

## *Original Paper*

# A Thorough Study of Ancient and Modern Fusion of Chinese and Western—On William Hung’s Position in Modern Chinese Academic History

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*Supported by: Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project of Jiangsu Universities, No. 2018SJA0505.*

Received: September 8, 2023    Accepted: September 30, 2023    Online Published: October 27, 2023  
doi:10.22158/jrph.v6n4p11    URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jrph.v6n4p11>

### **Abstract**

*William Hung is an outstanding historian and educator in modern China. The characteristics of William Hung’s history governance are noble patriotism, truth-seeking historical spirit, scientific research method and so on. William Hung’s academic activities mainly include the establishment of professional journals and the formation of an academic community dominated by teachers and students of Yenching University; Presided over the establishment of Harvard-Yenching Society “Introduction and compilation Office”, compiling series of Chinese studies introduction; Compiling the Format of Research Papers and standardizing the writing of academic papers. According to the standards of modern western universities, he set up disciplines and cultivated talents in a planned way, and vigorously carried out library construction. He spared no effort to publicize the excellent traditional Chinese culture and promote the intersection and integration of Chinese and Western cultures. He made great historical contributions to the research of modern Chinese history, higher education and academic exchanges with other countries. William Hung, connecting China and the West, has special significance and status in the process of Chinese traditional academic transformation to modern times.*

### **Keywords**

*modern academic transformation; William Hung; Academic thought*

## 1. William Hung's Academic Activities

### 1.1 Academic Origin and Academic Background

As a child, William Hung was deeply influenced by his father's Confucian ideas. The Confucian ideas of kindness and kindness went deep into his heart, and American scholar Chen Yuxian called him "Ji Shi Confucian". Later, he went to Shandong Normal Affiliated Middle School and Fuzhou Heling Yinghua Academy to receive new education. In 1915, he was sponsored by Crawford, the American director of the Academy, to study in the United States. Western education not only opened his eyes, but also trained him in empirical research methods. His profound foundation of sinology and scientific research methods made his research fruitful and his insights superior to others. The accomplishment of William Hung's empirical analysis of historical research methods is thanks to William Rockwell of Columbia University:

"Rockwell's approach to historical research requires that all references be divided into primary and secondary sources, that each be sourced and dated before it can be used, and that each piece be annotated clearly."

This empirical approach is summed up in William Hung's five W's: who, when, where, what and how. He attached great importance to the cultivation and application of historical research methods, integrated the western empirical methods of history and Chinese textual studies into research and teaching, and advocated the scientific study of history. He believed that historians must be objective and impartial before they can make value judgments on the basis of strict argumentations.

He kept close contact with the historians at home and abroad at that time. In Peiping academic circles, he was especially close to Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang. Harvard-yenching Institute stipulates that Harvard and Yenching exchange teacher and student training, and William Hung goes to Harvard as an exchange teacher to teach, so that he can know the latest trends of international Sinology research. Take Hu Shi as an example. Hong and Hu met for the first time in 1923, after Hong returned from the United States, they were introduced by Liu Tingfang in Beiping Wenhua Society. William Hung was deeply influenced by Hu Shi's idea of "sorting out the country's past". Yu Yingshi recalls:

"Although Mr. Hong studied Western history and theology in the United States, his interest soon turned to Chinese history after he returned to China. This was inseparable from the movement of "sorting out the country's history" advocated by Hu Shizhi and Gu Jiegang, and Mr. Gu had a great influence on him. Mr. Hong mentioned this to me many times before his death, and I can never be wrong."

William Hung received traditional private school education when he was a child, and has a profound foundation in traditional Chinese studies. During his eight years in the United States, William Hung received advanced modern education and mastered systematic scientific research methods. Yenching University and Harvard-Yenching Institute, a cooperative institution, provided and became a firm advocate and practitioner of modern scientific research methods after he returned to China.

