

## Historical Reflection on the Modern Movement of Chinese Students' Studying in Japan

FAN Guofu<sup>[a]</sup>, \*

<sup>[a]</sup>The Central Institute for Correctional Police, Baoding, China.  
\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** the Social Science Foundation of Hebei Province (No: HB13JY002). It is one of the stage research results of "Modern Students Studying in Japan and Modern Education Research of Zhili Province (1896-1928)".

Received 1 March 2014; accepted 9 May 2014  
Published online 26 May 2014

### Abstract

Based on the dialectical materialism and historical materialism, we reflect on the vigorous movement of Chinese students' studying in Japan in the education history of modern China from four aspects. The historical contributions of Chinese students' studying in Japan should be confirmed. At the same time, we focus on the analysis of its historical limitations and shortcomings and hope that the analysis will benefit the historical research of studying abroad, the research of educational history of China in modern times, and reform and development of studying abroad in the future.

**Key words:** Modern; Chinese students' studying in Japan

Fan, G. F. (2014). Historical Reflection on the Modern Movement of Chinese Students' Studying in Japan. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 6(3), 79-82. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/4854> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4854>

In the educational history of modern China, on the one hand the vigorous movement of Chinese students' studying in Japan has played an important role in pushing forward the historical process of Chinese education modernization even social modernization; on the other hand, it also inevitably shows historical limitations and shortcomings. Through objective and seeking truth from facts' analysis and reflection on the movement of Chinese

students' studying in Japan, we can correctly understand and evaluate its historical status and influence. This research result will also be a reference for the reform and development of studying abroad in the future.

### 1. UNSCIENTIFIC GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND UNSTABLE POLICY FOR STUDYING ABROAD CAUSE EFFECT OF THE MOVEMENT UNPERFECT

The guiding principle and policy of studying abroad is important factors to determine whether the education is successful. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the guiding principle of studying abroad was "Chinese knowledge is the major, studying Western knowledge for use." The turbulent political situation, the frequent changes of regimes, and students returning home because of some political events of Japan directly affected the realization and effect of the goal of studying in Japan.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Zhili Province quickly became an important province in the northern China for sending students to study in Japan because every governor of Zhili province paid attention to students' studying in Japan and Zhili province had a series of policy about the dispatch, management, reward, punishment, appointment of these students. Especially, during 1901-1907, the famous pro-Japanese representative of Chinese modern history, Yuan Shikai was the governor of Zhili province, Japan won the Russo Japanese War, Chinese government abolished the imperial examination system, Chinese and Japanese governments had incentive to study in Japan and so on that contributed to the first climax of students' studying in Japan. Based on the success of Japanese studying the west including the success of Japanese sending students to study in the west which Yuan Shikai believed, he sent a large number of students of Zhili province to Japan. However, the guiding

principle of studying abroad was “Chinese knowledge is the major, studying Western knowledge for use” in the late Qing Dynasty, the education of studying abroad had a strong feudal color. The Qing government wanted to train generalists who could be “Chinese knowledge is the major, studying Western knowledge for use” and use the education to maintain the rule of its feudal system so the education had the nature of limitation and closure. Because of the turbulent political situation and many political events’ happening, students of studying in Japan collectively returned home constantly in the period of the Republic of China. Especially, during the war time of warlords in China, “small and large-scale battles were always happening. According to historian statistics, between 1916 and 1928, there were 140 wars. According to a historian who also counted small wars, during this period, there were 400 wars only in Sichuan Province” (Seit, 2007). In such a volatile political situation, the government of the Republic of China did not have enough time to form a scientific guiding principle and a sound, complete, stable, rational policy for studying abroad. Zhili Province also had less new policies related to the education to issue. All of these affected the development of studying abroad.

