

HU SHI: A CHINESE PRAGMATIST AND REFORMIST

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Abstract

The name Hu Shi (1891-1962) would inevitable arise in the minds of scholars and students of Chinese intellectual history who wish to trace the development of Chinese modern thinking which encompasses such ideas as scientific attitude, democracy, cultural criticism and freedom of speech. Although studies on Hu are quite abundant, it is obvious that more profound research has yet to be done, especially since a prodigious amount of primary sources has appeared in recent years.

This dissertation has three objectives: (1) to show that Hu's thought was more complicated than had been reviewed; (2) to analyse the contribution and limitation of his Pragmatic approach to Chinese scholarship and politics; (3) to explore the dilemmas and mental tensions of Hu both as a intellectual and a scholar.

My study will first provide a brief account of Hu's education in China and in America with emphasis on Hu's adoption of Pragmatism. Then I shall recount how Hu spearheaded the New Cultural Movement by his application of Pragmatic and scientific approaches to the Literary Revolution and the reform of Chinese scholarship. The "scientism" in Hu's thought is illustrated in Chapter III, which will be followed by a discussion on Hu's predicament in his effort to integrate the concept of "use" (*yong*) of Chinese classical philosophy into his Pragmatism and how he used "scientific method" as an excuse to justify his textual research. I shall also argue that although Hu was apparently a leading advocator of Westernisation, he was indeed profoundly imbued in Chinese philosophical legacy. The last two

chapters will focus on Hu's dilemmas as a political critic and the ideological conflicts between his political stand and that of Chinese Communists and explain why the conflict could be said to be part of the definition of Pragmatism. Nevertheless, my study will attempt to prove that, ultimately, Hu's career as scholar and thinker was determined by the course of modern Chinese history that was beyond his capability to alter.

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A Note on Romanisation and Translation

Except those which are well-known in the West by different systems of romanisation, all personal or place names are romanised according to the pinyin system. However, when other systems is used for a Chinese word in a quotation from an English text, the original romanisation is kept.

As for the quotation from Hu Shi's works, if the title in the footnote first appears in English, the quotation is taken from Hu's own English writing. Otherwise the quotation is taken from his text in Chinese, and the English quotation is my translation. The same principle applies to quotation from others unless the translator is indicated.

Abbreviations Used in the Footnotes and Bibliography

<i>DLPL</i> :	<i>Duli Pinglun</i> (Independent Critics)
<i>HSSXJ</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Shuxin Ji</i> (Letters of Hu Shi). Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1996.
<i>HSZPJ</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Zuopin Ji</i> (Collected Works of Hu Shi), 37 vols. Taipei: Yuanliu Chuban Gongsi, 1986.
<i>KSZZ</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Koushu Zizhuan</i> (The Oral Autobiography of Hu Shi), translated with notes by Tang Degang. Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1983.
<i>LWSXX</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Laiwang Shuxin Xuan</i> (Selected Correspondences of Hu Shi), 3 vols. Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983.
<i>LXRJ</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Liuxue Riji</i> (Hu Shi's Diary while Studying Abroad), 4 vols. <i>HSZPJ</i> , vol. 34-37.
<i>NPCB</i> :	<i>Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao</i> (First Draft of an Extended Chronology of the Life of Hu Shi), 10 vols. Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1984.
<i>RJSGB</i> :	<i>Hu Shi de Riji Shougaoben</i> (The Diary of Hu Shi, photographic reproduction of the original manuscript and unpaginated), 18 vol. Taipei: Yuanliu Chuban Gongsi, 1990.
<i>SSZS</i> :	<i>Sishi Zishu</i> (Autobiography at Forty). <i>HSZPJ</i> , vol. 1.
<i>YGJMCSX</i> :	<i>Hu Shi Yigao ji Micang Shuxin</i> (Collected Writings and Letters of Hu Shi, photographic reproduction of the original manuscript), 42 vols. Hefei: Huangshan Shushe, 1994.
<i>ZYZG</i>	<i>Ziyou Zhongguo</i> (Free China)

Introduction

I

Hu Shi was one of the most generally recognised leader of the May Fourth Movement.¹ Any student of modern Chinese intellectual history would have no choice but to deal with his thoughts. Even before his return from his Ph.D study in the United States in 1917, Hu had already been a national figure. From the time of the May Fourth Movement until the take-over of Mainland China by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP hereafter) in 1949, he exerted a steady influence on Chinese thought. Even in semi-retirement in Taiwan or after his death, he cast a long shadow over the cultural life on both sides of the Taiwan straits.

¹On 4 May 1919, a student demonstration broke out in Beijing as a consequence of the unequal treatment of the China by the world powers during the Paris Conference. The nation-wide protests and demonstrations that followed soon brought together the intellectual, social, cultural, and political activities that existed prior to the student demonstrations under the loosely-defined term, the "May Fourth Movement." According to Chow Tse-tsung, The May Fourth Movement period "may be reasonably defined as 1917-1921 inclusive, which period may be divided into two phases separated by the May Fourth Incident proper. During the first phase, some new intellectuals concentrated on instilling their ideas in the students and youth of China. During the second phase an all-out attack on tradition and conservatism was launched principally by students, and the movement was carried beyond purely intellectual circles." Chow Tse-tsung: *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 6. The May Fourth Movement also has been referred to by several other names, such as the "New Culture Movement," the "Renaissance," and the "Chinese Enlightenment." Each name implies a particular historical interpretation regarding the nature and significance of the movement. For a brief discussion on these names, see Ying-shih Yu: "The Radicalisation of China in the Twentieth Century," *Daedalus* 122. 2 (Spring 1993): 130-131.

Hu was appointed professor at Beijing University in 1917 and was one of the main contributors to the most important magazine of the May Fourth Movement *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*). In 1922, he established *Endeavour* (*Nuli*) which marked the beginning of his role as an important political critic. Even after the closure of *Endeavour* in October 1923, Hu kept on voicing his political opinion. As the spiritual leader of the loosely-organised group around the magazine *The Crescent* (*Xinyue*) he was the most well-known and strongest critic of the KMT from 1928 until the Mukden Incident of 1931. However, after the Incident, his relationship with the KMT became cordial, although he never stopped opposing its dictatorship while continuing to advocate a constitutional government.

Throughout his life, he held many important posts in academic institutions. He was President of the National Chinese Institute (*Zhongguo Gongxue*) from 1928 to 1930 and later Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Beijing University from 1931 until the Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937. Because of the war, Hu reluctantly but dutifully accepted the government post of Ambassador to the United States from 1938 to 1942. When he came back to China in 1946, he became President of Beijing University. After the CCP had taken control of Mainland China, he went to the United States, at the request of Chiang Kai-shek in search of aid and support for the KMT government. In 1958 he became President of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan and held this position until his death four years later.

Hu contributed much to every enterprise he chose to undertake, as Jerome Grieder described in his pioneering work *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution 1917-1937*, "much of what he had had to say

had been perceptive, substantial, and even in an undramatic way courageous.”² His academic and literary interest was wide and his writing prolific. As a student of John Dewey, he was the most well-known Pragmatist in modern China. He had an audience in both the academia and the general public who were eager to hear his philosophical outlook and political commentaries. His name was associated with many important intellectual activity in modern China.

Studies on Hu Shi started almost simultaneously with the beginning of his own career, and are now abundant. It is clear, however, that the last words have yet to be written on Hu Shi, since many issues remain extremely controversial. A new research is called for especially because a huge amount of first-hand new material by him has appeared in recent years. Among these new sources are a three-volume collection of Hu’s correspondence (*Hu Shi Laiwang Shuxin Xuan*, published in Hong Kong in 1983), a ten-volume chronology of Hu’s career and writings (*Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao*, compiled by his personal secretary Hu Songping and published in Taipei in 1984), eighteen volumes of his diary (*Hu Shi de Riji Shougaoben*, published in Taipei in 1990), forty-two volumes of his unpublished manuscripts and letters (*Hu Shi Yigao ji Micang Shuxin*, published in Hefei in 1994) and three volumes of his letters (*Hu Shi Shuxin Ji*, compiled by Geng Yunzhi and Ouyang Zhesheng, published in Beijing in 1996). Professor Zhou Zhiping of Princeton University has also compiled a volume of Hu Shi’s early works (*Hu Shi Zaonian Wencun*, published in Taipei in 1995) and three volumes of Hu’s writings in English (*Hu Shi Yingwen Wencun*, published in Taipei in 1995). After

²Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. x.

going through these primary sources, I was convinced that a more thorough study is not only possible but also necessary and will serve to shed further light on many issues in Hu Shi studies.

II

To run the risk of some simplification, scholars and critics on Hu Shi can be divided into five different groups according to their stand.

The first group of scholars tend to picture Hu as a great thinker and a cultural hero with no match in modern China. Among these are Fei Haiji and Yang Chengbin.³

The second group could be called cultural conservatives. They attack Hu for his advocacy of Westernisation which had caused, according to them, the disruption of Chinese cultural tradition. Xu Fuguan and Xu Ziming are representatives of this group.⁴

The third group of scholars have not refrained from criticising Hu, but they try to understand him in a more sympathetic way. Jerome Grieder and Ming-chih

³Fei Haiji: *Hu Shi Zhuzuo Yanjiu Lunwenji* (On Hu Shi's Works) (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1970); Yang Chengbin: *Hu Shi de Zhengzhi Sixiang* (The Political Thought of Hu Shi) (Taipei: Zhongguo Xueshu Zhuzuo Jiangli Weiyuanhui 1967); Yang Chengbin: *Hu Shi de Zhexue Sixiang* (The Philosophical Thought of Hu Shi) (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1966).

⁴Xu Fuguan: "Zhongguo Ren de Chiru, Dongfan Ren de Chiru" (A Disgrace to the Chinese, A Disgrace to the Eastern Peoples), *Minzhu Pinglun* (Democratic Review) 12.24 (20 December 1961): 21-23; Xu Ziming et al.: *Hu Shi yu Guoyun* (Hu Shi and the Nation's Destiny) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1958).

Chou's works could belong to this group, both more or less depicting Hu as a tragic liberal in a turbulent period of a disaster-ridden nation.⁵

The Fourth group argue that Hu's leading status as an intellectual or a scholar has been exaggerated, and according to them, Hu Shi was neither qualified to be a great thinker nor an authentic Pragmatist. Among the prominent figures of this group are Liu Shuxian who claimed Hu's thought was shallow and Lin Yu-sheng who links the intellectual failings of Hu Shi and his generation of iconoclasts to the crisis of Chinese consciousness of the twentieth century.⁶

Detractors from Mainland China could be said to be the last group who attacks him mainly for political reasons. Their criticism, though not as sophisticated as that of the others, requires elaboration too, because of its severe impact on the politico-cultural development of Mainland China.

Since early 1950s when Hu Shi was first subjected to severest criticism campaign, the studies on Hu Shi were only for the purpose of denunciation. The once widely-circulated *Collected Essays of Hu Shi (Hu Shi Wencun)* were withdrawn from library bookshelves. Nevertheless, the attitude towards Hu changed dramatically in the 1980s and evaluation of Hu Shi's contributions became more

⁵Jerome B Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*; Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984).

⁶Liu Shuxian: "Jiu Chuantong Linian de Lijie yu Zhexue de Jiaodu duiyu Hu Shi de Pinglun" (On Hu's Understanding of Tradition and Philosophy) in Liu Qingfeng, ed.: *Hu Shi yu Xiandai Zhongguo Wenhua Zhuanxing* (Hu Shi and the Emergence of Modern Chinese Culture) (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1994); Lin Yu-sheng: *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Also see Lin Yusheng: "Liangzhong Guanyu Ruhe Goucheng Zhengzhi Zhixu de Guannian" (Two Concepts with respect to the Genesis of Political Order), in *Zhengzhi Zhixu yu Duoyuan Shehui* (Political Order and Pluralistic Society) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1989), p. 18.

objective. In spite of this, many aspects of Hu's thought still cannot be accepted, and scholars are particularly cautious in discussing his political views. What they have tried to do, as pointed out by Wang Ziyue, is to separate Hu's political philosophy from his scholarship.⁷ This is no surprise since Hu was among the few who stood at the opposite side of the Chinese Communists and completely denounced their ideology from the very beginning of the Communist movement in China and although he was never a member of the KMT, he maintained intimate relations with the KMT and often sided with the KMT government in its struggle against the Communists. Hu Shi's ideas can never be accepted completely in Mainland China as long as the country remains ideologically "communist."

My dissertation will not avoid taking a stand; one which is closer to but substantially different from that of the third group. One of the major differences between my study and Grieder or Chou's works lies in the fact that I try hard to make my arguments encompass Hu's whole life while they virtually do not cover Hu Shi after 1937. Another difference lies in the fact that Grieder and Chou did not pay much attention to Hu's scholarship, whereas it is one of the emphases in my study, which will show that Hu's thoughts were more complicated than has been reviewed.

The main focus of this study is the kind of Pragmatism adopted by Hu and its relationship with modern China. This study, however, is not a philosophical investigation of Pragmatism per se, as my intention was to examine his position in modern Chinese scholarship and intellectual history.

⁷See Wang Ziyue: "Xu" (Preface), in Geng Yunzhi and Wen Liming, eds.: *Xiandai Xueshushi shang de Hu Shi* (Hu Shi in Modern Chinese Intellectual History) (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1993), pp. 1-2.

For a person who had not yet reached his twenty-sixth year to snatch the cultural and academic laurel is not only unimaginable in the Western world, but in China as well. I have found that we will not have a clear idea of Hu's contribution unless we reconstruct the academic and historical circumstances of his time, and, more importantly, find out exactly what he learned from John Dewey's Pragmatism and how it influenced his cultural and political vision and practice. As a Pragmatist and reformist, Hu was destined to be involved in politics. I have devoted a lengthy of space and covered many political events in discussing the limitation of his Pragmatic stand in dealing with Chinese political situation. Many aspects of his political endeavour have so far been ignored: His relationship with political leaders of the time such as Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, Song Ziwen and Lei Zhen all deserved our attention. Even his well-known antagonism with the CCP warrants a revisit.

In his writings, Hu Shi revealed little of his inner life. His former students have lovingly described his kindness and courtesy and his respect for the dignity of others. If this combination of intellectual power and refined manner, of courage and humility led his admirers to consider Hu Shi "a Confucian sage," it was not always an enviable position, as it was almost impossible to live up to such expectations. Li Ao was really observant when he, some thirty years ago, pointed out that despite all the fame and glamour, Hu was indeed a lonely man.⁸ Recently published diaries confirmed what Li suspected -- underneath his calm, gentle exterior, Hu was neither a saint nor a sage, but an emotionally vulnerable human being. To probe Hu's agony

⁸Li Ao: *Hu Shi Yanjiu* (A Study of Hu Shi) (Taipei: Yuanjing Chubanshe, 1979), p. 1.

resulted from his difficult position in Chinese politico-cultural life could be said to be another aspect in which my dissertation is different from other studies.

Any discussion of modern Chinese thought unavoidably encounters the issue of discontinuity versus continuity of the Chinese cultural tradition. On this issue, Western scholars of modern Chinese intellectual history are divided into two camps: those who see more discontinuity and those who see more continuity. The most striking expression of the former is found in Joseph Levenson's *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*. With a subtle analysis of cultural identity, Levenson paints a disastrous picture of intellectual changes in modern China in which there is little continuity with Chinese tradition aside from emotional attachments.⁹ The continuity view, on the other hand, is best represented by Thomas Metzger's *Escape from Predicament*. Metzger argues that modern Chinese intellectuals by and large inherited the basic moral goals and aspirations of the Confucian tradition and what they accepted from "Western learning" was nothing more than new technologies and institutions to implement these goals and aspirations.¹⁰

When the Western scholars see Chinese scholars favour or even fight for more continuity or more discontinuity, paradoxically, Hu Shi, as a case study, offers support for both groups. My study will delineate a more complicated, and I think more real picture of this paradoxical stand of Hu's as I shall prove that Hu's intellectual life was rooted in the Chinese tradition, while at the same time breaking away from it. I hope that my analysis of this paradox which was essential for Hu's

⁹Joseph R. Levenson: *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), pp. xiii-xix.

¹⁰Thomas A Metzger: *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 191-235.

thought could help to illuminate the complex role of tradition and that of Western learning as complementary forces shaping modern Chinese consciousness.

III

Hu's unique blending of continuity and discontinuity of traditions could be said to be shaped by his early training. So in Chapter I, I shall give a brief account of Hu's education both in China and in America. Special attention will be given to Hu Shi's adoption of Pragmatism. It is safe to say that his life-long pursuit was an endless effort to interpret John Dewey's Pragmatism and to apply it to Chinese scholarship and politico culture. In Chapter II, I shall examine how Hu applied the Pragmatic approach to the Literary Revolution and to the reform of Chinese historiography in the period of the May Fourth Movement, which saw his rise as a central figure in modern Chinese intellectual history.

The chapter after that will deal with Hu's development from a Pragmatist to an exponent of "scientific method," and finally to an advocator of scientism in Modern Chinese thought. As the most ardent promoter and supporter of the introduction of scientific method into China, he invited John Dewey for a long lecture tour in China from 1919 to 1921. The first Western scholar of such eminence paying such an visit undoubtedly satisfied an intellectual need of the time and enhanced the popularity of Pragmatism which Hu had been ushering into China. While Hu was ready to preach Pragmatism, he also demanded complete acceptance of the scientific principles. In Hu's mind, science, both as a means and an end, is

worthy of worship. I shall posit that therein lies the difference between Hu and Dewey: Dewey's Pragmatism steers cleared of scientism.

Nevertheless, Hu's use of Pragmatic and scientific methods in what he called "re-examining the national heritage" (*zhengli guogu*), served to create a new era of Chinese scholarship by greatly broadening its horizons however ambivalent his attitude toward Chinese classical studies was. In Chapter IV, I shall discuss the predicament Hu faced when he identified his scientism with the notion of "use" (*yong*) of Chinese classics. Although Hu explicitly opposed the textual research of Chinese scholars for its remoteness from present day reality, his scholarly writings were gradually reduced to little more than conventional textual research, only with greater brilliance and more impressive achievements. He emphasised that his method of textual research was "scientific," but not related to praxis. The tensions generated by this apparent inconsistency induced a sense of guilt in him.

Hu Shi's attitude toward Chinese culture will be discussed in Chapter V. From the modern viewpoint, Hu Shi could easily blame -- and in fact he often did -- many of China's political, cultural and social failures on its cultural tradition. However, I shall argue that he did not reject the Chinese tradition in its entirety. Pragmatism is a philosophy which has as its primary social and intellectual concern, a desire to create new harmonious ties between the past and the present. Its doctrine revolves around the principle that the present is inextricably linked with the past. Hu Shi's endorsement of Westernisation aroused vehement opposition throughout his life. Obviously, his primary aim was to awaken China from its nightmare. In order to get his points across he took the risk of using exaggerated rhetoric. He said, for instance, that China must admit its backwardness. He urged the Chinese people to

learn wholeheartedly from the West. Although Hu Shi has always been regarded as a leading figure in the advocacy of Westernisation, the philosophical legacy of China greatly influenced him and his public and personal life was strictly confined to the Confucian norms and traditional values.

Chapter VI will focus on Hu Shi's half-hearted participation in politics. Since his return from the United States, Hu Shi had steadfastly refused to be drawn into political issues. He stated repeatedly that the reconstruction of China's social institutions and the emancipation of thought must take precedence over the solutions to its immediate political problems. Nevertheless, whether by Confucian "this-worldly" philosophy and Pragmatism which views human betterment as its purpose, Hu Shi was destined to give up this belief in a period fraught with pressing crises. Hu has always been identified as the archetypal liberal critic, protesting passionately but ineffectually against the evils of his time. Hu Shi's relationship with political power was always ambiguous. Committed to non-violent change and unwilling to become embroiled in situations calling for extreme measures, he was constantly depressed when faced with reality. He scathingly criticised the KMT government for its inability to provide basic human needs and to resist foreign aggression; he tirelessly demanded that the government slowly but systematically improve itself by giving the people more constitutional rights. However, frustrated by his feeling of powerlessness, Hu had to support the *status quo*, keeping his expectations to the very minimum, while clinging to the hope that misguided politicians would somehow come to their senses.

In Chapter VII, I will explore the ideological conflicts between Pragmatism and Chinese Communism. Hu's attitude toward Communism, especially when it was

still a political experiment in the Soviet Union, remained ambivalent for a number of years. His intellectual disagreement with Marxist doctrine began to crystallise by 1919 and it remained consistent thereafter. In the 1950s Hu Shi was singled out by Chinese Communists as the most notorious reactionary and the most evil enemy of the people. Hu's thought was repudiated from almost every conceivable angle; his philosophy, political thought, theory of history, theory of literature and other related fields were all targeted for criticism. This chapter will also attempt to examine the limitations of Pragmatism in dealing with Communism in China's context.

In conclusion, I shall argue that in hindsight of the end of the twentieth century, Hu Shi's Pragmatist-liberalism might be a more important legacy he left us than his Pragmatist-scientism of scholarship, though he has long been considered to have made more contribution to scholarship than the socio-cultural thinking in modern China.

That is why this study will explicate in details both the sides of Hu's ideas: his approach to literary, academic, cultural and political issues. For as a sensitive and tormented soul responding to the calls of his time, he dedicated himself wholeheartedly to what seemed to him the best route for his motherland.

Chapter I

The Education of Hu Shi

1.1 Village Education in Jixi

Hu Shi was born in Shanghai on 17 December 1891 into the family of an official. His father, Hu Chuan, was a scholar of high attainment and a man of strong will with administrative ability. Hu Chuan, however, never achieved political prominence. He was known for his geographical researches, especially in the frontier provinces of the Qing empire. Hu's mother was married in 1889 at the age of seventeen as the third wife of Hu Chuan when he was forty-seven years old. Hu's half sister was seven years older than Hu's mother and his eldest half brother two years her senior.

In 1891, two months after Hu Shi was born, his father was transferred to Taiwan as the magistrate of the newly-established Taidong Prefecture. Two years later Hu Shi and his mother joined him. But when the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1894, Hu Chuan sent the family back to the mainland. Hu Chuan left Taiwan in June 1895 and died a few days after his ship arrived in Xiamen; and thus Hu's mother became a widow at the age of twenty-three.

According to the will of his father, his mother staked all her hopes on Hu Shi's education.¹ Hu had already learned over eight hundred characters which his

¹SSZS, pp. 17-18.

father taught him on square slips of pink paper. Shortly after the death of his father, he was sent to a village school.

Hu remained in the village school in his native place, Jixi, Anhui, for nine years (1895-1904). At the beginning he read the writings of his father under the instruction of his uncle. Like most educated youths of his day, he was exposed to Confucian teachings in early years. The first book he studied was *Poems of Learning to Become a Man (Xue Wei Ren Shi)*, which was compiled by his father.² It is doubtful whether a three-year-old child would have comprehended such a difficult text. However a sentence in the book: “Learn to be a man and seek sagehood” described remarkably well Hu’s pursuit of his life-long goal.

In the village school, He also read and memorised the group of books which have formed the core of classical Chinese education for so many centuries. They are: *The Elementary Lessons (Xiao Xue)*, *The Book of Filial Piety (Xiao Jing)*, *Four Books (Si Shu)* and *Five Classics (Wu Jing)*. The little boy was taught these difficult texts by a teacher to whom his mother paid more than the annual tuition fee of two silver dollars for expounding and translating into the plain language, while the other students merely memorised without understanding.³

Judging from all accounts available, Hu’s mother was capable and kind. She won respect from the members of the family with her modesty, integrity, forbearance and a strong sense of responsibility towards the family. Hu was carefully taught the importance of self-discipline and self-improvement. His mother expected him to do well in his studies. She believed that academic knowledge would lead her son to

²SSZS, pp. 18-19.

³SSZS, pp. 23-24.

wealth and prestige. She used to tell Hu about his father's good points and reminded him: "You must follow in your father's footsteps. In my whole life, I have known only this one perfect man, you must learn to be like him and must not bring disgrace on him."⁴ She would often weep when she recalled her husband. Hu was profoundly influenced by his widowed mother's strict upbringing and education, which according to his later recollection, instilled in him "a cool sense of reason and a solid disposition"⁵

From the age of nine Hu started to read *Water Margin* (*Shui Hu Zhuan*), *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yanyi*), *The Dream of the Red Chambers* (*Hong Lou Meng*) and *The Scholars* (*Rulin Wai Shi*). These *baihua* (vernacular) novels "exposed a new universe to me, suddenly opening up a fresh new world to my youthful life," he recalled years later.⁶ William Schultz was right when he pointed out that in China before the twentieth century, "popular fiction, mythology, and fable and fantasy comprised a realm the child was rarely encouraged to enter. Frequently the youthful interest could be served surreptitiously."⁷ Hu Shi was permitted, in fact was assisted in, his exploration of this slightly unorthodox field which had some influence on his later intellectual orientation. The discovery of *baihua* novels at this time marked an epoch in his life. Of them he said:

They were written in the *pei-hua* (*baihua*), or spoken language, and were easily intelligible and absorbingly entertaining. They taught me life, for good and for evil, and gave me a literary medium which years later enabled me to start what has been called "the Literary Renaissance" in China.⁸

⁴SSZS, pp. 29-30.

⁵SSZS, p. 33.

⁶SSZS, p. 24.

⁷William R. Schultz: "Lu Xun: The Creative Years," Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Washington, 1955), p. 17.

⁸Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," *The People's Tribute* 6.4 (16 February, 1934): 224.

During this period he also came across the anti-religious writings of Sima Guang (1018-1086) and Fan Zhen (fl. 483-505), and his religious life underwent a curious revolution and crisis. At the age of thirteen Hu became an atheist. He expressed his conviction by attempting in 1904 to smash earth statues of Buddha in his village.⁹ At a very tender age the seeds of the many later activities of Hu Shi were sown.

1.2 New Education in Shanghai

Early in his thirteenth year Hu left home and went to Shanghai with his brothers to seek a “new education.” He spent six years in Shanghai and went through four private high schools without graduating from any.

Hu entered Meixi School (*Meixi Xuetang*) in 1904. The curriculum, although radically different from what he had experienced in Anhui, was far from satisfactory even according to the standard of the time. The school offered only Chinese language, mathematics and English language. Hu transferred to Chengzhong School (*Chengzhong Xuetang*) the next year. The school was established and managed by a wealthy Ningbo merchant, with the original objective of educating the poor students of Ningbo. When Hu entered this school, it had already expanded and become a well-known private school in Shanghai. Chengzhong School proved more satisfactory to Hu: besides Chinese, English and mathematics, it also offered courses

⁹SSZS, p. 43.

in physics, chemistry, geography and other gleanings of natural science. In 1906, Hu transferred to another school, China National Institute (*Zhongguo Gongxue*). This school was most special. It was established by students who gave up their studies in Japan to protest against the “Regulations Governing Chinese Students.” As one would expect, the students in this school were of radical thought. A few of his schoolmates in the China National Institute founded a periodical *The Struggle* (*Jingye Xunbao*) in December 1906. The main objective of this periodical was to instigate revolution. In order to circulate more widely to young students, the editorial board of this periodical decided to use *baihua*. Hu Shi was invited to contribute to its first issue, and a year later he became its sole editor. Like other contributors to *The Struggle*, Hu expressed his reaction against society and politics, promoted new thinking, and advocated various thoughts on social reforms.¹⁰

Shanghai in the first decade of the century was a rapidly growing city. It was not only a commercial centre, but also a hotbed of revolutionary agitation. In the city was found perhaps China’s most famous publishing enterprise, the Commercial Press, along with several other sizeable publishing houses and influential newspapers such as the *Shen Bao* (The Shanghai News), *Shi Bao* (The Times) and *Shishi Xinhao* (Current Affairs Daily). Intellectual opinions were diverse, lively and fluid. The entire experience greatly expanded Hu’s horizon. Hu had read many books written by radical intellectuals such as Lin Shu (1852-1924), Liang Qichao (1873-1929) and Yan Fu (1853-1921). By this time, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) had become a well-known revolutionary leader. The Qing empire was in its twilight years. Although Hu Shi was not a member of Sun’s *Tongmen Hui* (The Revolutionary Alliance), he was

¹⁰SSZS, pp. 65-73.

obviously one of its supporters. He was deeply touched by Zou Rong's (1885-1905) anti-Manchu tract, the *Revolutionary Army (Geming Jun)*, which he and his schoolmates borrowed and copied.¹¹ He was also involved, to a certain degree, in their activities. For instance, he once tried to help his revolutionary friends in the China National Institute to negotiate with the customs service for the release of some confiscated goods which had been smuggled from Japan by a female student.¹²

During his stay in Shanghai, Hu had gone through an intense ideological change and started calling himself a member of "the new people." Through the translations of Lin Shu and others, he made his first acquaintance with a number of English and European novels, including those of Scott, Dickens, Dumas *père et fils*, Hugo and Tolstoy. But the most significant stimulus to Hu Shi's intellectual development in this period came from the works of Yan Fu and Liang Qichao. Like most young intellectuals in urban China of that time, Hu Shi was immensely impressed by these two thinkers who made the Western and Japanese models into windows of enlightenment for the Chinese. A nation and a race they felt had to compete with other nations of the world. Hu first read Yan Fu's translations of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* when he was in Chengzhong School. Yan's translation of Huxley's essay had been published in 1898 and sent a long-lasting shock through Chinese new intelligentsia. In the course of a few years many terms and phrases of the evolutionary theory became proverbial expressions in the journalistic writings of the time. Numerous persons adopted them in naming themselves and their children. Hu Shi was no exception. The character *shi*

¹¹SSZS, p. 51.

¹²SSZS, p. 63.

in Hu Shi's own name was borrowed, at the suggestion of his brother, from the phrase "survival of the fittest" (*shizhe shengcun*).¹³

Through the popular writings of Liang Qichao, he came to know a little of such Western thinkers as Hobbes, Descartes, Rousseau, Bentham, Kant and Darwin. Liang was a great admirer of modern Western civilisation and published a series of essays in which he frankly admitted that the Chinese as a race had suffered from a deplorable lack of many fine traits possessed by the European people, such as emphasis on public morality, nationalism, love of adventure, the concept of personal rights and the eagerness to defend oneself against encroachment, love of freedom, ability for self-control, the infinite possibility of progress, capacity for corporate and organised effort and attention to bodily culture and health. Hu was greatly inspired by these essays. It is not an exaggeration when John K. Fairbank characterised Liang as the "the Chinese students' window on the world."¹⁴ With his powerful essays, Liang educated Hu and his contemporaries about China's changing relations with the world. Hu said Liang's writings were lucid, carrying an ardent passion. His readers could not help going along with him, and thinking along with him:

It was these essays that first violently shocked me out of the comfortable dream that our ancient civilization was self-sufficient and had nothing to learn from the militant and materialistic West except in the weapons of war and vehicles of commerce. They opened up to me, an entirely new vision of the world.¹⁵

Regarding the influence of Liang Qichao on Hu's academic research, Hu said it was Liang who made him realise that China had other scholarly systems of thought aside

¹³SSZS, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴John K Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig: *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 633.

¹⁵Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," p. 227.

from the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*. Liang's *Basic Trends in Chinese Intellectual Development* (*Zhongguo Xueshu Sixiang Bianqian zhi Dashi*) was the first serious effort in Chinese history to re-evaluate China's past in the light of Western thought systems. It broke new ground and might be considered the one which heralded the new intellectual world. Inspired by Liang, Hu began reading Chinese philosophy at this time. Though Liang's book was rendered unsatisfactory to today's readers, as Hu had admitted, it was the first time someone had tried to approach the old learning of China from the social Darwinian perspective, and to render a sense of history to Chinese thought. To Hu's disappointment, Liang did not finish the book. It nevertheless sowed the seed for Hu's later academic endeavour. Hu told us his feeling: "Would it not be worthy if I could write the chapters Mr. Liang left unwritten in the intellectual history of China? I was intrigued by the idea, and though I dared not tell anyone, I was determined to do it. This little ambition was the seed of my later work on the history of Chinese philosophy."¹⁶

Hu was certainly excited by the dynamic energy of people such as Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, and Lin Shu. It was a time of drastic transition from old ideas to new thoughts in China. It was also a time when the age-worn, out-dated political system was on the verge of collapse. Many hot-blooded youths, especially the intellectuals, became discontented with the old political systems and old society and engaged in various activities, though often without a clear sense of goal. Hu was obviously caught up in the reformist momentum of the time. As early as 1905, when Hu was fourteen and a student of Meixi School, he revealed his dissatisfaction through his actions. Hu was scandalised by the final judgement of a case in which a

¹⁶SSZS, pp. 58-59.

carpenter was killed by a Russian sailor. Because of their indignation, Hu and another two friends declined the honour of being selected to take a civil service examination sponsored by the Shanghai Authority with a letter of protest: "How could young men who were just in the process of copying the *Revolutionary Army* be willing to march down to the government offices for the examination?" Hu asked.¹⁷ Another incident worth mentioning happened in Chengzhong School. Hu was class leader, and could not help coming into conflict with the administration when he spoke on behalf of a fellow student who was facing expulsion. As a result, the head teacher put up a warning reprimanding him.

The incident which had greatest significant consequence to Hu's future was the major strike in 1908 against authorities at the China National Institute. Initially, staff members of the executive department were elected by the public. Unfortunately, the republican system was amended nine months later. After the amendment, the system which had been student-centred became director-centred. The incident resulted in a massive withdrawal of students, including Hu himself, and in the establishment of the New China National Institute (*Zhongguo Xin Gongxue*). Hu accepted a position as teacher at the New China National Institute. The finances of the new school were not solidly established and the New China National Institute finally disbanded and rejoined the old China National Institute. Hu felt disappointed at this change and refused to return to the old school.

These years (1909-10) were dark years in the history of China as well as in Hu's personal history. Revolutionary uprisings broke out in many provinces, and failed each time. Quite a number of Hu's schoolmates at the China National Institute,

¹⁷SSZS, p. 51.

which was a centre of revolutionary activities, were involved in plots and many lost their lives. Several political fugitives came to Shanghai and stayed with him. They were all despondent and pessimistic. To Hu's dismay, his family was now in great financial difficulty because of repeated business failures. He found himself facing the necessity of supporting himself at school and his mother at home. He gave up his studies and taught elementary English for over a year, and in 1910 he taught for a few months.

Hu's future looked hazy, everything so uncertain. At this depressed and troubled time, he later admitted frankly that he was "absurd for a while":

We drank, wrote pessimistic poetry, talked day and night, and often gambled for no stakes. We even engaged an old actor to teach us singing. One cold morning I wrote a poem which contained this line: "how proudly does the wintry frost scorn the powerless rays of the sun!"¹⁸

Despondency and drudgery drove Hu and his friends to all kinds of dissipations. One rainy night he got deadly drunk, fought with a policeman in the street and landed himself in prison for the night. When he came home the next morning and saw in the mirror the bruises on his face, the famous line of Li Bai's (701-762) "Drinking Song" came to his mind. "Heaven gave birth to me, there must be some use for my talents."¹⁹ With this thought, he abandoned his romantic friends and decided to quit teaching the next day. With the assistance of an uncle and several friends Hu was able to raise enough money to pay off a few small debts and provide for his mother's support. He immersed himself in study for two months to prepare for the second examination for a scholarship, financed from the returned American portion of the

¹⁸Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," p. 229.

¹⁹SSZS, p. 93.

Boxer Indemnity. He passed the examination and sailed for America in July 1910, one year before the fall of the last dynasty in China.

1.3 American Education.

Hu began his university career as a student in the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University. His reading of Yan Fu and Liang Qichao had served to reinforce his commitment to the “new academic subjects” -- science and technology --which he believed could provide the key to national wealth and power. But there was also an economic motive: the College of Agriculture then charged no tuition fees and he thought he might be able to save a part of his monthly allowance to send to his mother.

Hu soon realised that agriculture was not in accord with either his temperament or his ambition. The freshman courses in English Literature and German interested him far more than Farm Practice and Pomology. Hesitating for a year and a half, he finally transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences.

Hu's interest in philosophy, literature and historical subjects was obviously the fundamental reason for his change to the humanities. This change, however, also disclosed broad cultural and spiritual concern. When Liang Qichao finished his fourteen years' exile and returned to China in November 1912, Hu wrote this entry in his diary:

Mr. Liang is by far the most important of all contributors to the cause of revolution in China. His contribution lies in that he revitalised the world of thought in our country. In the past fifteen years, if people in China knew anything about nationalism and its trend, it was because of Liang's writings.

That is something no one could deny. The revolution at Wuhan last year succeeded and found great response across the country because nationalistic political thought had been ingrained deeply in people's mind, and once it was released, it could not be stopped. Had there been no writings of Liang, even hundreds of Sun Yat-sens or Huang Xings would not have succeeded so quickly.²⁰

Some might argue that Hu had overstated his case by favouring Liang over Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing in the cause of the 1911 Revolution. Regardless of the validity of Hu's argument, the framing of the idea betrays a strong trace of what Lin Yusheng calls the "cultural-intellectualistic" mode of thinking, with its emphasis on the priority of a "change of basic ideas *qua* idea' over changes in social, political, and economic areas.²¹

Hu's diary in the United States shows that what concerned him most was the issue of Chinese and Western culture, especially how China could adjust herself to the onslaught of modern Western civilisation. While still a student in the College of Agriculture, Hu devoted his free time to serious reading. His diary of the first year and a half was filled with notes on the books he read and summaries of the essays he wrote. The readings covered an extraordinarily wide range of subjects. Like other Chinese students on foreign soil, he read many Western books. What surprises us is that apart from his academic concern, Hu never stopped his pursuit of Chinese scholarship. His reading list included the Confucian Classics, the teachings of Lao Zi, Xun Zi, Mo Zi and other literary works such as *The Poetry of Tao Yuanming* (*Tao Yuanming Shi*), *The Works of Wang Anshi* (*Wang Linchuan Ji*), *The Poetry of*

²⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 1, p. 111.

²¹Yu-sheng Lin: "Radical Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Period and the Future of Chinese Liberalism," in Benjamin I. Schwartz, ed.: *Reflection on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Research Centre, 1972), p. 29.

Du Fu (Du Shi). His famous article, "Explanatory Notes on the Word "Yan" as found in the *Shi Jing*" (*Shi Sanbaipian Yan Zi Jie*), was written in this period. He also paid attention to the works of leading intellectuals and scholars such as Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan. In the entry for 22 July 1915, Hu remarked in his diary:

I have met many students from Europe. Whether they are from Germany, France, Russia or other countries, they have one thing in common. They understand their own country's history, politics, and literature. Only students from two countries are blind to their country's history, politics and civilisation. These are Chinese and Americans.²²

Hu's severe criticisms of Chinese students could be interpreted as the increasing pre-occupation of his mind with cultural issues. In addition to re-evaluating the Chinese traditional heritage, he kept an alert eye on Chinese political situations. He closely followed the important issues in magazines and newspapers. He kept many press cuttings in his diary. Eyewitness accounts by his friends in the United States confirmed the impression of an aspiring young man. Hu was regarded by them as "a man with abundant knowledge on Chinese current issues" and "the most scholarly of all Chinese students in America."²³ In May 1915, four months before he moved to Columbia University to continue his graduate studies, he had this reflection:

My habitual fault lies in spreading myself too thin and not bothering with detail. Whenever I look at the circumstances of our country I think that our fatherland today needs men for all kinds of things, and that I cannot but seek comprehensive knowledge and broad study in order to prepare myself to serve as a guide to my countrymen in the future -- without realizing that this is a mistaken idea. Have I been studying for ten years and more without coming to understand the principle of the division of labor? My energy has its limits, I cannot be omniscient and omnipotent, What I can contribute to my society is only the occupation I choose. My duty, my responsibility toward

²²*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 124.

²³*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 127.

society is only to do what I can do as well as I can do it. Will not men forgive me for what I cannot do.²⁴

A year later, he disclosed that he was disappointed with his teacher whose knowledge did not cover a range wide enough.²⁵ This disclosure reveals that Hu was by intellectual temper disposed to *boxue* (erudition) rather than *zhuanzhu* (specialisation). Indeed, he was sceptical of the emphasis of education on specialisation. At the end of 1914, he said:

One certainly would achieve something if one persists in studying one particular subject. But this would only bring one to become a bookworm without having any joy in life. Many scholars in our country have followed this path. Those who study civil and mechanical engineering do not have knowledge outside their expertise. This is indeed a great harm to our country.²⁶

Since Hu showed a natural aptitude for erudition, it is not surprising that he had many extra-curricular activities which probably had as much influence on his thought as on his academic work. In this respect he was unique: he could spend an unusual amount of time on different subjects without jeopardising his academic standing.²⁷ Admittedly, life for him entered a new domain after he arrived in

²⁴*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 78. This translation is from Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p.64.

²⁵*LXRJ*, vol. 4, p. 36.

²⁶*LXRJ*, vol. 2, pp. 205-206. In his later years, Hu frequently advised his students to acquire erudition. For instance, in a letter to Wu Jianxiong (1912-1997), who later became a well-known physician, Hu encouraged her to read more books on literature and history, and other sciences besides her own specialised subject. "I hope you can be an erudite person," Hu wrote. See Hu Shi's letter to Wu Jianxiong dated 30 October 1936 in *HSSXJ*, vol. 2, p. 705.

²⁷Because he possessed a wide knowledge of fields other than philosophy such as literature, politics, education and religion, particularly Buddhism, it has been claimed that Hu had no depth of knowledge in any specific field and that, though a student of philosophy, he published no work in that field while studying abroad. Hu found it necessary to defend himself against these charges. In his diary under the heading "Zhaji Buji Zhexue Zhigu" (The Reason that No Philosophy is Recorded in

America as it was a free, democratic community well on its way to modernisation. All signs pointed to a new pattern of life vastly different from what was known back in China, which still retained its old ways and autocratic political system.

As Hu himself admitted, he did not have any knowledge of American politics when he arrived. America gave him a glimpse of a nation of many races and cultures. As he adapted himself to this new environment, his views and thinking gradually changed and his political interest heightened with the passage of time. According to Hu, while at Cornell, he went to political rallies and attended meetings of the Ithaca Common Council and parliament to familiarise himself with the workings of American government. He also chose courses on those topics and participated in political activities. He watched the political elections of 1912 and 1916 closely, and actively participated in debate on such issues as women's suffrage, the conflict between China and Japan, and Christianity.²⁸

Another important influence came from Hu's involvement with the Cosmopolitan Movement. During the years when he was in the States, many eminent cosmopolitans, especially Jacob Gould Schurman, Woodrow Wilson and Norman Angell exerted direct or indirect influence on his thinking. Jacob Gould Schurman, the Chancellor of Cornell University was infatuated with Cosmopolitanism. He was the first to declare that Cornell University was a school which was open to all who wanted to come in, and that no one should be excluded from participation because of

My Diary), Hu Shi wrote: "Someone asked me: Why there were very few entries on philosophy in my diary, though I am a student of philosophy? Since philosophy is my field of study. . . I read philosophy daily; if I have to record everything I read in my diary, possibly there will be no space left to note down the events of my life." See *LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 146.

²⁸*KSZZ*, pp. 31-35.

race, colour, national origin, religion, rank, or wealth.²⁹ Woodrow Wilson, elected President of the United States in 1913, was a well-known humanitarian. Hu was his ardent supporter. In Hu's mind, Wilson was not only a statesman, but also a renowned literatus and a great idealist. "His prevailing spirit is really uncommon and his words are extraordinary."³⁰ Norman Angell, the author of *The Great Illusion*, was the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933. He showed Hu how war is "as wasteful in economics as it is disastrous in morals." Angell did not stop criticising and challenging the double standard and inconsistencies of American foreign policy. He also spent years fighting against racism. According to Hu, Angell was smart, widely read and experienced. Hu labelled him as a first-rate personage.³¹

As early as February 1911, half a year after his arrival in Ithaca, Hu had become interested in the Cornell Cosmopolitan club. At the end of 1912, he was one of the club's delegates to the sixth annual convention of the Association of Cosmopolitan Clubs in Philadelphia. In 1913 he was one of the club's delegates to the eighth International Congress of the Federation at Ithaca, representing both the Cornell Cosmopolitan Clubs and the Chinese Students' Alliance. In 1913-1914 he served on the Central Committee of the Federation and concurrently as president of the Cornell club, and in December 1914 he again represented Cornell at the national convention of the Association of Cosmopolitan Club, this time in Columbus, Ohio, where he served as Chairman of the Resolution Committee.³² These activities enlarged his intellectual horizons enormously and provided him with the framework

²⁹*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 177.

³⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 47.

³¹*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 98.

³²For an excellent discussion on Hu's Cosmopolitanism, see Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, pp. 83-106.

on which he constructed his own detached and cosmopolitan view of the conflict between Eastern and Western cultural values. Hu wrote in his diary on 9 November 1916:

Wherever I took abode, I always considered the local community and the local political affairs as those of my home town. Wherever there came a local political campaign or social project, I would not only follow it up closely, but would also participate in it, study its pros and cons, and even take sides with what I believed was right, sharing the gains, losses, delights, and worries of all concerned. . . . If we do not consider ourselves part of the community, we can never understand the viewpoints of the people in that community. What we can understand is only skin-deep. On the contrary, if we think ourselves part of that community, naturally we may achieve a similar viewpoint and arrive at conclusions similar to those of the residents of the community. Furthermore, the experience of sharing with the community helps us get into the habit of paying attention to public interests. If one does not have the habit of concerning himself with the public interests of the community he stays in when he lives abroad, how could he concern himself about the public interests of his home town when he comes back home?³³

With his lively and intimate contact with American ideas and institutions, Hu gained many useful experiences during his stay in the United States.. The political and social ferment of that Progressive Era made a lasting impression on him, and in some respects established the standards against which he was to judge Chinese political and social conditions. It is certainly true, as Grieder claimed, that nothing Hu gained from his American experience exerted a more enduring influence on his later attitudes than this conversion from the hopelessness of his last years in Shanghai to an attitude of restrained but dogged confidence in the future.³⁴ Hu wrote that he was most impressed with “the naive optimism and cheerfulness” of the American people and that as a result he came to believe that “in this land there seemed to be nothing

³³ *LXRJ*, vol. 4, pp. 144-145.

³⁴ Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 44.

which could not be achieved by human intelligence and effort.”³⁵ His subsequent encounter with Dewey’s philosophy further buttressed this optimism.

1.4 The Influence of John Dewey

Hu repeatedly reminded us in his writings that he was a Pragmatist. He said that his practical scholarship was indelibly influenced by John Dewey. Pragmatism had become the guidance of his life and thought and the foundation of his philosophy. Hu Shi certainly was not the only one who introduced and advocated Western doctrine but his lifelong conviction to Pragmatism nevertheless was extraordinary. In this section, we shall investigate the reasons for Hu’s early enthusiasm.

Upon receiving an invitation on 9 May 1915 to discuss the significance of the Japanese Twenty-one Demands, Hu noted in his diary:

At such an urgent time, the people here wanted to know the details of the Sino-Japanese negotiation. I am duty-bound to explain it. It shows that Pragmatism is useful. The doctrine says: “There is no general truth applicable to every case, but for each special case, there is a special truth. When we are in front of a stream, we will think of piling up stones or building a bridge to get across it. When we are beset by fire, we will think of a way to get out of it. When we are lost, we will think of asking for the accurate direction. All kinds of thinking are similar in their function to help us solve problems. Obviously, how we think depends on different situations.”³⁶

This was the first time Hu stated his interest in Pragmatism. In its most generic sense, Pragmatism has reference to a tool actively used to attain effect. In the

³⁵Hu Shi: “My Credo and Its Evolution,” p. 229.

³⁶*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 59.

process, one engages in transforming an object from one condition to another. For Dewey, thinking is an activity instrumental to changing a state of affairs from a problematic to a settled situation.³⁷ It is a redirection and rearrangement of the real.³⁸ It is “literally something which we do” and involves “active experimentation.”³⁹ Since the betterment of society was one of Hu’s foremost objects, the message that thinking is not something that goes on in the mind certainly impressed Hu. The various discussions in Hu’s diary revealed his concern with consequences rather than principles. The Chinese family system was defective because it restricted the productivity of the individual and cultivated an attitude of dependencies;⁴⁰ war was evil because of its destructive consequences;⁴¹ militarisation in China was foolish because it would not make China stronger;⁴² and women’s education was important because they had a special transforming power which could invigorate the weak and inspire the timid.⁴³ From the above observation it would appear that, all in all, Hu Shi and John Dewey were singularly well met and that in many respects they agreed on fundamentals.

Pragmatism was first expounded by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) in philosophical contexts in 1878 as the name of a logical maxim for the determining the meaning of words which he had formulated. In his words, Pierce offer the rule: “Consider what effects, which might conceivably

³⁷John Dewey: *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 174.

³⁸John Dewey: *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1929), p. 295.

³⁹John Dewey: *Essays in Experimental Logic*, pp. 331-332.

⁴⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 1, pp. 225-226.

⁴¹*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 83.

⁴²*LXRJ*, vol. 2, pp. 231-234.

⁴³*LXRJ*, vol.3, p. 215.

have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object"; alternatively Peirce said that Pragmatism was "the theory that a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept."⁴⁴ Later, William James (1842-1910) borrowed the term and formulated it more broadly. In his *Pragmatism*, James said that "ideas become true just so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience" and that "the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief." However, the main purpose of James was to develop Pragmatism into a tool for overcoming apparently insoluble philosophical controversies of time. "The pragmatic method," he writes, "is primary a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable."⁴⁵

Still, it is not easy to define Pragmatism. The Italian Papini observed that Pragmatism was less a philosophy than a method of doing without one. Dewey probably would have admitted the validity of this criticism, for he insisted that Pragmatism was less an independent system of thought than a method of thinking

⁴⁴Charles Sanders Peirce: *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by Charles Hartshorne et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), vol. 5, p. 412.

⁴⁵William James: *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 25, p. 30.

about philosophical questions.⁴⁶ John Dewey, like Peirce and William, emphasised scientific method and process. But he was dissatisfied with Pierce and William who said little about social and political matters. Unlike Pierce and William who mainly exercised the method in pursuit of “cosmical truth,” Dewey maintained that philosophy should deal with “the conflicts and difficulties of social life.”⁴⁷ He sought to apply the method and conclusions of science to the improvement of society. He believed that philosophical issues should be viewed “in the widest possible context set by the social, moral, and intellectual questions of the age.”⁴⁸ Philosophy was “an attempt to comprehend -- that is, to gather together the varied details of the world and of life into a single inclusive whole. He assumed that this was “a wisdom which would influence the conduct of life.”⁴⁹

According to Dewey, the method of science gave us facts about the knowledge of the world; the scientific method of philosophy was a means of effectively addressing the recurrent problems of mankind. Philosophy, as Dewey conceived it, was not knowledge but thinking. Knowledge, and especially grounded knowledge, he argued, “represents objects which have been settled, ordered,

⁴⁶In the popular mind, Pragmatism is the term most frequently associated with Dewey’s thought. Although Dewey uses the term in related though subtly different context, he did not discuss the term at length in any one place. A full treatment would have to pull together remarks made in almost all his works, but especially in books such as *Essays in Experimental Logic*, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, *Knowing and the Known* and *The Quest for Certainty*.

⁴⁷John Dewey: *Democracy and Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), vol. 6, p. 333.

⁴⁸Israel Scheffler: *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 187.

⁴⁹John Dewey: *Democracy and Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), vol. 6, p. 334.

disposed of rationally” while thinking is “prospective in reference. It is occasioned by an unsettlement and it aims at creating a disturbance.” The philosopher at his task thinks “what the known demands of us -- what responsive attitude it exacts. It is an idea of what is possible, not a record of accomplished fact.” Thinking “presents an assignment of something to be done -- something to be tried.” Thinking does not furnish solutions, which, Dewey argued, can be achieved only through action; its value lies in “defining difficulties and suggesting methods for dealing with them.” Dewey described philosophy as “thinking which has become conscious of itself -- which has generalised its place, function, and value in experience.”⁵⁰

In other words, the philosophy which Dewey elaborated was meant not for the classroom but for the world of affairs. The flyleaf of *Characters and Events*, a collection of Dewey’s essays on social and political philosophy, bears the inscription: “Better it is for philosophy to err in active participation in the living struggles and issues of its own age and times than to maintain an immune monastic impeccability.” Dewey wanted to throw the traditional humanities into the bin and replace them with the modern social science. Dewey believed that philosophy and philosophers must enter upon “the scene of human clash of social purpose and aspiration” and be concerned with “the choice of thoughtful men about what they would have life to be, and to what ends they would have men shape their intelligent activities.”⁵¹ Dewey preferred to call his philosophy “Experimentalism” to “Pragmatism” or “Instrumentalism.” What Dewey meant was that the truth, or more broadly the value, of any belief or statement about the world is to be measured in experience. He

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁵¹John Dewey: *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948), pp. 25-26.

was insistent that a thoroughgoing naturalism was the only intellectually respectable philosophy, the only approach to life, education, ethics, and politics that offered a hope of progress. Dewey stated that if philosophy rids itself of "the problems of philosophers" and turns towards "the problem of human beings," a new era in philosophy will have begun. Dewey called the emphasis on human problems "a recovery in philosophy." Hu Shi called it "a revolution in philosophy."⁵²

Dewey provided Hu with a model of engaged philosophy. To Hu, Dewey's Pragmatism is interesting because it was a means of intellectual control, of bringing to bear on the problems of the world the best minds and a proven method. It possessed not "the answer" but a way of thinking about how to reach some answers. According to Hu, not only did Dewey teach him to think, but also to think well. He asserted that this was "the most sacred responsibility of a man's life."⁵³

At this point, we must pause and ask, if this is the case, why then has Hu been accused by some scholars of misunderstanding and misinterpreting Dewey's ideas?⁵⁴

The criticism seems inevitable because Hu's interpretation of Pragmatism in certain degree is modified by his own concerns. For example, Hu's introduction of Pragmatism had abandoned the background of Pragmatism. Hu spent little time

⁵²Hu Shi: "Shiyan Zhuyi" (Pragmatism), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 91.

⁵³Hu Shi: "Jieshao Wo Ziji De Sixiang" (Introducing My Own Thought) *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁵⁴See for example, Wu Sheng: "Duwei Sixiang Yu Zhongguo Wenhua" (Dewey's Thought and Chinese Culture) in Wang Rongzu, ed.: *Wusi Yanjiu Lunwenji* (Collected Essays on the May Fourth Movement) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1979), pp.125-156; Cecile B. Dockser: "John Dewey and the May Fourth Movement in China: Dewey's social and political philosophy in relation to his encounter with China 1919-1921," Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University 1983), pp. 101-123; Chen-te Yang: "Hu Shih, Pragmatism, and the Chinese Tradition," Ph.D. Dissertation (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1993).

studying the historical conditions that gave rise to Pragmatism in the United States. He had cut the link between Hegeliansim and Dewey's thought, which I will discuss in Chapter VII. Hu remained hostile to William James because the latter attempted to reconcile the conflict between science and religion by means of Pragmatism. While religion was beyond Hu's concern, he contemptuously referred to this as "philosopher's question" and ignored the fact that John Dewey's philosophical quest was founded upon a religious faith.⁵⁵

Of course we could defend Hu by claiming that Western thought would inevitably undergo substantive change when it crossed the boundaries of culture. But we still have to answer a crucial question: on what grounds can we say that Hu Shi was a Pragmatist?

In "Introducing My Own Thought" (*Jieshao Wo Ziji de Sixiang*), Hu said that Thomas Huxley and John Dewey had influenced his thought profoundly.⁵⁶ During the high-school years in Shanghai, Hu Shi read Yan Fu's translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*. For Hu the impact of its ideas was tremendous. Huxley advocated Darwinian evolutionism, but he included in his book with an attitude known as "agnosticism" of which the essence is that one should doubt everything which cannot be empirically verified. He insisted on the impossibility of knowing anything beyond observation of the senses. To Hu, Huxley's attitude was a scepticism. It was Dewey's thought that made Hu Shi's intellectual orientation come into maturity. John Dewey taught him how to think about the concrete issue at hand, to regard all the theories as hypotheses awaiting proof, and always to look to the

⁵⁵For a discussion, see Steven Rockefeller: *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.29-75

⁵⁶HSZPJ, vol. 2, p. 2.

consequences of ideas.⁵⁷ Hu eventually found theoretical confirmation of his early philosophical inclinations in Darwin's evolutionary theory by Dewey's interpretation. He learned that human values and ideas could not be understood in terms of the supernatural mind and the ultimate cause, but only as the biological and cultural history of human behaviour. Human beings live in a changing and open but problematic world, full of possibilities for good and for ill. In such a world human knowledge and choice can make a critical difference. Knowledge, which apprehends the causal connection between things, has an instrumental function and may be used to control the changing world of nature and to guide the interactions that constitute human experience to immediate experiences that are realisations of the ideal possibilities of nature -- consummatory experiences in which life finds fulfilment. However, knowledge is incomplete without wisdom -- a knowledge of true and false ideals, of what is good and bad. The search for knowledge culminates, therefore, in a search for a method of valuation that can empower human beings to make wise choices and decisions in their efforts to idealise their evolving world.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Hu's philosophy was often simplified to a theme such as "logical method" or "scientific method." Confronted with some methodological difficulties in his reading, he wrote in January 1914:

Recently I have been reading many books and have not been concentrating; what I have acquired is merely superficial. I can understand things but I can not apply them. I can deceive others but I cannot benefit them. I can deceive myself but I can not cultivate myself. From now on I should work hard to change this.⁵⁸

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*LXRJ*, vol. 1, p. 151.

Hu's concern in these years, as he put it, was the search for a "practical philosophy". In 1912, inspired by a course in the history of European philosophy offered by John E. Crighton, Hu entered the Russell Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell which was a "stronghold of Idealism." There Hu "read the more important works of the classical philosophers of ancient and modern times." He also read the works of such idealists as Francis Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet. But "their problems never interested me," he recalled later.⁵⁹ Hu's thinking was developing in a different direction. He believed that what his country urgently needed "is not novel theories or obscure philosophical doctrines, but the methods (*shu*) by means of which knowledge may be sought, affairs discussed, things examined and the country governed." He saw three basic skills needed in order to achieve this aim: "the use of the inductive method, an historical outlook, and an evolutionary conception."⁶⁰ In 1914, Hu observed dispiritedly, "Our countrymen have no sense of logic."⁶¹ Hu's interest in methodology can be traced back to the time when he read works written by Fan Zhen (fl. 483-505), Wang Chong (27-ca.100), Sima Guang (1018-1046), Zhang Zai (1020-1077), Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Cheng Yi (1033-1107). In 1906, Hu wrote a short story "Reality Island" (*Zhenru Dao*), which he was very proud of, to deliver the spirit of doubt:

It is a pity that Chinese have not been willing to think, only knowing how to go along with the flow and agree with whatever they were told. The people have been deceived into such ignorance, and this, as I see it, is the reason they are unable or unwilling to think. Therefore the great Confucian of the Song dynasty, Cheng Yi (1033-1107) said "learning begins with thought."

⁵⁹Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," p. 230.

⁶⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 1, p. 151.

⁶¹*LXRJ*, vol. 1, p. 214.

These four simple words are clearly the most important words of all antiquity.⁶²

Hu's acquaintance with the Qing *kaozheng* (evidential research) scholarship strengthened further the spirit of doubt. It is difficult to determine exactly when and how Hu first became fascinated with the dominant trend in intellectual life in the Qing dynasty. But in the first year of his undergraduate study in the United States, his interest was at least rekindled. Inspired by *Ma's Work on Grammar (Mashi Wentong)*, Hu wrote "Explanatory Notes on the Word "Yan" as Found in the *Shi Jing*" (*Shi Sanbai Pian Yan Zi Jie*).⁶³ In 1914, he used logical theory to comment on Fan Zhen's "On the Extinction of the Soul" (*Shen Mie Lun*) and Shen Yue's "On the Existence of the Soul" (*Shen Bumie Lun*).⁶⁴ Hu also benefited from two courses he had taken at Cornell. One was from Frederick Woodbridge, professor of Greek philosophy, in which much attention was paid to problems of textual reliability. Another was from Lincoln Burr who taught "Auxiliary Science of History," which was related to philology, archaeology, and textual criticism.

