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# Language, Discourse, and Praxis in Ancient China

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*To Dr. James Morriss and Dr. Joan Boyle*
*without their varied and consistent support*
*this book would be impossible*

# Acknowledgments

# Contents

# Introduction

Since language is a primary medium of communication and even a form of human life, its relationship to reality and its role in the formation of culture and thinking-mode is always a significant issue interesting scholars in different study areas. For example, Piaget illuminates the connection between language and cognitive development; Sapir explores how grammatical categories shape world views; Geertz enquiries into the influence of symbolic forms on patterns of culture; Foucault reveals how serious speeches give rise to discipline and power. This issue has also drawn much attention from philosophers in the past 2,500 years. Parmenides stresses the correspondence among Being, thought, and speech; Heraclitus interprets reason, truth, and law in light of *logos* which implies conversation; Plato thinks of names as the starting point of obtaining knowledge; Aristotle treats language as the reflection of the structure of logic and existence. The linguistic turn in twentieth-century Western philosophy goes much further by suggesting philosophical problems being first and foremost linguistic ones. It not only causes revolutionary changes in philosophy, but also inspires reinterpretations of traditional problems in other disciplines of humanities and social sciences.

To understand the vital impact of the linguistic turn on philosophy and its influence on any study area that concerns language, reality, thought, and behavior, one may look at the works of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche is probably the first thinker who systematically and thoroughly rejects the Platonic tradition by critically reviewing the role language plays in basic metaphysical categories (including universe, subject, object, reason, truth, meaning, logic, and knowledge). Among his original and insightful points on language and philosophy, the following is very thought-provoking: because of the guidance of similar grammatical functions, Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing experience similar development. Thus, "It is highly possible that philosophers within the domain of the Ural-Altaic languages (where the concept of the subject is least developed) look otherwise 'into the world,' and will be found on paths different from those of the

Indo-Germanic peoples and the Muslims."[1] This point actually raises an issue in comparative philosophy; moreover, it challenges us to think about such questions as: To what extent or in what respects do different languages lead the philosophical discourse of various countries to different orientations? Can people philosophizing in different languages reach similar or even universal understandings of the world? Is it the structure of language alone or the actual employment of language that gives meaning to reality and makes it present to mankind? What are the differences (and similarities) among the ways different philosophical traditions handle the relationship of language to realty? How do different interpretations of the language-reality relationship shape different world views and cultural patterns?

This book aims not to give a detailed answer to every one of the above questions; instead, it focuses on Chinese understanding and treatment of language and reality and sets for itself three tasks: (1) exploring how Chinese thinkers living in pre-Qin times (551–221 BCE[2]) analyze the two concepts: *ming*[3] 名 (language) and *shi* 實 (reality) as well as their relationship in various settings; (2) investigating relevant issues in ontology, epistemology, ethics, axiology, and logic as addressed and developed in an ancient Chinese discourse on language and reality; (3) discussing how this discourse shapes a central characteristic of Chinese culture, which I call "practical *zhi*" 實踐知智[4] (practical knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom) and distinguishes Chinese culture from Western culture in ancient times. Furthermore, this book is in nature not a comparative study of Chinese and Western theories of language, although it would be very significant to involve an equal analysis of Western discourse on words and objects and to reveal the differences and similarities between the two discourses. Nevertheless, in some cases it mentions Western philosophers' ideas. My goal of doing so is twofold: on the one hand, to display effectively the meaning and significance of certain Chinese ideas by setting Western ideas as a reference; on the other hand, to help the reader better comprehend Chinese ideas since he/she might be familiar with Western theories of language.

By fulfilling the above tasks and goal, I hope, the book will shed light on the above questions one way or another. Specifically, it makes five main points among

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 27–28.

[2] In 551BCE Confucius was born and Lao Zi was about 20 years old. In 221 BCE, the Qin dynasty, the first Chinese Empire, was established. Whenever referring to this period of time, I use "China in ancient time" or "pre-Qin times."

[3] Throughout this book, Chinese characters are presented in the pinyin system. Chinese people's names are also spelled in terms of this system except those names that have been known popularly among English readers. By the same token, whenever citing a Chinese passage directly, I use the original book title plus its chapter title. In addition, unless otherwise indicated, English translations of passages quoted from ancient Chinese texts are my own. The reason why I do not use existing English translations is simple: translation is interpretation, and my interpretations of the quoted Chinese passages are sometimes different from that of English translators.

[4] 實踐知智 does not sound correct grammatically; but, I delivery use 知 to replace 之 to emphasize the difference and connection between 知 as knowledge and 智 as wisdom.

others. First, the character of Chinese language does affect the way Chinese people present and understand some complicated ideas and abstract statements; this can be seen in the texts of the School of Names and in the criticism of this school. Second, the linguistic limitation does not block Chinese people from conceptual thinking or restrict them from addressing metaphysical issues popular in Platonic tradition; this is exemplified in the works of the neo-Moists and Gongsun Long. Third, regarding the relationship between language and reality, ancient Chinese thinkers share some ideas with certain Western philosophers; Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, and Heidegger, for instance, study language in terms of *dao* (道 way), illuminating the ontological nature and cognitive function of language. Fourth, Chinese theory of language is characterized by its practical orientation and even the intellectual discourse on language and reality is aimed to help resolve sociopolitical problems in the lifeworld; moreover, language in ancient China is a pragmatic issue more than a semantic one, both the use of language and the understanding of language fall into the category of praxis; this distinguishes Chinese theory of language from Western theory of language. Fifth, a key to language and philosophy is discourse for not only are meaning, truth, and knowledge shaped and reshaped by discourse, but reason as a human faculty and philosophy as an intellectual enterprise are manifested and developed in discourse; with the framework of discourse, one can better understand the Chinese mind and clarify some popular misinterpretations of Chinese culture.

This book consists of 10 chapters. The first chapter introduces the method of this work; discusses the meaning and usage of the two Chinese words *ming* and *shi*; explores the social, political, and cultural background of the discourse on *ming* and *shi*. The second chapter examines the process of the discourse and its major arguments by presenting four ancient notions of *ming*, i.e., rectification of names, abandonment of names, analysis of names, and examination of names. The third chapter enquires into how the participants of the discourse treat the relationship between *ming* and *shi* as well as theory and practice in a synthetic way. Taken together, the first three chapters provide the reader with a detailed description of the ancient Chinese discourse on language and reality.

The next three chapters make a further analysis of language by exploring its relationship with Chinese praxis. Specifically, the fourth chapter investigates the connection between the *ming-shi* issue and morality, studying the Confucian view on the role language plays in self-cultivation. The fifth chapter deals with three sociopolitical issues: government, benefit, and law, addressing how language gets involved with and impacts social and political affairs. The sixth chapter reviews the entanglement of semantics with pragmatics as well as the influence of Chinese language on Chinese thought, discussing why language is a vital theme in Chinese thinkers' communicative practice. Since schools of thought in ancient China develop their understanding of language and reality by refining their own doctrine and criticizing other schools' theories, it is quite necessary for them to review the basic dimensions of academic dialogues; consequently, their review becomes a significant component of the discourse on *ming* and *shi*.

Thus, Chaps. 7–9, respectively, examine three dimensions of discourse, i.e., *yan* 言 (speaking), *bian* 辯 (arguing), and *dao* 導 (guiding). In particular, the seventh chapter focuses on the Confucian, Daoist, and Moist perspectives on speech; it reveals the relationship of speech to action in pursuing morality, knowledge, and an ideal society. The eighth chapter centers on the roots, characteristics, and criteria of argument; it displays a Chinese theory of rhetoric that is constituted through the *ming-shi* discourse. The ninth chapter is an in-depth analysis of the root metaphor, *dao*, in Chinese culture; it stresses the creative tension between *dao* as a noun and a verb as well as interprets the term as way, pattern, speech, and guiding dialogue.

The last chapter functions as a conclusion, characterizing the *ming-shi* discourse by the term "practical *zhi*," analyzing how practical *zhi* and its theses grow out of and pervade the discourse and why the Chinese way of dealing with language and reality is itself an example of practical *zhi*.

It is important to point out that language, discourse, and praxis stand out as the most basic themes of ancient Chinese philosophy, and practical *zhi* represents the spirit of Chinese culture. In understanding Chinese philosophy and culture, scholars of different backgrounds and traditions have presented various interpretations. Some of the interpretations are insightful, some are controversial, and some problematic or misleading, while almost all of them recognize the practical as a major, if not *the* major, character of the Chinese mind. Yet, how to construe and evaluate this character remains a serious problem; moreover, how to treat Chinese philosophy in the context of world philosophy is still a topic under study. In this regard, I suggest that it is very helpful to compare Chinese philosophy to pragmatism and that pragmatism is, in one way or another, a modern echo of ancient Chinese philosophy.

As we know, "pragmatic writers have laid more stress than any previous philosophers in human action."[5] In their eyes, theory cannot be separated from practice for theory derives from human experience and in turn guides human conduct. Moreover, the meaning and truth-value of theory or knowledge lies in its effect on behavior and environment; in other words, "to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance."[6] The reason that action centers on pragmatism is because it is in fact a vital axis that links together and shapes the humankind and the environment, the agent and the change, the knower and the known, the desire and the outcome, the means and the end, and so forth. As such, action involves not only material production and artistic creation, but intellectual contemplation and critical reflection as well. The unification of practice and theory causes a reconstruction in Western philosophy in the sense that pragmatism powerfully

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[5]   William James, *The Writings of William James*, ed. John McDermott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 448.

[6]   Charles Peirce, quoted in James, 377.

undermines Cartesian philosophy, which is characterized by dualism of body and mind, object and subject, value and fact, and conduct and thought.

To be sure, pragmatism is not limited to America in the late nineteenth and the entire twentieth century (featuring Peirce, James, Dewey, Lewis, Rorty, Putnam, and Brandom); instead, its orientation and extension can be clearly found in continental philosophy. According to Richard Bernstein, we can see a "pragmatic turn" that has lasted for 150 years and is displayed in the works of such leading philosophers as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Apel, and even Derrida to some extent.[7] To my understanding, while we can gain enlightenments from the pragmatic turn in thinking about the situation after the "linguistic turn" and in answering the questions regarding the "end of philosophy," the pragmatic turn itself can be better understood by exploring how ancient Chinese philosophy deals with the relationship of practice to theory.

Although an in-depth analysis of the similarities (and differences) between the pragmatist notion of action and the Chinese notion of action exceeds the scope of this book, a study of the discourse on *ming* and *shi*, I believe, can help people deepen their comprehension of both Eastern and Western culture. For example, after reading this book, the reader should be able to realize that God has never held a central position in Chinese culture but humankind does and that when talking about humankind, Chinese thinkers are mainly concerned with the good life in an ideal society. Surely, both life and society depend on behaviors, activities, or experiences. To understand human action, Chinese thinkers investigate the causes, features, effects, rules, and values of human action in all walks of life; their investigation derives real theories. Furthermore, when rethinking or contemplating these causes, features, effects, rules, and values, Chinese thinkers frame philosophical theories. Yet, the ultimate goal for them to conceptualize or philosophize human action is not to seek for and stop at a kind of pure knowledge or ultimate truth; instead, they aim to use knowledge and truth to serve and guide human action. Thus, practice and theory are treated in Chinese culture not as separated matters, but as a unity, a continuation, an interaction, and a mutual transition. This treatment and the relationship of practice to theory display a dialectic paradigm of *yin* and *yang*. In turn, this paradigm leads the Chinese mind to see the world as a diverse, ever-changing, and interactive process in which all human conduct shall follow the same pattern, namely, Dao.

It is the emphasis on action and the position of anti-dualism that stands for the similarity between and alliance of Chinese thought and Western pragmatism. One can better understand this point by reviewing the discourse on *ming* and *shi*.

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[7] See his book *The Pragmatic Turn* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010) for detail.

# Chapter 1
# Methodological and Historical Inquiry

Before tracing the appearance and development of the discourse on *ming* and *shi* as well as addressing its significance and effect, I shall introduce the method I employ to interpret the classical texts related to the topic and the sociopolitical and intellectual background of the discourse.

## 1.1 Discourse as a Method of Philosophy

Following the linguistic turn in twentieth-century Western philosophy, discourse has become an essential concept emerging from contemporary humanities and social sciences. More and more scholars in history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, literature, communications, and so forth have used discourse as a new paradigm to reexamine the basic topics or issues of their discipline. Consequently, discourse studies have turned out to be an interdisciplinary field. It is philosophy, however, that advances the more profound and far-reaching discourse theories. Philosophers specialized in classical studies, for instance, enquire into the relationship of intellectual conversations to truth and knowledge by discussing why Plato writes dialogues. Postmodernist thinkers examine the function of discourse in the interpretation of cultural tradition and in the deconstruction of Platonic philosophy. Based on their common understanding that reason, meaning, and knowledge cannot be isolated from intellectual dialogues, I would suggest that philosophy originates in, lives by, and develops through discourse; hence, discourse is a method not only of doing philosophy but also of interpreting philosophy.

"Discourse" refers to written conversations and spoken texts in general and intellectual dialogues in particular; and intellectual dialogues consist of different modes of discourse such as stating, reasoning, and arguing. The relationship between discourse and philosophy can be construed from the fact that both "discourse" and "philosophy" in the Western history of ideas originate from *logos*;

essentially, discourse is the form of philosophy. It can also be construed pragmatically in that discourse shapes and reshapes philosophy.

It may not be wrong to say that as Greek philosophy establishes itself, at least in part, as the foundation of Western culture, the Greek word *logos* paves a way for the originality of Western philosophy. As a noun *logos* is initially derived from the root found in the verb *lego* ("I say") and literally means "speech," "story," "argument," "statement," "reason," "principle," and "doctrine", it is then changed from a general term into a specific one, referring only to philosophical discourse.[1] Heraclitus believes "first and foremost in a Logos" and thinks of it as "both human thought and the governing principle of the Universe."[2] In his view, words, thoughts, meaning, reality, and values cannot be separated from the *logos*.[3] Socrates agrees with Theaetetus that knowledge is true belief together with a *logos*, stressing that to hold the *logos* of a thing indicates the real understanding of that thing.[4] Plato tries to formulate "an abstract language of descriptive science to replace a concrete language of oral memory" by transforming "*logos*" into a philosophical term.[5] Aristotle thinks of "form" as the inner nature of a thing and claims the form is stated in a formula or *logos*.[6] He also holds that true knowledge can only come from scientific discourse.[7] Taken together, the above philosophers suggest a position that it makes inevitable to do philosophy *with logos* since the principles of nature and thought as well as truth and knowledge can be reached only through *logos*. In other words, discourse and philosophy are symbiotic, both resting on *logos*: On the one hand, discourse is rooted etymologically in *logos* and *logos* covers all modes of discourse; on the other hand, philosophy is derived historically from *logos* and *logos* gives rise to the understanding of the world.

Coming to the twentieth century, some philosophers, influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's works, direct their attention to metaphilosophy, which refers to "the investigation of the nature of philosophy."[8] This kind of investigation replaces questions about reality with questions about the relationship between language and philosophy. And a basic proposition these philosophers hold is that philosophy should be seen as argumentative action enquiring into knowledge, reason, and

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[1]  Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina, 1987), 5.

[2]  W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 419 and 428.

[3]  James Wilbur and Harold Allen, eds., *The Worlds of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Press, 1979), 63.

[4]  Plato. *Theaetetus*, 201d8–202c5.

[5]  Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 236.

[6]  John Luce, *An Introduction to Greek Philosophy* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1992), 119.

[7]  Fisher, 7.

[8]  Chales Griswold, Jr. ed. *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 144.

meaning; knowledge, reason, and meaning are actually manifested and formulated through philosophical dialogue. In this sense, discourse is indeed the form of philosophy. Jurgen Mittelstrass, for example, reviews the Socratic–Platonic dialogue and makes the following points: First, philosophy is a dialectical praxis conducted under the perspective of reason; it is through philosophical discourse that a philosophical orientation is realized. Second, questioning/answering and proving/refuting are basic elements of philosophy; through the reciprocity of these elements, a philosophical subject of knowledge is acquired. Third, reason cannot be demonstrated or taught in just any way; instead, it is performed or activated in intellectual discourse only; reason is in nature dialogical and dialectical. And fourth, the Socratic form of philosophizing treats dialectics as "coming together and conferring with one another"; in this dialectical process, mutual understanding and conceptual clarity are achieved and combined together.[9]

To be sure, discourse not only determines the appearance and orientation of philosophy but also directs the development and reform of philosophy. In Michel Foucault's view, human sciences, including philosophy, "constitute a system of control in the production of discourse"; and he sees his "archaeology of knowledge" as a series of "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."[10] What Foucault suggests here and throughout his works is that a discipline consists of various *logoi*, which diachronically institutionalize the discursive acts of the professionals involved in that discipline; and in turn, the discursive acts as the power and form of that discipline synchronically give diverse interpretations to concepts and issues of common concern to the professionals. As discursive acts move forward, the meaning of the basic concepts and issues keeps open to all possible interpretations; and consequently, the discipline keeps developing. It is significant to note, however, that the orientation of a discipline is not rigid, and a certain paradigm cannot control all discursive acts forever. This is why Foucault stresses the "discontinuity" of intellectual history and why Jacques Derrida emphasizes the word *difference* as manifested in linguistic practice. To Derrida, the user of language does not always follow grammatical rules; and even the repeated type of linguistic action is differential and deferred over different points in time; thus, the meaning of terms and statements (and tradition, culture, etc.) "unceasingly dislocates itself," to borrow his words, "in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions."[11] In this sense, Derrida's deconstruction can be understood as reinterpretation and reconstruction of Western philosophy. Actually, both archaeology and deconstruction can be thought of as intellectual discourse in two senses: First, each of them is a series of statements rethinking Platonic problems; and second, each is a dialogue with and within traditional philosophy as a text and context.

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[9] Jurgen Mittelstrass, "On Socratic Dialogue," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Chales Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 126–142.

[10] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sherridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 224 and 49.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26.

In reviewing Chinese philosophy in pre-Qin times, one can find that it consists of a series of discourses, each focusing on a pair of concepts such as *tian* 天 (heaven) and *ren* 人 (mankind), *ming* 名 (language) and *shi* 實 (reality), *yi* 義 (rightness) and *li* 利 (benefit), *xing shan* 性善 (good human nature), and *xing e* 性惡 (evil human nature). Among these discourses, the one on *ming* and *shi* is of special significance for the following reasons. First, it involves more schools of thought than any other discourses. Second, it lasts about 200 years, longer than other discourses. Third, it covers almost all areas of philosophy: onto-cosmology, epistemology, axiology, logic, and ethics. Fourth, it remains as a crucial issue throughout the 2,500-year history of Chinese philosophy. Fifth, it parallels not only ancient Greek philosophers' discussion of language but also the linguistic turn in twentieth-century Western scholarship. Therefore, it is natural for this study to stress the methodological function of discourse.

Generally speaking, every method has its own perspectives, procedures, and characteristics. Then, what makes discourse different from any other methods and what benefits can discourse bring to philosophical inquiry?

First of all, discourse as a method treats philosophy not merely as a series of conceptual statements, but more importantly, as a system of institutionalized practice. Here, institutionalization refers to two formative processes: the formation of action and the formation of knowledge. When conducting philosophical investigations, one cannot focus only on a certain issue/theory. Instead, he has to consider (1) the relationship between that issue/theory and philosophy as a system of knowledge; (2) the relationship between the philosopher and others; and (3) the relationship between that issue/theory and its social, cultural, and political implications. That means, in order to participate in philosophical dialogue, to have one's voice heard, and to be accepted as a professional, one has to learn the language and rule of the dialogue in advance. Eventually, when all participants speak the same language and follow the same rule, the collective practice becomes organized and meaningful. Following this process is the formation of knowledge. The nature of knowledge and truth is not private but social, not purely semantic but pragmatic as well.[12] Only those assertions that are commonly verified and believed to be helpful to human life can be recognized as knowledge and truth.[13] Philosophical dialogue is a collective and intellectual practice that not merely promotes knowing and advances ideas, but refutes and defends assertions. In other words, it is through philosophical dialogue that knowledge and truth become legitimated; the very meaning of philosophy as a walk of life lies in the practical character of philosophy rather than in its metaphysical significance.

Defining philosophy as a kind of practice, we may overcome two biased tendencies: One is to limit philosophy to an intellectual game playing with words only and the other is to thinks of rationality as transcendental. Surely, it is wrong to

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[12] Pragmatists are characterized by this position.

[13] Nietzsche repeatedly stresses this point. I believe pragmatists share with Nietzsche the same understanding of the nature of truth and knowledge.

expect philosophy to resolve concrete sociopolitical problems, but it is equally wrong to separate philosophy from the lifeworld. Because when doing philosophy one has to consider the three, especially the last two, relations mentioned above, her investigation is, in one way or another, inevitably influenced, if not directed, by sociopolitical affaires. This is exactly the case when ancient Chinese thinkers define the terms *ming* and *shi*. What they are concerned most is not the connection of their own proposition to that of other persons but the realistic referents of these two terms. Though the School of Names and the Moist School concentrate on semantic and logical analysis, their final purpose is to set theoretical standards and criteria for evaluating ethical and sociopolitical behaviors instead of seeking pure knowledge. Practical concern and purpose play a key role in orienting and leading these thinkers' theoretical investigation. On the other hand, when trying to characterize ancient Chinese culture, some researchers focus their attention on ancient texts only. What they look for from these texts is whether there are direct statements on reason and the counterpart of the Western word "reason." Because they do not find what they look for, they announce that Chinese philosophy lacks abstract reason[14] or appears as a kind of "unreason within reason."[15] This is not a proper way to understand and interpret Chinese culture. Because reason cannot be spoken or taught, rather, it manifests itself in discursive practice. Though we can distinguish among various types of reason such as substantive, formal, objective, subjective, instrumental, technological, analytical, and practical, we should not reduce reason to any one of its variants.[16] And to be sure, in the final analysis, reason is dialogical and aimed at choosing, as Bertrand Russell holds, "the right means to an end that you wish to achieve."[17] Undoubtedly, choosing the right means is not predetermined or randomly selected. Rather, it results from purposeful discussion, comparison, demonstration, and argumentation, in short, from intellectual performance. Certainly, the *ming-shi* discourse is nothing, but an intellectual performance aimed at finding out the truth and knowledge of *ming* and *shi* and at resolving sociopolitical problems by rectifying the theoretical–practical relationship between the two concepts and realms.

The second characteristic of discourse as a method lies in linking individual philosophical theories together by revealing their interactive relationship; by so doing, the formation of philosophical knowledge and the development of philosophy will appear not as a list of isolated conceptions, but as a flux of discursive and

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[14] Chad Hansen holds this position. See his "Should the Ancient Masters Value Reason?" in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts*, ed. Henry Rosemont, Jr. (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1991), 179–208.

[15] See Angus Graham's book *Unreason within Reason* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1992).

[16] Martin Jay correctly points out that "Too often, in fact, such a reduction occurs, with the result the reason is rejected out of hand" ("Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn?" 1982, 110).

[17] Russell Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1955), vi.

interpretive discussions. In Plato's view, the nature of philosophy is dialogical and dialectic (they are interrelated and thus interchangeable), that is, why he writes *dialogues*. In the case of forming philosophy, Platonic dialogues aim to establish principles by transforming true opinions into real knowledge. They do not merely seek understanding of true opinions, but find out how to improve inadequate and partial statements. Accordingly, the function of discourse analysis is to discover (1) how and under what theoretical and practical conditions ideas or propositions emerge; (2) how points that relate to the same issue or problem reciprocate and differentiate from each other; and (3) how related and various conceptions amount to an influential or popular theory. In the case of developing philosophy, Platonic dialogues are "always pressing to find an interpretation that will represent not simply some historically accurate thought from an earlier period but one rich enough and flexible enough to provide insight into problems current in his own time."[18] Accordingly, the function of discourse analysis is to illuminate (1) in what way earlier thinkers influence later thinkers when dealing with the same issue or problem; (2) in what way and for what reason a philosophical dialogue crosses different periods of time; and (3) in what way an earlier concept is reshaped in terms of changed intellectual and sociopolitical contexts.

