

2017

The Dilemma of Philosophy and the Prospect of Chinese Philosophy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://css.researchcommons.org/journal>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2017) "The Dilemma of Philosophy and the Prospect of Chinese Philosophy," *Contemporary Social Sciences*: No. 2, Article 1.

Available at: <https://css.researchcommons.org/journal/vol2017/iss2/1>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by Contemporary Social Sciences. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Social Sciences by an authorized editor of Contemporary Social Sciences.

The Dilemma of Philosophy and the Prospect of Chinese Philosophy

Chen Xianda*

At gatherings with some professionals, many Chinese philosophy scholars often express their sorrow at the decline in first-choice applications of philosophy, even in some famous universities. Nowadays, philosophy seems to be on the wane, which is quite frustrating.

Often, history serves as a mirror to see the future. Looking back, all important reforms and revolutions in human history were closely associated with philosophy. Philosophy used to play a pioneering role in France in the 18th century and in Germany in the 19th century. Likewise, the Communist revolution, led by the Communist Party of China, had a lot to do with the ideological revolution triggered by the spread of Marxist philosophy. From a cultural perspective, philosophy is the “living soul” of a culture. The remote Axis Age has not yet been forgotten, partly because of the brilliant philosophers of that time. As a combined force, philosophers contributed significantly to the cultural booms of the UK in the 17th century, France in the 18th century and Germany in the 19th century. They also played a crucial role in the history of China. From the Pre-Qin period, through the Wei & Jin Dynasties and the Northern & Southern Song Dynasties, to the Ming & Qing Dynasties, a succession of prominent philosophers appeared, leaving extraordinary philosophical heritages in history. In contemporary China, without the guidance of philosophy, particularly Marxist philosophy, it is simply unimaginable to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The dilemma of modern philosophy is a worldwide issue. Seen from human history, the evolution of philosophy’s status does not seem that depressing. Socialist China has a promising future, so does Chinese philosophy. China is a country with

* Chen Xianda, professor, School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China.

rich traditions and profound cultural deposits. The Reform and Opening-up facilitates its exchanges with the Western world, connects ancient and modern learning, and integrates Chinese philosophy with Marxist philosophy and other Western philosophies in socialist context. Given that, the current “cold reception” that philosophy gets is bound to be a temporary phenomenon caused by the market-oriented employment view, and does not indicate a permanent decline of Chinese philosophy. I believe that with the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, philosophy will usher in a new heyday, and the Owl of Minerva will once again fly into the sky of China.

1. The Transfer of Predominance from the Humanities to Science and Technology

The marginalization of philosophy is an inevitable trend that comes with the world's modernization and industrialization. Instrumental rationality's overwhelming superiority over value rationality is an outcome of the deformed development of human thinking. With modern society replacing the traditional social norms, there is bound to be a transfer of predominance from the humanities to science and technology. However, modernization is accompanied with a variety of malpractices. To tackle such malpractices, the contemporary world calls for a return to the humanities and their combination with science and technology.

In the pre-capitalist era, be it in the East or West, literature, history and philosophy were the predominant thought forms of human society. This can be exemplified in Chinese history, which witnessed the contention of a hundred schools of thoughts in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, and the successive booms

of various literary forms, such as Chu Ci (the songs of Chu), Han Fu (poetry in the Han Dynasty), Tang Shi (poetry of the Tang Dynasty), Song Ci (lyrics of the Song Dynasty), Yuan Qu (verses of the Yuan Dynasty), as well as novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The importance of philosophy was particularly highlighted. Throughout human history, China probably has had more philosophers than most countries. In modern times, echoing the call of the Westernization Movement, the Chinese Culture in Western Use and the Hundred Days' Reform, there was advocacy for saving the nation through science. Even so, humanism still maintained its dominance in China. Prior to the founding of the PRC in 1949, China had been a technologically backward country, with its predominant humanistic culture never facing any serious challenge.

