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Surpassing the “Speech / Voice Distinction”: Rethinking the Construction of Chinese Philosophy in the Era of Bie-Modern (Doubtful Modernity)**

Recently, the question of whether Chinese academia should construct its own “zhuyi” (-isms)¹ or not has been given great attention by some Chinese and Western scholars.² In the discussion, several Chinese scholars, such as professor Wang Jianjiang at Shanghai Normal University, are eager to construct a new

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¹ In modern Chinese, “zhuyi” has multiple meanings, such as, “the main idea,” “a systematized thought on the world, society and academic problem,” “thinking model,” “regime, economic system,” etc. Cf. *Ci Hai*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Ci Shu Press, 1999), p. 3028. In some contexts, the significance of “zhuyi” is close to “philosophy,” “theory,” and “thought” in English. We use this word to highlight the multicultural perspective and goals of the construction of “zhuyi” in current Chinese academia.

² There have been a number of papers, international conferences and workshops on the topic, such as Aleš Erjavec, “Zhuyi: From Absence to Bustle, Some Comments on Jianjiang Wang’s Article ‘The Bustle and the Absence of Zhuyi,’” *Exploration and Free Views*, No. 9 (2016), pp. 75–80; Wang Jianjiang, “The Bustle and Absence of Zhuyi,” *Filozofski vestnik*, XXXVII, No. 1 (2016), pp. 157–178; Aleš Erjavec, “Some Additional Remarks Concerning Issues Opened by Prof. Wang Jianjiang,” *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, No. 13 (2017), pp. 143–147; Aleš Erjavec, “Trivial Truths Related to Further Comments on the Absence of Zhuyi,” in *Bie-modern Art and Theory International Academic Conference*, July, 2017; Ernest Ženko, “Lesson in Equality: Some Remarks on the Development of Chinese Aesthetics,” *Journal of Northwest Normal University*, 54, No. 5 (2017), pp. 23–28; Keaton Wynn, “Differing Modernisms: Similar Art, Different Meaning Zhuyi for a Bie-modern Age,” *Art Theory Innovation in Bie-modern Era*, September 2016; “From Postmodern to Bie-modern,” *Shanghai Culture*, No. 8 (2017), pp. 61–68; Rok Benčin, “Remarks on Philosophical ‘Moments,’ on the Aesthetics of Emancipation,” *Bie-modern Art and Theory International Academic Conferences*, July, 2017; Wang Jianjiang, “The Appeal and Construction of Zhuyi,” *Exploration and Free Views*, No. 12 (2014), pp. 72–77; “Bie-modern: Beyond Aesthetic and after Post-modern,” *Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition)* 44, No. 1 (2015), pp. 5–14; “Quadrilateral in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Humanities and Bie-modernism: Comments in Aleš Erjavec,” *Exploration and Free Views*, No. 9 (2016), pp. 80–86; “The Space of Heroes and the Hero Games,” *Chinese Journal of Literary Criticism*, No. 2 (2017), pp. 39–47; *Bie-modern: Space Encounter and Times Spans* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2017). There are also a number of international meetings focusing on the topic, such as *Art: Pre-modern, Modern, Post-modern and Bie-modern*, held by the Center for Chinese Bie-Modern Studies

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philosophical model in China's own discourse. Some European scholars admit that Chinese scholars have many quite persuasive insights and that contemporary Chinese visual art has been successfully integrated into global visual art circles, but they still insist the opportunity for China to conceive of its own “*zhuyi*” has not arrived yet. According to some Western researchers' opinions, Chinese scholars' expectation that “Chinese aesthetics will be developed to the same extent as the Western” cannot completely meet the actual need in China's present-day academia.³ In other words, there is indeed an *absence* of “*zhuyi*,” original philosophy, and aesthetics in China, but this does not mean Chinese aestheticians or philosophers must *bustle* to propose their own “*zhuyi*.”

I think Western scholars' queries have two reasons. Firstly, in the context of globalization and transnational academia, to call for a national “-ism” or “*zhuyi*” may raise the suspicion of “nationalism” or “fundamentalism.” Secondly, the given international academic circle or “republic of letters” has a set of rigorous conventions and terminology.

Therefore, conceptions or ideas with national characteristics may not be accepted by the international academic community. Accordingly, if a thought or discourse wants to find a place in the international academia, it should share “*speech*” otherwise, it is just a meaningless “*voice*.”

