

# Interpretation of Ethical Literary Criticism in Hu Shih's *The Suchness Island*

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**Abstract** This paper discusses the only full-length novel by Hu Shih, *The Suchness Island*, and its implication of literary ethics. This paper argues that Hu reveals the evils of various superstitions and idolatry practiced in the name of tradition, while addressing the necessity of overcoming superstition to enlighten the people. In this respect, *The Suchness Island* should be viewed as having literary ethical implications that triggered an awakening in society to reform many of their customs.

**Keywords** Ethical Literary Criticism; Hu Shih, vernacular Chinese novel; *Jingye Xunbao*; *The Suchness Island*; superstition; social reform

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## Introduction

If one is asked to choose one of the most pioneering intellectuals in China's modern and contemporary intellectual history, Hu Shih's (胡适, 1891-1962) name would be on the top of the list. On the border between tradition and modernity, and China and the West, Hu clearly established his academic, ideological, and cultural identity. As is well known, Hu also laid the foundation of his studies in a family of scholars from his childhood. Considering Hu's background, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868–1940) writes: “Hu was born in a family of Hu passing down their Han studies (汉学:

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Sinology) for generations, who had the gene for the studies. Although he entered the modern school at a young age, he could teach himself Han studies, and he continues to do so” (Hu 193). Because of his multi-faceted background, Hu was a rational pragmatist who based his ideas on the Western ideology and scientific methodology he had learned while studying in the United States. Hu was a progressive liberal who dreamed of the modernization and westernization of China despite its history. In this regard, a prominent Chinese scholar Ji Xianlin (季羨林, 1911-2009) says, “In the last hundred years’ history of academics, ideas, culture, literature, and even the education, Hu was the significant figure. Despite contradictions and controversy surrounding him, he is worthy of studying and should be studied” (Ibid. 1).

From these views, we can recognize that Hu was an intellectual with a broad spectrum of ideas that was brought about by his times, culture, and studies. Because of this breadth of perspectives Hu encapsulates, Hu’s works are still important and meaningful. In other words, research topics related to Hu are still open and multifaceted, and many approaches are possible because there are a variety of critical issues that need to be addressed that require additional research. In this reason, this paper focused on Hu’s early vernacular Chinese novel, *The Suchness Island* 真如岛.

Firstly, Hu focused on theories and ideological research rather than literary creation. Nevertheless, Hu advocated vernacular Chinese and created a literary work in vernacular Chinese in the early days of Chinese New Literature. *A Collection of Attempting Modern Language Poem* 尝试集 (1920) and *When a Girl Marries* 终身大事 (1919) are his representative works, the Korean academic community have taken interest in. As is well known, Hu insisted on the creation of a new literature, that is, a living literature with a living language. The creation of a new literature was the most important first step to promote new ideas and culture. However, it should be noted that before the beginning of the new literature, Hu published his novel in vernacular Chinese in his early teens. At that time, he created a total of five novels, including *The Suchness Island*, which is the subject of this paper, *East Rickshaw Puller* 东洋车夫 (1908), *Husband of love* 爱情之夫 (1908), *The Student's Hard Life* 苦学生 (1908), and *My Rickshaw and Rickshaw Puller* 我的车和我的车夫 (1919). These novels are included in *The Complete Collection of Hu Shih* 胡适全集. Although there are not many works, the value of creativity is considerable since they are his earliest literary achievements, published even before *A Collection of Attempting Modern Language Poem* and *When a Girl Marries*.

Secondly, the researcher selected *The Suchness Island* because it is necessary to understand Hu’s early vernacular Chinese novels to gain insight into his other

work. *The Suchness Island* is his serial novel in *Jingye Xunbao* 竞业旬报 published by the Jingye Society 竞业学会 while he was attending Chinese public school 中国公学 in Shanghai. Unlike his other vernacular Chinese novels released in *Jingye Xunbao* at the time, *The Suchness Island* is a long-form novel, which consists of 11 chapters. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to Hu's problem of consciousness that appears in *The Suchness Island* as it allows us to understand the changes in Hu's ethical concepts.

