

Научная статья /
Research Article

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УДК 82.09 + 821.161.1.0
ББК 83 + 83.3(2Рос=Рус)6

РЕЦЕПЦИЯ КНИГИ «ПРОБЛЕМЫ ПОЭТИКИ ДОСТОЕВСКОГО» М.М. БАХТИНА В КИТАЕ

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*Аньхоэский педагогический университет, Уху,
провинция Аньхоэ, КНР; Институт мировой
литературы факультета иностранных языков
Пекинского университета, Пекин, КНР*

Дата поступления статьи: 13 февраля 2025 г.

Дата одобрения рецензентами: 08 апреля 2026 г.

Дата публикации: 25 сентября 2026 г.

<https://doi.org/10.22455/2500-4247-2026-II-3-10-33>

*Данная статья завершена при финансовой поддержке Китайского
государственного фонда общественных наук, проект № 22&ZD286:*

«Исследование Русской школы поэтики»

Аннотация: Бахтиноведение в Китае, зародившееся в рамках изучения китайского достоевсковедения, набрало обороты на фоне «бахтин-бума» во французских и англосаксонских академических кругах. На протяжении четырех десятилетий интерес китайских ученых к Бахтину оставался устойчивым. Восприятие Бахтина китайскими учеными идет по четкой траектории: начинается с его теории полифонического романа, переходит к его поэтике карнавализации и в конечном счете распространяется на более широкие дисциплинарные области. Различные интерпретации «проблем поэтики Достоевского» создали симбиотический ландшафт в китайской рецепции научного наследия М.М. Бахтина. Это непреходящее влияние во многом обусловлено резонансом между полифоническим диалогизмом Бахтина и традиционным китайским принципом «гармонии без единообразия». Таким образом, его творчество является важным связующим звеном в современном китайско-российском культурном обмене.

Ключевые слова: М.М. Бахтин, «Проблемы поэтики Достоевского», полифонический диалогизм, гармония без единообразия, традиционная китайская культура

Информация об авторах: Чжан Лэй — доктор литературы, доцент, кафедра компаративистики и мировой литературы, факультет гуманитарных наук, Аньхоэский педагогический университет, ул. Цюйхуананлу, д. 189, 241002 г. Уху, провинция Аньхоэ, КНР.

E-mail: nj2013nj@126.com

Лин Цзяньхоу — доктор философии, профессор, Институт мировой литературы факультета иностранных языков, Пекинский университет, ул. Ихэюаньлу, д. 5, 100871 г. Пекин, КНР.

E-mail: lingjh@pku.edu.cn

Для цитирования: Чжан Лэй, Лин Цзяньхоу. Рецепция книги «Проблемы поэтики Достоевского» М.М. Бахтина в Китае // Studia Litterarum. 2026. Т. II, № 3. С. 10–33. <https://doi.org/10.22455/2500-4247-2026-II-3-10-33>



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Studia Litterarum,
vol. 11, no. 3, 2026

THE RECEPTION OF BAKHTIN'S BOOK *PROBLEMS OF DOSTOEVSKY'S POETICS* IN CHINA

© 2026. Zhang Lei, Ling Jianhou

*School of Liberal Arts of Anhui Normal University,
Wuhu, province Anhui, PRC; Institute of World
Literature, School of Foreign Languages, Peking
University, Beijing, PRC*

Received: February 13, 2025

Approved after reviewing: April 08, 2026

Date of publication: September 25, 2026

Acknowledgements: This article was funded by the National Social Science Fund of China (project no. 22&ZD286: "A Study of the Russian School of Poetics").

Abstract: Bakhtin studies in China, originating from Dostoevsky scholarship, gained momentum amid the "Bakhtin boom" in French and Anglo-Saxon academia. For four decades, Chinese scholarly interest in Bakhtin has remained robust. The reception of Bakhtin in Chinese academia follows a clear trajectory: beginning with his theory of the polyphonic novel, extending to his poetics of carnivalization, and ultimately expanding into broader disciplinary domains. Various interpretations of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* have created a symbiotic landscape in the Chinese reception of Bakhtin's work. This enduring influence largely stems from the resonance between Bakhtin's polyphonic dialogism and the traditional Chinese principle of "harmony without uniformity." His work thus stands as a significant bridge in contemporary Sino-Russian cultural exchange.

Keywords: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, polyphonic dialogism, harmony without uniformity, traditional Chinese culture

Information about the authors: Zhang Lei, PhD in Literature, Associate Professor, Department of Comparative and World Literature, School of Liberal Arts, Anhui Normal University, Jiuheuanan Road, 189, 241002 Wuhu, province Anhui, PRC.

E-mail: nj2013nj@126.com

Ling Jianhou, PhD in Philosophy, Professor, Institute of World Literature, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, Yiheyuan Road, 5, 100871 Beijing, PRC.