This distinction of “*voice*” and “*speech*” mentioned above is not just a simple metaphor, but a typical thinking model adopted by a substantial part of Western scholars when they talk about non-Western thought. This model can be traced back to Aristotle, who discusses the beginning of politics in *Politics*:

Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And where as mere sound is but an indication of pleasure or pain and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set

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³ Aleš Erjavec, “Trivial Truths Related to Further Comments on the Absence of *Zhuyi*,” in *Bie-modern Art and Theory International Academic Conference*, July 2017.

forth the expedient and inexpedient, and likewise the just and unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state. (1253a)⁴

In Aristotle's text, the distinction between "speech" and "voice" is not only a remarkable difference between human and animal but also a powerful symbol for the expedient and inexpedient, the just and unjust, the comprehensible and incomprehensible. This distinction is given much attention by contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. According to Rancière, in the context of Western political philosophy, any voice which may encroach on speech's own privilege will be expelled from a social community because such an animal voice will "introduce trouble into the logos and into its political realization as *analogia* of parts of the community."⁵ To maintain a proper "analogia," a given community will adopt a set of "police" strategies for punishing those movements or thoughts that will pose threats to certain rules.⁶

As we see, this distinction between speech and voice is also a "police strategy" in the Western academic community in a deeper way. Once non-Western thought is accepted by the Western academic community or "republic of letters," it will change the constant "analogia" of the given community, which many Western scholars try very hard to avoid. Some scholars compare Western and non-Western cultures to prove the superiority of "speech." However, supposing a thought is an instance of meaningless and incomprehensible "voice," how can comparative study be possible in the first place?

In this essay, I want to discuss the above questions. I will inquire into the double meaning of the concept "Chinese philosophy," the inherent structure of the

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885, p. 4.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 22.

⁶ The terms "analogia" and "police" are both important concepts in Rancière's philosophy. "Analogia" comes from the ancient Greek "ana-logos," which means "proportion" and "analogy." Rancière uses this term for discussing speech's proportion which is arranged by "logos" in a given community. In Rancière's text, "police" means a set of rules, including language, social system, ethical and aesthetic standards, etc. that are shared by all the people in a given community. Any consciousness or movement which breaks the rule will be refuted or punished by the "police."

“speech / voice distinction,” and its operational model. I will also observe various ways of surpassing this distinction. After that, I will introduce Bie-modern (Doubtful Modernity) theory in order to find a solution to the “speech / voice distinction” problem.

Speech or Voice? Double Signification of the Concept “Chinese Philosophy”

Interestingly, as early as 1900s, when they began to discuss whether China’s traditional thought could be viewed as philosophy or not, Chinese scholars have adopted a model of thinking similar to that of the “speech / voice distinction.” Wang Guowei, a crucial person in the process of the modernization of the Chinese academic world, argued that “philosophy” is indeed contained in Chinese traditional thought. He also believed that the research field of philosophy is to deal with the universal issue of the human being rather than that of a given nation. Since the Chinese is a part of humankind, China certainly has had its own philosophy.⁷ Because of the remarkable consistency of their research objects, traditional Chinese thought is the same as Western philosophy. It seems that Wang Guowei’s convincing argument not only ends the discussion “whether Chinese has philosophy or not” but also sharply suggests the question itself is irrational. Besides Wang Guowei, this way to stop the argument about “Chinese Philosophy” is also adopted by many influential scholars, such as Hu Shi, Feng Youlan, Zhang Dainian, etc. They all admitted there are plenty of differences between Chinese and Western philosophy, but they also believed that these differences are the result of history and culture rather than of race or nation.

222

However, a cultural fundamentalist may claim that, since “philosophy” has been a part of traditional Chinese disciplines, it is unnecessary to introduce Western philosophy into China. To respond to those who despised the Western academic world, some founders of Chinese philosophy engaged in inquiring into the difference between Chinese thought and Western philosophy in order to construct Chinese philosophy according to Western standards. For example, Yan Fu, who translated many Western important writings, believed Western ac-

⁷ Wang Guowei, *Selected Essay about Philosophy and Aesthetics*, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1999, p. 4.

ademic thought is theorized and systematized, while Chinese academic is just a rough summation of experience.⁸ Cai Yuanpei, a great educator, clearly stated,

Traditional Chinese academic is never systematically integrated and therefore it cannot be viewed as "science" or "discipline" in modern sense. The urgent task for Chinese scholars is to construct systemized Chinese philosophy and aesthetics by referring to the Western academic form. To complete this work, one must be familiar with the Western academic standard and must have profoundly studied the history of Western philosophy.⁹