The same was also true of the Western world for significant parts of its history. In the pre-capitalist era, a number of era-characterized philosophies came into being, including the ancient Greek-Roman philosophy, the Medieval Scholasticism, British philosophy in the 17th century, French Enlightenment philosophy and encyclopedia spirit in the 18th century and Classical German Philosophy in the 19th century. The Western Civilizations have no shortage of great philosophers with brilliant thoughts in the history of human culture. As the industrialization and modernization proceeded in the West, scientific technology gradually replaced the humanities as the dominant power. It was not until then that humanities began to be marginalized. Such marginalization further accelerated especially when science and technology became the primary productive force. Philosophy is a lesser specialty in the contemporary Western world, as well. The department of philosophy usually features a small number of students and professors. Compared with programs concerning science and technology, finance and management, philosophy is at a much

more “vulnerable status.”

The transfer of predominance from the humanities to science and technology is an unquenchable expression of capital appreciation and flow of market demand. Advanced by rapid capital appreciation, capital and market-related subjects have experienced significant development, while the humanities, philosophy in particular, have lost the amazing appeal they once enjoyed during the pre-capitalist era. When everything could be evaluated in currency, the “God of Capital” naturally rose to the top spot, forcing the “Goddess of Wisdom,” the Muses and other gods to retire from this realist world. According to the chapter about currency in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*, “the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe,” which explains why philosophy has been left out in an industrial era.

According to Hegel’s two speeches respectively delivered at the University of Heidelberg in 1816 and the University of Berlin in 1818, the hardship of the time forced people to focus on the prosaic daily details; those immediate interests and corresponding fights consumed almost their entire thinking capacity and strength, as well as external means, preventing them from paying attention to the higherlevel of inner needs and pure mental activities; and as a result, many outstanding talents were trapped in a harsh environment, and forced to make certain sacrifices. Such remarks, made 200 years ago, still sound incisive today. Back then, capitalism just emerged in Germany, a country far behind the UK and France. As a late-comer, Germany quickly experienced setbacks in industrialization before it could draw any benefit from it. Under such circumstances, German philosophers were worried about the general public’s excessive pursuit of material well-being, advocating a refocus on

intellectual life. However, history did not care about the complaints of those philosophers. Instead, it continued to advance on its own course.

When Feuerbach decided to apply for philosophy major, he received a letter of strong objection from his father, who, as a criminal defense lawyer, hoped his son would study law to carry on his cause. Learning Feuerbach’s insistence on studying philosophy, his father wrote to him, “I am well aware that it’s impossible to persuade you and that the foresight of a miserable life without enough bread and dignity won’t shake your mind. Therefore, we can do nothing but accept your own will and let you determine your own fate, knowing clearly that you will regret it sooner or later.” Despite his father’s opposition, Feuerbach still enrolled in the University of Berlin to study philosophy, holding that he would not find happiness beyond the scope of philosophy, that happiness only existed in a place which could make him satisfied, and that his passion for philosophy ensured his philosophical talent. He also believed that philosophy was his eternal golden apple, which provided him with permanent secular well-being and due equality to infinitely enrich himself. As far as he was concerned, philosophy is an inexhaustible source of knowledge. However, in a world of rapidly developing technologies and profit-seeking capitals, nothing could reverse the disadvantageous status of philosophy, not even the great perseverance of German classical philosophers like Feuerbach.

History has taught us a dialectical law that extremes meet. As science and technology rapidly developed, a variety of crises concerning ecology, culture and morality began to emerge. Under such circumstances, theorists once again returned to the humanities, particularly philosophy. Some ideologists attributed philosophy’s low tide to scientific development. Such a view gave rise to the “end-of-science” theory and fermented



Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach

an ideological trend of anti-science and anti-technology. science and technology, once regarded as the driving force of human society, became an obstacle to its progress and was even deemed to be a devil debasing human nature. As Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once put, the era of science and technology is the beginning of the end of human nature; the concepts about great progress, along with the belief that truth can eventually be recognized, are nothing but misconceptions; in fact, there is no positive thing worth pursuing in the scientific world; those who search for knowledge shall fall into a trap. Wittgenstein's view on science and technology is of course wrong.

