

Original Paper

Zhou Youguang's View of Modern Chinese Characters and its Significance

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Abstract

As one of the most famous linguists in China, Zhou Youguang made a great deal of beneficial researches to form his view of modern Chinese characters and research the modern Chinese characters teaching. Under the background of the current era, Zhou Youguang's view of modern Chinese characters is still of great significance. By thinking about his view, the future generations can gain valuable information and experience. Therefore, it is necessary for us to further study Zhou Youguang's view of modern Chinese characters.

Keywords

Zhou Youguang, modern Chinese characters, current era

1. The Forming Process of “Chinese Characters Study”

Chinese characters have a history of more than 3,000 years, starting with “Oracle Bone Inscriptions” on tortoise backs and animal bones. Chinese characters study is an ancient subject. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Zhang Taiyan formally put forward “the study of language and characters”, which mainly studied semantics, wordbook, and phonology. From that time, “Chinese characters “became an independent discipline. In 1980, Mr. Zhou Youguang published the article “The Development of Modern Chinese characters study”, which proposed the concept of “modern Chinese characters study” for the first time. Such a definition distinguished “modern Chinese characters study” from the “study of language and characters” proposed by Zhang Taiyan. In this article, he divided “Chinese characters study” into historical Chinese characters study, modern Chinese characters study and foreign Chinese characters study, clearly pointed out the purpose, object, scope, and historical development of modern

Chinese characters study. Zhou Youguang also put forward six specific problems in the research of modern Chinese character study: the study of character quantity, meaning, character, word order, character pronunciation and teaching method of Chinese characters, and a lot of research has been done on these problems. He expanded the scope of “modern Chinese characters study”, which is of great significance. In the forming process of construction and development of modern Chinese characters, Mr. Zhou made a great contribution for us.

2. Zhou Youguang’s View of Modern Chinese Characters

Zhou Youguang made a profound analysis of the current situation of modern Chinese characters, pointed out the problems of the previous Chinese character reform and put forward countermeasures. He was committed to the reform of modern Chinese characters from an international macro perspective, combining internationalization with nationalization, and finally achieving the convenience of using Chinese characters. This view showed his deep understanding of the frontier problems in the field of Chinese characters. So, his view of modern Chinese characters deserves our deep consideration.

2.1 The Using of Chinese Characters

Zhou Youguang had been devoted to the study of the convenience of characters. Zhou Youguang believed that international excellent traditional culture is worth carrying forward. While inheritance is not to completely restore the ancient ways, but to carry out innovative leap development through progressive internationalization process based on eliminating the false and preserving the true. Zhou Youguang found that although the length of time and the way of evolution of various languages were different, the rule of development from “ideogram” to “syllabic characters” was common. “The form of Chinese characters is not suitable for the requirements of the modern alphabet”, he said. “The most common Latin alphabet in the world today is an international collective creation developed by dozens of nations over the past 3,000 years. We would rather adopt it than start from scratch”. It can be seen that Zhou Youguang realized the preciousness of the Latin alphabet as a universal language. He put the absorption of international characters rules and the convenience of using Chinese characters into concrete behaviors. He advocated the study and use of modern Chinese characters and suggested appropriate use of spelling and Chinese characters mixed texts to better meet the requirements of modern reform. This kind of progressive reform proposal of international modern Chinese characters has been implemented in many links, which providing theoretical basis and more road guidance for posterity to facilitate the using of Chinese characters.

2.2 The Uniform Standard of Speech and Characters

Zhou Youguang has been doing in-depth research on the standardization of speech and characters. In order to find the theoretical basis to solve the relevant problems, he made a series of in-depth exploration and obtained rich academic achievements. Specifically, because of his affirmation of the Latin alphabet, he firstly confirmed the rationality of Chinese Latinization. On this basis, he further

proposed two principles of Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, colloquialization and latinization. In view of the rationality of the thoughts, the principles were absorbed into the “Scheme of the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet”. In 1982, the scheme was recognized by the International Standards Organization as the international standard of Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, and became an important reference for the establishment and formulation of languages by ethnic minorities in China, greatly speeding up the reform process of the spoken language communalization and uniform standard in China. In addition to the field of linguistics, Zhou Youguang further introduced the principles of economic statistics into the field of characters study, and firstly put forward the concept of “decline rate of the utility of Chinese characters” through the research method of character frequency statistics. This rule innovatively introduced new directions to the research field of Chinese characters. It is of great significance to the uniform standard of speech and characters.