We can see there are two paradoxical answers to "whether the Chinese have philosophy" given by Wang Guowei and Cai Yuanpei respectively. The two competing attitudes clearly reveal the double signification of the term "Chinese philosophy." On the one hand, according to Wang Guowei, and similarly to Western philosophy, traditional Chinese academics also deal with general issues that cannot be replaced by any Western thought. On the other hand, Chinese academia lacks a rigorous way to express such valuable thoughts. A theorized and systemized "Chinese philosophy," which is close to the West, is not yet established. Obviously, Wang Guowei's answer focuses on the field, while Cai Yuanpei views "philosophy" as a discipline, i.e., as a thinking model and a way of academic study, whose standards must refer to those of the West. If we view Wang Guowei and Cai Yuanpei's ideas in the perspective of the "speech / voice distinction," we can summarize their opinions in the following way: ancient Chinese thought possesses valuable "voice," but it does not comprise understandable "speech," because it does not meet the requirements of "modern academic" standards, that is, those of "Western academia." To this extent, the conception of "Chinese philosophy" is a curious mixture of "voice" and "speech."

223

Proposing the conception of "Chinese philosophy" is an important event in the development history of Chinese academic activity. It reveals that Chinese scholars have realized the defect of ancient academia and have attempted to restore traditional Chinese thought in an international perspective. From this time on, Chinese thought is not isolated but a part of "world philosophy." In this respect,

⁸ Yan Fu, *Collected Essays*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1986, p. 52.

⁹ Cai Yuanpei, *Collected Essays*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1984, p. 188.

an intrinsic connotation of “Chinese philosophy” is internationalism rather than nationalism.

The double signification of “Chinese philosophy” also reveals Chinese scholars’ complex attitude toward their academical tradition. Firstly, modern Chinese scholars have realized that it is necessary to consider the relationship between Chinese academia and the international academic community. Secondly, “Chinese philosophy” is not just an academic conception but also the transformation of the Chinese research paradigm. To construct the discipline of “Chinese philosophy” means the creation of a new type of academic “speech.” For modern Chinese scholars to demonstrate the value of traditional Chinese thought, it is crucial to transform traditional academic discourse from “voice” into “speech” by referring to the standards of the West. Many modern Chinese scholars have devoted themselves to completing this transformation, but it seems they ignore a potential problem if Chinese thought is expressed in a Western style, is it still Chinese philosophy?

The “Speech / Voice Distinction”: A Self-Deconstruction System

Although Chinese scholars have claimed that philosophy should be an indispensable part of the international republic of letters, the validity of Chinese philosophy has remained a controversial problem for Western academia. When Western scholars discuss whether Chinese thought can be considered a “philosophy” or not, the distinction between speech and voice has proven to be a typical thinking model adopted by some Western scholars.

224

Take the early Jesuits to visit China, for example. As culture disseminators, Jesuits translated many Confucian classics and other works of Chinese traditional thought. In their travels, letters, and academic writings, we can find two contradictory attitudes toward China. On the one hand, China is described as a civilized country whose political institutions are highly efficient and even perfect. On the other hand, some Jesuits considered Chinese thought to be a meaningless “voice” that is short of logic and value, whereas Western philosophy, especially Christian thought, is systemized and valuable. In his journals of China, Matteo Ricci commented on Chinese moral philosophy as being comprised of

various maxims and unreliable legends.¹⁰ Eusèbe Renaudot straightforwardly claimed there is no “Erste Philosophie” (first philosophy) in China at all.¹¹

It seems that it was the Jesuit movement in which communication between Western and Chinese philosophy began, and this should have led to an international philosophy. However, this “comparative philosophy” implies the thinking model of the speech / voice distinction. According to the Jesuits, Chinese traditional thought is just incomprehensible and valueless “voice,” and comparing Western thought with Chinese simply proves that the former is “speech” and naturally superior to Chinese thought.

On the surface, the above comparative study confirms the rationality of the “speech / voice distinction,” but in the process of carrying out the comparison, the distinction is considered as being the premise, rather than the conclusion.¹² There is no doubt that Chinese classics carried their primary value for Chinese scholars and that Chinese traditional academics had their own norms and standards.¹³ However, since the Jesuits had accepted the “speech / voice distinction” before comparing the two thoughts, any evidence which could prove that Chinese thought is valuable could not be accepted and, in fact, had to be concealed. Furthermore, as we have mentioned, the “speech / voice distinction” is not just an evident mark of difference but a powerful symbol of the comprehensible and incomprehensible, etc. For a Jesuit, it is not important to find out what is the real specificity of Chinese thought; he only wants to convey the impression that Western philosophy is much better than Chinese thought. The simplest way to achieve this effect is to claim that Chinese thought is merely an instance of “voice” that is accordingly unnecessary to study. This case suggests that the boundary between voice and speech is not natural but a result of ideological construction.

