

From Statecraft to Western Learning: The Curriculum Reform of Hubei-Hunan Academy During Zhang Zhidong's Reign as Governor of Hubei

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Abstract

Hubei-Hunan Academy is an educational institution founded by Zhang Zhidong, which is the experimental field of educational reform during his tenure as governor of Hu-Guang. Its curriculum has gone through several stages, such as the statecraft of the world, the study of the current affairs, and the Chinese essence and Western utility, finally changed to a new style school. The curriculum reform of Hubei-Hunan Academy is a reflection of the powerfully changes in Zhang Zhidong's educational thoughts during his period of supervising Hubei. Due to the lack of attention to the imperial examination system and the overemphasis on generalist education in the curriculum, the talent training of the Hubei and Hunan Academy did not actually achieve the goal of "being a famous minister and being a famous scholar".

Keywords: Hubei-Hunan Academy, Zhang Zhidong, course, statecraft, Chinese essence and western utility

1. Introduction

Since the late Qing Dynasty, with the intensification of the national crisis, traditional education has been unable to meet the needs of the times. The Westernization Movement was an attempt by the Westernization Group to reform education. In the late Qing Dynasty, the reforms were marked by the promulgation and abolition of the imperial examination system, which made China's education embark on the road of modernization. Zhang Zhidong, the founder of modern Chinese education, is one of the most influential figures in the history of education in the late Qing Dynasty. Previous studies on him mostly summarized his educational ideas and practices, or focused on "Quan Xue Pian" and its influence on Gui-Mao school system.¹ In recent years, the related research has obviously decreased, and it is urgent to open up the space for current studies. Hubei-Hunan Academy is an important educational institution founded by Zhang Zhidong when he was the governor of Hu-Guang, and it is the experimental field of his educational thought, which has undergone several curriculum reforms. In-depth study of the curriculum reform of Hubei-Hunan Academy can specifically and microscopically observe the changing process of Zhang Zhidong's educational reform concept and his influence on the reform of the traditional talent training model.

2. Statecraft: The Curriculum of the Initial Stage of the Hubei-Hunan Academy

Zhang Zhidong is an educator, who made important contributions to the rectification and restoration of school

¹ A holistic study of Zhang Zhidong's educational thought and practice can be found in Su Yunfeng: Zhang Zhidong and Hubei Education Reform (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, 1960); Huang Xinxian: Zhang Zhidong and Modern Chinese Education (Fuzhou: Fujian Education Press, 1991); Cai Zhensheng: Research on Zhang Zhidong's Educational Thought (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 1994).

order in the late Qing Dynasty.¹ He is also an educational thinker, who compiled and printed “You Xuan Yu” and “Shu Mu Wen Da” in his academic career in Sichuan, and he also advocated “understanding classics and putting them into practical”.

The Hubei-Hunan Academy covers a vast area, is well-funded, has excellent teaching and living conditions. It aims to cultivate talents with the goal of ‘being a famous minister and being a famous scholar in the future’.² Although its teaching content has a certain “current affairs” color, it is still dominated by traditional practical knowledge, and generally inherits the educational concept of “You Xuan Yu”. Zhang Zhidong explains the reasons for the creation of Hubei-Hunan Academy:

To ensure the stability of the world, we must rely on talents, and the cultivation of talents must rely on knowledge. The first method for officials to educate the people and establish good customs is to promote education. Therefore, the purpose of this academy is to cultivate talented people who can utilize knowledge in practice, to serve the country, the saints and the world.³

These requirements require students to understand current affairs. Therefore, the teaching content of the new academy is no longer dominated by stereotyped writing, but the “six subjects of classics, history, Neo-Confucianism, literature, mathematics and economics. Each subject has a teacher, all students are willing to do what they want to do.”⁴

In fact, the Hubei-Hunan Academy opened only four subjects: classics, history, Confucian classics, literature, mathematics and economics, two subjects are not opened. The teachers of various courses are Yi Shunding, Liang Dingfen and so on. More than half of them are from Tien Si (a person who passed all three examinations held by the government). They not only have expertise in the old knowledge, but also are familiar with current affairs, and most of them are representatives of the reformists. He is not only an academy teacher, but also a new deal adviser to Zhang Zhidong, which provides conditions for the infiltration of “current affairs” in curriculum teaching. In 1893, during his study in the Hubei-Hunan Academy, Gan Yunpeng formulated the daily class rules, which can be roughly divided into five kinds: “one is learning, one is introspection, one is work, one is social intercourse, one is current affairs.”⁵ It can be seen that “current affairs” is an important course link in the practical teaching of Hubei-Hunan Academy, and it is also the concrete presentation of Zhang Zhidong’s practical education thought.