Admittedly, a central aspect of Hu's system of ideas, "logical method," was redefined and was given new subject, new function, and was put into a new context after he "read all the works of John Dewey with great eagerness" in the summer of 1915.⁶⁵ Logic, Dewey argued:

is both a science and an art. It is a science because it gives an organised and tested descriptive account of the way in which thought actually goes on; an art so far as on the basis of this description it projects methods by which

⁶²Hu Shi: "Zhenru Dao" (Reality Island), in *Hu Shi Zaonian Wencun* (Hu Shi's Early Works), edited by Zhou Zhiping (Taipei: Yuanliu Chuban Shiye Gongsu, 1995), p. 71.

⁶³*KSZZ*, pp. 123-125.

⁶⁴*LXRJ*, vol. 2, pp. 105-110.

⁶⁵*LXRJ*, vol. 1, p. 4

future thinking shall take advantage of the operations that lead to success and avoid those which result in failure.⁶⁶

Dewey redefined logic as a descriptive account of thought in the process of human experience, a method of inquiry as opposed to the traditional interpretation of logic as formal and metaphysical, as a realm of theory dealing with the ultimate, higher, theoretical and supernatural realities. Any formal canon of logic, for Dewey, was justified only when used as an instrument of inquiry in clarifying problematic situations. Logical principles would necessarily change as new ways of comprehending experience arose.

Hu emphasised the methodological aspect of Pragmatism virtually to the exclusion of any other concern. To Hu, it was important because methodology, as compared to other aspects of philosophical thought, was capable of being neutral, universal and relatively value free. Besides methodology, other aspects of philosophy such as the theory of morals, politics, and education, Hu believed, could not be detached from the social, historical background and the personality of the theoretician or philosopher. The contents of these theories, therefore, were not capable of becoming universal. Toward the end of his life, he still believed that methodology, especially those scientific methods that had passed the test of the time, was not constrained by the time and place of the initiator, and was therefore, capable of being independent, neutral and unbiased:

I must acknowledge my debt to John Dewey in helping me understand that there were essential steps common to all scientific research -- methods of research in the West and in the east were the same. And the reason for their fundamental likeness was their basis in the common sense of mankind.⁶⁷

⁶⁶John Dewey: *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 135.

⁶⁷KSZZ, p. 97.

Dewey had given Hu a philosophy of thinking which treats thinking as an art, as a technique. In his books such as *How We Think* and *Essays in Experimental Logic*, Dewey had worked out this technique which Hu had found to be true not only of the discoveries in the experimental sciences, but also of the best researches in the historical sciences, such as textual criticism. The logical process that Hu borrowed from Dewey involved first an encounter with a problem, then the recognition of it, followed by the postulation of hypothetical solutions to it, examination of the probable consequences of these hypotheses, and finally careful evaluation of the results attained in practice.⁶⁸

A brief recapitulation of Hu Shi understanding of logical method might be useful to show Hu's intellectual development after his encounter with John Dewey's philosophy. In August 1915, he noted down the difference between *zheng* and *ju*. Hu said *ju* means "follow the classics." It is a sort of justification by using phrases such as "Confucius says" or "the bible says." *Zheng* means "follow the evidence." The correct attitude is to discard *ju* and accept *zheng*.⁶⁹ Shortly after this, he noticed that the higher criticism in the East and the West were very close. To his delight, he found that Dewey's logical method was very useful in dealing with Chinese classical studies. With Dewey's methodology in mind, he pointed out the weakness of Liang Qichao's *The Theories of Law in Chinese History* (*Zhongguo Falixue Fadashi Lun*). The problem with Liang was that he neither understood the genetic method nor noticed the logical method of Chinese philosophers.⁷⁰ Using the same approach, he

⁶⁸Hu Shi: "Shiyan Zhuyi," *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 94-100.

⁶⁹*LXRJ*, vol. 3, pp. 167-168.

⁷⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 3, pp. 272-286.



wrote two more articles. The first article was on the ancient inflexions of the second person pronouns *er* and *ru*.⁷¹ The second article was on the difference between two first-person pronouns, *wu* and *wo*.⁷² Hu told us that only through philological studies can one free oneself from the subjective biases of traditional commentators and arrive at a real understanding of what the ancient actually meant.⁷³

Hu's acceptance of instrumentalist methodology satisfied his intellectual need and it turned him into a successful historian. Hu had learned to think genetically, and this genetic habit of thinking was the key to success in all his subsequent work in the history of thought and literature.

Under the supervision of John Dewey, Hu finished his Ph. D. thesis *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China* in April 1917. Dewey's influence was clearly evident in this dissertation. In an echo of John Dewey, Hu said in the introduction to the book: "Philosophy is conditioned by its method, and that the development of philosophy is dependent upon the development of the logical method, are facts which find abundant illustration in the history of philosophy both of the West and of the East."⁷⁴ By referring to the history of Western philosophy, Hu illustrated the rise and growth of logic in ancient China. He reinterpreted the history of Chinese philosophy and demonstrated a brand new image of Ancient philosophers.

Hu's emphasis on the theory of logic is understandable from the perspective of his basic concern to modernise China. It seems that the foundation of a modern

⁷¹*LXRJ*, vol. 4, pp. 30-35.

⁷²*LXRJ*, vol. 4, pp. 105-109.

⁷³Hu Shi: *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China* (Shanghai: Oriental Book Co., 1922), p. 1.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

Chinese philosophy can now be supplied by introducing into China the philosophy and scientific method which have developed in the Western world from the time of Aristotle to his day. The problem, however, as Hu admitted, is not really simple. He argued that the future of Chinese philosophy depends upon its emancipation from the moralistic and rationalistic fetters of Confucianism. In other words, the future of Chinese philosophy would seem to depend much on the revival of those great philosophical schools which once flourished side by side with the school of Confucius in Ancient China. He said:

For my own part, I believe that the revival of the non-Confucian schools is absolutely necessary because it is in these schools that we may hope to find the congenial soil in which to transplant the best products of occidental philosophy and science. This is especially true with regard to the problem of methodology. The emphasis on experience as against dogmatism and rationalism, the highly developed scientific method in all its phases of operation, and the historical or evolutionary view of truth and morality -- these which I consider as the most important contributions of modern philosophy in the Western world, can all find their remote but highly developed precursors in those great non-Confucian schools of the fifth, fourth, and third centuries B.C. It would therefore seem to be the duty of New China to study these long-neglected native systems in the light and with the aid of modern Western philosophy. When the philosophies of Ancient China are reinterpreted in terms of modern philosophy, and when modern philosophy is interpreted in terms of the native systems of China, then, and not until then, can Chinese philosophers and students of philosophy truly feel at ease with the new methods and instrumentalities of speculation and research.⁷⁵

This new approach enabled Hu to bridge the gap between traditional Chinese thinking and modern Western thought. As he recalled later in his life:

Dewey's theory of systematic inferential thinking helped me to understand the basic procedure of scientific research. He also made me understand the significance of the research methods of the past three hundred years such as textual criticism, higher criticism, etc. At the time, only few people (or nobody) could imagine that there is a close relationship between modern scientific method and *kaozheng* scholarship. I was the first one who made

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

this statement. That I was able to reach such a conclusion was due to John Dewey's theory.⁷⁶

Hu was convinced that Pragmatism, being a philosophy of method, was able to reach beyond the American shores and be synthesised when mingled with a distant culture. Hu consciously worked out a general system of Pragmatism and applied it to China's concrete problems. To Hu, all theories were created to be practical. If a theory was not applicable, it was meaningless.

For the same reason, it must be Hu's intention to present a popularised version of Dewey's thought without going into minor details. The reason was simple: At the end of the 1910s, Chinese intellectual circles were certainly not ready for much more. Time and history hardly permitted that. In order to transplant Pragmatism on to Chinese soil, Hu extracted from Dewey those ideas that were compatible with Chinese way of thinking. He made no effort to place the thought of John Dewey in the context of Western philosophical history. In a sense, we can say that Hu did not have the luxury of a quiet and uninterrupted environment to work on Deweyan ideas thoroughly. Upon his return to China, he was immediately involved in unceasing polemical debates of one kind or another. This is by no mean to suggest that Hu did not understand, or that he wrongly interpreted John Dewey's ideas. On the contrary, he only tried to grasp the essential parts of Pragmatism, especially the methodological aspects. As far as I can judge, there cannot be the slightest doubt about Hu's commitment to the core values in Pragmatism. Hu Shi did not overstate his case when he said that his literary revolution, his classical studies, his criticisms of Chinese tradition and even his political discussions were all inspired by Pragmatism.

⁷⁶KSZZ, p. 96.

Chapter II

The Reconstruction of Literature and Philosophy:

Hu Shi as a Paradigmatic Thinker

In one of his Haskell Lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1933, Hu Shi explained what he meant by the term “Chinese Renaissance”:

The Renaissance was the name given by a group of Beijing University students to a new monthly magazine which they published in 1918. They were mature students well trained in the old cultural tradition of the country, and they readily recognised in the new movement then led by some of their professors a striking similarity to the Renaissance in Europe. These prominent features in the movement reminded them of the European Renaissance. First, it was a conscious movement to promote a new literature in the living language of the people to take the place of the classical literature of old. Second, it was a movement of conscious protest against many of the ideas and institutions in the traditional culture, and of conscious emancipation of the individual man and woman from the bondage of the forces of tradition. It was a movement of reason versus tradition, freedom versus authority, and glorification of life and human values versus their suppression. And lastly, strange enough, this new movement was led by men who knew their cultural heritage and tried to study it with the new methodology of modern historical criticism and research. In that sense it was also a humanist movement.¹

It is true that the English subtitle for the student magazine *New Wave (Xin Chao)* of Beijing University was suggested by a founding member of the New Wave Society in 1918. However, Hu's self-effacing modesty restrained him from revealing the important fact that it was he who had actually been the patron-saint of this influential publication. It is not an exaggeration to say that the members of the New Wave Society were propagating exactly the same ideas which Hu Shi preached. Indeed, Hu

¹Hu Shi: *The Chinese Renaissance: The Haskell Lectures 1933* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp. Reprint, 1963), p. 44.

Shi was introduced on several occasions as “the father of the Chinese Renaissance.”² It is not my intention to discuss whether the May Fourth Movement or the New Culture Movement was equivalent to the Renaissance of the West.³ My main concern is to explore the reasons why Hu, a young man who had not yet reached thirty, was able to occupy such a prominent position in this movement.

The year 1917, two years before the May Fourth Student Demonstration, witnessed the emergence of Hu Shi as a new cultural leader. In January that year, Hu published his famous article “A Modest Proposal on Literary Reform” (*Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi*) in the magazine *New Youth*. Seven months later, Hu became a professor of Beijing University. His emergence came as a shock to many young intellectuals. It was during this period that Chinese intellectuals were desperately in search of new solutions for China’s problems. After the 1911 revolution, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) established the republican system in China. New generations of intellectuals started to look at China’s future in a new light and hoped that Republican China could quickly achieve wealth and power. But to their disappointment, warlords seized political power, and a new China seemed remote. In 1915, when Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), the hated usurper of the new republic, made a failed attempt to restore the imperial system and Confucian orthodoxy, the new intellectuals rose up in protest and called for a new culture in China. However, the cultural picture during this period was still a bleak one. The leading intellectuals at the time were not able to provide them with much hope. The outstanding thinkers of

²For example, see *RJSGB*, vol.5, entry for 18 November 1926.

³For a discussion, see Ying-shih Yu: “Neither Renaissance Nor Enlightenment: A Historian’s Reflections on the May Fourth Movement” (unpublished paper). I wish to thank Professor Yu for sending me this paper.

the late Qing period -- Kang Youwei (1858-1927), Zhang Binglin (1869-1936), Yan Fu (1853-1921) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) seemed to have run out of new ideas and spirit. Kang, the active reformer and promoter of new learning, became a royalist in his later years and worked hard for the restoration of the last emperor. Zhang, the great scholar who was once the mentor of Lu Xun, became a conservative, and called for a return to the study of Confucian classics. Like Kang and Zhang, Yan Fu who shook the country with his translation of the *Evolution and Ethics* and his active introduction of other Western learning turned into a conservative in his later years. He was one of the most adamant opponents of the Literary Revolution. Liang, a promoter of Western learning and the intellectual who had played a significant role in Hu's intellectual development in his younger days, unfortunately had no working knowledge of any Western language.⁴

In order to break away from the old patterns of thinking and intellectual deadlock, the new leaders would have to redefine the central issues, a project which required a deep understanding and knowledge of Eastern and Western culture. It was within this context that Hu entered the intellectual arena. He successfully filled the intellectual vacuum left by Qing reformists. The emergence of Hu Shi in 1917 signalled that modern Chinese intellectual history had entered a new stage. As recalled by Gu Jiegang (1895-1980), one of his students and later a prominent Chinese historian: "His opinions coincide at almost every point with my own, and nearly everything he says is what I myself have in mind to say, but do not know how

⁴Liang himself acknowledged his linguistic handicap. During his year's stay in Europe in 1918, he said that he would have gained more than ten times as much from his trip if he had had knowledge of a Western language. See Ding Wenjiang: *Liang Rengong Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao* (First Draft of A Chronological Biography of Mr. Liang Qichao) (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1959), p. 599.

to say.”⁵ Gu’s excitement reflected the confusions and frustrations among the May Fourth generation before Hu’s emergence. They realised that there were deep flaws in their culture of tradition but did not know how to diagnose them. Hu had indeed offered them a much needed intellectual compass. He successfully constructed an intellectual synthesis of Western thought and Chinese culture, hence providing a cognitive map that would make the modern Chinese cultural picture both intelligible and articulable. Tang Degang, a student of Hu and a well-known scholar of Hu Shi studies, described Hu as a great scholar who is a successor of the past and an innovator of the new.⁶ Hu was indeed a paradigmatic thinker of his time. As pointed out by Yu Ying-shih, Hu’s works had made a generation of Chinese intellectuals change the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques of the past.⁷

This chapter devotes itself to the discussion of Hu’s contributions on Literary Revolution and his establishment as an intellectual authority. Less than two years after he returned from the United States, Hu had attained an almost unparalleled position of intellectual dominance over the interpretations of many key aspects of the evolution of Chinese culture. He became a kind of Master with many devoted followers in the May Fourth period. How do we explain this phenomenon?

⁵Ku Chieh-kang (Gu Jiegang): *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian: Being the Preface to A Symposium on Ancient History (Ku-shih pien)*, translated by Arthur W. Hummel (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1931), p. 64.

⁶Tang Degang: *Hu Shi Zayi* (Miscellaneous Remisceneces of Hu Shi) (Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981), p. 2.

⁷Yu Ying-shih: “Zhongguo Jindai Sixiangshi shang de Hu Sh: *Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Nianpu Changbian Chugao Xu*” (Hu Shi in Modern Chinese Intellectual History: Preface to First Draft of an Extended Chronology of the Life of Hu Shi, hereafter “Preface”), *NPCB*, vol.1, p. 16.

2.1 The Literary Revolution

In January 1917, Hu's article "A Modest Proposal on Literary Reform" appeared in the magazine *New Youth*. Hu Shi wrote:

(I)n order to have a literary revolution we must start with eight rules: 1. Avoid the use of classical phrases. 2. Discard time-worn literary conventions, and classical illusions. 3. Discard the parallel construction of sentences. 4. Do not be afraid of using "vulgar" words and speech. 5. Continue to use the literary grammar. 6. Do not use sickly and over-emotional expressions when you are not really sick. 7. Do not imitate the ancients, every sentence should reflect one's individuality. 8. The presentation must have content.⁸

Hu Shi, instead of using the radical term "literary revolution," used the rather moderate words "literary reform." The intention is clear; it would not shock the minds of some of the old scholars at home too much. Furthermore he wrote the article in classical style with the hope that it might enjoy better circulation. As he had intended, the essay provoked a prolonged and heated discussion. In the next issue of *New Youth*; Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), its editor, contributed an article which bore the bold title "On Literary Revolution" (*Wenxue Geming Lun*) to support Hu. It reads:

The Literary Revolution has now begun, and the champion of the revolutionary army has been my friend, Hu Shi. I am willing to brave the enmity of all the pedantic scholars of the country, and hoist the great banner of the "Army of the Revolution in Literature" in support of my friend Hu Shi. On this manner shall be written in big characters the three great principles of the Army of Revolution:

1. To destroy the painted, powdered, and obsequious literature of the aristocratic few, and to create the plain, simple, and experience literature of the people.

⁸Hu Shi: "Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi" (A Modest Proposal on Literary Reform), *HSZPJ*, vol. 3, pp. 5-6. This English translation is adopted with modification from Chow Tse-tsung: *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, p. 274.

2. To destroy the stereotyped and monotonous literature of classicism, and to create the fresh and sincere literature of realism.
3. To destroy the pedantic, unintelligible and obscurantist literature of the hermit and the recluse, and to create the plain-speaking and popular literature of a living society.⁹

Chen Duxiu was a radical by temperament, unlike Hu Shi who was by nature a moderate. Hu's cautious approach was clearly affected by his unpleasant previous experience. In 1915, when Sino-Japanese relations were extremely strained, Hu released an open letter and asked his fellow students in America to study rather than going to protest in the streets. Because of this letter, Hu offended many patriotic students, and as a result, he was subjected to public criticism.¹⁰ From this experience, he learnt a lesson. Hu also received strong opposition from his fellow Chinese students in the United States when he presented these ideas of literary reform to them in the summer of 1915.¹¹

Although Hu called for "reform," it did not change the revolutionary nature of the article. After the publication of Chen's and his articles, the Literary Revolution was irresistible. Hu Shi at the time was still in the United States. His name, however, was already widely known among the *New Youth* readers. Building on his first article, Hu subsequently wrote a few more to develop his ideas and establish other criteria for the new Chinese literature.

⁹Chen Duxiu: "Wenxue Geming Lun" (On Literary Revolution), *Chen Duxiu Wencun* (Collected Essays of Chen Duxiu) (Wuhu: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), p. 95. This English translation is adopted with modification from Chow Tse-tsung: *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, pp. 275-276.

¹⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 3, pp. 29-33, p. 46.

¹¹*SSZS*, pp. 97-131.

Apparently, Hu was not the first one to advocate the use of *baihua* (vernacular language). Since the turn of the century there had been a number of periodicals published in *baihua*. When the leaders of the young intellectuals found themselves greatly handicapped in their efforts to communicate their new ideas to the masses of the people -- the only available means of expression being the classical language, which the common people could not read -- then the idea of using *baihua* as a literary tool and other language reforms began to occupy some of the new intellectuals' minds long before 1917. Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929), for example, were among intellectuals who promoted changes in Chinese literary concepts. Even Lin Shu (1852-1924), the most powerful opponent of the Literary Revolution during 1917 to 1919, contributed several *baihua* articles to the *Hangzhou Baihua Bao* (The Hangzhou Vernacular Magazine) at the end of the nineteenth century. Chen Duxiu also became associated with the movement and contributed numbers of articles from 1904 to the *Wuxi Baihua Bao* (Wuxi Vernacular Magazines), which was established as early as 1898. According to a survey, there were at least one hundred and forty magazines published in *baihua* in the 1900s.¹² Hu Shi's first association with *baihua* magazines was in 1906. In that year he contributed his first article written in *baihua* style entitled "On Geography" (*Dili Xue*) to *The Struggle* published by the students of the China National Institute in Shanghai.¹³

¹²For the titles of these magazines, see Chen Wanxiong: *Wusi Xinwenhua de Yuanliu* (The Source of the New Cultural Movement) (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1992), pp. 134-153.

¹³*Hu Shi Zaonian Wencun* (Hu Shi's Early Works) (Taipei: Yuanliu Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1995), pp.5-12.

Although the intellectuals in the late Qing had advocated using *baihua*, it had not occurred to them that *baihua* vernacular could completely replace *wenyan*, the classical written language. Reviewing the history of *baihua*, Hu aptly pointed out:

The last twenty years, we have people advocating *baihua* newspapers, *baihua* books, phonetic spelling, simplified characters. . . . These people intended to advocate *baihua*, but they had no intention of advocating *baihua* literature. Their greatest shortcoming was to divide society into two classes: on the one side, "we," the gentry; and on the other side, "they," the common people, the masses; on the one side, they should use *baihua* and on the other side, we should write old poetry.¹⁴

This comment deserves particular attention. It reveals the deep gulf between the intellectuals and the masses. The intellectuals can use *baihua* to teach or enlighten the masses. However, *baihua* was not the cultural language. *Baihua* was the vulgar writing of the people, traditionally regarded as only good enough for cheap novels, and not good enough for scholars. Hu's early works in *baihua*, which were intended to "instil new ideas into the uneducated masses," were clearly under such psychological constraint.¹⁵ However, after seven years in the United States, he was ready for an intellectual revolt. Influenced by Western democratic thought, Hu began to build an image as the voice of democracy, of the people and of mankind. He advocated freedom and democracy both in literary practice and in social relationships. He said:

Any country that pretends and intends to be a democracy must provide for its citizens a medium of expression which will be easily comprehended by everyone, and if China intends to be a democracy she ought to have a literature that smells less of classicism and which responds more adequately to the needs of everyday life."¹⁶

¹⁴Hu Shi: "Wu Shinian Lai Zhongguo Zhi Wenxue" (Chinese Literature in the Last Fifty Years), *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, pp. 135-136.

¹⁵*SSZS*, p. 67.

¹⁶Hu Shi: "A Literary Revolution in China," *The Peking Leader* (12 February 1919), pp. 116-118.

For this reason, Hu called for a “democratic” replacement for China’s “aristocratic” literature. He pointed out that to use the language employed in the great novels was not contemptible. There should be only one language, not two languages in Modern China. As early as July 1916, in discussing with his fellow students such as Mei Guangdi (1890-1945) and Ren Hongjun (1886-1961), Hu made it clear that the objective of the Literary Revolution was “to make all poets in China willing to write poetry in the popular song style,” and “to cause *baihua* popular mandarin song to give birth to great poets such as Tao Yuanming, Xie Linyun, Li Bai and Du Fu.”¹⁷ Hu emphasised that scholars should not decree that only they might eat meat, and that the common people must satisfy themselves with bones. The failure of language reform so far might all be attributed to the fact that *baihua* was meant for the use of the common people, and not for the scholars who still persisted in using the eight-legged essay style and parallel prose.¹⁸

What may have seemed to be merely a Literary Revolution was actually, in essence, a social revolution that entailed redefining the high culture of the educated class. By making the vernacular *baihua* the written language of the country, Hu had broadened the base of the elite culture. What had been previously considered popular culture, such as the so-called Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel (*Sida Qishu*), was now considered high culture worthy of meticulous scholarly study. Undergirding Hu’s Literary Revolution was that a new literary language must cut across class barriers.

¹⁷SSZS, p.122.

¹⁸Vincent Y. C Shih: “A Talk with Hu Shih,” *The China Quarterly* 10 (April/June 1962): 157.

It is for this reason that Lin Shu, Yan Fu, and the members of the *Xueheng* (*Critical Review*) opposed the Literary Revolution. The “traditional versus modern” or “Chinese versus Western” debate is well known in Modern China. The tension between high culture and low culture is, however overlooked. The reason that Lin Shu and other conservatives opposed the new literature was because it went against the Chinese cultural background. Confucian scholars regarded literature as a means to achieve political, social, moral, or educational purposes. Their concern for literature is a pragmatic rather than an aesthetic one. As analysed by James Liu: “From the time Confucianism was established as the orthodox ideology of China in the second century B.C. down to the early twentieth century, the pragmatic concept of literature remained practically sacrosanct, so that critics who basically believed in other concepts rarely dared to repudiate it openly.”¹⁹ Chinese intellectuals had long despised popular culture. The slogans “Literature is that by which one carries the Way” (*Wen yi zai dao*) and “Poetry expresses intent” (*Shi yan zhi*) became two much often quoted platitudes in Chinese literary criticism. Chinese intellectuals regarded themselves as the sole bearers of the Way. Popular culture certainly was not serious enough and certainly should not be regarded as mainstream culture. Popular literary genres such as fiction and drama were tolerated but not respected. Ban Gu in the first century summarised this attitude by quoting Confucius’s words that such a popular genre as *xiaoshuo*, “although not without merit, could not go very far and therefore, was beneath the scholars.”²⁰ I shall return to discuss the

¹⁹James J. Y. Liu: *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 111.

²⁰Ban Gu: *Han Shu* (History of the Han Dynasties) (Beijing Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), vol. 6, p. 1745. It is important to point out that *xiaoshuo* in *Han Shu* is not exactly the same as *xiaoshuo* in the modern sense (i.e. fiction). Ban Gu defined

status of popular literary genres later. For the present I want to call attention to the fact that Lin Shu and other conservatives, who were influenced by Confucianism, had a strong sense of superiority and elite sentiment. They believed that only real scholarship and real morality can survive respect. As Lin Shu put it: "If all the old classical books were discarded and the vernacular used, all the rickshaw boys and peddlers in Beijing and Tianjin could be regarded as professors" because their vernacular is more grammatically correct than the Fujianese and Cantonese dialects.²¹ The conservatives wanted to protect the integrity of elite culture. However, the strong democratic tendency and anti-traditionalist ethos during that time buried the conservative efforts.

It is not surprising that Hu's rejuvenation of Chinese literature did not invoke Confucianism. His authority derived from the Modern West. On his way returning to China in June 1917, he read Edith Sichel's *Renaissance* as his train ran across the Canadian Rockies towards Vancouver. Much to his gratification he found his advocacy of the vernacular as opposed to the classical language as the medium of Chinese literature historically justified by the rise of vernacular literature in Renaissance Europe. Dante and Petrarch, Hu Shi wrote, began to use the vernacular language in their writing. The rise of English, French, Italian, and German was

xiaoshuo as "gossip and hearsay in the streets." The fifteen books he listed under the heading *xiaoshuo* were all lost as early as the Sui Dynasty (sixth century AD), but we can see from the titles that the term covers a much wider area than what is considered fiction today. Although *xiaoshuo* writers were listed by Ban Gu as the last of the ten categories of writers, Ban Gu warned that "only the former nine are worth reading."

²¹Lin Shu: *Weilu Sanji* (Collected Essays of Lin Shu, Third Series) (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1924), pp. 27-28.

instrumental in the emergence of new literature and new values. In his mind, the adoption of *baihua* would definitely have the same effect.²²

To many intellectuals, Hu's argument was very convincing. Admittedly, his famous "eight-don'ts" proposal was directly influenced by Imagist poetic theory.²³ However, as Michel Hockx pointed out, it is clear that the influence took place on a rather general level, fulfilling only basic needs in the transformation of the poetic outlook.²⁴ If Hu Shi's literary view was narrow, it was because his conception of literature was overwhelmingly conditioned by practical purpose. But the fact is that this practical purpose was giving him the momentum needed to achieve his goal. Within intellectual circles, there was remarkable consensus over the need for this new literary language to save China. To write in the language of everyday speech was a step towards uniting the whole people. To quote Lu Xun's words: "Because we use the language of the ancients, which the people cannot understand and are not accustomed to hearing, we are like a dish of loose sand -- oblivious to each other's suffering."²⁵

²²*LXRJ*, vol. 4, pp. 240-247.

²³Wong Yun Wah: *Essays on Chinese Literature: A Comparative Approach* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1988), pp. 28-51. See also Shen Weiwei: "Xin Shiqi Hu Shi Wenxue Yanjiu Shuping" (An Overview of Research on Hu's Literary Works Since 1979) in his *Wenhua, Xintai, Renge: Renshi Hu Shi* (Culture, Mental State, Personality: To know Hu Shi) (Kaifeng: Henan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 180-206.

²⁴Michel Hockx: *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1994), p. 10.

²⁵Lu Xun: "Silent China: A Talk given at the Hong Kong Y.M.C.A., 16 February 1927" in Lu Xun: *Selected Works*, translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing Foreign Language Press, 1980), vol. 2, p. 332.

It is true that the modern literary reform was not first mentioned by Hu. In a letter to a friend in 1915, Huang Yuanyong (1884-1915) made the following remarks:

In my humble opinion, politics are in such confusion that I am at a loss to know what to talk about. Ideal schemes will have to be buried for future generations to unearth. . . . As to fundamental salvation, I believe its beginning must be sought in the promotion of a new literature. In short, we must endeavour to bring Chinese thought into direct contact with the contemporary thought of the world, thereby to accelerate its radical awakening. . . . The method seems to consist in using simple and simplified language and literature for wide dissemination of ideas among the people. Have we not seen that historians regard the Renaissance as the foundation of the overthrow of mediaevalism in Europe?"²⁶

Although Huang first mentioned the concept of new literature, he had not manifested it in a clearly defined form. Huang did not have any concrete plan for the new literature. He also had no idea how to start this movement. Hu went a step further and gave *baihua* literature a new life. He pragmatically pointed out the deficiencies of the Chinese classical language and stated that classical literature had lost its utility as an effective medium of communication a long time ago.

The call for a language able to meet the needs of the great majority of people, nevertheless, also entailed a concern that the new language should not be detrimental to the expressive power of literary diction. It is not enough to say that *wenyan* could not express the feelings and thoughts of the era. It would be easier and more effective to convince Chinese intellectuals from the standpoint of historical facts than purely from pragmatic experience.

²⁶Huang Yuanyong: "Shi Yan -- Zhi Jiayin Zazhi Jizhe" (A Letter to the Reporters of *Jiayin Magazine*), *Jiayin Zazhi* 1.10 (10 October 1915). Hu quoted this passage in his "The Renaissance in China," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 5 (1926): 270.

The appearance of Hu Shi's *History of Baihua Literature* (*Baihua Wenxue Shi*) sent two important signals: on the one hand, he intended to establish the orthodox status of *baihua* literature; on the other, he intended to seek historical justifications for his assertion that *baihua* was the ideal language for literature. In this book, Hu rewrote the history of literature. He cited Wang Fanzhi (590-660), Han Shan (fl. 627-649) and Shi De (fl. 627-649) as great *baihua* poets:

How can you say there has been no literature representative of its times in Chinese literary history? But we ought not to search for it in the history of classical traditions. Instead, we should look for it within the unorthodox literature that emerged on the side. Because these works did not follow the ancients, they can, of course, represent their own times.²⁷

Later Hu summarised his opinion:

The new concept of literary history we set forth at that time specifically aimed to provide readers with a new pair of spectacles. We wanted them to see other unparalleled and unprecedented exotic things. . . . When people reread the history of Chinese literature with these new spectacles and compared *Water Margin* and *Jin Ping Mei* with the orthodox literature, not only could He Jingming (1483-1521) and Li Mengyang (1473-1530) be ignored, but the members of the Gong'an and Jingling schools also seemed to be inferior. When they compared *The Scholars* and *The Dream of the Red Chambers* with Fang Bao (1668-1749), Yao Nai (1732-1815), Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and Wu Rulun (1840-1903), people could never again insist on their narrow-minded view that "the most beautiful things in the world cannot replace the creation of Yao Nai of the Tongcheng school."²⁸

The urge to write a new history of literature, in China or elsewhere, has never been absent. By the time of the May Fourth era, the intensity of writing new history of literature reached a new height. Hu chose to take a critical view of history and re-

²⁷Hu Shi: "Baihua Wenxue Shi Yinzi" (Introduction to History of Vernacular Literature), *HSZPJ*, vol. 19, p. 15.

²⁸Hu Shi's introductory note in *Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi Jianshe Lilun Ji* (A Collection of Constructive Theories), edited by Zhao Jiabi (Shanghai: Liangyou Gongsi, 1935), p. 21.

examined what was taken for granted in the past. He took a popularist view and focused on the daily experience of ordinary people. The concept of the evolution of literature constituted the core of Hu's literary theories throughout his literary career. In his final analysis the justification for promoting *baihua* lay in its historical timeliness. Hu Shi interpreted it as follows: "Literature changes with the times. Each era has its own literature."²⁹

Clearly, Hu Shi's *History of Baihua Literature* exhibited some shortcomings. He insisted *wenyan* and *baihua* were two separate trends in the development of Chinese literature, but the two concepts are not well defined in his book. Many examples Hu cited can hardly be considered typical *baihua* literature. For example, poets such as Wang Ji (590-644) and Bai Juyi (772-846), of whom Hu spoke highly, used many *wenyan* words in their works. Hu also ignored the fact that some of the literary genres such as *ci* and *qu* use *baihua* and *wenyan* at the same time.

In many cases, Hu exaggerated his points as he simply used "literature written in *baihua*" as a commendatory term and "literature written in *wenyan*" as a derogatory term. In Hu's mind, all *baihua* works are natural, "close to the life of people" whereas *wenyan* works on the other hand "were only for the enjoyment of the upper classes."³⁰ Thereupon was that *wenyan* literature had reached a dead end and *baihua* literature became the dominant trend. He inappropriately downgraded *cifu*, *pianwen* and *liushi*, and emphasised the importance of *yuefu* and other folk songs: "Rhymed compositions in the Han dynasty actually followed two trends. One was to imitate *cifu*. The other followed natural folk songs. The first one was lifeless,

²⁹Hu Shi: "Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi," *HSZPJ*, vol.3, p.7.

³⁰ Hu Shi: *Baihua Wenxue Shi: Tang Yiqian* (History of *Baihua* Literature Before Tang Dynasty), *HSZPJ*, vol. 19, p. 48, p. 50.

rigid and irredeemable . . . whereas the folk songs which were collected in the *yuefu* were fascinating. Their influence were great.”³¹ This is certainly not the case. As a matter of fact, *wenyan* literature which Hu declared dead in Han dynasty indeed dominated Chinese literary history of two thousand years and produced many works of high literary value. It should not be dismissed so contemptuously as Hu did.³²

Apparently Hu’s main purpose was to emphasis the theory that *baihua* represents the main style of Chinese literature. Using Darwinian ideas throughout the book, Hu Shi made it clear that *baihua* was the winner under Darwin’s evolutionary theory: “Species compete, Heaven chooses; the superior wins, the inferior loses.”³³ Hu recalled later:

This new approach to literature was a necessity and was a most useful tool. Chinese scholars understand Chinese history well. They only lack new approach.³⁴

The argument soon centred on the question of whether or not *baihua* style, which was generally acknowledged as suitable for the writing of such inferior things as novels and plays, could be appropriately employed in “culturally high genres” such

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 61.

³²For discussions on Hu’s *Baihua Wenxue Shi*, see Cao Boyan: “Hu Shi de Xin Wenxue Shiguan Shuping” (On Hu’s New Literary View), in Geng Yunzhi, ed.: *Hu Shi Yanjiu Congkan Diyi Ji* (Hu Shi Study, Series 1) (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 156-172; Zhang Qing: *Hu Shi Pingzhuan* (A Critical Biography of Hu Shi) (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 83-86.

³³Even though it had been more than twenty years since Yan Fu’s introduction of Darwinian Theory to China, the popularity of Evolutionary theory in the May Fourth era showed no sign of declining. This was still the era in which it was virtually impossible for children to get through school without having to write essays on the topic, “Species compete, Heaven chooses; the superior wins, the inferior loses.” See James R. Pusey: *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 436-437.

³⁴Hu Shi’s introductory note in *Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi Jianshe Lilun Ji* (A Collection of Constructive Theories), p. 21.

as poetry and belles-letters. Hu's ideal was to restore self-expressive function to literature, a function much hindered by shackles of tradition. By self-expressive function, Hu Shi meant the notion that literature should express the writer's emotions, which in turn should move the reader. Coupled with this affirmation of self-expression was an emphasis on spontaneity or freedom in writing. This emphasis on the self-expressive function was shared by many leading figures of the Literary Revolution. By the late Qing, Chinese poetry had developed for far too long and was by then exhausted itself. Writing poetry had become a matter of constantly referring to the past. Poets could not bypass the formal as well as thematic restrictions due to "pre-textuality."³⁵ Now with the Literary Revolution, the energy bridled up for ages was unleashed.

In a long article, Hu concluded that in spite of various attempts by earlier generations to "liberate" the poetic genre, only he and his confreres had succeeded in finally demolishing all the restrictions that had inhibited the outflow of emotions and ideas. Theirs was truly a "great liberation of poetic form"; they were the ones who swept away the complicated metrical patterns defined in accordance with the tones of the literary language.³⁶ He said:

We believe that *baihua* can give birth to literature and it is the only sharp tool for the future literature. However, most people do not agree with our

³⁵In his discussion on "pre-textuality", Henry Zhao writes: "Literary culture enjoys greater capacity for continuity, since written texts can be easily preserved, reread and reprinted. . . . The conservation of this tradition, nevertheless, leads its lack of flexibility. The ease of the production of pre-textuality naturally leads to the weight of accumulation. After a period of stability, the excess pressure of Letters combined with the inefficiency of Rule and the hypocritization of the Truth, and culture is then left with no choice but to reorientate." See Henry Y. H. Zhao: "Sensing the Shift -- New Wave Literature and Chinese Culture," in *Under Sky Under Ground*, edited by Henry Y. H. Zhao and John Cayley (London: Wellsweep Press, 1994), p. 162.

³⁶Hu Shi: "Tan Xinshi" (On New Poetry), *HSZPJ*, vol. 3, p. 181.

words. They do not agree that *baihua* can be used in poetry. The only way we can deal with this doubt is to use the experimental method. For scientists, an unverified hypothesis remains a hypothesis. All theories must be verified before they can be considered true. . . . The last three years we have been trying to verify whether *baihua* can give birth to good poetry.³⁷

Hu started writing *baihua* poems in 1916 and published *A Collection of Experiments* (*Changshi Ji*) in 1920. His anthology clearly shows that he was more familiar with *wenyan* poetry. As he himself admitted, the language used in his modern poems moved as awkwardly as the suddenly unbound feet of an old-fashioned Chinese woman. His determination, however, made him never write any old poetry again. Unfortunately Hu was not a poet by nature. His efforts at literary theory were more influential than his poetry. Zhu Xiang (1904-1927), a poet-critic, labelled Hu's poetry "sheer nonsense" and complained that *A Collection of Experiments* was "shallow in content and juvenile in technique."³⁸

In reality, as far as poetic reform was concerned, matters went far less smoothly. As summarised by Michel Hockx, "the development of new poetry started out from and continued to take place within a relatively small social and cultural periphery, consisting mainly of urban-based students and graduates from foreign universities. Even within that periphery, the new poetry was peripheral, since it was not a common concern of all intellectuals, while conventional poetry preserved some of its important functions among them as well."³⁹ However, Hu's efforts had successfully made many young poets followed suit. His poetry, as pointed out by

³⁷See Hu Shi's preface in *Changshi Ji* (A Collection of Experiments), *HSZPJ*, vol. 27, p. 33

³⁸Quoted in Julia C. Lin: *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), p. 41.

³⁹Michel Hockx: *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity*, pp. 7-8.

Julia C. Chin, "though limited in aesthetic worth, is important in indicating some of the directions modern Chinese poetry was to follow."⁴⁰ Hu was the first to make a conscious effort to elevate and popularise the use of *baihua* as a poetic medium and he created an awareness of the potential of *baihua* as an artistic means. Hu Shi's endeavours were responsible for the interest of his colleague such as Shen Yinmo (1887-1964), Liu Bannong (1891-1934) and Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) in the new verse.⁴¹ The overall response to new verse in the May Fourth era was very encouraging. There were eighteen new poetry collections published between 1920 and 1922, not including *A Collection of Experiments*.⁴² These pioneering poets eagerly experimented with a wide range of Western forms, from free verse to sonnet. Without their effort and experiment, *baihua* poetry would never be a "literati genre."⁴³

Apparently, Hu's advocacy of *baihua* literature was only part of the project which he had set forth for his life-long quest, namely, "how can we best assimilate modern civilisation in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilisation of our own making."⁴⁴ The success of the Literary Revolution gave him the intellectual confidence as well as convincing optimism to

⁴⁰Julia C. Lin: *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), p. 42.

⁴¹For a discussion of poetry of this period, see Michel Hockx: *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity*.

⁴²Michel Hockx: "Born Poet and Born Lover: Wang Jingzhi's Love Poetry within the May Fourth Context," *Modern Chinese Literature* 9 (1996): 264.

⁴³For a discussion on the importance of becoming "literati genre" before a new genre can be absorbed into Chinese culture, see Henry Y. H. Zhao: "Sensing the Shift-- New Wave Literature and Chinese Culture," p. 163.

⁴⁴Hu Shi: *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, p. 7.

introduce other new thought. In the next section, we shall see the response of academic circles to Hu's new approach to historical research.

2.2 The Young Professor

After assuming the post as President of Beijing University in 1916, Cai Yuanpei had successfully transformed the University from an old-style preparatory school for government officials into a modern university. To this day, whenever Chinese educators argue for a more tolerant policy towards intellectuals or towards the knowledge they represent, they appeal to the name and aura of Cai Yuanpei.⁴⁵ In the previous two decades before Cai's appointment, this institution had been a battleground between advocates of Chinese and Western learning, and between loyalists to the examination system and pioneers of modern education. While Cai was at Beijing University, the forces of the New Culture Movement had the leading edge.

It should be noted here that although the New Culture Movement was associated with anti-traditionalism, traditional scholarship continued to carry enormous weight at Beijing University. This tradition compelled committed Republican intellectuals to operate within its established norms. Even though Hu Shi's "A Modest Proposal on Literary Reform" published in January 1917 had earned him national renown, it was his philological research on *The Book of Poetry*

⁴⁵For a discussion on Cai Yuanpei and Beijing University, see Eugene Lubot: "Tsai Yuan-pei from Confucian Scholar to Chancellor Peking University, 1866-1923: The Evolution of a Patient Reformer," Ph. D. Dissertation (Ohio State University, 1970).

(*Shi Jing*) that convinced Cai Yuanpei to offer him a professorship of Chinese at the University.⁴⁶

As a young professor just returned from the United States, Hu could not entirely rely on Cai's trust. Major thinkers of the earlier generation were still alive, and some were intellectually active. *Kaozheng* scholars like Zhang Binglin (1869-1936) and Liu Shipei (1884-1919) had great influence on Beijing University's research environment. Lecturers such as Huang Kan (1886-1935), Ma Yuzao (1878-1945) and Qian Xuantong (1887-1939) were students of Zhang. Students at the time received a good foundation in the classics and in old literature generally before entering University. Fu Sinian, Gu Jiegang, Yu Pingpo and Luo Jialun were among those who had very good training in traditional scholarship. Fu Sinian was generally considered by Liu Shipei and Huang Kan as the most promising student and one who would lead in traditional studies.⁴⁷

Hu was a marginal scholar in the academic world when he started his teaching career. Gu Jiegang (1893-1980) recalled that "most of my fellow students, including myself, were rather dubious of his abilities in Chinese scholarship, with the result that our first estimates of him ran somewhat as follows: "He is just a returned student from America, without real qualification for taking the chair of Chinese philosophy in Beijing National University."⁴⁸ It seems that the fame Hu gained from

⁴⁶*NPCB*, vol. 1. p. 295n.

⁴⁷Tang Baolin and Lin Maosheng, eds.: *Chen Duxiu Nianpu* (Chronology of Chen Duxiu) (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe 1988), p. 87-88. In January 1951, in a letter of condolence to Fu's wife on Fu's death, Hu also admitted that Fu's knowledge in classical culture indeed was better than his. See Hu's letter of condolence to Yu Dacai, *HSSXJ*, vol. 3, p. 1200.

⁴⁸Ku Chieh-kang: *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian: Being the Preface to A Symposium on Ancient History (Ku-shih pien)*, p. 64. In another article, Gu frankly admitted that many students indeed looked down upon Hu Shi.

the Literary Revolution had nothing to do with his reputation in academia. Hu needed to persuade his students of the necessity of reforming traditional culture, and also showed them that he was a scholar qualified to assume the task. For Hu, this was by no means easy. It is well known that Hu had always consulted Qian Xuantong, a prominent philologist and historian, on phonetic questions, sometimes he even went further and asked Qian to write for him.⁴⁹ On many occasions, he was worried that students would laugh at him for not having enough knowledge. He said that he was under tremendous pressure and had to work hard in the fear that he might not be able to answer students' questions.⁵⁰ Within a year, however, he had successfully won their confidence. In 1919, Cai Yuanpei was convinced that he had employed the right man, saying that Hu's understanding of the Classics was "comparable to the scholars of the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods."⁵¹ In his well-known *Intellectual Trends in the Qing Period* (*Qingdai Xueshu Gailun*), Liang Qichao praised Hu as "an unquestioned successor of Qing scholarship."⁵²

See Gu Jiegang: "Wo Shi Zenyang Bianxie Gushi Bian de" (How Did I Compile Critiques of Ancient History), *Zhongguo Zhixue* (Chinese Philosophy) 2 (March 1980): 332.

⁴⁹*RJSGB*, vol. 1, entry for 19 August 1922.

⁵⁰See Luo Jialun: "Yuanqi Linli De Fu Mengzhen" (The Energetic Fu Sinian), in his *Shizhe Rusi Ji* (Recollection) (Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chuabanshe, 1967), p. 166.

⁵¹Cai Yanpei: "Cai Yuanpei Zi Gongyan Bao Han Bing Da Lin Qinnan Han" (A Letter to Gongyan Bao and Lin Shu), in *Cai Yuanpei Wenji* (Collected Writings of Cai Yuanpei) (Taipei: Jinxiu Chuban Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1995), vol. 10, p. 498.

⁵²Liang Qichao: *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Dynasty*, translated by Immanuel C.Y. Hsu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 26.

2.21 The Reconstruction of Chinese Philosophy

Hu's knowledge of classical learning certainly did not increase overnight. Indeed, his reputation was not based on his knowledge of classical learning but on bringing new insights and approaches to the study of Chinese philosophy and history. Hu tried to adopt a modern approach to the study of Chinese philosophy by emphasising source criticism and its method. It was like throwing a bomb into the stronghold of old learning when Hu first delivered his lecture on ancient Chinese history at the Philosophy Department of Beijing University. Before Hu, the teaching of the history of Chinese philosophy had always started with the legendary heroes of antiquity. The five mythical kings of prehistorical time had been taken quite literally as the ancestors of the Chinese nation. Usually within an academic year such teaching would not go beyond 400 B.C. Feng Youlan recalled that when he was attending this course, his lecturer had gone only as far as the Duke of Chou, that is to say, about five centuries before Confucius by the end of the first semester.⁵³ When Hu took over the course of the History of Chinese Philosophy, he discarded the "legends" altogether and started with *Lao Zi*, with a provable existence. Such an innovative choice, recalled Hu's student Gu Jiegang,

came as a sudden and devastating blow to our class whose mind was filled with the legends of the three kings and five emperors. We were lost for words. Many students were not convinced. It was only because there were no radicals in the class that a student protest was avoided. After a few classes, I perceived the reasonableness [of Hu's position] and told my classmates, "Although his lectures do not show the wide reading of Mr.

⁵³Feng Youlan: *Selected Philosophical Writing of Feng Youlan* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1991), p. 552.

Botao [our previous teacher] his powers of judgement are such as to place him in a position of independence.⁵⁴

According to Hu, previous histories of Chinese philosophy had been vague and they were confused accounts of poetry, religious beliefs, and irrelevant legendary philosophy forming an elaborate catalogue of names and quotations with neither coherence nor outline. Hu Shi eliminated unreliable and irrelevant material to give Chinese philosophy a clear outline. He wanted his students to appreciate his endeavour and understand why it removed various types of materials. Hu first convinced Gu Jiegang. For Gu, Hu was “perceptive, courageous and judicious.”⁵⁵ But Gu lacked the eloquence necessary to convince his classmates. Although he was not articulate, Gu was able to encourage his roommate, Fu Sinian, to come to Hu’s class. Curious to hear Hu’s new approach, Fu went with Gu and was quite pleased with Hu’s teaching after a few classes. Fu Sinian was very influential among his peers. His wide reading of classical literature and his sharp critique of his professors’ inadequate teaching had made him a natural student leader.⁵⁶ With Fu, Hu won important supporters and strengthened his status as a leader of academia.⁵⁷

⁵⁴See Gu Jiegang’s preface in *Gushi Bian* (Critiques of Ancient History), vol. 1, p. 36. This English translation is adopted with modification from Ku Chieh-kang: *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian: Being the Preface to A Symposium on Ancient History (Ku-shih pien)*, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁵Gu Jiegang: “Zixu” (Preface), *Gushi Bian*, vol. 1, p. 36.

⁵⁶Luo Jialun recalled that Fu once lead his classmates to humiliate one of the professors for his misinterpretation of literary classics. Fu listed the professor’s thirty mistakes and gave them to Cai Yuanpei, the president of Beijing University. As a result, Cai ordered the replacement of the professor. See Luo Jialun: *Yuanqi Linli De Fu Mengzhen*, in his *Shizhe Rusi Ji*, pp. 167-168.

⁵⁷Despite holding different views on many philosophical issues, Feng Youlan also acknowledged Hu’s contribution. He said that Hu’s *History of Chinese Philosophy* marked a new era in the history of Chinese philosophy. He said: “The book had opened a new horizon. . . . At the time, we all studied the classics and had to spend half a year before we studied the Duke of Zhou. Hu’s method has made us

In 1919, based on his Ph.D. dissertation and lecture notes at Beijing University, Hu published *Zhongguo Zhexue Shi Dagang Shangjuan* (An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy, vol 1). This publication made Hu recognised beyond Beijing University. The book, later retitled as *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi* (History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy, hereafter *History of Chinese Philosophy*) was the first book on Chinese history and philosophy written in *baihua*. Cai Yuanpei praised the book as the “most important work since the establishment of the republic.”⁵⁸ Hu began his book by telling people the importance of source criticism. He contended that before seeking the causes for the vicissitudes of ancient philosophy and evaluating various philosophical schools, the most urgent task for students was to give an accurate account of each philosopher using reliable sources. In order to reach this goal, “scientific methods” and careful examinations were necessary. This was because, Hu explained, previous records were often contradictory and incorrect. He then spent much space in his introduction talking about what historical sources are and how to work on them. According to Hu, sources were divided into two categories: primary and auxiliary. The former consisted of philosophers’ own works, the latter the works about them.⁵⁹

From his belief in Deweyan scientism, Hu further argues that to possess the sources does not complete the preparation for writing. A more important task is to examine them, that is to go from observation to experimentation. Hu enumerates five

excited.” See Feng Youlan’s preface in *Sansongtang Quanji* (Complete Works of Feng Youlan) (Henan: Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), vol. 1, p. 200.

⁵⁸See Cai Yuanpei’s preface in Hu Shi: *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexueshi* (History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy), *HSZPJ*, vol. 31, p. 1.

⁵⁹See Hu’s introduction in *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi*, *HSZPJ*, vol. 31, pp. 10-14.

things which require the historian's attention in conducting sources criticism 1. content; 2. language; 3. style; 4. ideas; and 5. comparison with contemporary works. In other words, if the style and language of a work are anachronistic; or if its records are contradictory and its ideas inconsistent, then the work is probably forgery.⁶⁰

Hu Shi himself spoke highly of his *History of Chinese Philosophy*, although he was never able to finish a second volume. He declared that with that book, he became the founder of the study of Chinese philosophy in China.⁶¹ What is it that makes *History of Chinese Philosophy* so significant and enduring a work? In order to answer this question, we must go back to *kaozheng* scholarship prevalent in the Qing dynasty.

As mentioned earlier, the main task of a Qing scholar was to understand the classics and grasp Way (*Dao*) through evidential research. The *daotong* was the path leading from Confucius to his immediate disciples, then to Mencius (third century B.C.), and on into later times. Qing scholars generally believed that only by studying the classics in depth was one able to propagate the values of Way and thus remove the obscurities resulting from mishandling and misunderstanding of the classics. Textual criticism and historical studies were thus important tools for the recovery and continuation of the *daotong*. Regarding Confucius as the supreme, their main purpose was to explain the classics and not to doubt the authenticity of the classics.

With the passage of time, however, their attention changed. At the beginning of the *kaozheng* scholarship movement, Qing scholars focused only on Confucian classics. After they finished their researches on Confucian classics, it is only natural

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 14-21.

⁶¹Hu Shi: "Zhengli Guogu yu Dagui" (Re-examining the National Heritage and Attacking the Ghosts), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 160.

that they would extend their scope by covering other philosophical schools as well, an inevitable development which evolved from what Yu Ying-shih called the "inner logic."⁶² The leading scholars in the Qing dynasty such as Qian Daxin (1728-1804), Wang Niansun (1744-1832) and Wang Zhong (1745-1794) were good examples of those who had carried their study beyond the Confucian classics into *Xun Zi* and *Mo Zi*. In the mean time, some well-accepted Confucian classics failed to meet the challenge of other historical data. The cry for facts and conviction of "no belief without evidence" lead the Qing scholars gradually onto a path that was the opposite of what they expected to travel. Most of the historians during this time, however, were not yet willing to doubt antiquity. Not until the late Qing period did it become gradually fashionable to question the genuineness of some editions of the Confucian texts. Zhang Binglin, for example, used other philosophical schools' work to doubt the authenticity of certain classics.⁶³ Kang Youwei, another outstanding thinker of the time, claimed that the classics of Old Text School which had been so popular during the last two thousand years, were invented by Liu Xin (45 B.C - A.D. 23) and Zheng Xuan (127-200) and had no connection with Confucius.⁶⁴ Their works eventually inspired other scholars to start questioning the authenticity of some Confucian texts.

Although Zhang and Kang's study went beyond the scope of Qing *kaozheng* scholarship, they had no intention of challenging Confucianism. Strictly speaking,

⁶²Yu Ying-shih: "Preface," *NPCB*, vol. 1, p. 64.

⁶³For a discussion, see Wang Fanshen: *Lun Zhang Taiyan de Sixiang* (A Study of Zhang Taiyan's Thought) (Taipei: Shibao Chuban Gongsì, 1985), pp. 26-29.

⁶⁴For a discussion, see Wang Fanshen: *Gushi Bian Yundong de Xingqi* (The Rise of the Movement of Discriminating Ancient History) (Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsì 1987), pp. 100-106.

they offered no great breakthrough. As Yu Ying-shih put it, the late Qing scholars failed to produce a new “paradigm” as Hu had done.⁶⁵ For Kang, his main purpose was to revive “real” Confucian studies. His doubt was limited to the Old Text School, not the New Text School which he used as a tool for his political reform. Zhang, on the other hand, had never abandoned his Old Text belief. He was a defender of the Old Text tradition and considered himself another Confucian great disciple in his later life.

Although Hu followed the path of the Qing evidential school, he had no relations with any Confucian orthodox school. Consequently he was under no obligation to stick to certain teaching, and thus was able to look at China’s past from a critical distance. Unlike Zhang and Kang who only paid attention to certain aspects of Confucian texts, Hu was able to view the Chinese past as a whole. Hu recalled later:

(I)n those days my first volume was a pioneer. It brought out at least one new feature, namely, the treatment of all schools of thought on an equal basis. To give to such non-Confucian schools or anti-Confucian schools as Mo Zi the same status as Confucius himself was, in a sense, a minor revolution in 1919.⁶⁶

Hu did not overstate his case. For a thousand years Chinese historians had made other schools of thought subordinated to Confucianism. The so-called history of Chinese philosophy was mainly the history of Confucianism. Ren Jiyu, a leftist philosopher, pointed out:

Hu shook the area, that is, the studies of classics which feudalistic scholars dared not touch. The classics belonged to members of the feudal system. One could only advocate them, explain them, follow them and was not allowed to

⁶⁵Yu Ying-shih: “Preface,” *NPCB*, vol. 1, pp. 71-72.

⁶⁶*KSZZ*, p.216.

question them. Emperor Yao, Emperor Sun, Emperor Yu, King Wen, King Wu and Confucius were all sages. One could only worship them and could not criticise them. This was a rule of feudalistic society. . . . Hu's *History of philosophy* made one feel fresh and new -- The main reason was that he neither spoke for the sages nor annotated the classics. On the contrary, the book touched the forbidden area of the feudalistic period. He viewed Confucianism as similar to other schools of philosophy. It can be studied and criticised. This was a great change.⁶⁷

By treating all philosophers on an equal basis, Hu finally managed to break away from the formal as well as the ideological constraints of the Chinese philosophical tradition. One of his noteworthy achievements was that Hu undertook fruitful research into *Mo Zi*. Mohism was persecuted under the Qin Empire together with Confucianism. Its books were burned together with Confucian works. After the founding of the Han Empire (B.C. 206 B.C-A.D. 7), Confucianism soon re-established itself. But Mohism, which had been attacked by the Confucians, was never revived. Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties in general concurred with Mencius, who had vehemently denounced Mo Zi's theory of universal love as demolishing the distinction between the devotion to one's father and that to the father of everyone else. "Mo Zi, one of the greatest souls China had ever produced," Hu remarked, "had never had a biographer until the 20th century." Living from 500 to 420 B.C. and enjoying much popularity during his time, Mo Zi was given only 24 words in the *Historical Records (Shi Ji)* by the famous Han historian Sima Qian.⁶⁸ Hu's research into *Mo Zi* was greatly facilitated by the insights he gained from his comparisons of Western and Chinese philosophical

⁶⁷Ren Jiyu: "Xuexi Zhongguo Zhexue Shi de Sanshi Nian" (Learning History of Chinese Philosophy in the Last Thirty Years), *Zhexue Yanjiu* (Philosophical Studies) 9 (1979): 40-41.

⁶⁸Hu Shi: *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, p. 55.

thought. By fully assimilating his predecessors' critical interpretations of lexical commentaries on Mo Zi's works, Hu Shi concluded that the chief ideological attribute of *Mo Zi* was its special emphasis on both verification and logical conception. He then proceeded to make a critical interpretation of and lexical commentary on the texts in "Mo Bian," the most difficult chapter in *Mo Zi*, by drawing on knowledge of Western logic and Indian Hetuciday (*vinming*) philosophy. Hu's work greatly contributed to expounding Mohist epistemology and logic and succeeded in retrieving the splendour of the Mohists.⁶⁹

As a pioneering work, the *History of Chinese Philosophy* inevitably exhibits shortcomings. As Jin Yuelin (1895-1984) pointed out, Hu's book "is like an introduction book written by an American scholar."⁷⁰ Yet in more than seventy years since its publication, students still read it for its information and insights. Indeed, Hu's influence on modern Chinese humanity study was profound. Exemplifying the critical method in his research, Hu's works exerted a considerable influence on Chinese scholars. His accomplishment was not limited by the subject itself -- Hu concentrated his research on philosophical works, and at the same time demonstrated a new standard of modern Chinese scholarship.

⁶⁹Liang Qichao, who was also an expert on Mo Zi, had especially praised Hu's research on Mo Zi. In the preface to his book *Mo Zi Xuean* (A Study of Mo Zi's Philosophy), Liang admitted frankly: "Mr Hu has done excellent research on Mo Zi's philosophy. He has shown original ideas on Mo Zi in his History of Philosophy. Chapter 7 of this book owes a great deal to his ideas." See Liang Qichao: *Mo Zi Xuean* (A Scholarly Record on Mo Zi's) (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1935), p. 2. It is noteworthy that *Mo Zi Xuean* has about sixty thousand words, with thirty thousand words in Chapter 7. Evidently, Liang was greatly influenced by Hu Shi.

⁷⁰Jin Yuelin: "Feng Youlan *Zhongguo Zhexue Shi* Shenchao Baogao" (A Report on Feng Youlan's History of Chinese Philosophy), in Feng Youlan: *Sansongtang Quanjī*, vol. 2, p. 379.

2.22 The Study of Fiction

The final section of this chapter is devoted to Hu's study of Chinese fiction in which Hu produced another new paradigm. Fiction as a literature genre was ignored and viewed with contempt by most traditional Chinese scholars and historians. The traditional classificatory system applied to ancient Chinese books took the Confucian scripture as the only canonised texts. The four traditional groupings of Chinese writings (*sibu*) -- the Confucian classics (*jing*), history (*shi*), philosophy (*zi*) and belles-lettres (*ji*) -- not only represented a four-fold division, but also a hierarchical order of arrangement judged according to higher and lower value ratings. For instance, *The Book of Poetry* was listed as a classic (*jing*) in *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiya*o (Essential Summary of the Contents of the Four Bibliothecae). Writings which fell within the scope of literature were only included in the last grouping of the Four bibliothecae of the *ji* division, while the *ji* itself was also restrained by the traditional concept of values. *Ci* and *qu* lyric and poetic genres were classified as part of the literary collection division but dramatic *zaju* were excluded. *Xiaoshuo* was listed in the *zi* (philosophy) division. This genre included *A New Account of Anecdotes* (*Shi Shuo Xinyu*) and *Court Hearsay and Folk Events of the Sui and Tang Dynasties* (*Chao Ye Qian Zai*), from which such famous novels as *Journey to the West* (*Xi You Ji*) and *Water Margin* (*Shui Hu Zhuan*) were excluded. Most works of *xiaoshuo* were excluded from the category of literature because they were arose from popular culture, using everyday life and folk heroes as their materials.