¹⁰ Mathew Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Mathew Ricci*, translated by He Gaoji, Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1983, p. 31.

¹¹ *Jesuits's Letters on China*, vol. 3, edited by Jean Baptiste du Halde, translated by Zhu Jing, Zhengzhou: Da Xiang Publishing House, 2001, p. 285.

¹² For the point that the act of such comparisons takes the “speech / voice” distinction” as a precondition and evidence for the distinction at the same time, see Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, pp. 22–23.

¹³ For example, Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng in the Qing Dynasty proposed a set of rigorous rules for studying, which was accepted by the majority of scholars in that time.

However, since Chinese thought cannot be understood (that is to say, no one can know what the real meaning of Chinese thought is), how can Jesuits claim that Western thought is superior to the Chinese? Interestingly, as soon as someone utilizes the “speech / voice distinction” to distinguish between evaluate different cultures, he or she has to view “voice” as something understandable at once. In other words, before being disparaged, “voice” must first be considered as an instance of “speech.” This paradoxical transformation implies that the “speech / voice distinction” is an unreasonable and self-deconstructive system.

The Failure of Ways to Surpass the “Speech / Voice Distinction”

What is the real basis for the “speech / voice distinction”? We may draw some inspiration from early Western philosophers. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s letters show that he found it curious whether there was metaphysics in China, and he also frankly admitted that “Erste Philosophie” in China was undeveloped. In other words, Chinese thought was not entitled to be named “philosophy,” because it did not pay attention to the problem of “being.”¹⁴ Hegel argued that Chinese thought was lower than Western language and that it was not a suitable language for studying philosophy.¹⁵ Jacques Derrida pointed out that philosophy in its nature was a production of the West, which is related to Western language, culture, and history. In dialogue with Wang Yuanhua, a famous contemporary scholar, Derrida directly claimed that China did not possess philosophy but only thought.¹⁶ Carine Defoort, a contemporary philosopher, insists it is a mistake to view Chinese thought as “philosophy” because Chinese thought lacks the fundamental and inherent elements of Western philosophy.¹⁷

According to these opinions, if Chinese thought wants to be accepted as “philosophy,” it needs to speak in a Western language and get used to the context of Western culture. Language and culture are not only the most serious setbacks

¹⁴ *German Thinkers Discussing China*, edited by Adrian Hsia, translated by Chen Aizhen etc., Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 1995, pp. 8 and 19.

¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated by He Lin, et al., Beijing: Commercial Press, 1959, pp. 115–122.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Collected Lectures in China*, Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2003, p. 139.

¹⁷ Carine Defoort, “Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West*, 51, No. 3 (2001), p. 396.

for Chinese thought but also the primary "police strategies" in the republic of letters. As sentinels, language and culture keep other thought at a distance from Western philosophy, which to some extent turns the republic of letters into a Western club. In fact, highlighting the elements of "philosophy" as another insidious form of the "speech / voice distinction" denies the possibility of two different cultures communicating with each other while keeping their own characteristics and independence respectively.

Many scholars have realized that the above thinking model is harmful for undertaking effective communication between different cultures, for surpassing this distinction, and for constructing a real international philosophy. Rein Raud points out that "philosophy" can include Eastern thought only if Western scholars expand the study field of traditional philosophy.¹⁸ However, if we do this, we may encounter an embarrassed situation. When we talk about "philosophy", we may refer to completely different disciplines and therefore drop into a "disagreement" situation as Jacques Rancière has put.¹⁹ Moreover, once non-Western thought is considered as the same as Western "philosophy", both Western and non-Western thought's unique features will be ignored. In that case, non-Western thought is admitted by the republic of letters at the expense of its own nature. It proves that expanding the field of philosophy is not a proper solution to the "speech / voice distinction," because such an expansion only strengthens it.

Some scholars, especially in Chinese academia, think the key to surpass the "speech/ voice distinction" is to find various "common principles" between Chinese and Western philosophy. For example, Ye Weilian adopts some conceptions, such as, "common principles" and "inner voice" proposed by T. S. Eliot,²⁰ and points out that the aim of international philosophy and poetics is to find out the basic differences between Western and Chinese culture while constructing "common poetics" and "common principles" to promote mutual

¹⁸ Rein Raud, "Philosophies versus Philosophy: In Defense of a Flexible Definition," *Philosophy East and West*, 56, No. 4 (2006), p. 624.

¹⁹ About the conception of "disagreement," see Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, p. x.