Thirdly, previous Hu studies have mainly focused on individualism, liberalism, and vernacular literary theory. However, this tendency shows the narrowness of research topics regarding Hu. To broaden the scope of research to fully understand the depth of Hu's cultural beliefs, it is also necessary to delve into the text. As mentioned above, the activities related to *Jingye Xunbao* in his early years provide important clues to understand the source of Hu's thought. However, there is not a single research paper in the Korean academy that professionally discusses Hu's early activities and his vernacular Chinese novels. Hu tried to modernize China by dismantling feudalist ideas and breaking traditional superstitions through a critical perspective and the scientific method. During this time of transition between tradition and modernization, it is no exaggeration to say that Hu's move was a literary ethical and daring attempt to sway society to his beliefs.

Thus, with these things in mind, this paper intends to become an entry point for analysis and research on *The Suchness Island*. By interpreting Hu's historical context and his activities during his attendance in Chinese public school and *Jingye Xunbao*, this paper seeks to allow other researchers access to a broader understanding of the Chinese author. Second, under the premise of the above, this paper highlights Hu's thoughts about *The Suchness Island* to discover the implications of the literary ethics.

### **A Stage of Literary Experimentation: Hu Shih and *Jingye Xunbao***

In discussing Hu's ideological background and career, the most frequently mentioned element is the pragmatic philosophy of his teacher John Dewey (1859-1952). However, beyond his American education, we should pay attention to the activities of the Jingye Society, which Hu participated in his early days. While the former supported to build the theoretical basis for the development of Hu's thought, the latter influenced the empirical basis for the formation of his thought. In this regard, Hu once said, "The editorial work in *Jingye Xunbao* made it possible to use the current spoken language as a means of creative writing. Through using clear language and reasonable order, I could construct thought in accordance with

formalities even at a young age” (Hu 1). He once said that the activities at the Jingye Society were the starting point of his thought and showed him the direction he should go (Hu 75). As such, through Hu’s own recollection, it can be proved that the activities at Jingye Society had a great influence on young Hu’s life and thoughts. In short, on account of his early experiences and a solid theoretical foundation set by his teacher John Dewey, Hu had an ideological direction for his thoughts.

It is necessary to look into the characteristics of the Jingye Society in order to see exactly how it influence the young Hu. The society was a revolutionary organization founded by Chinese public school students. Such a revolutionary organization was formed because of the enthusiasm of its members for national salvation. To understand this background, we must examine how it developed within the context of the Chinese public school. Chinese public school was the first private school in China established by Chinese students in 1906 who had been living in Japan. It was a different institution in that it was an international and nationwide school that represented students from 13 provinces.

What is noteworthy is the reason for these Chinese students who had been residing in Japan to return home and establish the Chinese public school. Chinese students in general at the time played an important role in delivering Western studies and culture to China through their studies in Japan. However, amid the anti-Qing movement, the Qing government felt threatened by the political activities of international students. At the request of the Qing, the Japanese government-imposed restrictions on the behavior of Chinese students through regulation on November 2, 1905. Various protests were staged: students boycotted classes, experienced temporary expulsion, and some students returned to China. In fact, about 2,000 students returned to China immediately following the imposition of regulation of Chinese student behavior. International students, who no longer saw Chinese government support, raised money and established the Chinese public school. Moreover, some more progressive students organized the Jingye Society within the school.

The Jingye Society began under the radical slogans of revolution to eradicate the various ills they believed were deeply rooted in society at the time (Ma 210). The main activity of the Jingye Society was publishing a magazine in vernacular Chinese, and thus *Jingye Xunbao* was created. Its first issue appeared in Shanghai on October 28, 1906, and the magazine was headed by Fu Xiongxiang 傅熊湘 (1882-1930), Zhang Danqin 张丹斧 (1868-1937), Wu Tieqiu 吴铁秋 (1875-1963), and Hu. Hu also served as a chief editor of *Jingye Xunbao* from the 24th to 40th issue (~1909.1.22). Xie Qiaozhuang 谢谏庄, Ding Honghai 丁洪海, Liu Fuji 刘复基

(1885-1911), and Jiang Yiwu 蒋翊武 (1884-1913) also served as editors. The first chief editor, Fu Xiongxiang, established four goals for the publication: “Promoting education, advocating the will of the people, improving society, and insisting on autonomy” (Hu 69). These were the main functions of *Jingye Xunbao*. Thus, the magazine includes not only editorials, but also academic texts on geography, natural science, biographies, military; novels; translations; discourse collections 谈话集; miscellaneous songs 杂俎; ballads 歌谣; and other types of writings. In short, the emergence of *Jingye Xunbao* allowed the spread of new knowledge and revolutionary ideas to everyone regardless of age or class.