E-mail: lingjh@pku.edu.cn

For citation: Zhang, Lei, and Ling, Jianhou. "The Reception of Bakhtin's Book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in China." *Studia Litterarum*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2026, pp. 10–33. (In English) <https://doi.org/10.22455/2500-4247-2026-11-3-10-33>

The selection of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (hereafter *PDP*) as the focal point for examining the reception of Bakhtin's academic thought in China is grounded in two key considerations. First, the emergence of Bakhtin studies in China in the early 1980s was significantly influenced by Dostoevsky scholars' attention to *PDP*. Second, *PDP* holds a pivotal position within Bakhtin's entire academic legacy. *PDP*, first published in 1929, bridges Bakhtin's early philosophical-aesthetic studies and his subsequent novel theory research. The revised and expanded 1963 edition not only embodies the author's philosophical and philological pursuits spanning over four decades but also connects with his 1965 work *Rabelais and His World: Folk Culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* and his later philosophical-anthropological reflections. This convergence of various intellectual threads establishes *PDP* as a pivotal monograph of Bakhtin. Chinese scholars' engagement with this seminal work has evolved through three distinctive phases of reception: first, the 1980s–1990s witnessed scholarly debates concerning the possibility of polyphonic novels; second, the early 2000s marked a turn toward the comprehensive interpretation of carnivalesque poetics, particularly following the 2007 establishment of the Chinese Bakhtin Studies Society, which deepened the exploration of the folk cultural origin of the polyphonic genre; third, since the 21st century, the work's influence expanded beyond its primary domain of literary theory, extending into diverse fields including philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, semiotics, media studies, history, folklore studies, and interdisciplinary methodology in the humanities, all unified through the concept of “dialogism.” This paper argues that the sustained vitality of Bakhtin studies in China primarily stems from the profound resonance between the core dialogic principle in the

polyphonic novel theory and the traditional Chinese philosophical concept of “harmony without uniformity.”

I. The “Bakhtin Boom” Sparked by Dostoevsky Studies in China

Professor Xia Zhongyi from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Fudan University discovered *PDP* while studying *Notes from Underground*. He subsequently published his research findings “Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* and the Problem of Polyphonic Novel Structure” along with a partial translation of *PDP*’s first chapter in *World Literature (Shijie Wenxue)* (Issue 4, 1982), marking Bakhtin’s formal introduction to China. At this stage, Bakhtin’s work circulated primarily within Chinese Dostoevsky studies circles. The breakthrough came in 1987 when *Foreign Literature Review* (Issue 1) published two papers: Qian Zhongwen’s “Polyphonic Novel: Hero and Author — A Study of Bakhtin’s Narrative Theory” and Song Datu’s “Bakhtin’s Polyphony Theory and Dostoevsky’s Authorial Position.” These publications brought Bakhtin to the attention of China’s literary criticism community and sparked a modest debate. The discussion continued in the same journal with Huang Mei’s “Bakhtin Revisited” (Issue 1, 1989), followed by Zhang Jie’s “Author Consciousness and Dialogic Relations in Polyphonic Novels — Also on Bakhtin’s Polyphony Theory” and Qian Zhongwen’s “Misinterpretations Must Be Avoided, but Marginal Mistakes Matter” (Issue 4, 1989). The debate centered on two key issues: the interpretation of Bakhtin’s concept of “author-hero relations” and the understanding of polyphonic novels. Qian Zhongwen argued that the independence and subjectivity of heroes exist in all novels, suggesting that Bakhtin overstated the superiority of polyphonic novels over the monologic ones. Song Datu contended that the hero’s consciousness cannot escape authorial control, thus making true equality between author and hero impossible. These arguments prompted responses from Huang Mei and Zhang Jie. Huang proposed understanding the polyphony theory as a reading methodology, while Zhang cautioned against discussing polyphony in isolation, warning of excessive theoretical dependency. Qian Zhongwen countered that Huang Mei’s misinterpretation stemmed from unfamiliarity with the revision history of *PDP*, and criticized Zhang Jie’s exclusive reliance on biographical literary research. He suggested that misinterpretations could be avoided by recognizing dialogic relationships between individuals as the foundation of Bakhtin’s philosophy. In retrospect, this debate itself exemplified the significance of

polyphonic dialogue and foreshadowed the polyphonic approach to *PDP* studies that would later emerge in China.

In 1988, amid the ongoing debate, SDX Joint Publishing Company released the complete Chinese translation of *PDP*, translated by Professors Bai Chunren and Gu Yaling of Beijing Foreign Studies University from the 1979 Sovetsky Pisatel Publishing House edition. The 1998 six-volume *Collected Works of M.M. Bakhtin* in Chinese and its 2009 seven-volume reprint both used Bai and Gu's translation. Even after the publication of Liu Hu's translation by Central Compilation & Translation Press in 2010, the 2024 third Chinese edition of *Collected Works of M.M. Bakhtin* (six volumes plus two supplementary volumes) still retained the 1988 translation, demonstrating its canonical status. Propelled by this debate, this classic translation was enthusiastically received by Chinese academia. According to the *Report on Academic Impact of Chinese Books in Humanities and Social Sciences* published in 2011, the Chinese version of *PDP* ranked 8th among the most cited academic works in CSSCI source journals in the field of foreign literature studies [2, p. 317]. Bakhtin's name quickly transcended the boundaries of Dostoevsky studies and Russian literature research, spreading throughout foreign literary criticism and Chinese literary criticism circles.

