

An Analysis of the Evolution of the School Motto "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" at Inner Mongolia University

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ABSTRACT

The school motto "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" of Inner Mongolia University not only embodies the spiritual essence of its community but also serves as a revered inheritance of the age-old "truth-seeking" and "pragmatic" traditions from preceding generations. It further reflects a profound alignment with the need to develop in the new era. By tracing its historical origins and integrating traditional culture, modern politics, and the ethos of higher education, this paper explores the continuous promotion of the core philosophy of "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" at Inner Mongolia University, emphasizing the unity of knowledge and action for its sustainable inheritance.

KEYWORDS

Inner Mongolia University; Seeking truth and Being pragmatic; School motto; Cultural inheritance

1 Introduction

"Seeking truth and being pragmatic" has gained prominence in political discourse since the early 21st century. Many institutions of higher learning have actively embraced this trend, integrating the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" into university life, thus establishing it as a widespread educational practice.^①

In the new era, the spirit of universities shines brightly, with ideals and reality intertwined in the collective consciousness. The spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" is not only a defining feature of the times but also a demonstration of our theoretical confidence. To ensure that the school motto of Inner Mongolia University continues to inspire, thrive, and remain dynamically relevant, it is essential to synthesize ancient and modern wisdom, absorb diverse influences, and undergo a process of critical inheritance and refinement.^②

2 Historical origin: the evolution of "truth-seeking" and "pragmatic" concepts

Etymologically, "seeking truth and being pragmatic" can be deconstructed as:

- (1) Seek: To pursue, endeavor to attain, or engage in systematic inquiry.
- (2) Truth: Objective reality, the fundamental essence of things, and the laws governing their existence.
- (3) Pragmatic: To engage in practical action, focus on tangible results, and emphasize real-world application.
- (4) Reality: Factual existence, empirical evidence, and the material basis of experience.

Collectively, the concept denotes the continuous exploration of the essence of things, the grasp of their internal laws, and the practice of acting in accordance with objective reality through down-to-earth efforts. Although often associated with modern discourse, "seeking truth and being pragmatic" has deep historical roots, embedded in the philosophical traditions of ancient China and evidenced in the writings of early thinkers, requiring us to examine its origins through a historical and philosophical lens.

During the Warring States period, "Zhuang Zhou once dreamed he was a butterfly, a vivid and carefree butterfly, fully immersed in the experience and unaware of being Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly, he awoke and found himself abruptly as Zhuang Zhou, perplexed and wondering: Was he Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed of being a butterfly, or a butterfly now dreaming of being Zhuang Zhou? There must be a distinction between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly! This is called the transformation of things."^[1] Zhuang Zhou's meditation on the boundary between dreams and reality challenges conventional perceptions, illustrating the importance of transcending human cognitive limitations to explore the essence of reality—a core principle of "seeking truth and being pragmatic." Later scholars expanded this idea, driving its theoretical development in abstract philosophy and innovating methodologies for knowledge acquisition.

In the Western Han Dynasty, Sima Qian synthesized the theories of the Yin-Yang, Confucian, Mohist, Logician, Legalist, and Taoist schools, aiming to "investigate the relationship between heaven and humanity, understand the vicissitudes of history, and establish a unique theoretical system."^[2] Through his monumental historical writings, he sought to uncover the laws governing the rise and fall of dynasties, inheriting the ancient historians' commitment to "neither exaggerating virtues nor concealing vices" and establishing "seeking truth and being pragmatic" as a paradigm for scholarly research and governance. Wang Fu's assertion, "Great men do not pursue superficial glory; gentlemen seek practical

achievements"^[3],elevated "seeking truth and being pragmatic" from an individual virtue to a social norm, defining it as a criterion for moral and intellectual excellence. At this stage, the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" began to emerge as a guiding light in Chinese thought

