of the liberalism spirit of Hu Shi's method.

### 1. Introduction

In Chinese modernization, the scholar Hu Shi has a very important position, which promotes Chinese modernization development and is the enlightener and the founder. Hu Shi first introduced method consciousness and carried out the localized transformation of foreign method consciousness. In 1922, as one of the leaders of the New Culture Movement, Hu Shi made a general evaluation and summary of his behavior. It can be seen as applying an experimentalist attitude in various fields. Hu Shi's purpose was to advocate a new way of thinking that the content lies in focusing on facts and obeying practical verification. After Wang Guowei and others, Hu Shi adopted a more comprehensive method of studying Sinology. He studies and reforms traditional Chinese studies following Western consciousness methods and my country's national conditions. Most of Hu Shi's works revolve around this ideological method. Therefore, in the method advocated by Hu Shi, he was the enlightener and founder and greatly influenced later generations.

### 2. Theoretical Basis

#### 2.1 Method of Hu Shi

The method consciousness and innovation of traditional methodology advocated by Hu Shi have completely changed the way of thinking of the Chinese people to view research objects, think and analyze problems and solve problems, and completely change the traditional way of thinking of the Chinese people, which in turn promotes the development of China's modernization process has created China's modern people and modern society. The main content of the method he advocates includes three aspects, two levels, and a basic point, and it is a method of consciousness of a composite structure [1].

Among them, three aspects refer to academic aspects, political aspects, and social aspects. If more extensive, it can also include religious beliefs. Hu Shi believes that in the academic aspect, we should be realistic and pragmatic, seek goodness in politics, development, and progress should be sought in the social aspect, that is to say, inhuman practice, facts, and evidence should be respected, and repeated practice and verification should be carried out to avoid being deceived by others. Therefore, the so-called three aspects establish the spirit of science and follow the scientific method.

From the perspective of theoretical construction, the method proposed by Hu Shi is based on experience, starting from Western pragmatism theory, combined with the simple method of the Qing Dynasty and the naturalistic cosmology and outlook on life, and then localized these methods so that the method can meet China's national conditions, then, it is feasible in the process of China's modernization.

## **2.2 Liberal Spirit**

The spirit of liberalism is, in essence, an ideology that belongs to a philosophical system. In general, the spirit of liberalism can be seen as a collection of schools of thought that assemble major political values. The content of the liberal spirit refers to the pursuit of development, the belief in the goodness of human nature, and the support of individual human autonomy. From a broader perspective, the spirit of liberalism emphasizes the protection of individual freedom of thought and the use of laws to limit the scope of government power, establish the concept of free trade, and vigorously support the development of private enterprises. In contemporary social development, advocates of the spirit of liberalism support the construction of liberal democracy, pursue an open and fair electoral system, and believe that every citizen can have equal rights to participate in government affairs.

In many countries and regions, the supporters of the contemporary liberal spirit are the supporters of the previous classical liberalism. Therefore, the contemporary liberal spirit covers various ideas and schools.

## **3. The New Culture Movement and Three Social Thoughts**

With the beginning and development of the New Culture Movement, different schools of thought emerged for the May 4th youth generation in the face of cultural reconstruction. According to the degree of influence of these schools on China's modernization process, they can be divided into three modern social thought trends: conservatism, radicalism, and liberalism [2].

In the process of China's modernization, these three social and ideological trends have shown different development trends and directions. Conservatism emerged in the West in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and it wasn't until the early 19th century that its adherents truly became conservatives. It is also believed that the emergence and rise of conservatism are closely related to the French revolution. During the French revolution, the progressive trend of thought emerged, and some people still maintained the old traditions and things, and then the theory of conservatism appeared. As the trend of conservatism was introduced into China, under the Chinese environment, Western conservatism was gradually localized. The conservatism after sinicization was more inclined to cultural conservatism and had little to do with social politics. However, it is worth noting that if culturally based conservatism is divorced from social environment soil and political connotations, then it's a matter of time before it's gone. Radicalism takes Marxism as the leading ideology, promotes cultural radicalism through political radicalism, and then presents dual political and cultural radicalism. At the same time, in the Chinese environment, radicalism has gradually become the dominant force in modern Chinese social thought because of its change in ideas, power, and practice.

