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# “Chinese” Philosophy or “The-Chinese-Language” Philosophy?

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## Abstract

This paper offers an analytical and critical examination of the on-going discussion since the turn of the twenty-first century in China on *hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學. Since people engaging in the *hanyu zhexue* discourse are often confused, the paper tries to articulate and differentiate various different theses in the discourse, clarifying conceptual confusions, uncovering hidden presuppositions, and showing which theses are false, which ones are true, and which ones are undetermined. Clarifications and arguments are made based on my previous works done in philosophy of language, pragmatics, comparative philosophy, Chinese philosophy of language, and the study of classics (*jingxue* 經學). This paper sketches out a larger conceptual and historical landscape, in which the *hanyu zhexue* discourse can be located. It also points out places where the battles can be fought, hidden paths found, and arguments and counter-arguments made. It concludes that the term “*zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學” (Chinese philosophy) should not be jettisoned, and replaced by the term “*hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學,” as it has been proposed by many people.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of language, pragmatics, Chinese philosophy (*zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學), the Chinese language (*hanyu* 漢語), *hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學, the study of classics (*jingxue* 經學), “sociology of knowledge” approach vs. linguistic determinist approach, cultural manifolds, nonindividualist vs. individualist, anti-elitist vs. elitist

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When future historians look back at the study of Chinese philosophy in mainland China around the turn of the century (from the late 1990s to the first two decades of the twenty-first century), they may report that the two most significant events were: (a) the discussion about “the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy” (中國哲學的合法性) in the late 1990s, and (b) the discussion about *hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學, starting in the early 2010s. The first discussion ended toward the end of the 1990s and produced a large body of literature, the second discussion has been producing a rapidly expanding body of literature, and it is impossible to list them all here. If one randomly picks a well-known scholar working on Chinese philosophy in China today, the chances are that this scholar probably has said something about the “legitimacy of Chinese philosophy.” As I am writing in 2018, one cannot yet say the same about *hanyu zhexue*, which is still ongoing. However, I believe that it is safe to predict that one eventually will be able to say the same about it.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to summarize these two major discussions in which so many people already have participated. For the purposes of the present paper, it suffices to make three important observations about them. First, what is good about both discussions is that they have brought critical attention and acute self-awareness to the fact that scholars have been using “modern” and “Western” concepts, such as philosophy (哲學), materialism vs. idealism (唯物主義 vs. 唯心主義), logic (邏輯), ontology (本體論), and ethics (倫理學), to study Chinese philosophy since the beginning of the twentieth-century, and we might want to ask the question of whether it is “legitimate” to do so. However, one might question about and object to the terms in which the discussions are formulated. For example, a major flaw of these discussions is that they are not critical and self-conscious enough when it comes to their own meta-concepts in terms of which they conduct the discussions, such

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<sup>1</sup> As I was revising this paper in 2018, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 (Academic Monthly), a major scholarly journal in China, has created a special section on *hanyu zhexue* in their latest issue. One senior editor, who was at the conference on *hanyu zhexue* in September in Hangzhou, told me that they would continue to have a special section on *hanyu zhexue* in future issues. In fact, the paper I wrote in Chinese on *hanyu zhexue* is forthcoming in this journal.

as the concepts of "modern," "Chinese," "Western," "Chinese philosophy," *hanyu* (the Chinese language), and the distinctive features of the Chinese language. What is most troubling is a key assumption, taken for granted by the participants in the discussions, which is that if a given concept or a *keyword*  $x$ , which is used to study Chinese philosophy, is a "modern" and "Western" concept, then it necessarily must be illegitimate to use  $x$  to talk about "Chinese" philosophy. As I have argued elsewhere, this assumption is false.<sup>2</sup>

The second observation about these two discussions is that a significant difference between them is that the participants in the first discussion are mostly scholars who study Chinese philosophy, whereas many participants in the second discussion are people who study "Western philosophy," such as analytic philosophy, philosophy of language, and phenomenology. For example, an active and strong voice in the discussion comes from what we might call "Chinese phenomenologists," and they have been promoting the idea of "*hanyu xianxiangxue* 漢語現象學" (*hanyu* phenomenology) (more on this topic later).