There were many policies against popular literary genres throughout Chinese history. For example, after the foundation of the Ming dynasty in the fourteenth century, the government imposed a ban on fiction, drama and balladry. Emperor Kangxi, the founder of Qing dynasty, also promulgated a strict and perpetual prohibition against fiction and balladry in 1709. Despite the repeated decrees of suppression, popular literary genres could hope to enjoy some tolerance on the part of the dominant culture. As pointed out by Henry Zhao: "Except for some short periods, there was not much effective suppression of the subculture in China so long as these discursive activities stayed in subordination, and not even much complaint if it remained in the oral sphere."⁷¹

Nevertheless, the generic hierarchy of Chinese culture could not stand any confusion. Though fiction as a genre appeared early in Chinese history, it was not a subject of serious scholarly research. Lu Xun's observation was certainly correct: "Novelists were not considered members of literary circles until 1917 when the literary revolution movement was launched."⁷²

Hu published sixty-one articles commenting on various aspects of Chinese fiction. His research on fiction successfully paved a new path in the study of many worthy novels. Fiction, to Hu, became a significant form for social and literary historians because of its ability to record and preserve, in vivid language and images. For example, in commenting on *A Marriage that is a Warning to the World* (*Xingshi*

⁷¹For a further discussion on the cultural status of popular literary genres, see Henry Y. H. Zhao: *The Uneasy Narrator: Chinese Fiction From the Traditional to the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 182.

⁷²Lu Xun: "Caoxie Jiao Xiaoyin" (Foreword to *Straw Sandals*), *Lu Xun Quanjí* (Complete Works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981), vol. 6, p. 20.

Yinyuan), Hu said the work “is a most valuable socio-historical record. All its most abominable perversions, most hopeless predicaments, and drollest situations are highly significant socio-historical facts.”⁷³ He predicted that it would be necessary for future scholars to embark on a career of research into the history of the social customs, education, economy and even politics of the seventeenth century through studying the novel. Vernacular fiction, in Hu’s mind, was closer to real life and was thus able to record and express its pulses better than the aloof, dead and dry official history.

Hu’s first serious attempt at the reinterpretation of Chinese fiction appeared as an article entitled “Textual Research on Water Margin” (*Shui Hu Zhuan Kaozheng*) which was completed in July 1920. Together with “Later Research on Water Margin” (*Shui Hu Zhuan Houkao*) which was published a year later, Hu’s research marked the beginnings of the textual clarification of this ancient literary classic. *Water Margin*, according to Hu, is outstanding for its language, plot and structure. However, it took a long period of gestation before it reached its present form. Hu’s investigation shows that *Water Margin* first took the popular oral narrative form. It then developed to prompt-book. With the passage of time, it grew to form of fiction based on a more or less consistent plot, and finally to its novel form consisting of seventy chapters written by someone using the name Shi Nai’an. Hu’s specific research method, exemplified by his pioneering article, of tracing the metamorphosis of a phenomenon through every phase of its history has long served researchers for the methodological insights it provides. This historical method or the

⁷³Hu Shi: *Xingshi Yinyuan Kaozheng* (Textual Research on *A Marriage that is a Warning to the World*), *HSZPJ*, vol. 17, p. 71.

“grandfather-grandson method,” as he sometimes called it, is a historical investigation of the causality of the existence of the object. According to this methodology there are never any isolated systems of doctrines. There is always a “grandfather” before them and a “grandson” after them, the grandfather is the cause and the grandson the result. Only by grasping the “cause” and the “result,” can sequence of events be made clear. Therefore, causality dominates the historical process of the development of things in time and space. Hu believed that from the perspective of historical evolution, any object of research in the social sciences was in a constant state of flux. Its foundation lay in its historical situation and specific social environment. He cited Duan Yucai (1735-1815), a leading scholar in the Qing dynasty, who said that in studying traditional scholarship, “one must restore the truth of Han to Han, the truth of Wei-Jin to Wei-Jin, the truth of Tang, Song, Ming and Qing to Tang, Song, Ming and Qing, . . . restore to each its true original nature.”⁷⁴ By applying this principle, *Water Margin*, according to Hu, “did not fall from the sky. It is the quintessence of a four hundred years’ evolution of the Story of Mt. Liang between the early southern Song Dynasty and the mid Ming Dynasty.” He continued:

Most historical novels originated from popular folklore. After going through long evolution, they become novels with complicated and characteristic figures. . . . To study these novels, one must begin from the original, and understand the long process and changes made by the story-tellers.⁷⁵

Gu Jiegang later stressed that it was Hu’s first article on *Water Margin* that aroused his own enthusiasm for exposing falsehoods in ancient Chinese

⁷⁴Hu Shi: “Guoxue Jikan Fankan Xuanyan” (Opening Remarks for the National Study Quarterly), *HSZPJ*, vol. 7, p. 9.

⁷⁵*KSZZ*, p. 238.

historiography. Encouraged by Hu's works, Gu later led the National Studies Movement in the 1930s and 1940s by founding and editing the famous journal *Gushi Bian* (Critiques of Ancient History), in which he discovered the legendary nature of many ancient works. In his study of the authenticity of ancient books, Gu learned, with Hu's method, to explain why a book was intercalated or forged in later years. This endeavour subsequently led to Gu's creation of his famous "Stratification Theory" (*Cenglei Zaocheng Shuo*)⁷⁶

Hu Shi's study on *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, was even more memorable. To begin with, there was one school of late nineteenth and early twentieth century critics of the novel known as *Suoyin Pai* (Believers of "Roman-à-clef" Theory). Endeavouring to bring out that which was "hidden" and to guess the real purpose of the novel, the members of this group variously interpreted *The Dream of the Red Chambers* as a political satire, a love story of the Imperial Court, and a patriotic dirge for the fallen Ming dynasty. Developers of the allegorical approach such as Cai Yuanpei, Zhang Xinzhu, Yao Xie, Hong Qiufan and Sun Chufu, argued that the novel is a *ying shu* or shadow-book, and that every character is a *yingzi* (reflection, or shadow of another). This school emerged in the late nineteenth century and enjoyed strong popularity. However, after Hu Shi published his "A Textual Study on *The Dream of the Red Chambers*" (*Hong Lou Meng Kaozheng*) the whole approach to understanding the novel was altered.⁷⁷ Having spent great efforts on gathering and examining information about the life of the

⁷⁶Wang Fansheng: *Gushi Bian Yudong de Xingqi*, pp. 40-45.

⁷⁷For a discussion on *Suoyin Pai*'s theories, see Lucien Miller: *Masks of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber: Myth, Mimesis, and Persona* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1975), p. 7.

author, Hu was able to point out that *The Dream of the Red Chambers* was an autobiography of its author, the eighteenth century writer Cao Xueqin (1715-1763). Hu's research ushered in a new epoch for *The Dream of the Red Chambers* studies and swept aside centuries of guesswork concerning this marvellous work by the followers of *Suoyin Pai*, as pointed out by Gu Jieang:

The study of *The Dream of the Red Chambers* has lasted for a hundred years without any achievement. Less than a year after Mr. Hu's "A Textual Study on *The Dream of the Red Chambers*," we have this wonderful publication (i.e. Yu Pingbo's book). This is not because our predecessors did not have clear minds or we are more smart. The only difference is that we have new methodology. . . . I hope that we will learn from this experience and realise the importance of the new methodology.⁷⁸

It was the emergence of Hu's treatise that enabled *The Dream of the Red Chambers* studies to become a genuine academic pursuit. Hu not only became the founder of *Xin Hongxue* (New School of *The Dream of the Red Chambers* Studies), his studies of *The Dream of the Red Chambers* have also become the dominant paradigm for the next half century's research on China's greatest novel.⁷⁹

Hu's impact on novel studies was enormous. He opened up the history of modern literature, as well as providing a new interpretation of the history of traditional literature. These two aspects were linked and intertwined. Some might argue that Hu's research on fiction was nothing more than textual criticism. He did,

⁷⁸Gu Jieang: "Xu" (Preface), in Yu Pingbo: *Hong Lou Meng Bian* (Critiques of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) (Hong Kong: Wenxin Shudian 1972), pp. 11-12.

⁷⁹For a summary view of scholarly research on the novel in the twentieth century, see Yu Ying-shih: "Jindai Hongxue de Fazhan yu Hongxue Geming" (The Development of the Studies of *Hong Lou Meng* and Its Breakthrough) in *Lishi yu Sixiang* (History and Thoughts) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1976), pp. 381-417. See also *NPCB*, vol. 2, p. 432.

however, provide the conscious element to this new literary movement and enable new intellectuals to realise their historical mission. As mentioned earlier, the Qing scholars' quest for truth began with a fundamental belief in the existence of some near-sacred, unchangeable Confucian texts. Their doubt regarding these texts originated in a quarrel over which one was the real one, not over the belief that everything changes and nothing is sacred. Hu, on the contrary, felt strongly that he was accomplishing the historical mission of showing the world that the canons and the novels were similar in importance and respectability, and that belief could be established only after a careful search for its validity. Without this conscious effort and realisation, the objective of the New Cultural Movement could not have been achieved. It was Hu who contributed most to this conscious element. Those who argue about the importance of Hu in the Chinese Renaissance often neglect the significance of this factor.

Chapter III

From Pragmatism to Scientism

3.1 Hu Shi and China's Response to John Dewey

Hu Shi is best remembered for the role he played in the Literary Revolution and the reformation of Chinese historiography during the period of the New Culture Movement. As discussed in the previous chapters, his achievements could be traced back to his adherence to John Dewey's "method of science," which Hu had somewhat successfully integrated into Chinese thought. The fame that he gained brought great confidence to his continuous advocacy of scientific method in the later years. In an era when all Chinese thinkers looked to Western ideas for inspiration, Hu Shi was at the frontier introducing Deweyan philosophy. It proved to have a profound impact on his generation.

In March 1919, Dewey was invited to lecture in Japan. On learning of this, Hu Shi and others of Dewey's former Chinese students at Columbia University such as Jiang Menglin (1886-1964) and Tao Xingzhi (1891-1964), raised sponsorship and arranged a visiting professorship for him in China. Dewey arrived in Shanghai on 1 May 1919, three days before the outbreak of the May Fourth Student Demonstration. He stayed in China for over two years, based in Beijing and making tours throughout the country. He delivered one hundred and fifty lectures which touched mostly on philosophy, education and politics. He gave the lectures at a time

when the intellectual climate in Chinese philosophy circles was highly invigorating. His lectures were eagerly awaited. Each was interpreted in Chinese, and five editions of his different lectures soon appeared in Chinese, and one went through ten printings before he left China.¹ Hu Shi had been the prime mover behind the invitation to bring Dewey to China. He made arrangements for Dewey's speeches and travels during the entire two years of Dewey's visit. Before Dewey's arrival, Hu Shi gave a series of four lectures on the philosophy of Pragmatism. These four lectures were later published in several leading Beijing journals. By June 1919, Hu Shi had published three other articles on Dewey's philosophy and educational theory.

In his speech in a farewell party for Dewey, Hu Shi said that since China's encounter with the West, no other Western thinker had had such a direct influence on the world of Chinese thought.² This judgement was correct at the time, for infatuation with Pragmatism was very ardent in those years. In the time Dewey was in China, apart from Hu Shi, John Dewey's other students also published biographical sketches of him, pictures, and introductory articles. Chen Duxiu, the editor of *New Youth*, who was one of the founding members of the Chinese Communist Party, praised John Dewey highly. In a remark in *New Youth*, he said: "We believe that the precondition for the modernity of China is respect for natural science and Pragmatic philosophy and not superstitious belief."³ A month before

¹For general accounts of Dewey and China, see Thomas Berry: "Dewey's Influence in China," in *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence*, ed. by John Blewett (New York: Forham University Press, 1960), pp. 109-235.

²Hu Shi: "Duwei Xiansheng yu Zhongguo" (Mr. Dewey and China), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 151.

³Chen Duxiu: "Xin Qingnian Xuanyan" (A Remark of *New Youth*), *Chen Duxiu Wencun*, p. 245.

Dewey left China an article in the New York *Chinese Students Monthly* described some of the fervour surrounding his visit:

Mr. Dewey's career in China is one of singular success. From the time of his arrival to the present, continual ovation follows his footprints. Bankers and editors frequent his residences, teachers and students flock to his classroom. Clubs compete to entertain him, to hear him speak; newspapers vie with each other in translating his latest utterances. His speeches and lectures are eagerly read, his biography has been elaborately written. The serious-minded comment on his philosophy; the light-hearted remember his time.⁴

Dewey's theory came at a time when the situation inevitably demanded change and when people were ready and looking outwards for solution and remedies for such change. His greatest contribution to these changes, however, was a more reflective method of thinking, and a method of criticism and valuation, rather than a new programme of action to replace the old. His Pragmatism provided the movement with just what it needed: an effective method with which to criticise and to re-evaluate Chinese culture on the one hand, and a stimulus to the critical selection and adaptation of Western culture on the other. In the eyes of the young Chinese students, Dewey virtually embodied the new thought they were so desperately searching for. To them, Dewey represented a new hope for intellectual enlightenment and guidance.

Many ideas were flooding into China during the beginning of the century. However, it is important to bear in mind that most schools of thought did not successfully attract Chinese intellectuals' attention. Shortly after Dewey's visit, the English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, also came to China. Like Dewey, Russell was

⁴Quoted in Barry Keenan: *The Deweyan Experiment in China: Education Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 34.

an advocate of the “scientific method in philosophy.” Despite four or five of Russell’s works being translated into Chinese, he never caused the same sensation as his American colleague. Dewey neither wrote the elegant prose of Russell nor lived Russell’s colourful life. In a general sense, Dewey had none of Russell’s skill at making complicated ideas accessible and entertaining. As pointed out by Alan Ryan, Dewey “was always more at his ease in front of his typewriter than in front of another human being.”⁵ Dewey’s ideas, however, were more easily assimilated by a Chinese audience than were Russell’s. Dewey’s liberalism was holistic; it stressed community values, emphasised the child’s ties to his or her local culture and community, and saw the school as a natural extension of the family. To an audience brought up on Confucius’s ideals of family and community loyalty, Dewey’s liberalism was much more attractive than the fiercely individualistic liberalism of someone like Russell, who struck his Chinese hosts as a very distinguished creature from another planet.

Professor Yu Ying-shih offers us an excellent analysis of Dewey’s popularity. According to Yu, since the basis of Russell’s philosophy was logic and mathematics, Russell was destined to face more difficulty in encountering his Chinese audience. For the same reason, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant suffered the same fate. Building their philosophies on epistemology, Kant and Russell represented mainstream Western philosophy, yet logic and epistemology “were the weakest points in the tradition of Chinese philosophy”⁶ In contrast, there is a fundamental similarity between Dewey’s philosophy and the mainstream Confucian tradition in

⁵ Alan Ryan: *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, p. 52.

⁶ Yu Ying-shih: “Preface,” *NPCB*, vol. 1, p. 48.

China. Most Western philosophers saw it as their major responsibility to explain the world, whereas Dewey defined his duty as a philosopher in terms of changing and bringing order to the world. The former were interested in metaphysical issues somewhat detached from social reality, while the latter argued that philosophy should shift its attention away from metaphysics to social issues such as politics, education and morals. Admittedly, the mainstream Confucian tradition also had a deep-rooted interest in social affairs. The characteristic of Chinese philosophy is that it does not view the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but for solving problems "of this life, in this world." The unity of theory and practice and of order and construction were high priorities in both Confucianism and Pragmatism. Yu concludes:

The ideas (such as those offered by Dewey) were easier to comprehend by the Chinese Intellectuals. First most Chinese did not understand the abstract concept of Platonic "transcendent reality." The later developments of Western philosophy on epistemological and metaphysical questions were also foreign to the Chinese mind. By abandoning these questions, Dewey freed his Chinese audience from the obstacles they encountered in their study of Western philosophy. Second, Dewey emphasised the unity of practice and theory, and the unity of subjectivity and objectivity in human life. This approach was very close to the Chinese view of the world. Third, Chinese intellectual tradition placed a strong emphasis on ordinary human affairs. The so-called "philosopher's issues" were the products of Western minds. Fourth, Dewey stressed the control of the environment and the adjustment to change for the benefit of man. This was easily accepted by the Chinese who were strongly influenced at the time by the theory of evolution. Fifth, Dewey's emphasis on the social effect of theories also came very close to the Chinese intellectual tradition. Sixth, Dewey's theory of education, once very influential in America, came to China at a time when it was essential to offer new education. . . . The thought pattern represented by Dewey's philosophy comes relatively close to the basic thinking structure of the Chinese tradition."⁷

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 49.

Dewey concurred with most Chinese philosophers and intellectuals including Wang Yangming (1472-1529), the great Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Ming Dynasty, and Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary and statesman who was Dewey's contemporary, that knowledge should be relevant to concrete problems of living. Like Wang and Sun, Dewey also denounced theories that separated knowing and doing, theory and practice. For this reason, he was able to share with the Chinese certain areas of concern, and exercise an influence over their society.⁸

Hu claimed himself to be the spokesman in China for Dewey's idea, and his essays often sound like Dewey. Hu was by no means Dewey's only Chinese disciple; but after his return to China in 1917 he was probably the most celebrated and widely read populariser of Dewey's ideas. Dewey's association with Hu may well have bestowed upon the former a prestige he would otherwise have lacked in this alien setting. As observed by Sidney Hook, Dewey was a poor lecturer, unable to look his audience in the eye, unequipped with rhetorical tricks, and cursed with a dull, drawling delivery:

As a teacher, Dewey seemed to me to violate his own pedagogical principles. He made no attempt to motivate or arouse the interest of his auditors, to relate problems to their own experiences, to use graphic, concrete illustrations in order to give point to abstract and abstruse positions. He rarely provoked a lively participation and response from students, in the absence of which it is difficult to determine whether genuine learning or even comprehension has taken place. . . . Dewey spoke in a husky monotone, and although there was a sheet of notes on the desk at which he was usually seated, he never seemed to consult it. He folded it into many creases as he slowly spoke. Occasionally he would read from a book to which he was making a critical reference. His discourse was far from fluent. There were pauses and sometimes long lapses as he gazed out of the window or above the heads of his audience.⁹

⁸For a discussion on why Dewey's ideas were more easily assimilated by a Chinese audience, see also Li Moying: "Hu Shi and His Deweyan Reconstruction of Chinese History," Ph.D. Dissertation (Boston University, 1990), pp. 267-271.

⁹Sidney Hook: *Out of Step* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 82-83.

Chinese audiences were attracted to John Dewey's lectures because he was introduced by Hu Shi as his teacher and a great philosopher. Hu Shi's reputation as a leading personality in the May Fourth Movement was firmly established before Dewey arrived in China. Though still under thirty, Hu was accepted by academic circles as a perceptive interpreter of China's intellectual inheritance and was well regarded as the leader of the May Fourth Movement.

Hu Shi of course realised the difficulties in translating the essentials of Pragmatism into terms that could be easily understood and be used by the Chinese. However, he had already solved some of these difficulties as early as 1917 before Dewey came to China. He successfully applied Pragmatic approach in his literary reform. His doctoral dissertation, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient Chinese*, was another attempt in this direction, and it set the pattern for much of his later works.

Two weeks before Dewey's arrival in China, Hu Shi published an introductory essay "Pragmatism" (*Shiyan Zhuyi*). Hu demonstrated Dewey's five-stage schema: "(i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition; (iii) suggestion of a possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief."¹⁰ The examples Hu Shi gave show how far he demonstrated the relationship between Chinese experience and scientific method. Hu began his first example by quoting Cheng Yi's famous words. "Learning begins with thought." Hu said that Chen Yi should add another sentence by saying that

¹⁰John Dewey: *How We Think* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1910), p. 72.

“Learning begins with thought. Thought begins with doubt.” Hu then demonstrated the second to fifth step by using a philological puzzle in the Qing dynasty. The example of the second step is that when Bi Yuan (1730 – 1797) became confused by the presence of the words “*ju ye wu*” (举也物) in the sentence of “*pi ye zhe, ju ye wu er yi ming ye*” (辟也者, 举也物而以明也), he immediately interpreted “*ye*” (也) as a redundant word. This sentence later attracted the attention of Wang Niansun (1744-1832). Wang agreed with Bi on the location of the problem but was not satisfied with Bi’s solution. Wang thus went to the third step by putting forward his own hypothesis. His hypothesis was that the word “*ye*” (也) was a misprint for “*ta*” (他). Wang later went to the fourth step by converting his hypothesis into a suggested explanation. In doing so, Wang found that there are many “*ye*” (也) written as “*ta*” (他) in the book *Mo Zi*. Subsequently, Wang was able to reach the conclusion that “*ye*” (也) is written as “*ta*” (他).¹¹

To make it simple, Hu reduced this Pragmatic approach to three experimental steps: (i) Start from concrete facts and situations; (ii) All theories, ideas and knowledge are but hypotheses to be proved and not taken for granted; (iii) All theories and ideas should be tested by experience. Experience is the only touchstone of truth.¹² In application, it consisted of only ten words: “Be bold in hypothesising, and be meticulous in proving it.” (*Dadan de jiashe, xiaoxin de qiuzheng*).¹³ Hu referred to this “ten-word-axiom” elsewhere as the scientific “laboratory method.” At the beginning of the 1920s, when Hu’s authority and his reputation were close to

¹¹Hu Shi: “Shiyan Zhuyi,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 94-98..

¹²Hu Shi: “Duwei Xiansheng yu Zhongguo” (Mr. Dewey and China), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 152-153.

¹³Hu Shi: “Jieshao Wo Ziji de Sixiang” (Introducing My Own Thought), *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 17.

their zenith, his ten-word-axiom was heard everywhere. People assumed it as “the real spirit of modern science.”¹⁴

It is true that during the past centuries China had lagged behind the Western world in its exploration of natural science. However, Hu sincerely believed it was an exaggeration to say that there was no science in the East. He argued that in the historical development of science, the scientific spirit or attitude of mind and the scientific method were far more important than any practical or empirical results of the astronomer, the calendar-reformer, the alchemist, the physician, or the horticulturist. Understanding science in such a way made it possible for Hu to find a congenial group of people with whom Chinese might organically link the systems of thought of modern Europe and America.

Three major groups of thinkers, according to Hu, were representatives of the scientific tradition in China. The first group were the early Confucians. One of the outstanding features of the Confucian tradition was its encouragement of independent thought. In his opinion, Confucius and Socrates had many points in common; for example, Hu said, Confucius, like Socrates, did not consider himself a wise man, but only a man who loved knowledge. Hu claimed that there was a “Socratic tradition” in the traditional school of Confucius that comprised free questions and answers, free discussion, independent thinking, scepticism, and an eager and dispassionate search for knowledge. Confucius apparently wanted no docile disciples who would feel pleased with everything he said. He wanted to encourage them to doubt and raise objections. This spirit of doubt and questioning,

¹⁴Ai Siqi: “Ershi’er Nian Lai zhi Zhongguo Zhexue Sixiang” (Trends in Chinese Philosophy over the Past Twenty-two Years) in *Ai Siqi Wenji* (Collected Writings of Ai Siqi) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe), vol. 1, p. 62.

Hu claimed, was best shown in Mencius who openly declared that to accept the whole *Book of History* (*Shang Shu*) as trustworthy is worse than to have no *Book of History* at all, and that, of the essay "Wucheng" (a section of *Book of History*), he would accept no more than three pages.¹⁵ The second group was represented by Hu's favourite philosopher Wang Chong who carried on the Confucian spirit of courageous doubt and intellectual honesty, and developed it into the fight of human reason against ignorance and falsehood, of creative doubt and constructive criticism against superstitious and blind authority. Wang's motto, "to check falsehoods against facts and to expose them by setting up proofs," argued Hu, "constitutes the procedure of science."¹⁶ The third group, the Neo-Confucians, who according to Hu, started out their movement with the ambitious slogan of "investigation of the reason of all things and extension of human knowledge to the utmost" but which ended in improving and even perfecting a critical method of historical research and thereby opening up a new age or revival of classical learning. The most important thinker of this time, Zhu Xi, was an experienced scholar in textual and semantic researches. His great achievements had two facets. In the first place, Zhu was never tired of preaching the importance of doubt in thinking and investigation -- doubt in the sense of a "tentatively formed doubting thesis"; doubt, not as an end in itself, but as a perplexity to be overcome, as a puzzling problem to be solved, as a challenge to be satisfactorily met. In the second place, he had the courage to apply this technique of doubt to the major Confucian scriptures.¹⁷

¹⁵Hu Shi: "The Scientific Spirit and Method in Chinese Philosophy" in Charles E. Moore: *The Chinese Mind* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1959), p. 109.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 118.

The Neo-Confucian Movement was dominant in Chinese thinking for eight hundred years, beginning with philosophy and later extending to other humanistic and historical studies, such as textual criticism, semantics, history, historical geography and archaeology. For the general trend of the period, Hu had this to say:

The only dependable tool of those great men, was their strict method of patiently collecting, comparing, and classifying what they recognised as facts or evidence, and an equally strict method of applying formulated generalisations to the test of particular instances within the classified groups. It was indeed meticulous application of a rigorous method that enabled Wu Yu and Zhu Xi in the twelfth century, Cheng Di and Gu Yanwu in the seventeenth century, and their successors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to carry on their systematic study of Chinese phonetic problems and to develop it into something of a science -- into a body of knowledge answering to the rigorous canons of evidence, exactitude, and logical systematisation.¹⁸

Hu asked what the historical significance of this spirit and method of exact impartial inquiry was. The answer was straightforward. According to Hu, it succeeded "in replacing an age of subjective, idealistic, and moralising philosophy" and "in creating a new "Revival of learning" (1600-1900) based on disciplined and dispassionate research."¹⁹ What Hu meant by "Revival of learning" was the Qing *kaozheng* scholarship movement.

Hu Shi often lamented that China did not enjoy an age of natural science. He insisted, however, that the Qing scholars had successfully applied the scientific method to the study of the Confucian scriptures. It was this movement which provided Hu with the best example to demonstrate the relationship between Chinese experience and modern attitudes, and to establish the sense of "historical continuity" that would render the values of "modern" civilisation "continuous" and "congenial"

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 128.

with China's past. Hu especially mentioned Qing scholars' circumspect use of evidence and the types of evidence they considered admissible. He also repeatedly expressed his admiration for the scientific spirit with which they dealt with scholarly questions.

Since he paid extensive tribute to Qing scholars on their method of textual criticism and specifically acknowledged their contributions in several essays, it is not surprising that he criticised Liang in his diary entry for 15 February 1922, when the latter downgraded the status of Qing *kaozheng* scholarship. Hu Shi was against the transcendental principles embodied in neo-Confucianism of the Song and the Ming dynasties. He believed that Qing *kaozheng* scholarship was compatible with his faith in experimentalism.²⁰ Hu not only compared Qing *kaozheng* scholarship to the Renaissance in Europe but viewed the May Fourth Movement as the acme of the Chinese Renaissance. He did not want others to downgrade Qing *kaozheng* scholarship, for that would also mean the downgrading the May Fourth Movement. Ding Wenjiang once said that the Chinese Renaissance should be limited to Qing *kaozheng* scholarship. It should not include a literary revolution like the May Fourth Movement. Hu promptly answered: "I disagree."²¹

By revealing the scientific tradition in China, Hu carefully brought out a sense of continuity in thinking and methodology among the thinkers. He was equally careful to emphasise the "spirit" of what he believed to be the scientific heritage. Such a care was the result of Hu's awareness of the challenges and questions he was to face when he had to compare the Chinese scientific tradition with that of the

²⁰*YGMCSX*, vol. 16, pp. 113-115.

²¹*Ibid.*

West. He stated his intention in clear terms: "a great heritage of scientific spirit and method which makes us, sons and daughters of present-day China, feel not entirely at sea, but rather at home, in the new age of modern science."²²

Hu Shi deserved credit for his efforts to assimilate Deweyan Pragmatism into Chinese thinking. On the one hand, there are similarities in genetic method, experiment and the process of hypothesis and verification. On the other, the methods of Pragmatism were more advanced than the methods of the textual school and therefore, could be applied to all concrete social issues. These advanced methods, according to Hu, were the newest and highest form of scientific method. He said:

My essays in recent years, were guided by Pragmatism. I have only one thing in mind, that is to advocate a new method of thinking based on facts and verification. My proposal to replace the classical language with *baihua*, my study on Chinese philosophical history, my textual criticism on *Water Margin* and *The Dream of the Red Chambers*, and my research on the meaning of single words such as "*le*" (了) or "*men*" (们) are all following this direction. At this moment I discuss political issues. My intention is also to call political critics' attention to the method based on "facts and verification."²³

During the period of the New Culture Movement, the term "Science" or "Scientific method" became almost synonymous with modern civilisation. It had acquired an incomparable position of respect in China.²⁴ The journal *New Wave* carried in its preface a credo -- "The adoption of a critical spirit, scientific thinking, and a reformed rhetoric." *Young China* (*Shaonian Zhongguo*), established by the Young China Association, which began publishing in 1919, followed the same practice; the frontispiece of the journal carried the dedication to "social services

²²Hu Shi: "The Scientific Spirit and Method in Chinese Philosophy," p. 130.

²³Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu" (My Cross-roads), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 67-68.

²⁴Hu Shi: "Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu" (Preface to Science and Philosophy of Life), *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 2.

under the guidance of the scientific spirit in order to realise our ideal of creating a young China.” In both journals, Hu was the spiritual leader. Hu’s role in the advocacy of scientific method had profound influence on his generation. Even the most vehement critics of the New Culture Movement admitted Hu’s contributions. For example Xiong Shili (1885-1968), a well known cultural conservative, praised Hu in his advocacy of scientific method. Xiong noted: “In the period of the New Culture Movement, Mr. Hu Shi advocated scientific method. It was very important. Although Mr. Yan Fu was the first one who introduced logical method by translating *Elementary Lessons of Logic* written by William Jevons, the book was not popular. Only after the advocacy of Hu Shi, did the young generation start to pay attention to logical method. From that moment, the style of research experienced a great change.”²⁵ Ai Siqi (1910-1966), a Marxist and a sharp critic of Hu, also shared this view. He was most impressed by Hu’s advocacy of “respect for facts and evidence.”²⁶ For many intellectuals who were frustrated with China’s past, the scientific outlook and its presumed method provided by Hu offered models and programmes for the improvement of society itself. Although most of them were not entirely clear what scientific method was, they believed that only the acceptance of this scientific attitude could prepare Chinese for a more promising future.

²⁵Xiong Shili: “Jinian Beida Wushi Nian Xiaoqing” (In Commemoration of the Beijing University Fifty Anniversary), *Shili Li Yuyao Chuxu* (Sequel to Essential Sayings of Shili) (Taipei: Retian Chubanshe, 1971), p. 16.

²⁶Ai Siqi: “Ershi’er Nian Lai de Zhexue Sixiang” (Trends in Chinese Philosophy over the Past Twenty-two Years), in *Ai Siqi Wenji* (Collected Writings of Ai Siqi), vol. 1, p. 57.

3.2 The Development of Scientism in Modern China

The first wave of China's appreciation of science began after China's defeat by the British in the 1840 Opium War. This war proved to Chinese intellectuals that Western weaponry was superior to Chinese swords and spears. However, their response to the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing of 1842 was rather a mute one. Limited by experiences of "barbarian" invasions in the past, they interpreted China's defeat mainly in terms of the technological superiority of the West. Discussing China's foreign policy towards the West in 1842, the reform-minded scholar Wei Yuan (1794-1856) came to the conclusion that China would be able to control the barbarians only if she was resolved to learn their superior techniques: warships, firearms, and methods of training soldiers.²⁷ His reformism was still very much in the Confucian statecraft (*jingshi*) tradition, with no trace of Western influence. Two decades later, the prophetic reformer Feng Guifen (1809-1874) was among the earliest Chinese intellectuals to recognise the importance of Western learning to China's survival in the modern world. In his influential essay, "On the Adoption of Western Learning" (*Cai Xixue Yi*), he went beyond the ideas of Wei Yuan by pointing out that in order to learn the superior techniques of the barbarians, China must first grasp the fundamentals of Western learning including mathematics, mechanics, optics, chemistry, and other branches of the natural sciences. The prominent scholar-official Zhang Zhidong's (1837-1909) famous saying, "Chinese learning as fundamental principle, Western learning as practical application (*Zhong*

²⁷Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, eds.: *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 34.

xue wei ti, Xi xue wei yong), was clearly a crystallisation of the ideas originally developed in Feng Guifen's writings.²⁸ Zhang Zhidong's essential ideals of reform were presented in his widely read book, *Exhortation to Study (Quan Xue Pian)*. After Japan defeated China in the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 Zhang was impressed by the achievements of the Meiji Restoration in Japan. He began to reflect on not only Western technology, but also Western institutions including the school system, financial management, taxation methods, military preparedness, laws and statutes and industrial policies. Although Zhang, a generation younger than Feng, had more information, the two scholars had the same pattern of thought. Their faith in the traditional political and social order remained unshaken. Chinese ethics and Confucian teachings, they insisted, must continue to serve as the original foundation. Zhang's eight-character slogan served as the justification for reformists down to the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹

The thinker most instrumental in introducing modern Western concepts of science, philosophy, and political thought at the end of the nineteenth century was Yan Fu. As early as the mid-1890s, Yan tried to determine the essential difference between the two civilisations. For him the main contrast between China and the West was that Western culture "in intellectual matters detests falsehood and respects truth

²⁸Feng Guifen wrote in his essay "Caixi Pian" (On the Adoption of Western Knowledge): "If we let Chinese ethics and moral teachings serve as an original foundation, and let them be supplemented by the methods used by the various nations for attainment of prosperity and strength, would it not be the best of all procedures?" Translated in Ssu-yuTeng and John K. Fairbank, eds.: *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey*, p. 52.

²⁹For a thoughtful critique of the limitation of nineteenth-century Chinese efforts to separate Western "practical application" (*yong*) from Chinese "fundamental principles" (*ti*), see Joseph Levenson: *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 59-78.

(the term closest to scientific impartiality at that time) and in political matters subjects the private and personal to the majority (then the term closest to democracy).³⁰ Yan Fu had set the stage for the thinkers of the new century to accept the forward-looking position of the 1890s. Through his interpretative translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, Charles Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and William Jevon's *Elementary Lessons of Logic*, Yan galvanised a whole generation of Chinese intellectuals into a fury of reform-related activity.³¹

The storm of events at the turn of the century -- China's defeat by Japan in the war of 1894-1895, the scramble of imperialist powers for economic and territorial concessions in China in 1897-1898, the humiliating defeat of China by the "Eight Powers" during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, Japan's stunning victory over Russia in a war fought on Chinese territory in 1904-1905 -- demonstrated the inadequacy of China's self-strengthening endeavours and the real possibility that foreign nations might simply carve up China and bring its independent existence to an end. As a result, China turned from the search for a means to protect its traditional way of life to a quest for national power even at the expense of tradition. In yielding to the pressure of reform the court introduced many new measures. In 1905 the imperial examinations were abolished. New schools and new studies were planned to take its place. Students were sent abroad, principally to Japan, both by Beijing and by the provincial governments. In 1908 the court proposed the

³⁰D. W. Y. Kwok: *Scientism in Chinese Thought 1900-1950*, p. 6.

³¹For a detailed account of Yan Fu, see Benjamin I. Schwartz: *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

“constitutional principles” which looked forward to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy similar to Japan’s. However, these series of changes only paved the way for the revolutionaries whose intent was solely the elimination of the Manchus and dynastic politics.

The revolution of 1911 had replaced the imperial order with a shaky republic. On the one hand, few people knew what a Republic was, only that the emperor was replaced with a president. On the other hand, when both traditional political and moral orders collapsed after the fall of the monarchy, it became necessary to find new grounds for defending tradition. To make matter worse, this political and cultural crisis was further jeopardised by political opportunists, corrupt bureaucrats, and militarists who manipulated traditional Confucian elements for personal gains.

For many Chinese intellectuals, then, not only had a political revolution failed to save China from imperialist intrusion, but also corrupt politicians were clinging to Chinese tradition. Extremely disappointed, these intellectuals advocated changing the ideas of the people as the only solution. They claimed that not only Western science technology, laws and political institutions ought to be introduced, but also China’s philosophy, ethics and institutions ought to be thoroughly re-examined and modelled after those of the West. It was not half-hearted reforms or partial renovation which were being advocated, but a vast and fervent attempt to dethrone the very fundamentals of the old stagnant tradition, replacing it with a completely new culture.

It is interesting to note that the overwhelming endorsement of science was always accompanied by all around attacks on Chinese tradition. Scientism and iconoclasm seemed to always go hand in hand in China. Some Chinese thinkers

believe that iconoclasm has been a distinct phenomenon not only in China's intellectual history but also in the world.³² Iconoclasm has intellectual origins in China's tradition: all parts of consciousness are treated as a whole. It does not make sense to most Chinese who want to modernise the country to attack only parts of the Chinese tradition. The two seemingly opposite notions of iconoclasm and scientism are linked by a holistic and monistic understanding of the universe which is a characteristic of the Chinese tradition. Iconoclasm is the precondition for the emergence of scientism while scientism is a major by-product of iconoclasm. In answering charges against *New Youth* by conservatives, Chen Duxiu, its editor and one the most influential intellectuals in the period of the May Fourth Movement wrote:

They accused this magazine on the grounds that it intended to destroy Confucianism, the code of rituals, the "national quintessence," chastity of women, traditional ethics (loyalty, filial piety, and chastity), traditional arts (the Chinese opera), traditional religion (ghost and gods), and ancient literature, as well as old fashioned politics (privileges and government by men alone).

All of the charges are conceded. But we plead not guilty. We have committed the alleged crimes only because we supported the two gentlemen, Mr Democracy and Mr. Science. In order to advocate Mr. Democracy, we are obliged to opposed Confucianism, the codes of rituals, chastity of women, traditional ethic, and old-fashioned politics; in order to support Mr Science, we have to oppose traditional arts and traditional religion; and in order to support Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science, we are compelled to oppose the cult of the "national quintessence" and ancient literature. Let us then ponder dispassionately: has this magazine committed any crimes other than advocating Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science. If not, please do not solely reprove this magazine: the only way to be heroic and to solve the problem

³²Benjamin Schwartz's foreword in Yu-sheng Lin: *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditonalism in the May Fourth Era*, p. 5; Tu Weiming (Du Weiming): *Rujia Ziwo Yishi de Fansi* (A Reflection of the Self-consciousness of Confucianism) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1990), p. 244.

fundamentally is to oppose the two gentlemen, Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science.³³

In opposing Confucianism, Chen effectively popularised science by personifying it as “Mr. Science.” Together with “Mr. Democracy,” the two gentlemen were seen as guardians of modern civilisation. They were also seen as the two goals China should adopt in the process of modernisation. In later development, while there were strong opponents of democracy, who chose other forms of government as being more suitable for China, no one denied the significance of science or attempted to reject it.

As pointed out by Hu Shi:

During the last thirty years or so there is a name which has acquired an incomparable position of respect in China; no one, whether informed or ignorant, conservative or progressive, dares openly slight or jeer at it. The name is Science. The worth of this almost nation-wide worship is another question, But we can at least say that ever since the beginning of reformist tendencies [1890s] in China, there is not a single person who calls himself a modern man and yet dares openly to belittle Science.³⁴

Hu was right in making this statement. After half a century of debate, the prestige of science was not only firmly established, but its meaning much exaggerated. Science for Chinese intellectuals connoted not just new knowledge, but a method of reforming the traditional mode of thought. However, in the advocacy of science, Hu did not agree with Chen's adoption. In Hu's mind, by personifying science and democracy as Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy, it would be highly possible that a

³³Chen Duxiu: “Ben Zhi Zuian Dabian Shu” (Our Answer to the Charges against the Magazine), *Chen Duxiu Wencun*, pp. 242-243; The translation here is adopted from Chow Tse-tsung: *May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, p. 59.

³⁴Hu Shi: “Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 2. This translation is from D. W. Y. Kwok: *Scientism in Chinese Thought, 1900-1950*, p. 12.

new superstitious belief in them would emerge.³⁵ Chen believed that science could be a tool to rescue China but his descriptions of science were vague. Hu, on the other hand, had more profound understanding of the concept of science. What he advocated was scientific method and scientific spirit. By scientific method, Hu meant “love of the dispassionate search for truth,” the “interest in attempts to use the human reason critically and without prejudice”, the “ardour in disciplined intellectual inquiry,” and the “setting of standards for exact and impartial inquiry.”³⁶ In Hu’s mind, the fundamental axiom of this world view was methodological: scientific reasoning provides the sole guide to truth in all matters about which human beings may reliably know anything. Hu was consistent as far as his interpretation of science and its methods are concerned.

Although Chen and Hu had different understandings of science, they shared a common belief that the Chinese must bring science to bear upon problems they confronted. They shared an almost religious esteem for science as a corrosive to attack Chinese traditions that they regarded as backward superstitions. They both used science as a tool for dealing with problems of national salvation. Hu said:

Our main problem is national salvation. We must save our suffering people, save our half-dead people, save our half-dead culture. In the process of national salvation, whatever culture we find, if it is useful, we should fully adopt it.³⁷

In the name of national salvation, scientism profoundly touched the heart of Chinese intellectuals. In Hu’s mind, science would offer the only universal solution

³⁵Hu Shi: *Hu Shi Shou Gao* (Facsimiles of Manuscript of Hu Shi) (Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Hu Shi Jinianguan, 1970), vol. 9, pp. 501-504.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Hu Shi: “Jieshao Wo Ziji de Sixiang,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 12.

to whatever problems Chinese faced. The principal aim of introducing scientific method was to provide the unprejudiced understanding of the past so as to ensure China's survival in the future.

For most Chinese intellectuals, the great importance of scientific education lay in the training in mental discipline and objective attitude. Their advocacy of the scientific attitude was not an advocacy of science for its own sake. Given the decline of the Chinese historical tradition, along with the decay of Confucianism, Hu Shi and his friends seized upon the idea of the scientific method with special zeal, as a new style of reasoning capable of providing a clear guide to decisions for an uncharted future. For them, the progress of science was linked inextricably with the progress of humanity itself. They believed that the ideas, theoretical conclusions, and technological consequences of science had brought enormous benefit to society, both in terms of material abundance and enlightenment.

Such were the bases for the Chinese form of scientism. Scientism may be viewed as a matter of putting too high a value on science in comparison with other branches of learning or culture, as defined by Charlotte Furth, "the application of scientific concepts to other, unrelated areas of inquiry outside their own sphere of relevance."³⁸ Indeed, scientism has been pejorative in the West in the twentieth century. It has been taken to mean an exaggeration, or over-optimism regarding science.

The popularity of science and its newly acquired position as a value system owed much to the purposeful effort of its active promoters. It was estimated that

³⁸Charlotte Furth: *Ting Wen-chiang: Science and China's New Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 14.

within the span of twenty years at the beginning of the century, over one hundred “little magazines” appeared in China with the purpose of promoting science. The combined efforts of these magazines and organisations extended the influence of science among the literate segment of the population with the belief that all aspects of society could be understood by scientific method, and no system of thought was respectable if it was unable to be verified by this method. Though the definition or the lack of definition of science varied in degree from one person to another, the boundless power of science was well acknowledged in intellectual circles. “We may not easily and lightly admit that God is omnipotent,” said Hu, “but we certainly can believe that the scientific method is omnipotent, and the progress of the human race is without boundary.”³⁹

3.3 A Scientific Outlook on Life

The question facing Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth era was how the nation’s socio-political and cultural structure could be rejuvenated. The lack of self-confidence and the absence of an indigenous belief system in China contributed in no small degree to China’s slow pace in this re-establishment. With his belief that the vitality of society depended on individuals who were free and independent, Hu concluded that conservative China was urgently in need of a new philosophy of life.

³⁹Hu Shi: “Women duiyu Xiyang Wenming de Taidu” (Our Attitude towards the Modern Civilisation of the West), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p.11.

When Hu turned his attention to these issues, they were no longer new to the Chinese mind. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese reformers had paid attention to Western concepts of individualism, and Western attempts to reconcile the conflicts between individual and social purpose. For example, Liang Qichao recognised this as an area in which Chinese and Western social traditions diverged radically. He emphasised the need for an awakened citizenry as the foundation on which to erect a strong national state.⁴⁰ Tan Sitong was also impressed by the dynamism and vitality exhibited in the character of Western people. He notes that it is mainly because of these character traits that Westerners were capable of their stupendous achievements and their modern world-wide expansion.⁴¹ Confucian social theory emphasised authoritarian hierarchy and the relative status of each social group within it, placing a premium on the preservation of social equilibrium and on the time-honoured distinction between those who govern and those who are governed. Thus a major objective of the reformers was the eradication of these assumptions, which they viewed as impediments to the growth of a “national” consciousness based on broader popular participation in political and social life and a heightened sense of individual responsibility.

It is apparent that Hu had more in mind than his predecessors. He acknowledged that the Chinese temperament was characterised by the qualities that the neo-traditionalist attributed: “satisfaction with one’s lot in life, contentment in

⁴⁰For a discussion, see Xiao Gongquan: *Zhongguo Zhengzhi Sixiang Shi* (A History of Chinese Political Thought) (Taipei: Zhonghua Wenhua Chuban Shiye Weiyanhui, 1954), pp. 733-780.

⁴¹For a discussion on Tan Sitong’s thought, see Hao Chang: *Chinese Intellectual in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890-1911* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 66-193.

poverty, acceptance of the will of heaven, quietism, and the acceptance of suffering.”⁴² This negative outlook on life had been extolled for generations. From Hu’s point of view, it was more a vice than a virtue. The passive acceptance of suffering and deprivation was itself a tragedy: “The civilization under which people are restricted and controlled by a material environment from which they cannot escape, and under which they cannot utilise human thought and intellectual power to change environment and improve conditions, is the civilization of a lazy and non-progressive people. It is truly a materialistic civilization. Such civilization can only obstruct but cannot satisfy the spiritual demands of mankind.”⁴³

According to Hu, the West was dedicated to very different principles. In contrast to oriental passivity and resignation, the modern civilisation of the West was built on the foundation of the pursuit of happiness. It has not only increased material enjoyment, but also satisfied the spiritual demands of mankind. The Western temperament was characterised by “discontent with one’s lot, dissatisfaction with poverty, an unwillingness to suffer, respect for hard work -- and the desire for continuous improvement of the environment.”⁴⁴ Hu contended that material advancement was the basis for spiritual quality. When man’s material demand was met, he had the time and energy to seek spiritual experiences and satisfactions. Thus, Western civilisation which had progressed effectively to meet human material needs could not properly be called a materialistic civilisation. It was, Hu argued, the very

⁴²Hu Shi: “Women duiyu Xiyang Wenming de Taidu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 5

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 16. This translation is from Wm. Theodore de Bary et.al., eds.: *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), vol. 2, p. 192.

⁴⁴Hu Shi: “Women duiyu Xiyang Wenming de Taidu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 15.

opposite: idealistic, indeed spiritual. For the essence of spiritual freedom was not contentment and quietism, but the active pursuit of truth. In fact, the passive acceptance of fate and quietism in the face of poverty were not virtues of Chinese life, as asserted by those who claimed China had a spiritual civilisation; they were really the shortcomings of Chinese mentality. He admitted that "when we look collectively at modern Western industrial arts, science, and laws, we see among them, certainly, implements of human death and institutions of aggression and plunder." But he insisted that "we cannot fail to acknowledge the fundamental Western spirit of attending to the well-being of the masses."⁴⁵

For this reason, Hu introduced the notion of "healthy individualism" which he borrowed from Ibsenism. He elucidated his concept of individualism with a quotation from a letter Ibsen wrote to Brandes in 1871. "There are actually moments when the history of the world appears to me like one great shipwreck, and the only important thing is to save one's self."⁴⁶ "To save one's self" was obviously in line with the youth ethos of May Fourth thinkers, and Hu explicitly endorsed it.

Hu's exposition of Ibsenism was based entirely on Ibsen's earlier "problem plays," for he found it much easier to draw from such works as *A Doll's House* and *An Enemy of the People* the clear social message he was seeking. He never read Ibsen to find aesthetic solutions to literary problems. Hu selected the elements of Ibsenism which he could use in creating a new society. As pointed out by Jerome

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp.6-7. This translation is from Jerome Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 159.

⁴⁶Hu Shi: "Yibusheng Zhuyi" (Ibsenism), *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 94. I have adopted this English translation from Henrik Ibsen: *Letter of Henrik Ibsen*, translated by John Nilsen Laurvik and Mary Morison. (New York: Duffield and Company, 1908), p. 218.

Grieder: "What had originated with Ibsen as an attack on bourgeois conventionality Hu translated into assault on the whole body of Confucian social attitudes. What he was interested in was not the particular details of Ibsen's critique of European middle-class society, but Ibsen's conclusion, with which Hu heartily agreed: 'No social evil is greater than the destruction of the individual's individuality.'"⁴⁷

In interpreting Ibsenism, Hu said that in order to develop fully a person's individuality, two conditions were necessary: i. The individual must have his own free will; ii. The individual must be responsible for his own actions. He wrote:

An autonomous country or a republic must give the individual the right to choose for himself, and give him responsibility for his own actions. If not, it will be impossible to create independent individuals. A society or a country without independent individuals is like alcohol without yeast, bread without leavening or a human body without a brain. A society or country such as that has no hope of improvement or progress.⁴⁸

In Hu's mind, this individualism "on the one hand teaches us to emulate Nora to create a whole individual; on the other hand, it teaches us to learn from Dr. Stockmann in order to become independent, to dare to say the truth, and to fight against the evil forces of society."⁴⁹ Ibsen believed that society and state were merely the sum total of their individuals. The full development of individuality was the foundation of true democracy. It was individualism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, which produced countless individualists who loved freedom more than bread and truth more than life, that made modern civilisation possible.

⁴⁷Jerome B Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 93.

⁴⁸Hu Shi: "Yibusheng Zhuyi," *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 97. This translation is from Elisabeth Eide: *China's Ibsen: From Ibsen to Ibsenism*, p. 167.

⁴⁹Hu Shi: "Jieshao Wo Ziji de Sixiang," *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 7.

In his essay "Fei Geren Zhuyi de Xin Shenghuo" (The Anti-individualistic New Life) Hu clearly stated that his individualism was not synonymous with egoism. In this essay Hu used *geren zhuyi* for individualism, *weiwo zhuyi* for false individualism characterised as egoism, and *dushan de geren zhuyi* for the escapist, romantic individualism that he considered the most dangerous. Hu regarded the escapist individual as an antisocial individualist. Not satisfied with society as it is, the only thought of an escapist individualist is to flee and find a safe haven for himself, arguing that nothing can save society anyway.⁵⁰

To Hu, Ibsen's ideas are important because he created the concept of "a wholesome individualism." Wholesome individualism consisted of a kind of selfishness which enabled the individual to save himself in a deteriorating world. However, since society was formed by individuals, one saved individual means one additional individual for the next reformed society. Hu drew a parallel between this and Mencius's words: "If poor, they attend to their own virtue in solitude" (*qiong ze du shan qi shen*). According to Hu, this selfishness is really inestimable altruism. Hu pointed out that this is what Ibsen means by "saving oneself." He then coupled this with another quotation from Ibsen: "If you want to be useful to society you must make yourself a tool."⁵¹

Hu Shi's "healthy individualism" attracted the attention of many serious minds. When Hu exhorted the Chinese to break the bond that had chained them to the past for centuries, he was in fact describing an attitude oriented not exclusively

⁵⁰HSZPJ, vol. 6, pp. 131-142.

⁵¹Hu Shi: "Yibusheng Zhuyi," HSZPJ, vol. 2, p. 96.

against the past but also towards the needs of present and future. In 1923, he further expanded his view on this matter by putting forward a scientific outlook in life.

In 1919 Liang Qichao returned from Europe, where he had observed the aftermath of the First World War. Liang was an early moderniser and an esteemed senior scholar who had urged his countrymen to accept Western science. After discussions with European philosophers like Henry Bergson and Rudolf Eucken, he concluded his one year journey with a pessimistic assessment of the post-war European intellectual climate. He talked about the “bankruptcy of science” in Western civilisation which had led to the devastations of the War, and the need for China to preserve the spiritual values of traditional culture.⁵² While he did not intend to oppose the introduction of science into China, his criticism of Western materialism was welcomed by those in the traditionalist camp who felt threatened by the onslaught of Western ideas.

The controversy was deepened by a lecture entitled “View of Life” (*Rensheng Guan*) delivered by a young German-trained philosopher at Beijing’s Qinghua University, Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang, 1886-1969) in February 1923. Zhang’s lecture raised similar doubts about blind adherence to the West’s path of industrialism, capitalism, and scientism. It eventually provoked a full-scale intellectual debate. Zhang put forth a critique of Western modernisation, pointing out the ugliness, injustice, and cruelty of industrialised urban society. Should this be China’s goal? Zhang asked. His position was that “no matter how far science

⁵²Liang Qichao: “Ouyou Xinying Lu (A Record of Impressions of Travels in Europe). I have used the shorter version *Ouyou Xinying Lu Jielu* (A Condensed Record of Impressions of Travels in Europe) (Taipei: Zhonghua Shuju Reprint, 1966).

develops, it is not able to solve the problem of a view of life,”⁵³ and that China should seek the reconstruction of her own spiritual civilisation. He advised a revival of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

Zhang’s lecture aroused vehement opposition from those who believed in the cult of science. The first man to oppose Zhang was Hu’s close friend Ding Wenjiang (V. K. Ting, 1887-1936), the famous geologist who ridiculed Zhang as someone being possessed by the “metaphysical devil of Europe”.⁵⁴ A heated and lengthy polemic ensued, lasting almost the entire year, involving almost all leading intellectuals of the day. When the debate essays were finally collected and published in book form in 1924, the whole book contained over 250,000 words.

Hu Shi was absent from Beijing during much of 1923, recuperating in the mountains of Zhejiang from an illness suffered at the end of 1922. He only wrote one article “The King of Monkeys and Zhang Junmai” (*Sun Xingzhe yu Zhang Junmai*) to ridicule Zhang. His close association with other active participants such as Ding Wenjiang, Ren Hongjun (1886-1961) and Zhu Jingnong, coupled with his duty as an editor of *Endeavour*, enabled him to follow the debate closely. Hu had always been deemed the most important representative in the debate on science and the philosophy of life, especially after he was invited to write an introduction to a collection of essays on the debate entitled *Science and Philosophy of Life* (*Kexue Yu Rensheng Guan*).

⁵³Zhang Junmai: “Rensheng Guan” (A Philosophy of Life), in *Kexue yu Rensheng Guan* (Science and Philosophy of Life) (Shanghai: Yadong Tushuguan 1935), vol.1, p. 9 (1st. Article).

⁵⁴For a detailed discussion of Ding Wenjiang’s view on this debate, see Charlotte Furth: *Ting Wenjiang: Science and China’s New Culture*, pp. 94-135.

In his introductory essay, Hu Shi entirely rejected the contention that Europe was in a state of crisis. He dismissed Western soul-searching following the war as no more than a reflection of "the pathological mentality of war-stricken Europe," and he denounced such thinkers as Bergson and Eucken as "reactionary philosophers, who, in the course of things, have eaten to repletion of the delicacies of science, and then casually grumble a bit, like the rich man who has eaten his fill of meat and fish and then wishes to taste a little salted vegetable or beancurd." In the West, Hu noted, where there was a firm appreciation of science, there was no need to be gravely concerned when a few "metaphysical ghosts" assaulted it. However, the situation in China was different. "At the present time, China has not yet enjoyed the blessing of science -- how much less, then, can we speak of the 'catastrophe' that science brings with it."⁵⁵

Before this debate, Hu had already established his belief in science and the type of world-view which he eventually was to build on. In 1922, he argued in a lecture that a scientific outlook on life meant "to use scientific spirit, attitudes and method to deal with the problems of practical living."⁵⁶ In the debate of 1923, he emphasised the concrete values that one could derive from scientific knowledge. Life, as he saw it, was forever changing according to conditions. Therefore, one must adopt a scientific attitude to study life. In Hu's view, instead of arguing about whether science could resolve the issue of life's outlook, one had better present a hypothetical scientific outlook and then verify it as one would have done in an experiment. Supporting his position with references to various branches of scientific

⁵⁵Hu Shi: "Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 5.

⁵⁶*RJSGB*, vol. 2, entry for 25 March 1922.

knowledge, Hu set forth his new philosophy of life by proposing a hypothesis within which, he claimed, scientists of all fields could at least agree:

1. On the basis of our knowledge of astronomy, and physics, we should recognize that the world of space is infinitely large.
2. On the basis of our geological and paleontological knowledge, we should recognize that the universe extends over infinite time.
3. On the basis of all our verifiable scientific knowledge, we should recognize that the universe and everything in it follow natural laws of movement and change -- "natural" in the Chinese sense of "being so of themselves" -- and that there is no need for the concept of a supernatural Ruler and Creator.
4. On the basis of the biological sciences, we should recognize the terrific wastefulness and brutality in the struggle for existence in the biological world, and consequently the untenability of the hypothesis of a benevolent Ruler.
5. On the basis of the biological, physiological, and psychological sciences, we should recognize that man is only one species in the animal kingdom and differs from the other species only in degree but not in kind.
6. On the basis of the knowledge derived from anthropology, sociology, and the biological sciences, we should understand the history and causes of the evolution of living organisms and of human society.
7. On the basis of the biological and psychological sciences, we should recognize that all psychological phenomena are explainable through the law of causality.
8. On the basis of biological and historical knowledge, we should recognize that morality and religion are subject to change, and that the causes of such change can be scientifically studied.
9. On the basis of our newer knowledge of physics and chemistry, we should recognize that matter is full of motion and not static.
10. On the basis of biological, sociological and historical knowledge, we should recognize that the individual self is subject to death and decay, but the sum total of individual achievement, for better or worse, lives on in the immortality of the Larger self; that to live for the sake of the species and posterity is religion of the highest kind; and that those religions which seek a future life either in Heaven or the Pure Land, are selfish religions.⁵⁷

Hu called such a philosophy of life "a naturalistic philosophy of life." On the question of how to conduct life, Hu again insisted on the necessity of scientific spirit, attitude and method. This scheme consisted of four stages: First, there must be doubt

⁵⁷Hu Shi: "Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, pp. 18-19. Translations are Hu's own in his "My Credo and Its Evolution," p. 236.

about whatever one undertakes so that uncritical postulates might not be formed from the start. Second, there must be a mode of conduct based on factual data so that one is not guided by sensational values and slogans. Third, there must be the demand for evidence. If there is a need to believe in God, there must be proof that God exists. Fourth, the foremost goal in life is truth. According to Hu, the constant search for truth does not guarantee complete success, because truth is infinite and the universe is infinite. The fact that we keep on searching is merely to fulfil our obligations, hoping that we can add an iota to the total whole. Therefore, only science possesses the unselfish and co-operative spirit.⁵⁸ As the concept of “social immortality” and “healthy individual” gave him a sense of freedom from the confines of Chinese society, the scientific philosophy of life provided Hu Shi with an instrument by which all the visible and invisible bounds can be transcended.

Hu Shi argued that if religion, through its theism and belief in the immortality of the soul, could unite the European philosophy of life for more than a thousand years, the scientific world-view should, by analogy, also be able to achieve a basic and minimum unity through education and propaganda. Hu Shi made it known that science was the only true source of human knowledge. Since his overriding concern was to apply science to the non-science areas, it became unavoidable that he considered scientific laws and value judgement to be organically associated. The difficulty he encountered, however, was more than he anticipated. A scientific law is factually neutral; it describes an unchanging regularity in nature. A value judgement, on the other hand, is the result of the interaction of many factors; it must pertain to but it cannot be derived from facts. The relationship between fact and value

⁵⁸Hu Shi: “Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 20.

judgement, therefore, is that of one to many. Unmindful of this, Hu insisted that a certain scientific assertion necessarily yielded a predetermined view. Despite the claim that his scientific philosophy of life "is a hypothesis founded on the generally accepted scientific knowledge of the last two or three hundred years."⁵⁹ Hu was convinced that by the effects of 'education and propaganda' this scientific view would become a 'more or less uniform' human outlook.⁶⁰

In the debate on science and the philosophy of life in 1923, the score was definitely in favour of science and against religion. Hu himself observed that "with the exception of a few conservative scholars trained in German philosophy through the Japanese school, the majority of those who took part in this debate were on the side of science, which they held to be capable of dealing with all problems of human life and conduct."⁶¹

Science emerged stronger than before, not so much because of the general anti-religious feeling in China, but because of the popularity of the scientific method itself. Hu himself was certainly responsible to a large extent for the popularity of the new "scientific" view of life in May Fourth China. Hu Shi and other Chinese intellectuals focused on what they regarded as a new bond of unity between themselves and those Western intellectuals who were abandoning religion in favour of a secular-scientific outlook. In proposing to set Confucianism aside, they were convinced that they could achieve the same success which they believed the West had attained as the result of adopting the new secular frame of mind. He declared his

⁵⁹Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," p.236.