Hu became a member of the Jingye Society on the recommendation of the former president of the group, Zhong Wenhui 钟文恢, but Hu did not participate in actual revolutionary movements and activities. Instead, he concentrated on the editing and publication aspects of *Jingye Xunbao* (Hu 67). Hu published an article titled *Geography* under the pen name of Qizishengsheng 期自胜生 for the first issue of *Jingye Xunbao* (June 11, 1909). At that time, Hu published more than 40 articles under various pen names such as Tie'er 铁儿, Shih Zhi 适之, and Xing 驛. *Geography* is instructive because it is Hu's first literary text, and it reveals Hu's passionate aspiration for Western learning. After the publication of *Geography*, Hu speeded up his output in vernacular Chinese, showing the breadth of his talent by publishing articles in various formats including editorials, columns, biographies, and discourses. Despite Hu's extraordinary passion for editing, publishing, and writing, *Jingye Xunbao's* publication came to an end with its 41st issue on February 1, 1909. However, this turned out to be an opportune event in that it allowed Hu to freely express his thoughts and ideas since he was no longer bound by the topics that *Jingye Xunbao* covered. Yet, those very same topics laid the foundation for Hu to grow as an original thinker. Therefore, *Jingye Xunbao's* influence on Hu was significant.

In most of his articles in *Jingye Xunbao*, Hu revealed an atheistic stance on modernity because he criticized pre-modern culture—especially religion and superstition—prevalent in Chinese society. In fact, as is implied in *The Suchness Island*, Hu completely denied the existence of gods and ghosts in several places, and he denounced all kinds of superstitious behavior, and these denials can specifically be seen in *Story Collection of No Ghost* 无鬼丛话 and *On Destroying God* 论毁除神. *Story Collection of No Ghost* was published under the pen name of Shih Zhi 适之 in the 25th edition of *Jingye Xunbao*, and *On Destroying God* was published under the pen name of Tie'er 铁儿 in its 28th edition. Hu's atheism implied that only science and reason could save people from the bondage of religion and

superstition, which were both outdated and deeply entrenched in Chinese society. His position was quite consistent with the direction pursued by *Jingye Xunbao*, which was a catalyst for young intellectuals who were eager for reformation and revolution. In this respect, Hu's *The Suchness Island* can be seen as a literary ethical attempt to break superstition and change society through human reason and science.

### **Enlightenment and Breaking Superstition: The Literary Ethical Implications of *The Suchness Island***

Hu's *The Suchness Island* is a serial vernacular Chinese novel he wrote at the age of 15, he started to serialize the story under the pen name of Xijiang 希疆 from the 3rd issue of *Jingye Xunbao* (1909.6). According to Hu himself, he initially planned to serialize a total of 40 chapters, but he had to end it at the 11th chapter because *Jingye Xunbao* (1909.6) was no longer being published. Unfortunately, the reason for his choice of serializing *The Suchness Island* is not mentioned in any sources, including Hu's autobiography. Yet, it is possible to surmise that Hu was also influenced by the creative tendencies of literature in the Late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China 清末民初, but this assumption is not well-founded enough to include in our discussion of the literary ethical implications of *The Suchness Island*.

As mentioned earlier, to properly discuss the literary ethical implications of *The Suchness Island*, the main idea of this paper, it is necessary to review its form, style, and main contents, in that particular order. First of all, in terms of the form and style of the novel, *The Suchness Island* adopts the system of the chapter novel 章回体. That means it is written in vernacular Chinese with each chapter bearing a title, and it ends with a narrative intervention to lead to the next story. Unfortunately, because it was an unfinished work, it is hard to determine the true extent of its literary value. However, *The Suchness Island* attempts to play with the possibility that vernacular Chinese could replace the literary style. It also can be seen as a transitional creation, reflecting the atmosphere and culture of China at that time. This suggestion is based on how Hu established his academic, philosophic, and theoretical systems through his tenure studying in the United States. To give one example, when Hu returned from the United States, he defined traditional literature written in old texts as dead literature, and the new literature written in vernacular Chinese as a living literature, and he applied himself to writing about and researching the history of literature, through a Western, scientific, and positivist lens. In brief, this means that Hu did not limit the Vernacular Movement 白话文运动 (1917-1919) to literary creation, but expanded it to include the history of literature. Therefore, I refer to *The Suchness*

*Island* as the result of an earlier trial to see if vernacular Chinese can replace older literary forms.