Centuries later, scholars of the Sui and Tang Dynasties built on the legacy of pre-Qin philosophers and Han historians, revitalizing the ideology of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" through the interplay of academic inheritance and social change. Yan Shigu annotated Liu De, Prince of Hejian's "devotion to learning, reverence for antiquity, and pursuit of truth from facts," explaining it as "seeking empirical evidence and pursuing truth in inquiry."^[2] Ban Gu praised Liu De for his meticulous collation of ancient texts based on factual evidence, while Yan Shigu emphasized the rigor of scholarly research—exploring, analyzing, and verifying knowledge through empirical investigation. Han Wo, one of the "Four Worthies of Nan'an," captured this ethos in his poem *Tian Jian* (Heaven's Mirror): Why stoop to flattery and follow fleeting trends? Pragmatic cultivation and sincere practice surpass cunning and expediency. A tiger stands firm, wagging its tail for ten years; an eagle soars with clarified vision, once its mind is awakened. Divine power protects those who walk the path of righteousness; heaven acknowledges and rewards sincere hearts. Only through hardship does true value emerge; greatness is forged from the accumulation of small beginnings.^[4] These verses contrast superficial opportunism with sincere pragmatism, using the tiger and eagle as metaphors for integrity and resolve. The poem underscores that those who uphold truth are guided by virtue, and that enduring value is shaped through adversity. By this period, "seeking truth and being pragmatic" had become a foundational principle for social and intellectual development.

In the dynamic landscape of the modern era, the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" has emerged as an indispensable guiding principle, underpinning progress across various sectors and defining the path to sustainable development. This timeless wisdom, which emphasizes the alignment of actions with objective reality and the pursuit of truth through systematic inquiry, has taken on new dimensions and profound significance in contemporary society.

At its core, "seeking truth" represents the relentless pursuit of accurate knowledge and understanding, while "being pragmatic" underscores the importance of applying this knowledge in practical, effective ways.

In essence, the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" has become a cornerstone of modern society, shaping how we think, act, and progress. It encourages a culture of critical thinking, evidence-based decision-making, and practical innovation, enabling individuals, organizations, and societies to overcome obstacles, seize opportunities, and create a brighter future. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, this timeless wisdom will continue to guide us towards greater understanding, collaboration, and achievement.

Throughout history, the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" has evolved by absorbing philosophical insights from diverse eras and adapting to political and social changes, continually acquiring new meanings and applications. It remains a timeless guiding principle, inspiring Chinese scholars, scientists, and leaders to uphold scientific rigor, pursue truth, and drive societal progress through practical action.

3 The formation of inner mongolia university's school motto: inheriting and forging "seeking truth and being pragmatic"

The school motto of Inner Mongolia University, "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic," derives its essence from both the historical spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" and the intrinsic values of university education. It integrates traditional academic pragmatism with modern scientific principles and aligns with the simple, practical, and truth-oriented traditions of the multi-ethnic communities in the northern frontier, serving as a spiritual cornerstone for its faculty and students.

"The so-called 'attaining knowledge requires the investigation of things' means that to acquire knowledge, one must explore the principles underlying all things. The human mind is innately capable of understanding, but all things in the world have their own laws; if these laws are not fully understood, knowledge remains incomplete." Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi posited that human cognitive limitations arise from the unfinished exploration of the natural and social world. "The primary teaching of The Great Learning is to guide scholars to deeply investigate all things based on existing knowledge until they grasp their ultimate principles." Universities, in this sense, serve as platforms for revealing the complexities of the world and encouraging scholars to pursue knowledge relentlessly—a process synonymous with "seeking truth."^[5] Zhu Xi's philosophy highlights the dual mission of universities: to cultivate broad intellectual horizons and meticulous academic rigor, reflecting the core goal of higher education to pursue truth and explore the essence of things.

