

Paradigm Revolution and Ideological Confrontation: A Review of Hu Shi's Zhuangzi Studies

Jiawu Li*

Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Bengbu, Anhui 233030, China

*120160002@aufe.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Hu Shi's research on Zhuangzi holds a paradigm-shifting significance in the 20th-century history of Zhuangzi studies in China. His research unfolds across four core dimensions: first, excavating and critiquing Zhuangzi's "theory of biological evolution" through the lens of evolutionism; second, assailing Zhuangzi's "broad-minded" (daguanzhuyi) philosophy of life from the standpoint of experimentalism; third, conducting a comparative analysis between Zhuangzi and Spinoza to explore Sino-Western parallels; and fourth, creatively transforming the Lao-Zhuang concept of "non-action" (wuwei) into a modern liberal idea for limiting government power and safeguarding freedom, advocating a practical model of "expert planning, government non-action." This body of research profoundly reflects Hu Shi's "interpreting China through the West" methodology and the intertwining of Enlightenment concerns and pragmatic orientations in his thought. While his work paved the way for the modern transformation of traditional scholarship, its limitations, such as the tendency to analogize with Western learning and serve immediate practical concerns, also provide an important cautionary lesson for later generations.

KEYWORDS

Hu Shi; Zhuangzi; Research Paradigm; Evolutionism; Experimentalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the 20th century, as the tide of Western learning swept across China, traditional scholarship faced unprecedented challenges and reconstruction. Amidst the call to "reorganize the national heritage" (*zhengli guogu*), the task of re-examining and reinterpreting classical thought through a modern lens became a crucial mission entrusted to the intellectuals of the era. In this magnificent academic transformation, Hu Shi (1891–1962) was undoubtedly a pivotal standard-bearer. With his profound grounding in traditional Chinese studies and the modern Western academic training he received while studying in the United States, he undertook a systematic review and critique of traditional Chinese thought, particularly the philosophies of the pre-Qin masters. Among these, his research on the *Zhuangzi* not only caused a great stir at the time for its distinct viewpoints and unique methods but also profoundly influenced the trajectory of Zhuangzi studies for nearly a century thereafter.

Hu Shi's contributions to Zhuangzi studies are primarily concentrated in his book *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, as well as in various articles, letters, and speeches. He attempted to dissect the *Zhuangzi* using Western philosophical systems, evolutionary thought, and the methods of experimentalism. This involved both excavating the spirits of "science" and "democracy" within Zhuangzi's thought and launching a fierce critique of its philosophy of life and social concepts. Such a research path was undoubtedly revolutionary at the time. It broke the traditional scholarly mold of

"annotating the Six Classics" or "letting the Six Classics annotate me," pioneering the study of Chinese philosophical history within a modern disciplinary paradigm [1]. However, Hu Shi's research also became highly controversial due to his pronounced "total Westernization" stance and his "interpreting China through the West" methodology. Contemporaries like Liang Qichao and Feng Youlan, as well as later scholars such as Yu Yingshi and Lin Yusheng, have offered profound critiques of the merits and demerits of his research from various perspectives [2].

Today, an exploration of Hu Shi's Zhuangzi studies is not only key to understanding Hu Shi's own intellectual system but also serves as an important entry point for reflecting on the modern transformation of Chinese philosophy in the 20th century. This article aims to conduct a comprehensive review of Hu Shi's research on Zhuangzi. By integrating and analyzing relevant literature, it seeks to clarify the main threads, core viewpoints, and methodological characteristics of his research, placing it within the grand historical context of Sino-Western intellectual encounters in the modern era to explore its pioneering contributions and historical limitations.

2. PARADIGM REVOLUTION: REORGANIZING THE NATIONAL HERITAGE WITH WESTERN METHODS

The primary contribution of Hu Shi's Zhuangzi studies lies in its methodological revolution. Marked by the 1919 publication of *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, he completely subverted the traditional Chinese scholarly paradigm, pioneering the study of Chinese philosophical history within the framework of modern Western academia. This paradigm shift provided a new path and model not only for Zhuangzi studies but for the entire "reorganization of the national heritage" movement.