The story embodies the consistent theme of breaking superstition and awakening the people under the banner of modernization. Hu discusses the reality of ancient customs prevalent in Chinese society at the time, such as the barbaric practice of early marriages to near relations, blind faith in the yin 阴 and yang 阳, the Five Elements theory 五行, fortune, destiny, and karma through reincarnation. The main contents of each chapter are discussed below.

Chapter 1: Yu Shanren gets sick from suspiciousness, and Sun Shaowu dispels it by reasoning (第一回: 虞善仁疑心致疾, 孙绍武正论祛迷). The main characters of the work, Yu Shanren 虞善仁 and Sun Shaowu 孙绍武 appear. Yu is Sun's maternal uncle, and he symbolizes the old generation that blindly believe in superstitions. Sun represents the new generation that is exposed to new teachings and open to the changes in the world. One day, while Yu is sick in bed for no reason, Sun thought that all of Yu's symptoms are caused by mental illness, and advises him not to blindly believe in superstitions.

Chapter 2: Yu asks the blind fortune-teller about marriage, and he draws divination sticks before the idol for a decision (第二回: 议婚事问道盲人, 求神签决心土偶). Yu is concerned about getting his daughter Huihua 蕙华 married. He wants his nephew Sun to be his son-in-law, so he calls a fortune-teller to see if the two fit together. However, contrary to his expectations, the fortune-teller determines they are not compatible, so Yu is disheartened. He goes to the temple again and prays in front of the Bodhisattva, and tries to draw the fortune-telling paper, but he is disappointed again due to the bad luck on it.

Chapter 3: Sun breaks down superstition by commenting on backward customs, and his friend Guo exhorts his father to stop trying to establish an auspicious date through divination (第三回: 辟愚顽闲论薄俗, 估时日几谏高堂). Sun returns home and is embarrassed to know that Yu wants to have him as his son-in-law. First of all, he is a man with great ambition for the future, so he does not take marriage seriously. Not only that, he cannot understand why Yu wants him to marry his daughter since they are cousins.

Chapter 4: Yu looks for a blessed burial place everywhere with his belief in geomancy, and Sun goes to visit relatives living far away while worrying about his future career (第四回: 信堪輿广求福地, 忧身世远探至亲). Yu's servant arrives to visit Sun. The servant conveys Yu's words that he needs

Sun's help because of the geomancy problem, and Sun goes to Yu's house. In the past, Yu was not able to carry out Sun's maternal grandparents' funeral due to geomancy. However, since Yu is an elder member of his family and a stubborn person by nature, Sun feels uncomfortable with his uncle but helpless. Unable to give up his desire to study, Sun decides to go to Huizhou 徽州, where his uncle-in-law Cheng Yi 程义 lives.

Chapter 5: Sun hears someone tirelessly dissuading another from gambling, and he watches an opium store catch fire (第五回：逆旅谆谆戒蒲博，炎威烈烈火烟间). Sun spends a night at an inn and overhears a conversation from the next room. Two people, a man and his father-in-law, are discussing gambling. The man gambles, but his father-in-law scolds him about it. Out of curiosity, Sun listens to their conversation unconsciously. Then suddenly there is a fire in the inn, and it turns out that the fire started from the opium house in the inn.

Chapter 6: Sun is welcomed with hospitality and sincerity by his relatives, but a religious rite is performed that contains superstition (第六回：殷殷情谊厚待至亲，重重迷信声张善会). Sun arrives in Huizhou and goes to his uncle's house. On the same day of his arrival, a banquet is held at the temple, and Sun takes his brother-in-law Hu Nao 胡璠 and his nephews to the banquet together. They watch people bow and kneel in front of the Bodhisattva statue; Sun again witnesses superstition and idolatry prevalent throughout society.