### *1.2 To Set up Professional Journals and Form an Academic Community Dominated by Yenching University Teachers and Students*

“Yanjing Journal” was founded in 1927, “Yanjing Journal” is a semi-annual periodical, from 1927 to 1951, a total of 40 issues. It was also funded by the Harvard-Yenching Society, and its first issue was published even before Harvard-Yenching Society was formally established. Rong Geng, Gu Jiegang and Qi Sihe were the chief editors, and William Hung was on the editorial board of the first issue. This journal intended to “publish Chinese academic translations” as the purpose, but the actual publication of the three departments of literature, history and philosophy of Yanda mainly published the research papers of teachers and students, few translations. In addition to research papers, Yenjing Journal also publishes academic news and research trends, and the book reviews it publishes are all quite academic, not just praised works. The journal of the Historical Society of Yenching University, “Annals of Historiography”, was founded for 11 years from 1929 to 1940, with a total of 12 issues. It is not only one of the earliest professional historiography journals, but also has shown and made many academic functions and contributions in the development of historiography in the Republic of China, and has relatively important academic research value.

The above-mentioned journals mainly involve the participation of students and supplemented by the participation of teachers. Hou Renzhi recalled, “Among the teachers, there were three most influential ones: Professor William Hung (Simlian), Professor Deng Zhicheng (Wen Ru) and Professor Gu Jiegang. ... Not only that, but they also actively participate in the ‘History Society’ activities jointly organized with students and publish a high-quality Annals of Historiography.” Zhang Chunshu believed that the academic press of the Republic of China had many functions for the study of history, and concluded: “The overall result was to guide the study of Chinese history into a territory and set the foundation for the standard of modern Chinese history.” It can be seen that the journals of history in the 1920s and 1930s not only contributed to the further academic research of history, but also the emergence of associations and professional academic journals. The teachers and students of Yan University gradually formed an academic community, which provided important conditions for the trend of modernization of history.

### *1.3 Introduction and Compilation of William Hung*

On January 5, 1928, the Harvard-Yenching Society was officially established, and William Hung was keenly aware that the time was ripe for the establishment of a special organization to compile the index of Chinese ancient books. In the spring of 1930, he proposed the establishment of a “Compilation Office” at the annual meeting of the Harvard-Yenching Society, and William Hung served as the director of the Compilation Office. Under his auspices, in a short span of ten years, a total of 64 volumes and 81 volumes of Sinology were compiled by the Office.

The series involved the Thirteen Classics, the first four Histories, four kinds of pre-Qin scholars, as well as periodical indexes, which were not included in the Book of Shang, totaling 64 kinds and 81 volumes. It was followed by the “General Survey Series” of the Institute of Sino-French Sinology. Although not

as large as the Harvard-Yenching Society in scale, it was a supplement to the “Introduction Series” in content, and also had its own topic selection and arrangement style, which also had a lot of influence. These two index series were not only relied on by scholars studying Chinese classics and culture and sorting out ancient books at home and abroad at that time, but were re-printed and published after the liberation and were very popular.

Hu Shi fully recognized William Hung’s contributions made in Yenching University. He wrote in the preface to the autobiography of Leiden Stu: In 1937, with the recommendation of Boxihe, William Hung won the Rulian Prize for his Book of Rites, which is known as the “Nobel Prize” in the world sinology circle.

#### *1.4 To Compile “The Format of Research Papers” to Standardize the Writing of Academic Papers*

According to Zhou Liang’s recall, William Hung repeatedly emphasized in class the basic concepts of “quoting books must be faithful to the original text, quoting predecessors’ statements and materials must be noted, and tracing first-hand materials as far as possible”, requiring students to write papers in accordance with the methods taught in class, which indeed made them obtain “extremely useful training” later. These paper formats taught by William Hung, as well as the academic norms for writing papers, were embodied in a booklet titled Introduction to the Format of Research Papers. In 1938, William Hung returned from a visit to the United States and wrote a book entitled “Introduction to the Format of Research Papers”, which was distributed to the graduate students of Yan University as a reference, “or it may be regarded as the beginning of the academic circle of the Republic of China to summarize the writing standards of academic articles.” William Hung believed that since the spread of Western learning to the east, scholars in the Republic of China had been deeply influenced by the Western tide, and their writing style and format had gradually become the same. However, as for how to use classical books as evidence for textual research, they still took the name of “model ancient” and were unwilling to change their tune and practice new laws. William Hung believes that “research papers” are to express scholars’ “inventions that have created new ideas”. After the article is published, it is used for expert review and refutation, so the style of the research paper is different from the general paraphrasing and retrospection of the main article, mainly based on textual research, for the “way of discussion”, “evidence data” must be explained in detail, so as to prepare for the repetition of experts and scholars. “Research paper format” most of the French and Western methods, and the difference between Chinese and Western idioms, list items for reference. William Hung believes that a complete “research paper” needs to have 10 points, the main contents are as follows: “abstract”, “preface”, “outline”, “thesis”, “notes”, “translation”, “punctuation”, “chart”, “bibliography”, “appendix” and so on. He also explains them in detail.