The problem is not so much about science and technology itself, but more about how it is utilized. The utilization of science and technology concerns the social system and scholars' values, humanistic accomplishments and moral cultivation. The penalty from nature gradually wakens human beings from the agony of severe imbalance between material production and intellectual production, and from the serious deterioration of eco-environment and social ethics. British scholar C.P. Snow warned of the dangers of the conflict between science and technology and the humanities in *The Two Cultures*, a collection of speeches delivered during the 1950s. According to Snow, the only weapon

that can be adopted to fight technology's disastrous consequences is technology itself; there is no other weapon available; and it is impossible for human beings to return to a non-existent technology-free never-never land. Yet, at the same time, he also stressed that human beings must learn about technology, apply science, and explore in what aspects it can be used; that such a learning was a necessary part of the education system at the end of the 20th century; and that a common culture was in need. The so-called common culture is a new type of culture which attaches equal importance to natural sciences and the humanities. Philosophy will become, and should become, a guidance and adhesive for such a common culture. Judging from the history of human civilization, even if there is no second Axis Age, philosophy will by no means lose its appeal as science and technology develops. Rather, the more science and technology develops, the more philosophy is needed. The "end-of-philosophy" claim, held by many post-modernists, runs against the law of historical development. It is in nature a kind of philosophy trapped in a paradox, i.e. refuting one philosophical theory with another. If society continues to develop and we human beings keep expanding our intellectual needs, there will be no chance for philosophy to wither away.

2. Philosophy's Temporary Dilemma in Contemporary China

Why is philosophy left out in socialist China, particularly since the launch of the Reform and Opening-up policy? The philosophical boom at the School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China in the 1950s still vividly lives in the mind of many. The decline of philosophy is not the fault of any individual, but an inevitable outcome of a society's economic transformation. When the market plays a dominant role in social and economic activities,

philosophy surely gets trapped in a huge crack among this socialist country/the Chinese nation, the market economy, and individuals. That is why philosophy is struggling to survive.

From a perspective of national needs, socialist China needs intellectual wealth as well as material gains, for both are indispensable to its development. Socialism should by no means be characterized by material poverty or soul poverty. Socialist China needs to give full play to philosophy. Spirit is the soul of a nation and the intellectual impetus for its persistent development. A nation without a philosophical system can hardly find a position on the world stage. A foresighted nation and its state leaders must know how valuable philosophy can be.

Comrade Mao Zedong used to attach great importance to philosophy. In fact, he himself was a great philosopher. Likewise, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping places a strong emphasis on the development of the philosophical and social sciences. At a symposium on the development of Chinese philosophy and social sciences, he particularly mentioned some great philosophers when talking about renowned cultural figures both at home and abroad. At a collective learning session on the basic tenets of historical materialism and methodology attended by all members of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Xi stressed, "The leading CPC cadres at all levels, high-ranking cadres in particular, must thoroughly read and study the classic Marxist works and keep cultivating their attainment of Marxist philosophy." It is fair to say that both the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government attach great importance to the development of philosophy and the social sciences. Meanwhile, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping also values the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, particularly the philosophical wisdom it contains. With the end of feudal monarchy, Confucianism lost its status as a nationally dominant

ideology. Even so, many of its ethics and thoughts of governing still form significant parts of the excellent culture of the Chinese nation. While inheriting the excellent parts of Confucianism, the Communist Party of China refuses to follow the Confucian orthodoxy. Marxist philosophy, along with many excellent philosophies both at home and abroad, occupies an important position in the mind of the Communist Party of China and its leadership.

However, there is a substantial difference between the needs of market economy and those of the state. Market economy plays a significant role in promoting the development of productivity, increasing the material wealth of a society, and tackling commodity shortages. A socialist society also needs to develop market economy, which is a historical necessity of socialized production. China has a population of over 1.3 billion, many of whom still live below the poverty line. Given that, economic development remains its top priority. In the context of market economy, the accumulated wealth can be used to boost the development of socialist culture and philosophy. However, a market economy, due to its primary role, inevitably gives its priority to subjects capable of directly generating the highest benefits to the capital invested while pushing aside those not urgently needed by the market. This principle applies to private capital and collective capital alike. Because of that, philosophy, not accepted as a professional skill, finds it hard to bring a proper job to graduates in current market-oriented sectors. In response to market demands, re-ranking of popular subjects at university is unavoidable. To generate maximum benefits, enterprises starve for graduates who can accordingly serve that purpose. Compared with Aristotelian talents, professionals specializing in sectors like science and technology, accounting, law, economics, finance, management, investment and securities are much more needed by capitalist markets. This has nothing to do with

