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## **Where is Bie-Modern Going? Responding to Professors who study Bie-modern Theories**

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# Where is Bie-Modern Going? Responding to Professors who study Bie-modern Theories

Wang Jianjiang

## Abstract

*“Bie-modern” is a theory about social form. It refers to “doubtful modernity” or pseudo modernity, manifested in the hybridity of the modern, pre-modern and post-modern. At present, Bie-modern theory is applied in philosophy, aesthetics, literature, linguistics, art, design, psychology, tourism, law, economics, and Human-Computer Interaction. Bie-modernism is to seek the direction of future development in the mixed society and to reduce human misjudgments and errors on the way forward. Therefore, it is the priority of Bie-modernism to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Where is Bie-modern going? Firstly, we shall leave the ambiguity of the word “Bie”, to distinguish the difference between Bie-modernism and “plural modernity”, to distinguish true and false modernity, to distinguish the difference between Bie-modernism and modernism and post-modernism. Secondly, towards authenticity, to seek the truth and reality and implement the real modernity. Thirdly, we will be implementing life equity/life stocks, an inherent right to life of every individual, and the share that the right to life holds in the total wealth of society that cannot be deprived, transferred for the whole of their life, that means the right to enjoy free medical care, free education, free old-age pension, and the right to food, clothing, housing, and transportation. To realize human life equity/life stocks, the historical mission of society lies in eliminating the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie. Life equity/life stocks is a primitive and real right, which is not influenced by acquired ideas and has the most irreplaceable dignity and value of life. Life equity/life stocks are closely related to human well-being and aesthetic feeling, and it has become the source of both. Lastly, we will be upholding “Bie”, the distinguishing, to the end through entering the ideological market and keeping authenticity, implementing life equity/life stocks, and the Great-leap-forward Pause of Bie-modernism. At present, Bie-modernism has rippled in the United States and the European Union. In the future, we will bring it to more countries and regions. The future development of Bie-modernism will focus on returning to the origins and implementing life equity/life stocks.*

**Keywords:** *Bie-modern, Bie-modernism, Life Equity/Life Stocks, Distinguishing, Authenticity*

## Introduction

“Bie-modern” is a theory about social form and civilized form that I presented at the Sino-Russian High-level Cultural Forum in 2014. It refers to a “doubtful modernity”, manifested in the hybridity of the modern, pre-modern and post-modern. After the publication of Bie-modern theory<sup>1</sup>, it aroused discussion among scholars in China,

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Jianjiang, ‘Don’t be Modern(Bie-modern): Ism’s Appeal and Construction’, *Exploration and Free Views* p.72, 2014, p. 74.

Europe, and the United States, and attracted significant attention from some insightful people. They have established the Bie-modern Research Center (CCBMS and CBMS) respectively in the United States and the European Union.<sup>2</sup> For modern and contemporary Chinese scholars, this is an unprecedented academic event in history. Meanwhile, with the continuous convening of international Bie-modern academic conferences and the progress of a Bie-modern international art tour,<sup>3</sup> Bie-modern theory has been widely disseminated.

At present, Bie-modern theory has been applied in philosophy, aesthetics, literature, linguistics, art, design, psychology, tourism, law, economics, and other fields. In this case, how Bie-modern theory develops, that is, where Bie-modern theory is going, becomes an important question that needs to be recognized and acknowledged. So far, more than 20 academics at home and abroad have written articles about Bie-modernist theories, including the former chairperson of the International Association of Aesthetics (IAA), the distinguished philosopher and aesthetician Ales Erjavic.<sup>4</sup> There are 3 books published in Chinese and English, and more than 130 papers, including more than 30 groups of column length articles in Chinese and English that have been published. Xie Jinliang, a professor of Fudan University published an article titled “Where is Bie-modern going? On Wang Jianjiang’s Theory of Bie-modernism”<sup>5</sup>. On the one hand, he expressed his appreciation for the generation and influence of Bie-modern theories, and on the other hand, he also expressed his doubts, in response to this, I will answer.

