

# The Introduction and Dissemination of the Behaviorism in Modern China — the Historical Investigation Centered by Kuo,Z,Y

Huyanfeng

Foreign Language Department, Dezhou University

Dezhou 235023, Shandong, China

E-mail: Huyanfeng7548@sina.com

## Abstract

*The behaviorism was the most influential school during the former half of the 20<sup>th</sup>.C. In the early years of the century, the oversea students introduced it into China, among whom Dr. Kuo,Z,Y, a faithful behaviorist, was the most typical example, who, after returned home, set about to this project, which made the great contributions to the early Chinese psychology.*

**Key Words:** behaviorism; Modern China; Kuo,Z,Y; introduction; dissemination

The behaviorism, founded by American psychologist John B.Watson, was the most influential school during the former half of the 20<sup>th</sup>.C. Watson claimed that psychology was not concerned with the mind or with human consciousness. Instead, psychology would be concerned only with behavior. In this way, men could be studied objectively, like rats and apes. In the 1920's-30's, the Chinese intellectuals began to introduce the western scientific knowledge into China in order to establish the Chinese own academic culture. Under such condition, the western behaviorism was brought in. The oversea students made great contribution in the process of this cultural dissemination, among whom Dr. Kuo,Z,Y was the best example. Therefore this paper intends to comb the contribution Dr. Kuo,Z,Y made to the spread of the western behaviorism in modern China.

## 1. The formation of Kuo,Z,Y's psychological system

Kuo,Z,Y (1898-1970), born in Shantou, Guangdong, graduated from Fudan University and then went to America in 1918 for the further education in California University. In 1923, he was awarded the psychology doctoral degree and at the same year he was invited by Zhangyi, the principal of Fudan University to come back to teach here. From 1924 to 1926, Kuo,Z,Y was appointed the vice principal of Fudan University, and during his term he established the psychology department and psychology institute. From 1927 to 1936, he taught in Central University and Zhejiang University successively and he was appointed principal of Zhejiang University from 1933 to 1936. In 1946, Kuo,Z,Y moved to Hang Kong till death. During his study in America, Kuo,Z,Y began to show interest in behaviorism and meanwhile he began to question its researching content and researching method. In his opinion, although the behaviorists were not concerned with the mind or with human consciousness any more, they did not pay much attention to the behaviors. For example, instinct and learning should belong to the category of the old psychology, but the behaviorists did not dare to neglect these issues, on the contrary they regarded them as their main researching content.

What's more, the behaviorists had no specific method to study the behavior. Although the behaviorists showed sympathy for mechanism, they did not lose contact with the traditional psychological teleology. Therefore Kuo,Z,Y thought(1933)that the most contribution of the behaviorism was negative because its researching method and content was still traditional. At the same time the behaviorism also lacked the constructive plan. So Kuo,Z,Y began to build his extreme behaviorism, and this project began with the Instinct Debate of 1920's. Before the evolutionism became popular, the concept of instinct did not cause the psychologists' attention. Later Darwin and Spencer explained the problems of instinct and mood from the angle of heredity and meanwhile pointed out the importance the heredity had in the process of living and competition. Influenced by Darwin, some psychologists began to focus on instinct. Later encouraged by the James, the founder of psychology, the theory of instinct became very popular. Until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as described by Kuo,Z,Y(1924),instinct had become a very important psychology issue. McDougall, Thorndike and other people who studied abnormal psychology all regarded instinct as the foundation of their own studying field. Even Watson the revolutionist of the psychology admitted the importance of instinct and heredity. So along with the popularity of instinct, this concept ran rampant.