the preference of an entrepreneur. In private, an entrepreneur may be fond of poetry, literature and philosophy. On the other hand, profit-oriented capitalists expel such literary forms unless they can be transformed into cultural products that can generate lucrative profits. It is the inherent nature of capital, rather than the personified form of capital (i.e. personal preference) that is of decisive significance to the market. The invariable law of capital operation means the capitalist enjoys the right to select freely, pushing aside those subjects or talents not urgently needed by the market.

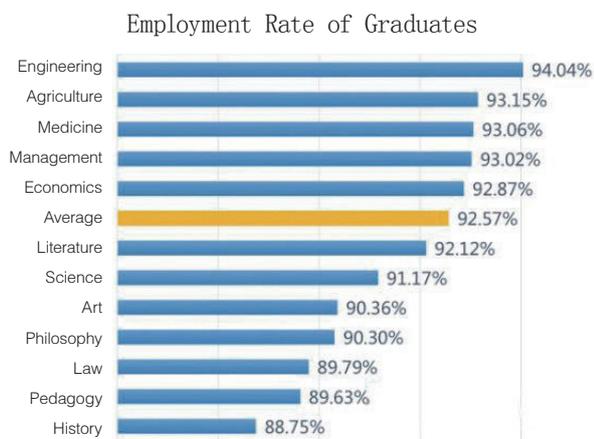
Individual needs, however, cannot be exactly geared to the needs of the market economy and the state. That is because individual needs concern personal preference and hobby, as well as livelihood. In the context of market economy, college applicants' choice of a major has a lot to do with the economic environment, and in some cases may even be dominated by market demands. In the eyes of many students and their parents, an ideal major is supposed to be one with an access to a good job. By good job, they mean a job with a high salary and decent welfare. Such an entirely market-oriented choice of major tends to suppress personal preference and hobby. Striving solely for survival and material

gains is to the detriment of the humanities. As Hegel put, excessive emphasis on material gains estranges people from significant mental activities.

The conflicts among the three needs of the country, the market and individuals form a crack, in which philosophy is trapped. Often, the market demand, along with the market-driven employment needs, overwhelms many people's philosophical passions, spiritual needs, personal preferences, as well as philosophical potential. It does not seem that difficult to fall in love with philosophy and "maintain a relationship" for a while. When it comes to "marriage" with philosophy, however, one should be prepared for permanent poverty. Given that, without the Feuerbach-style absolute philosophical passion and pursuit, one cannot expect to overcome it.

The needs of China/the Chinese nation are based on its overall development; the needs of the market echo enterprises' pursuit of economic benefits; and the needs of individuals are to be satisfied to ensure their survival and development. In principle, of the three types of needs, the needs of the country/the Chinese nation top the list. A country represents all its citizens, for which its needs must meet. In other words, the needs of our country should truthfully reflect the overall humanistic cultivation and morality of the Chinese people. In this sense, the core values of Chinese socialism embody our national identity, which perfectly integrates the interests of the country, groups and individuals into an organic whole. As a socialist country, China is supposed to look forward. It should consider the development, prospect and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the revival of its excellent traditional culture, the improvement of the Chinese people's humanistic cultivation, and the development of Chinese civilization.

For a country and its people, no billionaire or prominent figure can compare with a well-accomplished poor philosopher in terms of



