ABSTRACT

Hsu Fu-kuan 徐复观 (1902-1982) is considered an eminent scholar of Chinese Neo-Confucianism in the 20th century. He was known as one of the “Three Great Neo-Confucianists”, alongside T’ang Chun-i 唐君毅 (1909-1978) and Mou Tsung-san 毛宗三 (1909-1995), after Hsung Shih-li 熊十力. (1885-1968)

Among his contemporaries, Hsu's life experiences and his thinking on Neo-Confucianism are distinctive. Hsu began his career as a military officer and, in his early years, was involved in state planning. He switched to academia in the prime of his illustrious military career and sought to explain, in his works, his reflections of the changes that had taken place in China. Unlike Tang and Mou, Hsu developed a unique cultural philosophy of the spirit of humanism in the Chinese culture. This was developed through his theses on intellectual history and essays on current affairs, thus making comparisons between historical events and current perspectives, and between the East and the West.

In explaining Confucianism of the pre-Qin era, Hsu's most important work is an intellectual discourse entitled “The History Of The Chinese Philosophy Of Human Nature –The pre-Qin Period” 《中 国 人 性 论 史 — 先 秦 篇》. Among his works, “Theses on Chinese Intellectual History” 《中 国 思 想 史 论 集》 and “Between Scholarship and Politics” 《学 术 与 政 治 之 间》 also reflected similar discourse.

By having a full grasp of the fundamental principles of Confucianism in the pre-Qin era, Hsu was able to provide a modern annotation and interpretation of Chinese culture, and examine how it would develop in the future.

This thesis seeks to explore Hsu's annotation and interpretation of pre-Qin Confucianism and their implications from various perspectives. It focuses on two main areas:

1. The uniqueness of Hsu's intellectual discourse on pre-Qin Confucianism; and
2. The main thrust of Hsu's annotation and interpretation of pre-Qin Confucianism.

This thesis comprises nine chapters. The first chapter highlights the various facets of Hsu's unique methodology in studying Chinese intellectual history, how this methodology has revived pre-Qin Confucianism, and the analysis of the roots of Hsu's pursuit.

The second chapter analyses Hsu's interpretation of the evolution of the spirit of humanism during the early Zhou dynasty. This analysis offers the perspective that "premonitions" exerted a great influence on the culture of Chinese intellectual thoughts.

The third chapter to eighth chapter analyse Hsu's approach to the various theories of human nature in Confucianism. These chapters show Hsu's reinterpretation of the thoughts on human nature in "The Analects"，《论语》， "Doctrine of the Mean"，《中庸》， "Mencius"，《孟子》， "The Appendices of the Book of Changes"，《易传》， "Hsun Tzu"，《荀子》， "Great Learning"，《大学》. These chapters seek to amplify:

1. How Hsu's perspective of "premonitions" binds his ideology, that is, how humanism in pre-Qin Confucianism was inherited from the early Zhou and its subsequent developments;
2. Hsu's understanding of the human-nature-orientedness of Confucianism. It therefore elicits a central tenet of the Confucian philosophy: the concept of "nature" versus "nurture", emphasising the original goodness of human nature, and its ultimate manifestation in human relations; and
3. Hsu's reflections on Confucianism in pre-Qin era, and why he urged the elimination of the metaphysical aspects of "natural humanism" (天的人文化).

The final chapter sums up how Hsu has contributed to the resurrection of Chinese cultural thoughts in everyday life.