The third observation is that the first discussion (the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy discussion) is a real "debate" among people with diverse views, and the debate ended without a clear answer or consensus. However, the second discussion (the *hanyu zhexue* discussion) has not really been a debate so far. Almost everyone participating in it agrees with one another on some core ideas. It is for this reason that I shall call it the "*hanyu zhexue* discourse," rather than the "*hanyu zhexue* debate." And what is most significant about the discourse is that it has emerged as an answer to the "legitimacy of Chinese philosophy" debate. Of course, this is an on-going discourse, so things might change in the future. I hope this paper might be helpful in turning the discourse into a debate.

In Sections 1-4, I will be primarily articulating and differentiating the key ideas of the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, clarifying conceptual confusions, and uncovering hidden presuppositions in the discourse.

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<sup>2</sup> See Xiao (2007, 502-503; 2011; forthcoming). An early version of Xiao (forthcoming) can be found at <https://kenyon.academia.edu/yangxiao>.

In Section 4, the last section, I argue against the proposal made by people who promote the HYZX thesis that the term “Chinese philosophy” (*zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學) should be jettisoned, and replaced by the term “*hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學.”

## 1. The Core Ideas of the *Hanyu Zhexue* Discourse

In order to understand better what is really going on in the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, we might want to state explicitly the key ideas that are at the heart of the discourse. We might break them down into two independent theses, one being the “historicist thesis” and the other being the “*hanyu zhexue* thesis” (the HYZX thesis):

(The Historicist Thesis): There is such a thing called “Chinese philosophy” with its own uniquely distinctive features that make it “Chinese” philosophy and different from “Western philosophy”.

(The HYZX Thesis): Distinctive features of “Chinese philosophy” or “the Chinese way of thinking” (中國特有的思維方式) are determined by distinctive features of the Chinese language (漢語).

I shall also refer to the HYZX thesis as the “particular thesis” of linguistic relativism, or “PT of linguistic relativism.”<sup>3</sup> The HYZX thesis or PT can be seen as a particular version of a more general thesis called “linguistic relativism,” which is sometimes formulated as follows:

(GT) Distinctive features of the way of thinking of a community of speakers of a language *L* are determined by distinctive features of *L*.

I shall call it the “general thesis” of linguistic relativism or “GT of linguistic relativism.” I shall not deal with GT in this paper. Obviously, PT is a particular version of GT when *L* happens to be the Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> If one just looks at the literal meaning of the formulation, it is clear that it is more accurate to call this view “linguistic determinism.” However, the view has been widely known as “linguistic relativism.” I follow the popular usage here.

language. For practical purposes, we shall say that people who believe in PT belong to the “party of linguistic relativism” or “the party of the HYZX thesis,” by which I mean people who believe in the particular version of linguistic relativism, namely PT or the HYZX thesis.

It is important to note that the two key ideas of the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, namely, the historicist thesis and the HYZX thesis, are independent of each other. In fact, the term “*hanyu* 漢語” does not appear in the historicist thesis. That is to say, one can accept the historicist thesis without accepting the HYZX thesis. Hence it is entirely possible for one to hold the view that there are distinctive features of Chinese philosophy but reject the view that they are determined by the distinctive features of the Chinese language (I shall have more to say about this in Section 3). This indicates that the HYZX thesis is the essence of the *hanyu zhexue* discourse. This is the main reason I shall focus on it in this paper.<sup>4</sup>

