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Reflections on discourse and critique in China and the West

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The term “critical”, as used by scholars writing under the banner of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is in need of review in a new global intellectual environment in which diverse philosophical and political traditions are increasingly in contact with one another. This essay is particularly concerned with the question of how a shared understanding of the concept of the critical can be developed among Western and Chinese scholars. To this end the paper gives an overview of notions of critique in the historical traditions of China and the West, addressing issues of conceptualisation, discourse practice and translation. This leads us to consider, from a “critical” point of view, what the appearance of the “critical” approach may mean in the Chinese context. The need for continued dialogue oriented to a deepened understanding of existing ideas and approaches is highlighted.

Keywords: discourse, critique, CDA, China, West, reflections

China is now experiencing a wide-spread and profound social transformation. This phenomenon has been and is being studied by scholars in a wide range of disciplines, principally economics, politics, sociology and international relation. However, the study of socio-political transformation in Chinese society, we believe, also requires research into *discourses* in contemporary China. By ‘discourse’ we understand primarily the ways in which a language is used in diverse systematic ways, in a society as a whole, but also in many specific sub-domains, social fields, national, regional, and local contexts. When we talk of discourses in this sense, we mean not just the jargon used in diverse fields of activity (such as the government, education, law, and so forth), but the way complex kinds of verbal exchange are institutionalized around specific macro-topics and realized in genres and texts (cf. Reisigl and Wodak 2009) as well as the conceptual representations carried by discourse (Chilton 2004). To research discourses in China is then to examine how discourses change in context-dependent ways, and to relate the

changes to the social factors that lead to these changes or are the effects of them. Discourse research also examines how social identities are constructed through language use and how discourse facilitates change in society. Further, this kind of research may include the investigation of the ways in which agents or agencies manipulate meanings. In the context of Chinese society, a discourse approach has its focus on the role of the Chinese language, or more precisely its use, in the socio-political transformation that is currently unfolding.

For many western scholars the analysis of discourse is not only a matter of technical description — though of course it certainly can be that — but also a way of understanding human beings, their behaviour and activities in society. This means that, in a certain sense of the term, discourse analysis can be “critical” — hence Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). But the term “critical”, especially when translated into another language and another culture, is a term that gives rise to many interpretations. As Shi-xu has often argued, it is essential that scholars from different cultural traditions seek to understand one another’s methods, concepts and values (Shi-xu 2005, 2007, 2009). This article seeks to begin a theoretical discussion around culturally varying concepts of the critical.

Being “critical” in the West

In the West, and in various European languages, the term “critical” (or its translation equivalents) has a complex history but it is clear that for proponents of CDA the aim of using discourse analysis to challenge and expose what they regard as undesirable social and political practices is central. Western CDA scholars generally see their roots in (post-)Marxist “critical theory” and this perspective has developed in a political and cultural environment in which it is possible for Western scholars to be “critical” vis à vis all political regimes, including that of the country of which they are citizens or subjects.

The term “critical” is associated with currents of thought whose recent sources are in the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment but whose roots are in ancient Greek philosophy. Etymologically, the verb “criticize” derives from a Greek word *krinein* “to separate, decide”, in the sense of making a judgement or a distinction. In the European philosophical tradition of the eighteenth century, “critique” further implies not accepting arguments or states of affairs as given and unchangeable but analyzing them on the basis of rational judgement. Criticism in this sense is assumed to be value-free, except in so far as high value is given to rationality itself. More specifically, to be critical in the European Enlightenment meant, in many cases, rejecting metaphysics, denouncing religion and challenging political abuse. In the work of Immanuel Kant, “critique” (*Kritik*) has an anti-metaphysical