This educational philosophy is exemplified in the mottos of other leading universities. Tsinghua University's motto, "Self-Discipline and Social Commitment," inspires students to seek truth from facts and pursue excellence with perseverance, as articulated in its school song: "Seeking knowledge and exploring principles, delving into antiquity and uncovering mysteries. Glory, glory! Solid scholarship shines with enduring light!" Liu Da, former president of Tsinghua University, described Tsinghua spirit as "an unyielding pursuit of truth."^[6] During the national crisis of the 1930s, Zhu

Kezhen, president of Zhejiang University, adopted "Seeking Truth" as the school motto, emphasizing critical thinking, problem-solving, and continuous innovation. He argued, "Only those willing to sacrifice for truth can truly adhere to seeking truth from facts."^[6] Similarly, the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China's motto, "Seeking Truth and Reality, Aiming High and Achieving Greatness," embodies its commitment to truth, pragmatism, and ambition. Inner Mongolia University's motto distills these ideals into a concise expression of its unique educational philosophy.

Rooted in the northern frontier and oriented toward national and global perspectives, Inner Mongolia University has cultivated the motto "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" and the tradition of "Valuing Knowledge and Pursuing Excellence" through decades of perseverance.^[7] Guided by the philosophy of "developing from the frontier, prioritizing people, and strengthening through unique characteristics," Xu Rigan, the first Mongolian academician and former Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, summarized the university's ethos as "emancipating the mind, seeking truth from facts, keeping pace with the times, pursuing truth, and emphasizing practice"—core principles condensed into "seeking truth and being pragmatic." Since 1993, "seeking truth and being pragmatic, working diligently" has served as a guiding principle, complementing the university's spirit and inspiring its community. In 2001, following a campus-wide motto solicitation, the terms "truth" and "reality"—the most frequently proposed—were formally adopted as the school motto by the university's cultural construction committee.^[8]

"Seeking truth" at Inner Mongolia University entails a commitment to academic integrity, intellectual curiosity, and the courageous exploration of uncharted knowledge. It demands rigorous scholarship, a willingness to challenge assumptions, and a dedication to preserving and advancing cultural and scientific knowledge. "Being pragmatic" emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, urging scholars to translate research into tangible solutions for real-world problems and contribute to social progress. This dual emphasis on intellectual rigor and practical application defines the university's educational mission.

Generations of Inner Mongolia University faculty and students have embodied the spirit of the motto in their work. In 1956, Li Bo, a doctoral researcher from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, initiated ecological research in Inner Mongolia's arid regions, describing the grassland as "a virgin land of natural excellence" and laying the foundation for environmental protection and governance in the northern frontier. In the 1960s, Professor Qingertai dedicated himself to modernizing Mongolian linguistic studies, leading decades of research that culminated in the establishment of scientific methodologies for Mongolian language research before his passing in 2013.^[9]

Today, three generations of researchers at Inner Mongolia University—including the late Professor Zhao Yizhi, Professor Cao Rui, and Professor Zhao Liqing—have devoted their careers to documenting the region's flora, reflecting a deep commitment to understanding and preserving the natural environment. The research team led by Professor Guo Shuo in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering has made breakthroughs in synthesizing novel fluorinated compounds, such as pentafluorothioalcohols, offering new possibilities for pharmaceutical and materials science.

The university's achievements underscore the transformative power of its motto. With a faculty of over 3,000, a vast library collection, and more than 1,000 national and regional research projects, Inner Mongolia University has established itself as a leading research institution. Its international collaboration centers facilitate academic exchanges with countries including Russia, Japan, and the United States, while its focus on "Five Major Tasks" and building a model autonomous region has driven innovations in modern biological breeding, including the development of a new double-muscle cattle strain and intelligent pasture management systems. These initiatives address critical challenges in China's livestock industry, reducing reliance on foreign seed technology and promoting sustainable rural development.^[7-8]

"Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" is more than a motto; it is the defining spirit of Inner Mongolia University, shaping its academic culture and inspiring generations to pursue excellence through integrity and action.