Chapter 7: A shrew breaks into the Bodhisattvas and destroys all the idols, and her family foolishly seek an elixir from a religious rite (第七回：扫群魔泼妇力诛菩萨，施善会痴人妄想仙方). A woman with a knife suddenly breaks into the temple where the banquet is being held and cuts off the Bodhisattva's head. Sun hears the tragic story from Hu Nao, the wife of Hu Qiqing 胡启庆 and a distant relative of Hu Nao. Her husband and his two brothers get dysentery and are between life and death, and, to make matters worse, the doctor also dies of an acute fever. Hopelessly, the woman comes to the temple to pray for her family, and she even offers all the money she had, but unfortunately all of them die in the end.

Chapter 8: An evil man is believed to have been punished by heavenly fire, and the man of insight gives an edifying speech against superstition (第八回：天火炎炎奸人褫魄，高谈侃侃志士箴愚); Chapter 9: A renowned sage is introduced during a conversation, and a past wise man is remembered in the lines of a few ci poems (第九回：一席话介绍名贤，几首词迢怀往哲). The stories of Chapter 8 and 9 are about karma, a topic of conversation for Hu

Nao and Sun. Hu, who is extremely superstitious, explains the logic of karma to Sun, but Sun does not listen and reemphasizes his atheistic position. After discovering Sun's disposition, Hu introduces him to a scholar named Hu Jinxi 胡近溪. Hu Jinxi, like Sun, has modern ideas who is wary of superstition. Sun talks openly with Hu Jinxi, who has the same tendencies as him.

Chapter 10: A sinner named Meiqing betrays his friend, and Jinxi gives sharp criticism about ethics (第十回：名教罪人美卿负友，伦常针砭近溪放言). While Sun and Hu are having a long conversation, Hu's friend Lan Xian 兰仙 suddenly visits him. After Lan Xian left, Hu tells Lan Xian's story to Sun.

Chapter 11: Ambiguous language confuse society and misguide people, and the harsh but needed advice destroys customs, which causes grief (第十一回：模棱语惑世诬民，药石言伤时疾俗). Cheng tells the story of his cousin's experience to Sun, who has return to Huizhou, and to Zheng Guoshi 郑国士, the tutor of his nephews. Cheng's cousin, who does not believe in divination, is shocked when the fortune-telling that he got out of curiosity turns out to be true. Because of this experience, he believes to believe in divination. After hearing the story, Zheng provides his own theory about shamanism, saying that this is nothing more than vain superstition. Cheng is deeply moved by Zheng's words, realizing his own ignorance.

In addition, *The Suchness Island* was serialized from 1906 to 1909, which was a transitional period rife with great changes—not only in the literary world, as mentioned above, but also in terms of political world. If one looks closely at the characters and plot of each chapter of *The Suchness Island*, it reflects the transitional landscape of Chinese society at the time. In other words, the changing face of China as a whole during this period was directly an influence on the creation of *The Suchness Island*, and this historical circumstance affected the form of the novel. Therefore, *The Suchness Island* can be seen as an inevitable result of history. In this regard, this chapter intends to discuss the literary ethical implications of the work by selecting and analyzing the passages that best reflect the main theme of *The Suchness Island*.

Uncle's illness could have been nothing serious if he had not been bewitched by the fortune-teller. He believes that he was to die within this year, and his fear of death has grown even greater since he got ill this time. One should know that 'suspiciousness' has everything to do with the cause of the disease.

The more suspicious he is, the more serious the disease will turn ... When it comes to the cause and effect, it's really hard to say ... Every cause yields an effect. For instance, eating causes satiety, drinking causes drunkenness ... But when you eat, it's the food that gives satiety; when you grow a melon, it's the melon that produces new melons; and when you grow beans, it's the beans that produce new beans. There's no human power that works as a dominator. If a man has done evil things, what he did will naturally incur bad consequences. People name it karma and believe that Heaven sees. But it's not Heaven that effects the retribution. If 'Heaven' has such a power, why wouldn't He make everyone in the world a good person? (Hu 503-530)<sup>1</sup>

