

A Study on Jiang Yi's Philosophy of Language

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Keywords: Jiangyi, Philosophy of Language, Analytical Philosophy, Wittgenstein

Abstract: Professor Jiang Yi is a famous contemporary philosopher who has made important contributions to the research and development of philosophy of language in China. His main research fields include Anglo-American analytical philosophy, Wittgenstein's philosophy, philosophy of language, metaphysics, and the comparative study of modern Anglo-American philosophy and European philosophy. Based on the analysis of his works, articles, interviews and lectures, this paper explores and comments on his philosophy of language to help us understand his academic connotation more deeply.

1. Introduction

Professor Jiang Yi is a contemporary renowned philosopher and scholar. He is a Distinguished Professor under the "Changjiang Scholars Program" of the Ministry of Education, a subject review expert for the National Social Science Fund, the President of the Chinese Association for Modern Foreign Philosophy (a national first-class academic society), and the Chinese chair of the Sino-British-American Summer Philosophy Institute. He has previously held positions such as the "Jingshi Distinguished Professor" at Beijing Normal University (2005–2006), a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the director of the Modern Foreign Philosophy Research Office [1]. Currently, he is a professor at the School of Philosophy and Sociology, Beijing Normal University. His main research areas include Anglo-American analytic philosophy, Wittgenstein's philosophy, philosophy of language, metaphysics, and comparative studies between modern Anglo-American philosophy and European continental philosophy. He has led and completed numerous projects funded by the National Social Science Fund and major research projects of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He has published over ten monographs and co-authored works, six translations, and more than 200 academic papers [2]. Over his more than 30 years of academic research, through continuous efforts in both the philosophical and foreign language communities, Professor Jiang Yi has expanded the field of philosophy of language from a niche area studied by only a few to the realm of foreign languages. The research team in this area has continuously grown and developed, and it has become an independent discipline. In this process, Professor Jiang Yi, as a philosopher, has made tremendous contributions. Since the early 1990s, Professor Jiang Yi has been consistently publishing high-quality papers and works without interruption. Given the high quality, significant impact, and large number of his academic outputs, this paper will mainly summarize several major areas of Professor Jiang Yi's research in the philosophy of language over the past 15 years and explore the underlying philosophical ideas of language.

2. Philosophy of Language

Before the emergence of the specialized field of philosophy of language, philosophers had never ceased to study language-related issues, such as Aristotle, Locke, Leibniz, and Hume. Since the linguistic turn in philosophy in the 1960s, research in the philosophy of language has gradually come into the public eye, with philosophers attempting to use the philosophy of language as a tool

to address philosophical problems. The advent of mathematical logic has also promoted the development of research in the philosophy of language. As Wittgenstein said, all philosophy is a critique of language. Language is primarily related to form rather than content. Through years of research, Professor Jiang Yi has developed his unique understanding of the philosophy of language, which he divides into broad and narrow senses. The broad sense of the philosophy of language is a branch of philosophical research, encompassing all philosophical fields that take language as the main object of study. Professor Jiang Yi generally discusses the philosophy of language in its broad sense. For example, in his article *Saussure as a Philosopher*, he explores the philosophical thoughts of Saussure, the master of linguistics and the founder of modern linguistics. Saussure's three major distinctions laid the important foundation for the philosophy of language. The narrow sense of the philosophy of language specifically refers to the philosophical school that emerged in Anglo-American countries, which primarily uses language analysis as its methodology. Professor Jiang Yi's monograph *A Tutorial on Analytic Philosophy* mainly deals with the narrow sense of the philosophy of language. This paper will summarize and review Professor Jiang Yi's ideas on the philosophy of language from the narrow perspective.