### **Leave the Ambiguity of the Word “Bie”**

Bie-modern, which is increasingly recognized, is a combination of Chinese Pinyin “Bie” and English word “modern”. “Bie” in Chinese contains at least 7 different meanings. It can mean “distinctive” “don’t” “farewell” “in addition” “special”, “other”, or “awkward”. However, all of them originated from the original meaning of the Chinese character “Bie” which means the separation of flesh from bone (see figure 1). The “categorized (Bie) 64 hexagrams” in the Book of Changes, the “revisionist (Bie) school of Moism” in Chuang Tzu, the “The spread of Buddhism in different ways” in Zen, and the “analytic(Bie) method” in Chinese poetry and verse, which formed a different way of thinking and classification criteria from others, and belonged to a philosophy of difference with a long history.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Research Centers’, available at <https://www.biomodernism.org/research-center/>, accessed on 25 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Archives: Exhibitions’, available at <https://www.biomodernism.org/exhibitions/>, accessed on 25 December 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Aleš Erjavec, ‘Editors’ Note’, *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume 39:3, 2018, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> Xie Jinliang, ‘Where is Bie-modern going? On Wang Jianjiang’s Theory of Bie-modernism’, *Guizhou Social Sciences*, 2019, p. 49.



Figure 1: Bie-modern's Bie(别) has more than 3000 years of history. Bie (别) is an ancient Chinese Hieroglyphic showing separation of flesh from bones by knife.

However, this ambiguity of the word “Bie” is prone to misreading. Just like a sentence “‘Bie’ together” has two opposite meanings of overlapping and breaking up, that is to (overlap each other) or (don't stay together or separate). In this case, there must be a strict definition both to explain oneself and to prove oneself. Therefore, Bie-modernism came into being. Bie-modernism is to seek the direction of future development in the mixed society and to reduce human misjudgments and errors on the way forward. Therefore, it is the priority of Bie-modernism to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to be both realistic and pragmatic.

The difference between Bie-modernism and “plural modernity” is that it first distinguishes true and false modernity, rather than affirming the object of study as one type of modernity without any distinction. At present, in Europe and the United States, there are many views concerning modernity. In China, there are also several views about modernity, such as “complex modernity”<sup>6</sup>, “mixed modernity”<sup>7</sup>, “new modernity”<sup>8</sup> and “special modernity”<sup>9</sup>. But these theories do not conform to the reality of China. The reality of China lies in the hybridity of the modern, pre-modern and post-modern, and so complete modernity has not yet been fully accomplished. On the contrary, pre-modernity still accounts for a large percentage of the Chinese experience.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Xingfu, ‘Complex Modernity Thesis’, *Tianjin Social Sciences*, 2018, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Zha Changping, ‘The Surface and Deep Significances of the Mixed-modern—Remarks on Wang Jianjiang’s Bie-modern Theory’, *Urban Cultural Studies*, 2021, p. 407.

<sup>8</sup> Shi Zhongyi, *The Glory and Crisis of Modernity: Towards a New Modernity*, Social Sciences Academic Press, China, 2012, p. 442.

<sup>9</sup> Chen Bohai, “‘Bie-modernity’ and Civilization Coordination”, *Social Science Front*, 2021, p.144.