The core of the above passage is the confrontation between superstition and causation. The passage clearly reflects Hu's stance and perspective, which clearly show that superstition is an inaccurate view of the causation. This view stems from the author's childhood experiences. According to Hu's autobiography, his mother also had a deep belief in superstitions, just like many other Chinese people at the time. Hu had to follow his mother around while she burned incense and prayed for the well-being of his family in a shrine. It is said that superstition was a vague fear to young Hu, but due to his critical personality, he became an atheist at the age of eleven. His belief system began with Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200)'s *Xiaoxue* 小学. According to Hu, he got to know Si Maguang 司马光 (1019-1086)'s materialism in *Xiaoxue*. After learning about it, he started reading Si Maguang's *Zizhitongjian* 资治通鉴 in earnest, and he discovered the doctrine of the mortality of the soul 神灭论 of Fanzhen 范缜 (450-515). According to Hu's retrospective, he had doubts about the afterlife through *Xiaoxue*, and the vague fear he once had of superstition as a whole vanished through Si Maguang's *Zizhitongjian*. With the doctrine of the mortality of the soul of Fanzhen, Hu no longer believed in the existence of ghosts (Hu 44-45). Additionally, Hu regarded superstition and causationism as evil factors that hindered the state and society. As is well known, causationism is one of the core

1 此处中文原文为：“舅父这病，本来是狠不要紧的，只因舅父的心上，已经着了那算命先生的迷，时常恐怕今年要死，如今害了这病，那怕死的心，自然是格外重了。须知道那‘疑心’和这病根狠有关系，疑心越重，病也越重……这因果二字，狠难说的……有了一个因，必收一个果。譬如吃饭自然会饱，吃酒自然会醉。……但是吃饭是饭的作用生出饱来，种瓜是瓜的作用生出新瓜来，种豆便是豆的作用生出新豆来，其中并没有什么人为之主宰。譬如有一人，作了许多伤阴鹭的事，他所做的事，自然而然的会生出一个恶报来，我们看见了，便叫他做报应，说这是某人行恶事的现报，说这真是天有眼睛了，其实这并不是‘天’的作用。‘天’要是真有这么大的能力，何不把天下的人个个都成了善人呢？”

ideas of Buddhism, and it is not an exaggeration to say that it occupied an absolute position in Chinese folk beliefs at the time. Hu criticized the belief that evil was increasing in the world, an idea that was a result of causationism. He also blamed people for attempting to find solutions via causationism. In particular, he strongly emphasized the rejection of superstition and the elimination of folk beliefs, as he regarded groups that made idols and forced people to worship them as social evils (Hu 63-65).

In short, the influences from *Xiaoxue*, *Zizhitongjian*, the doctrine of the mortality of the soul of Fanzhen, and Hu's academic experiences in his early days, allowed Hu to organically connect each chapter of *The Suchness Island*. Furthermore, these build the theoretical background that supports Hu's atheism. Once this is understood, an examination of the last chapter of *The Suchness Island* is telling:

It's a shame that we Chinese people always refuse to think. We are contented with following other's leads and agreeing on everything we are told. From my perspective, the reason why we've become such a benighted country is that we are reluctant to think. Cheng Yichuan once said, "learning originates from thinking". Such a short phrase can be regarded as reputed words for many years ... Cheng Yi replied, "Mr. Zheng. I totally agree with you. We have all made the mistake of being reluctant to think. Even those who stand on the altar should think so as to trick people. It is thus clear that thinking is indispensable for everything, big or small." Mr. Zheng nodded to agree. (Hu 541)<sup>1</sup>

The paragraph above is a conversation between Cheng and Zheng. Cheng reveals his theory of the origins of learning, while at the same time deeply reflecting on his own foolishness when he propagated false rumors and baseless superstitions and followed a herd mentality. We should note that the conversation is deeply rooted in Hu family's progressive academic background. As is well known, Hu's hometown, Huizhou in Anhui Province, had a long tradition of Confucianism. Through his father's education, Hu learned the value of the empirical tradition. This laid the groundwork for Hu to become a pioneer intellectual who led China's modernization

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1 此处中文原文为：“只可怜我们中国人总不肯想，只晓得随波逐流，随声附和，国民愚到这步田地，照我的眼光看来，这都是不肯思想之故。所以程伊川说：‘学原于思’这区区四个字，简直是千古至言。……程义说道：‘郑先生，你这话真正不错，我们都是犯了这种不肯思想的毛病。即如乱坛上的人，他若是不肯深思默想，他怎能哄得人呢？可见凡事无论大小，总要思想的。’郑先生点头称是。”

and a pragmatic thinker who emphasized critical attitudes and scientific methods (Hu 131).