meaning to some degree, but not a denunciatory meaning. Rather “Kantian critique” has to do with the use of rational analysis to explore the bounds of concepts and theories, including, the human use of reason itself and its relationship to the physical structure of the world. Later philosophers radically extended the reach of Kant’s notion of *Kritik*. Marx applied it to political economy. The *Frankfurt School of Critical Theory* in the twentieth century (e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas, and Max Horkheimer) extended it to include rational analysis of cultural forms of various kinds. Another philosophical development of the Kantian outlook is *Critical Realism*, the British version (e.g. Roy Bhaskar’s [1989] work) being a case that is relevant to the socio-political domain. In the second half of the twentieth century, this broad “critical” tendency produced studies that linked cultural forms with some prominent social issues, notably genderism/sexism and racism. *Critical Discourse Analysis* can certainly be seen in this tradition, as claimed by its early exponents (e.g. Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress, who referred to their endeavours as *Critical Linguistics*). Among the “critical” academic disciplines in the West (cultural studies, critical international relations theory, critical legal studies, gender studies, and the like) Critical Discourse Analysis has perhaps tried the hardest both to theorize its approaches and to apply technical tools often imported from linguistics.

It is of course the case that the meanings of the word “critical” in English include non-technical meanings that might be glossed as “censorious” and in some contexts “denunciatory”. It is arguable that there are two senses in English and European languages. The first and more specialised sense might be called “cognitive”: to “criticise” is to engage in “critique”, to engage in a rational conceptual activity. The second and everyday meaning is primarily interactive. In this sense, to “criticise” denotes an interactive social activity that somehow incorporates a normative ethical or quasi-ethical standpoint. The verb “criticise” is thus a particular kind of speech act verb. Below we shall consider how the Chinese translation equivalents of “criticise” (“criticism”, “critique”, “critic”, etc.) compare with these senses.

Within Western CDA, there are varied and sometimes vague understandings of terms such as “critical”, “criticism” and “critique”. One can distinguish at least three interrelated concepts. First, critical analysis of discourse can mean to make the implicit explicit. More specifically, it means making explicit the implicit relationship between discourse, power and ideology, challenging surface meanings, and not taking anything for granted. In societies where people, especially those in dominant or influential positions, tend to convey their propositions in a rather opaque manner, it is by being “critical” in this sense that one can “make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). And to be “critical” requires analysis. As Fairclough put it twenty years ago:

Critical is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people — such as the connections between language, power and ideology. [*Italics in original*] (Fairclough [1989] 2001a: 4)

Second, for advocates of CDA, being “critical” has an additional element — putting theory into action. On one level, this follows from the view that all discourse is a form of action, not “mere words”. Thus, critical analysis which is of course a form of discourse (or rather “metadiscourse”) is also a form of social action. For instance, Wodak (1996, 2001: 9, 2003, 2007) speaks of the “application of the results” to communication problems in, for example, schools and hospitals, as well as to guidelines for non-discriminatory language behaviour which should make prejudicial, sexist, and racist “coded” utterances explicit (e.g., expert opinions at court). Chilton’s early work on the discourse of nuclear deterrence arose from peace movement interests during the Cold War period (cf. Chilton 1982, 1983, 1985, 1988, 1996). Van Dijk has on numerous occasions stated the view that critical discourse studies should be engaged in the “critique of social inequality” (cf. van Dijk 1993, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2001). Fairclough makes specific proposals for critical discourse analysts: working with activists in designing and carrying out research, linking it, for instance, to the campaigns of disabled people over welfare reform, seeking to publish pamphlets, articles in newspapers and magazines, or on the web, and developing ways of writing which are accessible to many people without being superficial (Fairclough 2001b: 264–265). The implication appears to be that critical discourse analysts have some obligation to be (i) politically committed, (ii) to seek to apply practical results of analysis to communication problems, or (iii) both of these activities combined. Kress summarises the political project of CDA as follows:

Critical studies of language, Critical linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have from the beginning had a political project: broadly speaking that of altering inequitable distributions of economic, cultural and political goods in contemporary societies. The intention has been to bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis by uncovering its workings and its effects through the analysis of potent cultural objects — texts — and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order. (Kress 1996: 15)

This line of thinking is question-provoking if compared to some of the features that we will note later with respect to the Chinese context — in particular the close linkage between “criticism” and ethical or socio-political principles, according to which the social order can be improved if public language is rid of undesirable elements.

CDA itself is subject to critique. For example, Billig (2003) challenges the CDA community by asking if their institutionalisation might have led to being less critical and self-reflective; recently, Billig (2008) has illustrated how some CDA

scholars employ certain linguistic features frequently in their writing which they tend to criticise in the writing of others such as the use of nominalisations.