In order to control this situation, an anti-instinct movement was initiated from the year 1919 to 1920 in the psychological circle and Kuo,Z,Y was one of the main advocates. Later when Kuo,Z,Y recalled the whole course of this event, he said that this movement was fermented between the year 1919 and 1920, but I myself began to question instinct in the fall of 1919, when I was in grade three in University of California. I made a term report the next fall in the seminary in education psychology and this was the article *Giving up Instincts in Psychology* published later in Journal of Philosophy. After several revises, this article was sent to Journal of Philosophy in the winter of 1920, and until 12, 1921 it was published finally. However, during this year several articles which opposed and criticized instinct were published successively ( 1929, p.234). Although these articles were published at the different time, I daresay each author did not know what others did in advance(Kuo,Z,Y,1924). So although the launch of anti-instinct movement could not owe to Kuo,Z,Y himself totally, yet undoubtedly he was the one of the important advocates. Kuo,Z,Y's attitude towards heredity and instinct was in constant change in the process of anti-instinct movement, which witnessed the formation of his academic system, that's, during this period Kuo,Z,Y completed his disintegration from a common behaviorist to an extreme behaviorist.

The formation of Kuo,Z,Y's academic system can be divided into three stages as a whole: The publication of *Giving up Instincts in Psychology* is the first stage; the publication of *How Are Our Instincts Acquired* is the second stage and the publication of *Psychology without heredity* is the third stage. During the first stage, Kuo,Z,Y till admitted the existence of heredity. In the second stage, he began to question whether the innate behavior could prove the existence of instinct. At this moment he still admitted the differences between the acquired behaviors and the innate behaviors were right. Until the third stage, Kuo,Z,Y's attitude changed completely and he insisted the psychology without heredity totally. He thought that all the so called innate behaviors not only could not be proved by experiment, but also prevented the experimental psychology from developing. So all the innate behaviors should be abandoned by psychology. Owing to his firm attitude towards instinct, Kuo,Z,Y was called Super Watson by McDougall. For the action of anti-instinct, Kuo,Z,Y's did not try to please the public, but intended to found his own theory of behaviorism, that's, the extreme behaviorism.

For this, Kuo,Z,Y ever made such expression (1928,p.75):we oppose instinct not to gain a well used psychology term, this is not our goal at all. If so, what we have done is most stupid. In fact, if we can not arouse the experimental study on the behaviors, if we fail to establish a pure genetic psychology, and if the non-instinct movement has no any effect, we are sure that what the professor Gento said will come true: the prospect of this movement is very disappointing, and meanwhile we will make the same mistakes that the instinct believers did. After initiating anti-instinct movement successfully, Kuo,Z,Y put forward his basic views of the extreme behaviorism, as follows: The behaviors not only can be regarded the researching goal, but also the research on behaviors can also be treated as a specific science like physiology, zoology and botany etc. The extreme behaviorists as well as the behaviorists neglect the existence of mind, and always regard the spiritual phenomenon as one sort of behaviors, which can be studied by the method of material science. The extreme behaviorists do not admit the issues on the traditional behaviors. The fundamental issue on behaviors lies in two aspects: growth of behaviors and physiology of the behaviors. The stand of the extreme behaviorism is in accordance with that of material science like physics and chemistry.

All the concepts which can show material phenomenon can show behavior and the behavior is a kind of mechanical phenomenon, which can be explained by the principles of physics and chemistry (Kuo,Z,Y,1933). All the opinions mentioned above were called the compendium of extreme behaviorism, which, compared with the traditional behaviorism, are much more radical and much more revolutionary. Through the brief analysis on Kuo,Z,Y's academic system, we can see that Kuo,Z,Y, as a mechanist, went to another extreme in building his praxiology, so his theory was partial inevitably. In fact, Kuo,Z,Y had been conscious of his theoretical defect. By doing so, Kuo,Z,Y had his own far-reaching purpose: whether he advocated the extreme behaviorism and opposed instinct and heredity or he attacked all kinds of mysterious concepts in psychology, he tried to repelled the anti-scientific psychology in a word. At the same time, Kuo,Z,Y compared himself to a street cleaner who managed to put psychology into the palace of natural science—bioscience(Kuo,Z,Y,1928,).

## **2. Kuo,Z,Y and the introduction and dissemination of behaviorism**

After he got the doctor degree in 1923, Kuo,Z,Y was invited home and taught in Fudan University, where he devoted himself to the introduction and dissemination of behaviorism and meanwhile he tried to establish the Chinese own psychology.