In 1992, *A Study of Polyphonic Novel Theory* emerged as China's first systematic study of Bakhtin's theory of polyphonic novels. Setting his analysis against the backdrop of Dostoevsky studies, Zhang Jie examines the major viewpoints and approaches advanced by Soviet Russian critics from the nineteenth to twentieth century, aiming to illuminate the intrinsic value of Bakhtin's polyphonic novel theory through comparative analysis. Zhang argues that the most distinctive feature of *PDP* lies in "its application of discourse analysis methods to literary criticism, offering a fresh synchronic perspective on the poetic characteristics of Dostoevsky's novels" [3, p. 172]. However, he also identifies a significant limitation in the polyphonic theory: its failure to explore the ideological origins of polyphony in Dostoevsky's thought. By evaluating Bakhtin's polyphonic novel theory in conjunction with Dostoevsky's creative practice, this monograph established itself as a pioneering work in early Bakhtin studies in China.

In 1992, Renmin University of China Press published the Chinese translated version of *Mikhail Bakhtin* by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist. In a dedicated section discussing *PDP*, the authors assert that "the book saved Bakhtin's life twice <...> the first edition saved his physical life from Solovki, while the sec-

ond edition rescued his intellectual life from oblivion" [4, p. 314]. Undeniably, this biographical work by American scholars, particularly in its assessment of Bakhtin as "one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century," catalyzed a surge of Bakhtin studies in Chinese academia. In response to this growing interest, Renmin University of China Press published *The Heteroglossia of Dialogue: Bakhtin's Theory of Cultural Transformation* in 1995, authored by the Chinese-American scholar Liu Kang [5]. This work provides a comprehensive overview of Bakhtin studies in English-speaking countries during the 1980s and early 1990s. It particularly emphasizes that the core of Bakhtin's cultural theory lies in cultural and aesthetic dialogism, opposing cultural monologism and authoritarian singularity. The work's most distinctive contribution is its application of Bakhtin's theoretical concepts to Chinese literary case studies.

In 1994, Dong Xiaoying published *Ascending the Tower of Babel Anew: Bakhtin and Dialogic Theory* [6]. Drawing from the dialogic concepts of discourse in *PDP* and building upon Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Bakhtin's works, the author attempts a systematic analysis of Bakhtin's dialogic theory. The study contextualizes Bakhtin within the broader development of the humanities while examining the practical applications of his dialogic theory in modern novel interpretation. This monograph demonstrates a broad vision, with the author firmly grasping the interdisciplinary and multidimensional value of the dialogue theory. However, the work's limitations are equally apparent. For instance, the author's conceptualization of internal dialogue as "a miniature dialogue manifested in content" is problematic. The text states: "Internal dialogue is distinctive: when it merely exists at the double-voiced stage, expressing ideological contradictions through double-voiced forms, it constitutes a micro-dialogue. However, when internal contradictions split into two distinct personas <...> internal dialogue ceases to be a micro-dialogue and transforms into a macro-dialogue" [6, p. 30, 32]. This analysis clearly lacks support from Bakhtin's original works and appears to be speculative, potentially misleading readers. Nevertheless, Dong's work remains pioneering in the Chinese reception and study of Bakhtin's dialogic theory.

The Chinese reception of Bakhtin initially emerged through Dostoevsky scholars, who prioritized validating the polyphonic novel theory with textual evidence from Dostoevsky's works over engaging with Bakhtin's theoretical system. As a result, *PDP* was regarded as a text to be substantiated through Dostoevsky's writings. While researchers broadly acknowledged its significance and inspiration

for Dostoevsky studies, they refrained from treating literary works as mere theoretical testing grounds. Instead, they advanced Dostoevsky studies through close textual reading and theoretical comparison, employing Bakhtin's theories while maintaining skepticism about whether his views on "author-hero relations" fully aligned with Dostoevsky's novels. For Bakhtin scholars, however, Bakhtin's theory itself constitutes the research object, with Dostoevsky's novels serving merely as vehicles through which Bakhtin articulated his literary theory and philosophical thought. Consequently, theoretical researchers focus more on the intrinsic content, characteristics, origins, and value of Bakhtin's theory itself.

Objectively speaking, the reception of *PDP* from both Dostoevsky studies and theoretical perspectives should not be viewed as contradictory. Dostoevsky as a writer and Bakhtin as a theorist should hold complementary significance in readers' eyes: they demonstrate the "convergent factors" and "existential (dialogic) elements" of Russian culture through different narrative approaches, and "the polyphonic novel embodies a narrative ethics, or more precisely, an artistic conception — a cultural pursuit that reconstructs the lifeworld through artistic power" [7, p. 39]. Professor Wang Zhigeng's parallel consideration of both writer and theorist illuminates the shared value between Dostoevsky's artistic creation and Bakhtin's theoretical exploration. The different emphases of Dostoevsky studies and Bakhtin studies as two distinct fields actually provide each other with a perspective of outsideness for their respective research.