2.1. The Transformation from the "Xue'an" Style to "History of Philosophy"

Before Hu Shi, traditional Chinese works on intellectual history predominantly adopted the "*xue'an*" (scholarly cases) style, which centered on individuals, listing their words, deeds, and doctrines without systematic logical analysis or a clear narrative of historical evolution [3]. Hu Shi, however, borrowed the historiographical format of Western philosophy, emphasizing the three main objectives of "discerning change" (*ming bian*), "seeking causes" (*qiu yin*), and "offering judgment" (*ping pan*) [2]. He argued that a history of philosophy should not only "know the threads of change in ancient and modern thought" [4, p.48] but also "find the reasons for these changes" [4, p.49] and make "objective" judgments on the value of each school's doctrines. This problem-centered, systematic approach, which emphasized intellectual evolution and logical analysis, completely altered the traditional scholarly practice of "transmitting without creating."

In *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Hu Shi placed ancient Chinese thought within the disciplinary framework of Western philosophy, using categories such as cosmology, epistemology, philosophy of life, and political philosophy to classify and interpret the ideas of the pre-Qin masters [5]. Specifically in his study of Zhuangzi, he no longer confined himself to traditional textual collation and exegetical elucidation but analyzed Zhuangzi's thought as a complete philosophical system. For instance, he traced the starting point of Zhuangzi's philosophy to "the problem of the transformation of all things" [4, p.190] and used this as the core to systematically expound on Zhuangzi's "theory of biological evolution," theory of names, and philosophy of life. This approach, as praised by Cai Yuanpei in his preface, constituted a "systematic study" capable of "sorting out a clear thread" [4, p.5].

2.2. The Division of Zhuangzi Studies under the New Paradigm

The new paradigm initiated by Hu Shi profoundly influenced Zhuangzi studies for decades. Li Baohong points out that after the publication of *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*,

Zhuangzi studies split into two major schools: one was the "history of philosophy" style of research, which followed the paradigm established by Hu Shi, using Western disciplinary systems to interpret Zhuangzi's thought from multiple angles; the other continued to use traditional methods of textual criticism and evidential research [1]. The former became the mainstream during the Republican era. Under Hu Shi's influence, a series of systematic research works were published, including Su Jiarong's *The Philosophy of Zhuangzi* (1920), Zhi Weicheng's *Zhuangzi Collated and Annotated* (1924), Lang Qingxiao's *A Scholarly Case of Zhuangzi* (1934), and Jiang Xichang's *The Philosophy of Zhuangzi* (1937) [1]. These works commonly adopted a structure that divided Zhuangzi's thought into chapters on cosmology, philosophy of life, political philosophy, dialectics, and so on, marking significant progress in Zhuangzi studies under the new paradigm.

However, this paradigm was not without its critics. Hu Shi himself, using Western philosophy as a yardstick, often gave low evaluations to Chinese thought that did not meet his standards. For example, he considered Zhuangzi's philosophy to be "merely superficial and commonplace reasoning" [1]. This attitude drew criticism from scholars like Mou Zongsan, who argued that it was an act of tailoring Chinese philosophy to fit Western standards, leading to a neglect of the unique characteristics of Chinese philosophy [6]. Furthermore, Hu Shi and his followers inevitably engaged in forced analogies and even misinterpretations when applying Western concepts, a point that will be detailed later. Nevertheless, the historical merit of the paradigm Hu Shi created-systematically studying Chinese philosophy with modern academic methods-in "clearing obstacles and opening new paths" [7] is undeniable.

3. EXCAVATION AND CRITIQUE OF ZHUANGZI'S THOUGHT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EVOLUTIONISM

Evolutionism was a core analytical tool in Hu Shi's research on Zhuangzi. Deeply influenced by Yan Fu's translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* and John Dewey's experimentalist philosophy, he used Darwin's theory of biological evolution as a "scientific method" to examine and judge the thought of the pre-Qin masters. Hu Shi's evolutionary interpretation of Zhuangzi's thought is manifested in two interrelated yet tense aspects: first, the excavation of "biological evolutionist" ideas in the *Zhuangzi* text; and second, a fierce critique of the social value of this thought.