Mathematics and economics are not empty talk. When the Hubei-Hunan Academy was founded, Hankow tea merchants donated a lot of money, so there were forty enrollment quotas for them. Tea merchants often do not understand foreign languages and culture. When doing business, they are very easy to fall behind. Therefore, there is a request to open dialect courses and business courses. For these requests, Zhang Zhidong believes: “Mathematics is the most practical use ... foreign language, business also for today’s self-improvement need.”⁶ So he decided to open mathematics, foreign language, business school. Due to space limitations, Zhang Zhidong chose another place to establish a new school. The unopened mathematics and economics subjects of the Hubei-Hunan Academy, as well as the foreign language subjects proposed by tea merchants, have actually been moved to the new school. After the new school, it developed into Self-strengthening school, which is the predecessor of Wuhan University today. In August 1896, when Zhang Zhidong revised the charter of Self-strengthening School, he thought that “there are many Chinese books in mathematics, no need to use western knowledge”. He transferred a course of mathematics to the Hubei-Hunan Academy.⁷

The establishment of the Hubei-Hunan Academy was originally the result of Zhang Zhidong’s innovation of traditional education. In its early education, it also focused on seeking practical methods from traditional knowledge, and only innovated to a limited extent, isolating western subject from the Hubei-Hunan Academy. The students’ initial purpose was to pass the imperial examination. However, the curriculum emphasize practical application and “current affairs”, laying the foundation for future curriculum reform.

3. The Study of Current Affairs: Curriculum Reform After the Defeat of the Sino-Japanese War

After the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, saving the nation and striving for survival has become the main

¹ An Dongqiang, (2017). *Regulations of Hsüeh-cheng and the Imperial System in Qing Dynasty*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Academic Press, p. 213.

² Zhu Youxian, (1986). *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Volume 1. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, p. 392.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Yang Jinde and He Liang, (2020). *The Chronicle of Gan Yunpeng*. Beijing: Unity Press, p. 81.

⁶ Wu Jianjie, (2022). *Chronology of Zhang Zhidong Supervising in Hubei*. Wuhan: Wuhan Press, p. 65.

⁷ Ibid., p. 214.

theme of Chinese society, which was also the catalyst of education reform. Traditional education cannot bring up Westernized talents, so the Westernized academic rise. In 1896, Zhang Zhidong ordered the abolition of the Neo-Confucianism and literature of Hubei-Hunan Academy, and the establishment of geography and current affairs course. In the spring of 1897, mathematics was added, and the affairs at that time were changed to public compulsory course. ¹This year, Liang Qichao wrote a letter to Zhang Zhidong about current affairs course:

I think the classics, history, geography and mathematics are all to be learned, which is to be used by the current situation. Current affairs are the destination of all knowledge, it does not necessarily need to set up special course, but often runs through four course. Its classics, history, geography and mathematics are all supervised by daily record to reflect student learning. Current affairs should use exams to test learning outcomes.²

Zhang Zhidong adopted the above opinions, canceled the current affairs course, re-established the academic system of the Hubei-Hunan Academy, and emphasized: "The original intention of establishing the academy is to reserve talents, so the four subjects of classics, history, geography and mathematics are necessary, one subject cannot be missing." After canceling the Neo-Confucianism course, he requires students to read some Neo-Confucianism books every night.³

The curriculum of the Hunan-Hubei Academy, influenced by the post-war military education trend, also showed a trend of stylistics. Liang Dingfen, the supervisor of the academy, called on the students to sweep away the decadent atmosphere and cultivate strong talents. In August 1896, the Hubei-Hunan Academy began to set up physical education courses. Since then, the students have been to the playground every afternoon for physical training, and the practice of unarmed, equipment and other sports.⁴

Before 1895, there was no teaching activity in classroom, students going to teacher's office for some advice if there want. After 1895, the old-fashioned academy did not follow the old practice, instead, it was taught in batches in the classroom everyday. In 1896, the Western-style school division system was adopted in the Hunan-Hubei Academy. In 1897, the students were divided into eight classes, one day studying classics and history, one day studying geography and mathematics.⁵

After this change, Hunan-Hubei Academy has made a preliminary change to the traditional educational system. From the perspective of subject structure, the proportion of traditional Chinese subject has been significantly reduced due to the abolition of Neo-Confucianism, literature and other subject. Zhang Zhidong added mathematics subjects in his teaching, and hired a group of outstanding mathematics scholars such as Hua Hengfang to teach students, and intended to combine his students with Western scientific knowledge. However, western subjects did not have an advantage in the subject system, but was juxtaposed with classics and history. A geography that includes modern geography and ancient geography. Therefore, the new round of curriculum reform after the Sino-Japanese War is the expansion and deepening of Zhang Zhidong 's educational thought in modern education.