In terms of meaning and content, the writing styles listed by William Hung are actually quite close to the writing styles of modern academic papers. The gradual unification of the format of academic journals appears with the increasing specialization and standardization of academic research. William Hung’s

Research Paper Format not only represents personal academic knowledge, but also can be regarded as the general view of the academic circle at that time.

During his eight years in the United States, William Hung received advanced modern education and mastered systematic scientific research methods. After returning to China, he became a firm propagander and practitioner of modern scientific research methods.

## **2. William Hung and the Training of Chinese Historiography Talents**

Missionary universities occupy a place in the universities of the Republic of China. Due to their inextricable relations with Western churches, they not only communicate Chinese and Western cultures and integrate Chinese and western education, but also promote the transformation of China's higher education, the construction of China's degree system, the modern curriculum setting and the reform of teaching methods.

### *2.1 The Special Status of Missionary Universities Has Played a Role in Promoting the Exchange and Integration of Chinese Higher Education*

In 1922, through the introduction of Liu Tingfang, William Hung got acquainted with Stuart Redden and accepted the invitation of Stuart Redden to teach at Yenching University. In August 1923, William Hung became assistant professor of Church history at Yenching University, and soon after was officially promoted to Professor of History at Yenching University, as well as director of the library and provost of Yenching University. In his spare time, William Hung often led his students to buy books in Beijing old Book Market and raised funds from people from all walks of life to buy books to replenish the library's collection.

In the early days, the History Department of Yenching University had excellent teachers but relatively weak strength, but it made remarkable achievements in the cultivation of professional talents. As the head of the department, Hong decided to cultivate a group of Chinese history experts with a global vision. His requirements were specific and practical: to be clear-headed, to have an independent spirit of research, to collect and use first-hand materials to the maximum extent, to note the sources, and to abide by norms. He laid particular stress on the layout and cultivation of talents in the history of dynastyism, teaching them in quantity, inducing them in good practice, providing opportunities and casting them carefully. A group of historians born in Yan Da gradually emerged, such as Zheng Dekun (archaeology), Qi Sihe (History of Spring and Autumn and Warring States), Qu Tongzu (history of the two Han Dynasties), Zhou Liliang (history of Wei, Jin and Six Dynasties), Du Qiah (history of Tang Dynasty), Nie Chongqi (history of Song), Feng Jiasheng (history of Liao), Weng Dujian (history of Mongolia), Wang Zhonghan (history of Qing Dynasty), etc. In addition, there were Zheng Siyu (History of institutions), Zhang Tianze (History of navigation and transportation), Chen Guansheng (History of Buddhism), Zhu Shijia (History of local Chronicles), Hou Renzhi (Historical geography) and so on. They became the academic backbone of the May 4th Movement, which connected the past with the future.

## 2.2 *Planned Personnel Training*

In the Center for Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, there is a collection of archives of the Joint Board of Directors of Asian Christian Higher Education in the United States, in which two copies of Yenching University's academic plans for that year are preserved.

The first one was written on April 15, 1929, and was drafted by William Hung and submitted jointly by the then Executive director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute and the head of the Department of Philosophy of Yenching University, the American scholar L.C. Bo Chenguang. From it, we can clearly see that Yenching University's academic plans in the following five years, Will focus on the construction of materials, academic research and student training. In terms of material construction, in addition to collecting Chinese local Chronicles, series and miscellaneous books, William Hung advocates a large collection of European Sinology works, requiring that \$15,000 be spent to purchase such works. In terms of academic research, William Hung advocated pure academic research, using scientific methods to guide academic research, emphasizing the avoidance of duplication, news commentary and popular things. In academic publishing, the highest standards should be upheld. In terms of student training, William Hung requested the Society to adopt the Western degree training system and train researchers of Chinese literature, history and philosophy. He envisioned that Yenjing would train master's degrees and send excellent students to Harvard for doctoral studies. He also put forward specific requirements for American students to study Chinese culture in China.

