ABSTRACT

Wang Yuanhua, an important contemporary Chinese writer, thinker, and philosopher, was born in 1920 when the country was attempting to break away from its backward and traditional past to find its place in the modern and rapidly changing world.

Through him, this thesis retraces and explores the concerned consciousness of an intellectual, as he underwent the extremely difficult and turbulent time when a country phases from one social, cultural and political system into another. Along the way, this thesis examines the roles of intellectuals in the Chinese society, how they are influenced by the society in time of great changes and how in turn, they have helped to shape the social, cultural and academic landscape of an emerging era.

Wang Yuanhua’s life has personified the academic circles of China and their works in those difficult times when China underwent the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, the move into communist rule, the Cultural Revolution and the recent Economic Reform.

Unlike intellectuals who fled the country in times of turbulence, Wang Yuanhua has always endeavored through hardship and remained in his motherland. Through all this time he stood up to political pressures and eventually - perhaps also fortunately - emerged as a highly respected and influential scholar in his country. His life and works are excellent sources of study materials in examining the roles of intellectuals in the contemporary China. Through him, the life and thoughts of intellectuals in contemporary China, how they are influenced by the environment of their times and how they reacted and adjusted to the political and cultural changes, is presented.

This thesis is divided into 7 chapters.

Chapter One explains the purposes and methods of research of this thesis.

Chapter Two presents the childhood and foundation years of Wang Yuanhua.

Chapter Three traces Wang Yuanhua’s teenage and formative years, his leftist transformation during the Sino-Japanese War and his active participation during the war. It identifies the lure of the Communist ideology to a great many intellectuals like him in times when the country seemed on the verge of collapsing under foreign invasion.

Chapter Four discusses his involvement in the Hu Feng (胡风) Incident in the 1950s and his bitter experiences during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, when he was condemned, mentally tortured, and isolated in solitude.

Chapter Five explores Wang Yuanhua’s academic achievements and his influential writings in the past sixty years, examining how his works and thoughts had been influenced by his experiences.

Chapter Six investigates Wang Yuanhua’s current thinking as seen through his recent works and how he has helped to shape the academic landscape of contemporary China.

Chapter Seven evaluates the effects of Wang Yuanhua’s scholarship and the significance of this studies, and attempts to conclude on his contributions as an important thinker and philosopher of his time.