In the formulation of the HYZX thesis given above, I used the phrase “Chinese philosophy” or “the Chinese way of thinking” (中國特有的思維方式). I did this in order to include a group of people who deny that there is such a thing called “Chinese philosophy” because of certain distinctive features of the Chinese language. I shall call this group of people “the deniers.” Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950) might have been the first “denier” to have articulated this view. In the deniers’ formulation of the thesis, they would use “the Chinese way of thinking,” rather than “Chinese philosophy.”<sup>5</sup>

As we have mentioned, the *hanyu zhexue* discourse has not been a genuine debate, and there are not many people who have openly stated their objection to the HYZX thesis. However, we can easily imagine that the HYZX thesis would be rejected by those who belong to the party of people who reject linguistic relativism. If we put their position in the form of a thesis, it would be the negation of the HYZX thesis. In other words, if we are to turn the *hanyu zhexue* discourse into a debate, it could take the form of a debate between two parties:

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<sup>4</sup> For a critique of the historicist thesis, see Xiao (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> I do not discuss the deniers in this paper. For a detailed discussion of Fu Sinian, see Xiao (forthcoming).

those who accept and those who reject all or parts of the HYZX thesis.

If I am asked to which of the two parties I belong, I must say it is the third party of those people who would say that they do not know what the HYZX thesis is. When they see the formulation of the HYZX thesis given earlier, their response would be that they do not think they know the determinate meaning of the thesis because the keywords and key-concepts in the thesis, such as “*hanyu*” (the Chinese language), or “the distinctive features of *hanyu*,” have such a wide range of meanings. Whether the thesis is true, then, depends on how one interprets these keywords and key concepts. For this reason, to conduct the debate on the level of the thesis and its negation would be pointless and fruitless. Here a useful instruction might be: “Don’t argue, but look!” or “Don’t debate, but look!” Of course, in our current philosophical culture, one is often tempted to first identify oneself in terms of certain “ism” (e.g., as an endorser or a denier of linguistic relativism), and then try to argue for it. One joins a debate by taking a side of the debate. Wittgenstein once said that one of the most difficult things in philosophy is to begin early enough. I think to jump into a debate in this way is to begin too late in philosophy; one should begin earlier. In other words, one should begin with the presuppositions taken for granted by and shared by both parties in the debate.

As I have mentioned before, many people who have participated in the *hanyu zhexue* discourse are scholars who study “Western philosophy,” including analytic philosophy and philosophy of language. It is a surprise that none of them has tried to clarify what the HYZX thesis really means, or to articulate the multiple versions of the thesis, corresponding to the multiple meanings of the terms used in the thesis. As many of these people must have been aware, one important achievement, as well as an important methodological lesson, in the early history of analytic philosophy and philosophy of language is that philosophical problems could be solved or dissolved when we clarify vague and ambitious meanings of words in the formulations of these philosophical problems. When linguistic philosophy, which is the project to solve or dissolve philosophical problems by making the “linguistic turn” (by taking language seri-

ously), was in its heydays, some people might have even believed that *all* philosophical problems could be solved or dissolved this way. We now are not so confident anymore. Linguistic philosophy as a project has been abandoned. Nevertheless, I believe that one belief that has survived the demise of linguistic philosophy is that it is always a good thing to articulate and clarify the multiple meanings of the words we use. And when we do that in the case of the HYZX thesis, we will then be able to see that we are actually not dealing with one thesis, but several different theses. In fact, if one can show how many of the specific meanings of the phrase "the distinctive features of *hanyu*" there can be, then one can show how many specific versions of the HYZX thesis there can be, correspondingly. Only once we have narrowed down and sorted out these specific meanings of the phrase, will we be able to see which versions of the HYZX thesis are true, which ones are false, and which ones are still to be settled.<sup>6</sup>

I have mentioned that I belong to a third party of people who do not know what the HYZX thesis is. It might also be helpful if we pay special attention to a group of people who belong to a fourth party: Nathan Sivin, Geoffrey Lloyd, and Randall Collins. They are people who insist that there is no such a thing called *hanyu zhexue*, even if there might be such a thing called "Chinese philosophy." In other words, these are people who acknowledge that there are distinctive features of "Chinese philosophy," and at the same time insist that *none* of them are determined by (explained in terms of) the distinctive features of the Chinese language. I have more to say about this fourth party in the next section.