3.1. Excavating the "Theory of Biological Evolution" in the Zhuangzi

In his 1917 article "*The Theory of Evolution among the Pre-Qin Philosophers*" and his later book *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Hu Shi explicitly proposed the thesis of "the theory of biological evolution in Zhuangzi's time" [1]. He believed that the starting point of Zhuangzi's philosophy was "a problem of the transformation of all things" [4, p.190]. He quoted passages from the "Autumn Floods" (*Qiu Shui*) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, such as "The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash-with every movement they alter, with every moment they shift. What to do? What not to do? The truth is that they will transform of themselves," pointing out that the two characters for "self-transformation" (*zihua*) were the central tenet of Zhuangzi's theory of biological evolution [8]. Hu Shi further cited the "Parables" (*Yuyan*) chapter: "All things are seeds, which pass into different forms. The beginning and end are like a circle, whose principle cannot be grasped. This is called the Equality of Heaven." He argued that these eleven characters "are in fact a 'Descent of Species'" [4, p.193], summarizing the process of all things originating from a common source and gradually evolving into different species.

Particularly noteworthy is Hu Shi's interpretation of a complex description of species transformation in the "Perfect Joy" (*Zhile*) chapter: "Seeds have germs. When they get water they become filaments... The qingning produces the cheng, the cheng produces the horse, the horse produces man. Man in turn enters the germinal stage." Hu Shi interpreted this passage as a "Descent of Man." He believed that

Zhuangzi "arranged all living things into a genealogy, evolving step by step from the lowest microorganisms to the highest being, man" [8], an argument strikingly similar to modern theories of biological evolution. Hu Shi's "discovery" attracted widespread attention at the time. Liang Qichao praised it as "truly a marvelous interpretation" [9]; and Liu Wendian also believed that Zhuangzi could not have made such statements without careful observation [10]. This interpretive path connected ancient Daoist thought with modern scientific theory, greatly elevating the status of Zhuangzi's thought in modern intellectual circles.

3.2. Critiquing Zhuangzi's "Passive Evolutionism" and Its Social Value

Although Hu Shi discovered elements in Zhuangzi's thought that corresponded with evolutionism, he held a severely critical attitude toward the social value orientation of Zhuangzi's evolutionary ideas. He argued that Zhuangzi's evolutionism was a "completely passive, natural theory of biological evolution" [4, p.197]. Hu Shi distinguished between two ways of "adapting" to the environment: one is "active adaptation" [4, p.197], such as humans creating tools to conquer nature; the other is "passive adaptation" [4, p.197], such as fish being able to swim and birds being able to fly. He criticized Zhuangzi's evolutionism for "only recognizing passive adaptation, while ignoring the more important active adaptation" [4, p.197].

In Hu Shi's view, Zhuangzi's "passive evolutionism" stemmed from his "treating evolution as a godless fate" [1], which gave rise to "a way of thinking that relies on heaven, resigns to fate, clings to the old, and is world-weary" [8]. Concepts in Zhuangzi's philosophy like "be at ease with the time and submit to the circumstances" and "follow the principles of Heaven and accord with what is inherent" were, in Hu Shi's eyes, a form of negative fatalism. This philosophy of life, Hu Shi asserted, "at its worst, can cultivate shameless sycophants who flatter and curry favor; at its best, it will also produce useless people who are indifferent to social suffering, unconcerned with the people's hardships, content with their lot, and let things take their natural course" [4, p.206]. Therefore, he bluntly pointed out that Zhuangzi's doctrines "are truly a great obstacle to social progress and academic advancement" [4, p.207].

This critique is closely related to the historical context in which Hu Shi lived. Faced with "changes unseen in three thousand years," the harsh law of "survival of the fittest" in social Darwinism made Hu Shi and a generation of intellectuals feel a deep sense of urgency for national salvation [10]. They saw the passive and world-renouncing elements in Zhuangzi's thought as the root of "inertia" and "unwillingness to advance" in the national character and fiercely attacked them. This practice of using social Darwinism as a weapon to re-evaluate traditional thought had significant enlightening significance at the time.

3.3. "A Young Man's Absurd Argument": Hu Shi's Self-Correction

It is worth noting that in his later years, Hu Shi deeply reflected on and self-critiqued his early interpretation of Zhuangzi through the lens of evolutionism. In 1958, when *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* was republished in Taipei under the new title *A History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy*, Hu Shi admitted in the "Author's Note" that the chapter on "the theory of biological evolution in Zhuangzi's time" was "the weakest chapter in the entire book" [11], and that the materials used and conclusions drawn "were all highly problematic" [11]. He pointed out that Zhuangzi's statement, "The beginning and end are like a circle, whose principle cannot be grasped," merely described a theory of cyclical change, which he had mistakenly taken for a theory of biological evolution. He mockingly called this "truly a young man's absurd argument, truly a disgrace to that immortal great work, *The Origin of Species*" [1].