However, the desirability of a political “mission” (or practical “application”) in CDA is not acceptable to certain linguists and discourse analysts in the West. There is also an argument based on methodological considerations to the effect that the research of CDA is not scientifically “objective” enough. Widdowson (2004), for example, is well known for criticism of the CDA approach to discourse. It is not so much the “mission” of CDA that Widdowson objects to, as what he regards as a methodological problem (but see Wodak 2006 in response to this and for an argument that Widdowson’s critique is unjustified). One of his specific points is that critical discourse analysts sample text selectively and analyse linguistic features selectively in order to confirm their own political values. Similar kinds of objection to the CDA paradigm have been made by Stubbs (1997) and Schegloff (1997). Several kinds of arguments have been made in response. One is that CDA analysts do in fact acknowledge their normative position, while this frequently stays implicit in other social science research. Moreover, many studies in CDA have not only selected a few texts to illustrate their assumptions but have, indeed, analysed huge data sets in quantitative and qualitative ways (e.g., Krzyżanowski & Wodak 2008; Wodak & van Dijk 2000) — a fact rarely or not acknowledged by the above mentioned critics. Another response is to argue that no research is objective, all scientific research is always subservient to interests. This line of argument often cites Kuhn (1962) on the shift of scientific paradigms and Habermas (e.g. Habermas 1968, 1971) on science, normativity, knowledge, and interests.

It is worth considering another type of claim to scientific objectivity in discourse analysis. The claim runs roughly as follows and can easily be found for lexical items and (with more difficulty) for grammatical constructions. Texts can be processed automatically, without the intervention of a human brain in a process of text understanding, thus eliminating subjective bias. The techniques of quantitative corpus linguistics are now well known: relative frequencies, collocations and correlations with context and co-text can. For selecting texts for analysis, statistical sampling techniques are available and well known in the social sciences. The problem here, however, is that meanings cannot be found this way. Assuming you have an object text sample and some statistically significant lexical or grammatical patterns, the discourse analyst still wants to investigate first the meaning and second the social significance of these findings. There is no objective method for these two interpretative stages (but see Baker et al. 2008 and Mautner 2008, 2009 for attempts of integrating CDA with corpus linguistics in innovative ways).

Since objectivist defences are difficult to sustain some, CDA scholars have elaborated a different response to reproaches of subjective bias. One such response (cf. Chilton 2004) might be: “Analysts are also socialised members of a speech

community. They are concerned with the meanings of texts and they can only know those meanings via their socialised membership in a society. Therefore any and all discourse analysis concerned with meanings must involve analysts' existing knowledge about potential meanings that different readers will arrive at in processing texts under consideration; otherwise they would be unable to make sense of the text at all." This response does not address the selection of texts for analysis; nor does it guarantee that the analyst will spot all potential meanings. But it may be that there is in fact no other route than to produce analyses and allow open critical discussion about alternative analyses and readings. Critical researchers emphasise "*retroductability*" in their studies: this implies that the analysis must be explicit and transparent enough so that other researchers are able to understand and replicate it, possibly with different goals and results.

This approach can be elaborated further. "Being critical" in CDA includes being reflexively self-critical. For CDA, discourse is a form of social practice and, consequently, the discourse produced by the critical analysis of discourse is also a form of social practice among free intellectuals. In this sense, critical discourse analysis does not only mean to criticise others. It also means to criticise the "critical" itself, a point that is in line with Habermas, and was made in 1989 (Wodak 1989) and again ten years later:

CDA, like other critical social sciences, needs to be reflexive and self-critical about its own institutional position and all that goes with it. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 9).

A similar point about self-reflection is made strongly in Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 32ff.) with respect to the sampling and analysis of texts. These authors also make useful distinctions between text-immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique, and prospective (retrospective) critique. Whether these levels can really be separated remains of course a matter for debate.