Without getting into detailed arguments here, let me just state that I eventually want to distance myself from the fourth party. It can be argued that "none" might be too strong a word to use when they claim that *none* of the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy can be explained in terms of the distinctive features of the Chinese language. It seems reasonable to assume that it is possible that *some* of the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy might have

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<sup>6</sup> For my answers to these questions, see Xiao (2018, forthcoming).

something to do with *some* of the distinctive features of the Chinese language, and it depends on what one means by “the distinctive features of the Chinese language,” which is a remarkably vague phrase. At this point, we might just say that we should at least be open-minded about this possibility.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Locating the HYZX Thesis in the Conceptual Landscape of Explanation

I have mentioned earlier that the two core ideas of the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, the historicist thesis and the HYZX thesis, are independent of each other, which means that one can accept one and reject the other at the same time. In other words, it is entirely possible for one to hold the view that there are distinctive features of Chinese philosophy (the historicist thesis) but reject the view that these distinctive features are determined by the distinctive features of the Chinese language (the HYZX thesis).

It is worth taking another and closer look at the formulation of the HYZX thesis:

The HYZX Thesis: Distinctive features of “Chinese philosophy,” or “the Chinese way of thinking” (中國特有的思維方式), are determined by distinctive features of the Chinese language (漢語).

It is obvious that this thesis assumes at least two presuppositions: (i) there is *only one* factor that determines the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy, and (ii) this factor is *hanyu* (with its distinctive features). Obviously, both could be challenged: Why *only one* decisive factor? Why *hanyu*? In other words, why should we assume that *hanyu* must be the only decisive factor when we give explanations of the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy?

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed arguments, see Xiao (2018, forthcoming).

The point here is that what the HYZX thesis (or linguistic relativism) is attempting to do is to explain the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy in terms of linguistic features of *hanyu*. Now, not everyone who rejects linguistic relativism would necessarily reject the possibility that Chinese philosophy might have distinctive features, of which one should offer some explanations. What they reject is that *all* of the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy can *only* be explained in terms of the distinctive features of *hanyu*. There can be so many nonlinguistic factors that can appear in one's explanations of why Chinese philosophy has the distinctive features it does. The burden of proof is on the party of linguistic relativism to rule out these nonlinguistic factors.

In fact, some of the most influential explanations of the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy in the literature do not belong to the party of linguistic relativism. We may first mention two accounts that belong to what might be called the "sociology of knowledge" based accounts. In their comparative study of ancient Greek and Chinese philosophy and sciences, Nathan Sivin and Geoffrey Lloyd have argued that the ways in which philosophy and sciences were done in ancient Greece and China are distinctively different; however, they explain the differences in terms of the institutional differences of how intellectual lives were organized in ancient Greece and China, including, for example, the particular ways in which intellectual discussions, debates, and communications were conducted.<sup>8</sup> To accommodate such a holistic set of explanations, Lloyd and Sivin have coined the term "cultural manifolds" (文化瓣) in order to include a wide range of factors in the explanations of the distinctive features of ancient Chinese philosophy and sciences (Lloyd and Sivin 2003; Sivin 2011).

Another example of the "sociology of knowledge" based approach is Randall Collins' book *Sociology of Philosophies* (1998). He spent 25 years studying various schools and movements of philosophy

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd and Sivin (2003). Of course, one does not have to agree with the details of their arguments, as I do not. But the very existence of such a nonlinguistic explanation is a serious challenge to the linguistic relativist explanation.

around the world throughout human history (including ancient Greek philosophy, the Stoics, Mohism, Confucianism, the Song Neo-Confucians, the logical positivists, and so on). Like Sivin and Lloyd, Collins (1998) offers explanations not in terms of linguistic features of various languages, but rather in terms of institutional and structural features, such as the complicated social and political networks among philosophers.<sup>9</sup> Collins is one of the first ones who started practicing what has eventually become very popular recently, namely, network analysis.