II. From the Origins of the Polyphonic Novel Genre to the Poetics of Carnivalization

Chapter Four of *PDP* examines the genre characteristics of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel. Bakhtin traces the origins of this new novel genre to ancient folk festival culture, elaborating on its carnivalized literary manifestations in ancient Greece and Rome — the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire. The introduction of concepts such as carnival, the carnivalesque, and carnivalization opened up a new domain in literary studies oriented toward folk festival culture. In *PDP*, Bakhtin's discussion of the relationship between folk festival culture and Dostoevsky's novel genre is highly condensed, omitting the intermediate stage of how folk carnival culture underwent literary carnivalization — as exemplified in the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire. This sparked a strong desire for further investigation within Chinese academia, initiating a decade-long journey

of translating Bakhtin's scholarly legacy. In 1998, the six-volume Chinese version of *Collected Works of M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Qian Zhongwen, was published. At its launch ceremony on May 14, Mr. Zhong Jingwen, the pioneer of modern Chinese folklore studies, remarked:

In his literary theoretical works, Bakhtin examined the concept of carnivalization in literature through his analyses of Dostoevsky in Russia and Rabelais in France <...> Bakhtin's theory of literary carnivalization indeed holds broad academic significance. The concept of carnivalization can be applied to explain certain distinctive phenomena in human spiritual life and narrative literature. However, this concept should encompass two levels: carnival phenomena and carnivalized literary phenomena. Carnival phenomena exist in Chinese culture, as evidenced by both historical and contemporary circumstances. But questions remain: can Bakhtin's theory of carnivalized literature be meaningfully connected to Chinese literary works and literary theory? If so, what is the nature of this connection? In other words, how does Chinese literature manifest carnival depiction in its distinctly Chinese style? These questions demand substantive answers [8, p. 244–246].

Professor Zhong Jingwen, a long-serving faculty member at Beijing Normal University, catalyzed Bakhtin's studies among the university's scholars through his emphasis on carnival theory. His distinguished student Zhao Shiyu approached the subject from folkloric and historical perspectives, publishing "The Carnival Spirit of Traditional Temple Fairs" in 1996 [9]. This influential paper was subsequently reprinted in full in *Xinhua Digest* (1996, no. 4) and later translated for *Social Sciences in China* (English edition, 1997, no. 3). Zhao's 2002 monograph, *Carnival and Everyday Life: Temple Fairs and Folk Culture* [10] in the Ming-Qing dynasties, published by SDX Joint Publishing Company, marked a breakthrough in Chinese scholarship on the "carnival phenomena" dimension of Bakhtin's carnival theory. Contemporaneously, Professor Xia Zhongxian of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Beijing Normal University, who translated *Rabelais and His World* into Chinese, published *A Study of Bakhtin's Poetics of Carnivalization* [11]. This work traced the historical evolution of the carnivalization of literary phenomena and their generic characteristics, while offering a fresh interpretation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* that unveiled its carnivalesque elements. The monograph not only provided a penetrating analysis

of Bakhtin's poetics of carnivalization and its theoretical significance but also validated these concepts through Chinese classical literature, thereby advancing Chinese readers' understanding of the polyphonic novel's origin while invigorating research on the carnivalesque in Chinese literature. In 2001, Professor Cheng Zhengmin from the same Department of Foreign Languages and Literature published *Bakhtin's Cultural Poetics*, which argued that *PDP* made its scholarly contribution by "illuminating the intrinsic connection between Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels and folk carnival culture <...> while offering new theoretical insights into European cultural development" [12, p. 8]. Cheng positioned *PDP* as a work encompassing genre poetics, historical poetics, and cultural poetics, arguing that Bakhtin articulated his own poetic views through his analysis of Dostoevsky's works, thus concluding that "'Dostoevsky's poetics' is essentially Bakhtin's poetics" [12, p. 25]. Cheng's work enlightened both Bakhtin and Dostoevsky studies in China, primarily by introducing the Bakhtin's dimension of folk culture into the study of polyphonic and carnivalized novels.

In 2001, Wang Jiangang published his monograph *Carnival Poetics: A Study of Bakhtin's Literary Thought* [13]. He argued that Bakhtin's poetics transcended the narrow scope of folklore and ethnology, achieving the heights of philosophical anthropology. He noted that both Rabelais's novels' connection to folk culture and Dostoevsky's novels were permeated with carnivalesque worldviews. The author also elucidated the relationship between carnivalization studies and dialogic theory, asserting that "carnival represents the secularization and embodiment of dialogic theory, while dialogue represents the rationalization and sanctification of carnival." He further maintained that "the polyphonic novel is the aesthetic transformation of dialogic theory" and that "the polyphonic novel is a form of carnivalized literature" [13, p. 41, 50, 51]. Wang focused on tracing the historical trajectory and development of the poetics of carnivalization, while demonstrating within this framework the interconnections among polyphonic novels, dialogic theory, generic and stylistic features, rhetorical theory, and the chronotope. Finally, through the lens of the poetics of carnivalization, he analyzed the carnivalesque characteristics manifest in women's writing and folk literature.

Mei Lan's 2005 monograph *A Study of Bakhtin's Philosophical Aesthetics and Literary Thought* [14] attempted to unveil the comprehensive landscape of Bakhtin's theoretical thinking by examining the core category of his philosophical aesthetics and literary theory: the interactive author-hero relationship. The

author dedicated a chapter to exploring the theory of the polyphonic novel in *PDP*, arguing that “the root of controversies surrounding polyphonic theory lies in the fact that its core principle — the equal relationship between author and hero — cannot find robust substantiation within Bakhtin’s existing literary critical framework” [14, p. 113–114]. By examining Bakhtin’s literary theory and linguistic concepts through a philosophical-aesthetic lens, Mei advanced Chinese scholars’ engagement with Bakhtin’s philosophical thought. Similarly, Shen Huazhu’s 2005 publication *Dialogic Epiphany: A Study of Bakhtin’s Philosophy of Language* specifically addressed the dialogic and carnivalesque aspects of language [15].