Their view of *text-immanent critique* is not focussed first and foremost on the linguistic description of texts. Rather it is, based on hermeneutics (the study of possible meanings in texts) and pursues one of the early ideas of Critical Theory, namely, the unearthing of inherent contradictions (a method also, incidentally, incorporated in versions of literary postmodernist deconstruction à la Derrida) via linguistic means; these are thus selected depending on the research questions and should be adequate to operationalise these in systematic ways. To this end descriptive methods sometimes seem to be taken from linguistics *ad hoc*.

While *text-immanent critique* is claimed to be inherently text-oriented, *socio-diagnostic critique* is avowedly based on the analyst's social and political commitments, i.e. integrating context. At this level, also, the aim is to reveal multiple interests and contradictions in the text producers, on the basis of the evidence of

the text and its *contexts*. Utterances in a text, or the text as a whole, may belie or be belied by other utterances and texts. This is described by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) as a process of “demystifying”. They are careful to note that mystificatory or manipulative intentions cannot be detected in any simply manner, and insist that contextual understanding by speakers and hearers is the basis for the production and processing of meaning.

Prospective critique builds on these two levels in order to identify areas of social concern that can be addressed by direct social and political engagement. In many Western polities, this is possible to a large degree if we make comparisons with many other nation states around the globe, even if there are also limitations on action that many citizens, including discourse analysts, would also criticise. What is important, when we come to think in terms of a cross-cultural and indeed globalised critique of discourse, is that authors like Reisigl and Wodak, whatever view one may take of the technicalities of their theories, are open about the *ethical* basis of their criticism:

...an engaged social critique is nurtured ethically by a sense of justice based on the normative and universalist conviction of the unrestricted validity of human rights and by the awareness of suffering, which both takes sides *against* social discrimination, repression, domination, exclusion and exploitation and *for* emancipation, self-determination and social recognition ... (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 34)

Such statements are not remarkable in Western political culture, but in a global context they are highly controversial, and Western CDA writers need to be aware of the fact and begin to address the problem. But this is not all that is globally significant in the critical approach outlined by Reisigl and Wodak (*ibid.*), and shared by other writers (including, for example, Chilton 2004, Chapter 2 on ‘language and freedom’). For Reisigl and Wodak make clear what their preferred political model is — and it is not of course simply an endorsement of the current political regime in their own country.

From a theoretical standpoint the ideas of Habermas are of fundamental importance, especially as found in Habermas (Habermas 1971, 1979, 1984/1987, 1996; see also Wright 2005 or Koller & Wodak 2008 for criticism of Habermas’ ideas and recent developments of these). The key concepts are: public sphere and a “deliberative democracy” in which free and equal participation in debate, critique and decision-making is guaranteed by the rule of law. Drawing on these principles, Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 34) give what is perhaps the most detailed statement in CDA of the grounds that underly the critical analysis of public discourse. In this perspective language itself is crucial:

... language is the central medium of democratic organisation and free public exchange of different interests, wishes, viewpoints, opinions and arguments is vital

for a pluralistic democracy in a modern decentred society, since it is essential for deliberatively and justly organising the different preferences, and since it can also have a critical influence on the relationship between legality and administrative power changes.

Ultimately, it is the individual citizen who engages in free critique, not just the scholar-analyst. The above quotation is an example of a discourse type yet to emerge in the Chinese context. But there is one further point to note in relation to the Reisigl and Wodak approach to critique — and again, it is one already shared among many critical discourse analysts. Time present and time past are both perhaps co-present in discourse practices and discourse practices in social and political practices. What Reisigl and Wodak mean by *retrospective critique* is that past events in a society's history (in Europe the slave trade and the Holocaust, for example, in China the Cultural Revolution, among many other episodes of history) are interpreted and perspectivised in narratives re-told and re-constructed in the present (see also Heer et al, 2008). In the present issue of *JLP*, we see this kind of critical approach in Cao's paper, which looks at the transformation of historical narratives about Western imperialism in the Chinese media.

Being "critical" in Western CDA does, then, imply ethical value judgments concerning what is "the good life", and these fundamental premises in all CDA work are not always overt. What this implies is a rather open-ended need to incorporate philosophical reflection on the underlying social, political and ethical premises of CDA, which may actually be independent of language and discourse.