⁶⁰ Hu Shi: "Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 17.

⁶¹Hu Shi: "Religion in Chinese Life," in *The Chinese Renaissance (The Haskell Lectures, 1933)* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1963), p. 91.

“scientific view of life” which, in part, stipulated that the universe was natural and purposeless, that human struggles were merciless and therefore no benevolent God or Buddha existed, and that all a man should hope for was a fulfilled life on earth.⁶² Hu wanted his naturalistic outlook on life to replace religions. He related science to valuation by polishing his adored values with whatever scientific facts he knew. While Hu was adamant in his belief in China’s need to be Westernised, he nevertheless underestimated the role played by the religious and humanistic heritage in the growth of Western societies. Since religion was an essential component of Western culture, it was impossible to understand Western thought in depth by ignoring the religious significance. As such, the root to an appreciation of Western thought has never been smooth. In this regard, Hu’s influence was certainly negative.

Hu was convinced that for China, only the acceptance of this kind of “scientific philosophy of life” would liberate her from ignorance, superstition, poverty and evil social institutions and prepare her to move into a more promising future. Although he constantly attacked his friends who advocated Communism and believed that there was no panacea of a “fundamental solution,” Hu himself did believe that “science” is a remedy for all social evils. “In examining the demands of this age of ours,” Hu wrote in 1922, “we must recognise that the greatest responsibility of mankind today, and its greatest need, is to apply the scientific method to the problem of human life.”⁶³ Assuming that those who acknowledged the same facts would share the same values that he espoused, Hu left unanswered the question of why, even if scientists shared what he defined as a scientific outlook on

⁶² Hu Shi: “Kexue yu Rensheng Guan Xu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 19.

⁶³ Hu Shi: “Wushinian Lai zhi Shijie Zhexue” (World Philosophy in the Last Fifty Years) *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, p. 200.

life, such an outlook was desirable. Apparently Hu was more interested in reforming China than in reforming philosophy itself.

Whether there is “metaphysics” in Dewey’s Pragmatism is a controversial issue. Dewey called his *Experience and Nature* his “principal work on metaphysics.” But Richard Rorty, the contemporary American philosopher disagrees with this statement, arguing that the book was an explanation of why nobody needs metaphysics, rather than a discussion on metaphysics. Rorty is right to point out that Dewey should not bother himself with metaphysics as a part of the philosophical tradition, because Dewey, in his own right, had done a wonderful job by getting rid of the necessity of metaphysics.⁶⁴

Indeed, throughout his life, Dewey attempted repeatedly to sort out the problem on the relations of science and metaphysics. Ironically his conclusion was typically Pragmatic: we could neither have a supernatural guarantee of our everyday natural grasp of the world nor would we know what to do with it if we had it.

In *The Quest of Certainty, Human Nature and Conduct* and *Experience and Nature*, Dewey argued that experience was its own guide, its own support, and its own critic and neither need nor could be given the kind of metaphysical underpinnings that philosophers have tried to supply.⁶⁵ Dewey held that the primary object of science was “to give intellectual control -- that is, ability to interpret phenomena -- and secondarily, practical control -- that is, ability to secure desirable and avoid undesirable future experiences.” But for philosophy, the question of

⁶⁴Richard Rorty: “Dewey’s Metaphysics,” in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Heatfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 72-89.

⁶⁵Alan Ryan: *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, p. 209.

practical control assumes primacy. Philosophy conceived primarily as method means the establishment of a "philosophy which shall be instrumental rather than final, and instrumental not to establishing and warranting any particular set of truths, but instrumental in furnishing points of view and working ideas which may clarify and illuminate the actual and concrete course of life." Philosophers should not constitute "a separate and monopolistic priesthood" guarding and revealing truth, but rather they much "organise . . . the highest and wisest ideas of humanity, past and present" to interpret effectively "certain recurrent and fundamental problems, which humanity, collectively and individually, has to face." ⁶⁶ Only then could there be any hope of resolving perennial problems and of restructuring society upon rational grounds. And that, Dewey insisted, was the real task of philosophy and the philosopher.

But Dewey did not intend to outline a "scheduled programme" for philosophers to follow. Rather, he suggested, the important issues for philosophers will become evident in the ever present "human difficulties of an urgent, deep-seated kind which may be clarified by trained reflection, and whose solution may be forwarded by the careful development of hypothesis." Philosophic thinking, properly conceived, is "caught up in the actual course of events, having the office of guiding them towards a prosperous issue." Unlike Hu, Dewey did not argue that philosophy or even scientific philosophy could solve whatever problems. Dewey believed that scientific truth can help bring about "the emancipation of goods, purpose and activities, producing the transition from a stationary society to a progressive

⁶⁶John Dewey: "The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 2 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), p. 19. John Dewey: "Philosophy and American National Life," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 3 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), p. 77.

society.”⁶⁷ But however necessary to the emancipation from a dead past, scientific truth, by itself, cannot point the way to a progressive future. Philosophy for him was “vision, imagination, reflection -- and these factions, apart from action, modify nothing and hence resolve nothing.” But action uninformed by these qualities, and lacking rigorous thought, is “more likely to increase confusion and conflict than to straighten things out.”⁶⁸ From the above analysis, we can draw a conclusion that the difference between Hu and Dewey is the latter regarded scientific method as essentially a thinking process. Dewey emphasised judgement based on the consequences of action, rather than on predetermined and fixed values. Hu Shi, on the other hand, perceived science as an all-inclusive system of nature which not only reveals objective reality concerning the physical universe but also prescribes the only legitimate outlook on human life and society.

Hu argued in essence that science is all-powerful. By over-emphasising science in its social function, the scientific career itself was ignored. As D.W.Y. Kwok aptly observed: “Scientism affects various areas of human endeavour without really helping science itself to advance.”⁶⁹ Although much recognition was accorded to the necessity of experimentation in the scientific method, the importance of research institutions was generally ignored. Moreover, attention was hardly given to the distinction between pure science and applied science that had begun to appear in the rhetoric of Western scientists since the late nineteenth century. Most

⁶⁷John Dewey: “The Problem of Truth,” in *The Middle Works John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol. 6 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 57.

⁶⁸John Dewey: “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, vol.10 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), p. 46.

⁶⁹D. W.Y. Kwok: *Scientism in Chinese Thought 1900-1950*, p. 200.

intellectuals' descriptions of the scientific method were blurred; many thought of it as a matter of simple, concrete observations followed by formal classification, echoing the empiricism of the Qing philologists and the rhetorical formalism of literary tradition. In this regard, Hu should bear certain responsibilities. Although Hu was well educated in scientific method, his interpretation of it sometimes was confusing and misleading, a topic we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Scientific Method and the “Usefulness” of Classical Studies

4.1 Academic Research and Its Practical Application

G. R. Elton once remarked: “Historians have always wondered just why they do this thing, why they study history.”¹ What is the use of history? What problems merit attention? Should one always view history from the perspective of the present? To what extent can one be objective? With their emphasis on structural confinements of the historian’s selection, Pragmatist historians have in particular faced difficulty regarding the historian’s present-mindedness. What should historians do to justify their existence in society?

As a Pragmatist, Hu Shi emphasised the importance of studying current problems. Throughout his life, Hu attempted to rescue the people from social, political and intellectual chaos and to provide a more civilised and rational outlook on life. When it came to historical research, Hu’s role seems to contradict his pragmatic thought. His main interest was *kaozheng* (evidential research in the classical texts) which seemed to have no bearing on current practical issues. As a

¹G. R. Elton: *The Practice of History* (London: Fontana Press, 1987), p. 17.

result, Hu was troubled throughout his career by the conflict between pure scholarship and practical-minded endeavour.

A brief recapitulation of Chinese historians' attitude to the purpose of historical writing might be helpful in understanding Hu's problems. Apart from the principle of truthful recording, Chinese historians were greatly concerned with the educational and moral function of history. They worked on the principle of praise and blame in traditional historiography. In writing his *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), Confucius proposed to implement moral values and political ideals in history. Mencius, a leading Confucian scholar in ancient China, explained:

Again the world fell into decay, and principles faded away. Perverse speaking and oppressive deeds waxed rife again. There were instances of ministers who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers. Confucius was afraid, and made *Spring and Autumn*. What *Spring and Autumn* contains are matters proper to the sovereign. On this account Confucius said: "Yes. It is *Spring and Autumn* which will make men know me, and it is *Spring and Autumn* which will make men condemn me."²

Confucius' concern with morality was revered by later historians and his initiative of passing judgement on history became an important heritage of traditional Chinese historiography. It was usually carried out by a careful choice of words as well as by the historian's comments. Traditional historians believed that the didactic purpose of history was indeed its most notable contribution to society.³

As is well known, the Confucian Way (*Dao*), from the very beginning, is a

²James Legge: *The Works of Mencius, The Chinese Classics, vol. 2* (London: Trubner & Co., 1861), pp. 157-158.

³For a discussion, see Hou Kok Chung: "Motif-motif Sima Qian menulis *Shi Ji*" (The Motives of Sima Qian in Writing *Shiji*, in Malay), *Papers on Chinese Studies* 4 (December 1990): 145-168.

busy, active thing. The Way is supposed to function in two major areas of human activities which have been traditionally identified as “sageness within and kingliness without” (*neisheng waiwang*). Or, as clearly redefined by the seventeenth-century Neo-Confucian scholar Shao Tingcai (1648-1711), the Way functions “outwardly to put the world in order and inwardly to nourish man’s nature and feelings” (*waiqi jingshi, neiyang xingqing*).⁴

When the Neo-Confucian movement emerged in the tenth and eleventh centuries, it had begun with the ambition of “putting the world in order.” It was largely the frustrating experience of the failure of Wang Anshi’s (1021-1086) reform that turned followers of Neo-Confucianism inward into the realm of “sageness within.” But the basic Confucian impulse to reorder the world was always there, always waiting for the right moment to re-emerge. At the end of the late Ming period, political and social decadence had reached such a degree that it was no longer possible to contain the Confucian impulse to reorder the world in the realm of ideas.

Qing *kaozheng* scholarship developed hand in hand with this practical idea. When the Qing dynasty was established in 1644, southern literati led the way in solving the dilemmas posed by the collapse of Ming rule. Many intellectuals believed that it was because of Wang Yangming (1472-1529) who advocated metaphysical speculation, that students became ignorant of the teachings of ancient sages, which led to catastrophic consequences. They thus called attention to the study and examination of ancient works. Their first task was to reject philosophical, that is *yili*

⁴Shao Tingcai: *Sifudang Wenji* (Collected Works of Shao Tingcai), Shaoxing Xianzheng Yishu Edition, 7:10b.

orientation to the classics as adopted by Song Learning (*Song Xue*) scholars. The texts they relied on were from the Han dynasty because they believed they were closer in time to the composition of the classics and thereby more likely to reveal the authentic meaning. As a consequence their efforts came to be known as Han Learning (*Han Xue*). The slogan of Han Learning scholars in early Qing was "Learning for practical statecraft" (*Jingshi zhiyong*). From a pragmatic standpoint, they criticised Song and Ming metaphysicians for their empty talk in the name of the tradition of the Way, offering no practical contribution to daily life at all. In promoting solid and practical learning, they insisted that an accurate reading of the classics was impossible without the foundation of a rigorous philological analysis of language.⁵

Gu Yanwu (1613-1683) was a major critic of this tradition. He condemned the metaphysical speculation which had predominated in late Ming intellectual life and in the official commentaries on the classics. He compared Ming metaphysicians to the practitioners of *qingtan* (pure talk) at the end of the Han dynasty.

Everyone knows that the chaos into which China was plunged (after the fall of the Han) came about because of *qingtan*. But how many would know that modern *qingtan* is even more dangerous? Formerly, those who engaged in *qingtan* spoke of Laozi and Zhuangzi, Now they speak of Confucius and Mencius. Not familiar with the six arts, not examining the system of ancient kings, not exploring the preoccupation of the times, they don't even consider Confucius' comments on government and learning, yet they speak of having the one thread (which united everything) or of transmission without words. They substitute "clarifying the mind to perceive nature" for the practical tasks of preparing the self to rule society.⁶

⁵For a discussion on Song Learning and Han Learning, see Benjamin A. Elman: "Philosophy (I-li) Versus Philology (K'ao-cheng): The *Jen-hsin Taoxin* Debate," *T'oung Pao* 69. 4 & 5 (1983): 175-222.

⁶Gu Yanwu: *Rizhiliu* (Taipei: Taiping Chubanshe Reprint, 1958), p.196. This translation is adopted from R. Kent Guy: "The Development of the Evidential

Following the lead of Gu Yanwu and others such as Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) and Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) in the seventeenth century, early Qing scholars called for a return to the texts of the classics themselves. Emphasis on practical statecraft (*jingshi*) during the Ming-Qing transition provided later *kaozheng* scholarship with the social justification for the broad learning and inductive research methods.

With the passage of time and the impact of authoritarian cultural policies in the form of the literary persecutions of the Qing government, scholars of this school succumbed to the temptation to pursue textual research as an end in itself. They eventually forgot that their original intention was to make these researches serve practical ends. The most significant and obvious change in the eighteenth century took place in the domain of Qianlong and Jiaqing scholarship.

During the Qianlong (1736-1795) and Jiaqing (1796-1820) periods, the major concern of the *kaozheng* scholars in their work was the authenticity of ancient books. To determine this, they mainly sought five things: annotation, confirmation, collation, correction, and verification. These five techniques constituted a kind of textual and historical criticism. The problems on which they worked were no longer posed by society at large but rather by an internal challenge to verify and increase the scope of knowledge about the Confucian past. The statecraft problems peculiar to the seventeenth century had been left behind.

This detailed study of specific texts made some scholars feel that it hindered the development of thought as a whole. For example, Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801),

Research: Ku Yen-wu and the Ssu-K'ü Ch'üan-shu," *The Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 16. 1&2, (December 1984): 102.

a prominent historian in the eighteenth century, had criticised this research as “too much quoting rather than expressing a scholar’s own idea.” He used the famous Confucian maxim “Learning without thinking”(xueer busi) to describe its weakness.⁷ At the end of the eighteenth century, more and more scholars voiced their dissatisfaction with this development. Li Zhaoluo (1769-1841), a prominent *kaozheng* scholar himself, complained of the frustrating superficiality of the *kaozheng* scholarship. He likened many works of *kaozheng* scholarship to eight-legged essays and accused scholars of simply taking up *kaozheng* research “to gain wealth and fame.”⁸

Political, social and economic crisis in the early decades of the nineteenth century further intensified antagonisms towards philological studies. In the wake of the foreign intrusion in the early nineteenth century, Chinese scholars found that they should do something more useful to their country, instead of being committed to what Willard Peterson described as “building knowledge item by item.”⁹

It has become common to accuse the *kaozheng* scholars of creating a climate of textual criticism that was irrelevant to society. To practise concrete studies, which earlier had been employed against Neo-Confucian philosophy, was now turned

⁷Zhang Xuecheng : *Wenshi Tongyi* (General Meaning of Literature and History), annotated by Zhu Ying (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), p. 4.

⁸Li Zhaoluo: *Yangyi Zhai Wenji* (Collected Writings from the Studio of Nurturing Oneness) (1874), 18.1. A similar complaint was made by Shen Yao. In a letter to a friend, Shen wrote: “After the Qianlong period, *kaozheng* scholarship has dominated academic circles. Scholars carry out research by tracing something which is totally unimportant. They deceive each other” See Shen Yao: *Luofanlou Wenji* (Collected Writings of Shen Yao) (1847), 8:21.

⁹Willard Peterson: “Fang I-chih: Western Learning and the ‘Investigation of Things,’” in Wm. T. de Bary et. al., eds.: *The Unfolding of Neo Confucianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) p. 400.

against precise *kaozheng* scholarship. Thus many *jingshi* scholars turned their attention to more recent history with a view to calling their contemporaries' attention to the urgency of basic institutional and economic reforms in China. Among them were Gong Zizhen (1792-1841), Wei Yuan (1794-1856) and Wang Tao (1828-1897). These intellectuals stressed practical statecraft as the key element of the Confucian legacy. By statecraft, they meant something more than just political concerns. Statecraft in their view was closely tied to a variety of fields of expertise. These included astronomy for calendar reform, hydraulics for flood control, cartography for military purposes, and the like.¹⁰

Scholars who supported the use of evidential research in historical scholarship praised the objective and impartial spirit of its method and its reliable or value-free reconstruction of the past. However, in as much as the *jingshi* ideal was inherent in Confucianism, the rise of intellectualism could not but create a new tension between the emphasis on textual criticism and the concern for state and society.

For example, Duan Yucai, one of the most outstanding scholars in the *kaozheng* scholarship wrote to his friend in later years, saying that it would be a great pleasure if he could differentiate the ancient pronunciation of the three characters: 之, 脂, 支 (all pronounced as *zhi*). At the same time, he confided that he felt extremely guilty for indulging in such a minor subject since it contributed almost

¹⁰For a discussion on late Qing historiography, see Hu Fengxiang and Zhang Wenjian *Zhongguo Jindai Shixue Sichao yu Liupai* (Modern Chinese Historiographical Thoughts and Schools) (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 20-25; Benjamin A. Elman: *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 233-253.

nothing to the nation.¹¹ It is clear that the pleasure of research for Duan could not generate any practical use. The problem was that he could not have it both ways. In reality, there was always a deep gulf between “the pleasure in pure scholarship” and its “social use.” Duan was not alone. Under the influence of Confucianist thought, political and social concerns had constantly been viewed as more important than academic research. Chinese intellectuals had never dared to regard pure academic research as first principle. In their view, personal research interest was a private matter. They must put society, nation, and people above everything else. Unless they could reconcile scholarly pursuits with the concern for society, Chinese intellectuals were not able to relieve their pangs of guilt.

4.2 Hu Shi's Attitude to the Purpose of History

As mentioned earlier, Hu always felt that the purpose of learning was to serve the country and solve human problems. His main concern was man's place in society, not in the cosmos. This had remained Hu's basic attitude throughout his entire life. With it went an incurable passion for the concrete, the empirical, the verifiable and an instinctive distrust of the impalpable, the supernatural -- in short a tendency to a scientific and positivist approach. He was not interested in abstract formulations and divine spiritual quest. In every situation he would look for “hard” facts -- what could be grasped and verified by the normal intellect. He had shown

¹¹On Duan Yucai's problems, see Yu Ying-shih: *Lishi yu Sixiang*, pp. 153-154.

that he had had no intrinsic interest in metaphysics since his childhood. By his own account, he was so happy that he leapt from his seat after reading the atheistic essays of Sima Guang (1018-1086) and Fan Zhen (483-505) when he was about eleven years old.¹²

From this position, Hu excluded the records of metaphysical questioning of any school of philosophy from his *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Instead of discussing the inner logic of philosophical thought, Hu emphasised external factors in explaining the relation between a philosophical thought and its political background. The emergence of philosophical thoughts, in Hu's mind, was the result of the social and political development of the time. Thus, it is not surprising that Hu described Lao Zi, whose main philosophy was *wuwei* (doing by not doing), as a rebel:

In China, the first philosophical thoughts were reactions to the political and social situation of the time. Social order had been destroyed, and political organisation had become corrupt. Lao Zi's political thought was a response to such a situation.¹³

By the same token, all major philosophers including Mo Zi, Yang Zhu, Confucius and his disciples, were social and political reformers. Their philosophies were very much the product of a particular time and situation. However, Hu's interest in politics and social phenomena did not push him to solve Chinese problems by political means. Hu shared with the intellectuals of his time the distaste for politics. He asserted that Chinese political life should be improved not through political means but through social and literary reform.

¹²SSZS, pp. 39-42.

¹³Hu Shi: *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi*, in *HSZPJ*, vol. 31, p. 47.

Ever since his return from the United States, Hu had refused to be drawn into political discussions. Like Chen Duxiu, the editor of *New Youth*, he was deeply dismayed by the Chinese people's apathy, effete-ness, and ignorance, which had persisted in spite of rapid political changes. He spoke a great deal about the reconstruction of social institutions, arguing that the emancipation of thought must take precedence over the solution of China's immediate political problems. For this reason, he raised such issues as literary revolution, the relationship between men and women, the shortcomings of national character and the dangers of the traditional spirit of subservience. In 1919, he added another element to his intellectual endeavours namely, "re-examining the national heritage (*zhengli guogu*). According to him, China's old tradition must be critically and systematically re-examined. Only then could the Chinese develop an objective understanding of the various parts of their own intellectual heritage in historical perspective and determine their values.¹⁴

As a Chinese historian, he was vitally concerned with China's present needs and future development, and his aim would be none other than to make meaningful a past which at the time appeared to be irrelevant. To Hu, one of the most pressing problems which confronted scholars in twentieth century China was how to come to terms with tradition on the one hand, while engaging in the process of modernisation on the other. If, in re-examining the national heritage, some aspects could be found to have stood the test of time, then obviously the present could be related to the past.

¹⁴Hu Shi: "Xin Sichao de Yiyi" (The Meaning of the New Thought), *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, pp. 41-50.

In a broad sense, most of the academic activities of Hu Shi fell into the category of "re-examining the national heritage." Hu's enthusiasm for heritage was always tinged with a faint distrust of things ancient, which in turn aroused in him a yearning to research it. He defined "re-examination of the national heritage" as follows:

Towards the old learning and thought, we make only one positive proposal, this is "re-examining the national heritage." To re-examine, this is finding order out of disorder; finding the causal relations out of a (situation) where causal relations are not apparent; finding the real meanings out of rubbish and nonsense; finding true value in arbitrariness and superstition.¹⁵

It might be helpful to illuminate John Dewey's views on history and their implications for Hu's approaches to Chinese history. According to John Dewey, the historic present determined how the past is viewed. History, thus, became an open book which had to be written and rewritten as "new standpoints for viewing, appraising and ordering data arise."¹⁶ Selectivity thus became an exceedingly important aspect in the writing of history. Dewey emphasised that the historian's selection was not only a logical necessity but also always culture-bound and that "there was no intellectual disinterestedness beyond the activities, interests, and concern of the groups."¹⁷ In Dewey's view, the historian's decision had much to do with the present. Historians had to be always in touch with the relevance of past historical phenomena to the present experience. In other words, historical data

¹⁵Hu Shi: "Xin Sichao de Yiyi," *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 48.

¹⁶John Dewey: *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1938), p. 233.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 115.

selected were determined by whatever was deemed "to be important in the present."¹⁸

In addition, Dewey emphasised the importance of the historical continuity. There were no absolute beginnings or finality in existence in nature. The past is the past of the present, just as the present will be the past of the future. He explained:

. . . "from which" and "to which" that determine the subject-matter of any particular narration-description are strictly relative to the objective intent set to inquiry by the problematic quality of a given situation.¹⁹

Dewey's emphasis on the existential implications was thus clear. History was a kind of dynamic continuum, interpreted in the present but moving at the same time unceasingly towards the future. As he put it: "Intelligent understanding of past history is to some extent a lever for moving the present into a certain kind of future."²⁰

Like John Dewey, Hu Shi wanted to place history in a new social context. He did not believe that the past had nothing of value to give to the present. More importantly he was convinced that finding the Chinese past might make the introduction of "modern" attitudes and method easier and more natural. He was attempting to describe an attitude that would be oriented not exclusively against the past but also towards the needs of the present and future.

In 1920, Hu drew up a plan for compiling a serial publication entitled "National Classics Series" (*Guogu Congshu*). In January 1923, Hu Shi undertook the publication of *Journal of Sinological Studies* (*Guoxue Jikan*). In its inaugural

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 222

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 239.

issue, he wrote a lengthy manifesto in which he put forward three significant ideas on promoting more extensive research in the field. He summed up as follows:

Extend the scope of investigation by means of the historical approach, by conceiving sinology as a study of Chinese cultural heritage. Second, use modern methods of organisation, such as the index and the inventory for the purpose of systematising and marshalling this vast unorganised material of Sinological research. Third, use the method of comparative study to aid historical research.²¹

In October 1923, he put forward his plan which set forth the five important tasks namely collation, annotation, punctuation, textual research and critical introduction. According to him, fulfilling these tasks would ensure that a previously incomprehensible, difficult ancient text was rendered intelligible. On this basis scholars could, and did, undertake more penetrating research.²² Hu expressly stated that the goal of the study of national heritage was to produce a reliable history of Chinese culture. It clearly would not be done for its own sake, without purpose. From his point of view, “re-examining the national heritage” was a project of a practical nature.

At the turn of the twentieth century, some scholars realised that the extremely politicised nature of Chinese scholarship in the second half of the nineteenth century had done more harm than good to Chinese scholarship. Some scholars emphasised professionalism and independence of scholarship. This group of people claimed that too much emphasis on practicality had led academic research nowhere. Wang Guowei (1877-1927), a prominent historian and literary critic, for

²¹*KSZZ*, p. 214.

²²Hu Shi: “Ni Zhengli Guogu Jihua” (A Plan on Re-examining the National heritage), *YGJMCSX*, vol. 13, p. 380.

example, voiced his concern over this matter. He felt that academic research should go beyond questions of usefulness and uselessness. It should not be valued mainly for its application to morality and politics. What was called truth sometimes served no purpose to meet the needs of the time. It was sometimes against the currently prevailing intellectual trend.²³ Cai Yuanpei shared the same point of view on pure scholarship. When he was president of Beijing University, he persuaded his students to concentrate solely on academic research.²⁴ Even Liang Qichao, a well-known practical-minded historian and political reformist, had similar views.

Liang once confessed that Kang and he were partly to blame for the superficiality and vulgarity of the intellectual world of the late Qing Dynasty.²⁵ Both of them shared the idea of "practical application," using classical learning as a cloak for their political discussions.²⁶ Liang claimed that "Kang was so anxious to be erudite and different. He often went so far as to distort evidence, thereby committing a serious crime for the scientist."²⁷ In his own self-criticism, Liang admitted that he tended "to be extensive and thus superficial, scarcely reaching the outer limits of [a field of] learning when he began to discuss and expound it."²⁸ His conclusion was that "from the point of view of pure scholarship, one need only ask whether a body

²³Wang Guowei: "Lun Zhexuejia yu Meixuejia de Tianzhi" (On the Callings of Philosophers and Artists) in *Wang Guowei Meixue Lunwen Xuan* (Wang Guowei's Selected Essays on Aesthetics), edited by Liu Gangqiang (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), p. 86.

²⁴Cai Yuanpei: "Jiuren Beijing Daxue Xiaozhang zhi Yanshuo" (Speech on Assuming the Presidency of Beijing University) in *Cai Yuanpei Wenji*, vol. 2, p. 360.

²⁵Liang Qichao: *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Dynasty*, translated by Immanuel C. Y. Hsu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 105.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 105.

of learning is really learning, but not whether it is useful; unless this is so, knowledge cannot achieve independence and thus develop.”²⁹

Hu was aware of the harm of “practical application.” He wished to be a scholar doing research for its own sake. It was Hu’s life-long ambition to break the fetters that had bound academia for the past two thousand years. He admired Western scientists’ attitudes towards their research. “There is no ultimate end in searching for truth -- although scientists know that knowledge is of no limit, they are happy with their search. Further inquiry brings them further satisfaction.”³⁰ He argued that the aim of science was to seek for truth, which was the greatest spiritual demand of man. Happiness and satisfaction derived from the discovery of a scientific law, according to Hu, was never sought after by the unmotivated Chinese people.³¹ Hu spoke of the spiritual joy of scientists such as Newton, Pasteur and Edison, and especially of the ecstasy of Archimedes.³² He criticised the Chinese people for never ever having such an attitude. They “have devoted no attention to the discovery of truth and the invention of techniques and machinery. They are satisfied with their present lot and environment and therefore do not want to conquer nature.”³³

Hu was critical of others who claimed that academic research should have usefulness. In a letter to Mao Zishui (1893-1988) in 1919, he argued that scholars need not be worried with areas of study. There were all equal important. Discovering

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁰Hu Shi: “Women duiyu Xiyang Wenmin de Taidu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 8.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Hu Shi: “Civilization of East and West” in Charles A. Beard, ed.: *Whither Mankind* (New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 36.

³³Hu Shi: “Women duiyu Xiyang Wenmin de Taidu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 16. English translation see Wm. Theodore de Bary et.al., eds.: *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 2, p. 192.

the original meaning of a word was as worthy as discovering a new star. He did not agree with Mao's opinion on the question of national heritage.

Some of your suggestions go too far. For example you said, "Re-examining the national heritage might be beneficial to the academic in the world, its benefit nevertheless is limited. . . . There are other fields of study which are more useful, more important than national heritage research." I feel that we should not take such a narrow, utilitarian position. One must choose the field which is congenial to one's aptitude and within one's ability. After choosing one's research project, one must have an attitude of seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake.³⁴

Hu was inclined to identify the values of historical inquiries with searching for truth. The writing of history, in his mind, should not be for other reason than to search for truth. Holding the view of "knowledge for knowledge's sake", Hu insisted on the equal values of all research. He tried to retain a disinterested position. Each was to be played according to its own rules. Altogether they constituted an autonomous realm which tolerated no external interference.

Encouraged by Hu's remarks on re-examining national heritage, many young students decided to devote their whole life to it. This was considered by many of Hu's contemporaries to be unwise. Wu Zhihui (1864-1953) predicted that it would lead to an unintended result: the revival of traditional learning. He criticised this movement as "Westernised eight-legged essays" (*yang bagu*) and said that it carried on the old learning in Western forms. Wu advised his fellow iconoclasts that the best way to cast off traditions was to be absolutely indifferent to them. He contended that whenever one kept one's eye on tradition, the old rotten soul would come right

³⁴Hu Shi: "Lun Guogu Xue: Da Mao Zishui" (On National Heritage: Reply to Mao Zishui's Inquiries) *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 216.

back.³⁵ Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958) and He Bingsong held similar views.³⁶ They were all alarmed that this movement had helped to smuggle in the old soul of China under the new term of *Guoxue*. No wonder Lu Xun was loud in his protest. Lu Xun had published his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (*Zhongguo Xiaoshuoshi Lue*) in 1923 and 1924. Hu regarded it as a pioneer work in the writing of the history of Chinese fiction.³⁷ Spending a great deal of time in traditional studies himself, Lu Xun nevertheless disagreed with Hu's projects:

In the current situation, everybody has his own right to do whatever he likes. An old scholar can go ahead if he wants to re-examine the national heritage. The younger generation has its own knowledge and new method. It is no harm for each to mind their own business. However, if only re-examining national heritage is proposed, it is asking China to live isolated from the outside world. It is definitely absurd to insist that everybody should do this [re-examine the national heritage].³⁸

In fact, once the younger generation began working on exorcising the old evil from Chinese heritage, they would find that a prerequisite for the task was a good training in Chinese scholarship. So it could be welcomed by conservatives who called for reading Confucian classics and reminded people that one could only re-examine the national heritage if one had good classical training.³⁹ The unintended result was that

³⁵Wu Zhihui: "Zhen Yang Bagu Hua zhi Lixue" (A Warning to Foreign Eight-legeed Neo Confucianism) in *Kexue yu Rensheng Guan*, vol. 2, pp. 6-10 (26th article).

³⁶Zheng Zhenduo: "Qie Mantan Suowei Guoxue" (Idle Talk on the so-called Classical Studies), *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (Short Stories Magazine) 20.1 (1929): 8-13; He Bingsong, "Lun Suowei Guoxue" (On Classical Studies), *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 20.1 (1929): 1-7.

³⁷Hu Shi: "Baihua Wenxue Shi Zixu" (Preface to History of Vernacular Literature), *HSZPJ*, vol. 19, p. 7.

³⁸Lu Xun: "Weiyong Tiancai Yiqian" (Waiting for Genius) in *Lu Xun Quanjī*, vol. 1, p. 167.

³⁹"Zheng Shixu Xiansheng de Yijian," *Dujing Wenti* (Shanghai 1935), pp. 31-34.

at the end of the 1920s old books that had been neglected after the May Fourth Movement flooded the market again under the sobriquet *Guoxue*. Chen Xiyong (1896-1970), a professor in English at Beijing University, complained that because of Hu's re-examination of the national heritage movement: "The most obvious result of the New Literature Movement is the soaring price of old Chinese books. A set of *24 Histories (Ershisi Shi)* used to cost 100 *yuan* a few years ago, but now cost 300 *yuan*."⁴⁰

Hu was ambivalent about these developments. As early as 1927, Hu was in doubt as to where it might all lead. In a letter to Qian Xuantong (1887-1939), his anxiety was clearly shown. He said: "The fire we set off is spreading wildly. Whether it is good or bad, success or failure, it has become reality. . . . We have no choice but to bear the responsibility."⁴¹ In 1928, when he wrote "The Methods and Materials of Research" (*Zhixue de Fangfa yu Cailiao*), the shift of emphasis was more evident. Although he repeatedly mentioned that Qing intellectual pursuits were rich in scientific spirit, he concluded that their achievements existed only on paper. In this article, Hu pointed out the shortcomings of Qing research. He recognised the problems inherent in *kaozheng* scholarship that promoted piecemeal research. Hu

⁴⁰Chen Xiyong: *Xiyong Xianhua* (Idle Talk by Chen Xiyong) (Shanghai: Xinyue Shudian, 1928), p. 291. It is helpful to take the publication activities of the Commercial Press as a test case. For the first time after the New Cultural Movement, several large-scale projects for reprinting ancient Chinese texts were launched in the 1930s under the momentum of "re-examination the national heritage." See Wang Yunwu: "Shinian de Zhongguo Chuban Shiye (The Publication Business in Last ten Years), in Zhang Jinglu, ed.: *Zhongguo Xiandai Chuban Shiliao* (Materials Concerning the Publication Business of Modern China (Beijing: Shangwu Yingshuguan, 1954), vol. 2, pp. 343-344.

⁴¹*HSSXJ*, vol. 1, pp. 398-399.

changed his attitude towards pure research. He claimed that research not related to the current world is meaningless:

We encourage them to learn more about science and technology instead of following us into the old piles of paper. The former is a way out while to be buried in the old piles of paper is a dead end. For hundreds of years, many first-rate geniuses wasted their time in the old papers without achieving good results. We should change our road.⁴²

He was of the opinion that what was really important was the subject matter of study. "An identical method, when applied to different materials, will produce divergent results." Therefore, when Western science had been producing astounding inventions and discoveries, "our scholarship was still wallowing in worn-out papers."⁴³

Even when he retained the badge of practicality, he nevertheless did not abandon the view of pure scholarship. A few months after writing "The Methods and Materials of Research," in a letter to a historian, Hu Pu'an (1879-1947), Hu wrote:

I do not agree that there must be a relation between nationalism and academic research. If academic research is carried out under the banner of nationalism or other *isms*, exaggeration or covering up will be its result. We treat re-examining the national heritage as historical research. We work for the sake of scholarship, in seeking the truth.⁴⁴

When Hu was engaging in scholarly writing, he held a sense of detachment and considered himself a modern historian. However, much of the time he consciously confronted contemporary reality and thus immediately assumed a much more direct

⁴²Hu Shi: "Zhixue de Fangfa yu Cailiao" (The Methods and Materials of Research), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 156.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴⁴Hu Shi's letter to Hu Pu'an, dated 17 November 1927, *HSSXJ*, vol. 1, p. 465.

social role. At the time he felt that academia should deal with current events and he was a Chinese intricately entwined in China's contemporary plight. Looking from two different perspectives, he naturally saw things differently. Hu was torn between his belief in rescuing his country and his academic ideal that demanded academic research for its own sake. How could he find equilibrium in this tug-of-war?

4.3 *Kaozheng* Scholarship and Hu Shi's Approach to History

Being an ardent advocate and promoter of Westernisation in China, Hu Shi was firm and unequivocal in certain aspects. Unlike Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu, the two prominent anti-traditional figures in the May Fourth era, Hu never spent his time in writing old poetry after his return from America. However, this does not mean that he had liberated himself completely from the influence of traditional Chinese scholarship.

During the later stages of the Qing dynasty, although *kaozheng* scholarship had already passed its peak and modern education had gradually become popular, most students still spent a considerable amount of their time in studying Chinese classics. The intellectual atmosphere in most schools did not deviate much from this tradition even in the era of the May Fourth Movement.

Hu's best performances in his early years clearly showed that he was following *kaozheng* scholarship. In his first examination on the subject of Chinese study during his undergraduate year, he received a high score by tracing the original

meaning of the words *gui* and *ju*.⁴⁵ His other papers concerning Chinese classics which he was proud of were mainly based on the philological approach. These included questioning *Erya*, the most important ancient dictionary on its interpretation of the meaning of the word *yan* in the *The Book of Poetry*; differentiating between two ancient inflexions of the second person pronouns *er* and *ru* and between two first-person pronouns *wu* and *wo*.⁴⁶ Though a student of philosophy, he published no work in that field. When he began to teach at Beijing University in 1917, his interest in historical studies continued to develop. He published his dissertation on ancient Chinese thought in Chinese. In this book, Hu again showed his interest in the philological approach. He said it clearly in the introduction:

In my opinion, writing a reliable history on Chinese philosophy requires the author to undergo few steps. First, to collect the historical materials; second, to verify the materials; third, to put away the unreliable materials; fourth, to organise the reliable materials: this means to examine different editions of the text, to understand the text to discover the thread of each school of thought by comparing all the different interpretations of a text offered by various exegetes. This led to the final step: illuminating the lineage and change of ideas by comparing different schools of thought and thus establishing the historical sequence and continuity of these schools; identifying factors contributing to the rise and decline of each school; sorting out the historical consequences of each school of thought and evaluating each school in terms of its consequences.⁴⁷

The four steps mentioned by Hu did not involve any intrinsic logic of philosophy. To interpret the philosophers' thought, according to Hu, it was necessary to begin with evidential research and historical explication of early exegetes. Philological

⁴⁵SSZS, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁶KSZZ, pp. 121-130.

⁴⁷Hu Shi: *Zhongguo Gudai Zhhexueshi*, HSZPJ, vol.31, p. 27.

interpretation remained the hermeneutical system and was a most important tool for him. The most successful part of the book was Hu's verification of the unreliable facts.

Yu Ying-shih has pointed out that Hu's academic research began with philology and ended with philology.⁴⁸ Looking at Hu's academic works holistically such an assessment seems fair and accurate. Comparing the *History of Chinese Philosophy* both had written, Feng Youlan (1895-1990) claimed that the greatest difference between his work and Hu's was the academic approach. As far as Chinese philosophy was concerned, Feng described the difference: "Hu is using the Han Learning approach whereas I am using the Song Learning approach. The strengths of Han Learning scholars are textual criticism and philological research. The shortcomings are their shallow understanding of the philosophical meaning of the text." He continued:

Most sections of his book are spent in verifying data and tracing the origins of a word. When it comes to philosophical thoughts, his descriptions are neither deep nor detailed.⁴⁹

It is true to say that philological investigation was the foundation of Hu's analysis. His most important contribution in classical study was his challenge to the traditional approach of history. He brought novel elements into traditional Chinese philological discourse, including the method of induction, the concern for compiling reference books, a comparative approach, and an evolutionary view of history. He also

⁴⁸Yu Ying-shih: "Preface," *NPCB*, vol. 1, p. 31.

⁴⁹Feng Youlan: *Sansongtang Quanj*, vol. 1, p. 208.

criticised the indifference on the part of traditional scholars to the need for historical interpretation.

Dewey's tutelage in instrumental logic gave Hu Shi a technique which he found to be useful not only for experimental science, but also for research in the historical sciences, such as textual criticism, philological reconstruction and "higher criticism." He admitted:

Curiously enough, this instrumental logic has turned me into a historical research worker. I have learned to think genetically, and this genetic habit of thinking has been the key to success in all my subsequent work in the history of thought and literature..⁵⁰

It was Hu's habit to relate his research to scientific method. "My scope of research in these few years seems not to have any focus." Hu said in 1921, "However, my objective is clear. My only aim is to apply scientific method in my research. All my articles, including those discussing Pragmatism, the origins of a novel, or even tracing a word, are methodological articles."⁵¹ He reiterated this point in 1928: "Why must I spend fifty-thousand words in textual research on *Water Margin*? Why must I spend four thousand words tracing the origins of a tower in Mount Lu? I want to show the method of thinking. I want to tell them that the branches of knowledge are all equal, that the method of thinking has consistency. A novel and a classic have the same research value. Finding out the authenticity of a tower is as worthy as finding out the authenticity of the legacy of Sun Yat-sen."⁵²

⁵⁰Hu Shi: "My Credo and Its Evolution," p. 232.

⁵¹Hu Shi: "Hu Shi Wencun Xuli (Preface to Hu Shi Wencun), *HSZPJ*, vol. 3, p. 1.

⁵²Hu Shi: "Lu Shan Youji" (On the Trip to Lu Mountain), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 211.

Throughout his life, Hu never stopped espousing the same views. He also liked to look into other books from the same perspective. Reviewing *Gu Shibian* (Critiques of Ancient History), which was edited by Gu Jiegang, Hu wrote:

This is a revolutionary book in Chinese historiography which shows the method of historical research. This book emancipates Chinese thought and introduces research methodology. It can be used to advocate the "genuine and factual" spirit.⁵³

One characteristic of Hu's thought was to think highly of methodology and to downgrade ontology and epistemology. He went further than John Dewey in trying to extend methodology to cover the whole of Chinese philosophy. Yu Ying-shih has pointed out that there was a very obvious tendency towards reductionism in Hu Shi's thought -- a reduction of all academic thought and even culture into methods.⁵⁴ In Hu Shi's eyes, histories of Chinese and Western philosophy were nothing more than histories of methodological evolution.

However, Hu was not by education a scientist. Brought up within the Confucian tradition, and with exclusive early education in Chinese classics, Hu did not have the inclination to pursue the natural sciences. He was an average student in the School of Agriculture at Cornell University and soon transferred to the study of his true love: philosophy. Other intellectuals in the May Fourth era such as Ding Wenjiang, Ren Hongjun and Chen Hengzhe who shared his enthusiasm for the scientific method were perhaps better equipped than he to speak of it intimately. For Hu, and for students upon whom his influence was most conspicuous such as Gu Jiegang, Fu Sinian and Yu Pingbo, libraries and archives rather than laboratories or

⁵³*NPCB*, vol. 2, p. 644.

⁵⁴Yu Ying-shih: "Preface," *NPCB*, vol. 1, p. 40.

experimental stations provided the appropriate opportunity for demonstrating the usefulness of the scientific method.

4.4 The Reasons Behind Hu Shi's Scholarly Choice

As a matter of fact, problems involving China's transformation into a technically advanced nation were more complex than Hu had first envisioned. The scientists of the May Fourth era were the first generation of China's modern science community. They acquired their scientific training abroad and returned to China in which they were met with apathy and lack of opportunity. The warlord-dominated state was weak and ill-prepared to nurture a modern science establishment. In the early 1920s China's colleges and universities provided few opportunities for research; facilities were generally weak or entirely absent, and faculty members were overwhelmed with other responsibilities. For example, Li Shuhua (1890-1979), the eminent physicist, later recalled that he and his colleagues at Beijing University devoted all their energies to teaching. At best, professors could "raise the standards and qualifications" of their students and impart some "adequate basic knowledge" to them; but for themselves they could only "hope later to advance a step and be able to progress to scientific research."⁵⁵ An institution like Beijing University where there were twenty-six professors in the various sciences, was atypical. Nearly half of the scientists active in the Science Society of China (*Zhongguo Kexue She*), an

⁵⁵Li Shuhua: *Jielu Ji* (Records from the Hut on Jieshi Mountain) (Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chuabanshe, 1967), p. 45, p. 48.

organisation which was formed in 1914 by a group of students at Cornell University and moved to China in 1918, were scattered singly or in pairs among the inordinately large number of small colleges that had proliferated in and around Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing.⁵⁶ These schools suffered from chronic fiscal difficulties, and even Beijing University's finances deteriorated to the point that by 1925 many professors had been forced to resign and seek employment elsewhere. Research programs remained out of the question, and it became "enormously difficult" just to continue "normal lectures and laboratory exercise."⁵⁷

The situation was also unfavourable to humanities scholars who were interested in doing research on Western studies. Tang Degang's sketch of Hu's biography had this vivid picture:

After finishing their studies in the United States sixty years ago, Hu Shi and his friends came back to their own country. Genuinely speaking, besides their own textbooks, they did not have other books to improve their knowledge. The library collections in China were not sufficient. The research environment was poor. They could not pursue their research on Western literature and historiography. Consequently they had only three alternatives. First was to apply their own ideology in a political party and participate in revolutionary activities, as Zhang Junmai did. Second, instead of participating in revolutionary activities, they tried to do some constructive work as members of *Independent Critics* had done. Third was to remain as a pure scholar. This is what Hu Shi set himself to do. Since they had limited knowledge, it was not easy to continue their initial plan to transmit new thoughts from the West. . . . The best way was to re-examine the national

⁵⁶For statistic on these institutions, see Earl Herbert Cressy, *Christian Higher Education in China: A Study for the Year 1925-26* (Shanghai: China Christian Education Association, 1928), pp. 299-301; Allan Bernard Linden, "Politics and higher Education in China: The Kuomintang and the University Community, 1927-37," Ph. D. dissertation (Columbia University 1969), pp. 42-46; Jiaoyu Bu Tongji Shi: *Quanguo Gaodeng Jiaoyu Tongji* (National Higher Education Statistics) (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1931).

⁵⁷Li Shuhua: *Jielu Ji*, p. 42. For a discussion on the difficulties of Chinese scientists, see also Peter Buck: *American Science and Modern China 1876-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 185-189.

heritage...spending their time in re-examining the national heritage was a natural development and most logical work for them.⁵⁸

The above statement shed some light on Hu's devotion to his research on national heritage. Tang indeed aptly pointed out the difficulties faced by Hu Shi, or more precisely, scholars of that period.

However, we must not forget that another force that had driven Hu Shi into the field of national heritage was his own pursuit of self satisfaction. Philological research had given him many pleasant moments in a joyless period of chaos in China. More than once he expressed the feeling that this enjoyment was something which he could not get from his other endeavours. While carrying out textual criticism on Cao Xueqin's *The Dream of the Red Chambers* in 1922, he revealed his excitement at discovering *Si Songdang Ji* (Collected Writings from the Hall of Four Pines). This particular work by Cao Xueqin's close friend Dun Cheng (1734-1791) furnished Hu with new vital information on Cao. Hu wrote:

When I came back from University, I saw a book with a yellow cover. It was titled *Si Songdang Ji*. I could not believe my eyes. . . . I was ecstatic. My pleasure was even more than the time I found the *Wen Mushanfan Ji* (Collected Writings from the Rooms of Literary Trees) written by Wu Jingzi.⁵⁹

His bitter feelings always found some outlet in his philological research. This was especially true in the later part of his life. From the time Hu was appointed ambassador in 1938 until his death in 1962, he spent almost seventeen years in the United States. During his time there, apart from the first four years in which he was

⁵⁸See Tang Degang's notes in *KSZZ*, p. 228.

⁵⁹Hu Shi: "Ba Hong Lou Meng Kaozheng" (Postscript to the Textual Research on *The Dream of the Red Chamber*), *HSZPJ*, vol. 10, p. 120.

busy with official engagement as Ambassador, Hu had nothing much with which to occupy himself.

A brief recapitulation of Hu's life in 1940s might strengthen our understanding of Hu's philological interest. In 1942, Hu Shi stepped down from his appointment as Chinese ambassador to Washington, he was in a low mood. Jiang Menglin advised him to teach in the United states in order to earn a living.⁶⁰ Another friend Guo Taiqi (1888-1952), the former foreign minister also shared the view because it would be embarrassing both for him and the government if he returned to China.⁶¹ As a result, Hu taught in Harvard University for a year. In July 1943, he assumed the post as consultant to the Oriental Division of the Library of Congress. In this year, he devoted most of his time to research and writing. Hu continued his interest in historical studies and published few articles. He had some plans in mind. Besides setting himself to finish the other volumes of *History of Chinese Philosophy* which he had promised a long time ago, he thought of changing its title to *Chinese Intellectual History* and to writing an English version. However, in 1944, he changed his research plans. In a letter to friends, he gave the reason:

My initial plan was to write Chinese Intellectual History. However, I am always distracted by small questions and indulge my time in philological

⁶⁰Jiang Menglin's letter to Hu Shi on 2 January 1943, *YGMCSX*, vol. 39, p. 489.

⁶¹*YGMCSX*, vol. 33, p. 210. As Ambassador, Hu was acceptable to the American government. He was the recipient of more than thirty honorary degrees from universities and colleges, Commonwealth Club, etc. His replacement as Ambassador by Wei Daoming in September 1942 caused a shock in the United States. The *New York Times* editorialised the event on 3 September 1942, calling the action a mistake unless some higher post was reserved for Hu in China. It was perhaps for this reason, Jiang Menglin and Guo Taiqi advised him not to go back to China because there was no such important position in the Chiang Kai-shek government waiting for him. For Hu's dismissal as Ambassador, see also Chapter VI, note 99.

work. I find it more interesting than to devote my time to writing a general history.⁶²

By “small questions”, Hu meant the philological issues on the *Shuijing Zhu* (Commentary on the Book of Waterways). He was so interested in these “small questions” that he always worked until dawn. As one would expect, this gave Hu Shi slight relief in his lonely life in the United States.⁶³ When he came back from the United States in 1946, nine years after he left China, to the reporters’ surprise, instead of talking about current issues, Hu’s first words were on his research on the *Shuijing Zhu*. Hu hoped that through this publicity, he could have access to more relevant materials. Even after he had assumed the post of President of Beijing University in July 1946, he was still full of enthusiasm for the book. In a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Zhao Yuanren at Berkeley, California, Hu said:

Even now I still hope that Yuanren will come to teach at Beijing University. Life here is not that comfortable, but it offers many pleasures. (I am still playing with my Commentary on the *Shuijing Zhu* and sometimes working on it for seven or eight hours a day).⁶⁴

This is indeed a natural development. In a time when the Chinese start to convince that the CCP was their only hope, Hu Shi’s political commentaries and liberal ideas was bound to lose its popularity. Hu still discussed politics, but he inevitably incurred the misunderstanding of others especially after he showed his support for

⁶²A letter to Lei Haizong and Tian Peilin on 17 July 1944, see Cao Boyan and Ji Weilong, eds.: *Hu Shi Nianpu* (Chronology of Hu Shi) (Hefei: Anhui Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1989), p. 613.

⁶³ Many of Hu’s friends described his life in the United States in this period as “living in exile.” See for example, a letter from Shen Congwen to Hu dated 16 September 1944, *YGJMC SX*, vol. 27, p. 146.

⁶⁴Hu’s letter to Mr and Mrs Zhao Yuanren dated 24 May 1948, *HSSXJ*, vol. 2, p. 1139.

the KMT, which we shall discuss in the next Chapter. On Hu's philological research, Ming-chih Chow makes a sensitive comment:

Whether Hu wrote to offer solutions for problems of China's modernisation, to engage in polemical debates, or for the consumption of Western readers, it was a burdensome experience. For pleasure, for respite, and for a truce with himself, he turned to something remote and unengaging.⁶⁵

His success in the early years of his career had determined his pursuits in the later years. The strong response to his *History of Chinese Philosophy* encouraged him to further his research. He held the opinion that classical research was an important field of study. It was not easy because it needed both strong training on traditional learning and scientific method in analysing the data:

In the past, we believed that re-examining the national past could be left to second-rate and third-rate scholars. Now we know it was a mistake to think that way. Many first-rate scholars in the past two thousand years have spent their life doing these researches without having achieved good results. These works were indeed not easy. It needed capable men to handle them.⁶⁶

This was to defend himself for having been involved in textual research. However, this perspective caused Hu some problems. Throwing himself with enthusiasm into philological research, he acquired an increasing amount of detailed historical knowledge. But there was a certain uneasiness about the ultimate purpose of this kind of detailed research. It is not surprising that some individuals looked at this enthusiasm with misgivings. In 1932 in a letter to a friend, Lu Xun, who had from the outset opposed the entire project of re-examining the national heritage,

⁶⁵Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, p. 189.

⁶⁶*YGMCSX*, vol. 17, p. 2.

complained of Hu's exaggeration of the importance of out-printed editions or rare books.⁶⁷ Again in 1936, half a year before his death, Lu Xun had this to say:

If the writer is good and his work has long been read, what has been remembered by the readers are the characters in the books. The characters are not necessarily linked to the real life of particular individuals. For example we would not bother whether Jia Baoyu in *The Dream of the Red Chambers* is indeed Cao Xueqin. We also would not bother whether Ma Er in *The Scholars* is Feng Zhizhong. What we remember are only the characters of Jia Baoyu and Ma Er in the books. Only special scholars such as Hu Shi, would keep Cao Xueqin and Feng Zhizhong in mind.⁶⁸

Lu Xun's view was representative of the intellectuals of the time. According to Lu Xun, the facts which Hu brought to light were not interesting. He argued that ordinary people who were not specialists in history were bored. To them whether this or that fact had been discovered simply did not matter.

4.5 Hu Shi and the *Shuijing Zhu*

Hu Shi's scholarly research interest in the later part of his life was on the *Shuijing Zhu*, the work of an unknown author, probably completed before 265 A.D. It consists of a brief account of one hundred and thirty-seven rivers in China. Li Daoyuan (d. 527 A.D.), a scholar and official of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), on the basis of his own studies and actual observations, wrote a detailed

⁶⁷See Lu Xun's letter to Tai Jingnong, *Lu Xun Quan Ji*, vol. 12, p. 102.

⁶⁸Lu Xun: "Chuguan de Guan" (The *Guan* of *Chuguan*), *Lu Xun Quan Ji*, vol. 6, p. 519.

commentary and expanded the book. The combined work contains such a wealth of geographical and historical information that it became a literary classic.

The text of this voluminous work, nevertheless, suffered much distortion in the reprinting and revamping through the centuries. It resulted in many scholars trying to provide supplementary annotations. In the eighteenth century, three men: Dai Zhen (1724-1777), Zhao Yiqing (1702-1759) and Quan Zuwang (1705-1755) stood out pre-eminently in the critical study of the *Shuijing Zhu*. Building on the cumulative achievements of their predecessors, and applying the same critical methods of research, these three scholars arrived at practically the same solutions regarding the numerous problems left over from the preceding periods. The fact that their methods and results were so impressively similar gave rise, oddly enough, to a suspicion. Such suspicion lasted a century and a half, that one or two of them had been guilty of plagiarism.

Many scholars believed that Dai Zhen had plagiarised Zhao Yiqing's textual research on the *Shuijing Zhu* on the grounds that the manuscript of Zhao's annotated version was officially recommended and handed over by the Zhejiang Provincial Government to the "*Siku Quanshu* Compilation Board" under the Qing Imperial Library long before the manuscript was published, and that Dai Zhen had once been assigned to the board to do textual research. Dai Zhen's own annotated version of the *Shuijing Zhu* failed in most cases to cite the authorities on which his collations were based. Famous scholars of the Qing dynasty such as Zhang Mu and Wei Yuan, and those flourishing in the early twentieth century, such as Yang Shoujing, Wang Guowei and Meng Sen, all joined in the chorus to pillory Dai Zhen

as a plagiarist. This is what Hu called the "century-old controversy concerning the *Shui-ching Chu Shih* [*Shuijing Zhu Shi*]." ⁶⁹

Hu started the project no later than 1942 and continued until his death. According to him, his re-examination was activated by his desire to redress injustice to Dai Zhen, his prominent fellow villager. Hu Shi came to the conclusion that there was no thievery or collusion committed by Dai Zhen, Zhao Yiqing or Quan Zuwang. Each of them had reached the same conclusion independently. He was so confident that he declared his findings in 1944:

During the past year I have spent fully six months in a special investigation of this famous controversy which involves three great names of the eighteenth century: Dai Zhen, Zhao Yiqing or Quan Zuwang. As a result of this investigation, I am now in a position radically to revise the verdict which has been honestly accepted in these biographies as final. ⁷⁰

However, the case was not as simple as Hu thought. Materials relevant to the charge were too voluminous. Hu's findings did not rest the case. Consequently he had to add other evidence to support his argument. He published occasional papers and lectures on the topic from time to time. When Hu passed away in 1962, ten volumes of his manuscript had been published. Among them, six volumes were on the *Shuijing Zhu*. Besides this, Hu left behind some materials and notes on the *Shuijing Zhu* in Beijing. Although he had dedicated the best part of the last two decades of his life to clearing up the imbroglio surrounding the reputation of Dai Zhen, to many

⁶⁹Hu Shi: "A Note on Chuan Tsu-wang, Chao I-ching and Tai Cheng: A Study of Independent Convergence in Research as Illustrated in Their Words on the *Shui-ching Chu*" in Arthur W. Hummel, ed.: *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company Reprint, 1970), p. 970.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 970.

experts, none of Hu Shi's conclusions could be ultimately acceptable. Chen Qiaoyi, a current authority on the *Shuijing Zhu* describes Hu's positions as follows:

One must have well-founded arguments if one has a different view on an issue to previous scholars who have carried out many researches and whose findings are generally accepted. This is exactly what happened to Hu Shi's case on the *Shuijing Zhu*. Before him, scholars included Wei Yuan, Zhang Mu, Yang Shoujing, Wang Guowei, Meng Sen and Zheng Dekun had serious researches on this issue. They gave different evidence from different angles to prove Dai plagiarised Zhao. . . . Hu's hypothesis is not well grounded and as a result, Hu's research on this issue for nearly twenty years came to no significant result.⁷¹

Most scholars in this area were bored with the controversy. As Chen indicated, the evidence which Hu had gathered was more disturbing than comforting. Chen complained that Hu's investigation was a meaningless exercise which did not contribute to the understanding of the book.⁷²

It is highly probable that Hu was aware of the controversy and scepticism of the value of his research. In his *Oral Autobiography*, he proudly gave descriptions on his academic achievements such as his studies in Chinese short stories and his research in Chan Buddhism, but did not mention the *Shuijing Zhu* in which he had put so much effort.

On the *Shuijing Zhu*, Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987), a well-known literary critic and one of Hu's close friends, had once voiced his doubt of its value:

When you wrote "Travel to Mount Lu" (*Lu Shan Youji*) in your younger days, you spent eight thousand words to trace the origins of the tomb of a monk. This research is published in *The Crescent* and later went to print in a monograph. This resulted in criticism from Mr. Chang Yansheng. He said

⁷¹Chen Qiaoyi: "Ping Hu Shi Shougao" (A Critique of *Hu Shi Shougao*) in Qian Bochong, ed.: *Zhonghua Wenshi Luncong Di Sishiqi Ji* (Essays on Chinese Literature and History 47) (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1991), p. 49

⁷²Chen Qiaoyi: *Shuijing Zhu Yanjiu Erji* (A Study of the *Shuijing Zhu*, Second Series) (Taiyuan: Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 67-92.

that you should not indulge in this small matter. The same question arises: is it worthwhile for you to put in so much effort on the *Shuijing Zhu*?⁷³

Hu promptly gave his response and defended his own study. He said:

I do not agree with you. I only want to show the research method. We should give our opinion on the works of scholars of the past. If they are wrongly accused, we should defend their case. The effort is worthwhile because I can show to future generations the method of research.⁷⁴

Besides Liang, Hu had been asked by many friends and students about the value of the study of the *Shuijing Zhu*. "I used my textual research on novels to show the research method," he said in a public lecture at the University of Taiwan in December 1952, "Similarly, I use my research on a century-old controversy concerning the *Shuijing Zhu* to show the method of textual research."⁷⁵ Again, in a letter written on November 1954 to Hong Ye (1893-1980), who taught in Harvard University at the time, Hu made the same remarks. "My re-examination of the case of the *Shuijing Zhu* over the past decade was partly motivated by my desire to restore justice for someone who was wrongly accused, but my main purpose was to give myself a rigorous training in the research method."⁷⁶

Hu repeated the same reason for his study of the *Shuijing Zhu* many times without adding anything persuasive. Liang Shiqiu noted down that "Hu's thought seems to have stopped growing in the later years of his life."⁷⁷ Hu complicated matters by appealing to the need to show the scientific method as though he was not

⁷³Liang Shiqiu: "Huainian Hu Shizhi Xiansheng (Reminiscing Mr. Hu Shi) in *Kanyun Ji* (Looking at the Cloud) (Taipei: Huangguan Chubanshe, 1984), p. 10.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵Hu Shi: "Zhixue Fangfa" (Research Method) in *HSZPJ*, vol. 24, p. 20.