Hu Shi's self-correction reflects the truth-seeking spirit of a rigorous scholar. It also illustrates that the method of analogizing ancient Chinese thought with Western concepts, while contributing to opening new perspectives, is highly susceptible to the pitfall of forced comparisons. Later scholars

pointed out that Hu Shi's use of the eleven characters "All things are seeds, which pass into different forms" to govern the entire philosophical system of Zhuangzi constituted a vicious "hermeneutic circle" [11], ignoring the more profound and rich connotations of Zhuangzi's thought. Yao Dechang also argued that viewing the idea of the transformation of things in the *Zhuangzi* as a theory of biological evolution was an inappropriate analogy; it was merely a "theory of cyclical transformation" explaining the origins of plants, animals, and humans [12]. Hu Shi's self-reflection provides a valuable lesson for later generations on how to conduct comparative studies of Chinese and Western thought more cautiously.

4. ZHUANGZI FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF EXPERIMENTALISM AND COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Hu Shi's study of Zhuangzi not only employed evolutionism but was also permeated by the philosophy of experimentalism (or pragmatism) that he espoused throughout his life. At the same time, he adeptly used the method of comparative philosophy, juxtaposing Zhuangzi with other Chinese and foreign thinkers to position and evaluate Zhuangzi's thought within a broader perspective.

4.1. The Critical Edge of Experimentalism: Zhuangzi's Philosophy of Life

Deeply influenced by his mentor John Dewey's experimentalist philosophy, Hu Shi emphasized the utility and practicality of thought, advocating to "study more problems, talk less about 'isms'" [7]. He believed that the value of philosophy lay in its ability to provide "fundamental methods" for solving real-world problems. It was from this experimentalist standpoint that Hu Shi launched his most vehement critique of Zhuangzi's philosophy of life.

Hu Shi summarized Zhuangzi's philosophy of life as "broad-mindedness" (*daguanzhuyi*) [4, p.204]. He argued that Zhuangzi was "broad-minded about everything"-right and wrong, good and evil, gain and loss, life and death-and that the root of this attitude was his view of "all transformations as the operation of the Way of Heaven" [4, p.204], and his perception of the Way of Heaven as "too mysterious and inconceivable" [4, p.204]. This attitude of "not condemning right and wrong," in Hu Shi's view, would inevitably lead to "extreme conservatism" [4, p.204]. For if all distinctions are rendered useless, then reform, innovation, and revolution lose their reason for existence. Hu Shi sharply pointed out that Zhuangzi's doctrines "are truly a great obstacle to social progress and academic advancement" [4, p.207].

Chen Duxiu, a contemporary leader of the New Culture Movement, held a similar view. He believed that the root cause of China's weakness lay in the "lazy, indulgent, and lawless free-thinking" of its people, the ideological source of which was "the nihilistic thought and laissez-faireism of Laozi and Zhuangzi" [1]. The critiques of Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu represented the mainstream tendency among intellectuals of the May Fourth period to re-evaluate traditional thought. They aspired to build a new culture that was proactive and courageous in transforming reality, while the nihilistic, reclusive, and fatalistic aspects of Zhuangzi's philosophy were seen as a "soporific" incompatible with this goal [1].

However, this critique was not without its detractors. Feng Youlan, in his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, gave high praise to Zhuangzi's philosophy of life. He argued that Zhuangzi pursued a state of "absolute happiness" and "absolute freedom" that transcended the finite and united with the Dao [5]. Achieving the realm of "all things are one with me" through cultivation practices like "fasting of the mind" (*xinzhai*) and "sitting in oblivion" (*zuowang*) was, in Feng's view, a sublime life ideal, not passive escapism. The polarized evaluations of Zhuangzi's philosophy of life by Hu and Feng profoundly reflect the fundamental differences in their respective philosophical positions and value orientations [3].

4.2. A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Thought: Zhuangzi and Spinoza

Hu Shi not only used Western theoretical tools to analyze Zhuangzi but also attempted to compare Zhuangzi with Western philosophers to understand his thought in a broader civilizational dialogue. Among these, his comparison of Zhuangzi and Spinoza is particularly noteworthy.

