

The Enlightenment of Hu Shi's Literary Wisdom on Modern Education: Language, Thought, and Humanistic Spirit

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Abstract:

Hu Shi's literary wisdom is actually important for changing modern Chinese social thoughts and literary ideas. It also has a great impact on education. By promoting the Vernacular Movement, Hu Shi made literature more relevant to normal people. He encouraged innovative ways of teaching language and moved away from traditional classical Chinese. This made education more accessible and practical for the general population. The popularization of vernacular education not only improved students' language expression skills but also increased their interest in and effectiveness of learning. At the same time, Hu Shi's literary criticism emphasized emotional expression and the analysis of social realities, fostering students' critical thinking and independent exploration. He suggested that students should think carefully about the thoughts and emotions behind literary works. This may help them improve their ability to analyze issues and question traditional beliefs. Furthermore, Hu Shi focuses on the importance of a humanistic spirit and moral education, arouses students' emotional resonance with literature, and helps them establish a correct outlook on life and values. He thinks that the humanistic spirit is the main component of education. By learning literature, students can get a broader mind and a deeper understanding of culture. In summary, Hu Shi's thoughts about literature not only helped boost literary creation but also offered valuable enlightenment for modern educational theory and practice. His ideas have created new ways for education, helping to develop future talents equipped with independent thinking, critical reasoning, and deep humanistic qualities.

Keywords: Hu Shi; literature; education.

1. Introduction

Literature is an important part of the humanities. It is not only a carrier for cultural transmission and aesthetic experience but also a shaper of thoughts, ideas, and moral emotions. Through the power of words, students deeply reflect on the world and life, while developing their critical thinking and emotional expression skills. In contemporary education, literature plays an important role. Enhancing students' language abilities, fostering independent thinking, and increasing empathy. It also broadens their horizons through exposure to diverse cultures. Moreover, writing and reading are essential to helping students use their minds and get creative, and as Mo Yan added impromptu at the Nobel Banquet, comparing literature to science is indeed useless, but its useless use is its great use [1].

Hu Shi advocated using vernacular Chinese in literary creation, which made literature easier for people to understand and helped boost language spreading. He promoted and used vernacular language, urging people to understand the power of language for conveying thoughts and emotions. This showed students how to express themselves effectively.

In literary criticism, Hu Shi emphasized the cultivation of analytical and critical thinking. He stressed that literary works are not only expressions of emotion but also deep reflections on social realities and human nature [2]. Through detailed textual interpretation and analysis, Hu Shi guided readers to expand the boundaries of their thinking, sparking their curiosity and questioning spirit. This approach helped develop learners' ability to think independently and increase their critical thinking abilities.

Moreover, Hu Shi also recognized the importance of humanistic spirit and moral values in education. He believed that literature feeds the heart, awakes people's inner emotional resonance and moral consciousness, and guides them to establish correct views on life and values in a better way [2]. Under the influence of literature, students learn to perceive the world and understand others with a more nuanced and caring attitude, which helps them cultivate a profound humanistic literacy.

Although previous studies have explored Hu Shi's contribution to literature, there is still a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms of the connection between his literary wisdom and modern educational practice. This article attempts to explore how Hu Shi's literary wisdom is specifically applied to contemporary education, especially in terms of the integration of language, thought, and humanistic spirit. This study aims to provide a new perspective on educational theory and practice and further illustrate the importance of Hu Shi's thought in cultivating future

talents with independent thinking ability and humanistic qualities. This not only enriches the academic field of Hu Shi's research but also provides valuable inspiration for modern education reform.

In the following chapters, mainly based on the literature research method, this paper will deeply study Hu Shi's literary wisdom and educational enlightenment, and explore its influence on modern education. It is hoped that this research can provide beneficial inspiration and reference for the development of the education field and education practice.