## 2.1 Introducing behaviorism and causing instinct debate in China

On returning home, Kuo,Z,Y began to publish the related articles in some magazines to publicize his own academic views. For example only in *Journal of the Orient* he published more than 6 articles in a short time such as *The Process of Anti-instinct and My Recent Position* (Volume 21, Memorial), *The Confession of a Psychological Revolutionist* (5, Volume 24), *Abnormal Psychology* (23, Volume 24), *The Study on Behaviors in Recent 30 Years* (1, Volume 31) etc. What's more, Kuo,Z,Y also published 10 books, as follows: *Human's Behavior* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1923), *Psychology ABC* (World Publishing House, 1928), *Psychology Symposium* (Shanghai Kaiming Bookstore, 1928), *Handout of Behaviorism* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1928), *Psychology and Heredity* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1929), *The Basis of Praxiology* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1929), *Behaviorism* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1933), *The Principle of Behavior* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1935), *The Domain of Praxiology* (Shangwu Publishing House, 1935). The publishing of these articles and books played an important role in the introduction and dissemination of behaviorism in modern China, and later more and more people knew about and accepted the basic views of behaviorism, as Gaojuefu, a Chinese famous psychologist said(1991, p.17), at that time many psychologists were inclined to behaviorism even though they were not the extreme behaviorist like Kuo,Z,Y.

The propaganda about behaviorism Kuo,Z,Y made at home also caused a debate on instinct, which was held between the psychological circle centered by Kuo,Z,Y and philosophical circle. The opposition side published articles on *Journal of Mind* to express their different opinions about instinct, such as *The Criticism of Non-instinct* by Yanjicheng(No.1, Volume 4, 1923 ), *Instinct* by Zhoujianren (No.2, Volume 5, 1924), *On Instinct* by Wangrui (No.2, Volume 5, 1924), *The Discussion on Instinct* by Liuruzhen(No.3, Volume 5, 1924)and so on. The two sides held their own views respectively and disagreed with each other. Kuo,Z,Y once made some comments on such debate. He said (1935)that each person held one's view and the constant conflicts were inevitable after a big revolution in the circle of psychology. As long as there existed the differences, true could be gained; as long as there existed conflicts, progress could be made. We had to base on the facts and true and this was the correct academic attitude. Anyone who had prejudice against others had no right to speak. Objectively speaking, this debate on instinct in modern China activated the tedious academic atmosphere to some extent and popularized the psychological knowledge among the people

## 2.2 Establishment of the Psychology School

As soon as he entered Fudan University, Kuo,Z,Y set about to found the department of psychology. In the beginning, only four courses were established, for example Primary Human Behavior, Experimental Psychology, Comparative Psychology and Psychology and Translation, and meanwhile many kinds of psychology magazines and experimental instruments were ordered from U.S.A. The establishment of the psychology department offered a wider platform for the dissemination of psychology knowledge and also made this new subject possess its own position in this Chinese famous university. In the spring of 1924, Kuo,Z,Y began to found the institute of psychology ambitiously. Until 1926, the institute of psychology, Zibin Building, was completed. The whole institute was divided into eight departments such as the department of physiologic psychology, the department of social psychology, the department of abnormal psychology, and the department of applied psychology etc.

Several oversea psychology doctors such as Dr. Caiqiao, Dr.Tangyue were invited to teach here. At that time, no any large scaled institute of psychology were founded in other universities, save Pavlov Institute of Psychology and the institute of psychology in Princeton University, therefore the Institute of psychology founded by Kuo,Z,Y was called the the first institute of Far East. This can be proved by a report made by Shenbao on July 25, 1924: Psychology is the newly invented natural science, which is the most developed in U.S.A. The most American universities possess the department of psychology, however, the institute of psychology is rare(1924).The establishment of Institute of Psychology of Fudan University caused the attention of the Board of the Chinese Cultural and Educational Fund. Owing to his excellent work, the board determined to finance it. In a word, the found of this institute of psychology not only won the attention and support from the all sections of society, but also offered a good humanistic and material environment for the dissemination of the western behaviorism in modern China.