Hu got the major themes to *The Suchness Island* from his childhood experiences. From the characters of the work to the plot and content of each chapter, this work was written based on Hu's autobiographical experiences. Although the characters in *The Suchness Island* are fictional characters, they are based on real people, including Hu's family and relatives. In particular, Sun, the main character of the work, is a person who reflects Hu's own thoughts and points of view. Sun's experiences are akin to Hu's autobiographical experiences, so much so that the boundary between fiction and reality is not clearly distinguished. However, this work is neither a retrospective of his childhood, nor a reflection of his past. In this respect, the literary ethical implications of *The Suchness Island* derived in this paper is as follows. First, *The Suchness Island* was incomplete due to the closure of *Jingye Xunbao*, but this work is the only full-length novel among the vernacular Chinese novels that Hu published in *Jingye Xunbao* in that period. A 15-year-old boy's attempt to create a serial novel with a strong reformatory and revolutionary character says just how much China was searching for change during this period of its history. Second, Hu described the behavior of the people of Huizhou who believed in superstitions in a bold style and straightforward way.<sup>1</sup> What Hu ultimately wanted to say in *The Suchness Island* was evident: the evils of various superstitions and idolatry practiced in the name of tradition was holding society from advancing. The issue of magical thinking needed to be addressed in order to overcome superstition and enlighten the people. For this reason, it can be categorized as a pioneer creation, one that triggered the awakening of a nation. It is significant that it embodies Hu's ethical resistance to the feudal ethics that pervaded Chinese life and the social problems that resulted. In this regard, the creation of *The Suchness Island* is remarkably significant in that it was an ethical challenges and resistance from Hu to China.

### Conclusion

Among the early works of Hu, *The Suchness Island* is a serial vernacular Chinese novel he wrote at the age of 15. Unfortunately, *The Suchness Island* did not follow Hu's original plan because it is unfinished, so it is hard to say what its complete value as a work of art is. However, it is worth noting that this work provides important clues to understand the source of Hu's thought. Based on this, I argue that literary ethical implications of Hu's *The Suchness Island* in two main aspects.

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1 See Gong, Xuanwu. "Hu Shih 45 years ago." *Taipei Central Daily* 17 December 1952.

The first reason for its importance is the fact that it gives more information about a popular author. It is not an exaggeration to say that admission to the Chinese public school and joining the Jingye Society, especially becoming an editor of *Jingye Xunbao*, are the most important experiences of Hu's early days. Unlike the other members of the Jingye Society who jumped into the revolutionary movement, Hu devoted all his energy to editing, publishing, and writing *Jingye Xunbao*. In spite of his young age at the time, Hu published numerous writings in *Jingye Xunbao*, revealing his radical and critical tendencies. Based on science and reason, Hu's awareness of the problems of society, which he saw were the conventions and superstitions, needed to be addressed in a way the Chinese people could understand, but also be in line with the direction pursued by *Jingye Xunbao*. The novel, *The Suchness Island*, helped accomplish those goals. Through the above discussion, in this paper, it is possible to obtain the result that *Jingye Xunbao* was a place for experiment in which Hu could freely write his own words without any specific form or style, and therefore his thoughts could be relayed to society in their own language.

Second, *The Suchness Island*, which Hu started serializing in 1906, is a novel that captured some of Hu's autobiographical experience. In particular, the main character, Sun is a stand-in for Hu, since they are both young intellectuals who were educated upon new ideas and a desire to give up outdated practices. In this work, Hu revealed the what he saw as a problematic legacy of the past but was prevalent in current Chinese society: superstition, child marriage, idolatry, and causality. To remove those obsolete beliefs and practices, Hu needed to fictionalize the problematic aspects of those social ills so his audience would be encouraged to break away from all superstitions, old customs, and feudal behaviors. This paper appreciates the message behind *The Suchness Island* and the changes in Hu's ethical concepts, a boy who took the first step toward a new ideology and a new culture.

Through this study, it is possible to grasp the source of Hu's thought through his activities and the characteristics of his early writings. Moreover, through the work *The Suchness Island*, it is possible to discover the meaning behind the literary ethical implications of Hu's early vernacular Chinese novel. If we take *The Suchness Island* as a starting point, then we can proceed study of Hu's early vernacular Chinese novels and his Chinese new poetry during the May Fourth movement from viewpoint of literary ethical.

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