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1980, p. 22.

communication.²¹ He believes this standpoint is so suitable and flexible that it will at the same time surpass both fundamentalism and cultural imperialism.

Unfortunately, Ye Weilian's proposal is no more than a fantasy. For instance, let us study the etymology of "principle" or "yuan" (Chinese term signifying "origin"). According to etymology, "principle" is the Latin word "principium," which means "the first place and time of conduction."²² In Chinese, the original meaning of "yuan" is "the headstream of river" according to *Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters*, the first Chinese dictionary.²³ As we can see, both "principle" and "yuan" mean "beginning" and "foundation." The different "beginnings" or "foundations" (that is, diverse "principles" or "yuan") engender various cultures. In that case, since scholars such as Ye Weilian admit that cultural difference indeed exists, how can they discover the "common principle" between different cultures? This paradox suggests that cultural relativism and "common principles," which are both endorsed by Ye Weilian, cannot get along with each other.

Furthermore, as the beginning of a thing or an event, "principles" or "yuan" also conduct and control their followers. To this extent, once someone uses the concept "principle" or "yuan," he or she will construct a hierarchical system, such as, mainstream and branch, leaders and followers etc. In that case, it is impossible to surpass cultural imperialism by finding out "common principles" because such an attempt is just the reason for the establishment of cultural imperialism. In this sense, "common principle" is only a potential re-expression of the "speech / voice distinction."

Some scholars try to construct a "good international philosophy" in order to solve the conflict between Western and non-Western thought and to promote the development of international philosophy. According to American aesthetician Richard Shusterman, a "good international philosophy" has to give up cultural, national, and racial specifics so as to deal with the general prob-

²¹ Ye Weilian, *Collected Essays*, Hefei: Anhui Education Publishing House, 2002, pp. 1 and 39.

²² *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, edited by P. G. W. Glare, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 1459.

²³ Xu Shen, *Explanations of Simple and Compound Characters*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1981, p. 569.

lem of humankind.²⁴ A "good international philosophy" should be based on the community of human kind, which will contain various thoughts belonging to diverse cultures. To some extent, this idea can be viewed as a replay of Christian "fellowship," i.e., Goethe's and Erich Auerbach's conception of "der Weltliteratur" (world literature).²⁵ In the name of "humankind," it seems there is no need to make a distinction between Western and Chinese culture in the first place. However, it is quite hard to prove that African-American criticism or Jewish diaspora literature has connections with academia in China today. Conversely, will a scholar who studies African-American criticism or other local cultures be guilty of fundamentalism and in turn be viewed as a "bad international philosopher" who ought to be excluded from the new republic of letters? If "a good international philosophy" can only deal with the general problem of humankind without considering a nation's or ethnicity's own specificity, then there will be no reason for developing a national philosophy. However, since a republic of letters is composed of various national philosophies, it will necessarily collapse if all regional cultures and national philosophies vanish as such. This case suggests that constructing a good international philosophy cannot rely on giving up dealing with a particular nation's own set of problems in the name of cultural universals. The "good international philosophy" project transforms the "speech / voice distinction" into a nation / world distinction, but the nature of Western-centrism is not thereby changed.

Superficially, the project of constructing a "good international philosophy" is similar to the proposal of making "world philosophy," which was proposed by Chinese scholars when they prepared to construct "Chinese philosophy" in the 1900s, but the two suggestions have different effects. The aim of Chinese scholars' desire for international philosophy is to earn an independent place for Chinese traditional thought, while the construction of "good international philosophy" will be at the cost of national philosophy altogether. Furthermore, who and how is one to judge which topic can be viewed as a "universal human problem" and ban in turn be situated in the field of "good international philosophy"?

²⁴ Richard Shusterman, "Internationalism in Philosophy: Models, Motives and Problems," *Metaphilosophy*, 28, No. 4 (1997), pp. 290–291.

²⁵ See Erich Auerbach, "Philology and Weltliteratur," translated by Jin Chengcheng, *Comparative Literature and World Literature*, No. 1 (2016), pp. 88–96.