For example, tens of millions of people are waiting to be lifted out of poverty, the household registration system with a history of more than 2000 years is still affecting the inequality among people. Feudal patriarchal ideology, feudal superstition, and feudal authoritarian ideology are still prevalent. Therefore, it is not how complex modernity is, but how complex the social form is. Using the complexity of social form to define the complexity of modernity is wrong. Modernity comes from the social contract of the European Enlightenment, the development of innate human rights, the concept of equality, freedom, the legal system, and the later developing social welfare system, which is not complex or complicated. Bie-modernism pursues real modernity, not pseudo-modernity (equality within social development). Therefore, it insists on the principle that features cannot replace noumenon. Firstly, it distinguishes between true and false and establishes real modernity, only then it can distinguish between special and or universal modernity. If the noumenon and essence do not belong to modernity, there is an ongoing suspicion of deception and the problem of “putting the cart before the horse” when it is included within special modernity. This is because the definition of “non-modernity” has rejected the description of “specific characteristics” and eliminates the rhetorical device, which will show the true face of things as they are.

The difference between Bie-modernism and modernism and post-modernism is also obvious. First of all, they have different stages of development. Western modernity is the product of industrialized civilization. Post-modernism is a reflection on modernity and a product of the development of human society to an advanced stage. Unlike, the modern and post-modern, the Bie-modern still drags the tail of the pre-modern. It is the hybridity of the modern, pre-modern, and post-modern. It has not become a real modern society and has not yet achieved modernization. To achieve modernization, China also needs to go through the period of harmony and conspiracy, conflict and contradiction, the interweaving of harmony and conflict, and the self-renewal and transcendence.<sup>10</sup> These developmental periods are no longer the problems or concerns facing modern and post-modern society.

Secondly, their internal theoretical structure is different. The modern is divorced from the historical development stage of the pre-modern, and the post-modern is a new form of civilization developed based on the modern. Therefore, it is a linear organizational structure and a diachronic form developed under a modernist framework. The Bie-modern, however, is a hybridity of modernity, pre-modernity, and post-modernity, which is characterized by time spatialization<sup>11</sup> in its synchronic form. It is unable to be classified periodically like the pre-modern, modern and post-modern, so its organizational structure is complex and simultaneous.

Finally, their theoretical direction is different. Modernism is concerned with how people (individuals) liberate freely from the rule of God, post-modernism is concerned with how to get rid of the restriction of instrumental rationality on people (individuals),

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<sup>10</sup> Wang Jianjiang, *Bie-modern: Space Encounters and Times Spans*, China Social Science Press, China, 2017, pp. 108-113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

while Bie-modernism is concerned about the difference between true and false modernity on the premise of caring about people. Intellectual property infringement and counterfeiting, which are prevalent in some countries and regions employing modern tools, not only lead to social moral degradation but also directly threaten people's lives and health. Nowadays, pseudo-modernity is ubiquitous in the world, and the issue of truth and falsehood has become the focus of all problems.

### **Towards Authenticity**

As for the above-mentioned viewpoint that noumenon precedes features, its direct ideological source lies in the Chinese Taoist thoughts of "returning to the truth" and "precious and true law". Lao Tzu, the ancestor of Taoism in China, insisted on "returning to the truth". Zhuangzi, the master of Taoism, advocated "the law is precious and true". They both criticized Confucianism at that time. The crux of Confucianism lies in putting moral and ethical principles above the real basis of things. Unlike Taoism's "returning to the truth", Confucianism requires "self-restraint and returning to the ritual". This leads to the hypocrisy of "Confucianism buries itself in poems and rites" and affects the hypocrisy of Chinese Society for thousands of years. After Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi, Taoism's authenticity will rise quietly when society changes. The style of metaphysics in the Wei and Jin Dynasties and the emancipation of the mind since the middle of the Ming Dynasty all have a revival of Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi's authenticity. Essentially, it is the revival of human nature and the consciousness of human nature. The reason why Taoism preaches authenticity is that Taoism can look beyond the immediate interests of human society and human beings, and thus can examine the plight, current situation, history, and developmental prospects of human society purely free from the fetters of interests. On the contrary, Confucianism has given too much consideration to "cultivating one's morality first, regulating the family, governing the country and finally ruling the world"<sup>12</sup> to serve the current politics, thus putting the "good" above "true". The difference between Confucianism and Taoism can be said to be the difference between good and true.