⁷⁶A letter to Hong Ye, *NPCB*, vol. 6, p. 2448.

⁷⁷Liang Shiqiu: "Huainian Hu Shizhi Xiansheng" in *Kanyun Ji*, p. 10.

doing research on history. It is no doubt that introducing scientific method was worthwhile and indeed had inspired many young students. Hu nevertheless claimed too much for it. As a Pragmatist, Hu Shi argued just this, and it is easy to see why. He must convince himself that there was no deep or serious conflict between his Pragmatist thinking and his research. "Scientific method" was his best argument to justify the value of his research. Only by giving an excuse for introducing scientific method to China, Hu could defend himself for doing something trivial, remote and unengaging which would presumably give him a sense of inner peace.

In his later years, Hu never complained of the uselessness of Qing *kaozheng* scholarship. In a letter written in May 1957 to Chen Zhifan, a young scientist and a well-known prose writer, Hu wrote:

They understood the importance of finding the truth. For this reason, they used their training and knowledge to verify the new findings. . . . This passion of finding truth was a genuine one. It was full of strength. . . . That is why I do not agree with you when you claim that philological research is scientific research but not healthy.⁷⁸

He wrote the above letter when he was sixty-six. He renounced his previous apologetic tone and no longer claimed that the scope of Qing scholars was limited. In July 1959, in a lecture delivered in the United States, he reiterated this point. He said that although great Chinese scholars of the seventeenth century were confined to books, words and documents, "the books they worked on were books of tremendous importance to the moral, religious and philosophical life of the entire nation. Those great men considered it their sacred duty to find out what each and every one of these books actually meant." And "those great men working with only

⁷⁸*HSSXJ*, p. 1309.

books, words and documents have actually succeeded in leaving to posterity a scientific tradition of dispassionate and disciplined inquiry, of rigorous evidential thinking and investigation, of boldness in doubt and hypotheses coupled with meticulous care in seeking verification.”⁷⁹

The larger question is whether Hu’s textual research had any social value. It is easy to conclude that it had none. He once regretted that the three hundred years of Qing scholarship only resulted in “scientific book-learning,” whereas in the West, in these three hundred years, “a new science and a new world” were created. While Galileo, Kepler, Harley, Boyle, and Newton experimented with objects of nature, Chinese scholars merely devoted themselves to analyses of ancient books.⁸⁰ Hu asked:

Our highest achievement of the past three hundred years was merely the study of a few ancient texts. What good does such a thing do to life? What is its benefit to the nation?⁸¹

The same criticism, technically, can be applied to Hu Shi himself. “What good does his research on the *Shujing Zhu* do to life?” It is difficult to share, in retrospect, his conviction that this sort of scholarly endeavour provided an adequate demonstration of the relevance of his principles to Chinese situations, or that it could, as he believed, affect in a compelling fashion the destiny of his nation in an age of great crisis. Without disputing the superficiality of Hu’s interpretation of the importance of

⁷⁹Hu Shih: “The Scientific Spirit and Method in Chinese Philosophy,” in Charles A. Moore, ed.: *The Chinese Mind: Essential of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, (Honolulu: East-West Centre, 1967), pp. 129-131.

⁸⁰Hu Shih: *The Chinese Renaissance: The Haskell Lectures 1933*, pp. 70-71.

⁸¹Hu Shi: “Zhixue de Fangfa yu Cailiao” (The Methods and Materials of Research), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 153.

his own work, we must conclude that he had tragically misjudged the needs of his time.

4.6 The Burden of a Historian

As I have discussed in Chapter II, when Hu started teaching at Beijing University, traditional scholarship was still dominant. Major thinkers of the earlier generation were still alive and were influential in academic circles. In order to strengthen his reputation as a professor, Hu knew that he must perform well. He finally gained fame in the academic circles after publishing his *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Hu's reputation in academic circles, as I have also pointed out, was generally based on his direct application of scientific method to Chinese classical studies, not by his intellectual depth and breadth of Chinese classics.

Apart from *The Book of Poetry*, Hu did not have thorough understanding of the other important classics. This is why his study mainly focused on the Chinese novel. In his project of re-examining the national heritage, he raised many questions worthy of further discussion. However, Hu's scholarship in the fields of Chinese philosophy and literature was superseded later. He was especially proud of guiding Gu Jiegang to edit the ancient history of China. As a matter of fact, besides the few letters in which he exchanged his ideas with Gu on the matter, Hu did not seem to

contribute much. Gu gradually went his own way.⁸² Since Hu always regarded academic research as his vocation, it was not surprising that he felt a great loss. Taking his political activities too seriously had interrupted his scholarly life. Thus Hu later decided to concentrate on scholarly research. As had been pointed out by Lu Yaodong, Hu probably thought of using the *Shuijing Zhu* as his new starting point.⁸³

Hu's specialising in the *Shuijing Zhu*, however, did not bring any inspiration for others. To most students of Hu Shi, the *Shuijing Zhu* was uninteresting. This is where Hu's problems lay. Hu always felt responsible for society and for the people who admired him. Hu made his reputation at the age of twenty-six. His contribution, as he believed, was important and profound. In Hu's own scholarship he served as a preceptor and inspiration for many younger men, opening to them wide and inviting new vistas. This earlier reputation, however, exerted pressure on him and always reminded him of his role as leader. For this reason, it is not surprising that Hu, as a historian, should think that he had a purpose beyond self-satisfaction.

As early as 1926, Hu had mentioned the disadvantages of early fame.⁸⁴ But he was never able to get rid of its pressure. In a letter to a friend in February 1959, Hu admitted that he was tortured by his early fame.⁸⁵ Hu's pressure was indeed a real one. His friend once wrote to him in 1922: "Since you have been the spokesman

⁸²On Gu's relations with Hu on academic points, see Liu Qiyu: *Gu Jiegang Xiansheng Xueshu* (The Scholarship of Gu Jiegang) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), pp. 258-271.

⁸³Lu Yaodong: *Qie Zuo Shen Zhou Xiushouren* (To be an Outsider of China) (Taipei: Yuncheng Wenhua Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1989), p. 188.

⁸⁴*NPCB*, vol. 1, p. 535.

⁸⁵See Hu's letter to Hu Guanglu dated 13 February 1959, *HSSXJ*, vol. 3, p. 1374.

in intellectual circles, you must be careful with words.”⁸⁶ It is true because in the era of the New Cultural Movement, young students regarded him as a precursor to their own scholarship. Some even became his devoted followers. Chen Xiying, an admirer of Hu Shi once noted:

Most articles in the *Collected Essays of Hu Shi* are on advocacy of revolution, anti-tradition, and construction of new literature. Through these articles, Mr. Hu led us in a new direction. . . . It is not easy to get into a new path. There must be a good guide who understands the path ahead. Hu should be situated in that position. . . . To me, everybody can take part in the project of re-examining the national past except Mr. Hu. After all he is the one to blame. Why did he create such an important reputation for himself?⁸⁷

Chen’s high expectation of Hu Shi was not an isolated case. The same view was shared by Tang Degang, one of his students who characterised Hu’s research on the *Shuijing Zhu* as “putting fine timber to petty use” (*dacai xiaoyong*).⁸⁸ His devoted disciples never stopped demanding that Hu become a great teacher, showing them the way to escape from the long-standing crisis of their country. Alas, there is a limitation to one’s capacity. As Liang Shiqiu lamented on Hu’s dilemma: “How many times can one show a completely new way of thinking?”⁸⁹

In short, we may say that Hu was pushed too hard to shoulder responsibilities beyond his capability. To Hu Shi, to study or to write history was a pleasant occupation. Indeed, he should have practised his belief in carrying out research for its own sake, especially since such an endeavour was largely innocuous. Unfortunately, he was perhaps impeded by an overriding concern with public

⁸⁶*YGMCSX*, vol. 16, p. 477.

⁸⁷Chen Xiying: “Xiying Bayu” (Xiying’s Postscript), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, pp. 161-162.

⁸⁸Tang Degang: *Hu Shi Zayi*, p. 110.

⁸⁹Liang Shiqiu: “Huainian Hu Shizhi Xiansheng,” in *Kanyun Ji*, p. 15.

concern. One can say, with some justification, that the problem with Hu was his over-consciousness about his public image.

Chapter V

A Frustrated Pragmatist: Hu Shi and Chinese Cultural Traditions

In 1916 on his birthday, Hu wrote a self-congratulatory poem in classical style. In it he spoke of his dream of a trip to Heaven as an “immortal” during which he discovered a few “magical drugs” unknown to other “immortals.” He intended to return to the human world and use them to cure diseases. Obviously, his “heaven” was America and his “human world” was China.¹ On 8 March 1917, just months away from his journey home, Hu Shi read a book about the Oxford Movement and was deeply touched by a phrase from the *Iliad*, quoted by John Henry Newman: “You shall know the difference now that we are back again.” In his diary, Hu remarked: “The motto should be inscribed on the banner of our generation of returned students.”² He returned to China and appealed to the people for an “enforced awakening.”

As a faithful disciple of Dewey’s philosophy, it is not surprising that Hu was against sterile traditionalism, dogma, institutions and habits that had lost their significance and purpose. Dewey was the philosopher of a world in process. He reminded us time and again that in government, law, social institutions, and the arts, the words “find” and “useful” mean complex active processes subjected to change.

¹*LXRJ*, vol. 4, pp. 162-63.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 194-195

There were three keys to meaningful life: growth, a constant alertness to the freshening and the reshaping, and the remaking of experience. The enemy of life (and its negation) is rigid and blind resistance to change. The function of intelligence is to be critical of outmoded methods in society, in government, in feeling, and in thought. This alertness applies also to those tendencies in human institutions, governments, laws, and customs which render life more meaningful, more alive, at once more integrated and more varied.³ "Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing and refining is the aim of living."⁴ It was precisely this conviction that Hu endeavoured to communicate to his Chinese audiences.

Hu was a frequent contributor to *New Youth* when he became professor at Beijing University. Both the University and the journal were then centres of radical ideas and provided him with convenient forums. Among the May Fourth Movement leaders, Chen Duxiu was the first one to expose the dichotomy of preserving the old Chinese culture as the foundation and adopting the new Western learning for practical purposes. He tried to show that such a dichotomy was impossible:

Whether in politics, scholarship, morality or literature, the Western method and the Chinese method are two absolutely different things and can in no way be compromised or reconciled. We need not now discuss which is better and which is worse, as that is a separate issue. But we must first decide on the national policy whether we should continue to use the old Chinese method or to adopt the new Western method. If we decide to be conservative, then we must use the old Chinese method through and through, and need not waste our money to send students abroad or open any schools for the study of Western learning. But if we decide to reform, then we must adopt the new Western method in all things and need not confuse the issue by such nonsense as "national heritage or special circumstances." . . . I dare say,

³See Irwin Edman: *John Dewey: His Contribution to the American Tradition* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1955), p. 31.

⁴John Dewey: *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 177.

unless we soon decide on the policy of reaction or reform, political and social contradictions, confusion, and retrogression are inevitable.⁵

Such a view was naturally regarded with suspicion by the conservatives. But this did not deter Chen Duxiu and his colleagues from their commitment. *New Youth* bitterly attacked anything old and traditional. Hu's articles in *New Youth* were also highly critical of traditional culture. The topics Hu wrote on included literary revolution, emancipation of women, the old family system and conventional ethics.

In November 1919, Hu attempted to clarify the on-going controversy on the new thought. Such a controversy began with Lin Shu in early 1919 when he published two short stories and an open letter to Cai Yuanpei, President of Beijing University, assaulting *New Youth* editors-contributors for their promotion of vernacular language, their ridicule of old-style gentry scholars, and their criticism of Chinese tradition. Despite such criticism, the new thought seemed irresistible to young readers. It is not surprising that Lin Shu's letter and stories were generally regarded as ludicrous.⁶ However, Hu noticed something very important was missing in the discussion of new culture. Considering that the new generations embraced whatever Western thought they took as "the new thought" (*xin sichao*), Hu Shi proposed to look into its essence and outline what was to be done. He pointed out that "the fundamental significance of the new thought lies simply in a new attitude." He explained:

- i. Of the traditional systems and conventions, we must ask, "Do these systems still possess the value to survive today?"

⁵Chen Duxiu: "Jinri Zhongguo zhi Zhengzhi Wenti" (The Political Problem of China today), *Chen Duxiu Wencun*, pp. 152-153..

⁶For a discussion on the controversy, see Chow Tse-tsung: *The May Fourth Movement*, pp. 63-72.

- ii. Of the teachings of the sages and philosophers handed down from ancient times, we must ask, "Are these words still valid today?"
- iii. Of all behavior and beliefs receiving the blind approval of society, we must ask, "Is everything that has been approved by the public necessarily correct? Should I do this, just because others are doing it? Is there no other way that is better, more reasonable and more beneficial?"

Nietzsche said that the modern era is an "era of re-evaluation of all values." These words, "re-evaluation of all values" are the best explanation of the critical attitude.⁷

Hu then listed programmes to be carried out under the guidance of this critical spirit in the New Culture Movement, that is, "to study the problem, introduce theories, re-examine the national heritage and recreate civilisation." He tried to present a New Culture project in its broadest possible terms and elevate it to a higher level. Defined in this way the New Culture is not just about advocacy of Western values and ideas such as democracy, science, dignity of the individual, emancipation of women, etc. Nor is its central significance limited to the denunciation of Chinese tradition including especially the theory and practice of Confucianism. From his point of view, probably all the above matters of a practical nature -- the list is endless -- can be included in the category of study problems. In promoting simultaneously the importation of Western thought and scholarship on the one hand and "re-examining the national heritage" on the other, Hu hoped to connect the best in both modern civilisation and Chinese civilisation.

As early as his student days in the United States, Hu Shi had made it clear that his philosophy stipulated cultural reform as a prerequisite for political reform.

⁷Hu Shi: "Xin Sichao de Yiyi," *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 42. This translation is from Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, eds.: *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923*, p. 252. In his student days Hu had read Nietzsche and rejected his philosophical ideas. See *LXRJ*, vol. 2, pp. 183-184. Without going into detail about the interpretation of Nietzsche in China, it seems fair to say that interest in him based itself mostly on the catchword "re-evaluation of all values" a slogan excellently suited to the policy of a periodical such as *New Youth*.

Hu had not changed his attitude after his return in 1917. Unlike Chen Duxiu who later changed his career to join politics, Hu was single-minded in this pursuit of cultural reform. It is not an exaggeration to say that Hu understood his goals more clearly than the others. Indeed, even in his most radical mood, Hu was more moderate than his friends in *New Youth* such as Chen Duxiu and Qian Xuantong. Both Chen and Qian were ready to break away completely from Chinese tradition. Hu was more cautious on cultural issues. He remained an outsider when Chen Duxiu was busy debating cultural issues with the conservatives in the *Dongfang Zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany) in 1919. It is important to note that Hu did not involve himself in cultural debates until 1923. He was more concerned with expounding new ideas from the West in order to map out new roads for traditional China.

5.1 The Conservatives

It is generally true that prior to the Qing Reform Movement of the 1890s, modernisation efforts encountered some intransigent opposition. Resistance faded from then on. Chinese intellectuals in increasing numbers came to realise that “tradition” would not provide solutions to China’s plight and that only radical departures from the old ways could rescue her.⁸ To be sure, opposition to Westernisation has never been absent, the central debate in the May Fourth era,

⁸Benjamin Schwartz: “Introduction,” in Benjamin Schwartz, ed.: *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 1-13; Benjamin Schwartz: “The Limits of ‘Traditions Versus Modernity’: The Case of the Chinese Intellectuals,” in his *China and Other Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 45-64.

however, was the direction and substance of China's modernisation, not modernisation itself. The great majority of Chinese conservatives held complex attitudes toward the question of change. They were conservatives largely within their immediate intellectual-political context. It is nearly impossible to find in China the specific commitments to institutions (such as monarchy) and norms (such as religious values) that characterised European conservative ideology. Furthermore, few Chinese especially in the twenties, gave serious consideration to the possibility or the desirability of preserving the cultural-political complex of the past in its entirety. In an environment which boarded on total breakdown, even the conservatives, one might venture, would have found little comfort in Lord Falkland's famous statement: "When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change." The question in China at this time was not whether or not it was necessary to change but how radical the change was to be. What justifies the use of the concept of conservatism is the fact that many Chinese continued to insist that some ties to the past were necessary; they opposed unqualified change that was totally divorced from what had existed before.

In order to illustrate the conservatives' view after the May Fourth Movement, I shall again go back to Zhang Zhidong's *ti-yong* formula. This theoretical distinction between principles and method provided cautious Chinese reformers with a convenient formula in the final years of the monarchy. They could uphold their commitment to China's cultural *ti* (essence) and still in good conscience import Western factories and firearms in order to achieve national "wealth and power." Early references to the nature of the Chinese essence were vague, usually mentioning some fundamental principles of Chinese moral philosophy and social

usage. In the last years of his life, Zhang felt compelled by events to take more concrete measures to preserve the *ti*. He moved to promote the study of traditional literature, an indication that whatever he considered the ultimate nature of the *ti*, it was somehow inseparable from classical and historical scholarship.

At the same time, some of the anti-Manchu revolutionaries -- Zhang Zhidong's political and ideological opposites -- began using the same concept for their own purposes. They adopted the Japanese neologism "national essence" (*guocui*) instead of *ti*. Even Zhang Zhidong himself used "national essence" on occasions to refer to the general concept of Chinese essence. The "national essence" coterie, led by such figures as Zhang Binglin, Liu Shipei, and Huang Jie (1874-1935), persisted until the May Fourth era. After the May Fourth era, the group of people around the conservative magazines *Xueheng* (Critical Review), *Jiayin Zazhi* (The Tiger Magazine) and *Dongfang Zazhi* (East Magazine) took on the mantle. In the hands of these people, the essence of Chineseness became just another classical "cradle culture" -- equal, but not necessary superior, to Western classical culture. The genealogy of the national essence idea may be extended forward in time to the more instrumental and politicised KMT neo-traditionalism of Dai Jitao and Chen Lifu in the 1930s, and even on to the recent resurgent conservatism in Mainland China.⁹

In all of its various reincarnations, the National Essence School was devoted to the preservation of Chinese "spirit" which adherents believed was embedded in the literary heritage. Their specific activity on behalf of national essence concentrated on classical and textual scholarship, history, and belles-lettres. They often drew

⁹For a discussion on recent resurgent conservatism, see Henry Y. H. Zhao: "Post-Isms and Chinese New Conservatism), *New Literary Theory*, no. 28 (1997), pp. 31-44.

parallels between their own endeavours and the revival of Western classical studies during the European Renaissance. Like Zhang Zhidong, they welcomed, to a certain extent, Western social, political and economic “forms” as a means for protecting China’s national essence.

It is important to note that those who were often labelled as conservative critics of the May Fourth era or Westernisation often turned out to be no less critical of Chinese culture and no less Westernised than their “progressive” rivals in their own time. For example, when Yan Fu was working on the translation of *Evolution and Ethics* from 1895 to 1896, he was the foremost radical thinker in China. “Respect the people and rebel against the ruler; respect the present and rebel against antiquity” was the gospel he preached to everybody; Kang Youwei in his heyday advocated not only total, but immediate change in the late nineteenth century. Kang is well-known for his proposal on monarchy democracy which was formulated with a Western model in mind; the National Essence group were *bona fide* radical scholars prior to the May Fourth Era. They were revolutionaries as opposed to the constitutionalists led by Kang Youwei and his leading disciple Liang Qichao. They were intellectually more radicalised than Kang in their attitude towards the Confucian tradition. In the May Fourth Era, Yan, Kang and the National Essence group were considered by the youth as men of the past. As a matter of fact, these intellectuals generally did not change their ideas. What happened in China was that radical ideas emerged and disappeared in quick succession. As interpreted by Yu Ying-shih, China had been under the process of rapid radicalisation since the turn of

the century.¹⁰ For this reason, conservatism must be viewed as being a relative concept in the contemporary context.

5.2 Hu Shi and the Cultural Conservatives

The first article Hu wrote refuting conservatism was his review of Liang Shuming's book *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (*Dongxi Wenhua ji Qi Zhexue*) in March 1923. Liang Shuming was famous for his dedication to the preservation of the Chinese cultural essence (or more precisely, Confucian ethical values), while accepting, albeit with qualifications, Western political forms and technology. In his book Liang Shuming proposed to study culture as a comprehensive system covering the spiritual, social and material aspects of human society, embodied "in a way a particular nation exists." Each culture and its observable features were rooted in its own philosophical resolution with regard to the primal "will to life." According to him, three distinct attitudes toward the relation between life and reality distinguish Western, Chinese, and Indian cultures from one another. As "the last Confucian", Liang Shuming believed that Western culture was the preliminary stage of world civilisation and would fulfil its historical mission in solving the problem of material scarcity. Only Chinese culture, embodied in the Confucian ideal of universal harmony, could provide the world with a consummating

¹⁰Ying-shih Yu: "The Radicalisation of China in the Twentieth Century," *Daedalus* 122. 2 (Spring 1993): 125-150.

alternative. Thus "the future culture of the world will be a revived Chinese culture."¹¹

Since Liang's book severely criticised Hu's recent work on ancient Chinese thought and even cast aspersions upon Hu's intellectual integrity, it was natural that Hu should respond publicly. According to Hu, culture is "a material and definable factor." It described the way in which people lived, and life was essentially adaptation to environment. Hu accused Liang of using oversimplified generalisations and vague abstractions to construct a fundamental solution. He emphasised that "since all humans shared the same physiological make-up, their demands on the environment were fundamentally the same." Human thought was not, as Liang suggested, an expression of cultural direction, but simply a tool for satisfying these demands. Any given environment is "subjected to constant and continuous change, and cultural change is the result of environmental change." Therefore, China's problems were related to a cultural change that was retarded. The difference between China and the West was therefore, "not qualitative but quantitative, not a difference in kind but in degree." Because human needs were everywhere the same, Hu implied, any statement about the special character of a particular culture was by its nature "arbitrary" and invalid. To Liang's question on why the Chinese were so far behind, Hu answered:

Because of environmental difficulties or the lack of them, and because of the (different degrees of) urgency of the problems (facing the various peoples), there are differences in the speed with which the peoples travel. . . . We can

¹¹Liang Shuming: *Dongxi Wenhua ji Qi Zhexue* (Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies), p. 10. For a discussion on Liang Shuming's cultural philosophy, see Guy Alitto: *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 82-134.

only say that, in the past three hundred years, the European peoples were confronted with an urgent coercive environment (which enabled them) to get ahead a few steps.¹²

Being an ardent advocate and promoter of Westernisation for China, Hu feared, as he said in 1928, that “in recent years the despondent mood of a number of European writers has led to the revival of such old myths as the bankruptcy of the material civilisation of the West and the superiority of the spiritual civilisation of the Oriental nations. . . . Although these expressions represent nothing more than the pathological mentality of war-stricken Europe, they have already had the unfortunate effect of gratifying the vanity of Oriental apologists and thereby strengthening the hand of reaction in the East.”¹³ It is clear that cultural conservatism of the twentieth century incensed Hu, and his most fierce attacks on Chinese culture were in part targeted at it. “Current intellectual thought is ridiculous and is out of expectation.” In a letter responding to Qian Xuantong who invited him to take part in the cultural debate, Hu said: “After reading these (conservatives’) articles, my sadness is not less than yours.”¹⁴

From the debate in 1923 to another famous debate which had been stirred up by ten professors in 1935, Hu wrote not less than ten important articles. In spite of his often very severe criticisms, Hu Shi’s rejection of Chinese tradition was far from total. The philosophy which Hu endeavoured to exploit as a rationale for Chinese

¹²Hu Shi: “Du Liang Shuming Xiansheng de Dongxi Wenhua ji Qi Zhexue” (On Reading Mr. Liang Shuming’s Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies) *HSZPJ*, vol. 8, pp. 58-59. Translation is from Guy Alitto: *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, p. 127.

¹³Hu Shi: “Civilizations of the East and the West,” in Charles A. Beard, ed: *Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), p. 25.

¹⁴*HSSXJ*, vol.1, p. 361.

cultural outlook was not a revolutionary creed. Pragmatism is enlivened more by a desire to conserve than a compulsion to destroy. Its purpose, in social as in intellectual concerns, is not to cut men entirely free from their past but to discover new and more harmonious connections between past and present. William James observed, in a discussion of his doctrine of truth, that "new truths always a go between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity."¹⁵ The point that James urged us to observe particularly is the role played by older truths. Dewey described the function of intelligence in similar terms. According to him, in its large sense, the remaking of the old through union with the new is precisely what intelligence is. "Every problem that arises, personal or collective, simple or complex, is solved only by selecting material from the store of knowledge amassed in past experience and by bringing into play habits already formed." He continued: "The office of intelligence in every problem that either a person or a community faces is to effect a working connection between old habits, customs, institutions, beliefs, and new conditions."¹⁶

Hu Shi always insisted that the May Fourth Movement as an intellectual or cultural movement must be understood as the Chinese Renaissance. This was not only because of his advocacy of the vernacular language as the modern literary medium, but more importantly, because of his profound sense of historical continuity. To him, "Renaissance" suggested renovation rather than destruction of

¹⁵William James: *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981) p. 31.

¹⁶John Dewey: *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), p. 50.

the Chinese tradition.¹⁷ As he said: "How can we best assimilate modern civilisation in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilisation of our own making? . . . The solution of this great problem, as far as I can see, will depend solely on the foresight and the sense of historical continuity of the intellectual leaders of New China, and on the tact and skill with which they can successfully connect the best in modern civilisation with the best in our own civilisation."¹⁸

Hu believed that it was impossible for the Chinese to do away with traditional culture and totally accept Western culture. Although a strong proponent of Westernisation, he nevertheless conceded the impossibility of his advocacy, which he explained in terms of "cultural inertia," that "there is an inertia inside culture, and the result of thorough Westernisation naturally tends to a mixture."¹⁹

Hu was convinced that old traditions would not be lost even when we took an extreme view of the need for modernisation, because civilisations were conservative by their nature.²⁰ According to Hu, the conservative nature of an indigenous culture can never be wiped out. In other words, Hu meant to imply that neither the voluntary discardings, nor the numerous acceptances would destroy the character and worth of recipient civilisation. He believed that on the contrary the discarding of the undesirable elements would only enrich and vitalise the older culture. He was never afraid that Chinese civilisation as the recipient might

¹⁷Hu Shi: "Zhongguo Wenyi Fuxing Yundong" (The Chinese Renaissance Movement) in *HSZPJ*, vol. 24, p. 178.

¹⁸Hu Shi: *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹Hu Shi: "Bianji Houji" (Editorial Notes), *DLPL* 142 (17 March 1935): 24.

²⁰Hu Shi: "Conflicts of Cultures," in Bruno Lasker, ed.: *Problems of the Pacific* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), p. 477.

disintegrate and disappear. On this important issue, Hu's argument although lengthy, is worth quoting in full:

Culture itself is conservative When two different cultures come into contact, the force of competition and comparison can partially destroy the resistance and conservatism of a certain culture. . . . In this process of survival of the fittest, there is no absolutely reliable standard by which to direct the selection from the various aspects of a culture. . . . There is always a limit to violent change in the various spheres of culture, namely, that it can never completely wipe out the conservative nature of an indigenous culture. This is the "Chinese basis" the destruction of which has been feared by numerous cautious people of the past as well as the present. This indigenous basis is found in the life and habits produced by a certain indigenous environment and history. Simply stated, it is the people -- all the people. This is the "basis." There is no danger that this basis will be destroyed. No matter how much intellectual systems have been transformed, the Japanese are still the Japanese and the Chinese are still Chinese. . . . Those of us who are forward looking should humbly accept the scientific and technological world culture and the spiritual civilization behind it. . . . There is no doubt that in the future the crystallization of this great change will, of course, be a culture on the "Chinese basis."²¹

Hu's idea of Westernisation, in this regard, was sensible and without any provocative intention. This was an unexceptionable thesis. Unfortunately, his advocacy for Westernisation was widely condemned. Hu was regarded by many as responsible, to a considerable degree, for China's loss of national confidence and pride.²²

To be fair, the cultural conservatives were not against modernisation. The advocacy of combining Chinese and Western cultures presupposed that there was much of value worth preserving in Chinese culture, and that the losses would outweigh the gain if the introduction of Western civilisation thoroughly negated

²¹Hu Shi: "Shi Ping Suowei 'Zhongguo Benwei de Wenhua Jianshe Xuanyan'" (Criticism of the 'Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis'), in *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, pp.137-140. English translation see Wm. Theodore de Bary et.al., eds.: *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 194-195.

²²For example, see Xu Ziming et al.: *Hu Shi yu Guoyun* (Hu Shi and the Nation's Destiny) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1958).

traditional culture. Most proponents of this idea sought to adopt the best of Western culture while preserving what was of value in traditional culture. While acknowledging some conflicts between Chinese and Western civilisation, they emphasised a combination instead of separation of the two. The conflict between the two civilisations implied that China's circumstances were unique and to imitate Western civilisation blindly would inevitably lead to failure. They pointed out that many advanced Western products lost their progressiveness as soon as they were introduced into China because they were not suitable to Chinese conditions.²³

Nevertheless, there was a dubious political implication behind the advocacy of modernisation with Chinese characteristics: politicians could use it to legitimise their authoritarian and despotic politics. Anyone could interpret the so-called "Chinese conditions," "Chinese characteristics," "Chinese nativeness" and so forth in their own terms and then, in these names, oppose China's modernisation in the political realm.

An example of the manipulation of the notion of Chinese-style modernisation for political purpose was the influential position of "Chinese Nativeness" in the 1930s. It was represented by Sa Mengwu (1897-1984) and Tao Xisheng (1899-1988) who were important theoreticians in the KMT. Ten professors including Sa and Tao published a "Declaration of Chinese Native Cultural Construction" on 10 January 1935. The Declaration was commissioned by the KMT authorities to promote "Economic Reconstruction under Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles."

²³Chen Shiquan: "Zhongguo Wenhua Jianshe de Dongxiang" (The Trend of Chinese Cultural Reconstruction), reprinted in Luo Rongqu, ed.: *Cong Xihua dao Xiandaihua* (From Westernisation to Modernisation) (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1990), p. 420.

The emphasis of the Declaration was on “Chinese native politics” rather than “Chinese native culture”: “Chinese political forms, social organisations and thinking methods and content have been losing their Chinese characteristics. People living under these politics, society and thought without Chinese characteristics are becoming non-Chinese.”²⁴ The authors attempted to convince the people that since the KMT authorities had completed the political revolution, “although there were a variety of difficulties, China has gained a lot of success in politics through years of effort.” Therefore, the biggest task in the future was not political reform but cultural reconstruction; cultural reconstruction was much more vital than political reform. In fact, negating the need for political reform would jeopardised the democratisation of China, and hence would lead to a sustenance of authoritarian politics.²⁵

Hu viewed the Declaration as a threat. He strongly opposed this China-centric stand. To him, the campaign of “Chinese Nativeness” in the 1930s was a new version of Zhang Zhidong’s “*ti-yong*” formula, even though the ten professors were critical of the latter. Hu Shi argued: “The ten professors say in their Declaration that they disagree with ‘Chinese learning as fundamental principle, Western learning as practical application.’ It is surprising! For their ‘Chinese native cultural construction’

²⁴Wang Xinming et al.: “Zhongguo Benwei de Wenhua Jianshe Xuanyan” (A Declaration of Chinese Native Cultural Construction), reprinted in Luo Rongqi, ed.: *Cong Xihua dao Xiandaihua*, p. 399.

²⁵When someone asked the ten professors what “Chinese nativeness” was, they answered that the so-called “Chinese nativeness was “the needs of the present,” i.e., “to enrich people’s life,” “to develop the national economy” and “to sustain national survival.” Democracy or political reform were not included in these “needs of the present. See Wang Xinming et.al.: “Women de Zhong Dafu” (Our General Answer), reprinted in Luo Rongqi, ed.: *Cong Xihua dao Xiandaihua*, p. 478; Zhang Xirou: “Quanpan Xihua yu Zhongguo Benwei” (On Wholesale Westernisation and Chinese Nativeness), reprinted in Luo Rongqi, ed.: *Cong Xihua dao Xiandaihua*, p. 447.

is the new disguise for 'Chinese learning as fundamental principle, Western learning as practical application.' The same spirit pervades the two, even if the words are different. 'According to Chinese nativeness' is 'Chinese learning as fundamental principle,' is it not? 'Absorb what should be absorbed' critically is 'Western learning as practical application,' is it not?"²⁶

In a lecture entitled "Conflicts of Culture" delivered in English in 1931, Hu blamed the failure of modernisation since the late Qing Dynasty on efforts to combine the irreconcilable civilisations of China and the West. Instead of devoting itself wholeheartedly to modernisation, China had only utilised Western material achievements while retaining its political and cultural traditions. The use of Western material products alone could not be called "modernisation" because the essence of modernisation was the assimilation of Western culture. Those who sought to blend the best of the two cultures, based on the theory that Western civilisation is materialistic and Chinese culture is spiritual, would finally be compelled to forsake modernisation: "When you assign all the basic function in the social and cultural life to the old and allow only the superficial external things to this invading civilisation, you are really taking the same attitude as those old reactionaries who resisted this new civilisation *in toto*."²⁷

In another English article under the same title two years before, Hu pointed out that if China hesitated and wavered in her acceptance of modernisation, China would stand dead still amidst rapid changes. He wrote:

²⁶Hu Shi" "Shiping Suowei 'Zhongguo Benwei de Wenhua Jianshe'" (Criticism of the 'Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese basis), *HSZPJ*, vol.18, p. 135.

²⁷Hu Shi : "Conflict of Culture," in Bruno Lasker, ed.: *Problems of the Pacific* p. 343.

China has failed to adjust herself in this modern world simply because her leaders have failed to take the only possible attitude of modern civilization, namely, the attitude of whole-hearted acceptance. For some decades, China has ceased to talk about resisting the civilization of the West simply because her conservatism has taken refuge under the disguise of the doctrine of selective modernization. The small amount of progress she has made in the adoption of certain phases of Western civilization -- such as the telegraph, the telephone, railways and steamships, military reorganisation, political changes and new economic institutions, -- has largely been forced upon her either by foreign concessionaires or by the Chinese themselves motivated by the nightmare of national extinction and bankruptcy. None of these phases of progress have been introduced into china with conscious volition and intelligent understanding. Even the most prominent leaders of the reform movements have never fully understood what they advocated. . . . Such superficiality in the leaders themselves cannot arouse much genuine enthusiasm or strong conviction in the people at large.²⁸

He always perceived culture in terms of how best to ensure China's survival. In order to "save the senile and sick nation, the half dead culture," he advised Chinese people to be more self-examining. Throughout his long intellectual life, Hu Shi repeatedly emphasised the importance of self-reflection and self-criticism. In a letter to Tao Xisheng in June 1935, Hu Shi pointed out that Liang Qichao's contribution lay in his "self-criticism." By criticising traditions, Liang had pushed China forward. To Hu, blaming China herself was the only route to revival, because only China's own efforts were reliable. Hu wrote: "Take a look at the history of the past thirty-five years. Is it Liang Qichao and Hu Shi's self-criticism that had an

²⁸Hu Shi: "Conflict of Cultures," in *The China Christian Year Book 1929* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1929), p. 115. Because Hu wrote two articles under the same title, the editors of *The Bibliography of Dr. Hu Shih's Writings in Western Language* and *A Collection of Hu Shih English Writings* have made the similar mistake by assuming that they are the same. See T. L. Yuan and Eugene L. Delafield: "Bibliography of Dr. Hu Shih's Writings in Western Language", *Zhongyang Yanjiu Yuan Lishi Yanjiu Suo Jikan* (Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica) 34 (1963): 814; Zhou Zhiping, ed.: *A Collection of Hu Shih English Writings* (Taipei: Yuanliu Chuban Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1995), p.335.

impact on the social reforms or is it those pompous traditionalists who had an impact.”²⁹

Ironically, Hu’s contemplation of the reformist programme was transposed into a familiar Confucian value. To examine the self, to mend the errors, to develop each individual to the utmost -- these were among the themes most frequently discussed in classical Confucianism. As pointed out by Wolfram Eberhard: “Confucianism, as the ideology of China’s elite of the traditional period, was built upon the principle of shame.”³⁰

Hu wanted to make the Chinese people aware that they must blame themselves rather than the imperialists for their difficulties and misfortune. “The fortunes of a nation are not accidental, or free from the iron law of cause and effect,” he told university graduates in 1932. “Our present suffering and shame are the evil results of evil causes sown in the past. . . . We must firmly believe that today’s defeats are a consequence of the fact that in the past we exerted too little effort.”³¹ After the Mukden incident of 18 September 1931, he insisted that ultimately China’s salvation could only come about through her own efforts. “A nation which cannot save itself cannot earn the sympathy and support of others,” he observed somewhat sententiously,³² and again, “Good fortune--never lights upon the head of the man

²⁹*RJSGB*, vol. 12, entry for 12 June 1935.

³⁰Wolfram Eberhard: *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 122.

³¹Hu Shi: “Zengyu Jinian de Daxue Biyesheng” (An Offering to This Year’s University Graduates), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 101.

³²Hu Shi: “Neitian dui Shijie de Tiaozhan” (Uchida’s Challenge to the World), *DLPL* 16 (4 September 1932): 2-3.

who is incapable of helping himself.”³³ China was in such a plight because “our ancestors have committed too many sins and accumulated too deep a retribution.”³⁴

He quoted Mencius’s famous words “Without understanding the shame, without suffering hard life, men will not grow” to support his argument.³⁵ “Our people know no sense of shame,” he wrote in 1934, “because they have never once reflected on their past.” If Chinese people were more self-examining, they would know that Chinese traditional culture was really too impoverished. “We can put aside modern scientific culture and industrial culture, for we are shamefully poor in these areas. Let us only speak of the remote past. . . . The Greek and Roman literature, sculpture, science, . . . and politics are enough to make us realise that our culture is too poor.” He continued: “As to the unique treasures that we do have . . . parallel prose, regulated poetry, eight-legged essays, bound feet, eunuchs, concubinage, five-generation households, chastity, arches, hellish prisons, court whipping, and law courts filled with torture implements . . . though they are ‘splendid,’ though ‘they are all unique in their own right in the world,’ they are after all institutions and systems for which we cannot hold our heads up.”³⁶

Although Hu Shi had never lost sight of the tenacious connection between the past and the present in his polemic writings, he sometimes passed sweeping judgements on Chinese culture. As early as 1918, writing a preface for Wu Yu (1871-1949), he said:

³³Hu Shi: “Guoji Weiji de Bijin” (The Approaching International Crisis), *DLPL* 132 (23 December 1932): 3.

³⁴Hu Shi: “Cantong de Huiyi yu Fanxing” (Painful Recollections and Reflections), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 39.

³⁵Hu Shi: “Xinxin yu Fanxing” (Confidence and Self-examination), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 53.

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

Because the man-eating *lijiao*, laws, and institutions for the last two thousand years have all hung out a signboard of Confucius, this signboard of Confucius -- whether it is from the old shop or a counterfeit -- must be crushed and burned.³⁷

Hu's primary aim was to awaken China from her slumber. In order to get his points across, he had to risk rhetorical exaggeration. Hu grew increasingly impatient as the controversy on Chinese and Western culture continued. His most savage attacks on Chinese culture were in part targeted at cultural conservatism. Hu repeated several times the angry remark which he often shared with friends: "If China is not exterminated, then there are no heavenly principles in the world."³⁸ However, he explained later:

My words were not to discourage people but to encourage them to be reflective; not to make them lose confidence but to want them to have confidence. I want them to commit themselves to the mood of self-examination. I want them to reflect on their ancestors and their own doing. They must decide to create new causes to replace those old bad causes.³⁹

The new causes, no doubt, were wholehearted learning from the West. For this purpose, he wanted the Chinese to admit their inferiority to Westerners in every respect -- in material products and machines, in the political system, in morality, knowledge, literature, music, art and even the physical build of the body.⁴⁰

It was these opinions, publicly expressed and widely circulated, that had won Hu a reputation as the most extreme spokesman for Westernisation. However, the use of "wholesale Westernisation" (*quanpan xihua*) brought him the most

³⁷Hu Shi: "Wu Yu Wenlu Xu" (Preface to the Collected Essays of Wu Yu), *HSZPJ*, vol. 6, p. 196.

³⁸See Hu's letter to Hu Zhihui, *LWSXX*, vol. 1, pp. 469-470.

³⁹Hu Shi: "Xinxin yu Fanxing," *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁰Hu Shi: "Jieshao Wo Ziji de Sixiang," *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 12.

controversy. Hu had first introduced the term “wholesale Westernisation” in an article entitled “Conflict of Cultures” written for the *Christian Year Book* in the United States in 1929. In a book review in the English language magazine *China Critic* in Shanghai, Pan Guangdan (1899-1967), the famous sociologist, took issue with Hu’s two terms -- “wholesale Westernisation” and “wholehearted modernisation.” Pan favoured the term “wholehearted modernisation” while objecting to the term “wholesale Westernisation.” The semantic difficulty of the terms gave rise to some unnecessary debates.⁴¹ Hu ultimately yielded to Pan’s objection. Hu formally announced in an article that he preferred the term “sufficient globalisation” (*congfen shijie hua*) to the term “wholesale Westernisation.”⁴² His new choice of words indicated that he considered the civilisation of science and technology to be a world civilisation.

Although Hu changed the term, the popular image of Hu as an advocate of complete Westernisation remained unchanged; the term “wholesale Westernisation” continued to be used among scholars, and Hu’s term “sufficient globalisation” has been neglected and almost forgotten. The fact that Hu dropped the term “wholesale Westernisation” did not alter his advocacy of Westernisation.

However, this advocacy of Westernisation, with whatever adjective he attached to it, did not alter the fact that Hu’s concept of Westernisation was selective. To do Hu justice, he did not mean the Chinese people should learn from

⁴¹For a historical account of Hu’s terms used and the related debates, see Xu Gaoruan: “Hu Shizhi yu Quanpan Xihua” (Hu Shi and Wholesale Westernisation), in Hu Shi et al: *Hu Shi yu Zhongxi Wenhua* (Taipei: Shuiniu Chubanshe, 1967), pp. 11-23.

⁴²For Hu Shi’s account on the term, see Hu Shi: “Chongfen Shijiehua yu Quanpan Xihua” (Sufficient Globalisation and Wholesale Westernisation), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, pp. 141-144.

the West uncritically and indiscriminately. He never for a moment toyed with the idea that modernisation could be accomplished at the cost of tradition.

Undoubtedly Hu's appreciation of the many aspects of the traditional past was a genuine one. He spoke highly of Chinese thought and Chinese philosophy. In the later part of his life, he said:

Many people said that I am anti-Confucianism. I am very critical of many aspects of the long history of Confucianism. However, on the whole, I have great respect for Confucius and his early disciples such as Mencius. This is clearly shown in all my writings. I also have a high respect for Zhu Xi, one of founders of Neo-Confucianism in the twelfth century.⁴³

Hu declared himself several times that he did not advocate the "down with Confucian shop" movement in any form.⁴⁴ To Hu, many Confucian values were worth preserving. He remained undaunted even at the very end of his life. In "The Chinese tradition and the Future," an opening speech at the Sino-American Conference on Intellectual Co-operation held at the University of Washington, July 1960, he raised the same issue:

(W)henver China had sunk deep into irrationality, superstition and other-worldliness, as she actually did several times in her long history, it was always the humanism of Confucius, or the naturalism of Lao-tzu and the philosophical Taoists, or a combination of both naturalism and humanism, that would rise up and try to rescue her out of her sluggish slumbers.⁴⁵

⁴³KSZZ, p. 258.

⁴⁴In "A Talk with Hu Shi" in the spring of 1959, Vincent Y.C. Shih recorded: "Hu said that he did not take part in the "Dadao Kongjia Dian" movement. All he did was to write a preface for old Mr. Wu Yu's collected essays, in which he introduced Wu as a veteran of the "down with "Confucian shop" movement. Hu himself had great respect for Confucius. In his *History of Chinese Philosophy*, he gave Confucius a rather high and important position as a logician, on the basis of his theory of the rectification of names." Vincent Y.C. Shih, "A Talk with Hu Shih," *The China Quarterly* 10 (April/June 1962): 158-159.

⁴⁵Hu Shi: "The Chinese Tradition and the Future," *Sino-American Conference on Intellectual Cooperation: Reports and Proceedings* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1962), p.14. This statement was also addressed by Hu to a Western audience in Third East-West Philosophers' Conference held at the

At the end of the speech, he emphatically concluded that "I believe the tradition of the "humanistic and rationalist China" has not been destroyed and in all probability cannot be destroyed."⁴⁶ This statement appeared to be spoken by a conservative rather than an advocate of Westernisation.

It was indeed an expression of Hu's personal belief. On the one hand, he held certain assumptions that traditional Chinese thought was partly responsible for China's failure to modernise. On the other hand, his objective as a Pragmatist was to reflect on the possibilities of the Chinese tradition which could provide moral and spiritual inspiration for the Chinese people living in the modern era. Sources of such inspiration may lie in the nature philosophy of the early Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius, Daoism, and Moism with its emphasis on individual moral character and social solidarity.

From this perspective, I can hardly agree with Lin Yusheng's argument in his well-known book *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness* when he declared that for those May Fourth pioneers like Hu Shi "there was no need to examine the Chinese tradition in any substantive way. The discredited Chinese tradition could not be valuable. . . . In line with this formalistic argument, those things in the Chinese that could be singled out as valuable were, by definition, general features of all civilisation."⁴⁷ It is unjust to say that Hu was an anti-traditionalist because of his

University of Hawaii in July 1959. See Hu Shi: "The Scientific Spirit and Method in Chinese Philosophy," in Charles A. Moore, ed.: *The Chinese Mind: Essential of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1962), p. 111.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁷Lin Yu-sheng: *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era*, p. 154.

statements. He should be recognised as a moderate liberal. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 4, there can be little doubt that Hu's interest in Chinese classics and history was a genuine one because it remained with him until the end of his life. This enduring interest in Chinese tradition not only played an important part in shaping his vision of China's future, it also prevented him from falling into the trap of radical iconoclasm that characterised many Chinese intellectuals during his time.

Hu respected many different views of the conservatives even if they were totally against him. He invited Zhang Huozai (1895-?) to debate on the validity of traditional drama. For that reason, Qian Xuantong criticised Hu for not totally severing relations with the conservatives. Hu especially respected scholars of the Chinese classics and maintained very close relations with them. Wang Guowei (1877-1927), universally acknowledged as the most "scientifically-minded" and original historian of ancient China, was politically a Qing loyalist and culturally an ultra-conservative. Chen Yinke (1890-1969), the leading medievalist, was politically and culturally conservative -- he never wrote a single sentence in the *baihua* vernacular. Tang Yungdong (1894-1964), a great authority on the history of Chinese Buddhism and philosophy, was a contributor to the *Xueheng* (Critical Review), and like Chen Yinke, always used the classical language as his medium. All of them, needless to say, were unsympathetic to the May Fourth Movement in both its narrow and broad senses. But in the Chinese classical field Hu Shi admired them all and found in them kindred spirits.⁴⁸

⁴⁸On the relationship between Hu Shi and Wang Guowei, see Zhou Minzhi: "Hu Shi yu Wang Guowei de Xueshu Sixiang Jiaoyi" (The Intellectual Relations Between Hu Shi and Wang Guowei) in Li Youning, ed.: *Hu Shi yu Tade Pengyou* (Hu Shi and his friends) (New York: Tianwai Chubanshe, 1991) vol. 2, pp. 1-57; On the relationship between Hu Shi and Chen Yinke, see Wang Rongzu: "Hu Shi yu

The most striking example is the case of Liang Shuming. Liang Shuming was generally known as a cultural conservative *par excellence*. Surprisingly, Hu had this to say about Liang's famous *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* in his lecture on "The Renaissance in China."

For the first time in history we begin to recognise a new attitude, a desire to understand the basic meaning of modern civilisation, to understand the philosophy behind the civilisation of the West. As the best example of this new consciousness I may cite the work of a Chinese scholar, Liang Shuming. . . . He is voicing the yearning of a new age. His book was widely read and much has been written since on the same subject. . . . May I suggest that in these discussions we find a completely new attitude, an attitude on the one hand of frank admission of our own weakness, all the weak points in Oriental civilisation; and on the other hand, the attitude of a frank, genuine understanding of the spirit, not only the material prosperity, but also the spiritual possibilities of Western civilisation⁴⁹

Hu's admiration for Western civilisation and his love for Chinese cultural tradition were both genuine. This balance is truly remarkable and needs to be clearly defined since Hu lived a life of constant tension between old and new, innovation and tradition, as well as continuity and rupture. To elaborate on this theme, special attention will now be given to the development of Hu's personal life.

5.3 The Burden of Traditional Chinese Values

Chen Yinge" (Hu Shi and Chen Yinge) in Li Youning, ed.: *Hu Shi yu Tade Pengyou*, vol. 2, pp. 199-229; On the relationship between Hu Shi and Tang Yongtong, see Tang Yijie's preface in Ma Tianxiang: *Tang Yongtong Pingzhuan*, (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe 1993), pp. 12-13.

⁴⁹Hu Shih: "The Renaissance in China," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 5 (1926): 273-274.

After Hu's death Chiang Kai-shek composed and personally wrote a memorial scroll summarising the accomplishments of the man who had been one of his most rational and perceptive critics. In Chiang's description, Hu Shi was:

A model of old moral values within the New Culture -- an example of the new thought within the framework of ancient principles.⁵⁰

This characterisation could be considered an accurate description of Hu's life. Hu's attitude towards Chinese tradition, like that of other intellectuals, was marked by contradictory strains. He was trained and brought up in the classical Chinese tradition. On the one hand, there were many aspects in Chinese culture which he thought were precious. On the other hand, he found that the Chinese tradition as a whole was outdated as compared to modern civilisations. Basically Hu was a reformist rather than a radical anti-traditionalist.

It is well-known that Hu was a strong proponent of individualism. He emphasised the autonomy of the self and the idea that one should be allowed to follow one's own inclination. Hu's individualism was clearly influenced by Western thought, especially Ibsenism. This individualism, however, was also full of Chinese characteristics. Hu suggested the importance of its relation to the group or society which is significant in Confucian tradition. As I wrote in Chapter III, Hu said that when facing the great shipwreck, the only important thing is to save one's self. He assumed that society is formed by individuals. The more individuals are saved, the more elements there are to prepare for the next reform society. In his view, an individual that he calls the lesser self (*xiaowo*) can only fulfil himself by identifying with the greater self (*dawo*), the social whole.

⁵⁰See Feng Aiquan: *Hu Shizi Xiansheng Jinian Ji* (A Collection of Memorials Honouring Mr. Hu Shizhi) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1973), p. 189.

He tried to modify and broaden the concept of the "Three Immortalities" (*San Buxiu*) expounded in the *Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo's Commentary). It was recorded that the wise statesman Shu Sunbao declared in the year 548 B.C. that there were three kinds of immortalities: *li de* (the immortality of virtue); *li gong* (the immortality of service); and *li yan* (the immortality of wise speech). These had not been forgotten with the passage of time. In fact they are exactly what is meant by immortality after death. This doctrine appeared to him much more convincing than the theory of "mortality of Soul." According to him, man is the product of everything that has gone. Thus everything that we do and everything that we say is immortal in the sense that it has its effect somewhere in this world, and that effect in turn will have its results somewhere else. This process goes on in infinite time and space. The "greater self" and the "lesser self," then, are inseparable, and the true worth of an individual is measured only by his contribution to the "greater self". Therefore, "I must constantly consider how I can best develop the present 'lesser self' so as to discharge my responsibilities towards the 'greater self' of the infinite past and leave no evil legacy to the greater self of the infinite future."⁵¹

Hu's emphasis on the "greater self" was a rooted concept in Chinese culture. The "lesser self" must gain its value by putting itself in the context of the "greater self." For many years he had contented himself with this ancient doctrine of "Three Immortalities." In early summer of 1915, Hu wrote:

Whenever I look at the circumstances of our country, I think that our fatherland today needs men for all kinds of things, and that I cannot but seek comprehensive knowledge and broad study in order to prepare myself to serve as a guide to my countrymen in the future.⁵²

⁵¹Hu Shi: "Buxiu -- Wo de Zongjiao" (Immortality -- My Religion), *HSZPJ*, vol. 2, p. 60.

⁵²*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 78.

The doctrines of "Three Immortalities" instilled in Hu Shi a strong sense of obligation to his country and a conviction that he was competent enough to rescue China from its national calamities and restore its proper international respectability. Growing up and maturing in a volatile period of political decay and social disorder, Hu faced the challenges squarely. Being alert and sensitive he quickly adapted to the dynamics of China's shifting environments, which witnessed the fall of the Qing dynasty, the Republican revolution and the warlord conflicts.

Besides this strong social commitment, his life included many elements of traditional Confucian thought. Even after he espoused Pragmatism, his essentially "correct" Confucian code, with emphasis on moderation, virtue, grace, and self discipline, enabled him to function effectively in the tradition-bound social milieu of China. This was a distinct advantage that not many of his liberal colleagues possessed.

This characteristic can be found since Hu's childhood. Although Hu was sceptical about many aspects of traditional thought when he was young, his natural and immediate response was that of obedience. He was regarded by his elders as a well-behaved boy.⁵³ His devotion to religious belief crumbled and ceased to exist when he was eleven years old. However, he could not bring himself to talk about his disbelief in ghosts and souls in his mother's presence. When his mother asked him to bow before the ancestors' plaques at the family shrine or go to burn incense to fulfil a vow, he never dared to say no, even when he was extremely reluctant in his heart.⁵⁴

⁵³SSZS, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁴SSZS, p. 42.

The best example to illustrate Hu's practice of the Confucian code of ethics was his marriage. Before Hu left for Shanghai for a modern education at the age of thirteen, his mother followed the time-honoured tradition of selecting her son a future bride. Hu was betrothed to Jiang Dongxiu who was a few months older than him. Hu and Jiang never met each other until more than thirteen years later when he returned from America in 1917. In 1908, when his mother was making preparations for their marriage, it was postponed because of Hu's vigorous objection.⁵⁵ Even so, he never requested cancellation of the marriage. When he was in the United States, his mother told him that Jiang would, following Chinese custom, stay in Hu's house. Although he disagreed with this arrangement, he never said he would not marry Jiang. He was happy to learn that Jiang had had her feet unbound and later encouraged Jiang to read and write.⁵⁶ In addition, he tried to comfort his mother by giving the reason for his full acceptance of arranged marriage:

Everything I said in my third letter concerning Dongxiu's education was expressed in the emotions of the moment, with no intention of rebuking Dongxiu, much less of placing any blame on my mother. In the matter of my marriage I harbour no grievances whatsoever. I know full well that in this matter my mother has indeed expended every effort to arrange for me a happy family life. . . . Nowadays, if a woman can read and write, this is of course a good thing; but if not, it is no great failing. The learning one gets from books is only one of many kinds of knowledge. I have seen many who can read and write, but who have not the capacity to be good wives and mothers; and how could I reprimand one who seeks to perfect herself.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Hu Shi: "Xinhun Zashi"(Poems in Various Styles on being Newly Married), *HSZPJ*, vol. 27, p. 90.

⁵⁶*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 5 and vol. 3, p. 3.

⁵⁷*LXRJ*, vol. 3, p. 73. This English translation is adopted with modification from Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 352.

During his stay in the United States, Hu found himself entangled in a profound emotional crisis. The more he came to know of Western ideas, the harder it was for him to accept the standards of social conduct to which his mother still adhered and expected him to conform. "There is but one truth, and it does not permit of compromise," he wrote in 1914, "How can I be forced to believe what I do not believe simply on account of others, or be compelled to do what I do not wish to do?"⁵⁸

It was during Hu Shi's struggle with this dilemma that John Morley's essay "On Compromise," to which he later attributed much significance as an influence on the development of his character, first came to his attention. "It seems to the present writer," Morley wrote, "that one relationship in life and one only justifies us in being silent where otherwise it would be right to speak. This relationship is that between child and parents."⁵⁹ With this reassurance, Hu was able to conclude:

If parents abruptly lose their beliefs in their old age, it will be like losing their support in life. The agony of that will be indescribable. It is not as easy for those who have reached the evening of life to change their ideas as it is for we young people to abandon old beliefs for the new.⁶⁰

Using Morley's words, Hu tried to justify his action in accepting an arranged marriage. Although he was aware of what love meant in a Western context, he made a number of sacrifices for the integrity of Chinese tradition.⁶¹ To Hu, there was no point arguing with his mother because she would not understand the importance of

⁵⁸*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 191.

⁵⁹*LXRJ*, vol. 2, p. 195.

⁶⁰*LXRJ*, vol. 2, pp. 190-191. Translation is from Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, p. 71.

⁶¹There is strong evidence to suggest that Hu was in love with Edith William during the last year of his residence in Ithaca. For a discussion, see Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, pp. 59-80.

free marriage. By marrying Jiang Dongxiu, he could repay his debt and show his gratitude to his mother.

Soon after he returned to China in 1917 to embark upon his career as a social critic and intellectual reformer, Hu returned to Jixi to marry the girl his mother had chosen for him -- ending a nine-year engagement and becoming an unhappy loner for the rest of his life. Newly-published diaries show that Hu later was in love with Cao Peisheng, who was his cousin, but the affair never came to anything.⁶² Unlike Lu Xun or Xu Zhimo, another two important figures in the New Culture Movement, Hu did not have enough courage to pursue his real love.⁶³

In his attack on Chinese tradition, Hu sounded a strikingly modern note. In his personal life, he remained much closer to the spirit of Confucian elitism. Hu's plans and hopes for China were extremely modern and Western. But in his real life, he was restricted by temperamental, or psychological, yearnings rooted in his Confucian upbringing. Hu has shown himself to be intellectually committed to Western thought and spiritually attached to China's past. Hu obviously found himself caught between dissatisfaction with the old and inability to take part in the new.

⁶²From what was written by Hu Shi in his diary, it was almost certain that he was in love with Cao Peisheng in 1923. See Hu Shi: *RJSGB*, vol. 4, entry for April to October 1923. For more detailed analysis, see Chou Zhiping: "Cui Bushan de Xintou Renyin" in his *Hu Shi Conglun* (Collected Essays on Hu Shi) (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju 1992), pp. 231-251.

⁶³Immediately after Xu died in a plane crash on 19 November 1931, Hu Shi wrote a eulogy praising Xu's pristine pursuit of love, freedom, and beauty." Hu wrote: "Xu Zhimo's failure was simply failure of idealism. Such idealism is a great source of embarrassment for us. We simply have never dared to dream the kinds of dreams that Xu dreamed. We derive our respect for him from the realisation of the loss he has suffered." Hu Shi: "Zhuidao Zhimo" (Mourning Zhimo) in *Xu Zhimo Quanji* (The Complete Works of Xu Zhimo) (Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1969), vol. 1, p. 363.

Hu Shi's attitude is not difficult to understand. Often, it is easier to accept new ideas in the abstract than to apply them to personal conduct. Most members of the new generation in early-twentieth-century China had accepted free love in principle, but could not practise it without inhibition or embarrassment. Xu Zhimo's experience was a case in point. In 1926 Xu Zhimo married for the second time. It is well-known that Xu's mentor Liang Qichao delivered a scathing lecture on the moral inadequacies of his student during the wedding ceremony.⁶⁴

Hu Shi understood clearly that the marriage for love could only be advocated but not practised by himself. Otherwise, his motive would be questioned. In a conversation with a friend in 1921, he discussed his own arranged marriage:

I did not have any idea of sacrificing myself. My only intention was not to hurt people. If I had broken the agreement, I know I would blame myself and feel very guilty. My family does not give me much trouble. This is a reward. The greatest reward is that my action was praised by society. Indeed, I am not afraid of people's scolding and I do not ask for their praises either. I did this because I wanted to have a restful mind. The unexpected reward, nevertheless is the greatest bonus.⁶⁵

By obeying convention to a point which a majority of Chinese educated people did not attain, Hu had accomplished the ultimate unconventionality. This was not Hu's intention in the first place. The praise nevertheless put him under more pressure to escape from the fetters of traditional norms.