Aleš Erjavec thinks students' own free will can lead them to find a proper field of study. He points out that the mode of operation of academia resembles that of the "market economy." There is an "invisible hand" that masters the distribution and transmission of the realm of philosophy (its topics and methods), and a student, no matter what country he or she belongs to, can choose the appropriate research field according to his or her own interests. Erjavec thinks financial support offered by governments to develop the study of national philosophical programs cannot succeed. He gives the example of Croatia, where the government had a project of developing Croatian national philosophy, even though "Croatian philosophers wanted to study Derrida, Lacan, Lyotard and the like." He reaches the conclusion that "[governmental] financial support will be generated only if such researchers and authors themselves from their own free will decide to carry out such agenda."²⁶

It seems the "free market of academia" makes students choose freely and gives them each an equal right to make their own speech. In this sense, the most popular philosophical topic will become the "universal problem of the human," making philosophy really international. However, this mode may just disguise as an optional choice that is in fact obligatory. Michel Foucault thinks the exercise of power is a "conduct of conducts" and a management of possibilities. Power means not only "confrontation" but also "conduct."²⁷ By means of the "invisible hand," the free market of philosophy conducts, or (more precisely) leads students to choose "freely." However, as we all know, Western culture is mainstream nowadays.

If we completely trust the free market of the academic community, we only obtain a set of Western, rather than international, discourses. In fact, those non-Western students just follow Western philosophy unconsciously and mistake Western topics for the universal study field. Even if the logic of today's academic community is indeed similar to the "free market," it will alert those nations who lack of original thought or "*zhuyi*" that they must create their own discourse and thus fully display their special value. Otherwise, a nation whose

230

²⁶ Erjavec, "*Zhuyi*: From Absence to Bustle, Some Comments on Jianjiang Wang's Article 'The Bustle and the Absence of *Zhuyi*,'" p. 78.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley, et al., New York: The New Press, 1997, p. 341.

"*zhuyi*" is absent cannot equally trade with others in "the free market of philosophy."

"Zhuyi" Construction in the Bie-modern (Doubtful Modernity) Era

The above ways to surpass the "speech / voice distinction" are unsuccessful because they all consciously or unconsciously admit to the existence of such distinction. Firstly, no matter whether we take Rode and his endeavor to expand the connotation of the term "philosophy," or Ye Weilian and his attempt to discover the "common principle" between Western and Chinese cultures, or the disparate efforts to construct "good international philosophy," none of these strategies can avoid setting up a duality that contains speech and voice, core and margin, leaders and followers, etc. However, we have explained above that the "speech / voice distinction" is based on a self-deconstructing paradox. Secondly, surpassing the "speech / voice distinction" does not mean one must renounce distinction as such. On the contrary, the key to surpassing the "speech / voice distinction" is to realize that identity cannot be a substitute for diversity. It is indeed necessary to make distinctions between different cultures and various "*zhuyi*." When we reject "the East is East and the West is West" (Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West"), we must also beware of eliminating culture difference in the name of identity. Only if a national philosophy blooms will a truly international philosophy be constructed that will then transcend the "speech / voice distinction." To this extent, professor Wang Jianjiang's Bie-modern (Doubtful Modernity) and other related theories can be viewed as a promising way to actualize the prospect of international philosophy.

Wang Jianjiang summarizes the Chinese contemporary social context as "Doubtful Modernity," which is a synthesis composed of the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. It is obvious that so called "Bie-modernity" is completely different from Western "modernity." This typological difference suggests that it is useless to simply repeat Western conception of modernity if one wants to solve Chinese contemporary problems. In *Bie-Modern: Behind the Creation of Discourse*, Wang Jianjiang points out that because all the problems in a nation have a close relationship with the current social situation, an academic must have specific historical features in a given time. Since contemporary China cannot be classified as having "Western modernity," what Chinese philosophy and

aesthetics focus on is not the problem of the Western modern or post-modern, but rather a special issue, that is, the “Bie-modern,” or “Doubtful Modernity.”²⁸

However, the conception of “Doubtful Modernity” (Bie-modern) does not mean that China has left the process of modernization. On the contrary, the purpose of Bie-modernism is to surpass the Bie-modern by pursuing the authenticity of modernity and then reaching an ideal social and academic situation. To achieve this goal, “Bie-modernity” contains various original and convincing theories, such as, time spatialization and the four-period development theory, the theory of the great-leap-forward pause, and Sino-West-Marxism-I (“Chinese traditional philosophy, Western philosophy, Marxism and I”).²⁹ In short, what Bie-modernism is in pursuit of is the deterrence of the pseudo-modern and the establishment of *real modernity*.