Nowadays, people often regard seeking truth as a scientific undertaking, but ignore the ontological significance of seeking truth. That is to say, truth is the first key to determining the quality of social existence. The proliferation of fraud and deception in the world, the prevalence of fake art, counterfeit and fake commodities are inseparable from the support of scientific and technological means, which are all related to the loss of human pursuit of the true noumenon.

Under the influence of Western Hermeneutics and reception aesthetics, truth has lost its authenticity, primitiveness, and essential nature, and has simply become a category of subjective understanding and the product of "foresight", which causes truth to no longer have any absolute significance, leading to arbitrary interpretation and unbridled

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<sup>12</sup> Anonymous Author, 'The Great Learning', in James Legge & Yang Bojun (eds), *The Four Books*, Hunan Publishing House, China, 'Revised', 1995, pp. 10-15.

disguise and lies.

Post-truth theory holds that not only is the truth difficult to determine, but even the truth does not exist. This theory has played a role in helping the distortion, spin, and lies to become abusive, making the truth something extravagant and unreasonable, while pseudo-modernity takes the opportunity to swagger through the market.

Different from Hermeneutics and post-truth theory, Bie-modernism advocates distinguishing between true and false modernity, returning to the truth, and establishing real modernity. These thoughts originate from Chinese Taoism, but at the same time, they are also a summary of the historical experience and lessons of human society. The healthy development of human society needs to get rid of the troubles of lies and fraud. To eradicate counterfeit and fake commodities, we must go back to Lao Tzu's "returning to the truth" and Chuang Tzu's "precious and true law" instead of walking towards self-destruction in the development of science and technology without ontological norms or direction.

Zhuang Tzu's thought of "precious and true law" constitutes the basic spirit of ancient Chinese literature and art. Litterateurs and artists not only love and eulogize nature but also regard nature and sincerity as the prerequisite of creation. Art that lacks nature and sincerity has always been regarded as bad art. The essence of Bie-modernism is to activate those valuable fine traditions in traditional culture, to maintain authenticity in all fields, especially in the fields of literature and art, to respect originality, to oppose counterfeits and pretenses, to express people's sincere and natural feelings, and to give a true demonstration and correction to the false society.

## **Implementing Life Equity/Life Stocks**

"Returning to the truth" and "precious and sincere law" requires not only the existence of the truth but also the existence of value in the survival and development of human beings. This valuable existence is manifested in the implementation of life equity/life stocks.<sup>13</sup> Life equity/life stocks are different from wealth equity. It cannot be transferred or traded. It is inherent with birth, gone with death, coexisting with the body and life. Life Equity is the proportion of a person's rights in the country's overall wealth, involving medical treatment, insurance, education, housing, pension, all aspects of life. Its greatest feature is that it is innate, acquired without labor or work, and will accompany one throughout life.

Life equity /life stocks are the inherent right to life of every individual, and the share that the right to life holds in the total wealth of society that cannot be deprived, transferred, and escrowed for the whole of their life. That means the right to enjoy free medical care, free education, free old-age pension, and the right to food, clothing, housing, and transportation. To get something without work is an identifying mark of life equity/life

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<sup>13</sup> Wang Jianjiang, 'Bie-modern Where Are You Going?—Responding to Mr. XIE Jin-liang', *Inner Mongolia Social Sciences* p.118, Volume 41:1, 2020, p. 124.

stocks. For instance, a member of one family, who is not working or unable to work or has no opportunity to work, also has equal rights to survival, material enjoyment, and the inheritance of property. The theory of life equity/life stocks is the development of the western theory of natural rights. It combines human innate natural rights with the share in rights that people acquire without effort in society but enjoys naturally as a life-long companion, which makes the rights of people in real life concrete and the essence of human life specific.