2. Literature is The Art of Language: Hu Shi's Enlightenment to Education in Language

2.1 The Popularization of Vernacular

Matteo Ricci once proposed a Chinese phenomenon, in style and structure, the written language and the Chinese used in everyday conversation are so different that no book is written in the spoken language [3]. From ancient China to the late Qing Dynasty, most Chinese people could only communicate in Chinese, not write. In order to solve this problem, the intellectuals at that time promoted the emergence of vernacular newspapers throughout China, and in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, more than 370 vernacular newspapers were published throughout China [4]. The purpose of this action is to enlighten the people's wisdom, hoping to spread the advanced thoughts of mankind through newspapers and promote the enlightenment movement in modern China with a style that people can understand. Although this Vernacular Movement was strangled in the cradle by the late Qing government under many factors, the seed of vernacular has quietly sprouted in the hearts of new intellectuals. Hu Shi's *Humble Opinions of Literary Reform* sounded the trumpet for the May Fourth vernacular movement, which was further fueled by the New Culture Movement. He remarked it is essential to use the vernacular as a tool for literature... Only then can it serve as a medium for new ideas and new spirits [5]. He believes that using the vernacular is closer to people's lives and thoughts. His promotion made literary works more accessible to the public and increased the popularity of literature. Liao Chung-kai commented that Hu Shi had set off a linguistic revolution through vernacular literature, enabling thoughts to spread to all levels of society through the medium of writing. His contribution to Chinese society was greater than that of Confucius and Mencius [6].

In promoting the teaching of vernacular Chinese, Hu Shi

thoroughly explored its rationale and advantages as an educational tool, providing new directions for language instruction in the education field. He believed that vernacular Chinese allows students to engage with more vivid and practical language, making learning more intuitive and enhancing both their interest and expressive abilities. Hu Shi believes that the promotion of vernacular Chinese helps break the constraints of classical Chinese, facilitates the democratization of education, and benefits a broader audience [7].

At that time, research on vernacular literature and education was almost nonexistent. Hu Shi conducted extensive exploration in the areas of promoting and teaching vernacular Chinese. He proposed many pioneering theories in the process of literary reform and made numerous beneficial attempts in vernacular literature, leading to the transformation of new literature. It can be said that Hu Shi was a foundational figure in the Vernacular Movement and vernacular education, having a positive and profound impact on literary education in modern China [8].

2.2 Practical Attempts in Vernacular Chinese Education

At the early stage of promoting vernacular Chinese textbooks, opposition arose from various sectors of society. Some argued that since the Mandarin standard had yet to be unified, adopting such textbooks blindly would not aid in promoting Mandarin. However, Hu Shi did not agree with this view. He believed that the standard for Mandarin should not be set by any organization or group but would naturally emerge after the flourishing of Mandarin literature, as people would spontaneously study and summarize it, forming a standard in due course [8]. This perspective underscores the importance of literature in shaping Mandarin. Moreover, the movement for Mandarin literature did indeed elevate the status of Mandarin in society at that time, accelerating the promotion of Mandarin textbooks.

In *Teaching Chinese in Middle Schools* and *Further Discussion on Chinese Teaching in Middle Schools*, Hu Shi elaborated on his views regarding language education and proposed his ideal framework for literary education. He emphasized the importance of vernacular literature in middle school textbooks and required students to read vernacular novels [9]. Despite the scarcity of vernacular dramatic literature at the time, Hu Shi did not ignore it, believing that although vernacular dramatic literature was limited then, it would certainly grow in the future. He also criticized the existing vernacular textbooks as being woefully inadequate. To remedy this, he chose to supplement the curriculum with ancient vernacular texts. This approach revitalized the vernacular literature materials and

enriched the literary horizons of students [9].

The reform of vernacular Chinese education and the intellectual awakening of the May Fourth Movement mutually reinforced each other, accelerating the spread of new ideas and culture, and promoting social progress and the development of modern literature in China. Moreover, the various ideas Hu Shi proposed at the early stages of promoting vernacular Chinese education also sped up the nationwide reform of language education and helped ensure consistency in these reforms across China. Chow Tse-tsung remarked that this transformation had profound impacts on Chinese cultural thought, academic research, social structure, and the political sphere, significantly shaping the thinking and behavior of the Chinese people [10]. This comment fully shows the far-reaching impact of the implementation of vernacular education.