The second document is a Proposal to Hayan Society, written by William Hung on February 10, 1940, when he was the director general of the Society in Pingping. The subtitle is "Five-year Plan for Postgraduate Education and Research in Yanjing". William Hung affirmed that the support of the Society had led to significant improvements in graduate education, research facilities and publications at Yenjing. But the basic point of the document is to ask the society to restore and expand its funding to Yenjing as the American economy gradually recovers. Going further than the first plan, Yenching hoped to win approval from the national government in this "five-year plan", with the support of the Society, for Yenching to train doctorates in seven disciplines: language, literature, art, archaeology, history, philosophy and religion. To achieve this goal, William Hung proposed 12 to 15 PhD-trained professors as mentors. He said Yenjing already has four professors and needs eight to 11 Ph.D.s to fill its faculty. "Let's make it our goal that after five years of continuous preparation, Hayan Society's activities in China will grow enough to support Yenching University to have a respected doctoral program in the field of Chinese studies," Hong said confidently. The proposal, which was later approved by the Society, made Yenching faculty "extremely excited".

During his tenure at Yenching University, William Hung introduced the advanced western university system modeled on Harvard University and promoted the development of modern higher education in China. During his tenure at the Harvard-Yenching Institute, he expanded the library materials of Harvard University and Yenching University, facilitated the exchange of student training between Yenching

University and Harvard University, and promoted the development of American Orientalism. He made great contributions to Sino-American educational history and Sino-American cultural exchanges.

### 3. Bridge and Bond of Sino-foreign Cultural Exchanges

The academic transformation of China in the 20th century was carried out against the background of the eastward spread of Western learning. Therefore, the discussion of the development and evolution of China from tradition to modern times naturally includes the exchange and interaction of Chinese and foreign cultures. Overseas Sinology was first pioneered by foreign missionaries, and much of China's modern and contemporary higher education is also run by churches. "Many studies of Sinology, which were very popular in the 1920s and 1930s, were carried out in missionary schools such as Yenching University and Furen University." In terms of communication and promoting academic exchanges between China and the West, missionary universities have unique advantages.

Throughout his life, William Hung has been striving to communicate and promote the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries through various means such as running schools, giving speeches, writing and so on. During his early years in the United States, he wrote a series of articles such as "The Losers", which mixed Confucius, Jesus and Socrates together to discuss. This was his first attempt to integrate Chinese and Western cultures. During his long tenure at Yenching University, William Hung promoted the study of Chinese studies in both China and the United States through the exchange of teachers and students, the purchase of books, and academic exchanges between Yenching and Harvard. In his later years, living in the United States, he wrote *Du Fu: The Greatest Poet of China* in English, sparing no effort to publicize the excellent Chinese culture in the Western world and increase the understanding of China in the Western world. Through the two-way transmission between cultures, he built a bridge between the two cultures to communicate with each other, understand each other and learn from each other.

#### 3.1 Promote Cultural Exchanges between China and the US

On July 15, 1917, William Hung, as one of the 14 representatives of China, attended the second General meeting of the Pacific Diplomatic Seminar in Honolulu. This conference was mainly attended by influential academic figures from various countries. It did not pass resolutions or vote, so the atmosphere was relatively relaxed. The Pacific International Relations Conference convened leaders from all aspects of the world to exchange views and bring them back to the people. William Hung highly appreciated this kind of communication to increase mutual understanding and friendship, instead of solving problems through economic and military means. Although it is a little one-sided, it also has positive significance.

In 1921, in order to increase the understanding of China and the Chinese among the American public, Hung Ye wrote a pamphlet called *Get Acquainted*. He listed the various misunderstandings Americans had about China and the Chinese, analyzed the causes of these misunderstandings, and proposed increasing mutual understanding between China and the United States to promote common

development. Finally, after explaining the shift of the world's center of gravity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and then to the Pacific, he concludes:

There are no other two nations, with greater territory, with more people, with more abundant resources, with nobler character, with nobler ideals. Divided, the problems between us will become more complicated. Together, our tasks become easier. Let's get to know each other well.