Employment Rate of Graduates

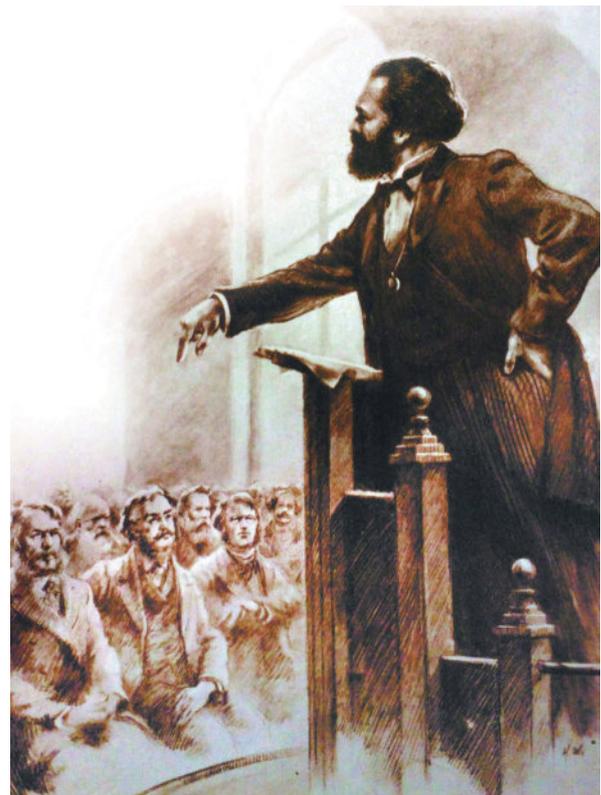
contributions to enriching the national spirit. Today, great philosophers in ancient times still live in the minds of people, including ancient Greek and Roman philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and their Chinese counterparts like Confucius, Mencius, Lao-Tzu and Zhuang Zhou. Legends have it that Zhuang Zhou used to lead such a down-and-out life as to borrow rice from others and that Confucius for a time lived on his students' tuition, i.e. ten pieces of preserved pork. Even so, both made unparalleled contributions to the Chinese nation. They were the shaper of our national spirit and are the eternal pride of the Chinese nation.

In the context of market economy, enterprises tend to pursue short-term tangible economic benefits; individuals are busy improving present livelihoods, which is a short-sighted behavior. A true philosophy lover or enthusiast is not supposed to sacrifice their philosophical ideal for high salary. Scholars with real academic accomplishments do not easily submit to secular views, nor just care about their own material well-being. Instead, they attach more importance to their contributions to their country and people, as well as their own interests and aptitudes.

Individuals' choice of major should still be based on their ideal and belief even in the market economy. As mentioned, regardless of his father's opposition, Feuerbach resolutely chose to study philosophy and eventually became a philosopher with great contributions to human civilization. The same was also true of Carl Marx, whose father was a lawyer, as well. In fact, Marx studied law at the University of Bonn and the University of Berlin. The boom of capitalist economy gave much more popularity to law than philosophy. Though majoring in law, Carl Marx was simply obsessed with philosophy. At the University of Bonn, he first delved into the theories of Immanuel Kant and Johann Fichte, and later shifted his focus to Georg Hegel, deeply fascinated

by the charm of philosophy. In a letter to his father, he described his "passion" for philosophy, arguing that "without philosophy, I cannot move forward." After his transfer to the University of Berlin, his passion grew even stronger. Eventually, Carl Marx became the founder of Marxism and one of the greatest intellectuals of all time. Had such geniuses as Feuerbach and Marx submitted to secular views and thus pursued a so-called decent life, there would probably have been one more mediocre lawyer named Feuerbach or Marx, but at the same time there would not have been a great philosopher resuming the authority of materialism, or a founder of a new philosophy.

As has been proved by the development of capitalism, the growing material desire and pursuing endless consumption may force some real talents to



Karl Heinrich Marx

sacrifice their philosophical potential for material gains. Such a possibility cannot be avoided even in Socialist China. Still, young people with an ambition should cultivate a far grander vision. I always advise students to carefully read Marx's high-school essay entitled *Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession*, which is of great significance on how to choose a profession in the context of market economy. Marx held in the essay, "We may adopt the one that assures us the greatest worth, one which is based on ideas of whose truth we are thoroughly convinced, which offers us the widest scope to work for mankind and for ourselves to approach closer to the general aim for which every profession is but a means-perfection." He also pointed out, "If we have chosen the position in life in which we can most of all work for mankind, no burdens can bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all; then we shall experience no petty, limited, selfish joy, but our happiness will belong to millions, our deeds will live on quietly but perpetually at work, and over our ashes will be shed the hot tears of noble people."