3. The Depth of Thought Determines the Achievement of Literature: Hu Shi's Enlightenment to Education in Thought

3.1 The Cultivation of Independent Thinking

Hu Shi advocated for critical thinking and encouraged students to think independently. In *Talk About The Book of Songs*, He said that traditional interpretations that have lasted for over two thousand years should be encouraged to be abandoned. Drawing on sociological, historical, and literary perspectives, he presented a comprehensive and original approach to interpreting each poem [11]. His aim was to motivate students to maintain a skeptical spirit, urging them to question the knowledge and ideas they encountered. He believed that skepticism was a key driver of scientific inquiry and the advancement of knowledge. When students are presented with any theory or idea, they should question it, and consider whether it makes sense and whether there is good information to support it, rather than blindly accepting or following popular opinions.

He believed that the purpose of education was not merely to impart knowledge but to cultivate students' thinking abilities. Through the analysis and discussion of literary works, students were guided to question traditional ideas and form their own opinions. This ability to think independently is particularly important in modern society, as it enables students to make wise decisions in complex environments.

Hu Shi also emphasized the scientific method of positivism, which could be summarized as his principle of „speaking as much as the evidence allows“ [12]. He believed that education should be based on facts and evi-

dence rather than blindly accepting authority. He believed that knowledge should be gained through observation, experimentation, and verification and that conclusions should never be drawn without evidence [12].

In his opinion, students should not stay at the theoretical level, they should apply the knowledge they have learned into practice and test the accuracy of the theory through hands-on activities and verification. This process not only helps students understand things better but also improves their ability to solve problems, scientific analysis, and logical reasoning skills.

3.2 Openness and Inclusiveness

He encouraged students to keep an open mind and guard against narrow-mindedness when they come across various ideas. "Tolerance is more important than freedom" [13], he said, because holding different views is key to learning and growing.

He said, "Anything that has a good reason, can be shown through practice, and is mostly accepted, can be tolerated" [13]. This statement profoundly reflects his emphasis on the spirit of openness and inclusiveness. In Hu Shi's view, social progress relies on the diversity of ideas. If a society cannot accept different ideas and opinions, it will fall into ideological stagnation and lose the ability to innovate. Therefore, he advocates open-mindedness and respect for all viewpoints that are based on facts and are widely recognized. Hu Shi hopes that through this open and inclusive approach, he can cultivate students who can understand and respect different viewpoints, thereby promoting the overall progress of society and thought.

4. Individuals Must Have Free Will: The enlightenment of Hu Shi to education in a humanistic spirit

4.1 Free Thought

Hu Shi valued free thought and advocated pluralistic values and an open mind. He believes that education should encourage students to express their opinions freely and respect the views of others. Hu Shi believes that this kind of free and open thinking can not only cultivate critical and innovative abilities but also cultivate students' critical and innovative abilities. Allowing them to better adjust and be creative in their future lives. By creating a place where diverse ideas are shared and discussed, students are prepared to navigate a rapidly changing world with intellectual curiosity and resilience.

In *Ibsenism*, Hu Shi explicitly advocated for liberalism and individualism, Hu Shi explicitly advocated for lib-

eralism and individualism, He said that for a person to develop as an individual, two things are needed: first, the individual must have free will; second, the individual must bear responsibility" [2]. He believed that the development of individuality and freedom was the core goal of education.

Hu Shi encouraged students to maintain freedom of thought in their studies and research. He said academic discussion and inquiry should be open so that students can easily share their ideas without being scared of repression by traditional ideas or authority. He focused on the importance of intellectual freedom in education and highlighted the belief that only in a free environment can students truly develop independent insights and innovative thinking. This concept emphasizes the need to encourage cultivating individuality, responsibility, and innovative thinking within the educational system.

About individualism, Hu Shi further elaborated: „Don't choose your field of study just based on the expectations of your parents or others, but study based on your own personality and interests“ [14]. Hu Shi attaches great importance to cultivating students' personalities. He believes that only by following their own personality and interests can learning become a happy experience. In a 1941 address at Purdue University, he reiterated this point, encouraging students to discover questions that pique their interest and curiosity, which will ignite their passion for learning, research, and exploration. He emphasized that most scientific achievements often start with a problem that makes people interested and sparks their thoughts [9]. Hu Shi's view clearly highlighted that aligning with personal interests and individuality is key to finding joy in learning and achieving scientific breakthroughs. This perspective reflects his belief that self-directed learning, fueled by genuine curiosity, not only enhances academic engagement but also contributes to the advancement of knowledge and innovation.