Reviewing modern works on ancient Chinese philosophy or ancient Chinese thought of logic and focusing on the terms *ming* and *shi*, however, what we can see very often are the following situations: First, these two terms are treated as separated pieces attached to different thinkers or schools under various categories such as epistemology, ethics, logic, or linguistics.. Second, when defined as the core concepts of an independent study area (like Chinese logic or studies of names), the rich and diverse meaning of the two terms is simplified or blotted out. And third, even though it is necessary and justified to limit the two terms' meaning to a certain area, their dialectic and developing trajectory is replaced by a static and isolated state.

These situations should and can be changed through discourse analysis. Specifically, we shall construe the *ming-shi* issue as a philosophical problem that has its own meaning and value and bring together various schools of thought in pre-Qin times; while each involved thinker represents his own thought on this issue, the discourse refines and deepens each thinker's philosophy. In other words, the *ming-shi* issue is not a secondary or marginal problem derived from some fundamental problems; instead, it is a core paradigm that drives each involved thinker's inquiry into onto-cosmology, epistemology, axiology, ethics, and logic. In this sense, the *ming-shi* issue is a focus through which many philosophical problems are critically examined; it is also a nexus where different intellectual conceptions display their correlations. One may ask: Why is this issue so comprehensive? The answer resides not merely in the nature of *ming* and *shi* themselves and the character of Chinese mode of thinking, but also in the function of discourse itself. The *ming-shi* discourse (and any other philosophical discourses) requires reference and demonstration;

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[18] Rosemary Desjardins, "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play," in *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Chales Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 123.

this broadens the sphere of the *ming-shi* issue and promotes both philosophical theories and real theories[19] of this issue. The discourse also necessitates refuting and critique; this deepens the understanding of *ming* and *shi* as a pair of category, stimulates the performance of analytical reason, and enhances the quality of semantic analysis. Moreover, the discourse generates consensus and difference; this unites individual thinker's investigations and enlivens dialogues on the *ming-shi* issue. In short, discourse analysis stresses the interrelationship between different theories and schools and represents this interrelationship as a meaning system existing only in dialogical practice.

Last but not least, discourse as a method also displays its character in stressing the openness of each text and context. It suggests that philosophy as discursive action opens texts and contexts to diverse interpretations; because of the openness and diverse interpretations, the meaning of a text (including its concepts and statements) can be *rich* and *present*, and its truth-value will be acknowledged and developed. As Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests, the meaning of a text resides neither in the text itself nor in the reader's mind, but comes out of the interpretations of the text.[20] The interpretations themselves actually amount to dialogues about the text. Yet, the formation of a text's meaning does not stop at these interpretations because the interpretations also need to be examined, i.e., reinterpreted in various spatial–temporal settings.

Thus, we may distinguish three levels of discourse: The first level can be called textual discourse—a conversation between the text itself and its references; the second level can be called interpretive discourse—a conversation between the text and its reader; the third level can be called metadiscourse—a conversation about textual and interpretive discourses. Because "the fusing of horizons"[21] occurs at all the three levels, the meaning of a text becomes diverse and keeps changing. Nevertheless, talking about the meaning of a text within the scope of the three-level conversation is still interior and hence limited. That is why we have to take the notion of "context" into account. It is context that makes a text not only meaningful but also more importantly present. Here, the context refers both to intellectual traditions, which can be called a theoretical context, and to sociopolitical realities, which can be called a practical context. Because any interpretation takes place in a current context, i.e., in the fusing of intellectual tradition and sociopolitical reality, the meaning of a text bears present significance. While the context makes a text go across the boundary of time, the present makes it alive.

The modern history of the studies of *ming* and *shi* fully displays the third characteristic of discourse analysis. Starting from the Han dynasty and down to the very end of the Qing dynasty, for example, Chinese scholars' interpretation of *ming* and *shi*

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[19] According to Rorty, "philosophical theories" means those theories that address metaphysical issues; on the other hand, "real theories" refers to those theories that deal with practical problems (*Consequences of Pragmatism*, 1982), 166–169.

[20] See his *Truth and Method* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985).

[21] Ibid, 273.

mainly focused on its epistemological, ethical, and sociopolitical dimensions. The tradition of semantic analysis of the School of Names and the logical investigation of the Neo-Moists almost totally disappeared from Chinese intellectual history (with the Wei-Jin period as an exception). Yet, after the 1910s, a number of modern scholars published works on ancient Chinese thought of logic; among them, Liang Qichao, Hu Shih, Tan Jiefu, and Yu Yu were more influential. A common feature of their works is that they reinterpret the ancient concepts of *ming* and *shi* in light of the categories of Western logic. Their interpretations are an interpretive discourse. A consensus growing out of this interpretive discourse is that pre-Qin thinkers' theories of *ming* and *shi* amount to an independent system of logic, paralleling Western and Indian logic. It is essential to note that the introduction of Western logic, which became popular after the 1880s, inspires and enlightens modern Chinese scholars. As for the influence of context on the interpretation of a text, Herbert Fingarette's work is a very good case in point.[22] When discussing Confucius's theory of rectifying names, he compares it to John Austin's theory of performative utterances, suggesting that both go beyond the truth-value of statements and illuminate the pragmatic function of language. In so doing, he reveals a significance of Confucius' theory, which has never been touched before. This is because he puts that theory in the context of the linguistic turn in twentieth-century Western philosophy. Recently, more and more Chinese scholars claim that studies of *ming* and *shi* should be independent from that of logic because ancient Chinese thinkers' ideas on this issue are not limited to logic. These ancient ideas, they argue, can be classified into two areas of inquiry: One is studies of names and the other is studies of argument. Zhou Yunzhi, for example, suggests that the former includes a philosophy of rectifying names, criteria of names, and stopping the misuse of names, while the latter includes the principles and rules of statement, reasoning, and argumentation.[23] Although lacking the awareness of metadiscourse and ignoring the importance of *shi*, what these scholars do is to critically review textual and interpretive discourses in the past while bringing studies of names and argument to a higher and more synthetic level.

Among postmodernist thinkers, Foucault is probably most famous because of his discourse analysis. In Clifford Geertz's view, he is "a counter-structuralist structuralist."[24] This label can be construed in such a way that Foucault stresses the constructive influence of discourse (the "discourse" refers to serious speeches in a discipline or even the discipline itself) on those professionals who work in that discipline. Here, the discourse is a sociopolitically formalized ideology that functions as a system, and as a system, it sets the scope, direction, rule, method, and language for the professionals. Yet, a critical point of postmodernism is to encourage differences and to reject centralism. Logically, the hegemony of any discourse is against the spirit of postmodernism. So, while Foucault acknowledges

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[22] See his *Confucius: Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972).

[23] See his *Ming Bian Xue Lun* (On Studies of Names and Argument) (Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu Chuban She, 1996), 6–7.

[24] See his "Stir Crazy" (*The New York Review of Books*, January 26, 1978).

the influence of discourse on the people involved in discourse, he also values those people's deconstructive influence on discourse. It is these people, more specifically their serious speeches, that make differences, and it is the differences that prevent a discipline from being rigid and an ideology from being centralized. When talking about discourse as a method of philosophy, it is vital to keep in mind that the nature of philosophy is a discursive practice more than a system of concepts. As a sort of human praxis, it performs instead of demonstrating reason; it aims at *seeking* knowledge more than knowledge itself. A principle can be derived from this point: Whenever reviewing philosophical works, our focus is not merely on a particular concept or theory, no matter how influential it is, but more importantly on its relationship to other concepts or theories, questioning from what theoretical and practical context it grows out, how it interacts with other texts, and in what way it is reshaped. The relational character of philosophical texts is indeed determined by philosophy as an organized dialogue. Because it is organized, philosophy keeps its identity as an independent discipline, which holds individual investigations together and promotes consensus among them. Because it is dialogical, different conceptions and theories have equal chances to be heard, verified, and refined so that they are always open to diverse and renewed interpretations. In short, philosophy cannot live without discourse, because discourse is the basic way doing philosophy; consequently, interpreting philosophical texts in light of the concept of discourse is the primary method of understanding philosophy.

## 1.2 Context of the Discourse on *Ming* and *Shi*

To better comprehend the discourse on *ming-shi*, we need to know first the context within which this discourse occurred. Here, attention is focused primarily on two aspects of the context: the etymology of *ming* and *shi* and the historical background of the discourse, including the collapse of Zhou *li* 禮 (propriety), the conflict between *ming* and *shi*, and the relative view of *shi–fei* 是-非 (right–wrong).

According to Xu Shen's (ca. 58–147 CE) *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*,[25] the first etymological dictionary in Chinese history, *ming* means "self-naming" or "self-introduction." Its form is a combination of two characters: *xi* 夕 (night) and *kou* 口 (mouth). *Xi* signifies the nether world, and a person in the nether world cannot be seen by living people; therefore, he introduces himself using his mouth, i.e., by words.

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[25] Besides Xu Shen's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* and Duan Yucai's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Zhu* (Commentaries to the Shuo Wen Jie Zi), the references I consulted in searching the etymology of the Chinese words discussed in this book include Ding Fubao's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Gu Lin* (Collected Commentaries to the Shuo Wen Jie Zi); Gao Shufan's *Zhongwen Xing Yin Yi Zonghe da Zidian* (A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Shape, Pronunciation, and Meaning of Chinese Language); Gui Fu's *Shuo Zen Jie Zi Yi Zheng* (Commentaries to the Shuo Wen Jie Zi), Shangwu Yinshu Guan's *Ciyuan* (The Etymology); Zhang Xuan's *Zhongwen Changyong Sanqian Zi Xing Yi Shi* (The Etymology of 3,000 Chinese Characters in Common Usage).

Why does Xu Shen interpret *ming* (names) in terms of *ming* 冥 (the nether world)? And what are the grounds on which Xu Shen interpreted *ming* as "self-naming"? To many people, Xu Shen's interpretation seems quite obscure.[26] But Duan Yucai (1735–1815) helps to clarify it by linking the term "*ming*" with a custom in early history. He suggests that in ancient times, copper vessels carried inscriptions, called *ming* 銘, that attested to the reputation of a deceased person as well as to his ancestors' merits and virtues. Hence, the inscriptions functioned as a self-introduction by someone dead, i.e., in the nether world.[27]

While Xu Shen thinks of *xi* as the nether world, other scholars interpret it as "evening," suggesting that people meet in the evening but cannot see each other clearly, so they use words to introduce themselves.[28] Although the two interpretations are different in regard to the meaning of *xi*, both confirm the function of *ming*, namely self-introduction. Moreover, both tally with the denotation of *ming* as an associative character appearing on animal bones and tortoise shells, that is, the moon sheds light through a window and makes the room bright.[29] In this sense, a *ming* is a name or word that enables the named thing known to people or introduces it to the world.

To further understand *ming*, we need also to see how it was actually used in pre-Qin times. Among its diverse usages, the following are most popular. First and foremost, it indicates the name of various things. For example, 多識于鳥獸草木之名 [the *Shi Jing* can help you] "learn the names of birds, beasts, plants, and trees" (*Lun Yu–Yang Huo*). 名可名, 非常名 "The name that can be talked about is not an eternal name" (*Dao De Jing*—Chap. 1). Second, it signifies one's title or reputation. For instance, 有不貢則修名 "if some minorities do not pay tribute, the king needs to review whether ranks/titles are clear enough" (*Guo Yu–Zhou Yu* 1). 大德…必得其名 "Those who possess great virtue must gain their reputation" (*Li Ji–Zhong Yong*). Third, it means naming and talking. For example, 生穆公, 名之曰蘭 Yan Ji "gave birth to Duke Mu and named him Lan" (*Zuo Zhuan–Xun Gong 3rd Year*). 蕩蕩乎, 民無能名焉 King Yao's virtue is "so great that people cannot describe it" (*Lun Yu–Tai Bo*). Fourth, it refers to written words. For instance, 屬瞽史喻書名 The king's representative "calls together the musicians and historians from different states to tell them the meaning of words in books" (*Zhou Li–Qiu Guan*). 百名以上書于策 A passage of "more than 100 words is written on pieces of wood/bamboo" (*Yi Li–Pin Li*). Fifth, it is interchangeable with *ming* 明 (to make clear, to understand).

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[26] Zhang Xuan claims that *ming* written "in the tortoise shell, the bestial born, and the ancient vessel is derived from *kou* and *xi*, and is the same as written in the seal; but its meaning is not understandable. It is quite obscure that Xu Shen interpreted *ming* in terms of *ming* (dark)" (*Zhongwen Changyong Sanqian Zi Xing Yi Shi,* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), 141.

[27] Quoted in Ding Fubao, ed. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Gu Lin* (Taibei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1959), 578.

[28] Gao Shufan, ed. *Zhongwen Xing Yin Yi Zonghe da Zidian* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989), 203.

[29] Ibid.

For example, 聖人…不見而名 "The Sage understands things without seeing them" (*Dao De Jing*—Chap. 47). 名, 明也; 名實事使分明也 "Names are to bring things to spotlight; in others words, to make actual things recognizable by naming them" (*Shi Ming–Shi Yan Yu*).

On the other hand, *shi* is interpreted by Xu Shen as *fu* (wealth) in the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, for this character consists of a radical 宀, meaning a "house", and a character 貫, meaning "money and goods." Duan Yucai follows Xu Shen, suggesting "a house that is full of goods" is *shi*. He also indicates that *shi* is later extended to mean "the seed of grass and the fruit of trees." According to Xu Shen and Duan Yucai, the original meaning of *shi* is "wealth"; no matter where the wealth comes from, either from money or from goods, wealth is what one personally holds and is a kind of real possession. This is the basis of Xu Shen and Duan Yucai's interpretation of *shi* and most likely the basis for all the usages of *shi* in ancient texts.

To be specific, *shi* has four basic meanings. First, it refers to wealth or richness. For instance, 君之倉廩實 "Your (Duke Hui's) barn is full of grains" (*Meng Zi–Liang Hui Wang* 2). 公家虛而大臣实 "The state is poor, but senior officials are rich" (*Han Fei Zi–Wang Zheng*). Second, it designates the actuality of things and people's real situation. For example, 名不得過實, 實不得延名 "Names should not exceed the actuality of things, things should not expand the scope of what names define (*Guan Zi–Xin Shu* 1). 循名責實, 君子之事也 "The ruler's duty is to review officers' actual performance in terms of their title" (*Deng Xi Zi–Wu Hou* 1). Third, it means to fill with or actualize something. For instance, 狗馬實外厩 "The outside stable fills with dogs and horses" (*Zhan Guo Ce–Qi Ce* 4). 實其言, 必長晉國 "To actualize these words must strengthen the Jin State" (*Zuo Zhuan–Xuan Gong 12th Year*). Fourth, it stands for what names signify. For example, 夫名, 實謂也 "Names are what people use to call things" (*Gongsun Long Zi–Ming Shi Lun*) . 名定而實辨 "Once names are established, things become distinct" (*Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*).

Taken together, *ming* and *shi* as two terms indicate two realms: one is the realm of words including names, characters, signifiers and the other is the realm of non-words including objects, ideas, and things. In the final analysis, the two Chinese terms share the same meaning, category, and function with the two English terms: language and reality. While the term language is commonly recognized as a set of symbols used in daily communication, the term reality is a little bit controversial. For some people such as the nominalist, reality refers to physical and concrete objects only; for some other people such as the idealist, however, it includes both physical and abstract objects. Apparently, ancient Chinese thinkers treat "classes, attributes, propositions, numbers, relations, and functions as typical abstract objects."[30] In their view, everything that can be named or talked about in words falls into the category of *shi*; in the meanwhile, *ming* does not limit itself to the

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[30]   Willard Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960), 233.

domain of proper names; rather, it can symbolize anything, no matter it is concrete, real or abstract, and virtual. To the modern mind, names are merely a part of, thus do not equal to, language. Yet, to the ancient mind, names stand for language.[31] This case derives from two situations: First, the vocabulary and grammar of ancient language are not as rich and meticulous as that of modern language; more importantly, names are original metaphors, and the evolution of language is in nature a kind of metaphorical development of names. Ancient Chinese thinkers' discussion of *ming* and *shi* demonstrates the validity of translating *ming-shi* into language-reality.

The term Zhou *li* is key to understanding early Chinese history and ancient Chinese thought (particularly Confucianism). In its broadest sense, "Zhou *li*" refers to a complex system of "proprieties" or code of correct social behaviors, that evolved over nearly 850 years of the Zhou dynasty (about 1100–256 BCE). It served as detailed rules of human behaviors in everyday life and as established norms of people's role in family, group, and society.

As a code of social conduct, Zhou *li* had three aspects. First, it consisted of some *traditions* rooted in the culture and history of very early China, that is, in the primitive rites of Chinese clan society. But during the Western Zhou dynasty (1100–771 BCE), these rites, customs, and traditions were systematically reworked and reformed. Their religious flavor was largely reduced, and the secularized corpus of traditions was extended to political and economic area. Thus, the second aspect of Zhou *li* appeared as a system of social, political, and economic *institutions* that constituted a social estate structure, which combined social and family order. And finally, Zhou *li* comprised a set of immensely detailed *regulations*, both oral and written, for the management of everyday affairs at every level, and within every institution, of Chinese society.

The content and function of Zhou *li* have been studied by both ancient and contemporary scholars. Li Dongfang, for example, suggests that Zhou *li* comprised, at the same time, the culture and history of early China, its institutional structure and dynamics, its moral and ethical code, and its system of social "proprieties." In his view, since the king administered his country in terms of *li*, *li* also had the function and significance of Chinese "constitution"; beyond that, Zhou *li* served as a guide to and judge of historical experience, from which people took their direction and enlightenment. He further points out that Zhou *li* held a central position in the literature, arts, and education of Zhou society: Zhou poetry represented *li*, Zhou music assisted *li*, and Zhou dance displayed *li*; since poetry, music, and dance were the main content of education in Zhou society, education, literature, and arts together strengthened and spread *li*.[32] In a similar vein, Zou Changlin comprehensively enquires into the origin, development, content, function, and significance

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[31] It is significant to point out that regarding the term "name(s)" ancient Greek thinkers share the same position with ancient Chinese thinkers, both treat names as nouns in particular and language in general.

[32] Li Dongfang, *Zhongguo Shanggu Shi Ba Jiang* (Taibei: Zhongguo Wenhua Daxue Chuban She, 1983), 67.

of *li*. According to him, *li* came into being earlier than writing and functioned as a carrier of culture; in early Chinese history, *li* linked together politics, laws, religion, thought, custom, literature, arts, and even economy and military; thus, it was nothing but *li* that stood for the basic character of ancient Chinese culture.[33]

Confucius (551–479 BCE) took the interpretation and protection of Zhou *li* as his lifelong mission. To him, the most important function of Zhou *li* is to build up a social estate system; if everyone plays his or her different roles and behaves in all situations in terms of *li*, an ideal society would come into being. Confucius thought of the establishment *li* as the most significant historical contribution the Zhou dynasty made; he claimed that "Zhou had the advantage of viewing the two past dynasties. How complete and elegant are its regulations! I follow Zhou."[34] Needless to say, the "complete and elegant regulations" were the ones based on *li*, and by "following Zhou," Confucius meant following Zhou *li*.

However, in Confucius's time, Zhou *li* faced serious challenges: people no longer respected Zhou *li*'s authority, and the social order based on Zhou *li* started to decline. Confucius himself gave us two examples to illustrate this condition. The first is that according to Zhou *li*, only the king is permitted to offer a sacrifice to ancestors; a lord may not. But a Lu lord broke this rule.[35] Second, Zhou *li* stipulates that the king may have eight rows of pantomimes, a lord six rows of pantomimes, and a senior official four rows. But a Lu official had eight rows of pantomimes. Confucius strongly criticized these discrepancies as violations of Zhou *li* and therefore intolerable.[36]

The two examples reflect the sociopolitical states of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BCE): The king lost his power, lords and officials overstepped their positions, and sons killed their fathers. As Zhou *li* began to break down, the society became disordered, and one clear expression of this disorder was the conflict between *ming* and *shi*.

Perhaps the simplest way to grasp the relationship between the collapse of Zhou *li* and the origins of the *ming-shi* discourse is to understand that Zhou *li* defines social roles (i.e., king, lord, father, son, etc.) in terms of the *behavior* proper to each and to their relations. The collapse of Zhou *li*, therefore, can be understood as a breakdown in the "proper" *meaning* of such names as "king," "lord," "father," "son," etc., as well as of such terms as "honor," "obey," "govern," and the like. In short, the collapse of Zhou *li* made the correspondence between *ming* (names, terms, words) and *shi* (things, behaviors, relations—that which names *mean*) problematic and therefore a matter of attention and major concern among thinkers of the time. In particular, the collapse manifested itself, toward the end of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, mainly in three types of *ming* that are discussed by Xun Zi

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[33] Zou Changlin, *Zhongguo Gu Li Yanjiu* (Taibei: Wenjin Chuban She, 1992), 10–13.

[34] *Lun Yu–Ba Yi*, James Legge, trans. *Confucian Analects, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970), 160.

[35] *Li Ji–Li Yun.*

[36] *Lun Yu–Ba Yi.*

(ca. 313–238 BCE): *san ming* 散名 (common terms), *xing ming* 刑名 (legal provisions), and *jue ming* 爵名 (ranks and titles).[37]

*San ming* refers to a term that is used to denote a class of things that share the same features. But very often, a *san ming* was used to denote something not falling into the same category. Confucius once complained about "A cornered vessel without corners—a strange cornered vessel! A strange cornered vessel!"[38] What Confucius complained of was the conflict between the name of a thing and the thing being named: The name *gu* was originally used for a kind of wine vessel with corners, hence meant literally "cornered vessel." But Confucius's contemporaries used *gu* for the wine vessel of their own time, which had no corners at all.

*Xing ming* refers to the terms of legal provisions that people must obey. *Xing ming* were thrown into disorder not only by actions that went against the legal provisions named, but also by creating (i.e., putting into words) legal provisions that violated Zhou *li*. From the Confucian point of view, Deng Xi (ca. 545–501 BCE) appeared as a good example in case. Deng Xi acted against the law by twisting the meaning of the law: When a law prohibited hanging up pamphlets, he advised that they be delivered; when delivering pamphlets was prohibited, he advised that they be smuggled among other articles. Moreover, Deng Xi also disrupted *xing ming* by creating bad laws. The ideal means of controlling society, to Confucians, was *li* (proprieties) instead of *xing* (criminal laws); yet, Deng Xi made a law for his native state that undermined the ruler's authority to make laws as well as encouraged ordinary people to fight with each other and even with nobles, thus undermining Zhou *li*.

*Jue ming* refers to terms for the ranks of nobilities and to the titles of officials. A rank or title indicates a social position defined by a set of clear regulations that people are not allowed to go against. A rank or title also implies duties which the person who has the title must undertake. *Jue ming* were disrupted when nobles and officials overstepped their boundaries and did not perform their duties. When Confucius's two students told him that the ruler of Wei State was going to attack Zhuan Yu, he criticized both the ruler and the students for not dissuading the ruler from his planned attack.[39] To Confucius, military attack could only be undertaken by the king, not by a lord or ruler of a state. If a ruler of a state made an attack, not only was the ruler wrong for going beyond the limit his title indicates, but his subjects were also wrong for not following their duty as subjects and dissuading their ruler from his wrongful act.

In Confucius's view, the collapse of Zhou *li* was to a large extent due to the conflict between *ming* and *shi*. For Zhou *li*, as a system of social rules and institutions, set up positions and duties for each member of a family and of society, and these positions and duties were embedded as well as defined in varied *ming*, which

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[37] Xun Zi also used the notion of *wen ming* (ceremonial names). This notion actually means *li* (proprieties); thus, it is not necessary to discuss it as a type of names.

[38] *Lun Yu–Yong Ye*, trans. James Legge, 1970, 92.

[39] *Lun Yu–Ji Shi.*

functioned as a kind of norms. Thus, to follow Zhou *li* was to follow *ming*, and to follow *ming* was to conduct oneself in keeping with the regulations and responsibilities given by *ming*. Once everyone acted in terms of the regulations and responsibilities that *defined* their ranks, titles, roles, i.e., their *names, ming* and *shi,* attained correspondence, and once *ming* and *shi* corresponded to each other, *li* was on the right track and society was in order. In this sense, mistaking *ming* was not simply a semantic problem, but a pragmatic one. To put it somewhat differently, it was not a linguistic problem, but a sociopolitical one. Of course, in ancient Chinese language and thought, the linguistic and the sociopolitical domains were not separated.