In a 1932 article titled "*Spinoza and Zhuangzi*," written to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Spinoza's birth, Hu Shi pointed out significant similarities in their philosophical thought^[13]. First, he believed both adhered to "Pantheism." Zhuangzi's "Dao" and Spinoza's "God" (or "substance") are both omnipresent. Hu Shi cited examples from the "Knowledge Wandered North" (*Zhi Bei You*) chapter of the Zhuangzi, such as the Dao being "in the ant" and "in the piss and shit," to corroborate Spinoza's view of "God, or Nature" (*Deus sive Natura*), arguing that both saw the ultimate reality of the universe as immanent in all things, rather than as a personified ruler^[13]. Second, Hu Shi argued that both held a "determinist" view. Zhuangzi's concepts of "be at ease with the time and submit to the circumstances" and "ride the transformations and await the end" were, in Hu Shi's view, remarkably similar to Spinoza's idea that all things in the universe follow necessary causal laws^[13]. However, Marián Gálík points out in his research that Hu Shi's argument here is not sufficiently developed and fails to deeply reveal the internal logic and differences between their determinist thoughts^[13].

In comparing their differences, Hu Shi believed the most fundamental distinction lay in "logic." Zhuangzi "does not condemn right and wrong," believing that "the 'is' is also infinite, and the 'is not' is also infinite," ultimately leading to a form of relativism, or even skepticism^[13]. Spinoza, on the other hand, firmly believed in "mathematical logic" as the absolutely reliable path to judge right and wrong, good and evil. Hu Shi used the story of Spinoza taking his sister to court over an inheritance dispute to illustrate that Spinoza was not indifferent to worldly justice but sought to clarify it through rational means^[13].

Hu Shi's comparison of Zhuangzi and Spinoza is a typical case of the "interpreting China through the West" trend in modern times. Niu Chunyu points out in his article that this type of comparison broke with the traditional attitudes of "Chinese learning as substance, Western learning as function" and "Western learning originated in China," presenting a characteristic of "parallel analysis" that promoted the effective integration of Chinese and Western cultures^[14]. However, Chen Xiangming also reminds us that such comparisons were often accompanied by "misunderstandings" and "mis-selections" of Western philosophy. For example, when modern scholars discussed "freedom," they often overlooked the rationalist tradition behind it^[5]. Although Hu Shi's comparison opened up new research directions, the depth of his understanding and the accuracy of his interpretation of both philosophers' thoughts remain open to further discussion.

5. THE BORROWING AND TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF "WUWEI"

Hu Shi's interest in Daoist thought was not limited to purely philosophical speculation; he was more committed to excavating intellectual resources from Daoism, particularly the political philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, that could be used by modern China. Among these, the concept of "governing through non-action" (*wuwei er zhi*) became a core idea that he repeatedly elaborated on and borrowed, combining it with his advocated liberal political ideals to form a unique modern interpretation.

5.1. "Wuwei" as a "Revolutionary Philosophy"

In *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Hu Shi portrayed Laozi as a "revolutionary," calling his doctrine of "non-action" (*wuwei*) a "revolutionary political philosophy"^[4, p.44]. He argued that Laozi's advocacy of "non-action" was a fierce reaction against the dark political reality of the late

Spring and Autumn period, where "the government was unfit to act, yet insisted on acting; unfit to interfere, yet insisted on interfering" [4, p.44]. In Hu Shi's view, Laozi's statement, "I take no action and the people are transformed of themselves; I prefer stillness and the people are rectified of themselves," was a form of extreme laissez-faireism aimed at opposing excessive government intervention in people's lives. This interpretation of "non-action" as a revolutionary idea for resisting despotism and striving for individual freedom had a distinct enlightening significance at the time.

Hu Shi's view of Zhuangzi's political thought followed the same line. He cited Yan Fu's opinion that the main theme of the "Fit for Emperors and Kings" (*Ying Di Wang*) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* was that "governing a state should allow the people freedom and self-transformation" [6]. He interpreted Zhuangzi's concept of "letting be" (*zaiyou*) as "to let the people have absolute freedom" [5] and believed that Zhuangzi embodied both "extreme naturalism" and "absolute liberalism" [5]. Although Hu Shi criticized Zhuangzi's broad-mindedness for leading to passive conservatism, on the level of political philosophy, he affirmed the liberal and anarchist tendencies inherent in Zhuangzi's thought.