3. Professor Jiang Yi's Ideas on the Philosophy of Language

3.1 Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy

Professor Jiang Yi's research on Anglo-American analytic philosophy, characterized by its transcendence and innovative breadth and depth, has yielded many excellent academic achievements, such as the monographs *Modern Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy* and *A Tutorial on Analytic Philosophy*, as well as a series of papers related to the National Social Science Fund general projects *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Western Philosophy* and *Research on the History of Analytic Western Philosophy*. Based on a summary of Professor Jiang Yi's views, the basic beliefs of analytic philosophy can be briefly summarized as follows: the study of language is the study of meaning (Frege); the study of language is the study of thought (Dummett); the study of language is the study of human activities (Wittgenstein); and the study of language is the study of the world (Quine). Professor Jiang Yi believes that analytic philosophy is an extension and development of Western traditional philosophy. Analytic philosophy has deepened Western traditional philosophers' understanding and recognition of the nature of philosophy, expanded the basic fields of philosophical research, such as the study of cognitive science, the study of philosophy of mind, and the further development of metaphysical research. In his research on analytic philosophy, Professor Jiang Yi emphasizes the rationality and clarity of analytic philosophy and also highlights the connections between language and thought, as well as between language and the world in analytic philosophy.

In Professor Jiang Yi's research on the analytic philosophy movement, he has always emphasized the foundation of analytic philosophy, namely, the logic and clarity combined with science. The alliance with the spirit of rationality and science is committed to overthrowing speculative metaphysics and eliminating the mystery in philosophy [3]. He believes that the rationality of philosophy and the combination of philosophy with science are the presuppositions of analytic philosophy research. "Early analytic philosophers already had an a priori understanding of the nature of logic when they put forward their philosophical claims and logical analysis, that is, starting from the a priori nature of logical form and logical rules to analyze whether the expression of language conforms to the a priori logical form and rules. This form and rules, as well as the exploration of the logic behind language, have constructed an important framework for contemporary Western philosophical discussions. In today's philosophical context, analytic philosophy is no longer seen as a historical movement or a universally applicable philosophical method, but as a spiritual force that truly enables our thoughts to seek clarity, our expressions to have logic, and our discussions to be more persuasive. This force allows us to more confidently understand the role of philosophy in addressing all issues. In addition to exploring the connections between analytic philosophy and many other philosophical schools, such as phenomenology and

hermeneutics, he has helped us recognize that the study of the history of philosophy and philosophical methodology is an important source of innovative philosophical ideas. The complementarity with modern science is also a process of continuous enrichment of analytic philosophy itself. The scientific nature and logical clarity of analytic philosophy are in line with both the analytical methods of the European philosophical tradition and the needs of modern scientific development. From Professor Jiang Yi's monographs and papers, we have not only systematically learned about Anglo-American analytic philosophy but also greatly benefited in terms of consolidating the foundation of research in the philosophy of language and improving our scientific thinking and logical reasoning abilities.

Professor Jiang Yi's research also permeates the idea that the relationship between language research and the world is inseparable. He believes that from the perspective of the nature of philosophy, the definition of the nature and tasks of philosophy by analytic philosophy is to some extent consistent with the modern understanding of the nature of philosophy, that is, to regard philosophy as an activity to understand the relationship between human rationality and the world. If we carefully examine the philosophical views of early analytic philosophy, we will find that it is fundamentally consistent with the philosophical tradition since ancient Greece at a deep level. For example, Wittgenstein's philosophical view is understood as pointing out the uselessness of philosophy. Whether in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* or the *Philosophical Investigations*, he seems to advocate such a unique philosophical view. However, his "unique understanding" of philosophy actually inherits the ancient Greek intellectual tradition, which emphasizes the fundamental role of philosophy in the meaning of life and human existence, especially regarding philosophy as the best interpretation of life. The Vienna Circle did not regard philosophy as a different enterprise from science; they placed greater emphasis on understanding the nature of philosophy from a scientific perspective, which is precisely the nature of philosophy that ancient Greek philosophers tried to clarify. He also refutes the logical positivism's complete denial of the value of language through the argumentation of the relationship between language and value, arguing that language expresses intentions, and the values expressed by intentions are the key to understanding our expressive behavior. Thus, he affirms the connection between language and thought, and between language and the world.