In Confucius's time, Zhou *li* was not the only standard for judging *shi* (right) and *fei* (wrong) and solving social conflicts. Laws (mainly criminal laws) were widely drawn up and carried out. Interestingly enough, while the use of *ming* was a sociopolitical issue disguised in the trappings of language, the use of laws was a linguistic issue disguised in the trappings of sociopolitical affairs. In other words, to solve a *ming* problem depends, ultimately, on sociopolitical means, whereas to solve a legal problem depends, ultimately, on language. This is true at least in Deng Xi's case.

Deng Xi once was a senior official of Zheng State. In his state, more and more merchants participated in political events, intellectuals fought against nobles, and ordinary people got together at local schools to criticize the government and political affairs. These activities broke down Zhou *li* as well as encouraged studies of *xing ming* (legal provisions) and arguments between the government and the people. In the face of this great social change, Deng Xi advocated ruling society by law instead of Zhou *li*. He not only made laws, but also taught people how to play with words in their lawsuits.[40]

The *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* (*Lü's Spring and Autumn*), a text from the Syncretist School, introduces Deng Xi as a man who "could argue a right to be wrong and a wrong to be right. With him right and wrong had no fixed standard, and 'yea' and 'nay' changed every day. What he wished to win was always won, and whom he desired to punish was always punished."[41] As mentioned earlier, when Zi Chan, a minister of Deng Xi's native state, prohibited the practice of "hanging up pamphlets" in public places, a practice which had become so prevalent as to cause disquiet on the part of the government, Deng Xi evaded the law by "delivering" the pamphlets. So Zi Chan prohibited the "delivering" of pamphlets, whereupon Deng Xi adopted the device of "smuggling" them among other articles. "The government ordinances were inexhaustible, but his devices to evade them were equally inexhaustible."[42]

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[40] Deng Xi's deed mentioned here comes from the *Zuo Zhuan* and the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Li Wei*.

[41] *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*, quoted in Hu Shih, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1968) 13.

[42] Ibid, 12.

On the surface, what Deng Xi did in this story was to play with words against the government. But on a deeper level, Deng Xi called attention to an aspect of the relationship between *ming* and *shi* that is problematic. There is always a gap between a thing signified by a word and the word that signifies the thing, and this gap makes both the thing and the word open to different interpretations. In Deng Xi's case, the real meaning of the government's orders was to prohibit pamphlets, but the two words (i.e., "hanging" and "delivering") used in the orders were too specific to fully express this meaning. Thus, names, here, enabled Deng Xi to change what was *essentially* illegal into what was *literally* legal using the gap between the word and the thing.

A basic function of laws is to make clear the distinction between right and wrong. Obviously, the distinction can be clear only when legal provisions are clear, and the clarity of legal provisions depends on the clarity of words employed in laws. Yet with Deng Xi's interpretations, legal provisions that seemed clear lost their clarity. Ironically, the more precisely the law specified what was "wrong", the more it failed to achieve its intent, and the more easily Deng Xi evaded it by "obeying" to the letter. Thus, laws lost their authoritative power, and the ruler's control of society was shaken.

Because of his interpretation of right and wrong as relative to the specific words used in law (and, of course, the intent of the "receiver"), Deng Xi was ultimately executed by the ruler of his native state. But the problem he raised was not solved by his death. On the contrary, it provoked scholars for generations to come to examine the nature of *ming* and its relationship to *shi*.[43]

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[43] Scholars have different views on Deng Xi and the text under his name. I treat Deng Xi as a historical figure. According to the *Zuo Zhuan*, *Xun Zi*, and *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*, Deng Xi was one of the first members of the School of Names. He paid much attention to language analysis, argument skill, and logic; in so doing, he advanced some propositions which seem to go against common sense but imply deep thinking and ingenious demonstration. We can safely believe that Deng Xi was a real person in history; what he did aggravated the conflict between *li* and law, and what he said encouraged an epistemic, if not epistemological, inquiry into *ming*. On the other hand, I suggest that though the *Deng Xi Zi* may not be a text written by Deng Xi himself, it does reflect his thought on *ming* and *shi*, which coincide with other ancient thinkers' ideas of the same issue.

# Chapter 2
# Four Notions of Names

As analyzed in the first chapter, the collapse of Zhou *li* was the basic sociopolitical situation of Eastern Zhou dynasty, and the conflict between *ming* and *shi* was a sharp symbol of the collapse of Zhou *li*; moreover, Deng Xi's relative view of right and wrong went beyond the area of legal affairs and raised a deep epistemic problem. Under these conditions, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* became a key issue that had both practical meaning and theoretical value and forced statesmen and scholars to think about and seek for answers.

It was Confucius who first advanced a theory of rectifying names and thought of rectifying names as an important means in solving sociopolitical problems. From then on, many thinkers proposed their theories of names; consequently, a discourse on *ming-shi* occurred. Starting from Confucius's rectifying names, ending at Lü Buwei's examining names, this discourse lasted about two hundred years and attracted all major schools of thought in pre-Qin times. By reviewing these schools' theories of *ming-shi*, we can find this discourse developed along with four notions of *ming*, i.e., *zheng ming* 正名 (rectification of names), *wu ming* 無名 (abandonment of names) , *bian ming* 辨名 (analysis of names), and *shen ming* 審名 (examination of names). In this chapter, I shall review this discourse in terms of the four notions.

## 2.1  Rectification of Names (*Zheng Ming*)

The notion of *zheng ming* comes from the *Lun Yu* 論語 (*The Analects of Confucius*). When answering the question: What would be the first thing to do if he is asked to administer Wei State, Confucius said that 必也正名乎 "It must be to rectify names."[1] This notion was quite popular in pre-Qin times. For example, the *Guo Yu* reads: 正名育類 "to clarify names and promote virtue."[2] The *Guan Zi* reads: 守慎正名 "to stay cautious and correct names."[3] All the three messages refer to the same

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[1]  *Lun Yu–Zi Lu.*
[2]  *Guo Yu–Jin Yu 4.*
[3]  *Guan Zi–Zheng Di.*

situation: A name (title, position, concept, etc.) has its defined meaning and proper referent; but, when being frequently misused, the name could cause cognitive confusion and social problems; under this condition, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the name and its relationship to the thing signified by the name, that is, to correct the misuse of the name.

Confucius repeatedly stressed such a point that government means rectification (e.g., *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*), and the first thing of government is to rectify names (e.g., *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*). When his student Zi Lu asked his suggestion for government, Confucius explained his point as follows:

> It will certainly concern the rectification of names…. If names are not rectified, then speech will not be in accord with truth. If speech is not in accord with truth, then things cannot be accomplished. If things cannot be accomplished, then ceremonies and music will not flourish. If ceremonies and music do not flourish, then punishment will not be just. If punishments are not just, then the people will not know how to move hand or foot.[4]

In this passage, Confucius told his student that a correct name and its correct use are the starting point of all things and are therefore the base of an ideal society; on the other hand, an incorrect name and an incorrect use of a name are the sources out of which grow linguistic, moral, and sociopolitical problems. In Confucius's thinking, the term "*ming*" refers at the same time to *san ming* (common terms), *xing ming* (legal provisions), and *jue ming* (ranks and titles). If the name is wrong, then speech cannot be in accord with truth; for first, communication and cognition cannot proceed with confused words; second, lawsuits and punishments cannot be conducted under obscured legal provisions; and third, government and duty cannot be carried out if titles and ranks are incorrectly assigned.

The significance of Confucius's position on rectification of names can be better understood when it is compared with Deng Xi's relative view of right and wrong. While Deng Xi focused mainly on the meaning of words in legal affairs, Confucius examined the function of words in all social dimensions. While Deng Xi cared about how to gain benefit by using the gap between the word and the thing, Confucius enquired into how words are related to social order and human behavior. While Deng Xi put forward metaphysical statements that go against common sense,[5] Confucius advanced a linguistic theory that address urgent realistic problems. Because of these differences, Mo Zi (ca. 480–420 BCE) joined the discussion of rectifying names on the side of Confucius's theory rather than that of Deng Xi's view.

The reason I believe that Mo Zi's theory of *ming-shi* is consonant with the orientation of Confucius's theory is that Mo Zi did not limit the *ming-shi* issue to legal affairs; instead, like Confucius, he thought of this issue as an important means to solutions of urgent sociopolitical problems. However, Mo Zi proposed his ideas on *ming-shi* by arguing with the Confucians.

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[4] *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 40. In Chan's translation, *yan* (言) is interpreted as language. I disagree and change it into speech. See Sect. 4.1 for detail.

[5] For Deng Xi's statements, see *Xun Zi–Bu Gou*.

As mentioned above, the essence of Confucius's theory of rectifying names is to correct those things that violated the meaning of names (terms, laws, and titles) as they had been established in or recognized by tradition and especially Zhou *li*. In other words, so-called rectification of names is to examine present things in terms of traditional names. Mo Zi realized the importance of names, but he disagreed with examining things in terms of names. On the contrary, he suggested reviewing names in terms of things. He held that

> Everyone agrees that the ways of the sage kings constitute a standard of righteousness. Yet many of the feudal lords of today continue to attack and annex their neighboring states. They claim they are honoring righteousness [i.e., *ming*], but they fail to examine the truth of the matter [i.e., *shi*]. They are like blind men, who talk about black and white in the same way as ordinary men, but in practice cannot distinguish between them.[6]

What we can read from this passage is not merely the two thinkers' divergence on how to treat the relationship between *ming* and *shi*, but their difference in the categories they used to talk about this relationship. Although Confucius suggested rectifying names, he did not construct a conceptual category that would distinguish names themselves from their semantic and sociopolitical *referents*. Although by rectifying names he meant to rectify things by means of names, he did not use the term "*shi*" to conceptualize things.[7] It was Mo Zi who first used the term "*shi*" philosophically and treated *ming* and *shi* as a pair of juxtaposed categories. This was certainly a significant contribution Mo Zi made to the discourse on *ming-shi*. It attracted other thinkers' attention to this issue and played a key role in pushing forward the Chinese understanding of the relationship between language and reality.

Mo Zi's chief contribution is, however, not simply embodied in the way he used *shi* as a philosophical category; it also lies in the three standards he advanced for examining words and their usage. Mo Zi held that the use of words, either in speaking or writing, must rely on certain standards of judgment; speaking and writing without standards "is like determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel. In this way, the distinction of right and wrong and benefit and harm cannot be clearly known."[8] Then, what should be the standards? Mo Zi suggested that

> [1] There must be a basis or foundation [for a word's use]. [2] There must be an examination. [3] And there must be practical application. [1] Where to find the basis? Find it in the experiences of the ancient sage-kings above. [2] How is it to be examined? It is to be examined by inquiring into the actual experience of the eyes and ears of the people below. [3] How to apply it? Put it into law and governmental measures and see if they bring about benefits to the state and of the people.[9]

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[6]   *Mo Zi*, ch. 19, trans. Burton Watson, 1967, 52.

[7]   In the *Lun Yu*, *shi* appears two times: one refers to substantial, the other means fruit. Similarly, *ming* and *shi* do not appear in the *Dao De Jing* as a pair of categories either.

[8]   *Mo Zi*, ch. 35, trans. Chan, 222.

[9]   Ibid.

It is quite logical for Mo Zi to advance these standards, since he suggested examining names in terms of things. Actually, his three standards could be construed not only as three methods of examining *ming*, but as three dimensions of *shi*, that is, historical experience, social reality, and administrative effect. Thus, the conflict between *ming* and *shi* is to Mo Zi the non-correspondence of words to things: speaking and writing that cannot be supported by historical experience, that cannot tally with social reality, and that cannot bring about positive administrative effect. This kind of speaking and writing should be corrected.

On a superficial level, Mo Zi's theory appears opposite to and critical of Confucius's theory: Whereas Confucius sought to change incorrect *shi* on the authority of *ming* settled by Zhou *li*, Mo Zi suggested changing incorrect *ming* on the authority of *shi* for its own sake. But on a deeper level, the two theories are complementary: Whereas Confucius's conception of *ming* emphasizes the importance of language in solving sociopolitical problems, Mo Zi's conception of *shi* stresses the critical role of sociopolitical reality in understanding and using language. Without Confucius's conception of *ming*, Mo Zi's conception of *shi* would lose its theoretical basis; without Mo Zi's conception of *shi*, Confucius's conception of *ming* would lack its practical references. Thus, both Confucius and Mo Zi played a formulating role in the discourse on *ming-shi*.

## 2.2  Abandonment of Names (*Wu Ming*)

The notion of *wu ming* comes from the *Dao De Jing*, which reads

> The [D]ao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal [D]ao;
> The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
> The Nameless is the origin of heaven and earth;
> The Named is the mother of all things.[10]

The term "*wu* 無" initially means "nothing"; thus, *wu ming* can be translated as "namelessness." To Lao Zi (ca. 570–490 BCE.),[11] namelessness is the situation of early history, and names are created by humans to grasp things. But, names are one of major causes of sociopolitical problems as well; in order to solve these problems, names should be restricted or even given up. Hence, *wu ming* can be also construed as "abandoning names."

A common point expressed in the *Lun Yu*, *Mo Zi*, and *Dao De Jing* is that names (words) are a means made and used by humans to serve their social purposes. In regard to this point, Lao Zi explores how and why names come into being. According to him,

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[10]  *Dao De Jing*, ch 1, trans. Chan, 139.

[11]  There are different ideas regarding Lao Zi and the *Dao De Jing*. In this work, I follow a popular one, that is, Lao Zi is a real figure in history and older than Confucius, and the *Dao De Jng* as a philosophical text is not written by Lao Zi, but presents his thought.

> The thing that is called [D]ao is eluding and vague.
>    Vague and eluding, there is in it the form.
>    Eluding and vague, in it are things.
> Deep and obscure, in it is the essence.
> The essence is the very real, in it are evidences.
> From the time of old until now, its name (manifestations) ever remains.
> By which we may see the beginning of all things.[12]

This passage implies three points: First, names are derived from forms and things (this indicates the relationship of language to reality); second, names embody the characteristics of forms and things being named (this is meaningful particularly in the case of Chinese language as a pictographic language); third, people can acquire knowledge of forms and things through their names (this displays the function of language in helping people to deal with the world).

Lao Zi was the first thinker who made prominent the linkage between language and knowledge. In so doing, however, he did not appreciate, but criticized this linkage. His criticism begins from exposing the limitation of language. By claiming "The Nameless is the origin of heaven and earth" and "The Named is the mother of all things," Lao Zi indicated such a paradox: While reality cannot be known apart from language, the world is prior to language; therefore, language can allow us to understand varied things, but it cannot grasp the constant Dao that hides behind, yet determines myriad things. "The [D]ao that can be told is not the eternal [D]ao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name." Thus, language is inescapably limited, and its limitation is manifested even in describing and naming the Dao itself. Lao Zi said that

> Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change.
> It operates everywhere and is free from danger.
> It may be considered the mother of the universe.
> I do not know its name; I call it [D]ao.
> If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great.[13]

It is important to point out that although Lao Zi was clearly aware of the metaphysical limitation of language, he intended to do nothing in overcoming this limitation. On the contrary, he preferred a life without language, holding that "[D]ao is eternal and has no name" and "As soon as there were regulations and institutions, there were names (differentiation of things)."[14] In other words, while language enables people to attain knowledge, what knowledge brings to people, however, is no benefit, but harmful. To Lao Zi, it is because of language and knowledge that people become dishonest and greedy; this is the major source of sociopolitical problems. Lao Zi's prescription for the social disorder of his time, therefore, was to abolish sageliness and knowledge as well as to go back to the simplicity of namelessness.

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[12]  *Dao De Jing*, ch 21, trans. Chan, 150.

[13]  Ibid. ch. 25, trans. Chan, 152.

[14]  Ibid, ch. 32, trans. Chan, 156.

Lao Zi's suggestion of abandoning knowledge and language was echoed by another Daoist, Yang Zhu (ca. 440–360 BCE).[15] In contrast to Lao Zi who recognized the linkage between language and knowledge, Yang Zhu sought to give up language by breaking the linkage between *shi* and *ming*. He argued that things have no names and that names are not the things named; names are but an artificial ploy.[16] In this view, most modern linguistic philosophers would say, Yang Zhu is correct because language is a set of symbols, and there is no "natural" relationship between the symbols and what they signify. Moreover, just like names are not innately derived from things, the existence of things, in Yang Zhu's words, "is not given by names."[17] But, to indicate this fact was not Yang Zhu's purpose. Rather, he unfolded his argument on language to provide a theoretical foundation for his philosophy of individualism.

Among ancient thinkers, Yang Zhu was well known for stressing the supremacy of individual life and individual interests. He believed that human being is the wisest of creatures because he has knowledge and that the value of knowledge lies in benefiting individuals' existence and development. In his view, the ideal world would come into being when everyone neither "loses even one hair" nor makes any contributions to society.[18] However, individual life and interests have suffered many limitations, primarily as a result of the varied social titles and duties established by names. Since these names are not endogenic to individuals' life and are harmful to individuals' interests, they should be abandoned forever. This is the solution Yang Zhu proposed for the conflict between *ming* and *shi*.

Obviously, Lao Zi and Yang Zhu's notion of abandoning names was formed by criticizing Confucius and Mo Zi's theories of names. To Confucius, "correct" names are important, for they are necessary means to realize an ideal society; but to Yang Zhu, what names do is to hinder individuals' freedom in pursuing personal interests and development. To Mo Zi, knowledge is useful in examining and adjusting the relationship of names to things; but to Lao Zi, what language and knowledge do is to make existing sociopolitical contradictions more acute and complex. Of course, Lao Zi and Yang Zhu's suggestion of abandoning names is impracticable: They had to use names to express their idea of namelessness, and although the beginning of heaven and earth cannot be fully articulated linguistically, humans have had to indicate its existence and meaning through a name, " *dao*." Hence, their suggestion did not convince later thinkers to give up language and knowledge, but led the discussion on *ming* and *shi* to a new notion.

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[15] Regarding Yang Zhu, scholars from the past to the present have different views. In Hu Shih's opinion, Yang Zhu might live between 440–360 BCE; the text of *Lie Zi*, which describes Yang Zhu's life and thought, is on the whole reliable (*Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi,* 1986, 155–156). I agree with him.

[16] *Lei Zi–Yang Zhu*.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

## 2.3  Analysis of Names (*Bian Ming*)

The notion of *bian ming* originates in the *Yin Wen Zi*, which argues that since names are used in regulating things, names themselves have to be analyzed first.[19] This idea is reflected in the theories of two groups of scholars: the dialecticians and the Neo-Moists. The dialecticians belonged to the School of Names and were called *bian zhe* 辯者 (those who argue out) in pre-Qin times. The Neo-Moists' thought was presented in a text called *Mo Bian* 墨辯 (*The Moist Disputation*) by Lu Sheng (265–316 CE). The term "*bian*" in ancient Chinese means "to argue out" (e.g., in the *Xun Zi*, ch. 1), "to distinguish" (e.g., in the *Zuo Zhuan–Duke Xi: 4th Year*), and "to demonstrate" (e.g., in the *Mo Bian–Canons A*). *Bian* is first of all a linguistic matter: It uses language, it refers to language, and it can only be carried on in language. Thus, *bian* provided the School of Names and the Neo-Moists with a shared orientation in the *ming-shi* discourse: They focused on the semantics of names, they enquired into skills of argument, and they proposed abstract statements or paradoxes to express their thoughts. In short, they concentrated on language analysis.

Yin Wen (ca. 350–270 BCE) is classified as an important member of the School of Names in the *Han Shu* 漢書 (*The Han History*).[20] His theory of *ming-shi* not only accepted other schools' ideas but also influenced later thinkers of his school. Like Lao Zi, Yin Wen held that Dao has no name, for it has no particular shape; what names designate is *qi* 器 (objects), for objects have their shape, and names are derived from shapes.[21] Thus, he was aware of the limitation of language. But unlike Lao Zi, Yin Wen did not argue that language should be abandoned because of its limitation; on the contrary, he stressed the necessity of Confucius's rectification of names, for "There exist ten thousands things; if not being regulated by names, these things must be in disorder."[22] Unlike Confucius, however, Yin Wen drew special attention to the relationship of *ming* to *shi*. He first indicated that *xing* 形, i.e., the natural or physical condition of things, is the source of names; without *xing*, there would be no names. Then, he suggested that once names come into being, they become means of identifying and examining things; without names, there would be no standards to judge things. Finally, he claimed that the conflicts between *ming* and *shi* come from the misuse of names, and the misuse of names comes from either sociopolitical disorder or semantic misunderstanding.[23]

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[19]  *Yin Wen Zi–Da Dao* A.

[20]  Regarding Yin Wen's life and thought, scholars have different viewpoints (for details, see Li Xianzhong, *Xian Qin Ming Jia Ming Shi Sixiang Tanxi*, 1992, 107–111). I concur with Wang Dianji that on the whole the *Yin Wen Zi*, a text in which Yin Wen's thought is recorded, is reliable (*Zhongguo Luoji Sixiang Shi*, 1979).

[21]  *Yin Wen Zi–Da Dao* A.

[22]  Ibid.

[23]  Ibid.

One of the most valuable points of Yin Wen's theory is his dialectical investigation of the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. On the one hand, Yin Wen insisted on the dependence of names on things, arguing that without names, things may not lose their characteristics, but without things, there is no basis for identifying and correcting our mistakes in using names (i.e., in thinking, speaking, behaving). Thus, names are established and examined through things. In this sense, he was in line with Mo Zi. On the other hand, he fully recognized the critical role of names in how we understand and treat things. He pointed out that things are grasped and distinguished by names, and from the past to the present, all gain and lose come from whether or not names are properly used.[24] In this sense, Yin Wen corrected Mo Zi's bias of overstressing the importance of *shi*.

It is in recognizing the critical role of names that Yin Wen proposed to find out the principles of *ming-shi* through *bian ming* (analyzing names). This project pushed the *ming-shi* discourse from its earlier focus primarily on the sociopolitical implications of the *ming-shi* issue toward a new focus on the semantics of names. The fullest development of this work, however, was accomplished in the writings of another thinker of the School of Names, Gongsun Long (ca. 325–250 BCE).[25]

Undoubtedly, Gongsun Long's work on *ming-shi* is the most profound and systematic one of the School of Names. The *Gongsun Long Zi* reads:

> Heaven, earth, and their products are all things [物 *wu*]. When things possess the characteristics of things without exceeding them, there is actuality [*shi*]. When actuality actually fulfills its function as actuality, without wanting, there is order [位 *wei*]. To be out of order is to fall into disorder. To remain in order is to be correct. What is correct is used to rectify what is incorrect. [What is incorrect is not used to] doubt what is correct. To rectify is to rectify actuality, and to rectify the name [*ming*] corresponding to it.[26]

Although the English translation here does not reflect the linguistic subtleties of the original, the Chinese version indicates three important points. First, Gongsun Long defined *shi* in terms of *wei*: a spatial and social order. That means *shi* is not empty or vague, but possesses concrete and actual characteristics. Moreover, as a spatial and social order, *wei* is further concretized in *wu*: varied things. In the natural area, these are objects, and in the social area, they are affairs. By providing these definitions, Gongsun overcame the limitation of Mo Zi's conception of *shi*, which lacks clear intension and extension. Second, *wei* is pivotal in dealing with the relationship between *shi* and *ming*, for *wei* is not only the nexus where things and names link together, but is the context in which things, names, and their linkage are examined and against which they are judged. By stressing the importance of *wei*, Gongsun Long provided a theoretical basis for, and strengthened Confucius's argument on, the rectification of names. Third, Gongsun Long emphasized that

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Besides the *Gongsun Long Zi*, Gongsun Long's life and thought is also introduced in the *Kong Cong Zi*, *Zhuang Zi*, *Lu Shi Chun Qiu*, *Zhan Guo Ce*, and *Shi Ji*.

[26] *Gongsun Long Zi* ch. 6, trans. Chan, 243.

things are denoted by names, thus to regulate names is key to regulating things. It is impossible to understand a thing without naming it, but to grasp a thing through a wrong name can have harmful consequences. In effect, Gongsun Long argued, whenever people try to understand a thing, they are actually doing so by handling language, and it is the misunderstanding or misuse of language that produces harmful consequences. Gongsun Long did not think that giving up language is the correct way to solve sociopolitical problems, as Lao Zi held. Rather, he believed that clear understanding of the *ming-shi* relationship is necessary.

