Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Chen Yinke (1890-1969) in Chinese Modern Intellectual History: A Comparative Study

Abstract:

Hu Shi and Chen Yinke are two distinctive scholars who entered the academic arena in early twentieth-century China, representing two main trends of scholarly orientation in modern Chinese intellectual history. By leading their way in an attempt to converge upon conflicting ideas and thoughts which had stormed the academic circles, both scholars characterized the diversification and development of the scholarship during that time period. Thus, by carrying out a comparative study on Hu Shi and Chen Yinke, this thesis hopes to provide an overall picture of the scholarship through a different angle from mere description. This study also sets out to provide a comprehensive examination of their lives, bringing out their differing characteristics rather than similarities.

This comparative study is conducted by contrasting firstly, Hu Shi and Chen Yinke's scholarly achievements, and secondly, their relationship with the Chinese intellectual world. It is concluded that Hu Shi and Chen Yinke mutually complemented each other in the scholarly aspect. Hu Shi's "scientific method" calls for the revaluation of all values and encourages spirit of criticism. He has opened new horizon in Chinese thinking, and thus, his status is more of an ideological one. Chen Yinke, on the other hand, has built up an academic authority, which has made him a paragon in historical research. His status is more of an scholarly one. Hu Shi has illustrated a publicising behaviour, voicing his views mainly regarding Chinese cultural transformation, while Chen Yinke shows much cautiousness in doing likewise. Even though the present comparison has drawn no conclusion of priority between the two scholars, it recognises the significance of each in the context of modern intellectual history.