In 2007, China published three monographs on Bakhtin’s philosophical thought. Xiao Jingyu’s *Beyond Linguistics: A Study of Bakhtin’s Philosophy of Language* dedicated a special section to discussing “metalinguistics” proposed at the beginning of Chapter 5 in *PDP*. The author argued that the Slavophile philosophy of language was a significant intellectual source for this Bakhtin’s theory [16, p. 16]. Ling Jianhou’s *Bakhtin’s Philosophical Thought and Textual Analysis Method*, the final outcome of his 2005 National Social Science Fund of China project, drew upon Russian scholar L.A. Gogotishvili’s research — particularly his exposition on the interrelationship between monologic and anti-monologic thinking tendencies in Bakhtin’s work. Ling thoroughly explored Bakhtin’s unique methodology in the human sciences, adopting a combined linguistic and literary perspective to understand the interconnections among various categories in Bakhtin’s theory. He argued that “dialogic theory integrates Bakhtin’s thinking across different humanities disciplines, leading him to discover a unique methodological principle for the human sciences” [17, p. 292]. He applied the dialogic method to analyze various textual genres while also providing a philosophical approach to address the feasibility of polyphonic novels. Zhou Weizhong’s monograph *Duality, Dialogue, and Existence: An Ontological Reading of Bakhtin’s Carnival Poetics* argued that “duality-double personality-double-voiced discourse reflects the profound carnival cultural origins in Dostoevsky’s works <...>. This demonstrates the logical coherence between Bakhtin’s theoretical thinking and poetic analysis regarding carnival and dialogue” [18, p. 91–92]. This monograph emphasized connecting carnival and dialogue through the lens of dialogic thought in *PDP*, thereby revealing the ontological philosophical implications of Bakhtin’s poetics of carnivalization.

The 1998 publication of the Chinese translation of *Collected Works of M.M. Bakhtin* generated significant resonance within Chinese academic circles. The genre origins of polyphonic novels discussed in *PDP* quickly expanded into comprehensive studies of “carnival phenomena” and “carnivalized literary phenomena.” Meanwhile, the concept of dialogue transcended literary studies to enter the philosophical domain. This scholarly trajectory proved to be a significant development, demonstrating *PDP*’s far-reaching radiating influence, which subsequently catalyzed an intensified engagement with Bakhtin’s studies in Chinese academia.

III. The Continuing Radiating Influence of *PDP*

As previously noted, the radiating influence of *PDP* in China emerged following the publication of its partially translated chapters in 1982, and particularly with the release of its complete Chinese translation in 1988. This sphere of influence continued to expand with the initial publication of the *Collected Works of M.M. Bakhtin* in Chinese version in 1998 and its second edition in 2009. The resultant scholarship developed notably in five distinct directions.

First and foremost, the most fruitful outcome has been the localization of Bakhtin’s literary theoretical thought in the Chinese context. Regarding the application of the polyphonic novel theory in China, the most influential work has been *Lu Xun’s Polyphonic Novels*, a collection of essays authored by Professor Yan Jiayan of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Peking University. The author argues that the diversity of Lu Xun’s creative methods and the flexibility of his narrative perspectives are either directly or indirectly related to the characteristics of polyphonic novels. Essays such as “Polyphonic Novel: Lu Xun’s Outstanding Contribution” and “The Classical Significance of Lu Xun’s Works” present compelling analyses of these issues. The book was first published in 2002, with subsequent editions in 2011 and 2021 [19]. This work stands as both a classic demonstration of Chinese scholars’ understanding of the practical value of the polyphonic novel theory from the perspective of Chinese literature and a pioneering, guiding work in Lu Xun studies and modern Chinese literary research. Similar to Yan’s work, Hu Peiping’s “*Carnavalesque*” *Writing: The Artistic Characteristics and Rebellious Spirit in Mo Yan’s Novels* is another monograph focused on a Chinese writer [20]. The author employs Bakhtin’s poetics of carnivalization from his polyphonic theory to comprehensively interpret the discursive strategies,

life forms, and rebellious spirit in Mo's creative works. This marks the expansion of combined studies of Bakhtin's theory and Chinese literature from classical and modern literature to contemporary literature.