5.2. From "Not Talking Politics" to Advocating "Wuwei Politics"

In his early years, Hu Shi had declared he would "not talk politics for twenty years," but faced with the increasingly severe national crisis of the 1930s, he ultimately could not remain aloof. Interestingly, when he re-engaged in political discussions, the Daoist idea of "non-action" became his important theoretical weapon. Between 1933 and 1934, in response to the calls for "despotism" and "centralization" by figures like Jiang Tingfu, Hu Shi published a series of articles in the *Independent Review*, such as "From Rural Relief to the Politics of Non-Action" and "A Further Discussion on the Politics of Non-Action," in which he explicitly proposed the concept of "wuwei politics" [9].

Hu Shi's "wuwei politics" was not simply equivalent to doing nothing. He emphasized: "I do not oppose action, but I oppose blind action; I approve of construction, but I oppose construction that harms the people. Blind construction is worse than the rest of non-action" [9]. He believed that in the China of his time, the "opportune moment for action" had not yet arrived, and the government's primary task was to "let the people rest and recuperate," reduce the number of officials and soldiers, lighten tax burdens, and decrease intervention in the economy [9]. Specific construction plans, he argued, should be left to experts and scholars in various fields to research and plan. This model of "expert planning, government non-action" was in fact a manifestation of his liberal and elitist thought, with "non-action" serving as the theoretical cloak for limiting government power and ensuring the free development of society and individuals.

Hu Shi's creative interpretation of the Daoist concept of "non-action" is a typical example of his modernization of traditional intellectual resources. He stripped away the regressive and passive elements of Daoist thought and transformed it into a theoretical tool serving modern liberal political ideals. This, on the one hand, demonstrates his practical concerns as an intellectual, and on the other, reflects the common mentality of modern intellectuals who, when faced with a powerful Western civilization, strove to find intellectual resources within their own tradition. However, this borrowing also carried the risk of simplifying and instrumentalizing complex historical concepts, and his proposal of "wuwei politics" failed to produce the expected impact in the political reality of the time.

6. CONCLUSION

Hu Shi's research on Zhuangzi, as an important chapter in the history of 20th-century Chinese academic thought, is complex and multi-dimensional in its significance. He acted as an enlightener, wielding the sharp tools of modern Western scholarship to conduct a drastic "re-evaluation of values" on Daoist thought, represented by Zhuangzi. The impact of his work is profound, with both merits and demerits.

On the positive side, Hu Shi's pioneering contributions are undeniable. First, methodologically, his work in *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy* established a new paradigm for studying ancient Chinese thought using Western philosophical systems and scientific methods, thereby promoting the modernization of the discipline of Chinese philosophical history. Second, in terms of intellectual excavation, he interpreted the *Zhuangzi* from new perspectives such as evolutionism and experimentalism. Despite the risk of forced analogy, this undoubtedly injected new vitality into traditional Zhuangzi studies and opened up many previously unexplored topics, such as Zhuangzi's "theory of biological evolution" and "theory of names." Third, in the clash of ideas, he placed Zhuangzi in a comparative Sino-Western context. Through comparisons with figures like Spinoza and the modern transformation of "non-action" political philosophy, he greatly expanded the interpretive space of Zhuangzi's thought, making it a resource for participating in discussions of modernity.

However, Hu Shi's Zhuangzi studies also clearly reflect the inherent limitations of his thought. First, his strong tendency to "interpret China through the West" left a distinct mark of his era on his research. Using the social value of evolutionism and the utilitarianism of experimentalism as his yardsticks, he lacked a "sympathetic understanding" of the non-utilitarian, freedom-seeking spiritual dimensions of Zhuangzi's philosophy. His assertion that "broad-mindedness is extreme conservatism" largely obscured the richness and depth of Zhuangzi's thought. Second, although his research method claimed to be "bold hypotheses, careful verification," in practice it was often "more bold than careful". His excavation of the "theory of biological evolution" in the *Zhuangzi*, which he himself later admitted was "a young man's absurd argument," illustrates the risks of making analogies based merely on conceptual similarities without sufficient evidence. Third, his borrowing from Daoist thought was driven by strong practical and utilitarian motives. Whether critiquing Zhuangzi's philosophy of life or advocating the "*wuwei* politics" of Lao-Zhuang, his fundamental goal was to serve his practical concerns for social reform and political enlightenment, which to some extent sacrificed the objectivity and purity of academic research.