Hu always controlled and sometimes even denied his instincts. It reminds us of the self-cultivation (*xiusheng*) aspect in Confucian thought. The basic concern in

⁶⁴"Nian Pu" (Chronology of Xu Zhimo), in *Xu Zhimo Quanjì*, vol. 1, p. 623. For a discussion on Xu's love life and marriage, see Leo Ou-fan Lee: *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 124-144.

⁶⁵*RJSGB*, vol. 1, entry for 30 August 1921.

Confucianism is how to become a sage. Since the attainment of Confucian sagehood is predicated on the belief that man can be perfected by self effort, the method in question is not an acquired technique but self-cultivation. Confucius's self-cultivation aspect can be seen in his interpretation of *ren*. Once Yan Yuan asked Confucius, what is *ren*. The answer was, "To conquer yourself and return to *li* (propriety)." He continued: "Do not look at what is contrary to *li*, do not listen to what is contrary to *li*, do not speak what is contrary to *li*, do not make any movement which is contrary to *li*."⁶⁶

The concept *keji* (conquering the self) is in fact closely linked to the concept of self-cultivation. They are practically identical. By conquering the self, Confucius implied that one should engage in a bitter struggle with one's own corporeal desires. As Qian Mu (1895-1990) put it: "When discussing human life, Confucius proposed controlling desire (*jieyu*) and lessening desire (*guayi*) until one reached the stage of desirelessness (*wuyi*). The control of desire has become an integral part of Confucian history."⁶⁷

Hu left no specific notes on his own commitment to any kind of self-cultivation. He did however speak positively of the traditional idea of self-cultivation in his later years.⁶⁸ As a youth he absorbed the orthodox neo-Confucian synthesis of Zhu Xi, which combined an earlier Confucian emphasis with a new, Buddhist influenced cosmology. Perhaps the most fundamental ethical theme of neo-

⁶⁶*Lun Yu* in Zhu Zi: *Sishu Jizhu* (Four Books, Text and Commentary), (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1988), p. 191.

⁶⁷Qian Mu: *Kong Zi yu Lunyu* (Confucius and Analects) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1979), p. 198.

⁶⁸*NPCB*, vol. 7, p. 2414; vol. 8, pp. 2799-2800.

Confucianism was the idea of constant self-examination and moral cultivation. According to Zhu Xi, man's nature, which was equivalent to his *li* or basic principle, was inherently good and pure. It consisted of the virtues of *ren* (love), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), and *zhi* (moral wisdom), which revealed themselves through the feelings of commiseration for others, shame from dishonour, modesty and submissiveness, and a sense of right and wrong. But although man's nature or *li* was naturally perfect, it expressed or manifested itself through his *qi* (matter of ether) which was usually impure. Thus the pearl of man's nature became clouded by his imperfect *qi*. To cleanse one's *qi*, Zhu Xi urged intense self-cultivation and the "extension of knowledge" (*zhizhi*) through the "investigation of things" (*gewu*) to learn about their individual *li*. But the final objective of the investigation of things was an enlightenment which would enable men to understand themselves and thus free the pearl of their *li* from its cloudy *qi*. The focus, then, was on self-discipline, self-cultivation and self-awareness. And the tone of neo-Confucianism was one of optimism since man's innate nature is basically good and sagehood is attainable through dedication and study.⁶⁹

Hu was only too aware of the real world around him. He was very conscious of having a place in history -- it was this consciousness that guided his entire conduct and sustained him through all his ordeals. Tang Degang described his teacher as follows:

Compared to his friends, his morality was unquestionable. He had his own personal desires, not on material satisfaction but on the things regarding his reputation. He was especially worried about what the future generation

⁶⁹For some convenient English accounts of neo-Confucianism see Feng Youlan: *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 533-629; Liu Wu-chi: *A Short History of Confucian Philosophy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 151-173.

would think of him. To Hu, this matter was more important than his heart problem⁷⁰

Again, this is compatible with *Zuo Zhuan*'s "Three Immortalities" of meritorious services, virtuous conduct, and immortal wisdom or writings which would enable a man to live in time and space: "to die but not to be forgotten" (*sier buxiu*). Throughout his life, Hu tried to follow this maxim in his own conduct. Imbedded in his liberal mentality were vestiges of the venerable Confucian conviction that knowledge was virtue, that intellectual attainment carried with it civic responsibilities and, more generally, the responsibility to set in one's own conduct a moral example to be followed by others.

Hu was also reflective. Through his experience, he understood the importance of tradition. He knew that if he wanted to lead, he must obey the old conventions. His was an intermediate generation which must sacrifice to both its parents and to its children. He tried to be morally good, in terms of traditional Chinese cultural standards. He told his friend Lewis Gannett (1891-1966) when they were students together in America:

If we are to lead we must obey the old conventions. Ours is an intermediate generation which must be sacrificed both to our parents and to our children. Unless we would lose all influence, we must marry as our parents wish, girls selected by them for us, whom we may not see before our wedding day -- and we must make society happier and healthier for our children to live in. Let that be our reward and consolation.⁷¹

Derk Bodde once offered a perceptive analysis of Chinese thought. He wrote: "Chinese thought pattern is the desire to merge seemingly conflicting elements into a

⁷⁰Tang Degang: *Hu Shi Zayi*, p. 82.

⁷¹Lewis Gannett: "Hu Shih: Young Prophet of Young China," *The New York Times Magazine* (27 March 1927): 10.

unified harmony. Chinese philosophy is filled with dualisms in which, however, their two component elements are usually regarded as complementary and mutually necessary rather than as hostile and incompatible.”⁷² This characterisation is remarkably fitting to Hu’s life. Hu knew the way to resolve his own emotional conflicts. Deeply influenced by the traditional attitudes of Confucianism, he leaned toward moderation and compromise. He was a person of his word, of great purity of manner, without a flicker of arrogance or self-conceit. He was a patient man and was amiable, equable and courteous, even under provocation.

Hu’s life reveals a constant and an uncertain wavering between traditionalism and modernity. These alternating moments were complicated times for China, and the men who worked for change were multi-faceted in their interests and attitudes. Hu was no exception and he was, at the same time, both a traditionalist and a reformer.

⁷²Derk Bodde: “Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” in Arthur Wright, ed.: *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 54.

Chapter VI

A Beleaguered Reformist:

Hu Shi's Experience in Politics

6.1 The Tension between Politics and Pure Scholarship

In 1922, the young poet Xu Zhimo (1896-1931) visited a prominent short-story writer Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) whom he admired greatly. Xu later recalled their conversation:

She hoped that I would not go into politics. She complained that modern politics was, no matter in what country, full of cruelty and crime.¹

Katherine Mansfield certainly was not the only Western intellectual portraying politics in such a light to Chinese students. Indeed, Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth generation thought that China's politics were worse than that of the West. Ding Wenjiang (1887-1936) once lamented: "China's problems can only be solved by co-operation between the literati and gangsters."² Such a remark showed how frustrated Chinese intellectuals were in dealing with China's prolonged chaos.

¹Xu Zhimo: "Manshufeier" (Katherine Mansfield), in *Xu Zhimo Quanjí*, vol. 5, p. 201.

²Jiang Tingfu: "Wo Suo Jidede Ding Zaijun" (My Impression of Ding Wenjiang) in *Jiang Tingfu Xuanji* (Selected Writings of Jiang Tingfu's) (Taipei: Wenxing Shuju, 1965), vol. 6, p. 1088.

Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese scholars found it almost impossible to keep away from political activities throughout their lives. They never enjoyed the luxury of being disinterested in political issues. In 1920, Hu Shi, Li Dazhao (1889-1927), Gao Yihan (1884-1968) and others wrote a petition demanding that the Beijing Government restore freedom of speech, freedom of publication and freedom of association. At the beginning of the petition, they wrote: "We had no intention to discuss practical politics. However, practical politics have never ceased to harm us."³

Hu once remarked that politics were his "cross-roads."⁴ Hu's agony was widely shared by other scholars. Whatever their specialisation, the scholars in modern China would always find themselves in the tide of politics. The leaders of the May Fourth Movement such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao were cases in point.⁵ Although Xu Zhimo had never joined any political party, this fact did not stop him from discussing political issues.⁶ Scholars without any political interest such as Gu Jiegang, Yu Pingbo and Zhu Zhiqing also participated in political activities. The only difference among modern Chinese scholars' involvement in politics was only a matter of degree.⁷

³NPCB, vol. 2, pp. 410-411.

⁴Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 61-73.

⁵For Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao's political vocation, see Thomas C. Kuo: *Che'n Duxiu (1879-1942) and the Chinese Communist Movement* (South Orange: Seton Hall University Press, 1975) and Maurice Meisner: *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁶For a discussion on Xu's political stand, see Hu Weixi et al.: *Shizi Jietou yu Ta: Zhongguo Jindai Ziyoushuyi Sichao Yanjiu* (Cross-roads and Tower: A Study of Liberalism in Modern China) (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 269-276.

⁷For a general discussion on above intellectuals' participation in politics, see Vera Schwarcz: *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectual and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

It cannot be denied that there was little choice for modern Chinese scholars. Believing in rule by virtue and confident that political action was the natural outgrowth of scholarship, scholars found it hard to distance themselves from politics. In contrast to Western philosophers' pursuit of truth and certainty, Chinese scholars had made it their task to engage in search for the Way (*Dao*), a path of action and knowledge tied to an ethical standard. In his publications, Yu Ying-shih explored the significance of the "philosophical breakthrough" of Chinese intellectual development since the time of Confucius. One crucial point elucidated by Yu is that tension between the tradition of the Way and the political *status quo* which emerged as a result of the breakdown of feudalism during the Eastern Zhou period. In the Western Zhou, ritual and music in themselves were thought to embody the Way. But as feudalism declined, the practice of ritual and music began to decline along with the political system that fostered them. Knowledge, which was needed to implement ritualistic and musical practices, shifted to newly risen private scholars from the central political authorities. It was Confucius who associated himself with the newly emerging intellectual group with the great mission to inherit and defend the Way. Devoted and committed to preserving and reviving the cultural tradition, Confucius redefined the term *shi* (intellectual). Confucius divested *shi* of its former social and political designation within a feudalistic structure as the lowest class of noblemen. At the same time, he gave the term *shi* in its relation to the Way a new meaning: the bearer of the Way.⁸

⁸Yu Ying-shih: "Gudai Zhishi Jiecheng de Xingqi yu Fazhan (The Rise and Development of the Class of the Intellectuals in Ancient China)" in his *Zhongguo Zhishi Jiecheng Shilun, Gudai Pian* (A Historical Survey of the Chinese Intellectual Class, the Ancient Period) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1980), pp. 1-108. Also see his "Daotong yu Zhengtong Zhijian" (Between *Daotong* and *Zhengtong*), in

Since then, the ideal intellectual or gentleman was expected to embody the Way -- to speak for it and act on it. Clearly, Confucius thought the primary duty of an intellectual was the quest for the Way. This meant that if one was solely concerned with material reward, one would not justify one's role in any true sense as an intellectual. Because Confucianism was a "this-worldly" ethic, its consideration tended to include political power. The primary task of philosophers was to serve in government to preserve and transmit the Confucian tradition even though the combination of the Way and political power was believed to have existed in a perfect state only in the "golden age" of the so-called Three Dynasties of early antiquity. Therefore, the belief that the Way and political power became separate and distinct after the "golden age" increasingly began to be subscribed to by later Confucians in spite of the fact that the concept of the Way then became the critical standard for judging the legitimacy and success of any political endeavour. When the question arose as to whether the Way took primacy over political power, the answer for most Confucians was obvious. They always cited the statement by Confucius: "When the Way prevails in the world, the common people will not criticise."⁹

After the imperial examinations were abolished in 1905, the institution that produced the scholar-gentry class finally came to an end. The old, normal road for Chinese intellectuals to become government officials no longer existed. After that, Chinese intellectuals widened their profession and became more aware of the values

his *Shixue yu Chuantong* (History and Tradition) (Taipei: Shibao Chuban Gongsi, 1982), pp. 30-70.

⁹*Lun Yu* in Zhu Xi: *Sishu Jizhu*, p. 249. For a discussion on intellectuals and political connections in ancient China, see also Chin-Hsing Huang: *Philosophy, Philology and Politics in Eighteen-century China, Li Fu and the Lu-Wang School under the Ch'ing* (New York: Cambridge Press, 1995), pp. 47-62.

of the professionalism and independence of scholarship. They knew that in order to be a worthy intellectual it was not necessary to get involved directly in governmental affairs. It was not surprising the majority of intellectuals were now totally committed to non-official careers.

However, the politically-orientated nature of intellectuals did not fade away in China. Although modern Chinese intellectuals tried to reject much of this legacy, many young intellectuals still perceived their role in traditional terms. The sense of social obligation and purpose remained as one of the dominant influences in the life of modern Chinese intellectuals.

The political role for intellectuals has been a recurring issue in China. It grew more pressing, however, as foreign threats intensified. China was invaded by foreign powers incessantly after 1840. The urgency of national issues made scholars unable to enjoy the luxury of disinterest in political matters. For example, Weng Wenhao (1889-1971), a returned graduate in geology from Louvain in Belgium, wrote that he had always wished to pursue a job which would give him satisfaction and cause no harm to society. He had never had any particular interest in big philosophical, social or political pursuits. But the Japanese invasion forced him to reformulate his views on political and social issues and to state them publicly, even if they were beyond his expertise.¹⁰ A sense of common guilt took root deeply in the heart of the intellectuals. As observed by Chen Pingyuan: "Modern literary works such as *Faxisi Xijun* (The Bacteria of Fascist) by Xia Yan, *Sishi Tongtang* (Four Generations in One House) by Lao She, *Qinglang de Tiankong* (The Clear Sky) by Cao Yu were all

¹⁰Weng Wenhao: "Wode Yijian Buguo Ruci" (My Opinion Does Not Go Beyond This), *DLPL* 15 (28 August 1932): 2-5.

set to criticise those people who were willingly limited to their specialities while showing no concern the society.”¹¹ In other words, social and political concerns still dominated the thoughts of Chinese intellectuals.

In July 1938, a few days before Hu Shi assumed office as Ambassador to the United States, he wrote to his wife, Jiang Dongxiu:

I left Beijing on 9 July last year. . . . Only on 12 July was I able to catch a plane. When I was in the plane, suddenly I remembered it was the 12 July. On the same day twenty years ago, I returned from abroad. In a new hotel in Shanghai, I promised myself that I would not join politics for twenty years, would not talk politics for twenty years. I had broken my promise by talking politics for a long time now. Nevertheless, I had kept my promise to avoid joining politics for the last twenty years. . . . I reckoned in the plane: “In the next twenty years, in a time when war is certain to break out, will I be able to keep away?”

True to this doubt, two months later, I participated in politics. It looks impossible for me to escape all these at the moment. I can only promise you again that I will go back to my scholarly life once the war comes to an end.¹²

This letter shows Hu was reluctant to accept the government post but he was forced to put himself at the service of his country under the urgency of the war situation. Fu Sinian, Hu’s student, a well-known historian, was also tormented by a dilemma of a similar nature. In a letter to Hu, Fu wrote:

I read *Zhuang Zi* again recently in order to liberate my mind. Why must I bear so much agony? Why must I worry about the problems of our country? . . . Our ancestors advocated that we must assume the attitude “only I can do it.” If one still harbour such a thought, one must be brimming with confidence. I have never agreed with such an attitude. However, I have got involved with the business of other people. . . . Deep in my heart, I am not happy with our politics and society, but I cannot see a way out. I try to concentrate on academic research but I really cannot forget our people. Consequently, I am vacillating between these two roads and have not made real achievements in either.¹³

¹¹Chen Pingyuan: “Xuezhe de Renjian Qinghua” (The Social Concern of Scholars), *Dushu* (Reading Monthly) 170 (May 1933): 79.

¹²*HSSXJ*, vol. 2, pp. 753-754.

¹³Fu’s letter to Hu Shi on 4 February 1947, *LWSXX*, vol. 3, p. 172.

This was certainly not a problem unique to intellectuals of Modern China, but it caused a special identity crisis for them. These intellectuals who took ideology seriously were caught in an agonising dilemma over their appropriate public role, and how to render the best service to Chinese society.¹⁴

Hu Shi was torn between two opposite poles: patriotism and pure scholarship. He alternated constantly between these two extremes and was unable to free himself from the resultant anguish. Although Hu could convince himself that he did not go against his Pragmatic belief in whatever he did, his inner tension still ran high. Hu himself often remarked about his natural inclination for scholarship rather than practical affairs. However, the suffering of China forced him to go for the latter. In November 1932, when asked by the *Dongfang Zazhi* whether he still had any dream, to everybody's surprise, Hu Shi replied that he wanted to be put in an ideal prison for fifteen years in order to finish all the books he intended to write.¹⁵ This expressed desire implied an end to his active engagement in and specific relationship with society, and acknowledged an alternative life that would involve withdrawal from and disavowal of involvement in political and social affairs.

Hu always viewed America as a model country for China. He hoped that China could become a peaceful, governed, prosperous, civilised, modern and unified nation. Hu Shi defined these terms in detail as follows:

¹⁴For a discussion on the political orientated nature of Chinese intellectuals, see also Hou Kok Chung: "Jindai Zhongguo Zhishifenzi de Zijue Wenti yu Shehui Bianqian" (Intellectuals' Self-awareness and Social Change in Modern China), in Lin Shuihao, ed.: *Zhonghua Wenhua: Fazhan Yu Bianqian* (Chinese Culture: Development and Social Changes) (Kuala Lumpur: Malaixiya Zhonghua Dahuitang Lianhehui, 1997), pp. 203-228.

¹⁵*YGMCSX*, vol. 13, p. 373.

“Peaceful and well governed” means long periods of peace, good law and government, and proper health administration. “Generally prosperous” means stable livelihood, developed industry and commerce, safe and convenient systems of communication and transportation, fair economic conditions and a public relief system. “Civilized” means universal and free education, good and sound secondary education, advanced university education, and a proper elevation and distribution in the other phases of cultural life. “Modern” means all those political, judicial, economic, educational, sanitary, scientific and cultural institutions and facilities that shall meet the demands of national life in a modern world.”¹⁶

Hu noted that China’s problems could only be solved by “adopting the scientific knowledge and methodology of the modern world, and consciously carrying out reform step by step.”¹⁷ Without science and education, Chinese could in no way eradicate “poverty, disease, ignorance, greed and disorder” which in Hu’s mind were China’s main enemies.¹⁸ However, Hu Shi’s programme would require years of selfless and single-minded effort for its implementation which needed the political power that Hu and his like never enjoyed.

One of the major constraints which Hu faced was the absence of the rule of law in China. Reviewing *Endeavour* prior to its closure, Hu characteristically de-emphasised the importance of his articles on politics. Instead, he insisted that it was the debate on “science and philosophy of life” and the articles on ancient history that would have major impact on China’s intellectual history.¹⁹ Hu had put together all the articles he wrote for *Endeavour* in *Collected Essays of Hu Shi (Hu Shi Wencun)*.

¹⁶Hu Shi: “Women Zou Na Tiaolu” (Which Road Do We Take?), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p.10. I have adopted this translation from *China’s Own Critics*, edited by T’ang Leang-li (Tientsin: China United Press, 1931), pp. 15-16.

¹⁷Hu Shi: “Women Zou Na Tiaolu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 17.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Hu Shi: “Yinianban de Huigu” (Reflecting Upon the Past Year and a Half), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 112.

Nevertheless, he removed all the political discussions from the collection in 1953 when it was reprinted in Taiwan.

It is not surprising that Hu did not value much of his political commentary. In the first place, political reform was not the task he had set himself. He frequently remarked that his profession was philosophy, his training was in history and his pastime was literature.²⁰ Apparently, politics was the last thing in his mind. Political discussions brought Hu more agony than joy. Time and again, Hu felt that he was forced to talk politics. He lamented in 1923 that his political discussions were totally irrelevant to reality.²¹ This is basically true as his political visions had little impact on China's development. He was sceptical about the effectiveness of political commentaries. Little more than a year before his death he wrote despondently to an old friend: "My birthday (the sixty-ninth) is approaching. As I look back upon the labours of the last forty or fifty years, it seems to me that everything has been utterly ruined, utterly destroyed, as though by some irresistible force."²²

In his early career, Hu sought to avoid political involvement of any kind and thought of serving his country by his pen. When Hu was still in America, he made it clear that his efforts would be to stipulate cultural reform as a prerequisite for political reform:

I believe that the proper way of creating causes at the present time lies in the cultivation of men (*shuren*). This properly depends upon education. Therefore I have of late entertained no extravagant hopes, and after returning home I will seek only to devote myself to the task of social education. . . believing this to be the only (possible) plan for the cultivation of men over a period of one hundred years. . . . I am well aware that the cultivation of men

²⁰Tang Degang: *Hu Shi Zayi*, p. 37.

²¹Hu Shi: "Yinianban de Huigu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 111.

²²Hu's letter to Zhang Foquan, dated 11 December 1960, *HSSXJ*, vol. 3, p. 1568.

is a long range scheme, but recently I have come to understand that there is no short-cut that can be effective in national or world affairs.²³

After an absence of seven years Hu Shi returned to Shanghai in the summer of 1917, only to find that the city's once stimulating intellectual life had become sterile and stifling. "I realised then," he wrote sometime later, "that Zhang Xun's restoration (of the Qing Dynasty) had been an entirely natural phenomenon." What he saw in China confirmed the initial impression he had had before he left the United States. He became even more convinced that intellectual and cultural regeneration must take precedence over political reform, and that new social values must supersede the old before a satisfactory political settlement could be reached. From his initial sense of shock and disappointment came Hu's resolve "to refrain from talking politics for twenty years," in the hope that in that time "a new foundation for Chinese politics" might be laid.²⁴

In Hu's view, reconstruction in China would be a long term task. William James' idea of "meliorism," Dewey's emphasis on piecemeal reform, and his own concern for cultural change all led him to the conclusion that civilisation evolved gradually and that the promise of a fast and wholesale solution was unrealistic. Hu suggested to his colleagues that "this cultural movement, which was vaguely called a Chinese Renaissance, should essentially confine itself to the non-political sphere, should deliberately and consciously aim at the establishment of a non-political basis

²³*LXRJ*, vol. 3, pp. 240-241. This translation is adopted from Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 69.

²⁴Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 65.

for a new China. We should devote ourselves to the fundamental problems which, in our view are predominantly intellectual, cultural, and educational.”²⁵

When Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and several members of *New Youth* group established a small magazine, *The Weekly Critic* (*Meizhou Pinglun*), expressly as a forum for political debate, Hu tried to keep a distance from the publication. His contributions to it consisted only of literary pieces and even these were in response to Chen’s invitation. He stood aloof from it for several months. Although he was reluctant to associate himself with political discussions, he remained deeply concerned with China’s deteriorating political situation. It was not easy for him to follow his own advice. Time and again “the turmoil of the newspaper” invaded his life and drew him away from the single-minded pursuit of cultural reform. In the end his non-involvement in politics was an impossible resolution to keep.

Moreover, Beijing University was then the foremost institution of learning in China, where many well-known politics-involved intellectuals had their base. As a public figure in the intellectual circle, Hu was forced to come to grips with political matters of urgent national interest. When Chen Duxiu was arrested by the Premier Duan Qirui’s police, Hu found it even harder to distance himself from politics. Consequently, he took over editorial responsibility for the journal and felt strongly that he “could no longer avoid political discussions.”²⁶

Events during 1920 reflected the absolute helplessness and ineffectiveness of educational institutions as agents of social reform. During the summer of 1920, North China was ravaged by internecine war among the warlords. Duan Qirui was

²⁵*KSZZ*, p. 195.

²⁶Hu Shi: “Wode Qilu,” *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 65.

temporarily swept aside by the *Zhili* faction, and national finances squandered in the process. In the spring of 1921, the staff of the eight national colleges and universities in Beijing went on strike for salaries which had not been paid to professors since the beginning of the year. Pressure was building up and boiled over in June, when the President's guard, in one of the ugliest actions taken by any militarist ruling group, beat and bayoneted the professors and students petitioning at the presidential mansion.

Another factor that had prompted Hu to publish his political view was the persuasion coming from some of his best friends. Hu's good friend, the celebrated geologist Ding Wenjiang criticised his vow of not talking or getting involved in politics for twenty years: "Don't be tricked by Hu Shi who tells us that political reform must be preceded by (a reform in) thought and literature," and he went on:

Your proposal is a kind of fantasy. Your literary revolution, intellectual reform, and cultural reconstruction will not be able to withstand the onslaught of corrupt politics. Good politics is the prerequisite for all peaceful social reforms.²⁷

Hu bowed to Ding's criticisms and began to doubt his cultural-intellectual approach. He conceded that "when political conditions are not favourable, nothing else can be done; education cannot be managed; industry cannot be managed; even a small business cannot be managed."²⁸

In this regard, Deweyan Pragmatism did little to help resolve Hu's strategic dilemmas. Despite the warm reception Dewey received in China and the wide circulation his ideas were given by Chinese liberal intellectuals, the weaknesses of

²⁷Hu Shi: *Ding Wenjiang de Zhuanji* (A Biography of Ding Wenjiang), *HSZPJ*, vol. 23, p. 58.

²⁸*YGMCSX*, vol. 15, p. 328.

Dewey's social theory were apparent when applied in the Chinese context during the May Fourth period. As Dewey said: "We must teach ourselves one inescapable fact: any real advantage of one group is shared by all groups; and when one group suffers disadvantage, all are hurt. Social groups are so intimately interrelated that what happens to one of them ultimately affects the well being of all of them."²⁹ The kind of reform Dewey advocated required the consensus of the conflicting social groups. However, this was not an "inescapable fact" at all in China. Maurice Meisner considered Dewey's social and political philosophy, based on American assumptions, "largely irrelevant" to China's chaotic conditions: "The extreme poverty and widespread illiteracy of the masses of the Chinese people and the lack of even the rudiments of responsible political authority negated the possibility of the general social consensus that Dewey's programme presupposed."³⁰ Jerome Grieder finds a basic incompatibility between liberalism and the reality of violence in China: "Chinese life was steeped in violence and revolution, and liberalism offers no answers to the great problems of violence and revolution."³¹

Hu realised clearly these conditions did not exist in China. For this reason he argued that a cultural revolution must precede political action. This strategy, however, as Keenan has observed, "assumed that education and cultural improvements could both avoid repression and begin the process leading gradually to

²⁹John Dewey: *Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, translated from the Chinese and edited by Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-chen Ou (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973), p. 65..

³⁰Maurice Meisner: *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, pp. 107-108

³¹Jerome B Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 345.

desirable political consequences.”³² In this sense, the programme of Hu Shi suffered from the same strategic weaknesses as Dewey’s own hopes of making the school the unsteeped church of democracy. Both Dewey and Hu assumed that cultural reconstruction could be separated from politics and thereby could circumvent the democratic reformer’s problem of powerlessness, ignoring the fact that any effort to establish a democratic culture was itself a political fact and would entail a struggle for power. One could not assume that the masters would teach themselves the virtues of participatory democracy, nor could one expect the masters to permit the free development of cultural institutions and values subversive of their rule. Culture was not an unprotected flank that democrats could easily seize. “Politics is rotten,” wrote the chastened Deweyan editor of the *New Education* (*Xin Jiaoyu*), Jiang Menglin, in 1922, “but how can we not talk politics.”³³

Dewey was not in a position to give guidance to Chinese politics in the early twenties. To the Chinese, Dewey had proposed radically democratic ends without proposing means commensurate with those ends. Viewing the political chaos at the time, Dewey could not stop expressing his concern on a few occasions. On 4 Jun 1921, staff from eight universities who went on demonstration for salaries were beaten by security members. Hu went to see John Dewey two days after the violence. Dewey drew a conclusion from the news which was pessimistic indeed. He said to Hu that it just seemed clear from such an event that “warlords and education

³²Barry Keenan: *The Deweyan Experiment in China: Education Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, p. 154.

³³Jiang Menglin: “Xuefeng yu Tigao Xueshu” (Academic Character and the Elevation of Learning), *Chenbao Fukan* (2 December 1922); reprinted in *Guodui Shidai zhi Sixiang yu Jiaoyu* (Thought and Education in a Transitional Period) (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1962), p. 98.

were simply incompatible.” Hu lamented in his diary that what Dewey said was right.³⁴ In his farewell speech on 30 June 1921, Dewey again voiced his opinions of China’s current problems. Beside praising Chinese youth for their commitment to new thought, he encouraged them to put their ideas into action. He claimed that a good idea without a proper action was meaningless. It is possible that some good ideas, in certain circumstances, could not help to solve social problems. He illustrated this by giving Chinese educational and political problems as an example. Which one should be the first priority for the intellectuals? Should Chinese pay attention to education rather than politics or vice versa? “This is the question without an easy answer.” Dewey said. “The only way to solve the problem was to put one’s ideas into action.”³⁵ Dewey’s words were enough encouragement for Hu to go ahead eventually to take a political stand.

From his vow of not talking politics for twenty years to subsequently breaking the silence, Hu indeed experienced tremendous tension within. It is interesting to note that his change caused heated debates in the intellectual community. This clearly shows that a similar dilemma had always occupied many intellectuals’ minds. Which should come first, cultural reform or political reform? Is it possible not to touch on political issues when undertaking the task of cultural reformation? Li Zehou, when analysing May Fourth intellectuals, aptly points out:

Despite the fact that intellectuals in the New Culture Movement believed that their motive was not political but to achieve cultural reforms, . . . from the beginning their action was full of political cause and features. The enlightenment, cultural reform and the abandonment of traditional value, were all aiming at national salvation and political and social change.³⁶

³⁴*YGMCSX*, vol.15, p.124.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁶Li Zehou: “Qimeng yu Jiuwang de Suangchong Bianzou” (The Dual Variation of Enlightenment and National Salvation) *Zhongguo Xiandai Sixiangshi*

Li's analysis shows that the tension between enlightenment and politics are two different faces of the same coin. Hu was destined to reach this cross-roads. After long contemplation, Hu realised that taking up politics would not mean abandoning his Pragmatist thought. In response to questions and worries regarding the change, Hu Shi explained that he had indeed not changed. To his friends who either welcomed his engagement in political discussion as a change or urged his return to philosophical and literary problems, Hu emphasised the continuity in his decisions. Like his study of philosophy and literature, Hu wrote, his political discussion "was a practical application of Pragmatism and was meant to introduce and teach a new method of thinking."³⁷

6.2 Good Men Government and the Defeat of Reason

Intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, although concerned with political and social issues, were different from their predecessors. The new generation of Chinese intellectuals who came of age during the first two decades of the twentieth century -- most of whom were trained in modern-style education or abroad -- tried not to be wedded to the traditional model of literati politics. For Hu, as for others of his generation, the image of an intellectual was changing. Fu Sinian once wrote to Hu: "We are stuck if we join the government; in my view, to launch a party is better

Lun (Studies in Modern Chinese Intellectual History) (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 11-12.

³⁷Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 67.

than to join a party, and to publish a newspaper is even better.”³⁸ Fu’s remark clearly showed the intention of fostering a change in the social status of intellectuals before trying to change politics. On 27 May 1922, Hu wrote in his diary:

Lin Changmin invited me to a lunch. Those who attended included Cai Yuanpei, Wang Daxie, Liang Qichao, Luo Wengan, Tang Tianru and Zhang Jia’ao. Lin Changmin persuaded us to organise a political party. He concentrated his efforts on me. It was hard to decline. However, organising a political party is not our business and is not my interest anyway. One knows what one should do. There is no point in trying to force someone to do something against his will or out of his capability. That will only make matters worse. Someone said we “safeguard our reputation.” Luo Wengan expressed our feeling well on one occasion: “If we did not safeguard our reputation, would there still be room for us to speak out today?”³⁹

He was sensitive and sceptical of the rough and uneven road of political activism. He knew his destiny was not in real politics. He sincerely believed that he would make the greatest contribution to Chinese society as an educator and social reformer. He evidently felt that, even though he stood aloof from quotidian politics, he could still be much more politically influential than his European or American counterparts, a belief based on the legacy of the Chinese traditional literatus influence. Political critics, he wrote, fall into three categories. First, there are those who remain subservient to the leadership of a particular political party. Second, there are those who themselves exercise leadership within a party. Finally, there are some -- and obviously it was in this category that Hu saw himself -- who remain unaffiliated with any party, in order to supervise the conduct of all. Such men are, as Hu put it, “transcendent and independent. They recognise only the long-term interest of society and the nation, not parties and cliques. They adopt a statesman-like view, not a

³⁸Fu Sinian’s letter to Hu Shi on 4 April 1947, *LWSXX*, vol. 3, p. 172.

³⁹*YGJMC SX*, vol. 16, p. 311.

partisan view. Perhaps by temperament and ability they are not fitted to organise a political party. They can analyse issues, but not necessarily manage affairs; they can plan, but not necessarily execute; they can criticise the authorities, but not necessarily know how to deal with them. They should, of course, exploit their strong points, and certainly not try to do what they cannot do well.⁴⁰

Hu reasoned that, as an intellectual and cultural movement leader, he could have an important impact upon the direction of long-term evolutionary change. When Hu was asked if it was possible to have effective political influence without direct involvement, he replied that “independent critics” such as he had described had at their disposal two important means of making their judgements count. The first was, of course, the role they played in shaping public opinion. The second was their role in the creation of an independent electoral majority. “Independent political critics have no party, yet sometimes it can be said that they have a party. Their party consists of the innumerable unaffiliated independent voters. In nations where the political situation is clear and education well developed there is always a part of the electorate that belongs to no party or group; their support is given according to the excellence of policies and personalities.”⁴¹

Hu had once criticised Liang Qichao for giving up his position as a critic on the warlord-bureaucrats. In February 1922, many of Hu’s friends advised him not to start a newspaper; if he did, he would become another Liang Qichao. Hu Shi disagreed. He believed that running a newspaper carried responsibility with it. The

⁴⁰Hu Shi: “Zhenglunjia yu Zhengdang” (Political Critics and Political Parties), *Nuli Zhoubao* 5 (4 June 1922), paper cutting in *YGMCSX*, vol. 16, p. 323.

⁴¹*Ibid.* The translation here is adopted from Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 201.

trouble with Liang was not that he ran a newspaper, but that he gave up journalism for a government post. Hu said: "Mr Liang shouldn't have given up his journalist vocation for the post of a minister. I can make up my mind not to seek a government post, but I cannot give up my urge to comment on public affairs."⁴² In May 1922, Hu and his friends started a new weekly, *Endeavour*, of which he was the editor.

It is not hard to discern the main causes of political impotence of the Chinese liberals. The basic reason is simply that liberalism needs a stable and functional context which did not exist in China. The rule of law generally did not prevail in China. Laws were bent, broken, or simply ignored by corrupt officials and arrogant militarists. The liberals' faith in reason and legal processes could not deter dictatorship and militarism.

By 1922, Hu had almost made the concession that cultural reform could not succeed without political struggle. He had also come to believe that his own effort for cultural reform was threatened by China's unresolved problems. In the second issue of *Endeavour*, he published a political proposal signed by him and fifteen other renowned intellectuals. The sixteen signatories contended that the objective of Good Government (*Hao Zhengfu*) was a minimal requirement that elites of all persuasions should acknowledge. It defined the minimum requirement of Good Government as follows: At the least, "Good Government" means the existence of proper organs to supervise and prevent corrupt activities in politics. At best, it should make use of the political organs for the purpose of pursuing the welfare of society, accept responsibilities fully, and protect individual freedom. To realise these demands, the proposal urged the establishment of a "constitutional government," an "open

⁴²*YGMCSX*, vol. 16, pp. 103-104.

government,” and “politics with a plan.” It accepted that mere demands and talk would not do much good. Thus the signatories proposed that the first step in combating corrupt politics was for “good men” to have fighting spirit. They appealed to all elite members of society, in the interest of society and the nation, to come forward to be involved in politics in a constructive manner.⁴³

Who were these “good men” on whom such change depended? And how could they get involved? Although Hu and his colleagues offered no initial definition of these people, they had in mind those who had both the knowledge for managing particular issues and the moral strength required for fighting corrupt politics.

The signatories of the political proposal were determined to rally “public opinion” and “fight a decisive battle.”⁴⁴ Three of those who signed the political proposal later became ministers in the warlord-dominated government. Practical politics quickly proved their efforts inadequate. Tang Erhe (1877-1943), a medical doctor, who became deputy minister of education in July 1922, occupied the post for only five days before resigning over a budget dispute. The Good Men Government (*Haoren Zhengfu*), led by the prime minister Wang Chonghui, collapsed in mid-September 1922, having lasted only a month without achieving anything. Its minister of finance, Luo Wengan (1888-1941), was even imprisoned for allegedly accepting a bribe in connection with the signing of a treaty with Austria, a charge of which he was later acquitted. In January 1923, Cai Yuanpei resigned from his presidency of Beijing University to protest against Luo’s arrest and corrupt politics, in the hope

⁴³Hu Shi: “Women de Zhengzhi Zhuzhang” (Our Political Proposal), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 21-24.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

that other bureaucrats would follow suit, so that to bring down the Beijing government.⁴⁵

Though advocating a “fighting spirit,” Hu Shi knew full well that self-preservation was probably the only option available. He reaffirmed the positive contributions of his friends’ efforts. “Though some people blame him for acting too hastily,” Hu wrote, “we do not believe that Tang Erhe’s decision was wrong. He came with a principle, and he left when it failed to be implemented. His decision to resign was quite appropriate, and we offer our respect.”⁴⁶ Hu saw Cai’s resignation in the same light. “We support Mr. Cai’s decision,” he declared. “And by doing so, we are showing our approval of a loud protest for the sake of justice and decency and in the spirit that ‘one should not get into the same stream and defile oneself.’ ” Hu agreed that Cai’s resignation would not lead to the collapse of the Beijing government. But “it would make the whole nation think and feel again.”⁴⁷

With intellectuals or “good men” participating in cabinet, Hu Shi and his friends remained hopeful that the Chinese government would be on course to implement real reforms. In order to solve China’s immediate problems, they suggested to the warlord regime a few concrete alternatives, including a peace conference for national unification, a constitutional government, the disarmament of warlord armies and the abolition of sinecure positions. They also designed electoral

⁴⁵Li Jiannong: “Zhongguo Jingbainian Zhengzhishi” (A Political History of China during the Last Hundred Years (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 592-593. For the chronology of this events, also see Hu Shi: “Zhe Yizhou”(This Week), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 119-124.

⁴⁶Hu Shi: “Zhe Yizhou”(This Week), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 150.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 190-195.

and financial reforms.⁴⁸ However in a transition period when the Chinese traditional order had collapsed and a new one had yet to be established, there was no political, social or economic institutions that would force those in power to take these liberals seriously. The warlord regime showed no interest in implementing political reforms. Social disturbances and student demonstrations continued. As one would expect, the “good men” failed to contain the ambitious warlords. In many cases, they were manipulated by them.

The experiment of Good Men Government had made it painfully obvious that it was a failure. After stepping down as a cabinet member, Tang Erhe told Hu: “I advised you not to talk politics any more. I read your political commentary in the past and was impressed by your arguments. Only after I had entered the government did I realise that it was not what I had expected. Your words are completely irrelevant. What you mentioned is a world totally different from what I have experienced.”⁴⁹ Hu Shi at first tried to be optimistic but finally admitted that it was utterly futile to influence politics. He realised that Good Men Government did not mean “good government.”⁵⁰

As the political situation continued to deteriorate, he announced the closing down of *Endeavour* in October 1923. Hu interpreted the misfortunes that had befallen *Endeavour* as a vindication of his earlier opposition to political engagement. Hu resumed his emphasis on the need to change the ideas of the individual as the basis of improving Chinese politics. He claimed that another *Endeavour* which he

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 119-224; also his “Liansheng Zizhi yu Junfa Geju” (Federationism and the Division of China by Warlords), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 75-82; “Yige Pingyong de Tiyi” (An Ordinary Suggestion), *HSZPJ*, vol.9, pp. 95-103.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p.215.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

and his friends had started planning, would expand to the point at which it could carry forward the unfulfilled mission of *New Youth*, “to lay a firm foundation in literature and thought for Chinese politics without interruption for another twenty years.”⁵¹ The idea of the new *Endeavour* had never come to fruition. Hu Shi did not go back to his old belief in abstaining from politics for twenty years. On the contrary, he was active in voicing his dissent in politics.

6.3 Democracy and Human Rights

John Dewey believed that every aspect of philosophy could be regarded an aspect of understanding modern democratic society and ethics should be turned into an account of the mutual adjustment of individual and society and thus transform itself into a sort of applied sociology. Although Dewey repudiated all philosophies of “fixed ends,” he came close in his own thinking to finding a final value in his version of democracy. This is the case because he held that only in such a democratic order is it possible to conduct free and varied experimentation which is for him the definition of life and thought. In effect, he proposed that society itself be transformed into a vast laboratory in which every member of the various “publics” affected by law might contribute to the formulation of laws. Moreover he/she should submit himself/herself to checks and controls analogous to those employed in experiments in the natural sciences. Only such a society, he believed, was truly free.

⁵¹Hu Shi: “Yu Yihan Deng Siwei de Xin” (A Letter to Gao Yihan and others), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 114.

Like Dewey, Hu Shi was a firm believer in and supporter of democracy. His whole life was dedicated to the promotion of liberty and democracy and to the fight against the thoughts of "anti-liberty" and "anti-democracy." In Hu's mind, democracy was not an ideal system too lofty to reach. It was actually nothing but a form of government which always allowed room for further adjustment and might be gradually improved and extended. He firmly believed that democracy would bring into existence a civilised society which would value freedom and tolerate differences.⁵²

Hu's understanding of constitutionalism was no doubt influenced by modern notions of democracy, especially by the American Bill of Rights. Throughout his life, he never stopped writing on these issues. His concept of constitutionalism was clearly expressed in the articles he wrote in *The Crescent* and *Independent Critics* between the end of the 1920s and the middle of the 1930s.⁵³ This was regarded by some authors as the most outstanding period in Hu's life as a political critic.⁵⁴

⁵²Hu Shi: "Instrumentalism as a Political Concept," in Hu Shih et.al.: *Studies in Political Science and Sociology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), pp. 1-6; see also his "Women Bixu Xuanzhe Women de Fangxiang" (We Must Choose Our Direction), *NPCB*, vol. 6, pp. 1988-1989.

⁵³*The Crescent* was a magazine set up by Xu Zhimo, Liang Shiqiu and few friends in Shanghai in March 1928. The magazine's main focus was in literature and politics. Hu Shi was their leader. See Liang Shiqiu: *Wenxue Yinyuan* (Association with Literature) (Taipei: Wenxing Shudian, 1964), p. 294. Like *The Crescent*, *Independent Critics* was a private journalistic enterprise. The magazine was established by leading liberal intellectuals of the time such as Hu Shi, Ding Wenjiang and Jiang Tingfu in Beijing in May 1932. Hu Shi was its editor. For a discussion on the contribution of *Independent Critics*, see Chen Yishen: *Duli Pinglun de Minzhu Sixiang* (The Democratic Thought of *Independent Critics*) (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Shiye Gongsi, 1989).

⁵⁴For example, see Chen Yishen: "Zhongguo Wenyi Fuxing de Xianqu" (The Pioneer of the Chinese Renaissance), in Zhang Yongjuan, ed.: *Zhongguo Xin Wenmin de Tansuo* (Finding China's New Culture) (Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1991), pp. 154-155.

When the KMT unified most of the country in 1927-28, China's liberal intellectuals were faced with a new situation. The prospects seemed much brighter for a while. Many liberal intellectuals thought this might be the end of their dark ages of warlord regimes. They looked upon the KMT with much hope. At the time, Hu apparently supported the KMT. He made this remark in Japan while on his way back to China from the United States in April 1928:

Chiang Kai-shek's party purification and anti-Communist movement was supported by a group of senior members, . . . this shows its justification. Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zhihui are not reactionaries. . . . I always respected these people. Their moral support for government will get our sympathy.⁵⁵

But it did not take long for Hu to realise that it was only the beginning of another dark age for China. Their dream soon turned to nightmare. Hu's clash with the KMT started in March 1929 when the KMT declared the beginning of "Political Tutelage" in the Third National Congress. Taking Sun Yat-sen's theory of "political tutelage" as its sanction, the KMT Government contended that political sovereignty should be vested in the party and not be given to the people who were ignorant of it.

In order to strengthen this Political Tutelage, Chen Dezhen, a delegate of the Shanghai KMT, proposed to the Third National Congress of the KMT in March 1929 that anti-KMT elements be severely dealt with. The proposal of Chen Dezhen was as follows:

Anyone found guilty of being a counter-revolutionary by the provincial or municipal headquarters of the Party should be sentenced by the judicial court, or a similar legal organisation, in conformity with the charge preferred against him by Party headquarters. If the accused were not satisfied with the judgement he could appeal against it before a higher court, but the so-called

⁵⁵Hu Shi, "Zhuiyi Wu Zhihui Xiansheng" (In Memory of Mr. Hu Zhihui), *ZYZG*, 10.1 (1 January 1954): 5-6.

higher Court must reject the appeal on receiving written evidence from the Headquarters of the Central Party.⁵⁶

Hu became disillusioned with the KMT after learning this. He wrote an open letter to Wang Chonghui, who was the Minister of Law at the time, to express his strong disagreement. The letter, however was banned from publication. Chen Dezhen even demanded that Hu Shi be punished for this unpublished letter.⁵⁷ Hu was angered by the KMT's action. Consequently, he and other friends at the *Crescent* wrote a number of essays against the government's moving to undemocratic directions.

Sun Yat-sen claimed that in order to reach its goals, an ideology need only be believed. In 1918, after seven frustrating years of witnessing the republic divided up among cliques of rival warlords, and having his own ideas for the development of China dismissed by his military opponents and his followers alike as a "mere mass of words," Sun wrote a book on his political plans and theories. In the Preface, he defended the thesis that action is easy and knowledge is difficult. He intended his dictum as a contradiction to the words of *Book of History* that "knowledge is easy but action is difficult," and felt that he was attacking the most undesirable single habit of thinking in Chinese tradition.⁵⁸

It was from this traditional ethical standpoint in Sun's thought that the subsequent KMT doctrine developed. His concept of "knowledge" was a useful support for party ideology and for the claim of party leaders that they should understand what must be done and why, and that they should accordingly be obeyed

⁵⁶*RJSGB*, vol. 8, entry for 26 March 1929. This translation is from T'ang Leang-li, ed.: *China's Own Critics*, p. 24.

⁵⁷See newspaper cutting in *RJSGB*, vol. 18, entry for 1 April 1929.

⁵⁸Hu Shi: "On Knowledge and Action," Translated in T'ang Leang-li, ed.: *China's Own Critics*, pp. 44-46.

and followed; for Sun's view could imply that to criticise or hesitate was to be "insincere." Hu Shi aptly pointed out the dubious assumptions behind such moralistic rhetoric. Characteristically and adroitly, he couched his critique in a form appealing to a traditionally approved idea: Sun and the party were committing the error of separating knowledge and action. They failed, he argued, to realise the value and the justice of criticism from the rank-and-file; "as one knows, one acts a little better, and as one acts, one knows a little more."⁵⁹ Hu stated his case plainly: Dr. Sun's theory of "Action is easy, knowledge is difficult teaches us that everybody can act and only a small number of people are charged with the task of knowing and discovering. A greater number of people ought to look up to intelligence and knowledge, obey their leaders and follow their plans."⁶⁰

Hu's words were courageous. They reflected the fundamental difference between himself and the KMT. The KMT ideologues reacted indignantly to Hu's charges. They denounced Hu for having "overstepped the limit of scholarly discussion and indulged in meaningless quibbling," and recommended him to be "duly punished."⁶¹

But that did not make Hu retreat. Hu with another two members of *The Crescent*, Luo Longji and Liang Shiqiu, published a book consisting of a collection of their political commentaries entitled *Essays on Human Rights (Renquan Lunji)*. Their criticism incurred the wrath of the KMT, and they were bitterly attacked in the KMT-controlled press. The climax of this dispute was that Jiang Menglin, another

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶¹Instruction of the Nanjing party to the State Council, *Shanghai Evening Post*, 30 September, 1929; quoted in the Editor's Preface of *China's Own Critics*, p. vii.

student of Dewey who held the post of Education Minister, was instructed to stifle Hu Shi's criticism of the KMT. With hesitation, Jiang Menglin issued a warning to the China National Institute of Shanghai in October 1929, of which Hu Shi was president.⁶²

In this period, Hu not only took part in political discussion, he also made important contacts with a few of the KMT's senior members. One of them was Song Ziwen (T. V. Soong, 1894-1971), brother-in-law of Chiang Kai-shek. Song was thoroughly Western educated and was then the Minister of Finance. He hoped the Civil War would come to an end to enable him to initiate a number of important economic reforms. In June 1928, Song called a conference of seventy Shanghai bankers, businessmen, and industrialists, and forty government officials. They came out with a proposal to cut military expenses and implement a few economic plans.⁶³ However, Song's plan did not come to fruition. The war became more serious. Hu's acquaintance with Song dated back to their student days in the United States and they held many common views. In the entry for 2 July 1929 of his diary, Hu said Song consulted him on national issues.⁶⁴ On 5 August 1929, in protest at the huge additional military expenses which were not in accordance with the budget, Song handed in his resignation letter which was drafted by Hu Shi.⁶⁵ Hu pushed Song to use his influence to persuade Chiang Kai-shek to end the civil war but it was to no

⁶²See Hu's letter to Jiang Menglin, *HSSXJ*, vol. 1, p. 492. In the letter, Hu questioned why the warning letter was addressed to the China National Institute and not to him. He returned the warning letter to Jiang because according to him, the whole issue did not concern the China National Institute.

⁶³Sterling Seagrave: *The Soong Dynasty* (New York: Harper & Row publishers, 1985), p. 299.

⁶⁴*RJSGB*, vol. 8, entry for 2 July 1929.

⁶⁵*RJSGB*, vol. 8, entry for 5 August 1929.

avail.⁶⁶ On 4 November 1930, Luo Longji was arrested because of his criticism of the KMT. It was Song's deputy who bailed him out.⁶⁷

However, Hu's close relation with Song did not help him to mend the difference between the KMT and his fellow liberals. Hu criticised Luo's arrest as a "ridiculous action" and "the KMT's political suicide."⁶⁸ When Luo was sacked from his professorship in Guanghua University, Hu appealed to Chen Bulei (1890-1948), then Chiang Kai-shek's Chief of Staff, to withdraw the dismissal and expressed a wish to talk to him. To Hu's disappointment, Chen rejected both requests.⁶⁹ Hu's tension with the KMT led to his resignation as president of China National Institute of Shanghai in May 1930. He found it difficult to stay in Shanghai and moved to Beijing in October 1930. His new appointment as President of Qinghua University later was also rejected by Chiang Kai-shek.⁷⁰ Although Hu was subjected to public rebukes and private pressures, he was never arrested, perhaps because of his national reputation or because of the intervention of close friends such as Song Ziwen, Jiang Menglin, Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zhihui, who were among the top officials in the government's council.

To be sure, Hu and his circle failed, after all, to foster a liberal force in Chinese leadership. Despite his harsh tone of criticism, Hu's aim was never more than the reform of the government in power. He regarded his words as sincere and

⁶⁶Song said that the time was not ripe to do it and this anger Hu. He said that Song did not understand politics. Hu criticised Song for only obeying instead of leading. See *RJSGB*, vol. 9, entry for 6 September 1930.

⁶⁷*RJSGB*, vol. 10, entry for 4 November 1930.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*RJSGB*, vol. 10, entry for 16 Jan 1931.

⁷⁰Chiang did not want to endorse it. He said that Hu was anti KMT and should not be appointed as President of Qinghua University. See *RJSGB*, vol. 10, entry for 18 March 1931.

fair ones which would help the government to improve itself. He liked to think of himself as a loyal opposition. He once told Song Ziwen that he and his friends' purpose was to put the government on the right way. "We do not care who is in office," he said, "we only hope to correct government's mistakes."⁷¹ Of the KMT government, Hu demanded only some assurances that they would heed the voice of responsible critics.

In any event, liberal demands for democracy and personal liberty seemed to make less and less sense in the light of the subsequent civil war between the KMT and the CCP, and the Japanese invasion. By the early 1930s, China succumbed to Japanese aggression, losing its North-Eastern provinces and a considerable part of North China. Although Hu stood outside the government and retained his critical stance, he could not be unmoved by the perilous state of the nation. Hu's attention increasingly shifted from dissatisfaction with China's central government to concern for national salvation. He became less critical of the dictatorial aspects of the KMT government though he still insisted on democracy as his ideal.

When Sino-Japanese relations began to worsen, contacts between Hu Shi and the KMT government became closer. After the Mukden Incident, Hu Shi, who was Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Beijing University at the time, and Ding Wenjiang were called for consultations on national issues by Chiang Kai-shek in Nanjing. According to a newspaper report in October 1931, the KMT Government intended to appoint both Hu and Ding as members of the Legislative *Yuan*.⁷² Regardless of whether the report was true, it was clear that the KMT no longer treated Hu as an

⁷¹*RJSGB*, vol. 8, entry for 2 July, 1929.

⁷²*Shen Bao*, 14 October 1931.

enemy. Hu's name was listed in the Council of Economics and the Council of Finance which were established in September and November of 1931 respectively. Although Hu turned down Song Ziwen's invitation to visit Nanjing on several occasions, his attitude towards the KMT had changed gradually.⁷³ In January 1932, before attending the Conference of National Salvation organised by the KMT, Hu had a discussion with other friends such as Jiang Tingfu, Tang Erhe and Fu Sinian who were also invited. They all agreed "not to treat the KMT as an enemy" and to "reform politics by non-revolutionary methods."⁷⁴

In view of China's chronic internal turmoil and the persistent external threat, some liberals, such as Jiang Tingfu (1895-1965), a professor of history at Qinghua University and Ding Wenjiang, felt that a temporary compromise with political realities was unavoidable. Dazzled by the successes of Hitler and Mussolini, they felt that a dictatorial form of government might help China better in the national crisis. They explained in *Independent Critics* why democracy did not and could not work in the form that the liberals had hoped for. In effect such a position meant that they preferred authoritarianism or even fascism to liberalism. The polemic of democracy versus dictatorship was as heated a debate as the earlier famous polemic on science and the philosophy of life.

While his close friends made an about-turn, Hu swam as hard as he could against the tide. He remarked that modern absolutism appeared in three different forms, namely, personal dictatorship, one-party dictatorship, and one-class dictatorship. The KMT slogan of democratic centralism -- *minzhu jiquan* --

⁷³See *RJSGB*, vol. 10, entries for 26 September 1931, 11 October 1931 and 12 November 1931.

⁷⁴*RJSGB*, vol. 10, entry for 7 January 1932.

identified one-party dictatorship; the Blue Shirts' leader system was a combination of personal and party dictatorship; the Communist party was a combination of one-class and one-party dictatorships. Moreover, Hu stated his opposition to all three forms, averring his conviction that there was no person, party or class in China qualified to carry out such dictatorship. Hu added that though people realised that citizens in a republic must possess high intellectual capacities, they did not realise that a dictatorship required special genius and even greater intelligence to operate.⁷⁵

Because of the danger of a personal or party tyranny, Hu was vehement in his opposition to any form of dictatorship, to the concentration of power in the hands of one or a few people. Democratic constitutionalism, he said, is a simple system of government, comparable to the kindergarten level, while a dictatorship is comparable to graduate school. Democratic government, he insisted, is simply "government by common sense." It is best suited to train people with little political experience or competence in order to learn how to practice politics. According to his own observation, those who ran the government in Britain and America were not the first-rate people, nor those who went into business and science; the common citizens, given the opportunity of political participation, would learn to love and protect their own rights. Dictatorship, as he saw it, demanded "especially outstanding men," such as Stalin and Lenin and their cohorts, and in his opinion China did not have such men of political genius. On this basis, Hu argued that it was wrong to assume that democracy was too advanced and difficult a political system for China, and that the Chinese people in general are not qualified. What China had

⁷⁵Hu Shi, "Zailun Jianguo yu Zhuanzhi" (Once More on National Reconstruction and Despotism), *DLPL* 82 (24 December 1933): 3-4.

to do, he proposed, was to enter the kindergarten first to learn the basics; she was not ready for graduate school yet.⁷⁶ He stressed his conclusion that democracy was the best form of government to train those people with little political experience to participate in politics and that the concentration of power in the hands of a few could never allow the people a chance to obtain modern political training. The most effective training was to gradually widen political rights for the people through political participation, just as one learns to swim by plunging into water.⁷⁷

Amongst contributors to *Independent Critics* was Jiang Tingfu who favoured some form of dictatorship for China. He dismissed Hu's argument about democracy being a kindergarten training in government as merely a farce, not worth discussing.⁷⁸ Ding Wenjiang characterised Hu's argument as absurd, and held that "in present day China, both democracy and dictatorship are impossible, but the degree of impossibility of democracy is greater than that of dictatorship." Ding appealed to the Chinese people to strive to make dictatorship possible in the shortest time. The first step, he said, would be to abandon advocacy of democracy.⁷⁹ Qian Duansheng (1900-1990), a professor of political science at Qinghua University, argued that what China urgently needed was a high degree of industrialisation of the coasted provinces within one or two decades, but this could be achieved only through a powerful and popular dictatorship. Qian urged the Chinese not to waste their energy in advocating democracy, which was not only difficult to achieve but as

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁷Hu Shi: "Cong Yidang dao Wudang de Zhengzhi" (From One-party to Non-party Politics), *DLPL* 171 (6 October, 1935): 11.

⁷⁸Hu Shi: "Zai Tan-tan Xianzheng" (Talking about the Constitutional System Once Again), *DLPL* 236 (30 May 1937): 5.

⁷⁹Ding Wenjiang: "Minzhu Zhengzhi yu Ducai Zhengzhi" (Democracy and Autocracy), *DLPL* 133 (30 December 1934): 5-7.

a form of government basically weak. Yet at the same time, he warned the people to guard against the emergence of tyrannical dictatorship.⁸⁰ Wu Jingchao (1901-1968), a professor of sociology at Qinghua University, and also one of Hu's close friends, pointed out that he could see no alternative for unifying China except by military force. He based this opinion on his own studies of the patterns of the history of Chinese civil wars.⁸¹

Hu's opinions on this issue were shaped more by his continuing faith in democracy than the immediate circumstances. National unity, whether physical or spiritual, could not be imposed from above, or by force. It had to come from below, through the use of political institutions designed "gradually to cultivate a centripetal force throughout the nation, and gradually to create a 'public loyalty' in place of the 'private loyalties' of the present time." Hu drew his conclusions from the experience of Britain and America without considering the extent to which Chinese intellectuals might be able to exercise similar influence on China's reality. Hu understood the limitations of his political stand. For that reason, he termed his own opinion as "wild prejudice."⁸² At the time, it was not easy to dismiss questions and doubts about the desirability of establishing democracy in China. As Hu Shi once indicated, China in the modern era had no leadership with the will and the power to implement reforms and maintain the continuity of change.⁸³ Every social class was weak and they had

⁸⁰Qian Duansheng: "Minzhu Zhengzhi hu, Jiquan Guojia hu" (Democratic Government or Unified Nation), *Dongfang Zazhi* 31.1 (1 January 1934): 24.

⁸¹Wu Jingchao: "Geming yu Jianguo" (Revolution and National Construction), *DLPL* 84 (7 January 1934): 4.

⁸²Hu Shi: "Cong Yidang dao Wudang Zhengshi" (From One-party to Non-party Politics), *DLPL* 171 (6 October, 1935): 7-9.

⁸³Hu Shi: "Cantong de Huiyi yu Fanxing" (Painful Recollections and Reflections), *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, pp. 44-45.

become increasingly subservient to the dominance of political power. Politically, none of the prevailing forces were stable and powerful enough to play a leading role. Under these conditions, the most important task facing China was the consolidation of political power before democratisation or the implementation of reforms.

6.4 Hu Shi's Relations with Chiang Kai-shek

During the period of Japanese intrusion, Hu Shi held fast to fundamental liberal values, though he found it difficult to shun the patriotic call for national unity. Although he publicly disagreed with Jiang Tingfu on the issue of dictatorship, he had to admit that the issue of democracy was of little relevance during the Sino-Japanese war.