Second, significant attention has been devoted to studying the reception history of Bakhtin's academic legacy in China. These studies share a common feature: they elucidate the influence of Bakhtin's academic thought on the construction of contemporary Chinese literary theory. In 2004, Zeng Jun published *The Reception of Polyphony: Bakhtin's Reception History in China*, summarizing Chinese Bakhtin's scholarship achievements from the early 1980s to the beginning of the 21st century. This work includes the process of PDP taking root in China, analyzing the pluralistic discursive forms of Chinese scholars' reception of Bakhtin's thought from hermeneutic and reception aesthetic perspectives. The most distinctive feature of the book is its division of China's reception of Bakhtin into four dimensions, examining the intricate "polyphonic relationships" between Bakhtin and contemporary Chinese realist poetics, formalist aesthetics, postmodern cultural poetics, and contemporary literary criticism. It reveals how different discursive forms constrained the reception of Bakhtin during three discursive transformations in Chinese literary theory since the New Era: from "realist poetics" to "modernist formalist aesthetics" and then to "postmodernist cultural poetics." Five years later, *Bakhtin's Thought and Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory* was published [21]. Its author, Song Chunxiang, argues that since the Reform and Opening-up, Chinese literary theory has undergone several paradigm shifts. In seeking to break free from political discourse constraints and achieve dialogic autonomy, its operational trajectory and developmental direction coincided with Bakhtin's reception path in China. In short, the Sinicization process of Bakhtin's polyphonic novel aesthetics reflects the dialogic orientation of Chinese literary theory in the New Era. Zhang Sumei's *The Localization of Bakhtin's Theories in China* is the third major work on Bakhtin's reception history [22]. The book's most notable feature is its meticulous textual research, demonstrating the author's profound philological expertise.

Furthermore, applying Bakhtin's dialogic theory to translation studies, both theoretical and practical, became a popular topic. In 2006, Chen Liming published *Translation: As Polyphonic Dialogue* [23], starting from the premise that "translation is a form of polyphonic dialogue." Using the concept of "dialogism" from Bakhtin's theory, Chen attempted to provide new interpretative paradigms

for contemporary Chinese translation studies, arguing that translation is a polyphonic dialogue involving authors, translators, and readers, with the text as the subject and cultural space-time as the background. Similar typological approaches can be found in Dong Wugang's *Bakhtin's Aesthetic Thought and the Construction of Translation Studies* [24] and Li Bo's *The Dialogic Approach to Translation Studies: Bakhtin's Thought and Translation Studies* [25]. All three works explore theoretical issues in translation studies through polyphonic dialogism from *PDP*. Cai Hua's *English Translation of Tao Yuanming's Poetry from a Bakhtin's Poetic Perspective: The Polyphonic Reality of Translation* [26] is a monograph addressing specific poetry translation practices. The author employs Bakhtin's poetic resources, including polyphony theory and carnivalization theory, to conduct a multidimensional examination of the English translations of the ancient Chinese poet Tao Yuanming's works, expanding the theoretical perspective for evaluating the current state of Chinese classical poetry translation.

Fourth, Bakhtin's poetic thought received significant academic attention. While Chinese classical poetics, like its European and Indian counterparts, has a long history, Russian poetics, inheriting the Greek tradition, pioneered modernization [1, p. 10–13]. Bakhtin's expansive understanding of poetics in *PDP* — beyond merely “theories about poetry” [27] — naturally had a profound impact on Chinese poetics circles, as the modern interpretation of traditional culture has been China's persistent goal since the 21st century. In 2009, Wu Chengdu published his monograph *An Overview of Bakhtin's Poetic Theory: From Sociological Poetics to Cultural Poetics* [28], systematically explaining polyphonic novel poetics, sociological poetics, historical poetics, and carnivalesque poetics, while exploring the relationship between Bakhtinian poetics and contemporary Chinese literary theory. Jian Shengyu's *Philosophical and Poetic Contemplation in Interactive Space: A Study of Bakhtin's Intersubjective Aesthetic Thought* [29] examines Bakhtin's poetic theory within his intersubjective aesthetic framework, attempting to fully release the energy of Bakhtin's aesthetic-poetic thought within contemporary Chinese society's core cultural values. Sun Pengcheng's monograph [30] and Lu Xiaohe's monograph [31] focus on Bakhtin's historical poetics of chronotope, both adopting comparative perspectives to reveal the overall logic and specific operations of Bakhtin's chronotope theory. The culminating work on Bakhtin's poetics is Cheng Zhengmin's *Bakhtin's Poetics* [32]. The author proposes the notion of “holistic poetics,” attempting to summarize the systematic

characteristics of Bakhtin's poetics — an integration of his continuous exploration since 2000 in cultural poetics, linguistic poetics, genre poetics, novelistic poetics, historical poetics, and sociological poetics [33]. Cheng's work discovered a new perspective for Bakhtin studies, providing insights into how Bakhtin's poetic thought promoted 20th-century literary theory development, while also indicating theoretical spaces for further consideration in Russian poetics research.

Fifth, specialized works emerged in comparative studies, transformative research, and genealogical investigations. In 2006, Luo Yirong, drawing extensively from English-language Bakhtin scholarship, published *Towards Dialogue: Literature, Self, and Communication* [34]. This seminal work traces the evolution of Western dialogic theory through a Bakhtin's lens. The first section, "Principles of Dialogism," analyzes Bakhtin's dialogism and elucidates its origins, while the second section, "Applications of Dialogism," examines its implementation across literature, psychology, communication studies, and management sciences. Wang Jiangang's *Post-Theory Era and the Transformation of Literary Criticism: A Study of Bakhtin's Dialogic Criticism Theory* reconstructs Bakhtin's dialogism using North American literary criticism paradigms. He argues that Bakhtin began implementing the polyphonic dialogic thought in *PDP*, not only engaging in dialogue with extensive Dostoevsky scholarship but also establishing a dialogue with Dostoevsky himself. This effectively serves as "intellectual midwifery" for the artist's work, "clarifying polyphonic and carnivalesque ideas that were previously latent in the work's structure" [35, p. 143]. This monograph represents a Chinese scholar's attempt to transform Russian literary theory into Western literary criticism, holding particular relevance for contemporary Chinese literary criticism. Zhang Bing's *A Study of Marxist Philosophy of Language in the Bakhtin School* builds upon *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* under the name of V.N. Voloshinov. After examining the text's reception from the late 1920s to the present, it dedicates a chapter to analyzing the relationship between polyphonic dialogue and discourse dialogue in *PDP*. Zhang contends that "others' speech, double-voiced discourse, single-voiced double-discourse, polyphony, dialogue <...> constitute a conceptual series that is fundamentally identical and interconnected" [36, p. 445], tracing these concepts' philosophical origins to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. The 2021 monograph *Bakhtin's Dialogism in the Context of Russian National Culture* [37, p. 133], authored by Wang Zhigeng, is another genealogical study focusing on dialogue theory primarily derived from *PDP*, demonstrating the