Let us now turn to the question of what it could mean to transpose such issues into the Chinese context: self-critique is advocated in the writings of Confucius.¹ This is not a private matter: the Confucian text appears to imply that self-criticism is a *public* duty. Moreover, public political discourse in modern China can be seen to incorporate such a "self-criticism" element, perhaps as a form of self-legitimation. Self-critique is thus historically embedded in Chinese discourse culture in a way that is not the case (except perhaps for some religious discourses) in the West. The implications of this observation need to be explored further as scholars work together to deepen Western and Chinese understandings of the "critical".

Being "critical" in China

While the concept of critique has developed rich technical meanings in the West, being "critical" in Chinese is generally associated with unfavourable meanings in daily life. This may also be the case for English, but in the Chinese context, if one is said to be "critical", one is most likely to be considered a person who is not

considerate, not friendly, and who finds fault with everyone and everything. This meaning may be traced back to the early recorded meanings of the word *pi* (批), the first syllable of the word *piping* (批评), which is the usual translation equivalent of the English “criticism” or “being critical”.

The etymology of the Chinese word *piping* is conceptually different from that of *criticise* and its cognates in European languages. According to *Cihai*, a Chinese encyclopaedic dictionary that provides earlier meanings of individual Chinese characters, *pi* in the ancient Chinese language mainly meant (i) “to hit with the hand, especially on the face” or (ii) “to remove by beating and sharpening” (Xia 1999: 1906).² In (ii) the meaning involves a material object as affected participant; in (i) the affected participant is human. It is not clear which of these meanings comes first historically. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of *pi* with material object, a change of state appears to be involved in the semantics, a change of state brought about by hitting or beating. In the case where the grammatical object of *pi* is semantically human,³ we have to envisage a change of state in some different sense, perhaps a change of mind or a change of heart. It is significant that the end result brought about by beating is the removal of something (considered by the speaker to be) undesirable. Such semantic transfers between domains are not uncommon in language change and would account for the emergence of a sense of *pi* that is translated as “criticise”. However, it remains a matter of speculation how much this historical association with physical beating and its effects remain a significant factor in its modern meaning. It is also worth noting that *Cihai* gives meaning of *piping* (批评) as “to rectify, to comment and to evaluate by causing physical pain”. In addition, another word, sometimes used to translate “criticise”, is *pipan* (批判) and an earlier meaning of *pipan* is “to differentiate by sharpening and cutting”.⁴ These cases are of interest because *piping* appears to denote a primarily physical act in a social context, while the etymology of *pipan* suggests how a concept of physical refinement or division could lead to the intellectual act of “criticising”, in the same way as the etymology of “criticise” in the European languages.

Let us briefly consider the modern meanings of *pi*. This morpheme is rarely, if ever, found alone in modern Chinese usage but is frequently found in two-morpheme compounds with other single morphemes, such as *ping* (评) and *pan* (判). In *Cihai*, *ping* (评) is defined as “to comment and to evaluate” (Xia 1999: 1711), and *pan* (判) is defined as “to differentiate and distinguish, often in public” (Xia 1999: 521). While the combined two-morpheme compounds (*piping* and *pipan*) have a meaning in themselves, they nonetheless have some associations with the earlier meanings of the separate Chinese characters/morphemes *pi*, *ping*, and *pan*. For modern Chinese, the *Grand Chinese Dictionary* (汉语大辞典), a Chinese dictionary that provides meanings of modern Chinese characters, gives the following two meanings for *piping* (批评): (i) “to point out the strong points and

weak points; to comment on these” and (ii) “esp. to point out the errors and mistakes” (Editorial Board 2006: 367). The word *pipan* (批判) is defined as “to make systematic analysis of wrong ideas” (Editorial Board 2006: 366). If this is an accurate reflection of the contemporary meanings of these two words, then it appears that there is a shift to a more abstract conceptual domain, with a lessening of the conceptual difference between the two words. It appears that in this abstract domain, concepts of rational comment may be involved. However, *pipan* may include more clearly a concept of social censure, reflecting perhaps the earlier link between *pi* and physical punishment. Some bilingual dictionaries give “sentence, condemn” (in the judicial sense) as equivalents of *pipan*. In both words, there is a clear implication that the object of the verb denotes something regarded by the speaker as in some sense “wrong”. These are words deeply embedded in normative cultural practices. Clearly, “errors”, “mistakes” and “wrong ideas” imply some basis of judgement, possibly ideological. Dictionaries can incorporate, and even seek to impose, ideological conceptions, but we shall not pursue this particular issue here.