4. Chinese Essence and Western Utility: The Curriculum Reform of the Hunan-Hubei Academy After the Coup of 1898

During the Reform Movement of 1898, Zhang Zhidong published "Quan Xue Pian" in early 1898, which advocated the study of Confucian classics and history as the main, supplemented by Western learning. Under the guidance of this point, he once again promoted the reform of the academy: "According to the academy approach, strict the rules, change the curriculum, break with old customs, but to cultivate truly useful talents. Although the curriculum reform of Hunan-Hubei Academy and Jingxin Academy are "Chinese learning as the fundamental structure, western learning for practical use".⁶ But It is difficult to find many suitable teachers at once, so the former focuses on the cultivation of officials in the future, and its curriculum is set up as four subjects: classics, history and geography, which requires students to be proficient in four subjects; the latter focuses on the training of practical talents, and the selected subjects are politics, astronomy, natural science, industrial manufacturing.⁷

But the failure of Reform Movement of 1898 plunged everyone into panic. Zhang Zhidong soon strengthened his policy by asking that "there must be titles of the Four Books and the Five Classics in all exam, and there must be

¹ Luo Fuhui, (2007). *The Modern Evolution of Academic Culture in the Yangtze River Basin*. Wuhan: Wuhan Press, p. 228.

² Chen Gujia and Deng Hongbo, (1998). *Historical materials of Chinese Academy*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Education Publishing Group, p. 1966.

³ Zhu Youxian, *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Vol.1, pp. 394-395.

⁴ Chen Yincui, (1984). *Historical Materials of Hubei*, Vol.8. Wuhan: Hubei People's Press, p. 32.

⁵ Zhu Youxian, *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Vol.1, p. 394.

⁶ Chen Gujia and Deng Hongbo, *Historical Materials of Chinese Academy*, p. 2170.

⁷ Zhu Youxian, *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Vol.1, pp. 396-397.

no ridiculous titles on all current issues and students.”¹ However, the coup did not affect the “Chinese learning as the fundamental structure, western learning for practical use” education. The Empress Dowager West soon made an imperial edict: “The establishment of the academy is for real knowledge, not for methods of literary study. All astronomical, geography, art of war and mathematics are all useful subjects.”² This edict grants legal status to western subjects.

Zhang Zhidong’s reform has embarked on a rapid development path because of the recognition of the court. In 1899, Hubei-Hunan Academy re-set the new curriculum: Classics, history, astronomy, geography, mapping science, mathematics. In addition to gymnastics classes, there are military training.³ In the selection of teachers, Hubei-Hunan Academy also set up courses such as chemistry, natural history and so on. Although there are also Four Books, the Five Classics and Neo-Confucianism both in the identity of moral examination, the main subjects of the Hubei-Hunan Academy are the collection of classics, history, astronomy, geography, art of war and mathematics.⁴

Zhang Zhidong is a shrewd educational reformer. The idea of “Chinese learning as the fundamental structure, western learning for practical use” is to combine Chinese and Western cultures. Objectively, it is not only conducive to the reform of education, but also flexible and easy to implement. After the Reform Movement of 1898, Empress’s attitude towards education was just clear, and Zhang Zhidong could quickly seize this opportunity. Compared with the educational reform before 1898, the reform in 1899 paid more attention to “Chinese learning as the fundamental structure, western learning for practical use”. The proportion of western-style educational in Hubei-Hunan Academy exceeded that of traditional Chinese educational, accounting for the proportion of main reform, showing the characteristics of both physical quality and intellectual development, both natural science and humanities sciences. However, Hubei-Hunan Academy has not completely shifted to the new style. It still focuses on “Chinese style” in teaching content, does not introduce western politics and lacks social science.

5. Destroy the Old and Establish the New: The Transformation from Academy to School

After 1900, the Qing Dynasty implemented the New Deal. Zhang Zhidong’s ideas on educational reform were more proactive, and he was determined to carry out a comprehensive reform of the academy.

In 1902, Zhang Zhidong imitated the Japanese educational system and changed the Hubei-Hunan Academy to the Hubei-Hunan higher school. The curriculum included classics, Chinese and foreign history, Chinese and foreign geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry, law, economics and art of war. Morality and literature belong to classics, national chronicles belong to history, mapping science belong to geography, astronomy belong to mathematics. On this basis, a large number of foreign teachers were added in school, which laid a foundation for future teaching work.⁵ In this reform, the traditional Chinese course was further compressed, the number and scope of western learning were expanded, the western subject such as law and economics were introduced, and the Hubei-Hunan Academy was transformed into a higher school including arts, science and law. Although it exists in the name of classics, it has become a course of morality and literature, which accounts for a small proportion in school education. Western subject occupies an absolute advantage in schools.