However, the “sociology of knowledge” based approach is only a small corner of a vast conceptual landscape of possible explanations of the distinctive features of a particular “culture,” or a particular “philosophy.” In fact, we would be genuinely surprised by the complex and intriguing patterns of the conceptual landscape. Interestingly enough, when we have charted a comprehensive overview of the landscape, we would be able to see that these two approaches: (a) the “sociology of knowledge” based approach (Sivin, Lloyd, and Collins), which puts emphasis on the nonlinguistic institutions, rules, and conventions, and (b) the linguistic relativist approach (the party of linguistic relativists or the *hanyu zhexue* promoters), which puts emphasis on the linguistic institutions, rules, and conventions, share more things in common than most people typically are aware of. The fact that one focuses on nonlinguistic factors and the other on linguistic factor does not matter that much, when one sees that both try to explain the distinctive features of Chinese philosophy in terms of things that are nonindividualistic and impersonal. Both downplay individual creativity. Both are “anti-individualist” and “anti-elitist.”

It becomes visible and obvious that they share all of these things in common when we contrast them with what might be called a Herderian, “romanticist” individualistic, and elitist approach in explaining distinctive features of a particular culture or philosophy. If one adopts such an approach to explain the distinctive features of

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<sup>9</sup> Again, one does not have to agree with the details in Collins’ arguments. The very existence of this type of nonlinguistic explanations in itself is a challenge to those who promote linguistic relativist explanation.

Chinese philosophy, it would be like this. There were geniuses in the history of China, who had penetrating insights into the distinctive essence of Chinese culture. They then formulated and expressed these insights in terms of philosophical concepts. The distinctive features of Chinese philosophy are ultimately the expressions of their individual creativity or originality. Or, if we adopt an even more individualistic version, these geniuses “created” or “invented” the distinctive essence of “Chinese philosophy,” which did not exist before it was created by them.

In terms of the *zeitgeist* of contemporary academia, it is extremely unfashionable to take an “individualistic” and “elitist” approach. This partly explains why the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, which puts emphasis on “language,” something impersonal and nonindividualistic, has proven to be so popular for so many people today. However, fashions come and go. We might have to learn to swim against the current. Furthermore, one can find in Davidson’s philosophy of language an “individualistic” but “nonelitist” approach that leaves room for individual creativity for everyone. There seems to be a middle path we can take here. Charles Taylor’s nonelitist reformulation of Herder’s concept of genius seems to be a perfect description of such a middle path: “Herder put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human. Each person has his or her own ‘measure’ is his way of putting it” (Taylor 1991, 28).

Obviously, I have only sketched out some parts of the conceptual landscape, pointing out places where the battles can be fought, hidden paths found, and arguments and counter-arguments made.<sup>10</sup> More work remains to be done.

### 3. Why We Should Not Replace “中國哲學” with “漢語哲學”

Long before the *hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學 discussion started in the 2010s, many scholars had articulated the core ideas of the discourse. The following is only a partial list of some of them: Zhang Dongsun

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<sup>10</sup> I offer more detailed discussions in Xiao (2006, 2018, and forthcoming).