It is essential to point out that though Confucius was the first thinker who indicated the importance of names, and though Mo Zi was the first thinker who construed of *shi* as a juxtaposed category of *ming*, it was not until Gongsun Long that *ming* (as well as *shi*) was theoretically defined. What is *ming*? Gongsun Long said that "A name is to designate an actuality."[27] This point seems obvious to modern readers, yet in the context of the *ming-shi* discourse, it represented a major step toward more abstract logical analysis. In earlier thinkers' usage, *ming* means personal statuses, social titles, proper names, and nouns. But Gongsun Long treated *ming* as a general term, more like the English term "words" than "names." In his famous statement that "*bai ma fei ma*" 白馬非馬 (a write horse is not a horse),[28] he meant that "*ma*" as a name does not designate any particular horse; rather, it is a concept signifying the generality of all horses. By calling attention to the difference between an abstract term and a proper name, Gongsun significantly advanced the project of name analysis; and because of his analysis, the Neo-Moists further developed Chinese theory of *ming-shi*.

Under the strong influence of Mo Zi, the Neo-Moists focused on studies of logic, in which *ming*, *shi*, and their relationship are a key issue. According to the *Mo Bian* (*The Moist Disputation*), "To call a name of a thing is to reflect the substance of the thing."[29] Here, for the first time, we meet *ming* and *shi* defined not in terms of the correspondence between language and reality, but in terms of their logical relationship. This refines Gongsun Long's point that the function of *ming* is to designate *shi*. In this logical relationship, not only is *ming* used as a concept, but *shi* means both appearance and substance. In analyzing a statement in the *Mo Bian* that contains the phrase, "to reflect things through names,"[30] the Neo-Moists commented: "To reflect is to abstract *shi*."[31] If *shi* refers merely to the appearance of things, they argued, it is not necessarily an abstraction. Therefore, what *ming* reflects is not only *shi* but *shi gu* 故, that is, "the rule behind things," or "the substance of things." Moreover, since substance is both abstract and general and *ming* reflects substance, *ming* is both abstract and general, too.

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[27]  Ibid.

[28]  Ibid, ch. 2, trans. Chan, 235.

[29]  *Mo Bian–Jing Shou* A.

[30]  *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu.*

[31]  *Mo Bian–Jing* A.

Of course, only to enquire into the logical nature of names is not enough to fully understand names. The pragmatic functions of names and their meanings must also be studied, for language is alive in its use in everyday life. Thus, the Neo-Moists examined how names are actually used, and distinguished three situations of name-use. The *Mo Bian* reads: "Calling: to name, to conceptualize, to make use of."[32] And it takes the term "dog" as an example to explain the three situations. First, "*ming* 命:" to give the dog a name. In this situation, the term *stands for* or *identifies* the thing called by it. Second, "*ju* 舉:" to conceptualize the dog by using a name. In this situation, the term reflects the "nature" or "substance" of the thing named, i.e., its general category. Here, "dog" as a name is a concept: It expresses the understanding of the dog as a specific kind of animal. Third, "*jia* 加:" to behave toward the dog in a particular way. In this situation, the name of a thing functions as a means of governing people's action related to the thing; it expresses people's attitude or behavioral intention as it is being uttered.[33] The Neo-Moists classified names in several different ways to uncover further the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. First, in terms of their extension, names in the *Mo Bian* are divided into *da ming* 达名 (categorical terms), *lei ming* 類名 (general terms), and *si ming* 私名 (proper names).[34] The *Mo Bian* reads that "*wu*" (object) is a categorical term, similar to "*shi*"; "*ma*" (horse) is a general term: All things that possess the shape and character indicated by the term "*ma*" can be called "*ma*"; "*zong*" is a proper name: It can be used to call only a particular person or thing.[35] Second, in terms of the scope they cover, names are divided into *jian ming* 兼名 (collective nouns) and *ti ming* 體名 (individual nouns). The *Mo Bian* explains that "ox-horse" is a collective noun: It refers to oxen and horses. But neither "ox" nor "horse" equals to "ox-horse"; those are individual nouns.[36] Third, in terms of the nature they indicate, names are divided into abstract terms, relative terms, and concrete terms. The *Mo Bian* takes "whiteness" as an example of abstract terms, and "bigness" as an example of relative terms, for, while "whiteness" indicates a characteristic that is possessed by all white things, "bigness" indicates a relation that is changeable; on the other hand, while those names that signify non-shape of things (such as spatial–temporal distance) are abstract terms, those names that signify shapes of things (such as "mountain" and "water") are concrete terms.[37]

The Neo-Moists were not the first to classify names. When Yin Wen discussed the *ming-shi* issue, he once divided names into (1) *ming wu zhi ming* 命物之名 (natural names) , which indicate objects and their characteristics such as "black" and "white," (2) *hui yu zhi ming* 毀譽之名 (moral names), which express ethical judgments such as "good" and "evil," and (3) *kuang wei zhi ming* 況謂之名

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[32] *Mo Bian–Jing Shuo* A.

[33] *Mo Bian–Jing Shuo Shang*.

[34] *Mo Bian–Jing Shang*.

[35] *Mo Bian–Jing Shuo* A.

[36] *Mo Bian–Jing Shuo* B.

[37] *Mo Bian–Da Qu*.

(expressive names), which signify personal characters or emotions such as "love" and "hate."[38] The difference between Yin Wen and the Neo-Moists' classifications lies not only in the number of name-type they proposed: Yin Wen offered only one set of categories, the Neo-Moists, at least four (the more the ways to analyze, the deeper people's understanding of language), but also in the standards they used to taxonomize names: Yin Wen's categories reflect sociopolitical considerations, the Neo-Moists' categories reflect primarily linguistic and epistemological issues. Both Yin Wen and Gongsun Long's theories of *ming-shi* indicate a consonance between the Confucians and the School of Names, to the extent that both schools attempted to solve the conflict between *ming* and *shi* by rectifying or regulating names. But whereas Confucius rectified names in terms of *li* 禮 (properties), Yin Wen and Gongsun Long regulated names in terms of *li* 理 (logic/pattern). It was the School of Names that led the discourse on *ming-shi* in an analytic direction, which recognized the independent value and importance of the *li* (logic/pattern) of names and their use. The Neo-Moists contributed the most refined and systematical language analysis in pre-Qin times. Their theories not only provided later thinkers with a model of thinking, but afforded the impetus for the subsequent development of the notion of *shen ming*.

## 2.4  Examination of Names (*Shen Ming*)

The notion of *shen ming* originates in both the *Han Fei Zi* and the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* (*Lü's Spring and Autumn*). The *Han Fei Zi* reads: "You must examine names carefully in order to establish ranks and clarify duties in order to distinguish worth."[39] The *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* reads: "Names should be examined in terms of the things that bear the names so that the situations of these names and things can be understood."[40] It is clear that these two points recognize the importance of names in grasping things, so the position of these texts is definitely opposite to that of *wu ming* (abandoning names). As the term "*shen* 審" ("to examine") implies, the position of *shen ming* overlaps, to a certain extent, that of *bian ming* (analyzing names). However, while the work of *bian ming* set forth enquiring into the logic of names as its *direct* objective, the work of *shen ming* is to study names with respect to sociopolitical situations. This makes *shen ming* different from *bian ming*, but in line with *zheng ming* (rectifying names). Xun Zi's theory of *ming-shi* typically embodies the position of *shen ming*. And his examination of names consists of three major parts: (1) the definition of *ming*, (2) the classification of *ming*, and (3) the function of *ming*.

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[38]  *Yin Wen Zi–Da Dao* A.

[39]  *Han Fei Zi*, Ch. 8, trans. Watson, 37–38.

[40]  *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Shen Fen*.

What is *ming*? Xun Zi said that "A name is that which abstracts a class of things."[41] The key terms in the original text are *qi lei shi* 期累實. According to the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, "*qi*" means "to get together," and "*lei*" means "to organize properly." Thus, a name is derived from a combination of a thing and the mental process of abstracting or categorizing it. This is similar to the Neo-Moists' point that "When a name corresponds to a thing, this is a situation of combination."[42] Both definitions point out that a name is a reflection of a thing; but it is also an organization of the thing's characteristics, in other words, an outcome of classification of a (class of) thing(s). Thus, so-called *qi lei shi* is a mental process in which a thing is abstracted; in this sense, a name is a concept. Before Xun Zi, Gongsun Long tried to define *ming* and in fact thought of a name as a concept, but his definition itself is vague. Obviously, Xun Zi developed Gongsun Long's idea, and his definition of *ming* is more precise and informed than Gongsun Long's. This is undoubtedly one of Xun Zi's contributions to the discourse on *ming-shi*.

Moreover, Xun Zi distinguished names in terms of three standards: historical content, social custom, and logical meaning. In terms of historical content, there are *xing ming* 刑名 (legal terms), which come from the Shang dynasty; *jue ming* 爵名 (ranks and titles), which come from the Zhou dynasty; and *wen ming* 文名 (names of rites), which come from ritual practice.[43] What Xun Zi showed here is the fact that to a large extent names in ancient times meant not popular terms or proper names, but legal provisions, titles of nobility, and Zhou *li*. These kinds of names have particular historical contents; thus, to understand these names depends on an understanding of history. And only after grasping these names and their historical significance, can one comprehend Confucius's argument for the rectification of names.

In terms of social custom, there are *san ming* 散名 (common terms), *shi ming* 實名 (conventional terms), and *shan ming* 善名 (concise terms). Common terms are names of varied things in the world; conventional terms are terms established and recognized through common use; concise terms are terms that are easy to understand and use for their simplicity and clarity.[44] Actually, the two categories of *shi ming* (conventional terms) and *shan ming* (concise terms) can be construed as explanations of *san ming* (common terms). Xun Zi pointed out that *san ming* come from social custom that has been popularly recognized, namely, they are themselves not innately proper or improper, but are thought of as proper, or have been accepted by social custom and common use. This point displays that Xun Zi distinguished names as terms from names as concepts. Names as terms are just socially determined symbols that neither need a logical relationship to what they signify nor imply reflection to what they stand for.

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[41] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

[42] *Mo Bian–Jing Shuo* A.

[43] *Xun Zi*, ch. 22, trans. Watson, 139.

[44] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

In terms of logical meaning, there are *dan ming* 單名 (single terms), *jian ming* 兼名 (compound terms),  *gong ming* 共名 (general terms), and *bie ming* 別名 (particular terms). While a single term is one that consists of only one character, e. g., *ma* (horse), a compound term is one that consists of two (or more) characters, e. g., *bai ma* (white horse). If one character can indicate a thing, Xun Zi suggested, one should use the single term to refer to that thing; otherwise, one should use the compound term. Single and compound terms, Xun Zi pointed out, are not contradictory, but may both refer to the same thing. For example, a white horse may be called either a horse or a white horse, since a white horse shares the features of the general category "horse."[45] Of course, neither single term nor compound term designates simply a concrete thing; rather, both of them refer to general concepts (e. g., "horse" or "white horse"). What Xun Zi expressed in the "single/compound" distinction is his understanding of how Chinese nouns are constructed. On the other hand, while a general term is a term that stands for a system of things, e.g., "animal," a particular term is a term that stands for a part of the system, e.g., "horse." According to Xun Zi, a term that is extended until nothing can be excluded is a broad general term 大共名 (*da gong ming*) , and a term that is contracted until nothing can be included is a great particular term 大別名 (*da bieming*) .[46]

Xun Zi's categories of general term, particular term, broad general term, and great particular term show that Xun Zi was clearly aware of the relationship between genus and species, and deeply grasped changes of concepts in their intension and extension. In contrast to the Neo-Moists' category of *da ming* 達名 (categories), *lei ming* 類名 (general terms), and *si ming* 私名 (proper terms or names), Xun Zi's one is more profound and subtle.

In the meantime, Xun Zi interpreted the functions of names as (1) to indicate things, (2) to communicate ideas, and (3) to unify people.[47] In the first case, to indicate things is the *epistemic* function of names. It is through names that humans establish their relation to the world in virtue of understanding varied things. Here, by "indicating things," Xun Zi meant not only that words name things in terms of their characteristics, but also that words distinguish one thing from another and/or group similar things together. To name things in terms of their characteristics is the symbolic function of names; and to distinguish similarity and difference is the logical function of names. Together, these functions make the meaning of language complex and the use of language flexible.

In the second case, to communicate ideas is the *social* function of names. Xun Zi held that the gentleman "employs the correct *ming* 名 (concept) and chooses a suitable *ci* 辭 (sentence) in order to insure that his meaning is clear."[48] As one name can reflect one thing, a combination of several names can express a combination of several things. An idea consists of several things, and its expression relies on a

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[45]   *Xun Zi* ch. 22, trans. Watson, 143.

[46]   Ibid, trans. Watson, 144.

[47]   Ibid, trans. Watson, 140.

[48]   Ibid, slightly modified from Watson, 149.

combination of several terms.[49] While Xun Zi recognized that "*ci*" (creation of complex word structures) can communicate ideas, he warned that concepts and judgments should be used only to express ideas. If people go beyond this limit and are involved in playing with words, that is *jian*, an evil.[50]

In the third case, to unifying people is the *political* function of names. Following Confucius's idea on the rectification of names, Xun Zi suggested that names enable people not only to distinguish similarities and differences but to understand the "eminent and humble," that is, the political hierarchy.[51] Like Confucius, Xun Zi treated *ming* partially as tokens of social order. To rectify names is to correct misuses of social titles and the overstepping of boundaries of political authorities. Therefore, to rectify names is to bring people's behavior into line with the hierarchy, order, and laws that names stand for or imply.

In Xun Zi's theory of *ming-shi*, we find a sharp contrast between its analytic character and its pragmatic orientation. While illuminating the origin and nature of language and set forth a variety of rules for conceptualization, Xun Zi stressed the aim of examining names, that is, to solve sociopolitical problems by rectifying names. This is a critical feature of the notion of *shen ming* (examining names), a feature even more prominent in Han Fei's (ca. 280–233 BCE) theory of *ming-shi*.

The pragmatic character of Han Fei's theory manifests first in his understanding of the two terms: *ming* and *shi*. Following Yin Wen, Han Fei used the term "*xing* 形" to mean *shi*. But unlike those thinkers who interpreted *shi* in its general meaning, i.e., "the varied things in the world," Han Fei in most cases narrowed *shi* down to particular affairs, actions, and their results. And he defined *ming* as the content of speech, the positions of officials, and the provisions of law. In his assertion that "words and ideas are what are used in examining *xing* and *ming*," "*xing*" means "affairs," and "*ming*" means "speeches."[52] In advocating "to give officials titles in terms of defined duties, and to examine *shi* in terms of *ming*," "*ming*" means "governmental positions," and "*shi*" means "governmental achievement."[53] In "The ruler makes *ming*, ministers carry out *xing*," "*ming*" means "legal provisions," "*xing*" means "legal actions."[54] The *Han Fei Zi* reads: "The ministers come forward to present their proposals; the ruler assigns them tasks on the basis of their words, and then concentrates on demanding the accomplishment of the task. If the accomplishment fits the task, and the task fits the words, then he bestows rewards; but if they do not match, he doles out punishment."[55] In this

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[49] The Chinese term "*ci*" compresses into one word both the meanings: "a structure of words or concepts" and "a reflective choice guiding that structure." In the second sense, a "*ci*" can also be thought of as a "judgment."

[50] *Xun Zi* ch. 22, trans. Watson, 149.

[51] Ibid, trans. Watson, 141.

[52] *Han Fei Zi–Er Bing*.

[53] *Han Fei Zi–Ding Fa*.

[54] *Han Fei Zi–Yang Quan*.

[55] *Han Fei Zi*, ch. 7, trans. Watson, 32.

passage, not only does "*ming*" mean "speech" or "what people say," but "*shi*" is construed as "what people do and its outcome"; hence, the relationship between names and things becomes the one between what is said and what is done.

Then, how should people treat the relationship between *ming* and *shi*? In answering this question, Han Fei once again showed his pragmatic intention. He suggested that like a body and its shadow, a thing and its name must correspond to each other.[56] But this does not mean *ming* and *shi* are equally important, at least in the genetic sense. Han Fei held that when one does not know the name of a thing, one must check the thing itself to learn what to call it.[57] To Han Fei, *shi* is physically and thus logically prior to *ming*; therefore, one cannot understand *shi* only by means of *ming*. In this sense, Han Fei's statement that a name must match a thing 形名参同[58] does not so much indicate the complementarity of *ming* and *shi* as stress the dependence of *ming* on *shi*. In this respect, Han Fei's position follows Mo Zi's.

Han Fei argued that the objective of examining names is "to judge right and wrong in terms of things and their names."[59] Here, he seemed to treat *ming* parallel to *shi*, and to imply that when *ming* is correct, it can even be the starting point in judging right and wrong. A similar emphasis on the central role of names is reflected in his advice "to use the single Way ([D]ao) and make names the head of it. When names are correct, things stay in place; when names are twisted, things shift about."[60] But elsewhere, Han Fei argued that in order to parallel to *shi*, *ming* itself must always be checked against reality. In Han Fei's words, "When words are used, one needs to estimate them with earth, consider them with heaven, examine them with objects, and check them with humans; words are acceptable only when they match the four kinds of reference."[61] It would not be wrong here to construe "earth, heaven, objects, and humans" as dimensions of "reality." But it would be wrong to think of them simply as objective existence and hence interpret this point as merely an epistemological or semantic requirement, that is, the equivalent of saying that a term is meaningful only when it has a definite reference, or a sentence is true only when it corresponds to a fact. For what Han Fei cared about is the function of *ming* and the results that speech brings about. As he said, "In listening to words, one must enquiry into their usefulness; in watching actions, one must check their achievements."[62] This is the final criterion of examining names; its essence is clearly pragmatic.

Like the *Han Fei Zi*, the *Lü's Spring and Autumn* also proposes a pragmatic theory directly linking names with social order. The work reads, "If names are

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[56]  *Han Fei Zi–Gong Ming*.

[57]  *Han Fei Zi–Yang Quan*.

[58]  *Han Fei Zi–Zhu Dao*.

[59]  *Han Fei Zi–Jian Jie Shi Chen*.

[60]  *Han Fei Zi*, ch. 8, trans. Watson, 36.

[61]  *Han Fei Zi–Ba Jing*.

[62]  *Han Fei Zi–Liu Fan*.

correct, society will be in order; if names are wrong, society will be in disorder."[63] By "names are wrong" it means they do not match things. For example, one is called "smart" and "bright," but in fact is silly and muddled; or a person is base, but is praised as noble-minded; or a person is described as "pure," but behaves in a corrupt and morally degenerate way, or claims to be "just and honest," yet takes bribes and bends the law; or, while holding a reputation for "bravery," behaves in a cowardly way. The *Lü's Spring and Autumn* thinks of these five examples as to naming an ox a "horse," and a horse an "ox." Such misuses, it argues, not only renders language useless, but threatens the very existence of the state.[64]

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[63] *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Zheng Ming.*

[64] *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Shen Fen.*

# Chapter 3
# Synthesis of Language and Reality

With the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*, one may say, the 200-year discourse on *ming-shi* came round full cycle to its starting point in Confucius's theory of rectifying names. Though to the Confucians, names referred mainly to hierarchy established in Zhou *Li* and the duties derived from that hierarchy, and to the scholars of the Syncretist School, names referred back to moral criteria and legal standards, both schools thought of *ming* as a token of social value and a key to social order: names distinguish good from evil, denote right and wrong, and pass judgment on people. Thus, to use names incorrectly is to turn things upside down, to confound right and wrong, and to misjudge people, in short, to bring about social chaos. Conversely, to examine and rectify names is to put right what has been confused, to defend the authority of what is true and good, and to seek an ideal society.

But the metaphor of a "cycle" characterizing the development of the *ming-shi* discourse over its 200-year span obscures much that is significant about the tenor of the discourse, its increasing subtlety and sophistication, and its ultimate implications for Chinese conceptions of knowledge, reason, and wisdom. This chapter, therefore, examines the discourse and its character more closely by addressing three issues: (1) the guiding spirit or dominant thrust of the discourse; (2) the linguistic theory shaped by the discourse; and (3) the relationship between *ming* as theory and *shi* as practice.

## 3.1 *Shi* as a Practical Issue

What were the dominant purposes or ends that fueled the discourse on *ming-shi* and guided its direction and development over a period of 200 years or so? What were the ultimate concerns that engaged ancient thinkers in the ongoing analysis of *ming*, *shi*, and their relationship? In posing these questions, we are enquiring into the philosophical starting point of this discourse. That is to say, if *ming* was the starting point, then the discourse would aim primarily at setting up a semantics, in which case the meanings of *ming* and the logical relations among *ming* were the focus, and *shi* played a secondary role as the set of symbolic referents that served to

distinguish types of *ming* and their logical relations. On the other hand, if *shi* was the starting point, then the discourse would aim primarily at setting up a pragmatics, in which case *shi* was the focus and *ming* was examined and analyzed primarily for its role in shaping *shi*. I would argue here that despite the traditional classification of the participants in terms of their positions on *ming*, *shi* was the real starting point of the discourse and that *shi* referred particularly to practice in solving sociopolitical problems and realizing an ideal society.

As pointed out earlier, Confucius was the first thinker who proposed to rectify names, but he neither studied names for their own sake nor intended to set up the semantics of names. Rather, he thought of rectifying *ming* (names) as an important means of rectifying *zheng* (government), believing that once names are rectified, propriety and music will flourish, people will behave properly, and ultimately an ideal society will come into being. This position can be demonstrated as follows.

First, what Confucius meant by *ming* is essentially *jue ming* (ranks, titles) and *wen ming* (proprieties). These two kinds of *ming*, as Xun Zi pointed out, derived from the Zhou dynasty and were symbols of social order and roles. To follow *ming* is to carry out the duties specified by one's social role, as defined by the name of one's rank (or title). Once everyone behaves in accordance with his or her social role, as defined by rank or title, the society will be in order. "Let the ruler *be* a ruler, the minister *be* a minister, the father *be* a father, and the son *be* a son."[1] This is the social intention of Confucius's *ming*.

Second, since *ming* is construed by Confucius as a sociopolitical token, to rectify *ming* is to a large extent a governmental matter, and governing begins by rectifying oneself. "Ji Kang Zi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied, 'To govern 政 (*zheng*) is to rectify 正 (*zheng*). If you lead the people by being rectified yourself, who will dare not be rectified'?"[2] In Confucius's view, rectifying *ming*, rectifying *zheng* (government), and rectifying *shen* 身 (body-mind) are inextricably related; the linguistic realm, the sociopolitical realm, and the moral realm are not separate spheres, but dimensions of the same world.

Third, rectifying names is a necessity in order that people behave properly. Although Confucius was aware of the relationship of *ming* to truth in its abstract philosophical sense, the value of *ming* to him is ultimately to be found not on its epistemic and semantic level, but in its practical function. He argued that names are correct or are used correctly only when things are accomplished. Thus, "the superior man will give only names that can be described in speech and say only what can be carried out in practice."[3]

In short, Confucius discussed *ming* only in terms of its practical connotations; he was not interested in theorizing about the ontological or metaphysical reference of *ming*. This work was done by his critic, Mo Zi. From Mo Zi's perspective, Confucius's concept of *ming* seems one-sided, if not wrong. Because Confucius's *ming*

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[1] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 39.

[2] Ibid, Chan, 40.

[3] *Lun Yu–Zi Lü*, trans. Chan, 40.

codifies traditional values, it overstresses the position and ideology of the nobles while ignoring that of ordinary people as well as the interests of the whole state. Hence, Mo Zi introduced the term "*shi*" as a philosophical category, correlating and prior to *ming*; in his view, *shi* is the criterion for "rectifying" *ming*. Moreover, his three standards of language make prominent a pragmatics of *ming*. Mo Zi's criticism of Confucianism, therefore, did not revise the essence of rectifying names, but led the discourse on *ming-shi* in an even more practical direction.

Lao Zi and Yang Zhu's proposals to abolish names were put forward as a criticism of both Confucius and Mo Zi's positions on names. But their motive for abandoning names was neither that language has metaphysical limitations nor that language lacks ontological relation to reality. Rather, it was that language does not reduce but increases the extent of social chaos. Thus, the ultimate goal of the "name-abandoners," too, was to ameliorate social conflicts rather than merely explicate the relationship of language to reality.