To realize human life equity/life stocks, the historical mission of society lies in eliminating the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie. According to normal human nature, no one is willing to abandon his house and savings to become the proletariat. On the contrary, the aim of “getting rid of poverty and becoming prosperous” is to transform the proletariat into a petty bourgeoisie, then a middle class, and then a big bourgeoisie. In the face of life equity/life stocks, public ownership is only a form. Its content is individual life equity/life stocks, that is, it is owned by every citizen in substance, not by an abstract “public” collective. When more than 70% of the wealth of the whole society is shared by its members as individuals in the form of life equity/life stocks, we can avoid the escrow of personal equity by citizens’ interests proxy system in the name of public ownership, and then the fraud of taking other people’s life equity/life stocks as their own and turn Utopia into reality.

Life equity/life stocks are primitive (fundamental) and real right, which is not influenced by acquired ideas and has the most irreplaceable dignity and value of life. Life equity/life stocks show people’s status in artificial (digitally mediated) life. With the advancement of virtual technology, the gap between the simulated world and the real world is narrowing, and the problem of distinguishing authenticity from falsehood is becoming apparent. With the development of AI technology, robots are partly replacing human work and becoming the extension of human life. However, robots cannot have life equity/life stocks, nor can they have the same status as original human life. Establishing human life equity/life stocks in due course will contribute to the maintenance of human dignity and value.

Life equity/life stocks are closely related to human well-being and aesthetic feeling, and it has become the source of human well-being and aesthetic feeling. Human happiness comes from material security in the objective world and the idea of “being contented in poverty and devoted to things spiritual” in the subjective world. Similarly, human misfortunes do not just refer to the unsustainable life for the lack of material resources, but also include the suffering that results from endless unfulfilled subjective desires. Therefore, life equity/life stocks are the source of happiness and aesthetic feeling in life. Without it, the premise of happiness and aesthetic feeling will be lost. Although the Transcendence Theory of the living realm is very popular, if there is no guarantee of life equity/life stocks, human happiness, and aesthetic sense will eventually be lost because the problem of “living” cannot be solved. (life is not sustainable) Bio-modernism advocates and protects life equity/life stocks, to give each full rights of their own, and maintain their happiness and aesthetic feeling.

Bio-modernism safeguards the existence of life equity/life stocks, which is essentially a



revelation of the true existence and value of the real human world, aiming at promoting the common progress of human beings under the full protection of individual rights.

Life equity/stocks are not related to the social system. Private ownership and public ownership are reasonable in existence. If according to Taoist thought, Yin and Yang are mutually alternate, heaven and earth, men and women are the unity of opposites in one. Public and private issues also belong to the problem of Yin and Yang intergrowth. The key here is that any reasonable social system should protect the individual life equity/life stocks. The biggest obstacle of individual life equity/life stocks is a proxy system of rights under the so-called self-righteous and superior social system, that is, to take over personal rights and property with deceptive promises, which makes the individual lose the foundation of life. In the view of Bie-modernism, revealing the hypocrisy of this proxy system, and implementing life equity/life stocks to every individual is the symbol of human social progress and the guarantee of human happiness and an aesthetic source.

Literature, art, and aesthetic education should consciously safeguard the individual's life equity/life stocks, defend the existence of each human's authenticity, eliminate the false and retain the true, to display the source of human happiness and beauty, reveal the source of human suffering, awakening people's sincerity, and conscience, and becoming the pioneer of Bie-modernism.

### **Upholding “Bie” to the end**

The history of human society is dominated by ideas and theories. Since modern times, social Darwinism has caused disorderly competition among human beings and even the break-out of wars. The theory of class and class struggle has resulted in hatred and massacre among generations. The concepts of public and private ownership lead to ethnic division and social antagonism. There is also scientism, materialism, truth-based theory, and so on, which have ruled mankind. But this kind of rule does not seem to bring happiness and beauty to mankind; on the contrary, it brings only greater doubts and more suffering. Therefore, Bie-modernism is to distinguish the history of human thought, distinguish between true and false, distinguish between pros and cons, eliminate those superficially alluring but harmful ideas, so that human beings will always be awake, not confused by some fashionable theory; amid speculation and controversy, all kinds of ideas should be tempered and compete with each other. Bie-modernism advocates, self-renewal, including Bie-modernism itself in an open state. It allows and even encourages criticism and self-criticism, aiming at self-regulation, self-transcendence,<sup>14</sup> abandoning the old and making innovations, so that all kinds of ideas are in the process of mutual criticism, avoiding the dominance of one kind of thought and curbing cultural autocracy.