張東蓀 (1886–1973), Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950), Zhou Youguang 周有光 (1906–2017), Yu Jiyuan 余紀元, A. C. Graham (1919–1991), Alfred Bloom, Henry Rosemont, Roger Ames, David Hall, and Chad Hansen.<sup>11</sup> These scholars anticipated almost everything in the *hanyu zhexue* discourse. It is unfortunate that most of the people participating in the current *hanyu zhexue* discourse have not paid enough attention to the ancestors of their ideas.<sup>12</sup>

However, it should be pointed out that there is one thing that is absolutely new in the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, which is the following proposal made by people who promote the HYZX thesis: In order to highlight the Chinese language's decisive influence on Chinese philosophy, we should refer to *zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 (Chinese philosophy) as *hanyu zhexue*. In fact, according to this proposal, the former should be jettisoned, and replaced by the latter.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, this proposal is a logical implication of the HYZX thesis: If it is indeed true that the distinctive features of “Chinese philosophy” are determined by the distinctive features of *hanyu* (the Chinese language), then “Chinese philosophy” and “*hanyu* philosophy” are identical with each other, and it makes sense to use them interchangeably.

As one can imagine, since the HYZX thesis or PT is a particular implication of the general thesis of linguistic relativism, other associated new terms would have to be coined as well. For example, the term “*deguo zhexue* 德國哲學” (German philosophy) should now be replaced by “*deyu zhexue*” (the-German-language philosophy), and

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<sup>11</sup> For critique discussions of these figures, please see Xiao (2005–6, 2006, 2018, forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Liu Liangjian's 劉梁劍 (2015) book is an exception here. It is also the first monograph on *hanyu zhexue*.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, some Chinese Christian theologians have coined the term *hanyu jidujiao shenxue* 漢語基督教神學 (*hanyu* Christian theology) to refer to *zhongguo jidujiao shenxue* 中國基督教神學 (Chinese Christian theology). In the literature, one rarely sees the latter these days. In fact, some Chinese Christian theologians might have started using the term earlier than the *hanyu zhexue* people; it is even possible that the latter have been inspired by the former. I do not know whether what I say here about the *hanyu zhexue* 漢語哲學 discourse is applicable to the *hanyu shenxue* 漢語神學 discourse. I shall not deal with this question here.

this idea has indeed been put into practice.<sup>14</sup> This also means that various sub-fields of Chinese philosophy should also be re-named, and accordingly we should have new terms such as “*hanyu xinling zhexue* 漢語心靈哲學” (*hanyu* philosophy of mind). And this should also include *hanyu yuyan zhexue* 漢語語言哲學 (*hanyu* philosophy of language). As I am writing in 2018, it seems that these new terms are in the process of gradually replacing the old ones.<sup>15</sup>

A main problem with the term *hanyu zhexue* is that it is vague and ambiguous. It has at least two meanings: a weak one and a strong one. For the *hanyu zhexue* promoters, it goes beyond “any philosophy done in *hanyu*” (任何用漢語做的哲學), which is its weak sense; rather, it means “any philosophy done in *hanyu*, whose distinctive features are determined by the distinctive features of *hanyu*” (任何一種用漢語做的, 並且為漢語所決定的哲學), which is its strong sense.

Let me first make it very clear that I have no problem with the term in its weak sense, in and of itself. It is fine as long as one does not claim that it is identical with “*zhongguo zhexue*” (Chinese philosophy) (more on this soon). There are indeed people who use the term in its weak sense. For example, phenomenology has been the most popular style of philosophizing today in China since it was introduced in the early 1980s; there are more people studying phenomenology than people studying any other type of philosophy in China today. As I mentioned earlier, some of these Chinese phenomenologists have coined the term “*hanyu xianxiangxue* 漢語現象學” (Chinese language phenomenology) to refer to “any phenomenology done in Chinese.” It is important to point out a significant difference between these people who promote “*hanyu* phenomenology” and those other people who promote “*hanyu* philosophy,” and it is the following: Although the *hanyu* phenomenology people have recently started talking about

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<sup>14</sup> A conference held in Taiwan in 2007, co-organized by universities from mainland China and Taiwan, is called “The Interactions between *hanyu* 漢語 philosophy and *deyu* 德語 philosophy.”