The “*real modernity*” here means highlighting the subjectivity of Chinese philosophy by “bie,” that is, finding out the difference between Chinese and Western consciously, surpassing current hybrid social situations, and arriving at a new type of modernity. To this extent, “Bie-modern” or “Doubtful Modernity” is not only a new “word” but also a new “practice,” one that can be employed to understand China’s specific social and cultural situation, which can in turn be especially beneficial for Chinese scholars constructing their own Chinese academic discourse, that is, “*zhuyi*.” Furthermore, although “bie” is the goal of the “Bie-modern,”³⁰ it does not deny the value of other cultures. Consequently, there is no distinction, such as that between “speech and voice” or “center and margin,” in the context of the “Bie-modern.” The guarded “threshold” of the international academic community is replaced by a communicative “bridge,” which will be a platform for dialogue and open for all kinds of “*zhuyi*.” We can take the conception “leap-forward pause,” for example, to reveal Bie-modern

²⁸ Wang Jianjiang, “Bie-Modern: Behind the Creation of Discourse,” *Shanghai Culture*, No. 12 (2015), pp. 5–23.

²⁹ Wang Jianjiang, “Introduction of ‘Bie-modern’ Theory,” *Bie-modern: Space Encounter and Times Spans*, Beijing: Social Science Press, 2017, p. 1.

³⁰ “Bie” is the core idea in the theory of “Bie-modern.” In modern Chinese, “bie” has multiple meanings. Literally, it means “not,” “farewell,” or “wrongly written words”; more implicitly, it refers to “awkward,” “another,” etc. In “Bie-modern” theory, “bie” is a way of thinking, which means to pursue original ideas, creative discourse, and subjective awareness. Although it tries to find differences and make distinctions, it is not restricted to those “bie” but attempts to transcend them.

theory's "bie" (distinguishing) and "jie" (borrowing). To adapt the special social circumstances, Bie-modern proposes the "leap-forward pause," which means stopping and reflecting on the current stage of development from the position of the future.³¹ According to this theory, the present is integrated in the same space with the past, future, and different times. It is obvious that the "leap-forward pause" theory is a bit similar to Heidegger's conception of "project," but it is also very different from the Western thinking model. In fact, this theory is rooted in Chinese traditional philosophy, especially "Zen" Buddhism. This case clearly illustrates that Bie-modern has its own foundation, but it also accepts other valuable theories, whether Western or Eastern. The Bie-modern has its own core idea based on Chinese traditional thought and current social situation, but it does not need to be restricted to a particular national perspective. The Bie-modern and its theories are not another version of nationalism or fundamentalism but rather an open and inclusive system.

As an original theory, the Bie-modern has its own appeal for constructing a real international philosophy and refusing the pseudo-modern. From China's new cultural movement up to now, many scholars claim it is necessary for China to abandon its own tradition if it wants to arrive in modern society quickly.³² In fact, such a claim is a typical phenomenon in the Bie-modern. Because present-day China is a synthesis of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern, some people, in trying to transform society into a real modern sociality, mistake the traditional for the past. They attempt to transform *Chinese* into *world* by way of completely imitating the West. However, is that possible?

Let us take the translation of the term "philosophy" as an example. From the start Western missionaries, such as Giulio Aleni, François Furtado and Cai Yuanpei, translated the term "philosophy" as "li xue" (studying various objects and phenomena to acquire knowledge), "ai zhi xue" (love knowledge) and "hao xue" ("love learning," an allusion to the Analects).³³ These translations do not only transform the Western word into Chinese, but also change philosophy's

³¹ Wang Jianjiang, "Bie-modern: Leap over Pause," *Exploration and Free Views*, No. 12 (2015), pp. 9–14.

³² This opinion can be found in many thinkers in the May 4th Movement, such as Lu Xun. See *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2005, p. 45.

³³ About the history of the translation of "philosophy," see Chen Qiwei, "History of the Chinese Translation of Philosophy," *World Philosophy*, No. 3 (2001), pp. 60–68.

original connotation in its native culture. This case suggests that the foreign conception, in the process of translation, cannot maintain the same meaning it has in its original culture.

The same situation also exists in Western philosophy. When we summarize Western thought as a “republic of letters,” we often neglect that it contains the *tone* of German, French, and English along with different research paradigms, such as continental philosophy and Anglo-American philosophy. Hegel never worries that the word “Philosophie” has deviated from the original meaning of “φιλοσοφία” when he proposes to “let philosophy speak German.” Hegel believes that, although it was created by the ancient Greeks, philosophy cannot completely meet the needs of the development of German thought at his time. To this extent, “philosophie” is Germany’s own discourse rather than that of the city-states of ancient Greece.

Hegel successfully made “φιλοσοφία” with a “German style”. This case may inspire us to believe that introducing Western culture does not mean that we must assimilate or eliminate China’s own culture. The question is not whether we should discard “Chinese style” by referring to Western thought or rely on Chinese thought exclusively, but rather how we are to construct our own style. I think Bie-modern’s “Sino-West-Marxism-I” theory may be a promising model.