significance of Russian Orthodox culture to Bakhtin and emphasizing the “Russianness” of his dialogism.

The International Symposium on Bakhtin’s Academic Thought was held at Xiangtan University, China, from June 19–21, 2004, with Russian scholars Natan Davidovich Tamarchenko, Konstantin Glebovich Isupov, and Nikolai Aleksandrovich Pankov as invited participants. Subsequently, from October 21–24, 2007, the Inaugural Conference of the Chinese Bakhtin Studies Association and Symposium on Bakhtin in Cross-cultural Perspectives was hosted at Beijing Normal University, with Bulgarian-French scholar Tzvetan Todorov as an invited participant. Tamarchenko’s paper, “Grotesque Aesthetics and Novel Poetics: On the Significance of Bakhtin’s Views and Concepts for Modern Science,” was translated into Chinese and published [38]. Todorov’s “Dialogism and Monologism: Bakhtin and Jakobson” was notably published almost simultaneously in two prestigious Chinese academic journals [39]. The international experts’ participation brought the latest research developments to Chinese academia, generating significant scholarly discourse and further stimulating the reception of Bakhtin in China. Although Chinese scholars’ interest in Bakhtin continued to broaden, *PDP* remained the foundational point of departure. This sustained focus on *PDP* can be attributed to two factors: first, Bakhtin’s dialogism, as constructed in this work, aligned with the urgent needs of contemporary Chinese literary theoretical development; more significantly, this theory resonated with traditional Chinese cultural concepts.

IV. Polyphonic Dialogue and “Harmony without Uniformity”: Resonance beyond Time and Space

Bakhtin’s academic legacy has had a profound impact on Chinese academia. While the “Bakhtin boom” in Western Europe and North America has been gradually subsiding, why do Bakhtin’s theories, derived from his study of Dostoevsky’s novels, maintain their research momentum in China? This can be partially attributed to China’s relatively late start in Bakhtin studies, but more importantly, it relates to the close connection between Bakhtin’s dialogic theory and the traditional Chinese cultural context. When comparing the traditional Chinese concept of “harmony without uniformity” with the polyphonic dialogue that emphasizes equal dialogue and pluralistic coexistence, we can discover a high degree of similarity between the two. Although these two philosophical thoughts

emerged more than two thousand years apart, there exists a profound compatibility between the philosophical ideas within these two cultural systems, which constitutes an indispensable cultural foundation for Bakhtin's reception in China.

The connotation of “harmony without uniformity” (“和而不同”) in traditional Chinese culture has undergone an evolutionary process. Discussions about “harmony” (he) and “uniformity” (tong) were recorded in classical texts such as *Guoyu* (*Discourses of the States*) and *Zuo Zhuan* (*The Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*). Around 700 BCE, during the late Western Zhou period, the “Zheng Speeches” of the *Guoyu* documented a conversation between Shi Bo and Duke Huan of Zheng about the political situation: “Harmony generates vitality, while uniformity leads to stagnation. When different things complement each other, it creates harmony, leading to growth and vitality; but when similar things merely supplement each other, exhaustion and decline inevitably follow” [40, p. 470]. This meant that the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE) was declining because the King of Zhou “abandoned harmony in favor of uniformity,” removing those who offered frank advice while only trusting those who blindly agreed with him. The ancient Chinese advocated that “harmony generates vitality, while uniformity leads to stagnation,” emphasizing the importance of respecting differences between things. When diverse elements coexist in harmony and evolve together, sustainable political development flourishes. Conversely, suppressing differences and enforcing uniformity merely creates a collection of identical elements, inevitably leading to stagnation and political decline.

Around 400 BCE, during the late Spring and Autumn Period, the *Zuo Zhuan*: “The Twentieth Year of Duke Zhao” recorded a significant dialogue about the proper relationship between ruler and minister. In this discourse, Yanzi, the renowned statesman of Qi, employed metaphors of cooking and music to elucidate to Duke Jing of Qi the crucial distinction between “harmony” and “uniformity” in governance and ruler-minister relations. He expounded that the proper relationship between sovereign and ministers ought to be akin to the art of refined cookery, where in the five flavors harmoniously blend to yield exquisite tastes. Like the masterful composition of music, where the five tones interweave to create sublime melodies, so should diverse counsel flourish at court. Ministers must possess the virtue to voice differing perspectives and engage in earnest discourse with their lord, thereby fostering sagacious governance. In stark contrast, he warned, lesser men who prize mere conformity offer naught but hollow flattery and ser-

vile acquiescence — as if one were to strike but a single note repeatedly upon the strings, rendering the music barren and lifeless. Through these metaphors, Yanzi illustrated the essential difference between harmony and uniformity.