Philosophical achievement cannot be made without a Confucian-style optimistic attitude towards life. A philosopher's impoverished life falls into the category of individual misfortune. By contrast, "poverty" in philosophy is a misfortune of the entire nation. For this reason, even today, we still have a strong sense of national pride for having so many philosophers in Chinese history.

3. The Reconstruction of Spiritual Home and the Outlook of Chinese Philosophy

Due to its current disadvantageous position, philosophy seems to have been reduced from a brilliant pearl in the crown to a grain of sand in some people's eyes. As the Chinese economy further develops, the necessity of philosophy, along with the

prospects for philosophy majors, is under serious doubts. However, the fact is just the opposite.

The more prosperous the Chinese market economy becomes, and the more material wealth it generates, the more spiritual needs there will be. Market tools may be applied to tackle shortages of commodities and scarcity of supplies, but they cannot enrich a human being's inner world. Money can buy whatever in the market. And the booming e-commerce enables consumers to buy things from across the country, or even from around the world. Still, no one can buy "spirit" through any channel.

But human beings need such a spirit to cultivate a sense of belonging. In the West, as the economy and society further developed, the conflict between people's "soul" and "body" intensifies. Physical needs can be satisfied through market transactions. In such an environment, many people lead a double life, indulging themselves in material comforts and confessing their sins in churches afterwards. This is a true picture of contemporary capitalism. In fact, we all need to have a sense of belonging. Zhu Xi, a great philosopher of the Southern Song Dynasty, discussed the importance of settling down and getting on with one's pursuit in his essay *Reply to Zhang Jingfu*, "Now, I know that one needs a shelter to settle down and get on with one's pursuit. Self-cultivation or inner world enrichment is of vital importance to the integration of inherent nature with external manifestation." Science cannot help us to achieve inner world enrichment. Nor can the market system. People in the West turn to religion, which can soothe their unsettled souls. Yet, that is not the way we should go.

Benefiting from the Reform and Opening-up, Chinese people enjoy increasingly abundant material wealth. In this context, it has become a trend for people to convert to a religion, going to church or burning incense and worshipping Buddha in the temples. Freedom of religious belief is a basic human

right, which is for sure. Truly religious believers who value self-cultivation and moral integrity are worth respecting. From such a religious boom, however, we catch a glimpse of the inner anxiety of contemporary Chinese people, who are looking for a soul asylum. Worse still, there are many superstitious people worshipping the so-called masters with supernatural power and spirit media, or blindly believing in *Feng Shui* and even reincarnation. Their irrationality reflects certain strong desires. However, such a desire has nothing to do with higher-level needs. It is a form of spiritual fulfillment which is clumsy, vulgar and selfish. Similarly, popular soul-soothing posts of mixed quality are widely spread on WeChat, which is a vivid demonstration of group-think, mental panic and lack of humanism. As a socialist country, China of course cannot take any religion as its spiritual foundation. Nor can it deify Confucianism as a religion. It must reconstruct a spiritual home with humanistic culture as the core.

Currently, Chinese society is faced with moral decline, confusion of values and loss of faith. Our spiritual home is under attack and there are numerous unsettled souls. For a country or a nation, ideological crisis is the most dangerous and most damaging crisis of all. Moral decline and confusion of values can affect the development of a whole generation, which may in turn shape the ideology of the next generation. Should such a trend extend for generations, the quality of the Chinese nation would inevitably deteriorate. It's just like a landslide, which does not stop until effective measures are introduced. The CPC Central Committee has been aware of the severe harm such a landslide can bring about and has taken corresponding measures to reverse the tide.

It is true that due to the market-oriented employment view, philosophy is currently trapped in low tide. However, with the reconstruction of our spiritual home under way and the overconsumption-

caused thirst for spirit getting stronger, philosophy, which equips human beings with views on life, values and the world, is bound to regain its popularity. As the economy further develops, philosophy, Marxist philosophy in particular, will play a more and more significant role as a mainstay of our inner world. We may not have noticed that we are living at a time when philosophy is needed most. The lack of faith, shaking pursuit, moral decline and confusion of values are all "labor pains" during the process of economic and social transformation. They are temporary setbacks in progress. Philosophy is a real need in this era.