Hubei-Hunan Academy has made great achievements in the reform of this aspect, which makes Hubei-Hunan Academy have the basic form of modern university. In 1903, the Qing government ordered Zhang Zhidong to draw up a new school charter. In the previous year, the Qing government promulgated a new education system, which caused dissatisfaction and was not successfully implemented. Zhang Zhidong’s thorough reform of Hubei-Hunan Academy provided important experience for him to preside over the formulation of new school system.

The advancement of education reform is inseparable from teachers, and teacher education is a part of new school system. Zhang Zhidong believes that “to revitalize education, we must first reserve teachers. Normal is not prosperous, why does the school flourish?”⁶ Determined to set up a normal school. In 1904, he changed Hubei-Hunan Higher School into Hubei-Hunan General Normal School to train teachers. Teachers hired by the school include: classics, literature, history, morality, education, geography, painting, calligraphy, physics, chemistry, natural science, English, arithmetic, mathematics, physical and so on. At the same time, Zhang Zhidong also widely accepted foreign teacher. The Hubei-Hunan General Normal School are no longer

¹ Zhang Zhidong, (2008). *Collected Works of Zhang Zhidong*, Vol.6. Wuhan: Wuhan Press, p. 145.

² Zhang Zhidong, *Collected Works of Zhang Zhidong*, Vol.6, p. 145.

³ Zhu Youxian, *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Vol.1, pp. 397-398.

⁴ Zhu Youxian, *Historical Materials of the Educational System in Modern China*, Vol.1, pp. 397-399.

⁵ Sun Yunfeng, *Zhang Zhidong and Hubei Education Reform*, p. 80.

⁶ Zhang Zhidong, *Collected Works of Zhang Zhidong*, Vol.6, p. 438.

old-fashioned school, but a pragmatic school that specializes in training new types of teachers.

In 1907, Zhang Zhidong left Hubei and returned to Beijing. After finishing his work in Hubei, he department and became the backbone of the Qing government. He was responsible for managing academics and died in 1909. Thereafter, due to the 1911 Revolution, the Hubei-Hunan Normal School was forced to close.

6. Summary

From the establishment of Hubei-Hunan Academy in 1890 to Zhang Zhidong's resignation in 1907, Hubei-Hunan Academy, Hubei-Hunan Higher School and Hubei-Hunan Normal School have always been his supervisors and his experimental place for educational reform. The teaching content of the academy and school was designed by him, and it has been modified several times:

Table 1. A table of curriculum changes from Hubei-Hunan Academy to school period

Time	Course			
1891	Classics	Historiography	neo-Confucianism	Literature
1895	Classics	Historiography	Geography	Current Affairs
1897	Classics	Historiography	Cartography	Mathematics
1898	Classics	Historiography	Geography	Mathematics
1899	Classics	Historiography	Geography	Mathematics
	Astronomy	Art of War	Chemistry	Natural History
1902	Classics	Chinese and Foreign Historiography	Chinese and Foreign Geography	Mathematics
	Law	Art of War	Ethics	Economics
1904	Classics	Historiography	Geography	Mathematics
	Literature	Self-examination	Physics and Chemistry	Natural History
	Painting	Calligraphy	Education	

From the perspective of the evolution of the educational system of the Hubei-Hunan Academy, the failure of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 was a watershed. It has undergone a gradual shift from Chinese style to Western style, from "Chinese learning as the fundamental structure, western learning for practical use" to "Chinese light and Western heavy", and finally from academy to modern school.

Zhang Zhidong is not only a knowledgeable traditional scholar, but also a rare reformist. He attached great importance to the academies of the Hubei-Hunan Academy, personally selected supervision and teachers, and often boasted that "my teacher's group is first-class in the country."¹ He actively recommended the students of Hubei-Hunan Academy and sent them to Japan for further study three times. The students of the Hubei-Hunan Academy are of high quality. Although they do not attach great importance to the imperial examination system, only 30% of them can be admitted to the imperial examination every year. In the last imperial examination, more than 60 students were admitted because of the change to the policy theory article. Among the students of Hubei-Hunan Academy, celebrities such as Huang Xing and Tang Caichang emerged, but "the vast majority of them participated in the educational circles, and only a few participated in the military and political circles".² In the field of education, there is also a lack of excellent talents. In terms of the effect of talent training, it is far from Zhang Zhidong's original intention of "becoming a famous official and becoming a famous scholar".

Why Hubei-Hunan Academy in personnel training is not satisfactory? On the one hand, Hubei-Hunan Academy did not pay attention to the imperial examination system, and few students entered the official career, which affected the normal development of its official career; Zhang Zhidong emphasized all-around talent in curriculum setting and reform, but at the same time, due to the increase of its subject types, the teaching of all-around talent became difficult, thus affecting the cultivation of professional talents. From this point, it can be seen that during the period of Hubei-Hunan Academy, his educational reform thought was more idealistic.

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¹ Chen Gujia and Deng Hongbo, *Historical Materials of Chinese Academy*, p. 2174.

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