After the Mukden Incident, Hu's relations with the KMT became gradually more cordial. From 1932 to 1935, Hu exchanged more than ten letters with Wang Jingwei, the president of the Administrative *Yuan*, mostly on the possibility of Hu accepting a government post.⁸⁴ In October 1932, Hu had spoken out on behalf of Chen Duxiu who was under arrest as the leader of the Chinese Trotskyites and Chiang Kai-shek did give him a very friendly reply.⁸⁵ In March 1933, he joined Ding Wenjiang and other friends in writing to Chiang. In the letter, they said that without

⁸⁴Wang had offered him the post of Minister of Education, Ambassador to German, Ambassador to United States and other important government post -- eventually rejected by Hu. See Wang's letter to Hu on 28 April 1933 and 31 March 1933. *LWSXX*, vol. 2, p. 211 and p. 204.

⁸⁵*LWSXX*, vol. 2, p. 139.

Chiang coming to the north, China would not be saved.⁸⁶ Although Hu had a comfortable relationship with the KMT, he did not seem to have any political ambitions of his own. On more than one occasion, he rejected offers of positions that might have led to the exercise of real power. He openly acknowledged that his choice was of a non-political approach and that the performance of his political obligations was a self-conscious act. In a letter to Wang Jingwei in April 1933, Hu explained:

I believe that staying outside rather than joining government will enable me to serve the country better. I maintain the status of independence, not because I want to gain fame or safeguard my reputation. The main reason is that I want to hold the position of non-partisanship. Only then can I speak the truth and be fair to the country in a difficult time. . . . For this reason, I would like you to let me stay outside the government. Let me be the nation's publicist, let me be the government's critical friend.⁸⁷

As a liberal intellectual, Hu was by no means a career politician. He held the principle of disinterest's interest.⁸⁸ He understood the importance of keeping a critical distance from politics. Hu hoped to comment on politics from without, not participating as a politician, let alone assuming any government post. Hu was meticulous in safe-guarding his independence. It was perhaps the KMT's friendly approaches which changed Hu's attitude towards the government. Hu's comments became more lenient and his attitude became more friendly. Although he did not abandon his role as a critic of the KMT, he was voicing his dissent tactfully, arguing in a rather diplomatic and circuitous manner. For example, in 1934, when he

⁸⁶Hu Shi: *Ding Wenjiang de Zhuanji* (A Biography of Ding Wenjiang), *HSZPJ*, vol. 23, p. 147.

⁸⁷*HSSXJ*, vol. 1, p. 11.

⁸⁸*KSZZ*, p. 36.

commented on Chiang's advocacy of the New Life Movement, Hu first praised Chiang's commitment. He said that "Chiang Kai-shek has considerable power, his life is nevertheless simple, tough and disciplined and he himself is a good model for this movement." Following this, Hu reminded of the danger of exaggeration of the effect of this "new life". He believed that national salvation should be based on knowledge and technology, which was to be inculcated by higher institutions rather than by a new life movement.⁸⁹

Chiang Kai-shek's KMT regime was plunged into unprecedented crisis by the events of late 1931 and early 1932, when the Japanese Army attacked first Manchuria and then Shanghai. Guangdong was in revolt. The Yangzi River flooded. The Nanjing government, in the face of these challenges, proved to be impotent. Within the politics of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek's heavy-handed moves to install the presidential system with himself as president in 1927 ended with failure because of the powerful challenge from the combined forces of his political rivals such as Wang Jingwei, Hu Hanmin and Sun Ke. The presidential form of government was thus replaced by a cabinet system. In order to win people's support, Chiang was forced to be more open-minded. In May 1931, he said that fascism was not suitable for the Chinese situation and decided to put "the political tutelage" period to an end. In December 1932, the Party's Central Executive Committee authorised the formation of an organisation to prepare for constitutional government.⁹⁰ Responding to the

⁸⁹Hu Shi: "Wei Xin Shenghuo Yundong Jin Yijie" (A Suggestion on New Life Movement), *DLPL* 95 (8 April 1934): 18.

⁹⁰On power politics in the KMT during this period, see Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1924-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 159-180 and Suisheng Zhao: *Power by Design: Constitution-making in Nationalist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), pp. 106-125.

pressure of public opinion during the heated polemic of democracy versus dictatorship, he and Wang Jingwei jointly issued a telegram for circulation to the entire country on 9 November 1934 announcing that "given the conditions and times of China today, there is neither any necessity nor possibility for China to follow the Italian or Russian-style political system." The terms fascism and dictatorship were not used but the meaning was quite clear. Because of Chiang's change of attitude, Hu also changed his tone:

Chiang is growing up. He becomes open-minded. His attitude has changed. His opinion might be a mistake and his policy might make people not happy. However, everybody gradually comes to know that he is not selfish, and does not only fight for the good of a particular party. In these few years, everybody has come to know that he is hardworking and always bears the responsibilities. He is never afraid of hard work and he never worries about criticisms. He understands the requests from those with different ideas. He respects their opinions.⁹¹

Overwhelmed by the national crisis, Hu chose to side with a less disagreeable and comparatively effective power centre to lead the nation out of foreign encroachment. He believed that having a unified leadership might not necessarily guarantee China from being subjugated; but without unified leadership at all, it definitely would have been conquered. He admitted in 1937: "Times have changed, and (we) know there is no room for us to oppose the government"⁹²

Hu was always prepared to grant the KMT a leading role in guiding China through the difficult times. He believed that Chiang and the KMT could be relied upon to implement their promises of political reform. He always emphasised the need for fundamental law. He tried to call for a new constitution as often as he could,

⁹¹Hu Shi: "Zhengzhi Gaige de Dalu" (The Great Road toward the Reform of Political Institutions), *DLPL* 163 (1 August 1935): 3-4.

⁹²Cao Boyan and Ji Weilong: *Hu Shi Nianpu*, p. 165.

arguing that without a constitution there could only be a dictatorship. Hu's hope for democratic political reform was boosted decisively by Chiang's later announcements. He published several articles in the process of drafting this constitution and paid attention to every word of the draft constitution. Before the National Assembly could ratify the draft constitution, however, the Sino-Japanese war broke out. *Independent Critics* was forced to publish its last issue. His advocacy of constitutional reform thus had to come to a stop temporarily.

Hu Shi's relationship with the political authority was always ambiguous. Despite doubts about the KMT's competence and compassion, there was still an undeniable pull towards the idea of working with the party and trying to enlighten it. Committed to non-violent change, Hu tirelessly demanded that the KMT government improve itself and give the people constitutional rights. He strove to enlighten, but never to overthrow the KMT government. He kept his expectations to the very minimum, taking delight in any progress made by the KMT.

In Hu's mind, Chiang Kai-shek was the only leader who could unite China. He asked society in general to support the government in the face of the Japanese invasion. Hu's acceptance as the Ambassador to the United States during the Sino-Japanese War marked the peak of his support for Chiang's government. After the war, Hu continued to have a good relationship with the KMT. In September 1945, he was appointed by the KMT government as President of Beijing University.⁹³ He was a representative of the Constituent National Assembly that convened in Nanjing in November-December 1946 for the purpose of drafting a "permanent"

⁹³Geng Yunzhi: *Hu Shi Nianpu* (Chronology of Hu Shi) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), p. 325.

constitution.⁹⁴ In 1948, he was elected to the National Assembly created by the new constitution and later he was appointed as speaker of the Assembly. Despite the fact that the Assembly was dominated completely by the KMT, the very act of constitution-making provided, in Hu's view, a sufficient legitimisation of process for KMT rule. He was happy that the KMT had finally "returned political power to the people and enforced constitutional administration" and thereafter he cited China as evidence of the slow but steady world-wide victory of democracy over totalitarianism. His involvement in the KMT's Constituent National Assembly put him under attack especially in 1946 when Chiang started the civil war with the Communists. However, Hu's main focus was on the constitution. He said: "Whether through the system of cabinet or presidency, it will benefit China if China can move on to constitutional democracy."⁹⁵

Hu repeatedly declined offers to join the KMT after the war, however. He was invited by Chiang to take up the office of *Guofu Weiyuan* (Cabinet Member) in February 1947. He told Wang Sijie that he wanted to be an independent man.⁹⁶ In December 1947, Chiang tried to persuade him to be Ambassador to the United States again.⁹⁷ All efforts failed. Fu Sinian once advised him not to accept any government post for fear that Hu would lose his high moral image.⁹⁸ Hu heartily agreed with Fu. After being dismissed from his ambassadorship, Hu was cautious in accepting any top government post.⁹⁹ There was almost a consensus among the

⁹⁴*NPCB*, vol. 5, pp. 1943-1949.

⁹⁵Geng Yunzhi: *Hu Shi Nianpu*, p. 337.

⁹⁶See *RJSGB*, entry 22 Feb 1947.

⁹⁷See *RJSGB*, vol. 18, entry for 16 December 1947.

⁹⁸Fu's letter to Hu dated 28 March, 1947 in *LWSXX*, vol. 3, pp. 192-194.

⁹⁹The relationship between Hu and Song began to turn sour in the early 1940s. During the later part of Hu's tenure as China's Ambassador to America

liberals that the best strategic position to help the government was to be outside the government. Hu later agreed to accept Chiang's offer of the presidency of Beijing University because he did not consider Beijing University an affiliated organ of the government, partly because it was in the north and was almost beyond the reach of the KMT.

It seems possible that Hu was appreciative of Chiang Kai-shek's kindness. In 1947, Hu declined the offer to be President of the Administrative *Yuan*. He sent a message through Tao Xisheng that he would be always behind Chiang in facing any national crisis.¹⁰⁰ Before the National Assembly convened in Nanjing at the end of March 1948, Chiang tried to nominate Hu for the presidency. Hu rejected Chiang's offer. In the entry of 30 March 1948 in his diary, Hu nevertheless said he believed Chiang was sincere.¹⁰¹ When Hu went to the United States on the eve of the Communist ascension to power, he said at a press conference: "Whatever happens, I will strongly support President Chiang." He continued, "My support might be not important. However, my words are sincere. Which government shall we support if

(1938-1942), Song Ziwen, who was dispatched to Washington in the summer of 1940 as Chiang Kai-shek's personal representative and chief negotiator for loans from the United States, was actually the real representative of the KMT Government. Song oppressed Hu and always bypassed him in negotiations between Chongqing and Washington. Song was the major saboteur who complained about Hu's "non-diplomatic" activities in America. Hu's diary hinted at the rift between himself and Song. For example, see *RJSGB*, vol. 15, entries for 11 February 1942 and 19 May 1942. For more information on Hu Shi's ambassadorship, see Richard Burns and Edward Bennett: *Diplomats in Crisis: United States - Chinese - Japanese Relations 1919-1941* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1974), pp. 153-170; Jiu-hwa Lo Upshur: "Hu Shi as Ambassador to the United States: 1938-1942," *Sino American Relations* 22.4 (winter 1996): 42-72. See also Chapter IV, note 61.

¹⁰⁰Tao Xisheng: "Guanyu Dunqing Hu Shi Churen Xingzheng Yuanzhang ji Qita" (On Inviting Hu Shi to be the Head of Administrative *Yuan* and Others), *Zhuanji Wenxue* 23: 5 (May 1976): 18-21.

¹⁰¹*RJSGB*, vol. 16, entry for 30 March 1948.

we do not support this government? If this government were overthrown, where should we go?”¹⁰²

Hu believed that the CCP had seriously neglected human rights, and this he could not tolerate. Hostile to the ideology of the CCP, Hu had no choice politically. The Japanese encroachment forced him to support a powerful leader who could best save the country. At a time when the government was losing its legitimacy, Hu's support of the KMT damaged his credibility among China's younger generation. He became, at least in the eyes of the leftists, a tool of the KMT. Slanders from leftist elements soon abounded. Hu was disposed to “take what we can get” to modify the party's dictatorship rather than to strive for its overthrow by revolutionary means. Any parliament would be better than none. In this spirit Hu was prepared to welcome any institutional reforms that would indicate the party's willingness to move in the right direction.

In this regard, his manner very much resembled the Confucian literati who offered propositions and criticism to the emperor and to their colleagues. Although Hu understood the importance of political parties, he had little interest in organising political groups or mass movements. He believed that ideas and morality were the primary sources of political order.

Many scholars characterised Hu's role as an assistant rather than a critic of the KMT and Chiang Kai-shek. Some scholars even claimed that Hu was a government scholar or a tool of the KMT.¹⁰³ Hu convinced himself that the KMT

¹⁰²HSYYJ, vol. 3, p. 52 and RJSGB, vol. 18, entry for 18 November, 1960.

¹⁰³For example, see Zhu Wenhua: *Hu Shi Pingzhuan* (A Critical Biography of Hu Shi) (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1988), p. 292; Xu Jilin: *Zhizhe de Zunyan* (The Dignity of the Wise) (Shanghai: Xuelin Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 17-18.

government might share his interest in political ideas. This was certainly a self-delusion. In reality, there was always a wide gap between those who pursued power in the world of practical affairs and those who sought objective truth. Most of the time, the KMT authorities did not share his belief in the necessity or the usefulness of criticism, regardless of the spirit in which it was offered. Hu was constantly in an angry mood and felt powerless. Nevertheless, he never gave up hope that misguided KMT politicians would somehow come to their senses

6.5 The Case of Lei Zhen

Hu went to the United States at the request of Chiang Kai-shek in search of aid and support for the KMT government in March 1949. After Chiang Kai-shek and his army fled to Taiwan in December 1949, both the KMT and Hu still remained close. Before Hu accepted the appointment as President of the Academia Sinica in April 1958, he was invited to Taiwan in 1952 and 1954. Both visits were arranged by the KMT government.

Even when Hu was in the United States in the early 1950s, he was regarded as their leader by liberals in Taiwan. Hu was especially close to Lei Zhen (1897-1979), one of the most influential liberals in Taiwan in the 1950s. Hu was the nominal publisher of *Free China* (Ziyou Zhongguo) and Lei Zhen was the editor in charge. The magazine was established in November 1949 after the KMT's retreat to Taiwan. However, the plan was said to have been hatched several years earlier in Shanghai before the Communists took control of the mainland. The idea was to

promote liberal democratic beliefs systematically, in the face of the Communist challenge. The magazine was named by Hu Shi, with De Gaulle's concept of a Free France as his source of inspiration.¹⁰⁴

The relationship between *Free China* and the KMT was close but tumultuous. During its early stage, the publication was actually subsidised by the KMT government. Money was funnelled on a monthly basis from the Ministry of Education's propaganda fund, with Chiang Kai-shek's blessing. Office space was provided by the Taiwan Provincial Government. In a period of deteriorating relations with its principal supporter, the United States, the KMT hoped to capitalise on the international reputation of liberals especially Hu Shi to garner sympathy and support. *Free China* was seen as a vehicle for this purpose, as was Hu Shi's appointment as Ambassador to the United States.

The objectives of *Free China* was readily apparent: advocating democracy, solidarity and anti-Communism. The three elements were closely related, according to the publishers of *Free China*. Without democracy, there could be no solidarity. Without solidarity, the task of anti-Communism was bound to fail. This central theme was played consistently through the 1950s. With the passage of time, it became increasingly evident to intellectuals who had retreated from the mainland that recovery of China was not likely to happen in the near future. There was a change from the previous "guest" mentality into one of "growing roots." The magazine's emphasis shifted gradually from anti-Communist polemics to criticism of the ruling party in the island state. The idea of anti-Communism was reinterpreted. As Yin

¹⁰⁴Lei Zhen: *Lei Zhen Huiyilu* (Memoirs of Lei Zhen) (Hong Kong: Qishi Niandai Chubanshe, 1978), p. 59.

Haiguang (1919-1969), a professor of logic at National Taiwan University, explained: "Our anti-Communism is not a question of the form of political power. Rather, it is that in thought and in life style we have basic differences in nature with the Communist party."¹⁰⁵ This interpretation implied that they were more concerned with basic human rights that included freedom of speech and freedom of publication which apparently were far from satisfactory level in Taiwan under KMT's ruling.

Free China became increasingly vocal in demanding more local autonomy. So the relationship between *Free China* and the KMT turned sour, as the magazine entered a new phase of criticising the authorities. Articles on government corruption, violation of the constitution, special economic privileges accorded to KMT cadres, the connection between the national treasury and the party treasury, one-party dictatorship and party interference in education and the military were published. In 1956, it called for a more extensive form of elections and for the adoption of a cabinet system. This would mean the presidency would be transformed into a symbolic institution, with real power exercised by the head of the Executive *Yuan*. *Free China* also demanded that the army become a truly national force, rather than an instrument of the KMT. They also argued that since it was impossible for the KMT to attack the Communist in Mainland China, the KMT government must have long term plans. According to them, it was not practical to allocate 85% of the government's entire expenditure on the military. To the KMT whose main policy

¹⁰⁵Yin Haiguang: "Fangong Dalu Wenti" (On Counter-attacking Mainland China), *ZYZG* 17.3 (1 August 1957), reprinted in *Yin Haiguang Quanjì* (Complete Works of Yin Haiguang), edited by Lin Zhenghong (Taipei: Guiguan Tushu Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1990), vol. 11, p. 520.

was to restore their political power in Mainland China, *Free China's* argument undoubtedly smacked of defeatism.¹⁰⁶

The most critical position adopted by *Free China* was its opposition to the third term of Chiang Kai-shek's presidency. Chiang's second term as President was to expire in 1960, and he was constitutionally prohibited from holding a third term. The National Assembly decided, however, that under the state of emergency this provision could be waived and that to suspend the provision somehow did not require a constitutional amendment. Chiang, then, was re-elected in 1960 (and again in 1966 and 1970).¹⁰⁷

In its later phase, *Free China* even questioned the legitimacy of the KMT regime, expressing doubt about its anti-Communist resolve. Articles asserted that the party seemed to put its own interests before everything else, with the aim of perpetuating its grip on power. By denying rights and freedom of expression as guaranteed by the constitution, *Free China* warned, the KMT had rung its own death knell.¹⁰⁸

Hu Shi sensed that *Free China's* outspokenness might bring them great trouble. He told supporters of *Free China* to be more tactful in voicing their dissent. He proposed, for instance, that they refrain from questioning the government's

¹⁰⁶See the leading article: "Shou Zongtong Jiang Gong," (Wishing President Chiang Kai-shek on His Birthday), *ZYZG* 15.9 (31 October 1956): 663-664.

¹⁰⁷*Free China* had published a number of articles opposing the third term of Chiang's presidency since January 1959. When Chiang was elected as the third term president, *Free China's* leading article expressed doubt about how history view this. For a discussion on this event, see Ma Zhisu: *Lei Zhen yu Jiang Jieshi* (Lei Zhen and Chiang Kai-shek) (Taipei: Zili Wanbao Wenhua Chubanshu, 1993), pp. 388-394 and Sima Sangdun: "Lei Zhen yu Ziyou Zhongguo Banyuekan" (Lei Zhen and Free China Semimonthly), *Mingbao Monthly* 5.12 (December 1970): 64.

¹⁰⁸Ma Zhisu: *Lei Zhen yu Jiang Jieshi*, pp. 362-376.

acclaimed policy of “fighting back to the mainland” (*fangong dalu*). However, Hu was highly ambiguous towards the idea of an opposition party. On the one hand, he strongly felt that an opposition party was badly needed to ensure that the KMT was kept on the right track. On the other hand, he was worried the idea of forming an opposition party might be too radical for the KMT to tolerate. He proposed replacing the term “opposition party” (*fandui dang*) with “non-government party” (*zaiye dang*). In spite of his earlier emphasis on the function of the opposition party in facilitating the peaceful transfer of power, Hu at this time suggested the idea of a political party organised by intellectuals who would place no claim in assuming power.¹⁰⁹

Hu did not support Lei’s suggestion of forming an opposition party. Lei decided to go ahead with his initial plan anyway.¹¹⁰ Lei and his liberal Mainlander associates formed an alliance with independent Taiwanese politicians and attempted to contest the elections. Under the emergency rules no new parties were permitted, but in the 1957 elections Lei’s group helped to set up an informal electoral co-ordination committee among anti-KMT candidates. In 1960, after Chiang’s re-election, Lei decided to push for direct confrontation and organised a loyal

¹⁰⁹Hu Shi: “Cong Zhengqu Yanlun dao Fanduidang” (From Demanding the Freedom of Speech to the Opposition Party), *ZYZG* 18.11 (1 June 1958): 9-13.

¹¹⁰According to Hu Songping’s record, Hu had advised Lei not to form the opposition party, namely China Democratic Party. In his mind, it would ultimately fail. Hu was not happy that Lei used him as a weapon on a few occasions. He clearly told Lei he would not take part in their organisation, let alone be their leader. Although Hu did not want to lend his prestige to the China Democratic Party, he did say that if the party was on the right track in the future, he would openly support it. See *NPCB*, vol. 9, p. 3271, p. 3305 and p. 3332. But Lei had a different story. In his memoirs, Lei said that Hu always encouraged them to form the opposition party, see Lei Zhen: *Lei Zhen Huiyilu*, pp. 328-333.

opposition, the Chinese Democratic Party.¹¹¹ This was more than Chiang could take. Chiang Kai-shek immediately ordered Lei's arrest on a highly controversial charge of associating with Communist agents. According to a KMT report, one of Lei's employees had been a Communist spy. Lei was arrested for shielding him. *Free China* was closed down. Lei Zhen was sentenced to prison for ten years by a military court while his associates received various prison terms.¹¹²

Hu was attending a meeting in the United States when Lei was arrested. After receiving the news from Vice President, Premier Chen Cheng, Hu immediately called for the case to be tried in a civil court rather than a military court. Interviewed by news reporters, he reiterated the same view, and emphasised that he saw no problem in Lei's anti-Communism stand or his patriotism, that he was willing to testify for Lei as a character witness. When he came back to Taiwan, he commented that ten years imprisonment was too heavy and unfair to Lei who was a symbol of free speech in Taiwan. In a meeting with Chiang, Hu tried to persuade Chiang to release him in the appeal trial. According to Hu's diary, Chiang was in no mood for Hu's words. He directly rejected Hu's demand by saying: "I am very open with free speech. But in cases regarding Communists, we must follow procedures."¹¹³ The meeting eventually ended in total failure. Chiang's negative reply greatly disappointed Hu. Chiang's words fell like a bombshell. Hu later joined others in petitioning for pardon for Lei. Hu of course knew the outcome of these efforts too well -- the sentence simply could not be altered.

¹¹¹Ma Zhisu: *Lei Zhen yu Jiang Jieshi*, pp. 348-381.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 379.

¹¹³*RJSGB*, vol. 18, entry for 18 November, 1960.

The whole episode angered Hu. He was disappointed and frustrated. According to Wang Shijie (1891-1981), Chief Secretary to the President, the soft-spoken Hu lost his temper in a conversation and showed strong inclination to withdraw support for the KMT. Wang anxiously advised Hu not to put his still comfortable relations with the KMT at risk. In his opinion, the clash between Hu and Chiang would bring disaster to China.¹¹⁴ Was Hu that important? Would Hu's clash with Chiang risk putting Taiwan in crisis? We do not know of Hu's response to Wang's words. Was this the reason that Hu did not continue to confront the government on Lei's case?

Hu's failure to rescue Lei from prison provoked criticism many sides. Many outspoken liberals displayed the greatest degree of disappointment. To them, Hu had abandoned his liberal ambition and made no contribution towards Taiwan's democratisation. Yin Haiguang felt that Hu could have played a more critical role in influencing the outcome of the case at that particular juncture, but he somehow did not try hard enough. Lin Yusheng, Yin's student, commented that Hu's attitude towards Taiwan's democracy was, in Weber's terms, neither approaching the ethic of ultimate ends nor the ethic of responsibility.¹¹⁵ Some critics even claimed that Lei's case clearly showed that Hu could not fully qualify as a liberal. It indeed signalled an end to Hu's political endeavour.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Wang Shijie: *Wang Shijie Riji* (The Diary of Wang Shijie), vol.6, pp. 360-409.

¹¹⁵Zhang Zhongdong: *Hu Shi, Lei Zhen, Yin Haiguang: Ziyou Zhuyi Huaxiang* (Hu Shi, Lei Zhen, Yin Haiguang: Portraits of Liberals) (Taipei: Zili Wanbao She Wenhua Chubanshu, 1990), p. 2.

¹¹⁶Chen Yishen: "Hu Shi yu Jiang Jieshi" (Hu Shi and Chiang Kai-shek) in Zhou Cezong et al: *Hu Shi yu Zhongguo* (Hu Shi and China) (Taipei: Shibao Chubanshu, 1991), pp. 97-112.

It is understandable why the liberals in Taiwan placed great hopes in Hu Shi. As a kind of living legend singularly associated with the May Fourth Movement and the liberal democratic tradition, Hu was almost unassailable. He was admired by foreigners and had extensive foreign networks, which could be translated into a considerable amount of political influence in a government that relied heavily on foreign goodwill. Hu's national reputation, if used properly, could mount a genuinely serious challenge to the KMT government. He had once argued about the need to end one-party rule and implement a constitutional government. He had argued that the corruption and inefficiency of the present administration were largely due to the abuse of power by the KMT. The best way to rectify this was to allow one or more opposition parties to act as a check on the KMT abuses. He agreed in theory that the existence of opposition parties was an essential part of a democratic country. However, to many liberals' disappointment, in practice he did not go far enough in supporting Lei in forming an opposition party.¹¹⁷

Apparently Hu had cultivated a relatively close relationship with Chiang and the KMT since the 1930s. He was not prepared to jeopardise that relationship by adhering to a rigid set of demands regarding political reform. Moreover, Hu believed that his close relations might help to reduce the tension between the critics and those in power. His approach might not have yield the expected outcome, but it is unfair to accuse him of abandoning liberalism.

Hu's support for the journal saved it from almost certain demise on more than one occasion. The best known of these incidents occurred in mid-1951, when

¹¹⁷Zhang Zhongdong: *Hu Shi, Lei Zhen, Yin Haiguang: Ziyou Zhuyi Huaxiang*, p. 40.

the government threatened to shut the publication down in response to its criticism of the government's handling of financial affairs. After Hu had issued a public protest from his ambassador's residence in the US, Vice President, Premier Chen Cheng responded with an open letter in a conciliatory tone and the government backed off.¹¹⁸

When Chiang Kai-shek decided to continue with the third term of his presidency, Hu criticised Chiang's decision openly. In June 1958, the KMT government issued new rules to restrain freedom of publication. Hu openly objected to these rules. Even in the case of Lei Zhen, it is not justified to condemn Hu for not making efforts to save Lei. Recently-published diaries of Hu tell us that in the meeting with Chiang Kai-shek on 18 November 1960, Hu had used fairly strong words to defend Lei which apparently angered Chiang.¹¹⁹

It must be admitted that Hu's position was a difficult one. At the time, Hu was already at the age of seventy-four and was troubled by heart problems. Moreover, the take-over of Mainland China by the CCP was a tremendous blow to Hu Shi. It is not surprising that he was no longer energetic. It is unfortunate that he was still regarded as the spiritual leader of liberalism. No one else was expected to

¹¹⁸Chen Cheng: "Chen Yuanzhang zhi Hu Shizhi Xiansheng Han" (A Letter to Mr. Hu Shi from Premier Chen), *ZYZG* 5.6 (16 March 1960): 4.

¹¹⁹*RJSGB*, vol. 18, entry for 18 November, 1960. According to recent memoirs of Hu Xiyi, another contributor of *Free China* who was sent to prison by Chiang Kai-shek from 1963 to 1970 for his dissent, Lei Zhen was deeply touched by Hu's words when he read this diary entry which was specially delivered to him by Hu's secretary Wang Zhixiong in 1974. See Hu Xuyi: "Cong Lei Zhen he Hu Shi de Wenjian zhong Kan Liangren Shenhou de Youyi (A Look at Lei Zhen and Hu Shi's Close Friendship through Their Own Records) in *Hu Shi Yanjiu Congkan Diyi Ji* (Hu Shi Study, Series I) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue, 1995), pp. 261-269.

do the job better than him. Perhaps Hu himself was to blame for not trying to free himself from these responsibilities.

During the last ten years of his life, Hu was attacked by various groups. Aside from the Communist, he was also accused by many people in Taiwan. Hu's articles which advocated freedom of speech and advised Chiang Kai-shek to be more liberal and tolerant angered both Chiang Kai-shek and his son and eventual successor Chiang Ching-kuo.¹²⁰ According to Lei Zhen's memoirs, Chiang Ching-kuo, who had never liked Hu, directed the Ministry of Defence of which he was head, to publish an official paper to attack Hu and *Free China* in 1956.¹²¹ He had also been blamed by the conservatives for "paving the way for the take-over of China by Communists." Certain members of the KMT on Taiwan, through articles in a periodical called *Essence of Scholarship (Xue Cui)*, alleged that Hu's Pragmatic method as utilised by the New Culture movement was responsible for the disintegration of traditional Chinese culture. While engaging with negative criticism, those in the movement offered nothing constructive for a new system of thought or programme of action. The result, so these critics charged, was that the floodgates were opened for the importation of every kind of Western idea. Consequently, the Communists were able to exploit the cultural vacuum, and the intellectual zest of youth for everything new.

¹²⁰Hu's article which angered both Chiang included "Ning Ming Er Si, Bu Mo Er Sheng (Better to Cry Out Loud and Perish than Survive Gagged), *ZYZG*, vo.12, no.7 (1 April 1955), pp.5-6; "Shu Aisenhao Zongtong de Liangge Gushi Gei Zongtong Ting" (Telling Two Stories of President Eisenhower to President Chiang on his Birthday), *ZYZG* 15.9 (5 November 1956): 668.

¹²¹Lei Zhen: *Lei Zhen Weiyilu*, pp. 107-112.

After Lei was sentenced to ten years in prison, Hu admitted publicly that he was deeply disappointed. Here is a newspaper's report:

After the verdict of Lei's second hearing was announced, Dr. Hu was in great sorrow and in no mood for doing his work. He tried to kill time by playing a Chinese game called *Guowuguan*. When we entered the room, Dr. Hu had just begun a new round of the game. He invited us to sit and watch him playing. When we asked about his feelings, he put his cards down and said: "I got the news during my dinner. I am very depressed and in no mood for doing my work. So I play *guowuguan* to work off my depression." . . . "What else can I say? At first I thought it might be a change because the second hearing had taken more time. But now I can only express my great disappointment. . . ." When we said good-bye to him, he showed us to the door. . . . Only now do I understand what it means to be so upset until that one has nothing to say.¹²²

This was certainly not Hu Shi as we know him. Tang Degang, one of his students described Hu as looking extremely old during this period. Tang added, "Hu felt so guilty about Lei's case."¹²³ Three days later, Hu announced his intention of retirement when addressing a council meeting in the Academia Sinica.

This was Hu's fate, as it had been the fate of most Chinese liberals. In the later part of his life, Hu always emphasised the value of tolerance in politics. As one would expect, those in power would not listen to him. Hu must have agreed with Lubot's dictum: "One of the most frustrating of all political circumstances is to be a liberal in an illiberal age."¹²⁴ Hu might consider himself to have come out in the losing side on the great game of history. The harsh political climate proved too much for him.

¹²²NPCB, vol. 9, pp. 3384-3385.

¹²³Tang Degang: *Hu Shi Zayi*, p. 175.

¹²⁴Eugene Lubot: *Liberalism in an Illiberal Age: New Culture Liberals in Republic China, 1917-1937* (Westport: Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 133.

Chapter VII

Problems vs “*Isms*”:

Hu Shi and Chinese Communism

After Chinese intellectuals began to show a genuine interest in Marxism as an ideology of revolution in 1919, Communism became an increasingly powerful and influential force.¹ Although non-Communist intellectuals with independent ideas for national salvation opposed Communists, they nevertheless understood that it was an important subject to be dealt with. The choice was either to embrace or to oppose it, as it was impossible to ignore its existence.

The intellectual history of modern China is basically a history of struggle between supporters of democracy and gradualism and supporters of Communist revolution. Communist writers were wont to categorise non-Communist thinkers of the past hundred years as reformists, which was very derogatory in Communist vocabulary, often even worse than “reactionaries” as reformism could be more deceptive to the masses, while viewing themselves as revolutionaries. To use Communist terminology, their conflict is a struggle between two classes -- bourgeois and the proletariat.

¹For a discussion on Chinese intellectuals' early interest in Marxism, see Arif Dirlik: *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); See also his *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1991), esp. p. 16.

As early as 1922, when Hu Shi supported for “Good Men Government,” he was attacked by the *The Guide Weekly* (*Xiangdao Zhoubao*) which was run by the CCP. As Hu was willing to compromise with the warlord regime, he was branded as “petit-bourgeois pacifist” by Zhang Guotao (1897-1979), a Beijing University student and one of the founding members of the CCP.² He was attacked more frequently as his relationships with the KMT became closer. For example, Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), the former Secretary-General of the CCP and a well-known prolific leftist writer, wrote a famous satirical poem in March 1933 criticising Hu for legitimising the KMT’s dictatorship instead of fighting for human rights.³ Guo Moruo (1892-1978), one of the leaders of the Creation Society (*Chuangzao She*) and a prominent leftist historian, put it more directly: “Mr. Doctor, I will tell you something quite frankly: You old man, you are yourself one of the viruses that made China sick. You are the bastard offspring of Chinese feudal forces and foreign capitalism. You demand proof? Very well, take as examples the crowd of disciples pressing around you: that is your feudal power. And the British and American governments that hold you in such high esteem, they are the very ones whom we call imperialists.”⁴

²Zhang Guotao: “Women duiyu Xiao Zichan Jieji Heping Pai de Quangao.” (Our Advice to the Petit-bourgeois Peacemaker), *Xiangdao Zhoubao* 13 (23 December 1921): 105.

³This poem was published under Lu Xun’s name. See Lu Xun: “Wangdao Shihua” (A Poem on Kingly Way) in *Lu Xun Quanjí*, vol. 5, pp.46-47; Chen Tiejian: *Cong Shusheng dao Lingxiu: Qu Qiubai* (From a Scholar to a Leader: Qu Qiubai) (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe 1995), p. 394.

⁴Quoted in Jerome B. Grieder: *Hu Shi and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937*, p. 359; Other criticisms of Hu Shi by leftist writers in the 1930s included Li Ji: *Hu Shi Zhongguo Zhexue Shi Dagang Sixiang Pipan* (Critique of Hu Shi’s An outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy) (Shanghai: Shenzhou Publication Company, 1931); Ye Qing: *Hu Shi Pipan* (Critique of Hu Shi) (Shanghai, 1933).

After World War II, Hu's pro-KMT position was apparent. The Communists branded him as a mere agent of the "corrupt and desperate reactionary ruling class," and its American backers, a willing pawn in their plot "to deceive the Chinese people." After the establishment of the Communist regime, Hu was deemed important enough to elicit from China's new rulers a full-scale attack to set the records straight.

Of all liberal intellectuals, Hu was criticised most severely by the Communists. Why was Hu Shi so unpopular in Communist China? In this chapter, I will analyse Hu's attitude towards the Communists and their ideological conflicts.

7.1 Problems and *Isms*

After the May Fourth student demonstration, many intellectuals, overwhelmed by the enthusiasm for reform, thought that Chinese problems might best be solved in a total over-all fashion with a specific Western doctrine. Most of them preached radical and all-encompassing solutions such as Anarchism, Socialism and Bolshevism. Hu was convinced that the only realistic and reliable approach lay in a gradual reform which would aim at the identification of specific problems and then seek to resolve them "bit by bit, drop by drop." He believed that the solution could be achieved only piecemeal and was against any idea of a radical solution of problems. He preferred the terms of evolutionary change rather than revolution, and he was deeply suspicious of emotional responses to any crisis.

In July 1919, Hu Shi published his renowned article "More Study of Problems, Less Talk of *Isms*" (*Duo Yanjiu Wenti, Shao Tanxie Zhuyi*). This was his first venture into political discussion after he returned from the United States in 1917. He did so because of his dissatisfaction with the current political discussions. The nation was in turmoil while intellectuals were more interested in utopian doctrines than in dealing with concrete issues. Hu suggested that young intellectuals should "study problems more and talk of *isms* less." He declared that every abstract doctrine or *ism* was no more than an instrument for the solution of a practical problem. Therefore the formulation of a doctrine and *ism* should be based on the study of specific and practical problems.⁵ The article was intended as a criticism of what he regarded as the danger of uncritical and slavish worship of dogmatic doctrines. Hu later recalled his intention of commenting on politics.

The so-called new elements in the nation, while being silent on concrete political issues, talked expansively about Anarchism and Marxism. It was indignation aroused by this phenomenon --- because I am a Pragmatist -- that drove me to speak out on politics.⁶

To Hu, imported *isms* might not fit the practical situations of China as every *ism* was the result of a conscious study of a particular social situation. Therefore it was essential to study the social problems before one could advocate any *ism*. He claimed that abstract *isms* on paper could be manipulated by politicians and warlords as vague slogans to serve their own ambitions instead of solving problems.⁷

⁵Hu Shi: "Duo Yanjiuxie Wenti, Shao Tanxie Zhuyi (More Study of Problems, Less Talk of *Isms*), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 113-114.

⁶Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu," *HSZPJ*, vol.9, p. 65.

⁷Hu Shi: "'Duo Yanjiuxie Wenti, Shao Tanxie Zhuyi'" *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 113.

In this article, Hu also pointed out that the problems of China could not be solved all at once, but must be tackled individually. He insisted that “there was no single prescription which could cure every kind of disease.”⁸

Hu Shi’s rejection of “isms” elicited vehement protests. One objection was voiced by Li Dazhao, who later became one of the founding fathers of the Chinese Communist Party. Li argued that problems and *isms* had an inseparable relationship. He emphasised that the instrumental role of *isms* was not only to examine problems but also to solve them. The fact that *isms* were utilised by warlords and politicians as propaganda had not proven that *isms* were themselves faulty, but rather “highlighted the necessity for careful study and vigorous implementation of the various *isms*.”⁹

As regards the problem of a fundamental solution, Li argued that according to Marx’s economic interpretation of history, the solution to the economic problem is fundamental. “When economic problems were solved, other problems, such as political and legal aspects of the family system, emancipation of women and workers would eventually disappear.” But if the people, although adhering to the economic interpretation of history and believing that economic change was inevitable, did not pay attention to the theory of class struggle or use it as an instrument to effect actual movement in uniting the workers, then “the economic revolution could never be realised. Even if they had the capabilities to undertake the task, its completion would be considerably delayed.” Nonetheless Li believed that solving economic problems was fundamental for eliminating all social evils.¹⁰

⁸*Ibid.*, p.116.

⁹Li Dazhao: “Zailun Wenti yu Zhuyi” (Further Discussion on Problems and *Isms*), in *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 129-130.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 132.

After reading Li's article, Hu found that Li had not caught up with his ideas. To Hu, the facts brought up by Li were disturbing rather than comforting. Replying to Li's arguments, Hu insisted that "*isms* might be studied and selectively adopted as instruments and hypotheses." However, they "could not be accepted as sacred creeds or iron laws, but must be studied in the light of evolution."¹¹

Hu Shi's stand in refuting *isms*, notably Marxism, was all but logical in his own thinking. As a Pragmatist, Hu's main intellectual concern was that of a "problem." Like John Dewey, Hu Shi believed that a world without a problem is unimaginable. Life is problematic: even when we are not conscious about it, our mind and body are continuously trying to solve the problem, because this is the condition of organic life. Societies, like individuals, solve problems and must act on the circumstances that cause the problems in the first place. Interaction with the environment alters the society or the individual that acts on the environment, with the result that new problems arise and demand new solutions. As aptly pointed out by Alan Ryan, a Pragmatist's preferred expression was always "growth."¹²

Hu acknowledged that Marx's emphasis on the importance of material development and economic structure in the evolution of human society had opened a door for historical, sociological, and political studies. But to suggest the necessity of socialism, was a Hegelian construction that few would accept. In addition, while the idea of class struggle was important in the history of socialist movements, it also led to class hatred which, Hu argued, prevented possible mutual aid between the capitalist and the working class, resulting in unnecessary tragedies. He objected to

¹¹Hu Shi: "Sanlun Wenti yu Zhuyi" (Third Discussion on Problems and *Isms*), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, pp. 142-143.

¹²Alan Ryan: *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, p. 28.

the Marxist claim that social progress was a function of conflict, holding that this was an “exaggeration” and that the opposite exaggeration attributing progress to co-operation is a more reasonable one. Hu’s complaint was not that Marxism was willing to employ violence to effect social changes but that it viewed violence as inevitable; for this involved knowing what could not be known and worse, it predisposed us to use violence where rationalism might better serve our purpose. Hu did not consider class conflict a possible means to democratic ends. He wanted those interested in *isms* to understand Marxism fully:

For those who study Marxism clearly know that Marx’s idea has a strong connection with current economic and political development, the French socialist movement, etc. His idea was also influenced by his family background (for example he was a Jew) and his education (for example he studied history and laws in his younger days and was influenced by the Herderian group). Besides this, the philosophical thoughts of the past such as evolutionism and materialism in the eighteenth century also play an important part in forming Marx’s thinking. We must study and should not ignore those elements.¹³

This was what Hu Shi called the “genetic method”. By tracing the origins of Marx’s thinking, Hu tried to show his readers the difference between Marxism and Pragmatism. He pointed out the importance of dialectics in Marxism and said that it was developed from Hegelianism. According to Hu, dialectics was a philosophical discourse before the appearance of the theory of biological evolution. It was metaphysical in nature. Pragmatism stemmed from the theory of biological evolution. It was a scientific method. Therefore, the two methods were extremely different.

Hu in his downright denunciation of Marxism neglected a basic fact that Dewey was profoundly inspired by Hegel’s grand attempt to understand the great

¹³Hu Shi: “Silun Wenti yu Zhuyi” (Fourth Discussion on Problems and *Isms*), *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 145.

conflicts of history as a dialectical process by which the human spirit progressively moves to a new and higher synthesis to be worked out in the social, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and religious life of society. In 1883, when Dewey was a graduate student at John Hopkins, he noted that Hegel's thought "supplied a demand for unification that was doubtless an intense emotional craving. . . . My earlier philosophic study had been an intellectual gymnastic. Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the human, was, however, no mere intellectual formula; it operated an immense release, a liberation."¹⁴ He committed to Hegelianism firmly for about ten years. Although it waned slowly in his later intellectual development, Dewey never completely took Hegel out of his philosophical scheme. Dewey remarked in 1945: "I jumped through Hegel, I should say, not just out of him, I took some of the hoop . . . with me, and also carried away considerable of the paper the hoop was filled with."¹⁵

Contrary to Hu's argument, Hegelianism was indeed the source that made Deweyan Pragmatism close to Marxist dialectic materialism to some extent. Both Dewey and Marx were influenced by Hegelianism to believe that stimulus and response were not isolated things. They also adopted the Hegelian view that social life shapes the quality of human individuality. Marx modified Hegel's dialectic idea and developed it towards dialectical materialism. Dewey accepted the dialectic idea

¹⁴John Dewey: "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," in George P. Adams and William P. Montague, eds.: *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statement* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), vol. 2, p. 15.

¹⁵John Dewey's letter to Arthur Bentley, 9 July 1945 in Sidney Ratner, Jules Altman and James E. Wheeler, eds.: *John Dewey and Arthur Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence, 1932-1951* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 439. For a discussion on relationships on the thought between Hegel and Dewey, see Westbrook, Robert B.: *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 13-22.

but abandoned Hegel's idealistic aspects and eventually made his theories of organic co-ordination more scientific and naturalistic. As pointed out by Bernstein, "the insights that Dewey had derived from his study of Hegel and neo-Hegelians are now divorced from the Hegelian context and reformulated in a terminology more congenial to an experimental scientific temper."¹⁶

Despite Hu's missing of the Hegelian elements in Dewey's thought, his opposition to Marxism was true to the Pragmatist's belief. To Hu, Li's argument represented precisely the kind of oversimplified generalisation that, as a Pragmatist, he had vowed to eradicate from the Chinese mentality. "Pragmatism is, of course, also a kind of *ism*," he admitted, "but Pragmatism is only a method for the study of problems, and consequently it does not acknowledge that there can be any fundamental solutions. It recognises only that kind of progress which is achieved bit by bit -- each step being guided by intelligence, each step making provision for testing -- only this is true progress."¹⁷

Hu Shi argued that it is important to look for specific solutions to specific problems. But such a steady, piecemeal approach implies the stability of the underlying value system. Deweyan Pragmatists maintained that any "wholesale forecast of the future or any simple remedy is not worth the paper it is written on."¹⁸

A wholesale remedy was, however, something needed that would provide the basic

¹⁶Richard J. Bernstein: *John Dewey* (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company 1966), p.20. For a further discussion on the relations between Dewey's Pragmatism and Marxism, see William J. Gavin: *Context Over Foundation: Dewey and Marx* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1988).

¹⁷Hu Shi: "Wode Qilu," *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, p. 67.

¹⁸John Dewey: *Characters and Events* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929), p.253.

fabric for the development of a new value system upon which social reconstruction could occur. De Reincourt is right when he points out:

The Chinese were not searching for merely intellectual explanation but that, divested of all the trappings of their past civilisation, there were searching for a new emotional and all-embracing creed... [Pragmatist] now advocated slow, patient, progressive work and a pragmatic, utilitarian and positivist broad-mindedness to a people thirsting for heroic solutions, for a passionate belief that would dispel their mental chaos, that would put an end to the bitter humiliation of the recent past.¹⁹

Hu was obviously not aware the reasons behind the popularity of *isms*, instead he attributed the preference for talking about *isms* to mental laziness, i.e., the subjective disposition to avoid difficulty and pursue easy solutions.²⁰

For Li, *ism* was a motivation for practical manoeuvres. He believed that once a correct *ism* was advocated, it would naturally adapt itself to changing conditions in accordance with time, space, and events. Li's position was permeated with the desire for political action: "I recognise that my recent discussions have mostly been empty talk on paper with little direct involvement in practical problems. From now on I vow to go out and engage in the practical movement."²¹ As a matter of fact, Li had gone into action as early as the summer of 1918. Inspired by the October Revolution of 1917, Li founded the "Society for the study of Marxism" at Beijing University. Very soon its meetings attracted a group of young and eager students, among them Mao Zedong, an assistant librarian.²² It was Li's commitment to *ism* that worried Hu. In Hu's view, such a solution detracted from the need to study

¹⁹Amaury de Reincourt: *The Soul of China* (New York: Coward & McCann, 1958), p. 216.

²⁰Hu Shi: "Duo Yanjiuxie Wenti, Shao Tanxie Zhuyi," *HSTPJ*, vol. 4, p. 117.

²¹Li Dazhao: "Zailun Wenti yu Zhuyi," in *HSZPJ*, vol. 4, p. 128.

²²Maurice Meisner: *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, p. 106.

specific problems. He insisted that *isms* might be studied and selectively adopted as instruments and hypotheses. They “should not be accepted as creeds or iron laws.”²³

The debate with Li Dazhao was, according to Hu, “his first clash with the Marxists.”²⁴ On the surface, the debate ended in Hu’s favour. Yet it was a hollow victory, for it was the vogue among youth to discuss *isms*.

This heated debate on “Problems and *isms*” foreshadowed the split that was soon to become explicit between the New Culture liberals and those opting for more activist and politically-slanted solutions to China’s problems. Since Hu offered no detailed criticism of Bolshevik doctrines, his article hardly convinced the Bolsheviks. To the revolutionary zealots, who believed that Chinese political and social systems were fundamentally flawed and that radical changes were absolutely necessary, looking to *isms* was the only solution. As pointed out by James Pusey: “They wanted a book to replace the *Analects*. They wanted a compass, a polestar, a helmsman.”²⁵ Under such circumstances, it was not surprising that Hu’s plea fell on deaf ears. The young, the ardent, and the radical were all too impatient for gradualist Pragmatism which Hu believed could solve China’s problems.

7.2 Hu’s Attitude towards the Communists

²³Hu Shi: “Sanlun Wenti yu Zhuyi,” *HSTPJ*, vol. 4, p. 142.

²⁴*KSZZ*, p. 195

²⁵James Reeve Pusey: *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 235.

On his way to Europe in July 1926, Hu stopped in Russia for a few days. He had an opportunity to examine both the positive and negative aspects of the Soviet system at first hand. Hu did not have the instinctive hatred of the new Soviet state that many liberals had for Czarist Russia and carried over to its Leninist successor. On the contrary, a glimpse of life in the Soviet Union excited him greatly. He wrote to Zhang Weici enthusiastically from Moscow in the summer of 1926, describing the sense of dedication that he discovered among the Russians. The vigour of Russia's effort at modernisation impressed him tremendously. Their ideas, he admitted, "might not be agreeable to us who love freedom." But he insisted that "we must respect their seriousness of purpose. Here they are conducting political experiment of an unprecedented magnitude. They have ideals, plans, and absolute faith, and these alone are enough to make us die of shame -- How are our drunk and dreamy people worthy to criticise the Soviet Union?"²⁶

Hu Shi's words surprised many of his liberal friends such as Xu Zhimo, Qian Duansheng and Ren Hongjun. Addressing their question whether there was any theoretical basis for the Soviet Union's revolution, Hu asked: "Was there any theoretical basis for capitalism? Was there any theoretical basis for nationalism? Was there any theoretical basis for the multi-party system? . . . Any system would do if the people committed to its cause."²⁷ Xu Zhimo did not totally agree with Hu Shi. He felt that there must be a more peaceful way to a nation's success. In reply to Xu's query, Hu said he also favoured the use of the "socialising" (*shehuihua*) economic system to raise the standard of living of mankind rather than the complete elimination

²⁶Hu Shi: "Ou You Daozhong Jishu" (Letters Sent during the Trip to Europe), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, p. 56.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 62..

of the bourgeoisie as being implemented in the Soviet Union.²⁸ However, Hu stressed that the most important task for a government was to have plans. Though Russia was undergoing a transitional period, Hu radiated optimism about its future. He anticipated that the repressive features of the regime would recede. Politicians in Russia deserved praise because they had a common faith. "They are very serious in improving their education system. They want to develop a new era for socialism. Seriously following their plans, they will be able to go through a transition period from a dictatorship to a socialist democratic society."²⁹

This was an entirely different attitude compared to his description of Li Dazhao as a person lacking a sense of responsibility by advocating Marxism. The reason behind this change was obvious: Hu Shi was disappointed and frustrated over what had happened in China. Russia was an inspiring living proof that a planned collectivist economy could succeed in a poverty-stricken non-Western country. "With plans," Hu said, "other issues were minor."³⁰

However, this excitement did not last long. When Hu Shi returned to the United States for the first time since he completed his graduate study, he regained his confidence in Pragmatism and piece-meal reform. He said that Marxist economic theory could not explain the situation in America. "America will not have a social revolution," he wrote when he was in the United States in 1927, "because America is in the middle of a social revolution every day. . . . In America in recent years, while capital has become concentrated, ownership has been distributed among the people.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.55. The word "socialising" was used by Hu in brackets after the Chinese word *shehuihua*. It referred to a more equitable distribution of wealth.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 65

. . . Anyone can be a capitalist, and consequently agitation for class war is ineffective.”³¹

The debate on “Problems and *Isms*” ended entente among the May Fourth leaders. In 1921, Chen Duxiu moved the editorial office of *New Youth* to Shanghai and converted it into the organ of the CCP, thus bringing to an end the four-year alliance of radical-reformist new intellectual leaders.³² Although a non-believer in the absolutism of the Marxists and an opponent of their use of Marxist ideology as a means for political change, Hu did not want to deny the CCP’s right to implement their experiments and challenge to the KMT. He only criticised the CCP once in the 1920s in an article in which he advised the CCP to focus on the democratisation of China rather than finding scapegoat in imperialism.³³ For some years, Hu avoided commenting publicly on the KMT-CCP struggle because he believed in the value of tolerance which was clearly seen in a letter to Chen Duxiu in 1925:

I know that while advocating the idea of class struggle and dictatorship, you do not believe in freedom. I am aware that you would laugh at me for insisting on freedom. Nevertheless, you should understand this is my fundamental belief. We have been friends for a long time. Even if we have different views on politics and even if we have different vocations, we are still able to be good friends because we know how to tolerate each other most of the time. At least I dare say, my fundamental belief is that others also have the same freedom of experimenting with ideologies. If we are unable to share this basic view, we would not be friends but enemies. Do you agree with what I am saying?”³⁴

³¹Hu Shi: “Manyou de Ganxiang” (Impressions of Ramblings), *HSZPJ*, vol. 11, pp. 44-45.

³²Chow Tse-tsung: *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, p. 250.

³³Hu Shi: “Guoji de Zhongguo” (An International China), *HSZPJ*, vol. 9, pp. 89-94.

³⁴Hu’s letter to Chen Duxiu in 1925, *LWSXX*, vol. 1, pp. 358-360.

Chen was the first Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party which was founded in 1921 but later became a Trotskyite. Hu remained friends with Chen until the latter's death in May 1942. He had sent money to Chen and helped him to publish books. Hu was concerned about Chen's safety and always spoke for him whenever the latter was under arrest for his dissent.³⁵ As can be seen, Hu could find it in himself to suffer ideologies divergent from his own.

When Hu started *Independent Critics* in 1932, He held the same principle. Not only refraining from criticising the Communists, he and his associates also condemned Chiang Kai-shek for his attempts to purge the Communists. In an article published in June 1936, *Independent Critics* criticised the KMT newspapers for labelling the Communists as "bandits." By using the term "bandits," according to the article, the KMT were legitimising their actions against the Chinese Communists. "The reality is that the Communists are not bandits, but political opponents." The article continued:

The Communists are an opposition party. They are well organised, having their beliefs and their own armed forces. . . . The government should be more reflective and try to find out why this political opponent has emerged. As a matter of fact, the Communists' existence is the result of government corruption and tyrannical administration. This is the consequence of a government with high taxation which does not have the intention of implementing good policy.³⁶

³⁵LWSXX, vol.2, pp. 143-144, p. 268; Zhang Zhonghua et.al., ed.: *Chen Duxiu Beibu Ziliao Huibian* (A Record on Chen Duxiu's Arrests) (Henan: Renmin Chubanshe, 1982), p. 140, p. 230; NPCB, vol. 4, p. 1245

³⁶Ding Wenjiang: "Suowei Chaofei Wenti" (The So-called Problem of "Destroying Banditry"), *DLPL* 6 (26 June 1932): 3.

This article reflected Hu's attitude towards the Communists.³⁷ Although Hu did not agree with Communism, he tried to judge the Communists on the basis of factual evidence rather than emotion or prejudice. This might be the reason why Hu did not publicly expose the reality of Soviet totalitarianism till more than twenty years later after the debate on "Problems and *Isms*." He had earlier deemed the Soviet Union a "social experiment" and advised a suspension of judgement until the experiment settled into a definite pattern.

Moreover, Hu felt that the only way for the KMT to revive itself was to correct their own mistakes instead of blaming social unrest on Communist subversion. To Hu, too many KMT government policies had done more harm than good. For example, the construction of motor roads, both in the urban areas and in the remote interior, was flaunted as an indication of economic progress. But to build roads, city walls were demolished, precious arable land was taken and peasants were conscripted to work on the construction. Once built, the roads remained in constant disrepair. Worse yet, many were rebuilt hurriedly in order to facilitate military action against the Communist "bandits."³⁸ Thus, peasants paid unbearable taxes to support a large bureaucracy which did little to benefit them, and to maintain troops that were only capable of plundering the people. "Beset by such hardships, if the people did not flee, resist, or become Communists or bandits, then indeed they are damned

³⁷Although the article was written by Ding Wenjiang, it was edited and certain parts were indeed rewritten by Hu. In the footnote to this article, Hu had this remark, "This article was written by Mr Ding and I was asked by him to make any necessary amendment. I have rewritten it from the fifth paragraph onward. Because there is no time for me to send it to Mr. Ding before the article goes for publication, any faults and errors are my responsibility." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁸Hu Shi: "Zai Lun Wuwei de Zhengzhi (Another Discussion of *Wewei* Politics), *DLPL* 89 (25 February 1934): 2-6.

bastards.”³⁹ In Hu Shi’s opinion, the KMT government itself was partly to blame for pushing the people to support the CCP.

Hu insisted that the KMT should not hesitate to create an environment conducive to free political competition. In December 1936, replying to Su Xuelin, a writer and a devoted student, Hu said that her worry over the latest cultural development being dominated by the Communists was unfounded. “Leftist thought and literature would not be harmful. If the government was able to improve its organisation and strengthen its power, no opposition could destroy it.”⁴⁰

During the Sino-Japanese war, the KMT took the Chinese Communists as partners in the fight against Japanese aggression. Neither party publicly repudiated the United Front until the end of the war in 1945, but actual co-operation between them was minimal and short-lived while conflicts sometimes developed on a very large scale. Chiang Kai-shek’s government found it impossible to exercise any kind of command over the Communist armies. The government suppressed some Communist mass associations, and the Communists denounced the refusal of the government to arm its people in defence of the nation. Mutual denunciations led ultimately to clashes between the KMT government and Communist troops particularly after the KMT’s attack upon the New Fourth Army led by the Communists in January 1941.

Hu was in the United States as Ambassador when the New Fourth Army incident happened. In reporting back to the KMT government on the United States’ dissatisfaction over the KMT government’s handling of the incident, Hu voiced his

³⁹Hu Shi: “Cong Nongcun Jiuji dao Wuwei Zhengzhi” (*Wuwei Politics in light of the Rural Relief*), *DLPL* 49 (7 May 1933): 2-6.

⁴⁰Hu’s letter to Su Xuelin dated 14 December 1936 in *HSSXJ*, vol. 2, p. 708.

personal opinion. First, in order to avoid the criticisms of other countries, the KMT government should avoid clashes with the CCP. Second, the KMT government should try its best to eliminate corruption and graft among its officials. Third, military expenses should be shared by the capitalists. Fourth, in order to prevent people who were not happy with the high cost of living from turning for their support to the CCP, the KMT government should try to give a helping hand to them. Fifth, the KMT government should have a good policy to help farmers and labourers. This would make the CCP lose their popularity and thus hamper their expansion.⁴¹ In Hu's mind, the KMT must initiate reforms of their own and the only way for them to stay in power was to create a truly popular party. These points represent, of course, no more than a restatement of opinions that had been expressed often enough in Hu's early political discussions. The only difference at the time was that the CCP was growing stronger. During the anti-Japanese war, Communist organisations and territory expanded steadily and membership in the Communist Party mushroomed. From a membership of approximately 40,000 in 1937, the party grew to about 1.2 million by the end of the war in 1945.⁴² Hu became increasingly worried that the Communist insurrection would further cripple the feeble foundation of the Chinese government. Judging from the fact that Governments in various countries started to be engaged in civil war with the Communists, Hu noted down in his diary in December 1944, that China might experience the same.⁴³

⁴¹*HSSXJ*, vol. 2, p. 857.

⁴²James E. Sheridan: *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History 1912-1949* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 263.

⁴³*Hu Shi de Riji* (The Diary of Hu Shi) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), p. 605.

After the Second World War, Hu chose to play the role of a mediator, struggling to help the two parties find common ground. Hu hoped that the KMT and the CCP, in the interest of national unity, would reopen the communications which had been virtually terminated during the war. Believing that the ultimate solution to China's problems was democracy, Hu hoped the Communists would agree to peaceful means to resolve their differences with the KMT. In August 1945, still in the United States, Hu sent a telegram to Mao Zedong who was visiting Chongqing:

I hoped the Chinese Communist leaders, in consideration of the international situation and China's future, would strive to forget what is past and look forward to what is coming, and be determined to build up a second major party in China not dependent on armed strength by laying down their arms. If you are so determined, then the eighteen years of internal conflicts will be settled, and your efforts through the past twenty-odd years will not be nullified by civil war. Jefferson fought peacefully for more than ten years in the early days of the United States, finally succeeding in bringing the Democratic Party, of which he was the founder, to power in the fourth presidential election. The British Labour Party polled only 44000 votes fifty years ago, but as a result of peaceful struggle, got 12,000,000 votes this year and became the major party. These two instances should furnish much food for thought. The Chinese Communist Party, today the second major party in China, has a great future if peacefully developed. It should not destroy itself through intolerance.⁴⁴

Hu's tended to believe that everyone was as rational, sensible, and guided by moral justice as he was. Practical Chinese affairs and cruel reality, however, drove him to despair. It was apparent that there was little chance of any enduring solution. Hu later admitted he was "too naive" to send the telegram to Mao.⁴⁵ As negotiations

⁴⁴NPCB, vol. 5, 1894-1895. This English translation is adopted with modification from Min-chih Chou: *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, p.144.

