

Sinologist Liu Ts'un-yan's Research on Taoist Culture and the Taoist Studies in Australia

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Abstract: This paper mainly reviews Liu Ts'un-yan's academic research, especially on Chinese Taoist studies, and combines the macro historical background of Australian sinology studies in the 20th century with his academic achievements. By analysing Liu's views and thoughts on Taoist history, culture and spirit, the paper explores the features of early Taoist studies in Australia. It finds that Liu started and led the research on Taoist studies in Australia, trained and influenced several well-known foreign scholars on Chinese studies, and became an important Chinese Australian scholar in the field and history of sinology research in the world in the 20th century.

1. Introduction

Liu Ts'un-yan (or Liu Cunren in Chinese *pinyin*) (1917-2009), a Chinese Australian scholar, was a professor of Chinese at the Australian National University. He has an in-depth study of ancient Chinese culture, such as literature, history, philosophy and so on. His research fields focus on the history of Taoism, novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties and Chinese ancient classical books, and his academic achievements enjoy a high position in the international sinology fields.

As for Liu's research and views on Taoism, there are some limited researches, such as on the knowledge of tuberculosis among Taoist priests in twelfth Century (Chen 1984), on Liu's general academic contribution (Penny 2006; Li 2011), and on the Taoist master Qiu Chuji and the *Quanzhen* (Complete Perfection) sect (Zuo 2004), etc. However, those researches mainly discussed about limited topics and have not deeply excavated Liu's unique views on Taoist history and related Taoist culture. Therefore, this paper introduces the life, education background, teaching career, academic association and achievements of Liu Ts'un-yan, especially focusing on the features of his Taoist studies. It combines the macro research background of Australian sinology studies in the 20th century with Prof. Liu's research, and generally discusses his research on Taoist culture by analysing his views and thoughts on Taoist history, culture and spirit.

2. Liu Ts'un-yan's Early Life, Education, and Teaching Career

Liu Ts'un-yan was born in Beijing in 1917, whose ancestral home is in Shandong province. He was weak physically when he was young for a long time, received much help from some Taoist monks, and thus made connection with Taoist medical treatment and Taoist culture. (Minford 2009)

He studied his undergraduate courses from the Chinese Language Department of Peking University. While studying at Peking University, he was taught by some well-known Chinese professors, such as historian Qian Mu (1895-1990), linguist Luo Changpei (1899-1958), historian and educator Zheng Tianting (1899-1981), expert in classical literature and Dunhuang culture Sun Kaidi (1898-1986), and so on. After the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in 1937, he transferred to Shanghai Guanghua University and obtained a diploma (Bachelor of Arts) from Peking University two years later in 1939.

In 1946, Liu Ts'un-yan went to work in Hong Kong and successively taught at some local colleges. Later, in 1957, he received his Ph.D. degree from the University of London. While teaching in one teachers' college in Hong Kong in 1961, he was invited to teach and do research in

Australian National University in Australia in 1962. After sinologists Hans Bielenstein and Goran Malmqvist (1924-2019), he became the third Chinese professor of the Australian National University. From 1966 to 1982, he served as Chair Professor of Chinese and chairman of the Chinese Department of the Australian National University. (Zhu 2013) The 1960s and 1980s when Liu went to Australia to teach were also regarded as the “golden age (1946-1974)” and the stage of “reinventing Australia (1975-2008)” (Macintyre 2009: 200-301) in Australia’s development history, which is conducive to Liu’s academic research and development of Chinese Studies.

3. Liu Ts’un-yan’s Academic Interests and Global Interaction

The title of Liu Ts’un-yan’s Ph.D. dissertation was “The Influence of Buddhism and Taoism on Chinese Novels”, from which we can find that he focused on the study of traditional Chinese culture and its overseas influences, and Taoism or Taoist studies is one of his main concerns.

In 1974 and 1977, Liu Ts’un-yan visited China twice as a member of the visiting delegation of the Australian Academy of Sciences. In 1984, at the invitation of the Institute of World religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, he gave a series of lectures on the history of Taoism in Beijing. Since then, he has returned to China many times to attend academic conferences and deliver lectures to promote sinological exchanges at home and abroad, including several lectures given by Prof. Liu upon the invitation of Chinese Academy of Philosophy and Culture in Peking University in 1998. (Liu 2000) In 1992, he was awarded the Order of Australia (AO) medal by the Australian government, for honouring his outstanding achievements and dedicated services to the whole of Australia or mankind.