## 3.3 Popularity of the Psychological Knowledge

In the early years of 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychology was very strange for the most Chinese people, so there existed lots of misunderstandings about it. The word psychology was a very mysterious concept, instead of a scientific none in the eyes of common people.They thought of the psychologist as the magician or hypnotist.

Undoubtedly, this condition the western psychology met with slowed the speed of its spread in modern China seriously. Therefore, Kuo,Z,Y found that if we meant to encourage the science, meant to cause the interest of the common in the science and meant to promote the development of the science, we must let the common people know about the scientific knowledge and know about its relationship with human's daily life(1928,p.1). According to such thought, the propaganda and popularity for the psychological knowledge became one of Kuo,Z,Y's routine tasks, for example (1)Holding lecture. Except his normal work, Kuo,Z,Y held lectures every Wednesday and Friday. Those who were interested in psychologu were welcomed to listen. Every time, not only the students in Fudan University took part in it actively, but also the many citizens far away from the campus came to listen to his lecture.(2)Publishing the popular articles on the magazines.

Kuo,Z,Y took Shenbao as the communicating platform, and wrote many popular articles about psychology on it, such as *True Meaning of Psychology*, *Ghost in Psychology* etc.(3)Publishing the scientific pamphlet. For example, Kuo,Z,Y published a book named *Psychology ABC* in August, 1928, which was divided eight chapters. These articles and pamphlets were popular with the people for their popular language and intelligible content. Through these forms mentioned above, Kuo,Z,Y hoped to popularize all kinds of academic knowledge in order to make everyone acquire all kinds of academic opportunities and find the way to science. He thought that all kinds of science could be liberated from the class of intellectuals and then should be distributed around the whole citizens (Kuo,Z,Y,1928.)

### **Summary**

As a faithful disciple of behaviorism, Kuo,Z,Y devoted all his life to the dissemination of his conviction. As the spokesman of behaviorism in modern China, Kuo,Z,Y made contributions to the establishment of Chinese Modern psychology. After his death, American famous psychology magazine *Comparative and Physiologic Psychology* carried a monograph in 1980 *Kuo,Z,Y—the Radical Philosopher and Innovative Experimenter* in memory of his contribution in this field.

### **References**

- Zhangyaoxiang(1940).The development history of Chinese psychology.*Journal of Xuelin*,No.1.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Study on Behaviors in Recent 30 Years. *Journal of the Orient*,No.1, Volume 31.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Process of Anti-instinct and My Recent Position. *Journal of the Orient*, Volume 21, Memorial.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1929).*Psychology and instinct*. Shanghai: Shangwu Publishing House. p.234.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Process of Anti-instinct and My Recent Position. *Journal of the Orient*, Volume 21, Memorial.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1921).Giving up instincts in psychology. *Journal of Philosohpy*,No.18.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1922). How are our instincts acquired?. *Psychology Review*,No.29.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Process of Anti-instinet and My Recent Position. *Journal of the Orient*, Volume 21, Memorial.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1928). *Psychology Symposium*. Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore, p.75.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Study on Behaviors in Recent 30 Years. *Journal of the Orient*,No.1, Volume 31.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1928). *Psychology Symposium*. Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore.
- Kuo,Z,Y. The Study on Behaviors in Recent 30 Years. *Journal of the Orient*,No.1, Volume 31.
- Gaojuefu(1991). *Biography of Chinese modern social scientists*. Beijing: Beijing Science Publishing House,p.17.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1935). *Behaviorism*. World Publishing House.
- Fudan University will establish the department of psychology. *Report of Shenbao*.23 June, 1923.
- Fudan University will establish the department of psychology. *Report of Shenbao*.25 July, 1924.
- Kuo,Z,Y(1928). *Psychology*. World Publishing House, p. 1.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1928). *Psychology Symposium*. Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore, p.2.
- Kuo,Z,Y.(1928). *Psychology Symposium*. Shanghai: Kaiming Bookstore.