In face of this phenomenon, I, a philosophy researcher, often ask myself two questions, "What kind of group do philosophers belong to?" and "Have we already fulfilled our social responsibility?" As far as I am concerned, philosophy branches are trapped by one-sided specialization and self-imposed isolation; philosophy researchers are limited by a single knowledge structure; and philosophy studies have become more and more self-entertaining. All these problems need to be taken seriously and addressed properly.

Throughout the development of philosophy both in China and abroad, not many truly accomplished philosophers had a professional background or were scholars of philosophy. Renowned Chinese philosophers of all time, such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao-Tzu, Zhuang Zhou, Cheng Yi, Cheng Hao, Lu Jiuyuan, Wang Shouren, Huang Zongxi, Wang Fuzhi, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were originally political-thought advocates, high-ranking officials, reformists or revolutionists. And great philosopher Wang Yangming was such an all-rounder as to wield both the pen and the gun. As a general, he led the army to quell rebellions; as a politician and Confucius scholar, he delivered impressive performance; when in exile, he was able to make thorough reflections. In ancient times,

philosophers were also proficient in literature and history. They were not just theorists, but also men of action. Aspiring and ambitious, they had an in-depth understanding of society, politics, human feelings, the way of the world and national conditions. They were by no means the so-called professional philosophers doing nothing but excerpting passages and burying themselves in Confucius classics all through their life. In 1912, Peking University established its department of philosophy, which marked the beginning of philosophy as an academic subject. The establishment of this philosophy department transformed philosophy into a formal academic subject.

The situation in the West is quite similar. Professional philosophers came into being with the secularization of education in modern times. Prior to Socrates' era, all philosophers had made contributions to natural sciences. By contrast, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle focused on city-state politics and public life. In the Medieval era, theology maintained its dominance, with numerous theologians graduating from seminaries. During that period, philosophy was inferior to theology and was meant to serve the latter. None of the great philosophers in the 18th century (John Locke, David Hume, Rene Descartes, Baruch de Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, etc.) were trained by the Church or any department of philosophy. In fact, they were equipped with extensive scientific literacy and maintained a close relationship with the community of natural sciences. German classical philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, Johann Fichte, Friedrich von Schelling, Georg Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach all received higher education, but they were more than academic philosophers. Focusing on the social reality of Germany and major philosophical questions, they made best possible contributions to the philosophy of their time, for which they were deemed pioneers of German political reform.

Since the 19th century, Western philosophers have become more and more specialized, professional and academic. Different from their predecessors, very few truly accomplished philosophers graduated from a philosophy department. There is nothing wrong with the establishment of a philosophy department or the training of professional philosophers. What needs to be guarded against is many philosophers' excessive focus on textbooks, disconnection with society, indifference to real issues and major philosophical problems of their time, as well as undue obsession with construction of abstract systems. Such philosophers are bound to be rejected by society.

A department of philosophy at a contemporary university is not supposed to train the above mentioned academic philosophers. While working on book learning, both philosophy teachers and students (BA, MA and PhD) should pay close attention to the society, reality and ordinary life. They should be capable of identifying philosophical questions in the real world. And it is not advisable for philosophers to merely sublime words with deep meaning from philosophical books, or to develop a so-called new system of philosophy through concept reasoning. Such a research approach is just like building a castle in the sand, which, though with an imposing appearance, can be easily destroyed.

In contemporary China, there is a diversity of branches at the department of philosophy. In the 1950s, dialectical materialism and historical materialism dominated philosophy studies. Now, philosophy has become a grade-1 discipline consisting of eight grade-2 subjects. Such diversification demonstrates the great progress in philosophy studies but also brings along a problem, i.e. grade-2 subjects' isolation from each other. How to boost the development of those grade-2 subjects and at the same time unite them to promote contemporary Chinese philosophy remains an

unsolved problem. There is a real need to give full play to Marxism's role in guiding the development of relevant grade-2 subjects. Without the support of Marxism as a basic theory and methodology, those grade-2 subjects at the department of philosophy in Chinese universities would lose their socialist identity. In that case, the department of philosophy in China would be no different from their Western counterparts. Creative thinking, patriotism and pursuit of political moral are all indispensable for philosophy studies. Without those qualities, all we can do is to create some meaningless papers of little theoretic value, or develop certain systems of philosophy based on concept reasoning. Philosophical achievement like that can only be admired among peers and cannot be expected to deliver any real impact beyond that scope. Due to lack of creativity, such a research approach is like, in Friedrich Nietzsche's words, "pouring water from a bottle," or rather, pouring water from one bottle into another.