In summary, Hu Shi's Zhuangzi studies represent an academic legacy full of internal tensions. It is both the harbinger of a paradigm revolution and a battlefield of ideological confrontation. It possesses the passion of enlightenment as well as methodological crudeness; the courage to break new ground as well as the bias of preconceived values. Future research could be deepened in several areas: First, by placing Hu Shi's Zhuangzi research in the broader context of Republican-era academic history, examining his interactions and debates with other scholars like Liang Qichao, Feng Youlan, Zhang Taiyan, and Liu Wendian to present a more complete academic picture. Second, by deeply analyzing the internal evolution of Hu Shi's thought, particularly the intellectual turn and mental journey from his early fierce critique of Zhuangzi's thought to his later borrowing of the political wisdom of Daoist "non-action." Third, by re-examining Hu Shi's "interpreting China through the West" research method with reference to contemporary hermeneutic theories, to explore its successes and failures in cross-cultural understanding and classical interpretation, providing a historical mirror for today's deep dialogue between Chinese and Western thought.

Hu Shi once said that the purpose of reorganizing the national heritage was to "capture demons" and "fight ghosts," but also to "recreate civilization". His study of Zhuangzi is a vivid embodiment of this complex mentality. Today, when we re-examine this case, it is not just to "restore the true face of Hu Shi," but more importantly, to inherit his academic courage of "doing what one knows to be impossible" through reflection and critique, and to continue exploring the value and potential of traditional Chinese thought in the modern world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is supported by Anhui Province Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Young Scholars Project : "A Study of Modern Anhui Scholars' Interpretations of Zhuangzi from a Western Perspective" (AHSKQ2022D193).

REFERENCES

- [1] LiBaohong. Hu Shi and Zhuangzi Studies[J].Anhui Historiography, 2004,(05):92-96.
- [2] Liu Jiyao.Hu Shi's Experimentalism and His Philosophy of History[J]. Bulletin of Historical Research, Taiwan Normal University, 2009,(41):191-232.
- [3] ZhouXiangyun. A Comparison of Feng Youlan's and Hu Shi's Views on Zhuangzi-From the Perspective of A History of Chinese Philosophy and An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy[J]. Popular Literature and Art, 2021,(24):150-151.
- [4] HuShi.An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy (and one other work)[M]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Press, 2001.
- [5] ChenXiangming.The Discovery and Interpretation of Zhuangzi's'Concept of Freedom'-Two Approaches to Modern Interpretation of Zhuangzi and Their Reflections[J]. Thought and Culture, 2019,(02):156-174.
- [6] LuoXianlong. The Changes in Modern Interpretive Models of Zhuangzi's Thought[J]. Journal of Chifeng University (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition), 2014,35(01):73-75.
- [7] ChenQitai.The New Paradigm of Hu Shi's An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy[J]. Collected Papers of Historical Science, 2005,(03):26-34.
- [8] LiChenggui. The Evolutionary Dimension in the Interpretation of Pre-Qin Confucian and Daoist Thought-Hu Shi's Excavation, Reflection, and Commentary[J]. Jinan Journal (Philosophy & Social Sciences),2013,35(03):2-7+169.
- [9] LouTingjian. Hu Shi's Modern Interpretation of Daoist Philosophy[J]. Local Culture Research, 2022,10(04):79-86.
- [10] XieTingyu. Scientific Progress and Social Evolution: Evolutionism and Zhuangzi Studies-Taking Hu Shi, Liu Wendian, and Wen Yiduo as Examples[J]. Masterpieces Review, 2019,(06):83-85.
- [11] OuyangZhesheng. Hu Shi and Daoism[J].History of Chinese Philosophy, 1997,(04):102-109+114.
- [12] YaoDechang. The Theory of Cyclical Transformation in the Book of Zhuangzi[J]. Studies in the History of Natural Sciences, 1990,(03):269-274.
- [13] GálíkMarián,Feng Yingying. Spinoza in the Eyes of Hu Shi and Carsun Chang[J]. Changjiang Academic Journal, 2015,(01):9-18.
- [14] NiuChunyu, Heng Guizhen. The New Changes in Modern Zhuangzi Studies-Based on a Sino-Western Fusion Perspective[J]. Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Technology, 2023,30(01):131-134.