3.2 Research on Wittgenstein

The study of Wittgenstein's philosophical thought runs through Professor Jiang Yi's academic career. He has published works such as *Wittgenstein: A Post-Philosophical Culture*, *A Biography of Wittgenstein*, and *Wittgenstein and the Development of Contemporary Philosophy*. He has also presided over the National Social Science Fund project "Wittgenstein and Contemporary Western Philosophy." In his research on Wittgenstein, in addition to sorting out his early, middle, and late thoughts, he has proposed views different from other Western philosophers of language through his own in-depth studies. He has also adopted new methods of interpretation, providing new ideas and even new methodologies for the interpretation of Wittgenstein's works.

In his interpretation of Wittgenstein's later thoughts on certainty and uncertainty, he differs from Western philosophers (such as Kripke, Cavell, and McDowell) by adopting a more moderate approach. This "moderate interpretation" means that his explanations are entirely based on the book *On Certainty*, without imposing any additional interpretations. Through an in-depth analysis of the four parts of *On Certainty*, Professor Jiang Yi argues that Wittgenstein clarifies certainty to present us with two arguments: First, certainty and knowledge belong to two completely different categories; second, once certainty is defined, we can describe the scope of uncertainty. Certainty and uncertainty belong to different categories; they are opposites rather than antagonists [4]. If they were antagonists, they would belong to the same category. Uncertainty and certainty belong to different categories, just as the body and mind do not belong to the same category. Language games and other everyday activities have uncertainty, but we need to define this uncertainty within a certain framework. To describe this uncertainty using human activities and language games requires some definite norms, like channeling an uncertain river into a riverbed, which is not fixed and

unchangeable. So what is the riverbed in language games and everyday activities? It is context. Context provides the appropriate conditions for the use of language activities, and when the context changes, the meaning of language also changes. Context belongs to the category of uncertainty, but belief belongs to the category of certainty. Context is used to determine meaning, which changes according to the context; belief is used to define certainty, eliminating all doubt and fallibility. Therefore, only by first defining something can we propose the possibility of uncertainty.

In summary, he argues that context provides the basic mode of language games. In terms of context, there is the possibility of certainty and uncertainty, that is, both certainty and uncertainty in context are possible; but for language games, there are only situations here or there, without the possibility of certainty or uncertainty. From this, he further proposes: 1) The opposite of certainty is not uncertainty, but doubt. This doubt is not a state of being full of doubts, but is related to knowledge, the acquisition of which is related to experience. 2) Experience provides support and assurance for the normal operation of language games (certainty), but it also becomes a shackle for innovation, breakthrough, and thinking. Following rules is a method of constantly trying to get out of intellectual confusion in language games, just like a fly trying to find a way out of a bottle.

Professor Jiang Yi has also proposed a new method of interpreting Wittgenstein's work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Currently, there are three main interpretations of this work in the Western philosophical community, and he has pointed out the controversial aspects of these interpretations. They are: the traditional *ineffable reading* represented by Russell and Anscombe (G.E.M. Anscombe), the *metaphysical or mystical reading* represented by Malcolm (N. Malcolm), Pears (D. Pears), and Hacker (P.M.S. Hacker), and the *therapeutic or elucidatory reading* represented by Diamond (C. Diamond) and McGinn (M. McGinn). The first two interpretations are usually referred to as the *orthodox readings*, while the latter is called the *resolute reading* (cf. Costello, p. 100) [5]. Based on this, he proposes a *reverse reading* method, which starts from the last proposition and works backward, progressively advancing Wittgenstein's basic line of thought. This kind of reasoning is different from superficial reasoning and is actually a deeper level of reasoning: ineffable (7) → propositions (5, 6) → thoughts (3, 4) → world (1, 2). Superficial reasoning follows the order of writing, while deep reasoning tends to follow the order of Wittgenstein's thinking, that is, starting from the ineffable, defining what is sayable, and then from the sayable propositions to thoughts and to the world. In his logical picture, the world and facts are the results of logical construction, existing only in the logical space revealed by propositions; similarly, since propositions constitute thoughts, thoughts become the meaning expressed by propositions. From this perspective, he argues that according to the reverse reading method, Wittgenstein constructs a logically constituted world, in which there are no negative facts, but there are negative forms of propositions. Based on the silence regarding the unsayable, the boundaries of thought are defined, and we express our thoughts on all sayable matters, that is, propositions express the content of thought, and ultimately obtain a logical picture of the world and facts. This method of interpretation helps us better understand Wittgenstein's seemingly heretical ideas at the time: Logical construction is form, ethical concern is attitude, and thought is the key.