The importance of “Sino-West-Marxism-I” theory has to do with the function of “I”. Firstly, when a student integrates theories, he or she will bring his or her own understanding and experience into the theory, which will make it into something new, just as we saw in the example of the translation of the term “philosophy” above. Secondly, no matter how many theories are introduced, a nation must have its own discourse and solve its own problems. Although Chinese philosophical discourse takes the construction of international philosophy as its ultimate aim, it must be based on the native current context at first. In the context of the Bie-modern, what Chinese philosophical discourse must do is to surpass the situation of mere juxtaposition and to integrate other cultures into the Chinese-style system. The judgment of the structure of “Sino-Western-Marxism-I” responds precisely to this requirement. Thirdly, because of the introduction of Western knowledge, the traditional Chinese context does not exist as it did in its original situation. On the one hand, Marxism and Western modern philosophy have found a new way to develop their theories. In other

words, there is no need to have complete opposition between Chinese traditional philosophy, Western philosophy, and Marxism, nor do we have to use the first three to hinder or eliminate "I", nor are we required to mix all of them together into a jumbled mess; rather, the obligation is to discard this paradox, highlight the individuality and originality of "I." "Sino-Western-Marxism" is not simply a combination of three thoughts, but rather a synthesis, the construction of which must depend on the subjective consciousness and innovative spirit of the researchers themselves. In "Sino-West-Marxism-I" theory, there is no distinction of "core and margin" or "leader and follower" among Chinese traditional philosophy, Western philosophy, and Marxism, because researchers themselves can integrate various thoughts and construct an open system. To this extent, "Sino-West-Marxism-I" theory can not only successfully surpass the "voice / speech distinction" but also conceive of a kind of international philosophy.

Because of Bie-modern theory's independence, inclusiveness and pursuit of real modernity, it is attaining contemporary international influence. Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) has established the Center for Chinese Bie-Modern Studies (CCBMS) to study and apply Bie-modern theory. Well-known European academic journals have devoted special columns to Bie-modernism. There have been four Bie-modern international academic conferences held in America and China respectively. Bie-modernism and its theory have been recorded in the *Chinese Aesthetic Association State of the Discipline Report*, and the series of works on this topic have been formally published by the China Social Sciences Press. At the same time, more and more artists illustrate their Bie-modern propositions by works and their own creative manifestos, which reveals a positive interactive relationship between artistic creation and art theory. Moreover, some scholars study the relationship between tourism and environment from the perspective of the Bie-modern, and others even deal with problems of economics, law, and linguistics by referring to this theory. Various disciplines come together by means of the Bie-modern theory, which not only clearly indicates that the study of the Bie-modern has expanded to philosophy, aesthetics, art theory, linguistics, literary theory, law, economics, sociology, and so on, but also suggests that the Bie-modern has become a thinking model and has been accepted by international academia, diverse disciplines, and artists.

We have analyzed the mistake of the "speech / voice distinction" and illustrated the advantage of the "Bie-modern" (Doubtful Modernity) in surpassing

it. As we can see, there will never exist a philosophy that can separate itself from its own national culture, and there is also no natural boundary between speech and voice. The Bie-modern era provides us a background to innovate discourses, but the way to “make them new” is not just simply to propose some conception or term. I think “Bie-modern” (Doubtful Modernity) has given us an illuminating model for constructing creative Chinese “*zhuyi*,” For example, in “‘For-non-existence,’ ‘For-being,’ and ‘Yet-for-being,’” Wang Jianjiang suggests using “for-non-existence” and “for-being” to summarize the two antagonistic attitudes of constructing local Chinese “isms”. In my opinion, instead of an opposition and limitation in viewpoints of whether there are aesthetics and literary theories in China in the first place, the issue of “yet-for-being” is to ask what is missed in Chinese aesthetics and literary theory in the situation of globalization. To solve the problem of “yet-for-being,” it is necessary to undertake a deep analysis of the history of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, to re-interpret traditional conceptions or theories in the contemporary context, and to have meaningful interactions with international academia.³⁴

In short, a valuable Chinese “*zhuyi*” needs to profoundly rethink the situation of contemporary China (that is, the feature of the “Bie-modern”) and to be a benefit for deterring the pseudo-modern and pursuing the authenticity of modernity. At the same, Chinese “*zhuyi*” needs to be integrated into international academia. It cannot be restricted to a national perspective but should promote a more open and international philosophy.

³⁴ Wang Jianjiang, “‘For-non-existence,’ ‘For-being,’ and ‘Yet-for-being,’” *Academic Monthly*, No. 10 (2015), pp. 126–135.