<sup>15</sup> Long before the *hanyu zhexue* discourse, scholars such as Zhang Dongsun and Chad Hansen (who is influenced by Zhang Dongsun) had already articulated the idea that the early Chinese thinkers’ philosophy of mind and philosophy of language are determined by their perception of distinctive features of the Chinese language. For a detailed critique of Zhang and Hansen, see Xiao (2006, 2018).

how *hanyu* phenomenology should have its own distinctive features that make it different from Western phenomenology, and that what they do when they do *hanyu* phenomenology should not be a mere translating or copying of Western phenomenology, they do not claim that these distinctive features of *hanyu* phenomenology are determined by the distinctive characteristics of *hanyu*. In other words, they are not using *hanyu* phenomenology in its strong sense (any phenomenology done in *hanyu* whose distinctive features are determined by the distinctive features of *hanyu*), rather, they are using the term in its weak sense (any phenomenology done in Chinese).

I want to end this paper by presenting arguments about why we should not equate *hanyu* philosophy (in either its weak or strong sense) with Chinese philosophy, and why we should keep the term Chinese philosophy and should not replace it with *hanyu* philosophy.

We may start with the strong sense of the term, which is intimately connected to the HYZX thesis. Now if the thesis turns out to be undetermined or false, then we should not use the term in its strong sense. As I have shown, the HYZX thesis is indeed undetermined or even false (under certain interpretations).<sup>16</sup> And this is reason enough not to use the term “*hanyu zhexue*” in its strong sense.

What about the term “*hanyu* philosophy” in its weak sense? Should we jettison “*zhongguo zhexue*” (Chinese philosophy), and replace it with *hanyu* philosophy in the sense of any philosophy done in *hanyu*? The answer is obviously no. The scope of Chinese philosophy is obviously much larger than the scope of *hanyu* philosophy. There are people who self-identify themselves as Chinese philosophers or as scholars doing Chinese philosophy, characterizing what they do as Chinese philosophy, but not all of them write in Chinese, and some of them write in other languages, such as Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, English, French, and German. In other words, we should keep the term “Chinese philosophy” as a large umbrella term, under which we can include *guhanyu zhexue* 古漢語哲學 (philosophy done in classical Chinese), *xiandai hanyu zhexue* 現代漢語哲學 (philosophy done in modern Chinese), *zangyu zhexue* 藏語哲學 (philosophy done in Tibetan). The canonic Buddhist texts written

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<sup>16</sup> See Xiao (2005–6, 2006, 2018, and forthcoming).

in Tibetan, as well as Tibetan scholars’ books on Buddhism written in Tibetan today, should be included as part of Chinese philosophy, even though they are not written in Chinese. It seems quite clear that the source of our disagreement with those who equate Chinese philosophy and *hanyu* philosophy has to be located in our different understandings of what it means to be “Chinese.” They seem to equate it with being a Chinese-speaker, whereas we do not.

In other words, “Chinese philosophy” can be done in many different languages; it can be Chinese, and it can be Korean, classical Chinese, modern Chinese, English, or any other languages. For example, I have written two papers on the *hanyu zhexue* discourse recently, one in Chinese (Xiao forthcoming) and one in English (the one you are reading now), and there are a lot of overlapping material and ideas between the two. I think everyone would agree that it makes no sense if one paper is, whereas the other paper is not, counted as part of “Chinese philosophy.”

Here is another example. Several modern classics in the study of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world, such as Herbert Fingarette’s *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, A. C. Graham’s *Disputers of Tao*, and David S. Nivison’s *The Ways of Confucianism*, have now all been translated into Chinese. I believe no one would deny that they were already parts of Chinese philosophy *before* they were translated into Chinese. It only makes sense to say that they were not parts of *hanyu* philosophy in the sense of any philosophy done in Chinese until they were translated into Chinese. However, it makes absolutely no sense to claim that they were not parts of Chinese philosophy until they were translated into Chinese. This indicates clearly that we cannot use “Chinese philosophy” and “*hanyu* philosophy” interchangeably.

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