CHAPTER ONE

JIN’S USE OF LANGUAGE

1.1 Philosophical Style

Generally speaking, Jin employed a language that is easy to understand. At times, he even wrote in a very colloquial style. He often illustrated his terms using examples drawn from everyday life. His works are well-structured, and he employed his terms consistently. He was very precise when defining his terms. In Zhishilun, and to a lesser degree in Lun dao, he created an abundance of terms and attributes to describe various aspects and perspectives of being and reality. However, by the time of his metaphysical work, Lun dao, his keywords had become vague for various reasons that will be examined below. The philosophical style considered here is the form in which Jin chose to compose his works.¹ Four distinct features may be found in these, most notably in Zhishilun and Lun dao: the numerical structure of the texts, his dualistic approach to the treatment of philosophical questions, his extensive employment of suffixes, and his creation of idioms.

Jin Yuelin structured his texts according to contemporary analytical school conventions, and in a fashion reminiscent of works on mathematical logic such as Whitehead and Russell’s Principia Mathematica (1903) and Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921).² These are divided into chapters, with each chapter organized according to propositions. These, in turn, are treated in subsections with numeric or alphabetic headings (such as 1.1, 1.2; 2.1, 2.2; 1, 2; A, B; or 1., 2.), in which each proposition is explained in short paragraphs.

¹ Regarding Jin Yuelin’s work, I prefer to speak of stylistic devices. This is because they are either too singular, as in the case of the suffixes which indicate the influence of Buddhist translation practices, or, in the case of Western philosophical genres, not sufficiently explored to inform about specific influences. In his work on style in philosophy, Manfred Frank indicated that philosophical texts also bear personal trade-marks and different styles, which are comparable to the genres and styles in literary texts. See Manfred Frank, Stil in der Philosophie (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1992), 7.
² Wittgenstein’s Tractatus was subsequently translated and published in 1927 in the journal Zhexue pinglun 哲學評論.
Second, the most prominent feature of Jin’s work was his dualistic approach to dealing with philosophical questions. Polarieties featured in great abundance in his epistemology, and were embedded in a complex system of relations:

Regarding the idea (yinian 意念) as an idea or as a signifier (suowei 所謂), the idea is not a picture. It is general, abstract and independent from the classes of perceiving [subjects]. In relation to the signified (suozhi 所指), the idea is either an image (yixiang 意像) or the given. […] Although the signifier is independent from the class of human beings, the signified of the idea of the class of human beings cannot be independent from the class of human beings. […] The world of the class of human beings is twofold: One part is the world that is common (gongtong 共同) to all classes of perceiving [subjects]. This is the world of the relation of universals. The other part is the special world of the class of human beings. It is relative to the world of the given of the class of human beings. […] Every perceiving [subject] that belongs to one class possesses a set of givens that is classtypical (leixing 類型). Although this set of classtypical givens cannot be shared with any other class of perceiving [subjects], it is common to any normal perceiving [subject] within one class. The given of a class of perceiving [subjects] is the special world of that class, and not the particular (teshu 特殊) world of the perceiving [subjects] within that class. […] Although the appearance of one perceiving [subject] can be typical [for its class], it is always particular. […] The particular world is, on the one hand, due to the particular senses of the perceiving [subject]. On the other hand, it is due to the specific attitudes, and so on, of the perceiving [subject].

Since he employed sets of polarities from both, this dualistic approach was probably inspired by Western logic or influenced by Hegelian dialectics, as well as derived from Chinese tradition:

Epistemology refers to knowledge, or the li 理 (regularity) of the knowledge of objects. Two [meanings] of the word li will be employed. On one hand, there is the li of the object; on the other, there is the li of the content. […] We can make use of the differences between universals (gongxiang 共相) and concepts (gainian 概念) to distinguish between the two different kinds of li. In the sense [that there is an] inner and an external [kind], the universals are outside (wai 外), and the concepts are inside (nei 内).