Marxist philosophy is the most creative philosophy, because it is based on real life and targets social problems. It is nothing like pouring water from someone else's bottle into your own. Rather, it aims to identify new problems in life, scientific development, social progress, and social science achievements. Marxist philosophy is problem targeted, rather than focus on unrealistically theory. Carl Marx and Friedrich Engels established Marxist philosophy to address fundamental issues such as the future of capitalist society, the future of human beings, how the proletariat and all mankind can be liberated, and how to achieve free and all-round development of individuals. Likewise, Comrade Mao Zedong's works (*On Practice, On Contradiction, On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People, and Other Philosophical Works*) discussed philosophical questions based on China's reality and existing problems of that time. The creative

development of philosophy involves critical inheritance, which is nothing like pouring water from one bottle into another. Comrade Mao Zedong highlighted the localization of Marxism in China, namely, the integration of Marxism with China's reality. Such integration is totally different from pouring water from bottle to bottle. After all, pouring does not change the nature of the water, while the integration of Marxism with China's reality facilitates creative development.

Philosophy, whether it falls into the category of Marxist philosophy, traditional Chinese philosophy, or Western philosophy, has a great potential to develop and prosper in China. It is used to formulate policies and guidelines, educate cadres at all levels, and enrich liberal education. More importantly, philosophy is an indispensable part of our ideological and political theory courses, which are compulsory for all Chinese students. There are people arguing that the ideological and political theory courses are designed for brainwashing purposes, rather than passing on the knowledge of philosophy. The word "brainwashing" sounds very unpleasant, for it is normally understood as "forcing somebody to accept certain ideas or beliefs." In this regard, I feel it necessary to point out that "brainwashing" should be part of the ideological and political theory courses in China, as "brainwashing" is to "clear" wrong ideas from the students' minds. Does not Western education involve brainwashing or promote patriotism? Does not Western education advocate Western values? Does not the Western world carry out daily brainwashing through school education and manipulation of public opinions? The Chinese government strives to equip its younger generations with socialist core values, scientific views of life and the world, as well as correct values. Why should such education be degraded into a form of brainwashing? What makes them think such education is against academic freedom and independent thinking? In



fact, the purpose of such “brainwashing” is to make the brain free from dust. What really matters is whether the “water” used for brainwashing is clean. This “water” must contain truths and scientific ideas, rather than lies and prejudices. And it should raise our understandings to higher levels. Ideological and political education should be enhanced in China, for it concerns what kind of talents we are cultivating and whom we are working for. There is no need to worry about the criticisms from the West, or their echoes in China. The most important thing of all is to make the most out of philosophy to equip Chinese students with scientific views of the world and ways of thinking.

As Comrade Mao Zedong once advocated, philosophy should be liberated from philosophers’ lectures and textbooks and serve as a weapon of the masses. This does not mean that lectures and

textbooks are unnecessary. It just warns against an unrealistic theory–focused approach. It is widely accepted that literature should go out of the “ivory tower.” The same is also true of philosophy. Chinese philosophy should care about the well–being of its people and the development of the country. It should be problem–oriented and encourage creative research. By turning research findings into treasures of the Chinese nation and practical philosophical wisdom conducive to national humanistic cultivation, Chinese philosophy will take on the broad way to a promising future. Given the over 1.3 billion Chinese population, the number of philosophical talents in China is too small. Therefore, philosophy in this socialist country still has a great potential to grow and prosper.

(Translator: Wu Lingwei; Editor: Jia Fengrong)

This paper has been translated and reprinted with the permission of *Guangming Online* (http://news.gmw.cn/2017-02/13/content_23702669.htm), February 13th, 2017.