On November 1, 1945, William Hung gave a speech in the auditorium of Yenching University entitled "Sino-US Diplomatic Relations", published in 1946, Volume 1, No. 3 of *Dazhong*. William Hung gave a detailed review of the development process of China and the United States as well as the relations between them. William Hung called on everyone to "never fail to be ambitious and resolute, and the long way to go", and to strengthen China-US relations, which is the foundation for building peace and happiness in the world:

"Maybe after this year, the Sino-US diplomatic relations will start a new period. Can the two countries work together with one heart to build a world of peace and happiness? It all depends on how the people of the two countries feel about each other." "We must have many opportunities to interact with the Americans. Let us not forget that everyone has the responsibility to maintain and contribute to goodwill between our two countries. In particular, Yenching University is one of the finest examples of goodwill between China and the United States. We should not give up this important responsibility here. China-u.s. friendship is the foundation for peace and happiness in the world."

William Hung's assessment of China-US relations is undoubtedly relatively fair. Even at present, William Hung's understanding and outlook on China-US relations are not too much. I have to admire his foresight. Through speeches, writing and other means, he introduced China to the United States and the United States to China, promoting mutual understanding between the two peoples.

### 3.2 "Welcoming the Gods" and "Fighting Ghosts" —William Hung's Study of Du Poetry

In 1952, William Hung wrote *Du Fu: The Greatest Poet of China in English*, which is a landmark work in the history of Du's poetry dissemination and is now recognized as the most important work on Du Fu in the English-speaking world.

Preface to the Introduction of Du's Poems by William Hung is a systematic and comprehensive treatise on the origin and flow of Du's poems and on the commentary of the text. On the basis of abundant data and seen versions, Hong makes a detailed examination of the development process of Du's anthology to annotation, critique, and selection, as well as the relationship between the source and flow of the anthology, and makes a concise and comprehensive evaluation of dozens of annotated anthology of Du poems from Song Dynasty to Qing Dynasty.

William Hung highly respected Du Fu. He read *Du Shi Jingquan* with his father when he was young, compiled *Du Shi Ji De* in middle age, and re-annotated *Du Shi* in old age. The book selected and translated 374 Du Fu poems, using the poems to research and interpret Du Fu's life path, which is a model study of mutual evidence between literature and history. Apart from the academic significance, William Hung's study of Du Fu exudes the life philosophy meaning of "I pay attention to Du Fu and



Du Fu pays attention to me”. All his life, Du Fu was displaced from place to place, witnessed the country in ruins and the people’s livelihood in decline, but all his life, he bore the sense of responsibility of intellectuals for the country and the nation. Du Fu, in William Hung’s spiritual world, is “a confidant across time and space”.

In 1973, Mr. Hong was awarded the certificate of “Advocate of Sino-Western Cultural and Academic Exchange” by the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1955, the Institute of History and Language of Academia Sinica appointed William Hung and Yang Liansheng as corresponding researchers, in order to expand the influence of Taiwan’s academia in the world and to widely communicate the research results and latest developments of international Sinology research.

In his later years, Mr. Hong kept his Chinese and foreign books in Beijing, including many rare catalogue books such as the Transfer of the Yue Etang Library, the Bibliography of Wu Jinsheng’s Rare Books, and the Synopsis of the Siku for Continued Repair, as well as a variety of rare historical reference books, reference books and periodicals, totaling more than 4,300 titles and 24,400 volumes. All of them were presented to the Library of the Central Institute for Nationalities.

In April 2020, the BBC documentary gave Du Fu the highest praise, “China’s greatest poet seems not worthy of his influence, in Western culture and civilization, there is no comparable image of him, a person who embodies the common moral feelings of the whole nation.” This is naturally closely related to the publication and dissemination of William Hung’s Du Fu: China’s Greatest Poet in the English-speaking world.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The characteristics of William Hung’s history governance are characterized by noble patriotism, truth-seeking historical spirit, scientific research methods and so on. He set up disciplines and trained talents according to the standards of modern western universities, trained talents in a planned way, and vigorously carried out library construction. He advocated the friendship between China and the United States, spared no effort to publicize the fine traditional Chinese culture in the western world, and promoted the intersection and integration of Chinese and Western cultures. He made great historical contributions to the research of modern Chinese history, higher education and academic exchanges with other countries. William Hung, who was well acquainted with China and the West, has special significance and status in the process of Chinese traditional academic transformation to modern times, and should be understood, interpreted and positioned as he should be.

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