The activity of analyzing names and their logical relations is quite abstract, and with the School of Names, a semantic theory emerged for the first time in ancient China. This does not mean, however, that the notion of analyzing names had nothing to do with practice. The School of Names and the Neo-Moists recognized the complementarity between *ming* and *shi* and insisted on the practical aim of analyzing names. For example, when Gongsun Long argued that "white horse" is not the same as "horse," he tried not only to correct the confused relationship between *ming* and *shi*, but also gave it a practical significance. For example, he argued that the state would be powerful and long-lived, if the duties of the ruler and ministers are clarified as clearly as the color difference between green and white.[4] Thus, although Gongsun Long advanced an analytic theory of *ming-shi*, he did not stop at the semantics of names. On the contrary, he thought of the analysis of *ming and shi* as a bridge toward "the enlightenment of the society."[5]

Similarly, the Neo-Moists treated theoretical argument as a means to accomplish practical ends. They claimed that it is through argument that people (1) illuminate the dividing line between right and wrong; (2) examine the rules of order and chaos; (3) grasp differences and similarities; (4) investigate the principles of names and things; (5) judge benefit and harm, and resolve ambiguities; and (6) study the reasons behind varied things and compare different theories.[6] Hence, even in the Neo-Moist logical and analytic text, moral and social issues such as right and wrong, benefit and harm, and order and chaos are the final, if not the immediate, aim of argument. This indicates once again the practical spirit of the discourse on *ming-shi*.

With the notion of examining names, the discourse on *ming-shi* came to its last stage. Because the preceding works of the dialecticians and Neo-Moists had laid the theoretical groundwork for a mature understanding of *ming-shi*, Xun Zi was able to

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[4] *Gongsun Long Zi–Tong Bian Lun.*

[5] *Gongsun Long Zi–Ji Fu.*

[6] *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu.*

propose a comprehensive theory of names. Significantly, Xun Zi's theory did not erase the practical flavor of the three notions of names discussed above; instead, it emphasized the sociopolitical implications of the *ming-shi* problem. Xun Zi held that the reason for examining names is that incorrect *ming* leads *shi* to disorder. He said that "Men are careless in abiding by established names, strange words have come into use, names and realities have become confused, and the distinction between right and wrong has become unclear. Even the officials who guard the laws or the scholars who recite the Classics have all become confused."[7] Yet, Xun Zi also argued that *ming* can serve *shi* in a positive way. We read:

> But now the sages and true kings have passed away and the world is in confusion. Evil doctrines arise, and the gentleman has no power to control the people with and no punishments to prohibit them from evil. Therefore, he must have recourse to persuasive speaking…. Hence, names, combinations of names, explanations, and discourses are the major forms to be used in conducting practical affairs and are the basis of the king's business.[8]

The chapter in which Xun Zi expressed his theory of *ming-shi* is entitled "*Zheng Ming*" (rectifying names), which comes directly from Confucius. This is not a coincidence, but a spiritual echo: in its aims, Xun Zi's notion of rectifying names reflects Confucius's notion of rectifying names. While Confucius found the authority of names in the traditions of Zhou *li*, and Xun Zi found the authority of names in logical analysis, both of them were practically oriented.

## 3.2 *Ming* as a Theoretical Issue

If *shi* was the starting point and aim of this discourse, then *ming* was its methodological core, for it was through *ming* that *shi* was denoted, understood, and handled. Different interpretations of *ming* led to different ways in treating the *ming-shi* relationship; in turn, a particular interpretation of *ming* and a distinct treatment of the *ming-shi* relationship shaped a general theory of language.

What kind of theory of language did the discourse on *ming-shi*  shape? This question relates to a basic understanding of the nature of the ancient views of *ming*. I suggest that on the whole, the Chinese theory of *ming* is realist, not nominalist. Generally speaking, a nominalist theory asserts (or assumes) that any *ming* is an arbitrary symbol, i.e., there is no inherent correspondence between a given *ming* and a given *shi*. To suppose an inherent correspondence is to suppose an abstract and metaphysical world that transcends or hides behind the concrete and physical world, but is somehow reflected or manifested in its forms including language. Yet since such a metaphysical world does not exist, in the nominalist view, the relationship of *ming* to *shi* is never logically fixed. On the other hand, a realist theory

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[7]  *Xun Zi*, Chap. 22, trans. Burton Watson, 1967, 141.

[8]  Ibid, trans. Watson, 146–147.

holds that there exists a proper or correct correspondence between a given *ming* and a given *shi*. This is because behind the realm of names and the realm of things, there is *Tian* 天 (Heaven) or Dao 道, which is the source of all phenomena and gives life and reason to names and things in terms of one principle. Thus, it is possible for *ming* to denote *shi*, for *shi* to verify *ming*, and for *ming* and *shi* to be logically related.

With this point in mind, we can now look closely at some key thinkers' views of *ming*.

In proposing the rectification of names, Confucius hoped to restore the social roles and order set by Zhou *li*. But in advancing this notion, Confucius made the assumption that each *ming* has a clear intention and a particular referent, and the characteristics of the referent are parallel to, as well as identified with, the intention of the *ming*. Having been established by *Tian* (Heaven) or Dao, the characteristics, the intention, and their correspondence are logically prior to, and thus legitimate bases for judging, an active use of the *ming* or a concrete appearance of the *shi*. Otherwise, a given *ming* could be used to denote any *shi*, and it would not be necessary (or possible) to say which *ming* is correct and which is wrong in a particular situation. In that case, rectifying names would be a ridiculous idea. The principle that one name denotes one thing and a realist theory of knowledge are both derived from this assumption. Since *ming* represents our understanding of reality, every conception and value should have a "correct" name. A "correct" name is to Confucius a name that denotes only one conception or value at a time. Although a name may have several meanings, in a specific context, only one of these meanings is proper. Confucius assumed that not only can language define reality, but the definition of reality is itself a direct reflection of truth. Here "truth" can be construed as metaphysical reason (similar to the Platonic Idea) that relates to as well as transcends to various things in natural and social worlds. When truth manifests itself in language and thus makes language knowledgeable, it at the same time grasps reality as general properties of various things. In this sense, it is truth that entails the correspondence between *ming* and *shi*.

In contrast to the notion of rectifying names, the notion of abandoning names does not assign language any positive value at all. According to Lao Zi, names can only denote concrete things, which are changeable and derivative. As the mother of varied things, Dao itself can never be named properly, for any name has a limited meaning, and thus is finite. But Dao is infinite; therefore, if it is reduced to a name, it is no longer the constant Dao. This position implies that beyond the concrete and physical world, there is an abstract and metaphysical world that gives form and meaning to the concrete and physical world. This point is actually what Guan Zi held. In his eyes, the relationship between the two worlds, and accordingly between *ming* and *shi*, cannot be arbitrary. On the contrary, because "things have inherent forms, and forms have inherent names,"[9] one can understand a thing's essence by examining its form. In searching out the form of a thing, one must trace back to the

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[9] *Guan Zi–Xin Shu Shang*.

starting point of the thing. Once one has understood its starting point, one can grasp the name of the thing.[10]

If Confucius's notion of *ming* is a realist assumption entailing an ultimate correspondence between language and behavior, and if Lao Zi's notion of *ming* is a skeptical derivative stressing the distance between concrete names and abstract realities, then Gongsun Long's notion of *ming* is an ontological deduction exploring the transcendence of universal terms and the nature of their application to particular things. As we know, Gongsun Long is famous for his proposition that "a white horse is not a horse." By this statement, Gongsun Long meant that (1) the term "white" is a name for a color, and the term "horse" is a name for a shape, since the name for a color is not the name for a shape, "white horse" is not "horse." (2) If one asks for a "horse," any color of horse, i.e., a "yellow horse" or a "black horse," is an acceptable response; but if one asks for a "white horse," a "yellow horse" or a "black horse" is not an acceptable reply. Therefore, "a white horse is not a horse." (3) While a horse is simply a horse, a "white horse" is a horse combined with whiteness. This means "whiteness" does not equal to the horse. Moreover, the whiteness in the case of a "white horse" is fixed on the object; it is different from "whiteness" itself, which is not fixed on any white object; therefore, "a white horse is not a horse." In this proposition, Gongsun Long displayed the metaphysical existence of separate and independent qualities by distinguishing "white" and "horse" as a particular color and animal from "whiteness" and "horseness" as universal entities.

Among thinkers who participated in the discourse on *ming-shi*, Xun Zi is thought of as a nominalist. For Xun Zi argued that names have neither intrinsic appropriateness nor intrinsic reality, but become appropriate and real when they are accepted by agreement and used by custom.[11] But this does not mean Xun Zi was not influenced by earlier thinkers' realist notion of *ming*, and it is not acceptable to suggest his notion of *ming* is on the whole nominalist. As we know, Xun Zi used *ming* on three levels, that is, the linguistic level, the political level, and the epistemological level. Only on the linguistic level did Xun Zi tend to nominalism; on the other two levels, he was in line with realism.

On the linguistic level, by *ming* Xun Zi meant "terms." Terms serve communication, and communication is based on mutual reorganization of an agreement on words, which entails terms used by virtue of convention. But this kind of *ming* is very limited. Terms are arbitrary only in the sense of origin; once put to use, they gain meaning through being fixed on concrete things. Xun Zi argued that only concrete things can be arbitrarily named. Things that are abstract and hidden cannot be arbitrarily signified, hence cannot be denoted by terms. Because of this limitation of terms, Xun Zi believed that people need other kinds of *ming*. On the political level, by *ming* Xun Zi meant *xing ming* (legal provisions), *jue ming* (ranks and titles), and *wen ming* (names of proprieties). These kinds of *ming* stand for social

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[10]  *Guan Zi–Bai Xin*.

[11]  *Xun Zi*, Chap. 22, trans. Watson, 144.

institutions and cultural values, which are not arbitrary but set by sages and kings. In designating these kinds of *ming*, what the sages and kings followed was not their own will, but the Dao. To them, the Dao is the determining principle for the designation of *ming* as well as the means of unifying the people. Thus, to rectify names is a necessary aspect of government. If on the linguistic level, Xun Zi's discussion of *ming* is focused on semantics, then on the political level, his discussion is based on pragmatics: What he considered is not merely how names come into being, but how they are politically treated and what social effects they bring about. On the epistemological level, by *ming* Xun Zi meant "concepts." Actually, it is on this level that Xun Zi defined *ming*. Needless to say, what a concept denotes is not an arbitrary thing or an arbitrary appearance; rather, it denotes the underlying nature or reason, the quality, or the norm of a class of things. Reason, quality, and norm determine the being of things; they are hidden behind the appearance of things, hence cannot be grasped by the senses. Though this does not mean they cannot be understood by the mind, it does bar arbitrariness and convention from knowledge. For knowledge is an outcome of the essential correspondence between inner understanding and external reality. Concepts are the embodiment of knowledge, and knowledge is not arbitrary; therefore, neither is *ming* when viewed as concepts.

## 3.3 *Ming-Shi* as a Synthetic Issue

What is the relationship between *shi* and *ming*? This question has two special meanings in light of our review of the starting point of the discourse on *ming-shi* and the nature of Chinese theory of language shaped by this discourse. First, the relationship between *shi* and *ming* is meant the connection between the motivation or purpose of this discourse and the understanding of *ming* gained in and through this discourse. Second, the relationship between *shi* and *ming* is meant the connection between practice and theory. In addressing this question, it is my view that *shi*, as a practical starting point, must lead *ming* to a realist theory; in turn, Heaven or Dao as the source of *shi* and *ming* entails a synthesis in which sociopolitical practice and reflection on language are not separated from, but complementary to, each other.

Many studies stress the practical orientation of Chinese philosophy. Fung Yu-lan, for example, points out that because what Chinese philosophy studies is the *dao* of interior sageliness and exterior kingliness, it cannot be separated from political thought; though there were different philosophical schools in ancient China, all of them advanced a political theory.[12] Mou Zongsan observes that the schools of thought in pre-Qin times faced the same problem, that is, the collapse of Zhou *li*;

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[12] Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1948), 9.

thus, the theories proposed by these schools were aimed at solving this problem.[13] Accordingly, the issue of *ming-shi* is to be construed in terms of Chinese thinkers' political theory. Then, what is the key issue in the political theory of the time? It is "the sources of all political authority," among them, as John Wu notes, Dao, Heaven, or the "Mandate of Heaven is the real cornerstone."[14] Many ancient thinkers, from Confucius to Han Fei, thought of sociopolitical affairs in terms of Heaven and its Mandate, or Dao. For them, Heaven and its Mandate or Dao is an origin, model, and standard from which human will, institutions, and conduct are derived, and against which they are examined, and adjusted. Without Heaven and its Mandate or Dao, not only would life lack meaning, but society would be in chaos.

We can illustrate this position by citing key representatives of Confucianism, Moism, Daoism, and Legalism. Confucius did not talk about strange phenomena, physical exploits, disorder, and spiritual beings;[15] but he did talk about Heaven and its Mandate. He both ascribed the fate of a culture to Heaven[16] and thought of understanding the Mandate of Heaven as a necessity for a superior man.[17] Interestingly enough, although Mo Zi was a critic of Confucianism, he stood with Confucius in thinking of Heaven as the final power in controlling human affairs. In Mo Zi's view, it is only Heaven, not common people or rulers, that determines what is right.[18] In order to perpetuate good and drive out evil, the sage kings in ancient times always followed what Heaven liked and avoided what Heaven hated.[19]

Similarly, the key to government, in Lao Zi's view, is to submit to Dao or Heaven. For Dao takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.[20] Humans who attempt to take on themselves the work of Heaven are like hewing wood for the master carpenter: Few of them can escape injuring their hands.[21] Lao Zi argued that the ruler should take no action, love tranquility, engage in no activity, and have no desire; then, people would become transformed, correct, prosperous, and simple.[22] Following Lao Zi's doctrine, Han Fei also interpreted the governmental *dao* in terms of the constant Dao. He said that "The Way [Dao] is the beginning of all things and the measure of right and wrong. Therefore the enlightened ruler holds fast to the beginning in order to understand the wellspring of all beings, and minds the measure in order to know the source of good and bad."[23]

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[13]  Mou Zongsan, *Zhongguo Zhexue Shijiu Jiang* (Taibei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1983), 60.

[14]  John Wu, "Chinese Legal and Political Philosophy," in C. Moor, ed. *The Chinese Mind* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), 213.

[15]  *Lun Yu–Shu Er.*

[16]  *Lun Yu–Zi Han.*

[17]  *Lun Yu–Yao Yue.*

[18]  *Mo Zi–Tian Zhi* I.

[19]  *Mo Zi–Tian Zhi* II.

[20]  *Lao Zi*, Chap. 37, trans. Chan, 158.

[21]  Ibid, Chap. 74, trans. Chan, 173.

[22]  Ibid, Chap. 57, trans. Chan, 167.

[23]  *Han Fei Zi*, Chap. 5, trans. Watson,16.

Of course, there are differences among the four schools' ideas of "Heaven" and its Mandate or Dao. As Graham observes, while Confucius did not care whether or not "Heaven" is a personal being, Mo Zi fully personified Heaven.[24] And as Tang Junyi indicates, while the Dao in Lao Zi is itself the aim, and to know the Dao is to become a sage, the Dao in Han Fei is a means, and to know the Dao is to attain political success.[25] Despite such differences, however, the pre-Qin thinkers shared such a belief that behind the physical and social worlds, there exists a constant principle and that this principle must determine varied things and human affairs. Thus, it is key to understanding, and accordingly, to handling things and affairs. Han Fei fully expressed this point. According to him, the Dao is that through which all things exist, and in which the varied patterns run together. Because of the Dao, things live and die, and affairs rise and decline. And because of their unique individual patterns, things and affairs cannot encroach upon each other. It is only by following the Dao and grasping the patterns that the sage can achieve results.[26]

Since Heaven or Dao is the cornerstone of pre-Qin Chinese political theory, it is also the cornerstone of Chinese theory of language reflected in and shaped by the *ming-shi* discourse. As already noted, the rise of Confucianism, Moism, Daoism, and Legalism was based on the same problem, i.e., the collapse of Zhou propriety. It was to address this problem that the four schools proposed their points on *ming-shi*; hence unavoidably, their points on *ming-shi* were made to correspond to their political doctrines. Since Heaven or Dao served as the metaphysical premise of their political doctrines, it also served as the basis of their linguistic propositions, namely giving rise to a realist rather than nominalist theory of names. Such a linguistic theory, along with the roots of the discourse in sociopolitical concerns, acted as a brake on movements toward purely semantic and logical analysis and intensified the practical thrust of the discourse on *ming-shi* and of Chinese philosophy generally. Thus, we may say that the *ming-shi* discourse developed, not as a *cycle* of movement from *shi* to *ming* and back, or from sociopolitical concerns to logical/linguistic concerns and back, but as a working out of a synthesis of sociopolitical and linguistic conceptions, both rooted in the metaphysics of Dao and both directed at pragmatic ends.

## 3.4  Practice and Praxis

It becomes clear in the light of reviewing the process of the discourse on *ming* and *shi* that its aim was practical. What I mean by "practical" is that this discourse was motivated by serious political conflicts; it treated the analysis of *ming-shi* as an important means of solving social problems. The practical orientation of this

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[24] Angus Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 48.

[25] Tang Junyi, *Zhexue Gailun* (Taibei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1989), 536.

[26] *Han Fei Zi–Jie Lao*.

discourse determined discussions of language and reality be related to many issues in morality, sociopolitics, and hermeneutics. Regarding this point, one may raise a question: Since the discourse is characterized by "practical" and since morality, sociopolitics, and hermeneutics are in nature practical as well, does this mean ancient Chinese thought is far away, or separated, from theoretical thinking and abstract contemplation as we can easily see among ancient Greek thinkers? This is certainly a serious question as some philosophers such as Georg Hegel have made this conclusion.[27]

My answer to this question is "No." I suggest that when interpreting ancient Chinese thought in general and the discourse on *ming-shi* in particular, we should not treat the two terms "practice" and "theory" dichotomously; instead, we need to understand them in light of the Aristotelian concept of praxis.

The Greek term "praxis" means "doing" or "action" and is often translated into English as "practice." In modern usage, people always contrast "practice" with "theory," thinking of the former as, in Bernstein's words, "mundane and bread-and-butter activity," and the latter as abstract ideas or "mere" thinking and reflecting.[28] However, this usage covers the distinction that ancient Greeks made between different walks of life and goes against Aristotle's notion of "praxis."

As we are told by Cicero and Jamblichus, Pythagoras claimed that people enter into their lives in three ways: Some desire only wealth, some just strive for fame, and a few merely watch or contemplate the beautiful, first, divine, pure, and eternal things. This tripartition displayed an old Greek tradition and was further characterized by Aristotle as three kinds of life from which a free Greek man could choose: the life of enjoyment, political life, and the life of contemplation.[29] In terms of Pythagoras, the life of contemplation is that of philosophers, the "lovers of wisdom," for wisdom is the knowledge about beautiful, first, divine, pure, and eternal things.[30] It is philosophers' life that signifies "theory."

Etymologically, the Greek term for "theory" is closely related to another Greek term meaning "spectator," which initially "referred to the envoy sent to consult an oracle," and the term for "theory" was "the official title of the group of state-ambassadors which a city-state delegated to the sacral festivals of another city-state."[31] Accordingly, "theory" denotes what a spectator does at games, i.e., "watching."

Extended from "a spectator's watching," Nickolas Lobkowicz notes, "'theory' appeared to the Greeks as a particularly sublime way of life which was less shallow than that of mere pleasure-seekers and less hectic than that of 'politicians'."[32]

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[27] See Georg Hegel *The Philosophy of History* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991).

[28] Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), xiv.

[29] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b.

[30] Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 5–6.

[31] Ibid, 6.

[32] Ibid, 7.

As the spectator is free of the unrest and the agitation for money and fame, so is the philosopher. This enables the philosopher to engage in contemplation, and in so doing, to achieve as far as possible immortality.

Then, what are the objects of contemplation? To Pythagoras, the first object of contemplation is "the totality of the universe and the order of the stars which move within it."[33] To Aristotle, there are three "theoretical sciences," i.e., the universal features of nature, the mathematical realm, and the first causes. Because sciences are based on contemplation, what a science deals with is certainly an object of contemplation.

The clarification of the objects of contemplation may seem quite simple from today's point of view. But the information it carries is rather important, namely it was not God but his manifestation in the visible world that consisted of the content of contemplation; and consequently, it was not God but contemplation itself as a theoretical life that became the reason for one to be born and to live. "As Aristotle put it, it was owing to their wonder that men began to philosophize; one philosophizes in order to escape from ignorance, not because on expects some use from philosophy."[34] In other words, "theory" was to ancient Greeks a way of life to possess a knowledge that goes beyond human limits.

In Greek, the term "practice" as a verb "refers to almost any kind of activity which a free man is likely to perform; in particular, all kinds of business and political activity. Only activities involving bodily labor seem to be excluded from the range of its meaning and also to some extent merely intellectual activities such as thinking and reflecting."[35]

To define this term further, Aristotle distinguished "producing (or "making") from "acting" (or "doing") and "external actions" from "independent and complete actions."

According to him, "producing" is an activity that aims at a certain end which is different from "producing" itself, whereas "acting" is an activity that aims at nothing but "acting" well itself as an activity. For example, to build a house aims at the house instead of at building itself; thus, it is "producing."[36] On the contrary, playing a flute aims at playing as both the end and the activity of the flute player;[37] thus, it is "acting." By the same token, if an activity has an effect upon others, it is an external action; if an activity has its end in itself like contemplating and reflecting, it is independent and complete action.[38]

Aristotle drew great attention to "acting" or "independent and complete action." He claimed that life is acting, not producing.[39] For life "obviously is not an activity

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[33] Ibid, 8.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid, 9.

[36] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a.

[37] Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, 1211b.

[38] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1325b.

[39] Ibid, 1254a.

which reaches its completion by stopping and leaving behind something different from itself. To live is like playing a flute, not like building a house."[40] Moreover, "in its most technical sense," as Lobkowicz points out, the expression of "action" "only covers those human actions and activities which Aristotle discusses in his ethical and political writings: moral conduct and political activity."[41]

In construing "practice" as "action" and particularly as "moral conduct and political activity," Aristotle made two crucial points: First, action is purposeful and rational; second, the end of the study of "action" is not knowledge but action itself. In terms of Aristotle, what makes humans different from animals is that humans have desire, but animals do not. Desire is the originator of action and is in nature a purposeful decision accompanied by reasoning toward a certain goal.[42] It is because of this character that Aristotle claimed only humans can be said to act and thought of studies of action as "practical philosophy." On the other hand, though ethics and politics are studies of action, they function not as knowledge of eternal and divine things but as knowledge of "doing something well." As Aristotle put it, "the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us."[43]

It is significant to note that Aristotle is probably the first thinker to use "praxis" as a technical term. Unlike his contemporaries, Aristotle did not use this term to refer to "doing" or "making" in a general sense, neither did he contrast this term to "theory," like modern people do. Instead, by "praxis," he "signifies the disciplines and activities predominant in man's ethical and political life."[44] And his notion of praxis expresses a complementarity of knowledge and action, which are two dimensions of human life. Aristotle's theory of praxis is construed by Hans-Georg Gadamer as the tradition of practical philosophy. As two leading philosophers from different schools of thought, John Dewey and Jurgen Habermas draw a lot of attention to the notion of action or praxis and make influential contribution to practical philosophy.

With the help of Aristotle's notion of praxis, I want to make four points. First, the practical orientation of Chinese thought does not exclude it from world philosophy because Chinese thought does derive from contemplation and consist of knowledge. Second, Chinese philosophy is by and large a kind of practical philosophy since it centers on humans' ethical and sociopolitical life. Third, like other intellectual discourses in pre-Qin times, the discourse on *ming-shi* sharply displays a complementarity of knowledge and action: It is action aiming to solve urgent sociopolitical problems; it is knowledge for it shapes a theory of language and its relation to reality. Fourth, unlike ancient Greek thinkers, ancient Chinese thinkers

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[40] Lobkowicz, 10.

[41] Ibid, 11.

[42] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a.

[43] Ibid, 1103b.