The rationality and value of thought are reflected in the ideological market. Only

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<sup>14</sup> Wang Jianjiang (n 10), pp. 112-113.

with an ideological market can ideas be exchanged equally, and it is impossible to be confused and enslaved by a certain kind of thought, thus putting human thought in the normal state of self-organization and self-renewal. The reason why fascism was rampant in the Second World War and swept the world was that it eliminated the ideological market, confused people with a doctrine, and ruled the world. The result is a common human disaster and indelible scars. Therefore, the “Bie”(difference) of Bie-modernism is to distinguish, inquire and research all kinds of ideas in the world, and to end the arbitrariness of one kind of thought and doctrine. Therefore, the “Bie” of Bie-modernism is not only a methodology but also an ontology, advocating to uphold “Bie” to the end and the root.

The Great-leap-forward Pause of Bie-modernism can best embody the idea of upholding “Bie” to the end. This theory advocates sudden stops and pauses at the high-speed advanced stage of the development of things to eliminate inertia and change course. Great-leap-forward Pause is a correction for leapfrogging development, which makes people turn back from their wrong path, rather than pursuing growth vigorously for the sake of growth. Great-leap-forward Pause conforms to Lao Tzu’s thought of “accomplishing success and fame and then retreating secretly to nature”. It holds that, unlike the leapfrog development in science, technology, economy, and military, there is no leapfrog development in ecological, cultural, and social systems. On the contrary, Great-leap-forward Pause is required to stop the ecological damage caused by economic development. In the process of cultural inheritance and innovation, it realized the incision with the inherited objects and referenced objects, to achieve real innovation. In terms of the social system, we should resolutely and decisively stop those outdated and unreasonable systems and realize the self-renewal of society.

Bie-modern thought originates from mixed reality and confusion of ideas. Therefore, it is strongly demanded to clear up ideas, distinguish between truth and falsehood, and let authenticity come to the earth again. I am glad that scholars in the United States and Europe have realized that although Bie-modern theory originated in China, it belongs to the world, and they have respectively established a Bie-modern research center. This is essential for us to launch a global academic dialogue and establish the Republic of Letters in the sense of a European academic tradition. It can overcome academic prejudices from narrow nationalism promptly and promote our insights and realms (influence) to a higher level.

Where is Bie-modern going? At present, it has rippled in the United States and the European Union. In the future, we will bring it to more countries and regions. The Bie-modern research centers in the U.S. and Slovenia have shown that the Bie-modern theory has settled in the U.S. and Europe, launching Edward Said’s “Travelling Theory.” Of course, as a trend of thought, the Bie-modern in the future is not limited to where Bie-modern institutions are located, but on its ideological line, value orientation, and more importantly the expansion of more participants. I am surprised to find that the establishment of Bie-modern research centers in the U.S. and Europe has established an international academic frontier, leading to Bie-modern international academic research.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In short, the future development of Bie-modernism will focus on returning to the origins and implementing life equity/life stocks. These two problems are not only the most serious problems facing mankind at present but also the precondition for mankind to eradicate harmful ideas and develop healthily. In a deceptive society, in a country where the right to life is not guaranteed, the existence and development of human beings will encounter tremendous resistance. However, what possibilities and areas does the “Bie” in Bie-modernism imply and engage in? It needs to be explored by all the scholars who care about and study Bie-modern theory.