## **4. The Spirit of Liberalism Based on Hu Shi's Method**

Hu Shi is a great leader in the spirit of independence in our country. The spirit of liberalism he proposed is, in essence, a pragmatic scientific method, which can also be regarded as the application and development of Hu Shi's method in the political field. The two are consistent, basically. Hu Shi's liberalism was born and formed during his stay in the United States. The reason is that the democratic political training that Hu Shi received during his stay in the United States. He established the independent character of intellectuals and thought about his social mission, all of which pushed Hu Shi to step on the path of liberalism and become a liberal. In addition, the Ibsen-style individualism accepted and advocated by Hu Shi is the booster for Hu Shi to become a supporter of the spirit of liberalism. Hu Shi once summed up the process of becoming a liberal. He said that the spirit of liberalism has four meanings, namely freedom, democracy, tolerance, and reform. Among them, tolerance refers to tolerance of opponents, and reform is not a radical reform but a peaceful and gradual reform. Under the Chinese environment, the liberalism bred in China is characterized by emphasizing people-oriented, adopting peaceful and gradual improvement methods, insisting on verification through experiments, and independently choosing culture and ideas. This is also the liberal spirit proposed by Hu Shi. The connotation and application of Hu Shi's method [3].

## **4.1 Hu Shi's Method and Three Social Thoughts**

From the perspective of the place of origin, the three social thought trends are a trinity and are inseparable. They are integral, appear in Western countries, and arise from the same conceptual framework system, and they approach the same problem from different directions. The theoretical propositions advocated by the three social trends of thought are different, but they all solve and think about the same social and historical problems in common. In other words, the three social ideological trends exist and are mutually exclusive. They have their own different theories and propositions, as well as their own different methods of solving social problems, which in turn give birth to the unique development model of Western society—sharp and profound without being biased. However, in the context of China's national conditions, these three social trends of thought did not have the calm and relaxed soil of Western society but developed under a heavy historical background. Therefore, on the soil of China, these three social trends of thought cannot develop and progress as fully as they do in Western countries, nor can they continue to develop and progress in the field of practice. In China's social environment, the three social, and ideological trends must seek their suitable survival paths and fight against other sidelines to continue developing and progressing.

In this tragic ideological struggle in Chinese history, Mr. Hu Shi was calm, unusual, and a firm advocate of liberalism. In fact, during his stay in the United States, Mr. Hu Shi began to make bold assumptions, planning and trying a new type of language revolution. In the beginning, when Hu Shi and a group of his friends discussed the issue of China's new form of language, all of his friends disagreed with it. Sparks of wisdom and profound reflection sparked the heated debates. These heated debates can be seen as one with conservatives, activists, and liberals on one side.

## **4.2 Conservatism and Activism**

### **4.2.1 Thoroughly Critical Spirit**

Although Mr. Hu Shi himself advocates and uses the spirit of liberalism, in essence, Mr. Hu Shi is based on pragmatism and regards liberalism as a practical activity in a social and political context. More specifically, the freedom Doctrine is a proven hypothesis that still needs to be tested. Moreover, Mr. Hu Shi always believes that all doctrines and theories are only hypotheses and reference materials, not standard creeds, which manifests the thorough critical spirit in Hu Shi's method. Moreover, Mr. Hu Shi always believes that all doctrines and theories are only hypotheses and reference materials, not standard creeds, which is the manifestation of the thorough critical spirit in Hu Shi's method.