[44] Bernstein, xiv.

do not treat knowledge as the end or pure aim of contemplation; instead, they think of knowledge as a means toward an ideal society.

To Chinese thinkers, engaging in intellectual discourses or doing philosophy is itself a practical matter; it is in form linguistic practice, it is in content sociopolitical practice, and it is based on moral practice. These three types of practice can be seen as three dimensions of praxis and are actually discussed as specific contents of the discourse on *ming-shi* and as the concrete reflections of the relationship between language and reality. In the following three chapters, I shall, respectively, analyze how these dimensions of praxis are represented in the discourse on *ming-shi*; by so doing, we can gain a further understanding of the discourse as a whole.

# Chapter 4
# Moral Practice and Language

Moral practice refers to the understanding and action of self-cultivation. This issue is mainly discussed by the Confucians. In the discourse on *ming-shi*, Confucius, Mencius, and Xun Zi explored the connection of the moral practice with *ming* and *shi* by proposing and developing concepts such as *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *xin*.

## 4.1 Humanity (*Ren*)

Etymologically, 仁 (*ren*) denotes the intimate relationship between people. The graphic form of "*ren*" consists of a radical 亻 and a character 二, the radical refers to "human being," and the character means "two." Thus, Xu Shen interprets "*ren*" as "intimacy," and Duan Yucai further suggests that the character symbolizes the self and the other; hence, "*ren*" is a word that means "intimacy," for the self is originally alone, but once the self combines with the other, intimacy takes place.

In discussing *ren*, it is essential to point out the fact that *ren* as a concept is rarely seen in classics prior to Confucius, but it is undoubtedly a core subject in Confucius's teaching: Among the four hundred and ninety-nine passages of the *Lun Yu* (*The Analects of Confucius*), fifty-eight of them talk about *ren*, and the term "*ren*" appears one hundred and five times.[1] Since the *Analects*, *ren* has been a key concept in the history of Chinese philosophy and is even a popular word in ordinary people's everyday conversation. This fact tells us that we cannot understand Chinese moral practice without referring to the concept of *ren*, and equally, we cannot understand *ren* without grasping Confucius's teaching on that term.

On the surface, Confucius did not offer a single definition of *ren* that is consistent through the *Analects*; in fact, he often discussed *ren* in terms of different situations. This makes *ren* "discouragingly complex";[2] it even seems "surrounded with paradox and mystery."[3] For example, in some place, Confucius interpreted *ren*

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[1] Wing-tsit Chan, *A South Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 16.

[2] Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 85.

[3] Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: the secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 37.

as "loving people";[4] he also thought of it, in some places, as "disciplining one self and returning to *li*";[5] still in another place, he suggested a man of *ren* would be "respectful in private life, be serious ([*j*]*ing*) in handling affairs, and be loyal in dealing with others."[6] On the other hand, Confucius seldom praised a person with the term *ren*, yet he claimed that *ren* is not far away; "[a]s soon as I want it, there it is right by me."[7] Under these conditions, scholars have been aware that in understanding *ren*, it is misleading to try to find out a passage from *the Analects* that can be thought of as "the" most basic or precise interpretation of *ren*, since any single passage can be construed as inconsistent with or even opposite to other passages on *ren*; hence, they suggest treating these passages as constructive aspects of Confucian thought of *ren*[8] and understanding *ren* as an active process rather than merely a state of being or a specific characteristic.[9]

In light of these suggestions, we may analyze *ren* from three respects: (1) In terms of its content, *ren* is a symbol and generalization of all virtues; (2) in terms of its nature, *ren* is a moral substance; and (3) in terms of its realization, *ren* is a process of self-cultivation.

In the first place, *ren* is not merely one of many virtues, but, more importantly, is the symbol and generalization of *all* virtues; this is the primary point Confucius made in the *Analects*. According to Chan Wing-tsit, *ren* in pre-Confucian texts simply means "dearness" and is but one virtue; in the *Analects*, however, *ren* becomes a general virtue,[10] even though it was treated sometimes as a particular virtue being juxtaposed with wisdom, truthfulness, uprightness, boldness, and firmness. In Confucius's view, *ren* consists of "respectfulness," "seriousness," "loyalty," "strength," "resoluteness,"[11] "earnestness," "liberality," "truthfulness," "diligence," "generosity,"[12] "to avoid aggressiveness, pride, resentment, and greed,"[13] "to be steadfast in one's purpose, to inquire earnestly, and to reflect on what is at hand (that is, what one can put into practice)."[14] Moreover, a man of *ren* can always discipline himself and return to *li*,[15] "wishing to establish his own

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[4]  *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*.

[5]  Ibid.

[6]  *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*, trans. Chan, 1963, 41.

[7]  *Lun Yu–Shu Er*, trans. Chan, 33.

[8]  Li Zehou, *Zhonguo Gudai Sixiang Shi Lun* (Beijing: Renmin Chuban She, 1985).

[9]  David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 115.

[10]  Chan, 16.

[11]  *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*.

[12]  *Lun Yu–Yang Huo*.

[13]  *Lun Yu–Xian Wen*.

[14]  *Lun Yu–Zi Zhang*, trans. Chan, 48.

[15]  *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*.

character, also establishes the character of others, and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent."[16]

What we can see from Confucius's teaching is that *ren* as a general virtue combines many virtues. Without *ren*, a certain virtue may not only violate other virtues, but goes too far to be virtue at all. Fundamentally, *ren* identifies one's self-cultivation with one's social behavior; without *ren*, self-cultivation loses its foundation and social behavior loses its orientation. In short, *ren*, as a primary principle, gives meaning to all virtues, self-cultivation, and social behavior as well.

In the second place, *ren* is not merely a personal virtue, but, in the final analysis, is a moral cosmic reality. "In other words, not only psychologically has every human being the potentiality to embody [*r*]*en*, but also metaphysically the moral mind, or the mind of [*r*]*en*, in essence is identical with the cosmic mind."[17]

Confucius suggested that although it is rare to encounter a person who really loves *ren*,[18] everyone has the potentiality to become a person of *ren*, if he really wants to become such.[19] This is because everyone has an innate sense or knowledge of the good, which is the seed of *ren*, and by means of proper training could fully extend it to the whole world.[20] Consequently, *ren* could develop one's life into a process of creative transformation. The life of embodying *ren* is the one of creation: Inwardly, it transforms one's mental world, and outwardly, it transforms one's environment; both transformations present the spirit of the world, and the world exists in the process of creative transformation. In this way, the nature of humans and the *dao* of Heaven combine together.

In the third place, *ren* is itself a process of becoming human. "Every human being embodies [*r*]*en* to a certain extent, but no one in the process of becoming a man who more fully embodies [*r*]*en* can reach the perfect stage."[21] This entails the fully realization of *ren* as a never-ending self-cultivation.

According to Confucius, "A superior man never abandons humanity [*ren*] even for the lapse of a single meal. In moments of haste, he acts according to it. In times of difficulty or confusion, he acts according to it."[22] This passage reveals how hard and long run the effort expended in self-cultivation. This sort of effort, in Tu Wei-ming's view, exists as "a permanent problem repeatedly confronting the individual in all situations" and demonstrates why the process of becoming human is not merely a means to an end, but an end in itself.[23]

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[16] *Lun Yu–Yong Ye*, trans. Chan, 31.

[17] Tu Wei-ming, "The Creative Tension between *Jen* and *Li*," in *Philosophy East and West* 18, no 1–2 (January–April 1968): 33.

[18] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*.

[19] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*.

[20] See the *Meng Zi* for detail.

[21] Tu, 32.

[22] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*, trans. Chen, 26.

[23] Tu, 32.

Through the above analysis, we can understand *ren* as a universal principle and overall value in the Confucian moral system. It displays the ideal state of human nature and life as well as indicates the metaphysical significance of moral practice. Yet, moral practice leads toward not merely an *ideal* state and universal principle, but always involves *specific* judgment and *individual* conduct in particular situations. Our next question must be how, then, can *ren*, as a principle and ideal, function in concrete moral judgment and individual conduct? In answering this question, we come to another Confucian concept, that is, *yi*.

## 4.2  Rightness (*Yi*)

The graphic form of 義 (*yi*) consists of two parts: The upper part is the character 羊 (*yang*), which means "sheep," and the lower part is the character 我 (*wo*), which means "self." The meaning of *yi* is derived from these two characters. Duan Yucai points out that as Dong Zhongshu (179—104 BCE) suggested, in contrast to *ren* which refers to "other people," *yi* refers to "myself," while *ren* must be related to other people, *yi* must be from myself. Thus, *yi* can be generally construed as the moral consciousness and conduct of the personal self.

Like *ren*, *yi* receives no explicit definition in *the Analects* either. This does not mean, however, *yi* is insignificant in Confucian moral doctrine. On the one hand, in many cases, Confucius took *yi* as a primary character of the superior man; on the other hand, Mencius (ca. 371—289 BCE) treated *yi* as one of the four basic principles of virtue (the other three are *ren*, *li*, and *zhi*). This shows clearly enough the importance of *yi*. Generally speaking, Confucius's teaching on *yi* consists of three aspects: *yi* is (1) a character of the superior man; (2) a standard of judgment; and (3) a principle of conduct.

First, a person who can embody *ren* at the perfect stage is a sage. Since *ren* is the ideal state of self-cultivation, few people can become sages. In contrast to becoming a sage, becoming a superior man is much more possible, because a superior man is a man of *yi*, and *yi* is a nexus between the ideal and reality as well as the universality and particularity. "The superior man," Confucius said, "in everything considers righteousness [*yi*] to be essential. He performs it according to the rules of propriety. He brings it forth in humility. He completes it with sincerity."[24] Here, *yi* is practiced in light of propriety, humility, and sincerity; thus, the realization of *yi* is a result of the cooperation between propriety, humility, and sincerity. This result entails *yi*, not other virtue, as the character of the superior man.

Second, a prominent difference between the superior man and the mean man is that "The mind of the superior man is conversant with rightness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain."[25] This does not mean that Confucians never

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[24]  *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*, trans. James Legge, 1970, 122.

[25]  *Lun Yu–Li Ren*, trans. Legge, 33.

needed any gain and thought of it as shameful. What this passage really means is that the standard of judgment Confucius held is first of all rightness, not gain. This point is clearly expressed in the claim Confucius made that "Wealth and honor obtained through unrighteousness are but floating clouds to me."[26] To Confucius, all gain and actions leading to gain must be judged with *yi*: Those that tally with *yi* are valuable, and those that go against *yi* have no value. "*Yi* thus determines the total significance of one's life and activities."[27]

Third, since *yi* is a standard of judging gain and actions, it is at the same time the principle of conduct, namely what can be valued by standards of *yi* is what should be practiced by the superior man. According to Confucius, *yi*, as the principle of conduct, has two related meanings. On the one hand, it is by practicing *yi* that one could fulfill his *dao*;[28] in other words, the practice of *yi* is the way of becoming human. In this sense, *yi* embodies the metaphysical spirit of *ren* and hence makes conduct meaningful. On the other hand, it is by following *yi* that one can deal with the world flexibly;[29] in other words, the conduct of *yi* is not rigid but the most suitable action to the situation. In this sense, *yi* combines universality with particularity and hence makes moral conduct practicable. Consequently, because of *yi*, one is able to distinguish correctly between right and wrong, to adjust his relation to others appropriately, and to act in different situations creatively; in so doing, one becomes a superior man.

Mencius further developed the concept of *yi*. He not only preserved Confucius's insights into *yi*, but deepened the meaning of *yi*. In the *Analects*, the position of *ren* is higher than that of *yi* for it is a general virtue. In the *Meng Zi*, however, *yi* becomes one of the four principles of virtue, and in many cases, it is parallel to *ren*. Mencius even suggested that "The great man does not think beforehand of his words that they may be sincere, nor of his actions that they may be resolute;—he simply *speaks and does* what is right."[30] Then, one may wonder why *yi* is so important that it is always in conjunction with *ren*. According to Mencius, this is because *yi* is a part of human nature and a way of becoming human.

First of all, as a part of human nature, *yi* is innate and internal. By "innate," he meant that *yi* comes into existence when one is born. "Benevolence [*ren*], rightness [*yi*], propriety [*li*], and knowledge [*zhi*]," Mencius argued, "are not infused into us from without. We are certainly furnished with them."[31] He believed that *ren* begins from the feeling of commiseration and *yi* begins from the feeling of shame and dislike; if people follow their feelings, namely their original nature, they can do

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[26] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*, trans. Chan, 32.

[27] Chung-ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 234.

[28] *Lun Yu–Ji Shi.*

[29] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*.

[30] *Meng Zi*, Chap. 4, trans. Legge, 321–322.

[31] *Meng Zi*, Chap. 6, trans. Legge, 403–404.

good.[32] Thus, the innateness of *yi* means that all people are able to realize *yi* under proper situation, since they cannot really lose the feeling of shame and dislike. By "internal," he meant that *yi* functions as a value judgment, which reflects one's moral understanding; both value judgment and moral understanding are subjective matters related to objective situations. In arguing with Gao Zi, who claimed *yi* is external, not internal, Mencius suggested that there is a difference between acknowledging the age of an old horse and the age of an old man, and between the fact that a man is old and the fact that we honor his old age.[33] To acknowledge the age of an old horse is simply a matter of grasping the quality of an object; to acknowledge and honor the age of an old man, however, is quite different for in so doing, people show, or at least imply, their attitude to, and their evaluation of, this old man. Thus, to Mencius, "*yi* is not just an intellectual intuition of a certain quality; it is also a modification of the subjective state of a person and a projection of one's value, which governs one's action and conduct."[34]

Moreover, as a way of becoming human, *yi* is mediate and creative. By "mediate," it means *yi* functions as a bridge between the subjective self and the objective situations. Mencius held that *ren* is man's mind, and *yi* is man's way;[35] thus, to become a man of *ren* is to realize *yi*. As mentioned above, the etymological meaning of *yi* refers to the personal self, yet the self is not totally isolated from the world, and becoming human can only be realized within a social context. David Hall and Roger Ames point out that "*yi* entails some unique personal contribution serving to define a human becoming," while one's "environment in some sense contributes to and determines his emergence as a person."[36] Actually, what *yi* indicates is the appropriate action the self should take under a particular situation, and the appropriateness is rightly a philosophical interpretation of *yi* that the *Li Ji* makes. The appropriateness begins from and ends at the self, so a practice of *yi* is the moral conduct of the self. Yet at the same time, the conduct of the self goes beyond a purely subjective matter for it takes into account the factors of the world and social context as well as combines the self and the situation in a harmonious state. Because situations vary from time to time, each of one's actions does not follow a fixed norm, but varies from situation to situation; therefore, each of them initiates and enhances one's becoming human. This is what we mean by the creativeness of *yi*.

In approaching the function of *yi* and its relation to *ren* and *li*, Chung-ying Cheng proposes an insightful point. He suggests that "As *yi* is the principle which mediates between the universal and the particular as well as between the understanding of the universal and the understanding of the particular. So also *yi*

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Cheng, 241.

[35] *Meng Zi*, Chap. 6.

[36] Hall and Ames, 96.

mediates between [*r*]*en* as the substance of virtue and *li* as the form of virtue."[37] This point uncovers the character of *yi* and its position in the Confucian moral system. Following this point, we might say that without *yi*, *ren* would have no practical basis to realize and thus becomes a utopian moral goal, instead of the substance of virtue; on the other hand, without *yi*, *li* would be no significance and thus becomes dead propriety, instead of being the form of virtue. This can be understood better in the following discussion of *li*.

## 4.3   Propriety (*Li*)

The graphic form of 禮 (*li*) consists of a radical 礻, which means "show," "indicate," and a character 豊, which symbolizes two pieces of jade in a sacrificial vessel. The *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* defines *li* as "treading a path," and it is by practicing *li* that people serve gods for the purpose of inviting good fortune. This definition implies two points: First, *li* is the root of cultural tradition and second, the nature of *li* is practical. Actually, these two points can be seen as a basis of the Confucian doctrine of *li*.

Confucius once claimed that he was a believer in tradition and that what he did was to transmit, not create.[38] The meaning of this passage can be further displayed by another passage in which Confucius praised the Zhou culture and expressed his desire to follow the Zhou tradition.[39] As mentioned earlier, the completion and transformation of *li* was done in the Zhou dynasty. From then on, *li* becomes

> cultural refinement, bodying forth either the prudence of conduct, or the balance of emotion, or the rationality of knowledge, or the intelligent working of order. Especially, it is blended with the excellent spirit of fine arts such as poetry and music. In short, what is called "*li*" in Chinese is a standard of measurement for the general cultural values, according to which we can enjoy the beauties of life in the rational order of political societies.[40]

To Confucius, it was *li* that made Zhou culture highly splendid; as a contrast, all the political conflicts and social problems in his time were caused by the collapse of *li*. Hence, to carry on Zhou tradition and train people with *li* were the key to solving these conflicts and problems as well as to his lifelong responsibility.

By "carrying on tradition," however, we should not construe Confucius's teaching as just simply advocating the dead faith of a past time. For there exists a primary difference between tradition and traditionism, as Jaroslav Pelikan points out, while "tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionism is the dead faith of

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[37] Cheng, 237.

[38] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*.

[39] *Lun Yu–Ba Yi*.

[40] Fang Dongmei, *Zhongguo Ren Sheng Zhexue* (Taibei: Liming Wenhua Shiye Gongsi, 1980), 248–489.

the living.[41] "Carrying on tradition" means, in Confucius's view, reviewing the old to find out the new.[42] For the old implies the general truth and the principles of human life, and thus possesses contemporary significance, whereas the new roots in the old, thus is the creative manifestation and application of the general truth and the principles of human life. History is a river in which the old retains its existence by leading to the new. It is in this sense that Confucius thought of himself as a transmitter instead of a creator. Then, what is the new in Confucius's doctrine of *li*? At least, two things can be marked. One is to give *li*, as ritual code, a practical significance; the other is to transform *li* as an external rule into an internal desire.

On the one hand, Confucius refined the moral meaning of *li* and took it as the standard of conduct. Initially, *li* is ritual code; it covers behavioral rules in almost all walks of human life. It "ranges from formal prescriptions (henceforth, ritual rules) concerning mourning, sacrifices, marriage, and communal festivities, to the more ordinary occasions relating to conduct toward ruler, superior, parent, elder, teacher, and guest."[43] Facing such a ritual code, which is mixed up with religious, ethical, social, and political factors, Confucius emphasized its function on becoming human and its rationale as the norm of action. He repeatedly claimed that one can only become human by learning and following *li*;[44] a distinct character of the superior man is to act in terms of *li*.[45] The reason why *li* has such a function is because *li* has been based on, and testified by, historical experiences and thus embodies universal truth and value; under the regulation of *li*, social affairs can be predicted and self-cultivation can be fulfilled as well. Hence, Confucius provided *li* with a ground of reason, which comes from and guides practice; in so doing, *li* goes beyond the limit of ritual performance and changes into the *norm* of conduct, while at the same time, it keeps alive only in practice.

On the other hand, Confucius internalized *li* and took it as a way of realizing *ren*. In terms of its nature, *li* is a set of behavioral rules. As sociopolitically established rules, *li* comes from social authority, not from personal desire. Consequently, when social authority is shaken, the function of *li* becomes weak. This is rightly the case of Confucius's time. In trying to restore *li*'s function, Confucius did not only appeal to the rectification of government, but to self-discipline and self-cultivation. When he explained *ren* as disciplining oneself and returning to *li*,[46] *li* was taken into account as morality; moreover, the performance of *li* was actually treated as the embodiment of *ren*. In other words, a person of *ren* is one who sees, listens, says, and does nothing that is against *li*; more importantly, he so behaves neither for

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[41]  Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65.

[42]  *Lun Yu–Wei Zheng*.

[43]  Antonio Cua, "The Concept of *Li* in Confucian Moral Theory," in *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, ed. R. Allinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 211.

[44]  *Lun Yu–Tai Bo* and *Ji Shi*.

[45]  *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*.

[46]  *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*.

others nor depending on others, but just for himself and on himself.[47] That means *li* is no longer an external restriction, but a form of virtue: Those behaviors that are good and right are deemed behaviors of *li*; the way to practice *li* is the way to realize *ren*, and those who wish to be a person of *ren* must take *li* as their own moral desire.

In understanding *li*, Fingarette focuses mainly on the function of *li* in becoming human. He suggests that "Men become truly human as their raw impulse is shaped by *li*. And *li* is the fulfillment of human impulse, the civilized expression of it—not a formalistic dehumanization."[48] This can be construed as a general point of Confucius's concept of *li*. This point is in fact also that of Xun Zi's conception of *li*.

While Mencius greatly elaborated Confucius's *yi*, Xun Zi fully developed Confucius's *li*. First, he enquired into the origin of *li*. In contrast to Mencius who claimed *li* begins from the heart-mind, Xun Zi argued that *li* does not come from man's nature for man's nature is evil rather than good; it is the sages who establish *li* and transform the evil nature into good by means of *li*.[49] Second, Xun Zi discussed the relation of *li* to *dao*. He focused not on the *dao* of heaven or earth, but on that of humans;[50] he defined *dao* as the principle of government.[51] Since government is the duty of the king, the *dao* of government is the *dao* of the king.[52] Then, what is the *dao* of the king? It is to act in terms of *li*.[53] Thus, *li* is the embodiment and core of *dao*. Third, based on the *dao* of man, Xun Zi further examined the dimensions of *li*. He suggested that (1) *li* is the basis of law and the foundation of precedents;[54] (2) *li* is the standard of government including economy, finance, military, and official affairs;[55] (3) *li* is the criterion of thought and behavior;[56] and (4) *li* is the general rule of dealing with social and natural matters.[57]

Though Xun Zi's *li* is all-embracing, its central function is expressed in the cultivation of humans. While Xun Zi claimed humans' nature is evil, he believed the evil nature can be transformed through self-cultivation. In terms of their character and ability, the superior man and the ordinary man are the same,[58] so it is possible for the person on the street to be a sage.[59] The reason why some people become superior men is that they can cultivate themselves by learning *li*. "Ritual [*li*]

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Fingarette, 7.

[49] *Xun Zi–Xing E.*

[50] *Xun Zi–Ru Xiao.*

[51] *Xun Zi–Xiu Shen.*

[52] *Xun Zi–Jun Dao.*

[53] *Xun Zi–Ru Xiao.*

[54] *Xun Zi–Quan Xue.*

[55] *Xun Zi–Fu Guo, Wang Ba, Jun Dao.*

[56] *Xun Zi–Xiu Shen, Xing E.*

[57] *Xun Zi–Xing E.*

[58] *Xun Zi–Rong Ru.*

[59] *Xun Zi–Xing E.*

is the means by which to rectify yourself";[60] moreover, learning cannot be completed until it reaches *li*, for *li* represents the highest point of morality.[61] Xun Zi called learning and practicing *li* with completion as *wei* 偽 and suggested it is *wei* that makes the superior man different from ordinary people.[62]

Undoubtedly, Xun Zi's *wei* is a constructive concept in the Confucian moral doctrine. On the one hand, *wei* makes prominent the necessity of self-cultivation and sets self-cultivation on the ground that combines knowledge and practice. In Xun Zi's view, *wei* begins from *zhi* 知 (knowing), *zhi* consists of learning and thinking. Because of learning and thinking, the gentleman knows what to do and does it appropriately; furthermore, *wei* ends at *xing* 行 (action), for what the gentleman learns manifests not in his words, but in his deeds. In this sense, *wei* is a conscious process toward *ren*. On the other hand, *wei* makes prominent the significance of *li* as a form of virtue by putting self-cultivation on the track of *li*. To Xun Zi, *li* is the subject of learning, the principle of thinking, and the standard of behaving; *li* enables people to understand social limitations, to establish relations with each other, and to meet their needs as well as control their desires properly. In this sense, *li* is the concrete way for one to become an authentic human being. Thus, *wei* moralizes and individualizes *li* as rituals, conventions, and formal rules.