2.3 Clear Aim of Modern Chinese Characters

Zhou Youguang had a clear aim of modern Chinese characters and was committed to promoting the systematic reform of modern Chinese characters. Zhou Youguang believed that “the problems and methods of modern Chinese characters study are very different from historical Chinese characters study. It is based on linguistics and combines statistics, psychology, pedagogy, and other edge disciplines. Thus, he defined the basic attributes of the subject, and enriched the system of modern Chinese characters study.

His effort to establish a modern Chinese characters system is also the concrete embodiment of his literati feelings. He did not see his view of modern Chinese characters as a profit-making tool. He has been devoted to promoting the establishment of modern Chinese characters study, proposing the establishment of modern Chinese characters study to the relevant government departments and academic circles, and advocating that the discipline serve the social reality. His ideas are worth learning.

3. The Significance of Zhou Youguang’s View of Modern Chinese Characters

Zhou Youguang’s view of modern Chinese characters is of great significance for us. We should find the intrinsic value in the process of forming the view of modern Chinese characters. This is beneficial for our future research and study.

3.1 Researching from Various Perspectives

Zhou Youguang believed that the development of culture and characters must be inseparable from the study of history. It can be seen that he studied the problem from a unique perspective of history and tried to find the reform mode of Chinese characters from history. In order to make clear the objective rule of language evolution and determine the correct direction of the view of modern Chinese characters, Zhou Youguang carefully collected more than 40 common, rare, or disappeared languages in China and its neighboring countries. At the same time, it also systematically combed the evolution

rule of various Chinese characters at home and abroad. These explorations eventually established the modern view of Chinese characters.

Zhou Youguang's method of studying the problem deeply from the perspective of history has important reference significance for our future research. In the long historical development process, no culture can be achieved overnight, so is the modernization reform of Chinese characters. Therefore, even in today's age of information explosion, it is still necessary to study a series of problems from a historical perspective, which helps to analyze the problems vertically and give corresponding solutions.

3.2 The Meaning of Multicultural Integration

Zhou Youguang had a deep understanding of multicultural research, which is also an important part of his view of Chinese characters. Zhou Youguang believed that many good ideas in China have not been introduced. So, he advocated strengthening the absorption of foreign excellent culture and advanced ideas, and thus improving the absorption degree of foreign advanced ideas by domestic professionals. A series of butterfly effects caused by this will form a virtuous circle in the academic field to some extent, and the establishment of a multi-cultural model will be conducive to promoting the benign interaction between domestic and foreign cultures. Zhou Youguang also believed that the internationalization of cultural exchange should be organically combined with nationalization. The overall international excellent culture is created by mankind and is the crystallization of the common spiritual wealth of mankind. Chinese cultural heritage contains the unique spiritual values of the Chinese nation, embodies the vitality and creativity of the Chinese nation, and is also the treasure of human civilization. Therefore, Chinese excellent traditional culture should be an important part of international excellent culture. Integrating nationalization into internationalization is beneficial to the construction of modern Chinese character view. Zhou Youguang's affirmation of western advanced culture and domestic excellent culture, as well as the initiative of organic integration of the two, still has important reference value even in this age of information explosion.

3.3 Thinking Realistically and Working Seriously

The process of exploring the view of modern Chinese characters is very difficult and worth learning. Zhou Youguang's view of modern Chinese characters is inseparable from his combination of reality and serious work. Taking the formulation of Scheme of the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet as an example, he not only opposed Lao Naixuan and Qu Qiubai's attitude towards the view of modern Chinese characters, but also respected the people's realistic demand from "the uniformity of written "to" spoken language nationwide". From the announcement of phonetic alphabet in February 1958 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1980, a total of 1,667 schemes were submitted. More than 3,300 "characters" schemes have been created by the masses. Zhou Youguang carefully studied all the above schemes, the pragmatic attitude that was extremely rare at that special time. Therefore, it can be seen that he had a correct judgment of the public opinion at that time, and gave a correct and positive reply, so that modern Chinese characters can develop so quickly. Therefore, no matter what we research or study in

the future, we should think about its actual situation and work seriously in the process of combining the reality. Only in this way can we better achieve the goals that we want.

4. Conclusion

Zhou Youguang's view of modern Chinese characters has a far-reaching influence, among which it is of great significance to take the Latin alphabet as the alphabet of Scheme of the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, which lays a foundation for the further reform of modern Chinese characters. We should pay special attention to the organic combination of internationalization and nationalization, and promote the benign interaction of domestic and foreign cultures. We should not only study the reform view of modern Chinese characters, but also study the formation process of the reform view. Zhou Youguang overcame all difficulties to explore the reform of Chinese characters and worked seriously in the process of combining the reality, which also has a significant enlighten effect on the development of our present society.

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