Of course, most word meanings are not a matter of stipulation by dictionaries. Rather, meanings are conceptual frames (often complex ones) associated with a phonological form. Such conceptual frames can include knowledge of the situations in which the words are typically used or have been used. In the case of *pipan* and *piping* associations of this kind, given the historical context of China, might be expected to include the discourse practice of public denunciation and private self-criticism enforced under Mao Zedong (Ji 2004). At least, this may be the case for a certain generation of the contemporary Chinese population. The practice of “criticism”, conducted in large meetings and small groups, was not left to the reasoning of individuals. From its systematic establishment in the “rectification” (*zheng feng* 整风) campaign of 1942–44 at the Communist base in Yan’an (self-) criticism was closely directed by supervisors who ensured conformity with the Party line. Such practices included what is in effect the discourse complement of denunciation, namely confession (Ji 2004: 48–50). The principal psycho-social tool of directed mass criticism is exclusion from the group. Physical violence was of course also used, notably in the Cultural Revolution, and it is of some interest to note in this connection the earlier meaning of *pi*, discussed above, “to change, or to remove something undesirable by beating”.

The goal of the kind of critical discursive practice instituted at Yan’an is conformity with a specific public vocabulary of political terminology approved by the Party, on the assumption that politically correct language causes politically correct thinking and behaviour. But the purpose of the discourse practice of criticism meetings was also to influence the masses by a public display in which an individual was humiliated by verbal denunciation. During the Cultural Revolution this kind of mass public meeting — the *pipan hui* (批判会) — was formalized and

ritualized. It was in this kind of practice that *pipan* acquires its specific set of associations rooted in a specific phase of Chinese history (Ji 2004: 161ff.). Today Chinese political discourse does not go to these extremes. Nonetheless, there remains an expectation of conformity to central government policy and this can be enforced in part by the tradition of self-critical discussion accompanied by the rectificatory guidance of the local Party secretary in small groups of Party members in work units. Being “critical” in the Chinese context thus carries a heavy ideological load, in the sense that many members of the population will have cognitive frames that include the kind of knowledge just outlined. Moreover, the conceptual frame of *pipan* is not one in which the individual criticises a central authority, as it is in the European Enlightenment tradition but rather the reverse. That is to say, it is individuals who are picked out for “criticism” by officials or by the masses incited by ideologically motivated elites.

There may be other cultural reasons why the words *piping* and *pipan* carry unfavourable connotations. It is often claimed that the Chinese tradition is more oriented to the concept of *harmony* than it is oriented to what might be termed critique. This is a complex area, especially if one bears in mind the historical context outlined in the last paragraph. For the notion of “harmony” may be bound up with ideological concepts of mass “unity”, that is of political and social conformity with an ideology. In which case, “harmony” can be seen not simply as a benign ethical or aesthetic principle but as part of a power structure. The recent re-assimilation of the notion of “harmony” in Chinese Communist Party discourse is open to the same kind of consideration — indeed “critical” consideration in the sense of the Western tradition, which is precisely the concern of CDA.

However, it is also important to bear in mind that the manipulation of public language for reasons that can be regarded as socio-political may be deeply embedded in pre-Communist culture. One of the key themes in Confucian thinking — we may call it Confucian *discourse*, since “Confucian thinking” is constituted in a social *practice* of verbal and other behaviours transmitted from generation to generation by educational and other channels — is the “rectification of names” (*zheng ming* 正名). The following passage from Confucius (1979) is well known, but gains a particular relevance when considered in the present context:

Tzu-lu said, ‘If the Lord of Wei left the administration [*zheng* 政] of his state to you, what would you put first?’

The Master said, ‘If something has to be put first, it is perhaps the rectification [*zheng* 正] of names.’

Tzu-lu said, ‘Is that so? What a roundabout way you take! Why bring rectification in at all?’