## 4.4  Truthfulness (*Xin*)

After reviewing the Confucian doctrine of self-cultivation, one may ask: "What role does language play in self-cultivation?" Or "How is moral practice related to the *ming-shi* issue?" It is quite logical to ask these questions in a context of exploring the relationship between language and reality. We cannot imagine a sufficient understanding and practice of self-cultivation that does not take language into account. These questions, on the other hand, do not seem to be dominant ones in the modern studies of Confucianism, for many researchers are very familiar with Confucius's teaching that the superior man "is diligent in his duties and careful in his speech";[63] therefore, "A man with clever words and an ingratiating appearance is seldom a man of humanity."[64] If this is the reason why few studies drew attention to the above questions, it should not be a fault caused by the limitation of Confucius's teaching, but by a misunderstanding in studies of Confucianism. As remarked earlier, Confucius himself thought of language as a serious issue and talked about it in all related places, and his concept of *xin* (truthfulness) expresses specifically his concern over language and morality.

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[60]  *Xun Zi–Xiu Shen*, trans. Burton Watson, 1967, 30.

[61]  *Xun Zi–Quan Xue*.

[62]  *Xun Zi–Xing E*.

[63]  *Lun Yu–Xue Er*, trans. Chan, 21.

[64]  Ibid.

The graphic form of 信 (*xin*) hints in fact that there is a relation between personhood and language. This word consists of a radical 亻 and a character 言. The radical symbolizes "human being," and the character means "word" or "speaking." Duan Yucai suggests that when a person speaks, there is nothing that he fails to live up to. His point expresses Confucians' belief in words.

Confucius's discussion of *xin* was tightly linked to this term's etymology. He treated *xin* as first of all a linguistic matter, which primarily refers to speaking. To him, *xin* is sincere in what one says,[65] or, put it another way, the situation that one's words are truthful is called *xin*.[66] Furthermore, he valued *xin* as a virtue, which is a feature of the superior man;[67] he held that a person without truthfulness cannot get on.[68] Here, Confucius clearly linked language and morality together. He believed self-cultivation is manifested not only in what one does, but also in what one says; how a person treats his words is a criterion for people to judge the level of that person's becoming human. To Confucius, language is not merely a social tool for communication between people; it is also a personal realm in and through which one cultivates himself to be a real human being.

When including language in moral practice, Confucius examined its function and its relation to behavior. As we know, the focus of Confucianism is to understand and cultivate human beings; in so doing, language possesses an important position. Confucius pointed out that without knowing words, it would be impossible to know man.[69] For words are the voice of the heart-mind, because of even one word a person is deemed to be either wise or foolish;[70] whereas the superior man is careful with his words,[71] those who use clever words and appear to be ingratiating are seldom associated with *ren*.[72] Thus, how to treat words (including what words to use in some situations) is a necessary dimension of self-cultivation.

Among *wen* 文 (culture), *xing* 行 (conduct), *zhong* 忠 (loyalty), and *xin* 信 (truthfulness), the four subjects of Confucius's teaching,[73] truthfulness particularly refers to language and its use. In Confucius's teaching, speaking is different from, but related to, conduct. Whereas one who is virtuous must be sure to speak truthfully, one whose speech is good may not be virtuous.[74] What makes this difference is to a large extent not embedded in the words the two sorts of people use; rather, it is embedded in whether or not their words match their actions.

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[65] *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*.

[66] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*.

[67] *Lun Yu–Yang Huo*.

[68] *Lun Yu–Wei Zheng*.

[69] *Lun Yu–Yao Ye*.

[70] *Lun Yu–Zi Zhang*.

[71] *Lun Yu–Xue Er*.

[72] Ibid.

[73] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*.

[74] *Lun Yu–Xian Wen*.

"The superior man wishes to be slow in his speech and earnest in his conduct;[75] if his words exceed his deeds, he would feel ashamed.[76] In this sense, the truth value of words manifests in their performative effect rather than in their cognitive correspondence. Thus, the concept of *xin* stands for an ideal state in which language and behavior are tightly fused.

It is in making the harmony between language and behavior that moral practice gets related to the *ming-shi* issue. As names and things form two systems, words and deeds are fraught with distance. Because of this distance, Confucius changed his way with people from hearing their words and giving them credit for their deeds to hearing their words and looking at their deeds.[77] To Confucius, this distance hinders one from being true to himself, being sincere to his friends, and being faithful to his society; thus, if what one says is not equal to what one does, words could cause personal conduct to be deviant, and if one does not mean what he says, words could cause social relations confused. Under these conditions, a necessary requirement for one to be a cultivated person is to live up to his word, namely to match the name (*ming*) with the thing (*shi*).

Undoubtedly, when Confucius put forward his theory of rectifying names, his focus was sociopolitical. This does not, however, exclude his theory's ethical implication from his sociopolitical focus. On the contrary, to Confucius, sociopolitics cannot be separated from ethics, for an ideal society is the one that is full of *ren*, and the ideal ruler of a society is a superior man. Accordingly, the moral value and implication of language use is a necessary part, or even a prerequisite, of Confucius's theory of rectifying names. This can be explained in two respects.

First, in Confucius's view, if names are not rectified, propriety and music will not flourish, and if propriety and music do not flourish, the people will not know how to behave. This view certainly uncovers the relation of language to social order. Nevertheless, it also illuminates the relation of language to self-cultivation. For propriety is both the principle of conduct and the form of virtue; since *ren* is to discipline oneself and return to propriety, one will find a way to behave properly; how one could successfully perform one's role in different social situations depends on to what extent one realizes *ren*, and to what extent one realizes *ren* depends on how one treats his words and deeds.

Second, the purpose of rectifying names is to Confucius regulating the relationship between a word and a thing. In this relation, speaking is a sort of nexus where the word and the thing are linked together. Whereas speaking expresses one's understanding of the thing that is symbolized by the word, it gives rise to the thing corresponding to the word. Hence, the relationship between a word and a thing begins from the utterance of the word and ends at the accomplishment of the thing. This is a whole process; if any part is missing, the process will stop, and the relationship between the word and the thing cannot keep existing. In this sense,

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[75]  *Lun Yu–Li Ren*.

[76]  *Lun Yu–Xian Wen*.

[77]  *Lun Yu–Gong Zhi Zhang*.

rectifying names is to rectify those uses of names that do not lead things to be accomplished, or replace doing things with merely saying things. Though Confucius did not deny illocutionary saying can be a sort of doing, what he emphasized is perlocutionary utterances.[78] According to him, the superior man's virtue is manifested not merely in what he says, but, more importantly, in what is done due to his words.

By the same token, Mencius, in developing his moral theory, did not on the surface discuss *ming* and *shi* as a pair of philosophical categories. His whole theory of morality, however, is based on Confucius's understanding of the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. As Lao Siguang observes, Mencius construed humans by means of rectifying names.[79] He defined human nature by examining how mankind is different from other beings and demonstrated the four principles, i.e., *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, and *zhi* 智, as the primary characteristics of being a human. In doing so, Mencius illuminated the meaning of *ren* as a name. On the other hand, he explored those *shi* that match the name of *ren*:

> The actuality [*shi*] of humanity consists in serving one's parents. The actuality of righteousness consists in obeying one's elder brother. The actuality of wisdom consists in knowing these two things and not departing from them. The actuality of propriety consists in regulating and adorning these two things. The actuality of music consists in rejoicing in these two things.[80]

In this passage, Mencius displayed the practical referent of the name *ren*. The very fact that he intentionally used the term *shi* to indicate moral conduct means Mencius actively participated in the discourse on *ming-shi* and his special contribution to this discourse lies in applying the principle of rectifying names to the construction of a moral theory or in reviewing the *ming-shi* issue from a moral point of view.

Following Confucius's rectifying names, Xun Zi further developed the Confucian theory of language. He not only analyzed the origin and classification of names but also exposed the moral function of language. According to Xun Zi, the purposes for the wise man to establish and regulate names are (1) to enable names to be applied correctly to the things they designate; (2) to make clear the distinction between the noble and the humble; and (3) to discriminate between similarities and differences among things.[81] We may say that the first purpose is a general principle which requires a correspondence between names and things; the second one focuses on the moral value displayed by names; and the third one centers on the objective attribution indicated by names. Significantly, Xun Zi elevates the importance of distinguishing the noble and the humble over that of distinguishing similarities and differences.

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[78]  I use the two words "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary" in John Austin's sense.

[79]  Lao Siguang, *Zhongguo Zhexue Shi* (Taibei: Sanmin Shuju, 1968).

[80]  *Meng Zi*, Chap. 4, trans. Chan, 76.

[81]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*, trans. Chan, 125 and Watson, 141.

The importance of linking together rectifying names and morality can be construed in two aspects. On the one hand, the terms "noble" and "humble" undoubtedly imply value judgment. Xun Zi deliberately used these terms in order to make prominent his emphasis on the moral function of names for the referents of these terms are not restricted to people's ranks or social positions; rather, as Chen Daqi points out, they refer in fact to the value, or lack of value, of human affairs.[82] On the other hand, the value and lack of value of human affairs depend not on given conditions, but on whether or not and to what extent these affairs tally with *li* as the ultimate criterion of human life. Thus, "the noble" and "the humble" are in the final analysis related to moral conduct; accordingly, to rectify (or regulate) names is to rectify (or regulate) human behaviors.

In short, the relation of words to deeds is an embodiment and specialization of the relation of names to things. Once again, the Confucian consideration in dealing with this relation is practical: Language does matter in becoming human; to a cultivated person, it is not enough to master a language and use it to communicate with others. Only when one's words speak one's heart-mind and lead one's conduct to the practice of the good, can one become a real human being.

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[82]  Chen, 142.

# Chapter 5
# Sociopolitical Practice and Language

Sociopolitical practice refers to the understanding and conduct of government. In the discourse on *ming-shi*, the Confucians, Moists, Daoists, and Legalists reviewed the connection of sociopolitical practice to the *ming-shi* issue by analyzing the concepts of *zheng* 政 (government), *li* 利 (benefit), and *fa* 灋 (law). Although the three concepts cannot include all areas of Chinese sociopolitical practice, they do represent the main ideas and execution of government in ancient China.

## 5.1 Government (*Zheng*)

The graphic form of 政 (*zheng*) consists of a character 正 and a radical 攵. The radical means "to beat," and the character means "to regulate" or "to rectify." Etymologically, the radical refers to sending an army to suppress. It was certainly a main form of the government prior to Confucius's time. However, since Confucius, the term *zheng* has been interpreted not as military suppression, but as political rectification, and even moral regulation. This is a significant change.

When Ji Kang asked Confucius about government, Confucius responded, "to govern ([z]*heng*) is to rectify ([z]*heng*). If you lead the people by being rectified yourself, who will dare not be rectified?"[1] Here, government is transformed from rectifying people into rectifying oneself, the self-rectification becomes the basic aim and means of government. In this sense, the nature of government is no longer a mere sociopolitical affair, but a moral project: The ruler should cultivate himself first; he leads his people by means of his self-cultivation so that people could cultivate themselves, too. Once all people practice self-cultivation, the state will automatically be governed well. To Confucius, the ideal government is not the one by law and punishment; rather, it is the one by the ruler's virtue and *li* (propriety). The reason is that "Lead the people with governmental measures and regulate them by law and punishment, and they will avoid wrongdoing but will have no sense of honor and shame. Lead them with virtue and regulate them by the rules of propriety

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[1] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 40.

(*li*), and they will have a sense of shame and, moreover, set themselves right."[2] From this passage, we can see that the ultimate task of government is cultivation instead of punishment. Government by law and punishment may work in the short run since it works only on people's body; however, its effect is negative and limited. In contrast, government by virtue and *li* can take effect in the long run for it influences people's mind; so cultivated people will spontaneously conduct themselves properly. Under these conditions, government changes from external force into internal power by initiating co-government, which is based on the people's self-regulation.

In governing a state by means of this form of "non-governing," the Daoists stood with Confucians. According to Lao Zi,

> The best (rulers) are those whose existence is (merely)
> known by the people.
> The next best are those who are loved and praised.
> The next are those who are feared.
> And the next are those who are despised.
> It is only when one does not have enough faith in others
> that others will have no faith in him.
> [The great rulers] value their words highly.
> They accomplish their task; they complete their work.
> Nevertheless their people say that they simply follow Nature [*ziran*].[3]

Here, Lao Zi classified rulers and governments. His criterion is to what extent they follow *ziran* 自然 (Nature). To Lao Zi, *ziran* is the very model of varied things, its spirit is creative; to follow *ziren* is to yield to the Dao from which characteristics of varied things are derived. Once everything can exist and develop naturally, the whole world is in order. Thus, the best way to govern a state is to give up government in the sense of not trying to change or spoil people's spontaneity.

Of course, in giving credit to people's spontaneity, the Confucians were different from the Daoists. The Confucians trusted spontaneity as the outcome of self-cultivation. To them, self-cultivation is the full extension of human nature.. Human nature not only belongs to Nature but can illuminate Nature. As Confucius said: "It is man that can make the Way [Dao] great, and not the Way that can make man great."[4] On the other hand, the Daoist School appealed to spontaneity as a direct embodiment of Nature. To them, Nature does not need any external decoration, nor do people need any external regulation. When people live in a natural way and conduct themselves spontaneously, they return to Nature's state of simplicity and reality. "Then complete harmony will be reached."[5]

The Daoist view on spontaneity cannot be thought of as excluding self-cultivation, however. On the contrary, both Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi (ca. 369–286) highly valued moral or spiritual cultivation, and construed it as the way to being a

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[2] *Lun Yu–Wei Zheng*, trans. Chan, 22.

[3] *Dao De Jing*, ch. 17, trans. Chan, 148.

[4] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*, trans. Chan, 44.

[5] *Dao De Jing*, ch. 65, trans. Chan, 170.

sage-ruler and returning to Nature. In terms of Lao Zi, the tasks of this cultivation include (1) keeping the oneness of the mind and the body ; (2) concentrating one's *qi* 氣 (vital force) to the softest degree like an infant; (3) cleaning and purifying one's insight so that it can be spotless, (4) loving people and governing the state by means of inaction; (5) not letting the mental world be tempted by the physical world; and (6) understanding all without scheming.[6] These tasks of self-cultivation are applied to meditation, knowledge, wisdom, and politics.. On the surface, these tasks seem not different from that of the Confucian cultivation. Yet, the Daoists' ultimate aim is not to transcend, but to return to Nature; thus, self-cultivation is to them not an end, but a means of returning to Nature. Hence, ruling the land in Confucianism is the logical extension and the top-level presentation of self-cultivation, whereas ruling the land in Daoism is "like cooking a small fish" if the ruler can follow the Dao and does not bother the people.[7] Self-cultivation shows up not in government, but in grasping the Dao, which "models itself after Nature."[8]

Meanwhile, the Confucians and Daoists shared ideas about the function and characters of the ruler. All of them believed that whether or not a government is good depends to a large extent on the ruler. In Lao Zi's view, the ideal ruler is the sage. The sage puts himself away and has no personal interests[9]; in his associations, he loves humanity; in his words, he loves faithfulness; in government, he loves order.[10] The sage is concerned with the belly and not the eyes, i.e., is satisfied with simple rather than luxurious life,[11] and values the world as his body.[12] He has no fixed ideas for he regards the people's ideas as his own; he treats those who are good and those who are not good with goodness; he is honest to those who are honest and those who are not honest.[13] From these descriptions of virtues attributed to the sage-ruler by Lao Zi, we can conclude that not only did Lao Zi think of a virtuous ruler as a key to the ideal government, but more importantly, he related these virtues, in one way or another, to the Dao and Nature, i.e., they are viewed as concrete expressions of the Dao and Nature in the actions of the sage-ruler and his government.

Like Lao Zi, Mencius thought of a virtuous ruler highly necessary for an ideal government. Yet, instead of thinking of the sage-ruler's virtues as reflections of the Dao and Nature, he made the sage-ruler's character directly related to *ren* (humanity) and *yi* (rightness), which are the very embodiment of human's nature and way.

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[6]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 10.

[7]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 60.

[8]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 25, trans. Chan, 153.

[9]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 7.

[10]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 8.

[11]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 12.

[12]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 13.

[13]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 49.

To Mencius, the rise and decline of a dynasty or a state depends on whether or not *ren* is realized. "It was by benevolence [*ren*] that the three dynasties gained the throne, and by not being benevolent that they lost it."[14] The principle of *ren*, according to Mencius, is the feeling of commiseration[15]; thus, a ruler who leads with the feeling of commiseration is a *ren jun* 仁君 (benevolent ruler), and a government which runs a state in terms of the feeling of commiseration is a *ren zheng* 仁政 (benevolent government). The regulation of a state begins from a benevolent government, and a benevolent government relies on a benevolent ruler; so Mencius advised: "Let the ruler be humane, and all his people will be humane. Let the ruler be righteous, and all his people will be righteous. Let the ruler be correct, and all his people will be correct. Once the ruler is rectified, the whole kingdom will be at peace."[16] This passage is certainly an elaboration of Confucius's view that to govern is to rectify.[17] What we can read from the passage is this: sociopolitics is not separated from, but a natural extension of, ethics; self-cultivation is the aim of moral practice and the basis of sociopolitical practice as well.

Nevertheless, one may raise a question here: Is it possible for Chinese sociopolitical practice to be restricted to the spiritual realm since *ren,* as a central concept, is the prescription that the Confucians wrote out for treating the conflicts in ancient China and since *ren* belongs to, in the final analysis, the spiritual realm and society is based to a large extent on materials and their distribution? If not, how could the problems in material interests be solved through a moral theory and practice? These questions are actually raised and answered by Mencius and Mo Zi in an argument about *yi* (rightness) and *li* (benefit).

## 5.2  Benefit (*Li*)

The graphic form of 利 (*li*) is totally different from that of *li* as propriety, though the two words share the same pronunciation. *Li* as benefit consists of a character 禾, which means "grain," and a radical 刂, which symbolizes "knife." Someone thus explains the etymology of this word as to reap grain with knife, and nothing can benefit people like grain does.[18] This explanation is slightly different from Xu Shen's. He suggests that the character is the elision of the word 禾, which means "appropriateness;" hence, *li* can be interpreted as "benefit derived from appropriateness." Although his interpretation is partially criticized by some scholars, it has been popularly adopted. It is essential to point out that Xu Shen's interpretation can

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[14] *Meng Zi–Li Lou* I, trans. James Legge, 1970, 293.

[15] *Meng Zi–Gongsun Chou* I.

[16] *Meng Zi–Li Lou* I, trans. Chan, 75.

[17] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*.

[18] *Guanyi Tang Suibi*, quoted in Ding Fubao, ed. *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Gu Lin* (Taibei: Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1959), 1828.

be seen as a clue to the argument on *li* and *yi* between the Moists and the Confucians.

In order to understand Mo Zi's view on *li*, we should first understand his point of *jian ai* 兼愛 (universal love) . For, since Mencius, universal love has been thought of as the very mark of Mo Zi's thought,[19] and it is even called "the only doctrine of Moism."[20] As Zhang Huiyan (1761–1802) pointed out, among the ten points of Mo Zi's theory, "universal love" is the basic element of Moism; "reverence for heaven" provides the "existence of spirits"; "identification with the superior" and "economy of expenditures "are its branches"; "anti-fatalism," "anti-music," and "simplicity in funerals" are merely other issues upon which circumstances provoked him to take such stands.[21] Zhang Huiyan's interpretation has been accepted by many scholars.

Generally speaking, universal love suggests a sort of love that removes all differences or limitations between people, families, and countries. In Mo Zi's words, universal love "is to regard other people's countries as one's own. Regard other people's families as one's own. Regard other people's person as one's own."[22] To Mo Zi, all the contradictions, conflicts, and wars in his time were for the same reason, that is, partiality 別 (*bie*): To love only his own person, family, and country, and to hate and try to injure other people's person, families, and countries. "[I]t is this partiality in their dealings with one another that gives rise to all the great harms in the world."[23] Under these conditions, if universal love can be realized, then not only can wars between countries and conflicts between families disappear, but case of widows and orphans can be fostered;[24] and finally, love fills of society, and peace comes to the world forever.

Of course, the key to the concept of universal love is not whether it can be realized, but its interchangeability with the idea of mutual benefit. To Mo Zi, the meaning of universal love is mutual benefit. People are benefitted by means of universal love.[25] Those who love people are loved by people; those who benefit people are benefitted by people.[26] Mutual benefits are derived from loving and benefiting people.[27] In addition to these points, Mo Zi often intentionally juxtaposed the two terms "love" (*ai*) and "benefit" (*li*). The *Mo Zi* reads: "to love and benefit all people";[28] "to report on those people and things that love and benefit the

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[19] Cai Renhou, *Mo Jia Zhexue* (Taibei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 1983), 66.

[20] Liang Qichao, *Xian Qin Zhengzhi Sixiang Shi* (Taibei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 1987), 134.

[21] Quoted in Hsiao Kung-chan, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, vol. 1. trans. F. Mote (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 226.

[22] *Mo Zi–Jian Ai* I, trans. Chan, 214.

[23] *Mo Zi–Jian Ai* III, trans. Burton Watson, 1967, 39.

[24] Ibid.

[25] *Mo Zi–Shang Xian* II.

[26] *Mo Zi–Jian Ai* II.

[27] *Mo Zi–Jian Ai* III.

[28] *Mo Zi–Shang Xian* II.

country is the same as to love and benefit the country."[29] These ideas clearly display Mo Zi's understanding of love and benefit, that is, real love must lead to benefit. Benefit is the criterion of love; if love cannot lead to benefit, it is merely a lip service. On the other hand, the real benefit must be mutual instead of partial; if benefit is partial, it may be a harm to those who are not benefitted; whenever there is a lack of mutual benefit, there is no universal love. Thus, universal love and mutual benefit are the two sides of a coin; we cannot imagine a love without benefit. In this sense, benefit can be construed as the key to Mo Zi's political doctrine and as his solution to social problems.

Mencius strongly rejected Mo Zi's view on benefit. To him, benefit is not the right solution to social problems. The reason why there are so many conflicts and wars is not that benefit has not been correctly understood and seriously taken; on the contrary, it is from seeking benefit that conflicts and wars grow out. Hence, the ruler should find a correct project to replace benefit, and the correct project is *ren* and *yi*. When King Hui of Liang asked Mencius what he would provide to benefit the kingdom, Mencius replied, "Why must your Majesty use that term '[benefit]'? What I am provided with are counsels to benevolence [*ren*] and righteousness [*yi*], and these are my only topics."[30] According to Mencius, when everyone asks for benefit, *ren* and *yi* will be abandoned, the kingdom will be endangered; but if sovereign and minister, father and son, elder brother and younger brother abandon the idea of benefit, treating *ren* and *yi* as the only principles, and carrying on all their intercourse upon them, then the kingdom would certainly take the world under its control.[31]

Obviously, for Mencius, *li* (benefit) goes against and corrupts *ren* and *yi*. That is why he rejected Mo Zi's doctrine. But in understanding the meaning of the argument on *yi* and *li* and judging the truth-value of this argument, we should answer two questions: Is *li* in Mo Zi's view naturally incompatible with *ren* and *yi*? Did Mencius believe neither the country nor the individual needs to be benefitted?

The answer to the first question is "No." Mo Zi never thought of *li* as inherently exclusive to *yi*. On the contrary, from Mo Zi's point of view, universal love is *ren*, mutual benefit is *yi;* since universal love shows up in mutual benefit, *ren* could be interpreted in terms of *yi*. First, *yi* is the ultimate principle: In the world, where there is rightness, there is life, wealth, and order; where there is no rightness, there is death, poverty, and disorder[32]. Second, to Mo Zi, *yi* is the basis and standard of *li*, only when *li* tallies with *yi*, i.e., people are benefitted *mutually*, could *li* be called *li*, otherwise it is *si li* 私利 (selfish interests), and selfish is *bu yi* 不義 (unrighteous). Third, in the final analysis, *li* is itself *yi*, for *li* is not merely what is materially useful to the people, but more importantly, it is what is appropriate to the people in principle, and in terms of both Confucianism and Moism, appropriateness is *yi*.

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[29]  *Mo Zi–Shang Tong* III.

[30]  *Meng Zi–Liang Hui Wang* I, trans. Legge, 126.

[31]  *Meng Zi–Gao Zi* II.

[32]  *Mo Zi–Tian Zhi* I.