⁴⁵See Hu's introduction to John Leighton Stuart: *Fifty Years in China* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. xix.

between the KMT and the CCP deteriorated, Hu displayed great disappointment over the Communists' refusal to give up armed force.

When civil war between the KMT and the CCP began in early 1947, Hu found that there was no longer any middle ground. He had only one choice -- to go along with the Chinese Communists or to oppose them. In July 1947, he openly sided with the KMT and denounced the Communists. Hu said: "To overthrow the Government by force of arms is not a legal way but a revolution. In self-defence, the Government is duty-bound to suppress the Communist rebellion."⁴⁶ By this statement, his relationship with the Chinese Communists had in fact reached the point of no return.

Immediately before and after the Communist take-over of mainland China, Hu became more adamant in his stance against the CCP. On 1 August 1948 Hu Shi made a radio address in Beijing in which he stressed three ideal common goals of the modern world: the use of science for the diminution of human suffering and for the increase of human happiness; the use of a "socialising"⁴⁷ economic system to raise the standard of living of mankind; the implementation of a democratic political system to emancipate the thoughts of man, to develop the talents of man, to create free and independent individuals.⁴⁸

At the time this radio speech was made, many people favoured the Soviet system over the Western democratic system. Hu argued that the Chinese could sympathise with the Russian Revolution that had fought for the interests of workers

⁴⁶*Xinming Bao* (Beijing), 6 July 1947.

⁴⁷For the meaning of the word, see this chapter, note 28.

⁴⁸Hu Shi: "Yanqian Shijie Wenhua de Quxiang" (The Direction of Current World Culture), in *NPCB*, vol. 6, p. 1983.

and peasants. but the adoption of class struggle, which had created an intolerant and anti-liberal political system, would be most unfortunate for China. Hu said that the undemocratic Soviet system was upheld by brutal force and had led to cruel oppression and destruction of opposition parties, eventually leading to a one-party one-man dictatorship. Hu added that, regrettably, the economic advantages obtained by the people in the Soviet Union in the thirty years of bitter struggle were also less than those achieved through free enterprise and social legislation in democratic countries.⁴⁹

At the time this speech was made, Beijing's fall to the Communists was imminent. Evidently Hu was trying to defend his own anti-Communist stand while the cause of anti-Communism was already lost. He appealed passionately to his fellow countrymen to be aware of the general trend in the world in choosing their own road. He repeated his earlier claim that only a democratic form of government could unite the whole population in solving their national difficulties, and that only freedom and democracy could produce a humanist civil society.⁵⁰

In December 1948, Hu Shi left the besieged city of Beijing in a plane dispatched by Chiang Kai-shek's personal order. Four months later, upon Chiang's request, Hu Shi sailed from Shanghai to the United States in search of aid and support for the KMT government. On his way, he wrote two essays: one being an introduction to "Chen Duxiu's Final Views" (*Chen Duxiu de Zuihou Jianjie*) and another an opening remark for a new journal *Free China*. Both essays were anti-Communist. In the first essay Hu analysed the last article which Chen Duxiu wrote

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 1986.

⁵⁰Hu Shi: "Women Bixu Xuanze Women de Fangxiang" (We Must Choose Our Direction), in *NPCB*, vol. 6, p. 1990.

before his death. To Hu's relief, this founder of the CCP had finally realised the importance of democracy, rejecting totalitarianism as advocated by the Communists.⁵¹ In the second essay Hu accused the Communists of denying all basic freedoms to the people and implementing the politics of terror.⁵² Before Hu reached the United States on 21 April 1949, the People's Liberation Army had crossed the Yangzi river and taken Nanjing, thus effectively ending the KMT's control of mainland China.

7.3 The Communists' Campaign Against Hu Shi

In Hu's view, the only political party that could keep alive China's hope for democratic government was the KMT. As a Pragmatist, Hu's view was predictable. Dewey held the same position. Amidst the KMT-CCP power struggle, Dewey said in a letter to Sidney Hook that he supported Chiang Kai-shek as the "lesser evil."⁵³

To the CCP, Hu was among the few who stood on the opposite side and totally rejected its ideology from the very beginning. Although Hu was critical of the KMT's policies, it never changed the CCP's hostile attitude towards him. It is of little wonder that after the CCP came to power, Hu was considered an ideological archenemy.

⁵¹Hu Shi: "Chen Duxiu de Zuihou Jianjie Xuyan" (Preface to the Final Words of Chen Duxiu) in Chen Duxiu: *Chen Duxiu de Zuihou Jianjie* (The Final Words of Chen Duxiu) (Taipei: Zhiyou Zhongguoshe, 1949), pp. 1-11.

⁵²Hu Shi: "Zhiyou Zhongguo de Zongzhi" (The Tenet of Free China), *NPCB*, vol. 6, pp. 2082-2083.

⁵³See Gary Bullert: *The Politics of John Dewey* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1983), p. 107.

Attention must be brought to the relationship between Mao Zedong and Hu Shi. Many studies on Mao had given us a wrong picture that Mao and Hu had a very bad relationship during the May Fourth era. We are told that Mao was very angry with Hu because the latter looked down upon him. In one of Hu's lecture, Mao tried to ask Hu a question, but Hu rebuffed him because he was not a proper student but a mere librarian's assistant.⁵⁴ Contrary to this story, I found that both Mao and Hu were in fact quite close during this period. Hu spoke highly of *Xiang River Review* (*Xiangjiang Pinglun*), a weekly magazine, founded in July 1919, with Mao as editor. Hu especially praised Mao's article "The Great Union of the Popular Masses" (*Mingzhong Da Lianhe*).⁵⁵ Later, Hu referred to Mao in several occasions as his "former student."⁵⁶

On the other side, Mao said quite frankly that he had read a considerable number of Hu's articles when he was a student at Hunan Teaching College. He told Edgar Snow in 1936 how he "admired the articles of Hu Shi" and how for a while Hu Shi had become his "model" in the May Fourth period.⁵⁷ Recent publication of Mao's early works gives us a clearer picture of the relationship between the two in the May Fourth era. He cited Hu's words in many of his own articles with great respect and admiration. Mao's idea of forming a self-study group in 1920 was

⁵⁴See Stuart Schram: *Mao Tse-tung*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. 48; Dick Wilson: *Mao: The People's Emperor* (London: Futura Publication Ltd., 1980), p.76.

⁵⁵Hu Shi: "Jieshao *Xiangjiang Pinglun*, *Xingqiri*" (Introducing Xiang River Review and Sunday), *Meizhou Pinglun* 36 (24 July 1919).

⁵⁶Hu Shi: "My Former Student, Mao Tse-tung: A Book Review of Robert Payne's *Mao Tse-tung: Ruler of Red China*," *The Freeman* (2 July 1951): 636-639; Hu Shi: "Introduction," in John Leighton Stuart: *Fifty Years in China* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. xix.

⁵⁷Edgar Snow: *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p.147.

actually inspired by Hu's suggestion.⁵⁸ He also visited Hu several times in 1920.⁵⁹ In a letter written to Hu on July 1920, Mao said that he needed Hu's help in his new project in Changsha.⁶⁰ Mao also spoke highly of Hu's books such as *Changshi Ji*, *Hu Shi Duanpian Xiaoshuo* and *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Mao considered these books were "important."⁶¹

Even when Mao turned into a Marxist and became the leader of the CCP, he did not seem regard Hu as an enemy. In September 1936, in a letter to Cai Yuanpei, Mao listed seventy public figures who could, according to him, play an important part to call on the KMT to stop civil war and concentrate on resisting Japanese invasion. Hu Shi was one of the seventy people Mao appealed to.⁶² In a discussion on Mo Zi's philosophy with Chen Boda (1904-1989) in February 1939, Mao maintained that some of Hu's points were acceptable, even though he believed Hu's thought was generally wrong.⁶³

Invited by the CCP, Fu Sinian and six other friends visited Yan'an in July 1945. In conversation with Fu, who was Hu's student and close friend, Mao sent regards to Hu.⁶⁴ But with Hu openly supporting Chiang Kai-shek in the civil war between the KMT and the CCP, Mao started to view him as one of his main enemies. In August 1949, the United States published *China White Paper*. Mao

⁵⁸Mao Zedong: *Mao Zedong Zaoqi Wengao* (Mao Zedong's Early Works) (Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe, 1990), pp. 474-475

⁵⁹Geng Yunzhi: *Hu Shi Nianpu*, p. 81; see also Mao Zedong: *Mao Zedong Zaoqi Wengao*, p. 474.

⁶⁰Mao Zedong: *Mao Zedong Zaoqi Wengao*, p. 494.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 537 and pp. 541-542.

⁶²Mao Zedong: *Mao Zedong Shuxin Xuanji* (Selected Letters of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), pp. 66-69.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁴*NPCB*, vol. 5, p. 1894.

wrote several articles expressing his anger for its description of the CCP. Hu was, for the first time, openly denounced in one of those essays. Mao said: "Imperialism produced hundreds of new intelligentsia who differed from the old literati. Imperialism and its associates could only control part of them. Their influence declined later. Consequently they can only control a few of them such as Hu Shi, Fu Sinian and Qian Mu."⁶⁵

The CCP started their repudiation of Hu Shi a month after he left China. On 11 May 1949 *People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)* carried a long "open letter" from Hu Shi's close friend Chen Yuan (1880-1971), a well-known historian and the President of Furen University. Chen Yuan reprimanded Hu for trying to stifle his thought and for attempting to lure him into the wrong direction. He said that it was only after the CCP assumed power that he saw the real freedom. He also realised for the first time that his study of history had been subjective and unscientific. He blamed Hu Shi for opposing the people by joining the reactionary group. According to him, Hu should give up his prejudice and be courageous enough to admit his mistakes. He closed his letter by saying "hopefully we will meet each other by travelling the same path."⁶⁶

This letter made Hu very uncomfortable, as he recorded in his diary.⁶⁷ In an article six months later, he claimed that the article had been ghost-written by someone else, for its style and terminology of accusation could not be Chen's. He said the letter was evidence that Chen Yuan had lost his freedom of speech.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Mao Zedong: "Diudiao Huanxiang, Zhunbie Douzheng" (Cast away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle), in *Mao Zedong Xuanju* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe 1960), vol. 4, pp. 1489.

⁶⁶*Renmin Ribao*, 11 May 1949.

⁶⁷*RJSGB*, vol. 16, entry for 19 Jun 1950.

⁶⁸Hu Shi: "Gongchandang Tongzhi xia Meiyou Ziyou" (There is Absolutely No Freedom under Communist Domination), *ZYZG* 2.3 (January 1950).

On 22 September 1950, there appeared in the *Wen Hui Bao* an article "Dui Wo Fuqin -- Hu Shi De Pipan" (Criticism of my father Hu Shi) by Hu Shi's second son Hu Sidu.⁶⁹ In this article Hu Sidu accused his father of being a "capitalist intellectual" and an "honest servant of the capitalist class" who bowed his head to the reactionary government and turned to Chiang Kai-shek to practice his doctrine of reform. As a "docile tool of the imperialist," Hu promoted cultural aggression against China, so accused the junior Hu. He also accused his father as "the enemy of the people" who left China to become a "White Russian" residing in foreign lands. The article ended with a typical statement of self-reflection and self-criticism: "Before he returns to the bosom of the people, my father remains the enemy of the people and also my own enemy."⁷⁰

Hu Sidu's article was certainly a big shock to Hu Shi. Hu kept the paper cutting in his diary, but did not make any comment on the article, as he would usually do on newspaper cuttings.⁷¹ A month later he published an English article "China in Stalin's Grand Strategy" attacking the CCP.⁷² Hu's staunch position might have made the CCP think that it was necessary to wage a campaign to

⁶⁹Hu Sidu insisted on staying in Beijing when Hu Shi flew to Shanghai in a plane dispatched by Chiang Kai-shek in December 1948. Hu Sidu, who was an assistant librarian at the Beijing University Library, believed that the CCP would not give him trouble because he had done nothing against them. After the CCP took over Mainland China, Hu Sidu was sent to Huabei Revolutionary University to study and to be "reformed." He committed suicide in September 1957 in the Anti-rightist Movement. For a discussion on Hu Sidu's life, see Shen Weiwei "Hu Shi De Xiao Erzi Sidu Zhi Si" (The Death of Hu Shi's Youngest Son Hu Sidu) in his *Wenhua, Xintai, Renge: Renshi Hu Shi* (Culture, Psyche, Personality: Getting to Know Hu Shi) (Kaifeng: Henan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 148-156.

⁷⁰English translation for this letter see Edward Hunter: *Brainwashing in Communist China* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), Appendix 1, pp. 331-35

⁷¹*RJSGB*, vol. 16, entry for 28 September 1950.

⁷²Hu Shi: "China in Stalin's Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affair* 29.1 (October 1950), pp. 11-40.

discredit his ideas completely. In November 1951, a campaign to stamp out Hu Shi's thought was launched by the leaders of the ideological reform programme. It was initiated by Tang Yongtong's article. Tang Yongtong (1893-1964), Vice-president of Beijing University and a leading authority on the history of Chinese Buddhism, regretted that "scholarship for scholarship's sake" and the thought of "liberal education" were still prevalent at Beijing University. In order to reform the university, the professors must first reform themselves.⁷³ A few days later, Qian Duanshen (1900-1990), Dean of the Law School at Beijing University, said that Beijing University had long been too liberal. He claimed that Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei must bear the greater part of the responsibility in this regard. Their erroneous ideas of "freedom of thought," and "freedom of research" were still in the minds of senior teachers.⁷⁴ Since Cai had passed away, Hu was naturally the main focus of the criticism.

The first open campaign to liquidate Hu Shi's thought got into top gear with a "Symposium on the Criticism of Hu Shi's Thought," held in Shanghai under the auspices of the *Dagong Bao* on 2 December 1951. Among those present were Hu Shi's former friends and students such as Shen Yinmo, Tang Yongtong, Zhou Gucheng, Cai Shangsi and Gu Jiegang. Those who had been associated with Hu at Beijing University were expected to slander him in every possible fashion, and then to thank Mao and the Party for deliverance from his influence. They claimed that Hu

⁷³Tang Yongtong: "Gaodeng Xuexiao Jiaoshi Zhuajin Shiji Jiji Xuexi" (Higher Institution Must Take Vigorous Action to Learn), *Guangming Ribao* (1 November 1951).

⁷⁴Qian Duansheng: "Wei Gaizao Ziji Genghao de Fuwu Zuguo er Xuexi" (One Should Learn in order to serve the Country Better), *Guangming Ribao* (6 November 1951).

was a man who maintained reactionary thought and had great influence in academic circles. They analysed Hu's background, his "harmful" role in the New Culture Movement and attacked his support for the KMT. A major area of investigation was to determine whether Hu Shi had had an influence on their intellectual development. The gist of these confessions was that Hu was a "cultural comprador imbued with feudal ideology."⁷⁵

The first campaign against Hu Shi's thought stopped in 1951. It was not until late 1954, touched off by different interpretations of one of China's greatest novels - - *The Dream of the Red Chambers* -- that Hu's thought was "penetratingly analysed." The campaign began by two blistering reviews of Yu Pingbo's book by two young students of literature, Li Xifan and Lan Ling. In their articles, they challenged Yu's description of the nature of the novel. They insisted that the novel was a great work of realism, a vivid reflection of the society of eighteenth-century China. They also criticised Yu's method of research. It was alleged that he attached undue importance to textual criticism by making it an end in itself. Yu's "art for art's sake" approach led him to consider the novel apart from its social and historical background. By studying *The Dream of the Red Chambers* purely as a matter of personal interest, they said, Yu had entangled himself in isolated incidents and details and had failed to recognise the social tragedy it portrayed as the problem of a whole era.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Cf. Li Ta: "Criticism of Hu Shi's Reactionary Thought"; quoted in Charmers A. Johnson: *Communist Policies Toward the Intellectual Class* (Hong Kong: The Union Research Institute, 1959), p. 87.

⁷⁶Li Sifan and Lan Ling: "Ping Hong Luo Meng Yanjiu" (Comment on the Study of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*), *Kuangming Ribao*, 10 October 1954. For the full English text, see *Current Background* 315 (4 March 1955): 25-31.

Following these two articles, the Communist press published numerous articles criticising Yu. It was clear later that the target aimed at was actually Hu, Yu's teacher at Beijing University who initiated Yu into the study of *The Dreams of the Red Chambers*. The Communist officials claimed that the problem behind the study of *The Dreams of the Red Chambers* was not created by Yu but through Hu Shi's pervasive bad influence. A campaign against Hu's bourgeois idealism in literature was thus necessary and it spread to all parts of mainland China.

The campaign rapidly intensified and was expanded by the joint effort of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Writers' Association. An attempt was made to cover not only Hu Shi's literary views but also his philosophical thinking, political beliefs and historical interpretations. On 8 November 1954, Guo Moruo, President of the Academy of Sciences, claimed that cultural circles still had many problems to be solved. He emphasised that "the battle between Marxism-Leninism and idealism (*weixin zhuyi*) is very important and everybody from academic circles must participate in the battle."⁷⁷ A month later, in a speech to a national meeting of people in art and literature, Guo said, "In the past thirty years, it is generally recognised that Hu Shi was the representative of bourgeois idealism. Before liberation, Hu was dubbed the 'sage' and 'present-day Confucius.' Hu is supported by American imperialism and becomes the number-one spokesman for the comprador bourgeoisie. . . . The influence of Hu's bourgeois idealism has even now a substantial potential force."⁷⁸ Guo Moruo declared in this speech that the two

⁷⁷*Hu Shi Sixiang Pipan* (A Critique of Hu Shi's Thought) (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1955-1956), vol. 1, p. 3.

⁷⁸Guo Moruo: "Sandian Jianyi" (Three Suggestions), *Hu Shi Sixiang Pipan*, vol. 1, pp. 9-10.

principles of scientific method which had been advocated and propagated throughout his life -- be bold in hypothesising, and be meticulous in proving it -- comprised an idealistic method and were, within a reactionary philosophy of Pragmatism, a fundamental distortion of the scientific method.⁷⁹ Another leader in the circle who played an influential role in initiating the campaign was Zhou Yang (1908-1989), Chairman of the Writers' Association. In a long lecture delivered on 8 May 1954, he denounced Hu as:

the most staunch enemy of Marxism and socialism. . . . Hu's thought has played a vital part in the mind of intellectuals. Without using Marxism to criticise thoroughly all the concrete problems, it is impossible to eradicate the idealism.⁸⁰

After the condemnation of Hu Shi's thought by Guo and Zhou, two leading party-intellectuals in the cultural circle, institutions of higher learning in various parts of the country began to respond enthusiastically to this undertaking and numerous meetings and forums were organised. Anyone who had known or worked with Hu as well as many others who had had no contact with him were required to denounce him and confess their past wrong doings. The ferocity of the campaign seems to have been rendered only more violent by the passage of time. By the end of 1955, the quantity of the literature and the total number of participants condemning him reached an unprecedented high level, more than all remoulding campaigns previously held in Communist China. The various critical essays were later published in an eight-volume work under the title *A Critique of Hu Shi's Thought (Hu Shi Sixiang*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁰Zhou Yang: "Women Bixu Zhanduo" (We Must Fight), *Zhou Yang Wenji* (Collected Essays of Zhou Yang) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 311-312.

Pipan). In addition to these volumes, criticisms made by leading Communist theoreticians such as Ai Siqi, Li Da, Sun Tingguo and Yao Pengzu were also subsequently expanded and published into books. The attack against Hu was renewed during the anti-rightist campaign in 1957. As Lu Tingyi pointed out: "If there are still places where such reactionary ideas has not been completely eliminated, the campaign against them must continue and "must not stop half way."⁸¹

The Chinese Communist Party had good reason for singling out Hu Shi as an ideological arch-enemy. The Chinese Communist Party regarded the May Fourth Movement as the very start of its revolution, and its anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism.⁸² It was in this period that Marxism was first introduced to China. In May 1919, *New Youth* published a special issue on Marxism. Two years later, the CCP was founded by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao. For most intellectuals, however, Hu Shi seemed to be the most visible figure in the May Fourth Movement. The Chinese Communists felt very uncomfortable about Hu being recognised as such.

Hu Shi did make reference to these campaigns, saying they were proof of his influence and jokingly commenting that they had made people reread his books.⁸³ But deep in his heart, there is no doubt that he must have felt very uncomfortable when he read the critiques written by his former devoted followers. Among them were Gu Jiegang and Luo Ergang. Both Gu and Luo had acknowledged their debt to Hu for the methodology he demonstrated in his studies of Chinese vernacular novels.

⁸¹Quoted in Theodore H. E. Chen: *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals* (Hong Kong University Press, 1960), pp. 118-20.

⁸²Mao Zedong: "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party" in *Mao Tse-tung: An Anthology of His Writings*, pp. 184-193.

⁸³*KSZZ*, p. 216; Hu Shi: "Yue Qingsuan Yue Liaojie" (More Critiques, More Understanding) in *HSZPJ*, vol. 26, p. 87.

However, they changed their tone completely in the campaign against Hu's thought. Gu said that his change from the study of classics to history was influenced by Qian Xuantong, not Hu. He blamed Hu for his hollow and reactionary Pragmatism and decided to part from him. On the reason why Hu was regarded as a leader of the cultural circle over the last thirty years, Gu acknowledged that he himself must bear much responsibility because he was one of Hu's students who had helped to build up the latter's reputation. Gu also said that Hu's academic achievements were far behind that of Zhang Binglin and Wang Guowei.⁸⁴ Luo Ergang, a well-known scholar of the history of the Taiping Rebellion under Hu's supervision, said that his achievement in the study was not influenced by Hu. What he had used was the method of Qing philology, not Hu's reactionary and idealistic "bold hypothesis." He admitted that Hu's scholarship had influenced him in the first half of his academic life. Hu initiated him into the academic world with his human outlook which transcended class and political thoughts. Nevertheless, these influences had made him "an utterly worthless person."⁸⁵

It was only after Hu Shi's influence seemed to have been thoroughly eradicated that criticisms of him became less frequent. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the CCP seldom evoked Hu's name.

7.4 The Predestined Failure of Pragmatism Confronting Communism in China

⁸⁴*Guangming Ribao*, 25 December 1954.

⁸⁵*Hu Shi Sixiang Pipan*, vol. 2, p. 183.

As a politico-cultural philosophy, Pragmatism failed in China for various reasons. To begin with, China was in perpetual chaos in the first half of the century. There was no foundation for the development of a society based on free speech and democracy. Sustained by the rich American democratic tradition, John Dewey could readily call his philosophy instrumentalism and characterise it as a method of action rather than as a high-sounding metaphysical system. But in a country like China where no such faith and tradition had ever existed, the challenge facing Pragmatism was indeed insurmountable.

The Pragmatists argued that it was important to look for specific solutions to specific problems. Unfortunately, such an incremental approach was only accepted by Chinese intellectuals for a brief period. Chen Duxiu, for instance, who was at first impressed by Dewey's talk of democracy and science, found it lacking of an all-embracing vision. Pressed by the urgency of China's problem, he was disillusioned with the Deweyan proposal of piecemeal solution and particular attention to education and cultural concerns. Benjamin Schwartz points out:

While the influences which were to lead Chen to Leninism were already present in 1919, their effect was to be delayed by a strong counter-influence - the social philosophy of John Dewey.⁸⁶

That seemed to be the most Pragmatism could do. Chen wanted to weld his actions and thoughts to an all-embracing formula, a philosophic panacea which would have universal value, capable of taking care of all future problems that might arise as a result of a movement. Chen's change was hardly surprising. I believe that this psychological urge for an "umbrella" ideology has been in evidence for many

⁸⁶Benjamin Schwartz: *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 19.

centuries in Chinese history; As Zhu Xi explained the meaning of “investigating things”: “One single principle suffices to understand all.”⁸⁷ Chinese philosophers have rarely been keen in elaborating logical structures in which parts could be detached from the whole. Instead, they were in favour of the one central idea. In order to grasp this central idea whose efficiency was always supposed to be universal, one had to go through a long initiation, replete with mental exercises, get himself into a discipline when this magic formula had at last pervaded his whole being. For this purpose, mere intellectual effort conducted along logical lines does not lead much far. Almost all Chinese philosophical systems seek not merely to inform, but to transform the student and, through the intuitive understanding of its central idea, put him in tune with the social, political and cosmic world -- thereby acquiring the virtue of universal panacea which is claimed by one and all Chinese systems.

Although Deweyan Pragmatism emphasised “transformation” too, it insisted on rejecting universal solutions for the ills of the world. Chen Duxiu and many other intellectuals who sought the universal effect of a redeeming faith, could not help turning to Marxism. The successful Marxist revolution in Russia and the revolutionaries’ public renunciation of Czarist imperialism as a means of national aggrandisement, exercised an overwhelming impact on the minds of Chen and his friends. They were particularly attracted by Lenin’s theory that imperialism represents the final stage in the declined capitalism, thus pointing to the victory of the victimised. Conversely, they were disillusioned with Anglo-American Liberalism, especially as Western Powers had sacrificed China’s case to unreasonable Japanese

⁸⁷Zhu Xi: *Si Shu Jizhu*, p. 11.

demands at the peace conference of Versailles of 1919 in return for Japanese support for the League of Nations. In the aftermath of the May Fourth Demonstration, many Chinese found it difficult to accept the West as a teacher but saw in Socialism a practical philosophy with which they could reject both the traditions of the Chinese past and the Western domination of the present.⁸⁸ Such a political climate certainly did not work to the advantage of Pragmatism.

It was about this time that Hu and Pragmatism started to lose its popularity. In the period between 1920 and 1927 Communism made much progress in gaining acceptance among the Chinese intelligentsia of the basic Marxist premises. The trend persisted even after the KMT suppression of the CCP in 1927. There is a most telling statistic to support this contention: among 400 new books published between early in 1928 and the middle of 1930, seventy percent were in social sciences and of that total almost three quarters were devoted to Marxist topics and interests.⁸⁹ There was a growing sense that Bolshevism represented something far more than a nationalist movement; it came to be seen as a march under the banner of mankind and as a movement destined to dominate the next stage of the history. Pragmatic ideas, it seemed, with its appeal to intelligence, individual judgement, hard work in dealing with specific problems had little of the drama and fascination possessed by the Marxist vision of a new and classless society destined to be released through an inexorable historical process. In the opinion of many, liberalism and the Pragmatism for which Dewey and Hu stood were made obsolete and reactionary by Communism.

⁸⁸Hsu, Immanuel C. Y. *The Rise of Modern China*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 604-605.

⁸⁹Kiang Wen Han: *The Chinese Student Movement* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948), p. 97.

Lin Yusheng is right in this respect when he points out that the ideals and instrumental function provided by the early Marxist sowed the seeds for the material mutation of utopianism in China. He explains the situation:

The more idealist and the more radical an *ism* was, the more it could become the instrument of political revolution, the more it could mobilise the people, and the more it could bring prestige and power to revolutionary leaders.⁹⁰

Hu sensed this when he argued that the absolutistic, monistic character of Marxism would encourage and provide the ideological backing for the totalitarian suppression of freedom and dissent, and would obscure the inestimable importance of formal democracy, genuine pluralism and -- most importantly, perhaps -- invite people to overlook the fact that democratic methods were "indispensable to effecting change in the interest of freedom." Hu did not have utopian vision for the future for his people to pursue and the bright future he predicted was only a little common sense not at all inspiring or emotion-stirring:

The new nation we have in mind will be peaceful and well-governed, a generally prosperous, civilised, modern and unified nation. We must . . . gather together people of ability and intelligence in the country at large, to adopt the knowledge and methods of the worlds of science, and to undertake conscious reforms step by step, under conscious leadership, and thus little by little to gain the results of persistent reforms.⁹¹

It was Pragmatism that had led him to this prospect. His reluctance to offer any detailed plan or an idealised future had undoubtedly made him vulnerable and put his

⁹⁰Lin Yusheng: "'Wenti yu Zhuyi' Bianlun de Lishi Yiyi" (The Historical Implication of the Debate on "Problems and *Isms*"), *Ershiyi Shiji* (The Twenty-first Century), no.8 (December 1991), p. 20. For further discussion on Chinese Marxism and utopianism, see Maurice Meisner: *Marxism Maoism and Utopianism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

⁹¹Hu Shi: "Women Zou Nantiao Lu?" (Which Road Do We Take?) in *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 10.

reformist ideas in jeopardy. Said the non-CCP, non-KMT scholar-politician Liang Shumin to Hu Shi with a lot of impatience in 1930:

Your propositions stand in stark contrast with the “revolutionary wave” of recent years. . . . How can you counterattack the “Great Revolutionary Theory” held by many ingenious, knowledgeable, and experienced people? Upon what do you base your “step by step, conscious revolution” theory? If you cannot point out specific mistakes in the Revolutionary Theory and cannot substantially demonstrate that your gradual reform theory is more efficient than the Revolutionary Theory, you are not qualified to negate [the proposition of] others.⁹²

Like other intellectuals, Liang found that China’s crisis at the time was a matter of life-and-death. In order to mobilise its people, he thought the primary task of the Chinese intellectuals was to explain the true nature of Chinese society. That was his main challenge to Hu:

You . . . never present your own observations and judgement of the [nature] of Chinese society. . . . What kind of society is Chinese society? Do the feudal system and feudal powers still exist? These are the most enthusiastically debated issues. . . . You are fond of historical study, you should have some contribution to make concerning these issues. We cannot help but ask you about this. The mistakes committed by revolutionaries represent their misunderstandings of Chinese society; therefore, if we cannot indicate and explain the structure of Chinese society, it will be impossible to get rid of false revolutionaries.⁹³

Such a generalisation to Pragmatists is meaningless and irresponsible as there was hardly any evidence to substantiate an analysis of the “nature of society.” According to Hu, his research method could be summed up in a motto: “Be bold in hypothesising, and be meticulous in proving it” (*Dadan de jiashe, xiaoxin de qiuzheng*). To provide such a “generalisation” on the nature of Chinese society was

⁹²Liang Shuming: “Jingyi Qingjiao Hu Shizhi Xiansheng”(May I Be Enlightened by Mr. Hu Shi) in *HSZPJ*, vol. 18, p. 21.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 27.

actually asking Hu to retain only "be bold in hypothesising" and abandon the more important second half "be meticulous in proving it."

Many intellectuals had complained of Hu's failure to provide a vision. It was indeed Hu's intention to avoid excitement which he thought had a rather corrupt intellectual influence on his contemporaries. Hu's attitude was that one must not go overboard for simple and colourful ideas. Fascism and Communism appealed to young people precisely because they were simple and vivid, but they brought disastrous consequences as well.

The limitations of Pragmatism therefore were obvious. With its emphasis on methodology, Pragmatism was confident in verifying truths by subjecting them to test. However, Pragmatism could offer no programme to facilitate social change. A viable political theory, like any other social theory, must fulfil a double need. On the one hand it must comprehend facts, offer an actual evaluation of the real situation of human behaviour, and consequently offer a solution. On the other hand, it must also have a legitimate normative side, without which the descriptions and solutions will remain meaningless. Pragmatism, as "a doctrine of no doctrine at all,"⁹⁴ certainly cannot be regarded as adequate to fulfil this function. But this is the price that Pragmatism had to pay: in order to be true to itself, it must heed its own limits.

⁹⁴Robert M. Hutchins: *Freedom, Education, and the Fund: Essays and Address: 1946-1956* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 126.

Conclusion

I

When the KMT government appointed Hu to be the president of the Academia Sinica, some of his friends who opposed the KMT government advised him not to accept the post. They also suggested that if Hu wished to accept it, he should remain in the United States and perform his duties only nominally.¹ Hu, however, ignored this advice. He finally came out of his retirement in New York in 1957 and accepted the Academia Sinica presidency at the age of sixty-six. The reason given was that he would feel more at home in Taiwan than in the United States. After all Taiwan was a province of China. He had hoped that he could use the library in the Academia Sinica to finish the books he had promised to write.² There could be another reason, as he frankly told his close friend Zhao Yuanren (1892-1982), he thought that people in his own country would take him more seriously.³

In retrospect, perhaps Hu Shi should have stayed in the United States. Though his life there was quiet and lonely, he would at least have had a peaceful mind which he could not find in Taiwan.

After Lei Zhen was sent to prison, Hu's hope that democracy could take root in China's soil had finally been shattered. In that one and a half years prior his death, Hu had nothing to be cheerful about. The members of *Free China* were either sent

¹Jiang Tingfu: "Wo Kan Hu Shizhi Xiansheng" (My Opinion on Mr. Hu Shi), *Jiang Tingfu Xuanji*, vol. 6, pp. 1261-1262.

²Hu's letter to Chen Zhifan on 11 January 1958, *HSSXJ*, vol. 3, p. 1336.

³Hu's letter to Zhao Yuanren on 26 July 1957, *HSSXJ*, vol. 3, p. 1320.

to jail, or not allowed to have any position in official institutions. Hu was severely criticised especially by his liberal comrades for failing to do enough. His feeling of guilt accompanied him until his death. On 28 September 1961, Hu attended a dinner in commemoration of Teacher's Day. Chiang Kai-shek repeatedly asked him to give a speech but Hu steadfastly refused.⁴ It might be interpreted as a protest against Chiang's dictatorship.

After Hu fell ill in February 1961, his health never recovered. His wife, Jiang Dongxiu, came back from the United States to look after him in October 1961. However, her quick temper and her *Mahjong* addiction brought Hu more misery.⁵ As usual, Hu did not complain much. He gave interviews and received visitors and letters. He continued to make plans for the Academia Sinica, and persisted in working on his evidential research.

On 6 November 1961, Hu gave a speech entitled "Social Changes Necessary for the Growth of Science" in which he talked about the shortcomings of Chinese culture. There was nothing new in Hu's speech. As he put it, "I have just repeated my words spoken thirty-five years ago."⁶ This speech, nevertheless, evoked resentment from the conservatives. Xu Fuguan (1903-1982), a professor at Donghai University, condemned him as "the most shameless person in China."⁷ Xu's article caused another clash between conservatives and those who supported Westernisation. When the new debate raged, newspapers such as *Zili Wanbao*, *Lian*

⁴*NPCB*, vol. 10, p. 3744.

⁵Wang Zhixiong: "Ji Hu Shi Xiansheng Qushi Qian de Tanhua Pianduan" (Hu's Words before His Death), *Lianhe Bao*, 24 February 1977.

⁶*NPCB*, vol. 10, p. 3801.

⁷Xu Fuguan: "Zhongguo Ren de Chiru, Dongfan Ren de Chiru" (A Disgrace to the Chinese, A Disgrace to the Eastern Peoples), *Minzhu Pinglun* (Democratic Review) vol.12, no.24 (20 December 1961), pp. 21-23.

He Bao and *Zhengxin Xinwen*, and periodicals such as *Zhonghua Zazhi*, *Wenxing* and *Minzhu Pinglun* all devoted space to it.

Hu did not intend to enter into another debate. The publications from both sides were more emotional than insightful. To Hu, the debate was in some sense an absurd one. Many articles carried personal attacks on Hu rather than dealing with the issue itself. Some traditionalists even proposed that Hu should be tarred, feathered and airdropped to mainland China “to which he properly belongs.”⁸ Hu’s health was clearly affected by the controversy. At the end of November 1961, he was hospitalised again for a heart attack. At this moment, a member of Legislative Yuan, Liao Weipan (1897-1968), joined other conservatives in criticising him. Hu’s immediate response was: “Am I doing any harm by staying in Taipei?”⁹

Compared to his popularity, the criticisms Hu had to bear were certainly insignificant. As far as his character was concerned, Hu Shi could be safely classified as a genuine *junzi* (gentleman) in the eyes of Confucius. He devoted to his mother and wife, dedicated to his motherland and he had all the virtues extolled by Confucius. He died on 24 February 1962 while chairing a welcoming party in honour of some new members of the Academia Sinica. His funeral was conducted with lavishness and solemnity. He was regarded as a kind of national treasure. Chiang Kai-shek, the president issued a memorial tribute. All the important newspapers in Taiwan carried the news of his death on the front page. From all corners of the island and overseas Chinese communities, eulogies flooded the media.

⁸*NPCB*, vol. 10, pp. 3528-3529.

⁹*NPCB*, vol. 10, p. 3824, p. 3825, p. 3881.

II

Hu was born at a time when China was being invaded by Western ideas. These ideas were given strong impetus by the sheer power of the nations from which they sprang. It was inevitable that his intellectual development should turn away from Confucianism, brought about by the influence of his tertiary education in the West and by the post-imperial Chinese reality which no longer sustained a Confucian social institution.

Although Hu's intellectual development was an evolution from a Confucianist to a "cosmopolitan" twentieth-century intellectual, this does not mean that the process was a simple "Westernisation." Hu Shi was deeply involved in the modern Chinese enlightenment which had its origin on the one hand in the West, and on the other hand in traditional cultural sources. His thinking was in many ways a miniature of the problems of his own country. He realised that traditional ways had failed and that uncharted paths lay ahead. Consequently he stressed more and more on the creation of the basic conditions according to which a course might be marked out step by step -- a method of adaptation to changing situations.

Though Hu swam against the mainstream thinking of the time, he succeeded in building a beachhead in the academic field. As a Pragmatic thinker, his influence was many-sided, and his contribution monumental. His efforts to introduce scientific thinking into the Chinese humanities was important and his study on Chinese philosophy and novels set a new paradigm that inspired many scholars.

Admittedly, Pragmatism and scientific method had preoccupied Hu's intellectual endeavour. His Pragmatism -- that is, his conviction that everything human beings may reliably accept as knowledge must be arrived at by scientific procedures of thought -- was the cornerstone of his intellectual creed. Fundamentally, Pragmatism is not a system of thought itself but of attitude towards thought: it implies confidence in the capability of reason to deal with the perplexities of life and a commitment to the possibility of a rational methodology. Hu generally saw science as systematic reasoning which trains human faculties to face problems. He emphasised the value of the scientific spirit with its laboratory habits of evidential and precise thinking which was necessary for mankind's moral and intellectual advancement. Science for Hu was the telescope of the modern age which pointed to an unprogressive past. In order to save China from its backwardness, Hu enlarged the role of science by presenting a philosophy based on knowledge and conception of utility. He certainly believed that China would become a modern prosperous country if its people followed the path he and his friends envisaged. But it did not take too long for Hu to realise that China's problems were more complicated to be solved rationally or "scientifically."

Originally, Hu along with many other May Fourth leaders, had called for a cultural revolution prior to a political revolution. Their abhorrence of warlord politics and their disappointment with the failure of the 1911 Revolution kept them away from politics and led them to the conviction that a cultural transformation was a necessary prerequisite to any substantial political changes. But the plan had no chance to survive the challenges of immediate political events, especially after the Mukden Incident of 1931, when the independence of learning, became too luxurious,

and the dictums “discovering the original meaning of one character of the Chinese language is equal in value to discovering a fixed star” struck many Chinese intellectuals as absurd. The pressing questions on their minds were what had to be done for national salvation and they wanted to hear the concise and simple answers. Many intellectuals, motivated by their patriotic feelings, turned away from their academic research to engage in political activities, even in areas that were beyond their expertise.¹⁰

Hu’s reluctant foray into politics was an unhappy one. His “scientific rationality” failed to remould Chinese political culture. By stressing the need to study specific problems, Hu seemed to be arguing for close attention to the realities of China. Ironically, however, many of Hu’s views exemplified a form of alienation of Chinese intellectual life as he failed to see that specific social problems cannot be resolved in a vacuum; they exist in a context of political and social institutions and values that dictate the general orientation which solutions must assume. When the KMT unified most of the country in 1927-28, the prospects for Hu’s reform programmes seemed much brighter. However, after the success of establishing its power almost throughout the whole nation, the KMT members started forming the core echelon of political power. The term “party” was in vogue, and most party members who were non-intellectuals or semi-intellectuals, swiftly replaced the warlord bureaucrats as the centre of political power. This occurred to such an extent that an incapable official suddenly became powerful enough to cause much trouble for Hu Shi and his friends. During this period, Hu strongly criticised Chiang Kai-

¹⁰For an excellent discussion on this trend, see Henry Zhao: “Zouxiang Bianyuan” (Towards a Marginalisation), *Dushu* 178 (Reading Monthly) (January 1994): 38-41.

shek and the KMT. Considering his even more intense hostility toward the CCP, politically he had no choice. The Japanese encroachment forced him to support Chiang who Hu thought was the only possible leader who could save the country from being subjugated.

Hu's support for Chiang was by no means an endorsement of dictatorship. He kept expounding the merits of freedom of speech. His fight for human rights was typical of the generation of the liberals. As observed by Eugene Lubot: "The word liberalism, in the context of modern China, immediately evokes the name of Hu Shi. He has become identified as the archetypical liberal critic."¹¹ Hu insisted democracy was the best form of government. While Hu continued to hold to his belief in democracy until the end of his life, his approach to politics could hardly help enhance the change. Apart from the fact that China faced an extremely difficult situation, Hu's position presumed a viable political and social structure and the presence of authorities willing to support democracy, both of which were absent in modern China. In short his occasional doubts notwithstanding, Hu continued to hope that the KMT authorities would eventually adopt a path to democracy in which, Hu explained, the peaceful transfer of power was possible. The civil War between the CCP and the KMT, further jeopardised Hu's hopes for a democratic China. The chaotic decades in China during Hu's life were undoubtedly among those periods in human history when conditions were not conducive to using "the method of intelligence."

¹¹Eugene Lubot: *Liberalism in an Illiberal Age: New Culture Liberals in Republic China, 1917-1937*, p. 3.

III

The general opinion in summing up Hu Shi's career is that he as a scholar could be said to be quite successful as he transplanted new method onto Chinese scholarship which influenced several generations of scholars, whereas in the political arena his Pragmatism came out on the losing side in modern China.

At the close of this detailed discussion, however, I shall allow myself to add a different assessment on Hu's achievements and his failures. Contrary to above "factual" general opinion, I would venture to say that in retrospect, Hu's Pragmatist liberalism, though failed, is more important to us intellectuals of Cultural China, while his new scholarship, though influential, leaves us more room for regret.

Undoubtedly, Hu had played an important role in his advocacy of Literary Revolution and the reconstruction of Chinese scholarship. But Hu's success was also due to historical and social reasons. Indeed, China was ripe for fundamental change in the May Fourth Era. Taking Hu's reinterpretation of Chinese philosophy as an example, Gu Jiegang, the prominent historian and Hu's student, mentioned that he had become dissatisfied with the way Chinese philosophy was taught before Hu started to lecture at Beijing University. By presenting this evidence, I am by no means downgrading Hu's academic contributions. What I am trying to say is that if Hu had not emerged at the time, the radical reform of Chinese scholarship might also have been realised. It was only a matter of time.

In addition, Hu's influence on scholarship is not all positive. For example, he exaggerated the model of science. His Pragmatism was in many aspects too general

and not clearly worked out, and thus easily reduced to a kind of scientism. Hu could have shown a remarkable intuition when he declared that modern way of research was a logical step forward from Qing *kaozheng* scholarship. With hindsight, Hu mainly speeded up the intrinsic development of Chinese scholarship.

If we attempt to compare several cases of foreign influence upon Chinese tradition, for example that of Chan Buddhism on Neo-Confucianism which pushed Chinese philosophy onto an entirely different stage, then the significance of Pragmatism might be minor. Pragmatism was easily accepted by the Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth Era because it had many similarities with Chinese traditional thought, which was its advantage but also its disadvantage. For what the Chinese philosophy needs most, then and now, is a powerful metaphysical dimension to enrich its own philosophy rather than something “similar.” Hu emphasised the importance of Pragmatism at the cost of neglecting other Western philosophical thoughts and, what was more, encouraged his followers to go back to “national heritage” by applying the Pragmatic approach rather than to study Pragmatism itself, thus limiting the achievements of May Fourth as an enlightenment movement.

Politically, the situation was quite different. For long years, Hu Shi suffered the attack from the critics of the right for having “paved the way” for the “Communist take-over” and for eroding the “spiritual” forces that could have served as a bulwark. At the same time he was vehemently criticised by Communist ideologues for persuading Chinese intellectuals to accept gradualism while rejecting revolution. It is none else but these barrages from both sides that modern Chinese liberalism started by Hu is of greater importance and deserves more praise.

The consistent underlying theme of Hu's career throughout his life was his urge for reform. He devoted all his energy to making China a nation which could meet the challenges of the contemporary world, and acquire the means to compete adequately. In an era of iconoclasm, Pragmatism could not provide the necessary bridge between the old Chinese tradition and modern Western liberalism, which was regarded as too much luxury in China when foreign invasions added to the frustration of belatedness.

Hu's Pragmatic philosophy, would therefore, appear to be not pragmatic enough. It is true that basic human rights and democratic practice were more easily applicable to a stable society. Hu himself had acknowledged more than once that his political discussions had no bearing on political realities then. But to say that Pragmatism was totally impractical for China is to misunderstand the philosophy. We cannot blame a moral vision for not being realised during a particular time, nor can we say that the "method of intelligence" for making our judgements more conscious and more rational, was a castle on sand because it has not been given a chance to be practised wisely.

Fundamental to Hu's vision was his belief that China in his life time was ready for political democracy, despite great difficulties. It was true that liberal and democratic values developed from Western traditions seemed to enjoy little applicability to a culture with vastly different traditions. But it was exactly on this point that Hu's insistence on liberalism based on his understanding of Pragmatism is really significant: He was ahead of his time. His liberalism might have failed, but it was not his own failure, and the example he set for Chinese intellectuals today cannot be exaggerated.

Therefore, in winding up this study, I have to insist that Hu deserves our admiration and more studies, because he envisaged in a difficult century that are entitled to intellectual freedom, economic security, and cultural fulfilment. I also concur with him that democracy as an ideal with moral values transcends cultural boundaries, and that, in fact, Deweyan Pragmatism seeks effectiveness of rational methods of judgement in times of crisis is particularly pertinent to China.

In the final analysis, just as the Chinese people chose other doctrines over Pragmatism more than half a century, it is also us ourselves now to determine the relevance to every Chinese community the liberal and democratic ideals. What happened in the whole cultural China in the twentieth century reminds us of Hu's words in 1960, not long before his death:

I wanted to lay a new foundation for politico-cultural Chinese system. Looking back over the past forty-four years, it seems that my medicine was not so effective. However, I do not agree that my medicine did not work. . . . The reason was that some of the patients did not want to follow my prescription, while some others, after taking my medicine, went to take other medicines. My medicine then came to no effect. A doctor's door is opened to everybody but he cannot force the patients to come to see him and to take the medicine. . . . However, I still believe that my prescription is good for everybody."¹²

And I believe that Hu's lack, or rather, refusal, of universalism in favour of Pragmatic piece-meal gradualism on politico-cultural issues would be of great help if we could look back to Hu Shi once more, and hear his words with more patience.

¹²*NPCB*, vol. 9, p. 3403.

Appendix A:

Chronological List of the Principal Events in Hu Shi's Life

17 December 1891	Birth
July 1894	Death of Hu's father
1895	Studies at village school in Jixi, Anhui Province
Spring 1904	Studies at Meixi School in Shanghai
1905	Transfers to Chengzhong School in Shanghai
1905	Abolition of the civil service examination system
1906-1908	Attends China National Institute
1908	Teaches at New China National Institute
September 1910	Attends College of Agriculture, Cornell University
Spring 1912	Transfers to the College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell University.
Autumn 1915	Pursues Ph.D. degree under John Dewey's supervision at Columbia University
January 1917	Publishes "Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi"
July 1917	Returns home to China
December 1917	Marries Jiang Dongxiu
September 1917	Teaches at Beijing University.
22 December 1918	Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and several members of <i>New Youth</i> establish <i>The Weekly Critic</i>
January 1919	Fu Sinian, Luo Jialun and other student leaders at Beijing

	University set up <i>New Wave</i>
February 1919	Publishes <i>History of Chinese Philosophy</i>
30 April 1919	Dewey arrives in Shanghai.
4 May 1919	May Fourth Student Demonstration
June 1919	Becomes editor of <i>The Weekly Critic</i>
August 1919	<i>The Weekly Critic</i> is banned by the Warlord Government
March 1920	Publishes <i>Changshi Ji</i>
July 1920	Chinese Communist Party is established
July 1920	Publishes “ <i>Shu Hu Zhuan Kaozheng</i> ”
September 1920	Chen Duxiu moved the editorial office of <i>New Youth</i> to Shanghai and converted it into the organ of the CCP.
March 1921	Publishes “ <i>Hong Lou Meng Kaozheng</i> ”
15 July 1921	Dewey leaves China
7 May 1922	Establishes <i>Endeavour</i>
13 May 1922	Publishes Good Government political proposal with other fifteen renowned intellectuals
19 September 1922	<i>Endeavour</i> members join the Good Government Cabinet
25 November 1922	Fall of the Good Government Cabinet
January 1923	Establishes Guoxue Jikan
21 October 1923	Closure of <i>Endeavour</i>
29 November 1923	Writes Preface to the Debate of Philosophy of Life
June 1926	The Northern Expedition is launched by the KMT
1926 - 1927	Travels to Moscow, the United Kingdom and the United States

10 March 1928	<i>The Crescent</i> publishes its first issue
April 1928	Assumes the post as President of China National Institute.
June 1928	Publishes <i>Baihua Wenxue Shi</i>
March 1929	the KMT declares the beginning of "political tutelage"
10 June 1929	Attacks Sun Yat-sen's theory of "Action is easy, knowledge is difficult" which results in a direct clash with the KMT
13 December 1929	Publishes <i>Renquan Lunji</i> with Luo Longji and Liang Shiqiu
19 May 1930	Resigns as President of China National Institute
December 1930	Becomes Dean of Faculty of Arts, Beijing University
18 September 1931	Mukden Incident: Japanese seize Manchuria
January 1932	Invited by the KMT to attend Conference of National Salvation Hu and his liberal friends decided "not to treat the KMT as an enemy"
22 May 1932	Establishes <i>Independent Critics</i> with Ding Wengjiang, Jiang Tingfu and other liberal friends
February 1933	Japanese conquer Rihe
March 1933	Hu joins Ding Wengjiang and other friends writing a letter to Chiang Kai-shek in which they said that without Chiang coming to the north, China would not be saved
June-October 1933	Travels to the United States and Canada
September 1933	Publishes <i>Sishi Zishu</i>
7 July 1937	Sino-Japanese War begins
25 July 1937	<i>Independent Critics</i> publishes its last issue
1938-1942	Appointed Ambassador to the United States
8 January 1942	Formally resigns as ambassador and moves to New York

August 1945	Japanese surrender
June 1946	Chiang Kai-shek starts civil war with the CCP
August 1946	Returns to China and assumes the post of President of Beijing University
March 1949	Goes to the United States at the request of Chiang Kai-shek in search of aid and support for the KMT government
1 October 1949	The People's Republic of China is formally established in Beijing
20 November 1949	<i>Free China</i> publishes its first issue
11 May 1949	<i>Renmin Ribao</i> carries a long "open letter" by Hu Shi's close friend Chen Yuan reprimanding Hu
1950-1952	Becomes Curator of Gest Oriental Library at Princeton University
22 September 1950	Hu Shi's second son Hu Sidu attacks his father from Mainland China
November 1952- January 1953	Invited to Taiwan by National Taiwan University. Hu's visit causes a sensation. Chiang Kai-shek greets Hu by inviting him to review a guard of honour
February 1954-April 1954	Invited to Taiwan by the KMT to attend the National Assembly.
November 1954	The CCP launches a campaign that lasts more than two years to discredit Hu's ideas
April 1958	Moves to Taiwan from the United States and becomes President of the Academia Sinica
4 September 1960	The KMT arrests Lei Zhen
24 February 1962	Death

Appendix B: Glossary

- Anfu 安福
Baihua 白话
Bi Yuan 毕沅
Boxue 博学
Cai Xixue Yi 采西学议
Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培
Cao Peisheng 曹佩声
Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹
Cao Yu 曹禺
Cenglei Zaocheng Shuo 层累造成说
Chang Yansheng 常燕生
Chao Ye Qian Zai 朝野僉载
Chen Boda 陈伯达
Chen Cheng 陈诚
Chen Di 陈第
Chen Duxiu 陈独秀
Chen Hengzhe 陈衡哲
Chen Lifu 陈立夫
Chen Yinge 陈寅恪
Chen Yuan 陈源
Chen Yuan 陈垣
Cheng Hao 程颢
Cheng Yi 程颐
Chengzhong Xuetaang 澄衷学堂
Chiang Ching-kuo 蒋经国
Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石
Chuangzao She 创造社
Ci 词
Da Cai Xiao Yong 大材小用
Dadan de Jiashe, Xiaoxin de Qiuzheng 大胆的假设, 小心的求证
Dai Jitao 戴季陶
Dai Zheng 戴震
Daotong 道统
Dawo 大我
De, Gong, Yan 德、公、言
Dili Xue 地理学
Ding Wenjiang 丁文江
Du Fu 杜甫
Du Shi 杜诗
Duan Qirui 段祺瑞
Dushan de Geren Zhuyi 独善的个人主义
Ershisi Shi 二十四史
Fan Zhen 范缜
Fandui Dang 反对党

Fang Bao 方苞
Fangong Dalu 反攻大陆
Faxisi Xijun 法西斯细菌
Feng Guifen 冯桂芬
Feng Zhizhong 冯执中
Fu Sinian 傅斯年
Furen 辅仁
Gao Yihan 高一涵
Geming Jun 革命军
Geren Zhuyi 个人主义
Gewu 格物
Gong Zizhen 龚自珍
Gong'an 公安
Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚
Guayu 寡欲
Guo Moruo 郭沫若
Guo Taiqi 郭泰祺
Guofu Weiyuan 国府委员
Guowuguan 过五关
Guoxue 国学
Han Shan 寒山
Hangzhou Baihua Bao 杭州白话报
Hao Zhengfu 好政府
Haoren Zhengfu 好人政府
He Jingming 何景明
Hong Lou Meng 红楼梦
Hong Qiufan 洪秋蕃
Hong Ye 洪业
Hu Chuan 胡传
Hu Hanmin 胡汉民
Hu Sidu 胡思杜
Huang Kan 黄侃
Huang Xing 黄兴
Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪
Ji 集
Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉
Jiang Dongxiu 江冬秀
Jiang Menglin 蒋梦麟
Jiang Tingfu 蒋廷黼
Jiaqing 嘉庆
Jieyu 节欲
Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅
Jing 经
Jingling 竞陵
Jingshi 经世
Jingye Xunbao 兢业旬报
Jixi 绩溪
Ju 据

Junzi 君子
Kang Youwei 康有为
Kangxi 康熙
Kaozheng 考证
Keji 克己
Lao She 老舍
Lao Zi 老子
Lei Zhen 雷震
Li 礼
Li Bai 李白
Li Dazhao 李大钊
Li Gong 李堪
Li Mengyang 李梦阳
Liang Qichao 梁启超
Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋
Lianhe Bao 联合报
Liao Weifan 廖维藩
Lin Changmin 林长民
Lin Shu 林纾
Liu Bannong 刘半农
Liu Xin 刘歆
Lu Xun 鲁迅
Luo Ergang 罗尔纲
Luo Longji 罗隆基
Luo Wengan 罗文干
Ma Er 马二
Ma Shijun 马仕俊
Ma Yuzao 马裕藻
Mashi Wentong 马氏文通
Mei Guangdi 梅光迪
Meixi Xuetaang 梅溪学堂
Minzhu Jiquan 民主集权
Minzhu Pinglun 民主评论
Mo Bian 墨辨
Mo Zi 墨子
Pan Guangdan 潘光旦
Qi 气
Qian Daxin 钱大昕
Qian Duansen 钱端森
Qian Xuanton 钱玄同
Qianlong 乾隆
Qingdai Xueshu Gailun 清代学术概论
Qinglang de Tiankong 晴朗的天空
Qiong Ze Du Shan Qi Shen 穷则独善其身
Qu 曲
Quan Xue Pian 劝学篇
Quan Zuwang 全祖望
Ren 仁

Ren Hongjun (Shuyong) 任鸿隽(叔永)
Rulin Wai Shi 儒林外史
San Buxiu 三不朽
San Guo Yanyi 三国演义
Sanhuang Wudi 三皇五帝
Shaonian Zhongguo 少年中国
Shehuihua 社会化
Shen Bao 申报
Shen Congwen 沈从文
Shen Yinmo 沈尹默
Shi 士
Shi 史
Shi Bao 时报
Shi De 拾得
Shi Ji 史记
Shi Jing 诗经
Shi Yan Zhi 诗言志
Shishi Xinbao 时事新报
Shishuo Xinyu 世说新语
Shu 术
Shu Ren 树人
Shui Hu Zhuan 水浒传
Shuijing Zhu 水经注
Si Shu 四书
Si Bu 四部
Si Da Qi Shu 四大奇书
Sier buxiu 死而不朽
Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao 四库全书总目提要
Sima Guang 司马光
Sima Qian 司马迁
Sishi Tongtang 四世同堂
Song Ziwen 宋子文
Sun Ke 孙科
Sun Yat-sen 孙逸仙
Suoyin Pai 索隐派
Taidong 台东
Tan Sitong 谭嗣同
Tang Degang 唐德刚
Tang Erhe 汤尔和
Tang Tianru 唐天如
Tang Yongtong 汤用彤
Tao Xingzhi 陶行知
Tao Xisheng 陶希圣
Tao Yuanming 陶渊明
Tao Yuanming Shi 陶渊明诗
Tiyong 体用
Tongcheng 桐城
Tongmen Hui 同盟会

Waiqi jingshi, Neiyang xingqing 外期经世, 内养性情
Wang Anshi 王安石
Wang Chong 王充
Wang Chonghui 王宠惠
Wang Daxie 王大燮
Wang Fanzhi 王梵志
Wang Guowei 王国维
Wang Jingwei 汪精卫
Wang Linchuan Ji 王临川集
Wang Niansun 王念孙
Wang Tao 王韬
Wang Yangming 王阳明
Wang Zhong 汪中
Wei Daoming 魏道明
Wei Yuan 魏源
Weiwo Zhuyi 为我主义
Wen yi zai dao 文以载道
Wenxing 文星
Wenyan 文言
Wu Dayou 吴大猷
Wu Jianxiong 吴健雄
Wu Jing 五经
Wu Lun 五伦
Wu Rulun 吴汝纶
Wu Yu 吴棫
Wu Yu 无欲
Wu Zhihui 吴稚晖
Wucheng 武成
Wuhan 武汉
Wuxi Baihua Bao 无锡白话报
Xi You Ji 西游记
Xia Yan 夏衍
Xiao Jing 孝经
Xiao Xue 小学
Xiaowo 小我
Xin Chao 新潮
Xin Hongxue 新红学
Xin Jiaoyu 新教育
Xin Qingnian 新青年
Xin Sichao 新思潮
Xingshi Yinyuan 醒世姻缘
Xu Zhimo 徐志摩
Xue Wei Ren Shi 学为人师
Xueheng 学衡
Xun Zi 荀子
Yan Fu 严复
Yang bagu 洋八股
Yao Nai 姚鼐

Yao Xie 姚燮
Yi 义
Yi xue wei ren, yi qi zuo sheng 以学为人, 以期作圣
Ying Shu 影书
Yingzi 影子
Yinming 因明
Yong 用
Yu Dacai 俞大彩
Yu Pingbo 俞平伯
Yuan Shikai 袁世凯
Zaiye Dang 在野党
Zaju 杂剧
Zeng Guofan 曾国藩
Zhang Binglin 张炳麟
Zhang Foquan 张佛泉
Zhang Jia'ao 张嘉璈
Zhang Junmai 张君勱
Zhang Weici 张慰慈
Zhang Xinzhi 张新之
Zhang Xun 张勋
Zhang Zhidong 张之洞
Zhao Yiqing 赵一清
Zhao Yuanren 赵元任
Zheng 证
Zheng Xuan 郑玄
Zhengli Guogu 整理国故
Zhengxin Xinwen 征信新闻
Zhi 智
Zhili 直隶
Zhizhi 致知
Zhong Ji Hui 中基会
Zhong Xue Wei Ti, Xi Xue Wei Yong 中学为体, 西学为用
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Zhonghua Zazhi 中华杂志
Zhou Yang 周扬
Zhou Zuoren 周作人
Zhu Xi 朱熹
Zhu Ziqing 朱自清
Zhuanzhu 专注
Zi 子
Zili Wanbao 自立晚报
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^{*}The dating of most of the entries were provided by Hu Shi himself who had the habit of dating every essay carefully when they were published and collected. The publication dates of Hu Shi's books are to be found in the first edition of those books respectively.

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