3.3 From Western Philosophy of Language to Chinese Philosophy of Language

Although Professor Jiang Yi's research field starts from Western philosophy, his ideas on the philosophy of language have made contributions to the development of Chinese philosophy of language and have also extended to discussions on the positioning, development, and globalization of Chinese philosophy of language.

In contemporary philosophical research, the revival of Chinese philosophy has begun. He has analyzed Chinese philosophy from three dimensions: time, space, and logic. From a temporal perspective, since the 21st century, there has been a surge of interest in discussing Chinese philosophy in the Chinese philosophical community, mainly manifested in two approaches: discussing from the perspective of Chinese philosophy and from the perspective of Western philosophy. In the study of Western philosophy, Jiang Yi and others argue that *the question of how to make philosophy speak Chinese is essentially about the possibility and reality of Chinese*

philosophy, as well as its rationality, necessity, and urgency [6]. From a spatial perspective, Professor Jiang Yi, by organizing the theories of a series of linguists and philosophers of language, has proposed that language activities are inseparable from thought and the world, which is a main thread running through his research. These all demonstrate the close connection between the world of language and the world of thought, providing important theoretical resources for our discussion of the relationship between Chinese language and philosophy. Logically, he advocates that the research object of Chinese philosophy must be clearly defined to distinguish it from other disciplines that primarily focus on Chinese linguistics or the Chinese written language. His exploration from the three dimensions of time, space, and logic has provided a historical combing of Chinese philosophy research, solidified its ideological foundation, and also clarified the significance of Chinese philosophy.

Professor Jiang Yi has also pointed the way for the development of Chinese analytical philosophy. Based on his in-depth study of Anglo-American analytical philosophy, he has explored its influence on Chinese analytical philosophy, reviewed the research on analytical philosophy in contemporary China, and proposed important values and requirements for building contemporary Chinese analytical philosophy: to conduct a historical combing of contemporary Chinese analytical philosophy and improve its logical framework; to provide theoretical interpretation of Chinese analytical philosophy research, *clarifying the theoretical characteristics of Chinese philosophy in using analytical methods to interpret Marxist philosophy and traditional Chinese philosophy, achieving the localization of Western philosophy, and making theoretical contributions to contemporary Chinese philosophy*[7]; to construct problems in the study of Chinese analytical philosophy and strive to fulfill the contemporary task of taking Chinese philosophy to the world; to innovate and diversify the methodology of Chinese analytical philosophy research; and to systematically study the history of Chinese analytical philosophy.

4. Conclusion

In his research on the philosophy of language, Professor Jiang Yi has achieved significant accomplishments in the above-mentioned areas based on the results of national projects related to Wittgenstein studies, research on Anglo-American analytical philosophy, and the relationship between language and value. He has not only conducted research on the history of the philosophy of language and analyzed philosophical problems but also proposed innovative methods of interpretation and philosophical views, bringing a profound impact on the analysis of the philosophy of language. As a leader in the Chinese philosophical and philosophical linguistic communities, a proponent of taking Chinese philosophy to the world, and the editor and publisher of the journal Chinese Analytical Philosophy, he has tirelessly worked for decades to secure a place for Chinese philosophy in global philosophical research. He has reflected on and provided suggestions for the development of Chinese philosophy of language, striving to enhance the status of Chinese philosophy in world philosophical studies. This reflects the cultural confidence of contemporary Chinese scholars in traditional Chinese philosophy and language, as well as the responsibility and commitment of a scholar to the study of Chinese culture. This is the most admirable aspect and also the historical mission of every foreign language learner in contemporary times[8].

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