In both international and domestic academic community, Liu Ts’un-yan had academic association with several important sinologists or scholars of Chinese studies, including professor Yang Liansheng (1914-1990) at Harvard University, professor and historian Yu Yingshi (1930-2021) at Princeton University, and professor Rao Zongyi (1917-2018) at Chinese University of Hong Kong, etc. In Australia, Liu Ts’un-yan, as the head of the Chinese Department, in the 1970s, invited several scholars to work at Australian National University, among which is one of Liu’s close friends and colleagues Pierre Ryckmans.

In the UK, he made acquaintances with sinologist and professor David Hawkes (1923-2009) and kept correspondences by writing letters (now archived in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library) with Prof. D. Hawkes for quite a long time (e.g. in 1969, 1978, 1980, 1985, 1989-1999, 2002-2003) for discussing Chinese Studies, such as the Taoist eight immortals, *the Dream of Red Mansions*, etc. Later, Liu and Hawkes were both honoured as “mentors and paragons” by the journal *China Heritage Quarterly*. Besides, Liu also had a Ph. D student from England, John Minford, during 1977-1980 at Australian National University.

In China, Liu Ts’un-yan attended several important academic conferences on Taoist studies and discussed Taoist history and culture with Chinese scholars, such as philosopher Tang Yijie (1927-2014), well-known Taoist scholar Chen Guying, etc. Liu also left a picture taken in 1949 in Guangzhou with well-known Chinese professor Chen Yinke (1890-1969) in the book *Hefengtang wenji* [*Selected Papers of Hall of Harmonious Wind*] (3 volumes) (1991). All these communication and correspondences enabled Liu Ts’un-yan to acquire much information about the latest academic trends, make friends with worldwide professors, train young talents on Chinese Studies and stand on the frontier of research, which are indispensable for yielding high-quality academic research achievements, certainly including the Taoist research.

4. Liu Ts’un-yan’s Publications, Taoist Research and Academic Views

Liu Ts’un-yan published more than 10 books and dozens of academic papers in both Chinese and English. In Liu’s English monographs, he explores and discusses widely on Chinese traditional culture and literature, and their overseas dissemination. For example, in his early academic stage, he published *Buddhist and Taoist Influence on Chinese Novels* (1962), and *Chinese Popular Fiction in Two London Libraries* (1967).

The English book *Selected Papers from the Hall of Harmonious Wind* (1976) was published by E.J. Brill in Leiden, Netherlands, with the preface written by French sinologist Paul Demiéville (1894-1979). In the book, Liu assembled several important research articles and compiled them together to present his views on traditional Chinese culture, such as several research articles on *Daode jing* (*The Book of Way and Virtue*) in *Daozang* (*The Taoist Canon*), research on Chinese ancient poems, novels (e.g. *The Dream of Red Mansion*) and so on. Moreover, the English book *New Excursions from the Hall of Harmonious Wind* was published in 1984 by Brill Press with the preface authored by American sinologist Luther Carrington Goodrich (1894-1986), which was later reviewed by sinologist and Taoist researcher Judith Magee Boltz (1947-2013). (Boltz 1986)

Liu's other Chinese publications include studies on Chinese literature, e.g. *Shanggu qin han wenxue* [*Ancient Literature in Qin and Han Dynasties*] (1967/2011/2016), *Zhongguo da wenxue shi* [*History of Chinese literature*] (I and II) (2001), and a few novels, such as the only full-length novel *Dadu* [*The Big Capital*] (1996) and *Waiguo de yueliang* [*The Moon in Foreign Country*] (2002).

As for Liu's Taoist research, Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, he has made special research on the history of Taoism. The book *Taoism and the Taoist Arts - Wind Hall Collection Sequel* (1991 in English and 1999 in Chinese) collected about Liu's 20 articles, including the first passage "Taoism and the Taoist Arts". In Liu's first article in this book, it explains the differences between "Dao [the Way]" and "Shu [the method]" and elaborates on the history of pre-Qin Taoist thoughts and their developments, which integrates abundant classical Chinese thoughts and both Taoist and Confucian canons, such as *Daode jing*, *Guanzi*, *The Mencius* and *The Records of Historians*. (Liu 1999: 1-28)

Besides, the Chinese book *Daojiao shi tanyuan* [*Exploring the Origin of Taoist History*] (2000) focuses on the history of Taoism, it could be regarded as one of his most important books focusing on Taoism. The book is consisted of 11 chapters, all concerning the topics of Taoism, such as the pre-history of Taoism, Taoist polytheism, historical figure Zhang Tianshi (celestial master) in Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), figure of *taiji* (the Great Ultimate), the longevity in Taoism, Chinese Taoist medicine, and the 3 religions during Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), etc. The book is worthy to be studied thoroughly if one wants to find out Liu's complete and systematic views on Taoism.