4 Prospects for the future: sustaining the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic"

As a leading institution in China's northern frontier, Inner Mongolia University faces the dual challenges of preserving its historical legacy and adapting to the demands of the new era. "seeking truth and being pragmatic" serves as a call to action, urging the university to leverage the spirit of "seeking truth and being pragmatic" as a driving force for innovation and social responsibility.

For young scholars, the motto represents a mandate to combine idealism with practicality. Like the rising sun, youth are tasked with carrying forward the torch of truth-seeking, navigating the complexities of modern society with intellectual rigor and moral clarity. This is exemplified in the work of Du Lan, a young writer from Inner Mongolia, whose stories depict the region's natural landscapes and human experiences with unflinching realism. In *The Disappearance of Unigo*, Du Lan contrasts the townspeople's fear of change with the protagonist's embrace of natural truth, critiquing societal resistance to innovation and advocating for a deeper connection with reality.^[10] Her writing, rooted in grassroots life and informed by literary and historical scholarship, embodies the motto's principles by seeking truth in human nature and celebrating the pragmatism of grassland culture.^[11]

Chao Wen, a distinguished student at Inner Mongolia University, exemplifies the motto's application in academic and professional life. Inspired by "seeking truth and being pragmatic," she engaged in grassroots work—such as serving as a restaurant cashier—to gain practical insights, later applying this experience to solve real-world problems in her research on "Internet +" taxi resource allocation and sensor technology. Her achievements, including two national utility model patents, demonstrate the transformative power of integrating theory with practice.^[12]

To sustain the motto's relevance, Inner Mongolia University must integrate it into every facet of campus culture. Architectural elements, such as campus signage and public art, already feature the motto in Chinese, Mongolian, and English, while the university song and ceremonial traditions reinforce its values. Moving forward, the university should further embed the motto in curriculum design, research priorities, and student development programs, ensuring that it remains a living principle rather than a mere slogan.^[13-14]

As a symbol of intellectual integrity and social responsibility, "Seeking Truth and Being Pragmatic" will continue to guide Inner Mongolia University in nurturing scholars who are both rooted in their local heritage and capable of addressing global challenges. Through sustained commitment to this motto, the university will uphold its role as a beacon of knowledge in the northern frontier, fostering innovation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development for generations to come.

Explanatory note :

(1) See Xia Jing, Zhang Songchao, and Chen Hua Wen, "Hardship and Simplicity, Seeking Truth and Being Practical: The Persistence and Commitment Behind the Motto of China University of Geosciences (Wuhan)", *Guangming Daily*, July 17, 2014; Wang Peng and Cao Wei, "Remembering Responsibility, Seeking Truth and Being Practical, Embracing All Rivers, Self-Improvement: Harbin Institute of Technology in the Ice City", *China & Foreign Architecture*, 2018; Wei Mengjia, "Peking University: Seeking Truth and Being Practical to Promote Effective Theme Education", *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, May 27, 2023; Ma Fuchun, "Northwest Normal University: Student Praise for the Reform of Youth League and Student Affairs", *China Youth Daily*, December 21, 2023.

(2) See Yang Hua's "Research on the Truth-seeking and Pragmatism of the New Leadership Collective of the Party" (Shaanxi Normal University, 2005 Master's Thesis). Chen Xianchun and Zheng Linhong, "The Essence and Soul of the Scientific Development Concept," Ningbo Daily, January 8, 2013; Leng Rong, "Comprehensively Grasping the Scientific Connotation and Spirit of the Scientific Development Concept," People's Daily, October 28, 2013; People's Daily Commentary Department, "People's View: Respecting Science, Seeking Truth, Being Pragmatic, and Innovating," People's Daily, September 17, 2020; Hong Yinxing, "Wei Xinghua: Theoretical Confidence in Seeking Truth and Pragmatism," Party History and Literature Review, Issue 5, 2024.

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