---

## **2. THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FALLING BEHIND LED TO HARD DAYS OF STUDYING IN JAPAN**

---

Falling behind will be beaten. Self-improvement can rejuvenate the country. These were main thoughts of “Xiaobanlu Protest” written by Feng Guifen, a thinker of the late Qing Dynasty, in 1861. The book was praised as “a theoretical guidance for the self-improvement movement in the late Qing dynasty”. However, China was the political instability, economic backwardness, and repeatedly bullied by foreign countries whether it was in the time of the late Qing Dynasty or the Republic of China. Because of China’s political and economic problems, not only students of studying in Japan were politically discriminated and government’s funds could not be guaranteed, but also they endured great spiritual pain caused by Japanese’ contempt. In 1896, the first batch of 13 students went to study in Japan. Among them, Han Chounan, Li Qingcheng, Wang and Zhao soon dropped out and returned home. As the Japanese scholar Sanetou Keishuu said in summing up the reason, “first, they were frequently mocked by Japanese kids because of their braids; second, they felt that Japanese food was not eaten easily and the food probably hurt their health. In the next forty years, Chinese students of studying in Japan still felt these two kinds of pain. Japanese used scornful words to call China and this problem became grievous in the Taisho Era (1912-1926). These scornful calling words hurt Chinese students. Students of studying in Japan often

protested. It cast a shadow over the history of studying abroad” (Keishuu, 1983). In addition, Sanetou Keishuu told two impressive things in his book, “The History of Chinese Studying in Japan”. These things also really let people feel the students’ hardship. “One thing was looking for a house for China students. Once I found a right place, the rent and other conditions were also settled. The other side asked a question: ‘what person will live in?’ ‘My friend, Chinese students...’ he stopped me, and said: ‘Oh, are Chinese! I’m sorry about that.’..... The other thing was to ask the sail time for a student’s returning home. At the beginning, the shipping company clerk politely answered me. When he knew I was asking for a Chinese student, his tone changed completely: ‘Oh, that’s it.....have you bought a ticket?’” (Keishuu, 1983)? The students of studying in the United States usually liked the United States. But most students of studying in Japan were anti-Japanese. This was closely related to the situation of these students in Japan. Chinese student Wang Gongbi described the situation in his book, “Sweating in Japan”. He said, “My studying in Japan likes a victim traveling in a thief nest. No matter where I go, I can find stolen goods or planning for stealing. I also like a person who is taken into an enemy place, and I see that the soup is ready for cooking people. Even I am spiritual numbness, I will still tell my home to stand against them” (Wang, 1919).

---

## **3. THE PROFESSIONAL CHOICES BASED ON MATERIAL GAIN AND VARIOUS TENDENCIES REDUCED THE STUDYING QUALITY**

---

In China, this historical period can be called “the era of transition”. “China has stopped for thousands of years but it is in the transitional era now..... This is the road for many nationalities from death to living, from separation to reuniting, from slaveries to masters, and from poor to rich” (Liang, 1994).

During the transitional time, every Chinese who had an ideal or ambition would “use the wind to sail and cross.....learn from others’ advantages to improve our own country.” Everyone wanted to make efforts establish a new civilization which could contain the old one.

Among students of studying in Japan, many of them had ideals to save China and Chinese people. Although they had the difficult time in Japan, they still studied hard for establishing a new civilization in china. However these students had different thoughts. Hu Hanmin, a student of studying in Japan, explained the point in his memory, “At that time, students were very complicated.....their political beliefs could be mainly divided into ‘revolution’ and ‘monarchism or constitutionalism’. More students believed monarchism or constitutionalism (although

monarchism and constitutionalism had different names, they were same in fact). Some students advocated the revolution when they just arrived at Japan and vigorously advocated monarchism or constitutionalism when their graduation. Students' circles were very active but these two thousands of students were very complicated and there were various thoughts" (Hu, 1987).

The situation of students in Zhili Province liked other places of China, on the one hand, there were many students went to study in Japan constantly, on the other hand, some students were eager for quick success and they took crash courses of lower level, went to middle schools, primary schools and even studied for a few months then returning home. These kinds of professional choices based on material gain and various tendencies extensively reduced the studying quality and had negatively effects on achieving correct goals of students in the transitional era. These students of studying in Japan did not want to be "the media between the old and the new civilization when they come to Japan. They think that the easy way of becoming officials is studying abroad because the imperial examination has been abolished. So some students try to get government loans and some mortgage their property to study in Japan. At the beginning of arriving Japan, they already plan to return home. A few years later, diplomas are already in their bags and it is time to return. So they immediately return to home and show their diplomas. Relying on bachelor's degrees, they can get fame and money". If students went to study in Japan with this intention, they would have the lower quality even they were many. How could they find the key for the prosperous and strong of China, save the nation and people from the abyss of suffering, and create a new civilization in China? Only emphasizing the quality not quantity, it can effectively improve students' quality and realize the task of establishing a new civilization of combining the new and old one.