The Master said, ‘Yu, how boorish you are. Where a gentleman is ignorant, one would expect him not to offer any opinion. When names are not correct, what is

said will not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishment will not fit the crimes; when punishments do not fit the crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot?...

(子路曰：“卫君待子而为政，子将奚先？”子曰：“必也正名乎。”子路曰：“有是哉，子之迂也。奚其正？”子曰：“野哉由也。君子于其所不知，盖阙如也。名不正则言不顺，言不顺则事不成，事不成则礼乐不兴，礼乐不兴则刑罚不中，刑罚不中则民无所措手足。故君子名之必可言也，言之必可行也。君子于其言，无所苟而已矣。”)

(*Analects*, XIII, 3, translated by D.C. Lau)

What can this tell us about present-day political discourse and indeed about language ideology and language policy? It seems that Confucius is outlining, however sketchily, a view of language according to which words determine thoughts. The language philosophy involved here is not, it seems, like the Platonic doctrine (or the doctrine of Cratylus) that words naturally denote their real-world referents (see Plato's (1996) dialogue *Cratylus*). Rather, it seems clear from the use of the word *zheng* (正) that Confucian means that words should be chosen by the ruler in the belief that they determine the way people think about reality, in line with the policies espoused by some such ruler.

The appeal to traditional Chinese values, or simply the transmission of the ideas in family and pedagogic discourse, may direct ruling elites to think about language in this way. In modern terms we could say that a traditional language ideology makes it appear natural for a regime to seek to control terminology in the perceived interests of society as a whole. Moreover, anyone familiar with the Western cultural tradition is bound to be reminded of George Orwell's (1949) novel *Nineteen Eighty-four*, in which an artificial language called “newspeak” is imposed by a totalitarian regime in the interests of “thought control”.

Despite the historical tendencies just outlined, there have been indications of a different kind of “critical” spirit in Chinese scholarship in the past. Interestingly, these resemble those of the early Western “critical” spirit in some respects. The period from the middle of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth was a period in China that was “a period of free thought and of radical criticism of the authoritarian empire” (Gernet 1999: 497). Such attitudes had their roots in the late sixteenth century, as was the case, *mutatis mutandis*, in the West. What is interesting is that the critical frame of mind was linked to researches into the previous ages of Chinese culture and, in the work of for instance, Wang Fuzhi, into the nature and evolution of human societies. Significantly, thinkers like Wang Fuzhi were associated with textual criticism, the re-analysis of classical texts. The questioning of the authenticity and accuracy of texts by the use of rational methods is most famously associated with Gu Yanwu. This rich history cannot be pursued

further here, but it is worth noting that it was also the tradition of textual criticism in the West, reaching back into the sixteenth century, that eventually merged textual criticism with political critique in the European Enlightenment.

A “colonising” recontextualization?

“Recontextualisation” has become a key term in much CDA writing. A piece of language (written or spoken) produced by one speaker may under certain conditions be repeated later by other speakers: the piece of repeated language is “text”. Each utterance, new or repeated, derives its meaning from its context; that is, in broad terms, the speech situation (participants, location, and medium) and genre combined with varying degrees of socio-cultural knowledge shared among the participants. A text may be “re-cycled” into a context that is different in kind and historical circumstances from its initial production.

An example is the use in the previous section of the quotation from Confucius. If Confucius and Tzu-lu ever held a conversation along these lines it was first “entextualised” orally and only many years later scribally (for this approach to text, cf. Blommaert 2005). Generations of scholars contributed to its continuous transmission in discourse over time. One can assume that it was recontextualised countless times for various purposes, including political purposes. Translation into English is a kind of recontextualisation. In our text above, we have in turn inserted this translation, recontextualised, for our own argumentation purposes, in a new context, a recontextualisation with which readers may or may not agree.