In this discourse on harmony versus uniformity, Confucius elevated “harmony without uniformity” as a defining attribute of the noble person (*junzi*). As recorded in *The Analects*, Book XIII (*Zilu*), “The Master said: ‘The noble person harmonizes but does not seek uniformity, whereas the petty person seeks uniformity but cannot harmonize’” [41, p. 935]. Through this juxtaposition of the noble person and the petty person, Confucius delineated two antithetical dispositions: “harmony without uniformity” and “uniformity without harmony.” The former characterizes noble persons who, while steadfast in their commitment to righteousness and distinct in their individual temperaments, share fundamental moral aspirations. The latter describes petty persons who, driven by profit-seeking, may affect outward conformity yet fail to achieve genuine harmony, ultimately descending into discord and strife.

A comparative examination of the ancient Chinese sages’ discourse on harmony versus uniformity with Bakhtin’s theory of polyphonic novels, particularly its embedded concept of dialogism, reveals notable parallels. Bakhtin illuminated the phenomenon of multiple voices engaging in equitable dialogue within Dostoevsky’s novels. This dialogic principle manifests primarily through equal exchanges between characters, as well as between the author and heroes. Bakhtin’s contention that the writer bestows upon each hero equal standing in expressing their perspectives resonates with Yanzi’s assertion that ministers may maintain and articulate divergent views in discourse with their ruler. Nevertheless, significant distinctions persist.

First, within the framework of traditional Chinese thought, philosophers conceptualized the noble person as an exemplary moral archetype, juxtaposed against the petty person as its antithetical counterpart. In the wake of Confucius, classical texts consistently employed the harmony-uniformity distinction as a criterion to differentiate between the noble and the petty persons, thus illuminating the hierarchical gradations in moral cultivation. Bakhtin’s conception of polyphonic dialogue, by contrast, centered on analyzing the egalitarian discourse that Dostoevsky crafted within his literary works. His theory emerged as an explication of specific artistic features in the author’s creative process, approached purely from a literary-theoretical perspective,

without any prescriptive intent to establish moral hierarchies among characters.

Second, the concept of “harmony without uniformity” in Chinese classical texts operates on three distinct levels. First, it embodies the Way of the noble person, exemplifying their moral excellence in maintaining inner equilibrium without compromising principles for fame or profit. Third, it manifests in the Way of sovereign–minister relations, underscoring their harmonious complementarity in statecraft. Finally, it serves as a guiding principle for interpersonal relations, affirming the value of mutual inclusiveness while preserving individual distinctions. Bakhtin’s theory of polyphonic novels and dialogism, conversely, emphasizes the equipollent relationships between characters, and between characters and author within the artistic realm, wherein the author relinquishes authoritative judgment over their characters’ consciousness. From this perspective, Bakhtin’s concept of polyphonic dialogue shares little commonality with the first two levels of “harmony without uniformity,” yet aligns with its third level in emphasizing equal dialogue and pluralistic coexistence. In China’s reception of Bakhtin, scholars not only examine the theoretical implications of polyphonic dialogue but also, as Zhang Sumei notes, benefit from how the tradition of “harmony without uniformity” creates an inherent resonance in their understanding [22, p. 278]. This explains Chinese academia’s strong identification with the egalitarian ideals in Bakhtin’s work. The cultural legacy of aspiring to the ideal noble person and valuing harmonious diversity has facilitated Chinese scholars’ natural acceptance and interpretation of Bakhtin’s dialogism.

Applying the principle of “harmony without uniformity” to examine China’s reception of *PDP* yields two insights. First, theoretical research requires a deep understanding of its underlying literary texts and cultural phenomena, as objective and fair judgments cannot be made otherwise. This is because theories often emerge from profound interpretations of specific artistic works, cultural contexts, or social histories rather than existing independently. Second, any interpretation of a fact (whether text, social history, or cultural phenomenon) inevitably adopts particular perspectives, illuminating certain aspects of the fact rather than encompassing all its characteristics. Therefore, when studying theory, while acknowledging its validity, we must also recognize its limitations, making genuine dialogue with theorists’ thoughts possible.

In today's global cultural landscape emphasizing civilizational exchange, China rejects cultural hegemony and advocates for equitable dialogue through the principles of "harmony without uniformity" and "appreciating diverse forms of beauty." This approach fosters mutual appreciation and creative harmony among distinct cultures while preserving their essential characteristics. The spirit of equal dialogue embedded in Bakhtin's polyphonic novel theory aligns with both humanity's universal aspiration for equality and its developmental trajectory, resonating naturally with China's traditional cultural ideal of "harmony without uniformity." In conclusion, the profound resonance between Bakhtin's thought and the traditional Chinese culture has sustained the enduring enthusiasm for and expanding influence of his polyphonic dialogism in China. This mutual interpretation between Bakhtin's scholarship and the traditional Chinese culture presents a noteworthy example for contemporary Sino-Russian cultural exchange.

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