4.2 Humanistic cCre

Hu Shi believed that to be a real person, one must break all false masks and let go of all old habits. Only in this way can one become a free and self-respecting person [2]. This statement showed that he cared a lot about individual freedom and self-respect and also reflected his humanistic concern for literary education. He argued that education should cultivate students to be courageous enough to break through falsehoods and seek the truth, thereby, they can think independently. Hu Shi wanted students to let go of their fake sides and find out who they really are through learning about literature.

In his letter to Chien-Shiung Wu, Hu Shi advised her to

pay more attention to the cultural heritage of the country she resided in, to read extensively about history and literature, and to explore other scientific fields beyond her own. He believed that broadening one's horizons in this way would cultivate a wider perspective and deeper insight. According to Hu Shi, leaders in the scientific community who achieve extraordinary success often do so because their knowledge extends beyond their specialized field of research. This interdisciplinary learning not only broadens their outlook but also enhances the depth of their understanding [6].

Hu Shi applied this concept of interdisciplinary learning to education. He emphasized that by reading extensively in literature, history, and various scientific fields, students could develop a deeper understanding of different cultures and social contexts, thereby enhancing their empathy for others. This educational approach, according to Hu Shi, helps students view the world from multiple perspectives, fostering emotional intelligence and a strong sense of social responsibility [15].

By encouraging broad-based learning, Hu Shi believed that students would not only acquire knowledge but also cultivate the humanistic values essential for a compassionate and socially engaged life. This holistic view of education aimed to create well-rounded individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

Hu Shi believed that literary education is not just about imparting knowledge but more importantly, building great character and guiding students to find the meaning of life. Help students avoid being numbed by habit by developing their sensitivity and critical thinking so they are not just going through the motions of life. He hopes that they will apply the knowledge they have learned in real life and achieve holistic personal development [16]. Additionally, Hu Shi argued that life itself has no inherent meaning, what meaning one gives to life is what it will hold. Literary education should aid students in using independent thought to assign unique meaning to their lives [16]. Therefore, literary education is not only about acquiring knowledge, it's also about understanding life, society, and personal beliefs more deeply. Reflecting Hu Shi's care and expectations for the comprehensive development of students.

5. Conclusion

Hu Shi's literary wisdom provides profound inspiration for modern education. His language reforms greatly contributed to the expansion and development of education, making knowledge more accessible to the general public. These language teaching reforms indirectly promoted the innovation of modern Chinese literature and gave students

a wider perspective of literature.

Furthermore, Hu Shi's encouragement of critical thinking and independent thought helped cultivate students' logical analysis skills and open and inclusive thinking. He paid attention to humanistic values, freedom of thought, and emotional cultivation, aiming to cultivate students' all-round development in the field of humanistic spirit. This holistic approach highlights the importance of both intellectual and emotional growth, ensuring that education not only provides individuals with knowledge but also the ability to empathize and open their minds.

In summary, Hu Shi's literary wisdom, integrating language, thought, and humanistic spirit, provides valuable theoretical foundations and practical guidance for modern education. His thoughts not only changed education in his day but also gave valuable lessons for enhancing education today. Future educators can draw inspiration from Hu Shi's philosophy to cultivate students with stronger independent thinking abilities and humanistic values, ultimately contributing to the progress of society.

This article explores the impact of Hu Shi's literary wisdom on modern education, but inevitably, any research has its limitations. Many of Hu Shi's thoughts have important theoretical value, but there is still a gap between theory and practice. The practical implementation of his educational principles may encounter various challenges at the implementation level, which are not adequately addressed in this study.

Although these limitations constitute the boundaries of the current study, they provide valuable insights for future research and highlight areas worthy of further exploration, namely how to better apply Hu Shi's literary wisdom in the context of modernization and globalization development. In educational practice, maximize its benefits.

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