CDA authors have argued that recontextualisation can play a crucial role in discourse-mediated power structures (see Iedema 1997; van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999; Wodak 2000a, b, 2008; Wodak & Fairclough 2010). Recontextualization is linked to *intertextuality*. This latter term can be defined as referring to the linkage of all texts to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Such links can be established in different ways: through continued reference to a topic or to its main actors; through reference to the same events as the other texts; or through the reappearance of a text’s main arguments in another text. Precisely the latter process is also labeled *recontextualization*. By taking an argument out of context and restating it in a new context, we first observe the process of de-contextualization, and then, when the respective element is implemented in a new context, of recontextualization. The element then acquires a new meaning, because, as Wittgenstein (1953) famously argued, meanings are forged in use. To take an example relevant to the present collection, the traditional discourse of education has in the West begun to include commercial vocabulary — indeed commercial text in the sense outlined above. A similar phenomenon is happening in China. One may

ask: is it the universities that are “appropriating” the language of commerce and managerialism for their own strategic goals? Or is it business that is somehow “colonising” the territory of the scholar? And one may ask, self-critically, à propos of our recontextualisation of Confucius above: are we appropriating Confucius? Or is Chinese culture colonising the discourse of CDA? Or, in an even more complicated dialectic, are we appropriating Confucian discourse, colonising it with a selective Western interpretation, and using it to colonise CDA discourse, or, even to colonise an emergent Chinese discourse on CDA?

Why are such convoluted points worth making? The reason, within the perspective of the present special issue of *JLP*, is that the dialogue between Chinese and Western scholars in the field of CDA is indeed dialectic, as indeed is the entire historical process of “opening up”, intensified in the contexts of globalization and glocalization. It is dialectic in which Chinese and Western intellectual perspectives and traditions meet one another, in various local, regional, and national contexts, at differing points in time.

Concluding note

The papers that we have included in this special issue of the *Journal of Language and Politics* are necessarily limited in scope. The aim, however, is much wider — to call the attention of discourse and language analysts to the challenging research tasks that the development of social, political and intellectual life in China is opening up. These tasks are both theoretical and empirical. As we have hoped to make clear in these reflections, there are some major and quite urgent theoretical — actually, philosophical — problems that are emerging as the analysis of political discourse becomes global and cross-cultural. On the empirical front, we are facing a very diverse, complex and dynamic culture which it is not even desirable to try to grasp as a stable totality. In any case, the concept of “discourse” is itself fluid and multiplex, so we can never be sure, nor do we need to try to be, that we have some sort of definitive inventory of a society’s discourses at some moment in time.

Nonetheless, the Leverhulme-funded project, *New Discourses in Contemporary China* (NDCC), which is the source for the selected papers in this issue of *JLP*, has enabled us to envisage further research topics, among which the dynamics of emergent discourses is one. For example, many new discourses gestate at the oral level, among circles of acquaintances, in notebooks, diaries, mobile phone messages and blogs; even later when they become sufficiently stable to be recognizable as “discourses”, they are originally recognised as marginal and alternative discourses, in contrast to mainstream discourses conveyed via mainstream media. Between these discourses are dialogues, and sometimes tensions and even

struggles, resulting in a change of status, with marginal turning to mainstream or mainstream to marginal. Something essential in this dynamics of discourses is “critique”, be it a perspective or a discursive act.

In researching the complexity of discourses, CDA has made its contribution in the past few decades. However, scholarly discourse analysis may be said to be itself a discourse, one that consciously engages with its socio-political context. In this sense, CDA’s critical perspective can be characterised as having “narrow focus” on specific socio-political issues. Tian (2008, 2009) therefore proposes a “wider angle” perspective, one which focuses research on the roles of discourse in contemporary Chinese society, for example, how discourse represents social events, constitutes identity, and hence participates in social practice. This way of doing CDA in China is an outcome of dialogue between reflections on discourse and critique in China and the West, and also of a recontextualisation of CDA in the Chinese context. We do not yet know where the collaboration of Chinese and Western scholars in understanding communication in different societies will lead. The entire environment for discourse studies in China, and indeed world-wide, could change.

Notes

1. For example, Tseng Tzu, one of Confucius’ students, said: “Each day I examine myself in three ways: in doing things for others, have I been disloyal? In my interactions with friends, have I been untrustworthy? Have not practiced what I have preached?” 曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身- 為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎？」
2. Translations from the cited dictionaries are by Tian.
3. Strictly speaking, a human body part, the face. The metaphorical significance of “face” is culturally relevant.
4. *Cihai* is not explicit about dates or chronological sequence.

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