---

#### **4. THE PURPOSE OF STUDYING ABROAD IS NOT ONLY "STUDY AND FOLLOW", BUT ALSO "REDUCING THE GAP AND BUILDING ON THE TOP"**

---

"A nationality or country needs to study the strengths of other nationalities and countries and learn their advanced science and technology. We not only need to learn from foreign countries when our science and technology are behind, but also to learn from others even if our science and technology catch up with advanced world levels" (Deng, 1987).

In the modern history of China, the history of students' studying in Japan is the history of Chinese outstanding intellectuals making efforts to save the nation and people from the abyss of suffering. These students had thoughts,

"some foreign countries can better use the ability of people and topographical advantages than China. In some foreign countries, ordinary people and the emperor are understanding each other, and names and the contents match" (Xie, 1998). These students had an ambition to make China rich and its military force efficient, and determinedly went to study in Japan. They had witnessed the poverty and backwardness in China and known that those world powers were truculent and unreasonable. They understood that they had to make China rich and its military force efficient in order to avoiding ravages of these powers. For thousands of years, Japan had been Chinese students, but Japan as a country which was the most adept at studying other countries' advantages. And it eventually surpassed China. After the war of Jia Wu, China had to learn from Japan and from Japanese successful experience. However, the ultimate goal of studying in Japan was not only to train a few officials or several engineers, but also to let foreign things serve China, input the foreign civilization, and establish China's new civilization. As Hu Shi said: "Studying abroad is a big shame of our country. Studying abroad is a way for the transition. Studying abroad is not an efficient way and it wastes time and money. Studying abroad only is a temporary way. .... If we know that studying abroad is a big shame of our country, we have to think how to get rid of it. If we know that studying abroad is a way for the transition, we have to think how to construct the country after the transition. If we know that studying abroad is not an efficient way and it wastes time and money, we have to think how to solve the problem. If we know that studying abroad only is a temporary way, we have to think what a permanent solution is. To sum up, the goal of studying abroad is to input new ideas for the new civilization of China. Shallow speaking, the purpose of studying abroad is to let later students not study abroad but still get foreign knowledge. .... If we only know the benefit of studying abroad and rely on it for hundreds of years, our great country will forever be a student. The inputting civilization likes food which is not suitable for our people. If we rely on an inputting civilization, the dream of new civilization will become a false will!"

"Studying abroad likes oars of the transitional boat and students of studying abroad are oarsmen" (Bai, 1994). The purpose of studying abroad is not only "study and follow", but also "reducing the gap and building on the top". Based on the platform of studying abroad, we realize transcendence and innovation in the studying. We should constantly upgrade our politics, economy, culture, education, science and technology, improve the ability of domestic universities and research institutions, and train all kinds of talents in the most advanced fields by using our resources of education. Constructing a powerful socialist country needs these talents.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Bai, J. A. (1994). *Hu Shi's speech on education* (p.20). Beijing: People's Education Press (in Chinese).
- Bai, J. A. (1994). *Hu Shi's speech on education* (pp.19, 22, 38). Beijing: People's Education Press (in Chinese).
- Deng, X. P. (1978). An Opening Speech at the National Science Conference on March 18 (in Chinese).
- Hu, H. M. (1987). *The autobiography of Hu Hanmin* (p.14). Taipei: Biography and Literature Press (in Chinese).
- Keishuu, S. (1983). *The history of Chinese studying in Japan* (R. Q. Tan & Q. Y. Lin, Trans., pp.19-20). Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company (in Chinese).
- Keishuu, S. (1983). *The history of Chinese studying in Japan* (R. Q. Tan & Q. Y. Lin, Trans., pp.462-463). Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company (in Chinese).
- Liang, Q. C. (1994). *A political speech selection of Liang Qichao* (pp.43-44). Beijing: Xinhua Press (in Chinese).
- Seit, Z. K. (2007). *China: the revival of a world power* (W. M. Xu & K. N. Li, Trans., p.83). Beijing: International Culture Publishing Corporation (in Chinese).
- The quarterly of students studying in the United States* (3rd season). (1914). (in Chinese).
- Wang, G. B. (1919). *Sweating in Japan* (in Chinese).
- Xie, J. M. (1998). *Xiaobanlu protest* (p.198). Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Classics Publishing House (in Chinese).