From the above publications, we may find that most of his English papers and books were basically prior to those in Chinese. Actually, according to the preface in his book, before 1982, the year that Liu Ts'un-yan retired from Australian National University, he mainly wrote in English, and after that, he began to write "more" on Chinese. (Liu 2000: preface 1)

Liu also delivered several keynote speeches at international sinology conferences, for example, he talked about the sinological studies and the cross-cultural communication from Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to Joseph Needham (1990-1995) in 1991 at National University of Singapore, regarding history as a "mirror" that sheds light on current development. (Liu 1999: (preface) 5) In 1993 in the international conference on Chinese Studies at University of Malaya, Liu discussed about sinological studies in Malaya and emphasized that it is worthwhile to study Chinese histories and contemporary conditions and Chinese Studies has become a "notable discipline" in world today. (ibid.)

5. Comments on Liu Ts'un-yan's Research and Taoist Research in Australia

Regarding Liu Ts'un-yan academic research and its influence, he was praised as the "erudite literatus and overseas master" (Liu 2009: 170), and the scholar and sinologist with "perseverance" (Li 2011: 63). Besides, in 2006, international scholars co-worked an edited book for Liu Ts'un-yan, and the book *Daoism in history: Essays in Honor of Liu Ts'un-yan* could be taken as a great gift for Prof. Liu at the age of 90. And this edited book gained international attention after its publication, which was reviewed respectively by Canadian sinologist James A. Benn in 2006, and by sinologist and Canadian scholar James Miller in 2009.

In Hong Kong, Liu Ts'un-yan "aroused his interest in the study of Taoism by studying the history of the Ming Dynasty. In order to study Taoism, he read *Daozang* through." (Zhu 2013: (Preface) 15) In Australia, Liu Ts'un-yan strived together with his colleagues and friends in the

international community to make the Chinese Studies in Australia visible in the world, and finally “put the ANU on the world map of Chinese Studies”. (Minford 2009)

Taoist Research in Australia was “brought into Australia” by Liu Ts’un-yan. (Zhu 2013: (Preface) 15) In January 1971, the Australian National University successfully held the 28th International Sinology Conference, and the conference and the collection of papers expanded the influence of Australian sinology research. The study of Chinese culture in Australia can be divided into traditional sinology stage and Chinese Studies stage, and the Chinese Studies in Australia started late and had a relatively small impact compared with that in the United States and other countries. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Australia in 1972, Chinese Studies in Australia developed rapidly, and Chinese Studies occupied an important place in its social sciences. (Hu 2005: 1-2)

Presently, the Australian National University publishes several journals on Chinese Studies, including *The China journal*, *East Asian History*, *Asian Studies Review*, and *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*. The Chinese Studies Association of Australia is set up in Australian National University, which just held the 17th biennial conference in December 2021 with the topic “Changing China: Then and Now”. Besides, University of Melbourne, Monash University and University of Sydney in Australia all made contribution to the development of Chinese research and established their own tradition and patterns in Chinese Studies.

6. Conclusion

Taoism is an indigenous religion in China, which has had an important impact on ancient Chinese science and Technology (see Joseph Needham’s books on Chinese Science and Civilisation, 7 volumes, 1954-present), traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy. Taoist culture is one of the pillars of Chinese traditional culture. Taoism research and relevant teaching practice in Australia is a necessary link between western readers and Chinese traditional culture, which is conducive for the mutual understanding among people and the spread of local and native Chinese culture. Undoubtedly, as “the most meticulous scholar and teacher” (Minford 2009) and an “intellectual giant” (Ryckmans 2009), Liu Ts’un-yan’s research on Taoist philosophy and religion brought enlightenment for overseas sinology research and the Sino-Australian cultural exchange.

As for the limitations, this paper combs and evaluates Liu Ts’un-yan’s education, publication, research and academic views as a whole, but has not made a comparative analysis of the views of relevant scholars. In addition, we can also make an in-depth thematic and critical analysis of his research in the future. Besides, against background of the current tense Sino-Australian bilateral relationship, how the cross-border and cross-cultural research of humanities can better promote the friendly and equal exchanges between countries needs to be deeply discussed and further studied.

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