### **4.2.2 Spirit of Tolerance**

In Hu Shi's method, in addition to the spirit of thorough criticism, there is also the consciousness of self-examination and equality that arise from the spirit of thorough criticism. In addition, Mr. Hu Shi also put forward the spirit of tolerance. Undoubtedly, Mr. Hu Shi was wary of communism. He believed that the feasibility of communism needs to be verified over time. In the 1940s, Mr. Hu Shi cheered for the Communist Party's constant striving for socialist experiments. This attitude of avoiding suspicion was rooted in Hu Shi's liberal spirit of tolerance. In his later years, Mr. Hu Shi believed that the spirit of tolerance was more important than freedom. In modern Chinese society, Mr. Hu Shi's tolerance spirit still applies. That is, the three social and ideological trends should not be opposed to each other but can also develop in coordination and are an important force to complete the process of China's modernization jointly.

### **4.2.3 Realistic and Pragmatic**

Whether in Western society or the Chinese context, the common goal of the three social and ideological trends is the pursuit of modernization, but the difference lies in the methods and paths they each choose. China's modernization is not a definite goal but a process of continuous change and optimization, which is the essence of modernization. According to this logic, in the context of Chinese society, conservatism is more rooted in culture and away from politics, while radicalism is more rooted in politics and away from culture. Under such circumstances, Mr. Hu Shi kept trying to make culture and politics promote and interact continuously. Compared with conservatives at the cultural

level, Mr. Hu Shi is more innovative; compared with radicals at the political level, Mr. Hu Shi lacks the transitional revolutionary spirit. Therefore, Mr. Hu Shi has a relatively independent spirit and a detached attitude. He is different from conservatives and activists. He has a realistic and pragmatic spirit and can do current things from a long-term perspective [4].

### 4.3 Difference Between Conservatives and Activists

Conservatives often uphold the attitude of retreating and keeping ahead. They do not focus on the present but have long-term thinking. Conservatives often dislike brutal political struggles and hypocritical politicians. Their attitude towards real politics is to avoid and exclude them, hoping to protect a pure land in the cultural field. Conservatives, usually cultural conservatives, have the idea of saving the country through culture but have abandoned their real motive to keep protecting traditional culture. Conservatives are usually satisfied with the exploration from theory to theory, from textbook to textbook. They are constantly building frameworks and systems, and they imagine that they can study the road to national salvation through pen and paper. Conservatives are mostly the mainstays of the academic world. They have created a precedent for the academic world, but they cannot stand on the ground in reality and lack keen attention to the sufferings of the people at the bottom [5].

Activists are different, and their radicalism is not cultural but political. Activists are one of the quickest to respond when the Enlightenment and ideological revolutions struggle to bear fruit in reality. During the May 4th Movement, the results achieved by the collaboration between the student group and the worker group gave the activists real inspiration. That is, the search for a way to save the country must be carried out in an organized and disciplined manner. Unlike conservatives, activists are less ideological and focus more on the politics of transforming real society. In addition, after the May 4th Movement, activists turned from individuals to collectives, hoping to seek a way to save the country through the whole team's strength [6]. They believe that their respective freedoms and rights should be put aside first, and each individual should put the collective interests first and then redeem the lost freedom and rights when the fruits of success are obtained. This great spirit of sacrifice and teamwork is worth learning and respecting for future generations.

Activists and conservatives have similarities and differences in their shared spirit of self-sacrifice for a purpose and in their differences in values and paths of practice.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the spirit of liberalism advocated by Mr. Hu Shi exists in the pragmatism he proposes and also in the scientific method he advocates. It can be seen that the connotation of the spirit of liberalism includes the core of the two. It is the spirit of scientific rationality and the spirit of practice. Specifically, liberalism is mainly composed of three dimensions, self-examination consciousness, tolerance spirit, and truth-seeking and pragmatic attitude, which are compatible with the advantages of the three social trends of thought. From a long-term perspective, in the process of China's modernization, the key to the integration of the three social ideological trends is to have a moderate and gentle social ideology as the backbone. This social ideology must follow the modernization characteristics of the contemporary social environment, that is, the thought should serve as a bridge, connecting the past and the future, which is the essence of the spirit of liberalism.

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