"No" is also the answer to the second question. Mencius neither abstractly denied interests nor did he keep gains out of humane government. What he rejected is to think of *li* as the only aim and to seek *li* through incorrect means. On the one hand, Mencius clearly delimited the *li* that should be abandoned. This kind of *li* is certainly not Mo Zi's "mutual benefit," for it brings benefit to merely one person, one family, or one country while harming other people, families, and countries; more importantly, it is based on force, not rightness (*yi*). On the other hand, Mencius drew a detailed picture of what he called *wang dao* 王道 (royal government) through which people's interests get good service. To him, because people will have no fixed heart until they gain a certain livelihood, the wise ruler regulates people's livelihood so that they can nourish their living and mourn for their dead without any feeling against the state. This condition "is the first step of royal government."[33]

In Mencius' sociopolitical doctrine, royal government is humane government and its primary concern is people's livelihood, which indicates the importance of benefit. This tells us that the focus or divergence of the argument on *yi* and *li* is not the *need* to benefit but the *way* to benefit. In terms of Mo Zi, the way to mutual benefit is universal love; only when everyone loves each other like loving himself, can mutual benefit be realized. In terms of Mencius, however, universal love is impossible for the differences between the one and the other, one's father and others' father, and one's ruler and others' ruler are inherent, and thus absolute. To ask one to love someone else's father like one's own father is equal to asking one forget and even deny his own father; this goes against .human nature, hence is not practicable. In contrast, *yi* recognizes the differences among people as well as takes into account both the interests of the one and others. For *yi* etymologically refers to oneself and is sociopolitically associated with others in particular situations, this enables *yi* metaphysically to turn into *ren* while at the same time practically to bring about benefit. Thus, *yi* is the right way to people's interests.

Neither the Confucians nor the Moists won the argument on *yi* and *li* in the sense that neither party persuaded the other to give up their beliefs; but both of them can be thought of as winners in the sense that their ideas deepen our understanding of *li* as a sociopolitical concept. The Confucians told us that the function of humane government (*ren Zheng*) is *yang* 養 (nourishment), which depends on livelihood and evokes moral cultivation. For most people, livelihood is the basis and starting point of moral cultivation; hence to regulate people's livelihood is the necessary task of humane government. But livelihood (its achievement and enjoyment) is itself not the final aim of human beings, it can only be meaningful and right when it serves moral cultivation. The Moists told us that *li* (benefit) is not inherently alien from *yi* (rightness) and *yi* should not be restricted to the spiritual realm and construed merely as a moral character. If *yi* is what is appropriate to the people in principle, then *li* must be a necessary reason of *yi;* for all those things, including personal livelihood and public good, from which the people benefit can be called *li*.

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[33] *Meng Zi–Liang Hui Wang*, trans. Legge, 131.

As far as they benefit the people, they are appropriate to the people; thus, whether or not a government is right depends on whether or not it benefits the people.

On the whole, the Confucians did not deny benefit, but they insisted that benefit is not the final aim of government and should be regulated by *yi* so that it can serve people's transformation into *ren* (humanity). The Moists promoted benefit without any reservation; for them, benefit is in nature right, otherwise it could not be called benefit at all. In a sense, if the central point of Confucian sociopolitics can be thought of as to rule the land through *ren*, then the basic project of Moist sociopolitics can be thought of as benefiting the people through universal love. Nevertheless, to the Legalists, neither *ren* nor *li* is the standard of government; the real standard should be *fa* (law).

## 5.3  Law (*Fa*)

The graphic form of *fa* 灋 consists of a radical 氵, which symbolizes "water," and two characters: The upper character 豸 (*zhi*) refers to an animal in folklore that can drive out evil, the lower character 去 (*qu*) means "to remove," "to drive out." According to Xu Shen and Duan Yucai, *fa* means "punishment" originally, and "model" extensionally; its radical refers to the evenness of water, and thus metaphorically means "justice;" putting the two characters *zhi* and *qu* together indicates that the function of *fa* in rectifying people is like that of the animal in driving out evil.

The main schools of thought in ancient China paid a lot of attention to *fa* and discussed its meaning and origin. To the Confucians, *fa* comes from the *dao* of heaven and the root of humans; what the *dao* and the root display is called *xiang* 象 (image), and what the *dao* and the root produce is called *qi* 器 (form) ; *fa* is what is made and dealt with in terms of images and forms.[34] In the Daoists' view, "Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after Dao. And Dao models itself after naturalness."[35] To the Moists, *fa* "is that in being like which something is so,"[36] and "An example is a standard [*fa*] for being deemed such-and-such; the thing exemplified is the standard by which the example is deemed such-and-such."[37] From these passages, we can read that (1) *fa* comes from Nature, the nature of a (class of) thing(s) is the *fa* of the (class of) thing(s); (2) since the *fa* of a (class of) thing(s) represents the nature of the (class of) thing(s), it must be a model through which one can examine and regulate the (class of) thing(s).

The ancient understanding of *fa* is fully developed by the Legalists; this can even be seen from the name of this school: 灋家 *Fa Jia*. Because this school came later

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[34]  *Yi Jing*.

[35]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 25, slightly modified from Chan, 153.

[36]  *Mo Bian–Jing* I, trans. Angus Graham, 1978, 316.

[37]  *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu*, trans. Graham, 471.

than the schools mentioned above, its view of *fa* is influenced by them. According to Liang Qichao, the Legalists not only accepted their broad sense of *fa* but followed their concrete perspectives.[38] In the first place, whereas other schools believed that the law of Nature is the model of human activity, the Legalists held that laws refer to the measurements of length, weight, and angle, and the carpenter's line marker and regulation.[39] These laws are construed as representing the nature of things and thus could be used to regulate humans' behavior. This kind of understanding displays the original and broad meaning of *fa*. In the second place, while Xun Zi thought of *li* (propriety) as principles of *fa*,[40] and treated *li* as concrete rules for people to obey,[41] the Legalists defined *fa* as charter made by government and as punishment inflicted on people.[42] While Lao Zi claimed that the people themselves can be transformed and rectified by following the rules of Nature,[43] the Legalists though of ruling the country by law as a form of inaction-government: The great ruler relies on *fa*, not his own effort; thus all affairs are handled by *fa*.[44] And while Mo Zi held that *yi* is the ultimate standard and to govern is to identify people's mind with the ruler's standard,[45] the Legalists suggested that the key to ruling the land is to control ministers effectively, it is through clear laws and correct standards that the ruler identifies his ministers.[46] These examples illuminate the influence of the Confucian, Daoists, and Moists on the Legalists' thought of *fa*.

Undoubtedly, the Legalists' thought of *fa* cannot be grasped without understanding Han Fei, since he epitomized the thought of this school. Briefly speaking, Han Fei's theory of *fa* consists of the following points: First, instead of modeling after past kings, he suggested following *fa*. He said that to spread ancient deeds and to talk about the past kings' benevolence and rightness are not the proper way to rule a country at all.[47] Since his time was full of complex affairs and sharp struggles, he believed that only by *fa* can the struggles and affairs be handled.[48] Second, by *fa* Han Fei meant what was written on papers, formulated in governmental office, and given as notices to the people;[49] *fa* teaches the officials and the people how to behave through rewarding good and punishing evil.[50] Third, Han Fei believed that the establishment of *fa* is based not on the ruler's will but on *ren qing*

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[38]  Liang, 1987, 155–158.

[39]  *Gun Zi–Qi Fa.*

[40]  *Xun Zi–Fu Guo.*

[41]  *Xun Zi–Ru Xiao.*

[42]  *Han Fei Zi–Ding Fa.*

[43]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 57.

[44]  *Shen Zi.*

[45]  *Mo Zi–Shang Tong* II.

[46]  *Shen Zi.*

[47]  *Han Fei Zi–Wai Chu Shuo* II.

[48]  *Han Fei Zi–Ba Shuo.*

[49]  *Han Fei Zi–Nan* III.

[50]  *Han Fei Zi–Ding Fa.*

人情 (human nature.);[51] thus, *fa* possesses the character of universality, and functions as objective standards in regulating the country. Therefore, everyone (even the prince) should follow *fa*, and the ruler should rely on *fa* rather than his wisdom and belief.[52]

By comparing Fan Fei's doctrine of government with that of other schools especially the Confucians, we can find that *fa* is in Han Fei's eyes the ultimate principle of government, the only criterion of right and wrong, and the most powerful tool in the country's administration. To the Legalists, the core and essence of sociopolitical practice is *fa* instead of *ren* or benevolent government as the Confucians suggested. For asking the ruler to carry out mutual love is like asking the ruler to love the people more than their parents love them, which is impossible. Meanwhile, though no one can love a child as his mother does, when the child is involved in illness and monstrous behavior, the mother cannot save him from death and punishment by mere means of her loving except sending him to see a teacher and a doctor. *Ren* as the way of government is like the mother, who elicits happiness followed by suffering, whereas *fa* as the way of governing is like the teacher and the doctor, who elicits happiness after bitterness.[53]

Between *ren* and *fa*, which one is the correct way of ruling the land? This is a heated argument between the Confucians and Legalists. As mentioned earlier, Confucius claimed that the ideal government is not governing by law and punishment, but by the ruler's virtue and propriety (*li*), for whereas the former works merely on the people's "body," the latter can work on the people's "mind."[54] The Legalists disagreed with the Confucians. Han Fei said that many officials suggest ruling the country with *ren* and *yi*, yet the government still failed to prevent disorder in the land. This means *ren* and *yi* are useless, and even harmful in political affairs; thus, the sage appeals not to virtue, but to law.[55] To the Confucians, however, the key is not whether or not law is necessary, but whether or not law can get at the root of the people's cultivation. Xun Zi pointed out that where there are good laws, disorder still exists; but in history, there was no such thing as disorder occurring where there was a superior man.[56] The reason, as he saw it, is that laws are not independent of people, to what extent laws function depends on the character of the people who carry them out.[57] It is in this sense that Mencius held that "Virtue alone is not sufficient for the exercise of government; laws alone cannot carry themselves into practice."[58] Moreover, even though everyone obeys laws, the best result that governing by law can achieve is to control people's behavior, but not forward

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[51] *Han Fei Zi–Ba Jing*.

[52] *Han Fei Zi–Wu Du*.

[53] *Han Fei Zi–Liu Fan*.

[54] *Lun Yu–Wei Zheng*.

[55] *Han Fei Zi–Xian Xue*.

[56] *Xun Zi–Wang Zhi*.

[57] *Xun Zi–Jun Dao*.

[58] *Meng Zi–Gongsun Chou* II, trans. Legge, 289.

self-cultivation and evoke full development to human being's nature. Hence, Liu An (179–122 BCE) concluded that in governing, *ren* and *yi* are cardinal, *fa* is auxiliary, and *fa* is used to assist the realization of *ren* and *yi*.[59]

It was in the argument between the Confucians and Legalists that Han Fei "established a wholly political kind of political thought, having thereby a modern flavor."[60] Following his political thought, the rulers and officials of later times made and carried out major policies in administration. But since the Legalists did not solve the tension between the realm of laws and the power of the ruler and the tension between social punishment and self-cultivation, their position could not replace Confucianism as being the dominant doctrine of sociopolitical practice.

## 5.4   The *Ming-Shi* Issue and Sociopolitical Practice

The role language plays in sociopolitical practice is very prominent. Not only did most schools of thought paid much attention to the linguistic aspect of sociopolitical affairs, but they enquired into the *ming-shi* issue in terms of their particular sociopolitical concepts.

To the Confucians, the core of sociopolitical practice is to govern. By "govern" they meant "to rectify," and the subject of rectification includes both "mind" (i.e., understanding) and "body" (i.e., conduct); to rectify the mind–body is to correct people's improper understanding and conduct in terms of their social role and duties. This is actually what Confucius argued when he said "Let the ruler *be* a ruler, the minister *be* a minister, the father *be* a father, and the son *be* a son."[61] Here, the first "ruler, minister, father, and, son" refer to the people who play a certain role, and the second "ruler, minister, father, and son" are names which possess a particular intention. Undoubtedly, in each name are embedded definite values, beliefs, and standards, which are traditionally carried on and socially recognized; thus, names are not only meaningful but *meaningfulness*. That is to say, the meaning of a name, i.e., the social, political, and cultural connotations of a name, can be (1) the criterion of the thing being named, and (2) the method of verifying the uses of names. Accordingly, to rectify names of "ruler, minister, father, and son" is (1) to rectify the behavior of the ruler, minister, father, and son in terms of their duties and (2) to rectify incorrect uses of the names of "ruler, minister, father, and son" in calling those who behave not like a ruler, a minister, a father, and a son.

In this sense, a name is a code that symbolizes a truth-relation between a thing and a society's understanding of the thing; governing is based on the maintenance of this kind of truth-relation; it is for this reason that Confucius insisted on returning to propriety (*li*), for propriety is actually a system of names. A name is a norm that

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[59] *Huai Nan Zi–Tai Zu Xun*.

[60] Hsiao, 386.

[61] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*, trans. Chan, 39.

indicates the person who is involved what to do and how to do it properly. To govern is to *zheng shen* 正身 (rectifying the mind–body) in terms of this kind of norm. Thus, Confucius's appeal is to the clarification of people's *ming fen* 名分 (sociopolitical roles) for every role, as a name, implies a norm. A name is meanwhile a criterion that distinguishes right from wrong and justice from injustice. Both the content (i.e., those that are governed) and the form (i.e., the way of establishment and execution) of governing are examined through this kind of criterion. That is why in the Confucian text 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn*), similar political events are recorded with different names (words).

Obviously, to rectify names is in nature to rectify the *ming-shi* relationship, since we can never grasp names without construe their referents. Furthermore, the rectification of this relationship is based on a correct understanding of *ming* and *shi* and is aimed at yielding proper behavior. This is the key to Confucius's theory of language. From the Confucian point of view, a correct understanding of *ming* and *shi* consists of grasping language's role in the sociopolitical realm in general and the correspondence between a name and a thing in particular. Although generally speaking, things are prior to names in the sense of occurrence, human behavior, as conscious action, begins from and is directed by language; thus, Confucius taught us that whether or not our speech is true and our conduct is accomplished depends on the names we use. That means, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* is not merely that *ming* symbolizes and carries *shi*; rather, it is that *ming* guides and transforms *shi* by virtue of symbolizing and carrying *shi*. Needless to say, the *ming-shi* relationship did not become a linguistic issue until the rectification of names was proposed. But because Confucius developed this theory within a sociopolitical context and thought of rectifying names as an important means of governing, the *ming-shi* relationship was construed as more than a semantic issue and was related closely to pragmatics. Under these conditions, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* has actually been changed from that of language and reality to that of linguistic theory and sociopolitical practice. Confucius did criticize some people who misused the name of a wine container; yet what he more strongly condemned was those people who usurped the names (i.e., social roles and political titles) that they did not deserve. Given a sociopolitical understanding of language, the *ming-shi* relationship must be regulated in terms of the function of language in human behavior. This, indeed, is also the soul of the Moist theory of language.

As discussed above, "*li*" (benefit) is the focus of Moist sociopolitical practice, to benefit all people and countries is the ideal of right governing as well as the way of solving the contradictions among families and countries; thus, "benefit" or "utility" is the final criterion. It is by virtue of "benefit" that Mo Zi examined words and writings, and his three standards of language can be seen as derived from this criterion.

First, Mo Zi claimed that all words and writings should be based on the experiences of the ancient sage-kings. Like Confucius, Mo Zi highly relied on the past sage-kings' wisdom and deeds in governing, for their wisdom and deeds benefitted all the people and the whole society in the past, and thus established a great model for later people to follow; moreover, their wisdom and deeds tallied with and

represent the will of Heaven and the spirits; therefore, they possessed the significance of absolute "truth." In this sense, their wisdom and deeds stood for beneficial experience and beard truth-value. Relying on their wisdom and deeds, words and writings could be both beneficial and truthful. Second, Mo Zi claimed that words and writings should be judged by the evidence of people's eyes and ears. In his view, merely appealing to historical experiences is not enough, only when historical experiences are blended with social realities, can language and doctrines be correctly tested. After all, people are the central focus of a government's stand and activity; it is through comparing with people's experience that government's stand and activity can be judged as right or wrong. Third, Mo Zi claimed that words and writings should be applied to the practice of governing to see whether they can benefit the country and the people. According to Mo Zi, neither appealing to the experiences of the ancient sage-kings nor enquiring into the evidence of people's eyes and ears is an end in itself; on the contrary, both of them are the means of bringing benefit to the whole country and all the people. Hence, the truth-value and social function of words and writings show up finally in their utility; any word or writing that cannot benefit the country and the people is deemed untruthful and worthless.

Given a sociopolitical context, there seems a difference between Confucius and Mo Zi: Whereas Confucius focused on *ming* (names), Mo Zi focused on *yan* (words); moreover, by names Confucius mainly meant social roles and political titles, and by words Mo Zi mainly referred to positions and doctrines. From their different foci, several more differences arose. Whereas terms are Confucius's concern and rectifying names is full of ethical flavor, sentences are Mo Zi's concern and examining doctrines involves epistemological significance. Hence, whereas Confucius drew people's attention to the correspondence between a name and the thing being named, Mo Zi drew people's attention to the validity of a theory in practice.

In other words, Mo Zi provided the *ming-shi* issue with new and deeper meaning by going beyond Confucius's understanding of this issue. First, *ming* is to Mo Zi no longer a particular name, but a generalization of what people say or write, while *shi* is no longer social roles and political status, but what people do and its result. As *shi* is the criterion of *ming*, what people do and its result is the criterion of what people say or write. Thus, in the case of Mo Zi, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* became more general and prominent as a relationship between language and behavior than that in the case of Confucius. Second, Mo Zi thought of *shi* as more primary than *ming*. This does not mean that he denied, or looked down on the importance of language; on the contrary, he stressed its value by presupposing *ming*'s influence on *shi*. If *ming* has nothing to do with *shi*, if all sorts of *ming* can only lead to the same outcome, what is the necessity of testing *ming* with *shi*? Whereas Confucius argued language has a direct bearing on the accomplishment of things, Mo Zi held language itself has to be tested in order to get things done well. Third, in using language, people not only recognize its root meaning, but shape it through the way it is used. This expresses their own understanding of language and the things symbolized by language. Hence, to test language is to test people's

understanding of language and things; this is certainly an epistemological job. By doing so, Mo Zi told people that besides particular names, a standpoint (i.e., a series of names) and a doctrine (i.e., a system of standpoints) are involved in the matter of knowledge and truth; furthermore, knowledge and truth are not independent of value, any language (specifically, any standpoint or doctrine) that are knowledge-able and truthful is deemed to be beneficial; needless to say, benefiting all the people and the whole country is the ultimate value.

Looking at Confucius and Mo Zi's theories of language closely, we can find that their views on *ming* and their ways of examining *ming* are tightly bonded to their sociopolitical doctrines: Taking "*zheng*" (government) as his horizon, Confucius focused the *ming-shi* relationship on political statuses and their correspondent duties; taking "*li*" (benefit) as his horizon, Mozi focused the *ming-shi* relationship on sociopolitical views and their practical effects. Thus, we cannot understand a thinker's linguistic points without grasping his sociopolitical ideas. This is true especially in Han Fei's case. In contrast to both Confucius and Mo Zi, Han Fei seemed not to hold a single standard in examining the *ming-shi* relationship. Sometimes, he thought of *ming* as the criterion of *shi*, and sometimes he judged *ming* in terms of *shi*. This is because Han Fei took "*fa*" (law) as his horizon and hence focused the *ming-shi* relationship on norm and conduct.

As mentioned earlier, *fa* is in Han Fei's view the ultimate principle of govern-ment and the only criterion of right and wrong. Since *fa* can only be established and expressed through language, it has to take the form of *ming*; consequently, *ming* functions as the norm of conduct. It is in this sense that Han Fei held that *ming* is the first principle of government; if *ming* is correct, things will be in order, if *ming* is wrong, things will be in chaos; thus, to govern is to regulate affairs in terms of *ming*.[62] Here, Han Fei was actually in-line with Confucius, namely, both of them stressed the behavioral orientation of *ming*, and both pointed out the dominant position of *ming* in its relation to *shi*. Then, where does the dominant position of *ming* come from, or why is it *ming* rather than *shi* that can take the dominant position? According to Confucius, it comes from political orthodoxy, which is based on tradition and humanity. According to Han Fei, however, it comes from social universality, which is based on the nature of humans and all things. As Confucius treated *ming* mainly as social roles and political statuses, Han Fei treated *ming* as norms of governmental and social affairs. Furthermore, by linking *ming* to "*zheng*" (governing and rectifying) and "*fa*" (law and norm), Confucius and Han Fei not only explored the practical character of *ming*, but provided *ming* with an epistemological foundation.

It is important to point out that when Han Fei held *ming* could function as the norm of conduct, he did not think *ming* is thoroughly independent from *shi* and can be exempt from being examined. On the contrary, he repeatedly claimed that *ming* and *shi* come into being by relying on each other[63]; thus, *ming* and *shi* have to be

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62   *Han Fei Zi–Yang Quan*.

63   *Han Fei Zi–Gong Ming*.

mutually correspondent,[64] and what one says need to be tested in terms of what one does.[65] This point makes Han Fei stand together with Mo Zi, namely, both of them believed that *ming* cannot be the criterion itself, a correct *ming* and its correct use has to (1) match the *shi* for which it stands and (2) lead to beneficial outcome or appropriate conduct. Here, we seem to be facing a contradiction: When Han Fei was in-line with Confucius, *ming* functions as principle, criterion, and norm of *shi*; yet when he was in-line with Mo Zi, *ming*'s position can only be confirmed by *shi*. How then should we understand these different interpretations of *ming*? This contradiction is to me superficial. It indeed shows up Han Fei's awareness that *ming* as the symbol of *fa* (norm of behavior) is different from *ming* as the form of *yan* (speech action) and that only can *fa* be a standard to judge *shi* and *yan* has to be judged in terms of *shi*. This means that Han Fei (1) distinguished language's truth value from language's use value, and thus recognized its semantic meaning; (2) took into account the utility of language, and thus stressed its pragmatic character.

To Han Fei, *fa* is the key to all sociopolitical affairs, the *ming-shi* relationship is not merely a linguistic issue; rather, it is a sharp embodiment of sociopolitical affairs. So Han Fei not only reviewed both *ming* and *shi* in light of *fa*, but treated this issue as an intermediary between theoretical thinking and practical conduct. Hence, his views on *ming-shi* display his sociopolitical doctrine and his linguistic proposition. This is certainly Confucius and Mo Zi's situation as well. Confucius and Mo Zi did not try to establish a pure linguistic theory; their focus is only on the sociopolitical problems of their time. Yet, since these problems arose and were handled through the *ming-shi* relationship, their sociopolitical doctrines have to involve language. It becomes clear, therefore, that sociopolitical practice is from the beginning bonded to language.

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[64]   *Han Fei Zi–Zhu Dao*.

[65]   *Han Fei Zi–Yang Quan*.

# Chapter 6
# Linguistic Practice and Language

Linguistic practice refers to language use in all walks of human life including using language to shape and reshape the meaning, truth, knowledge, and value of human activities. To be sure, the *ming-shi* discourse was itself a linguistic practice paralleling to philosophical discourses on other key issues in ancient China. Moreover, this discourse comprehensively examined language use in moral, social, political, and intellectual affaires. During its 200-year course, pre-Qin thinkers not only constructed pragmatic and semantic theories, but shaped a distinctive paradigm in which pragmatics and semantics are synthesized and the nature and function of language are critically reviewed.

## 6.1 Pragmatic Orientation

What are the limitations' of language? Is *shi* the final standard for judging all language use? If the answer to the questions is "Yes," then what is the basis for reviewing *shi* itself? These were the main questions ancient Chinese thinkers were concerned with. In answering these questions there arose three positions.

The first position insists on *shi* as the criterion for evaluating all language use because in the final analysis, speech action is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Only through its effects on the lifeworld can language use be meaningful and properly judged. In general, Confucius and Mo Zi held this position.

When Confucius argued that people should neither speak nor listen to words that go against *li* (propriety),[1] he was setting a clear boundary on daily communication. In his view, *li* alone represents the world to which words properly refer and from which words take their meanings. Thus, *li* is the sole authority for judging words and their use; moreover, to judge words by *li* is to make names correspond to realities. Here, we have to keep in mind that *li* was to Confucians not merely a set of behavioral norms; rather, it consisted of the society's values, truths, and traditions. Thus, the relation between *ming* and *shi* is to a large extent the relation between

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[1] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*.

words or speeches and *li*. Accordingly, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* is not merely an epistemic or semantic matter, i.e., a matter of grasping the meaning of a word and/or adjusting our understanding of a word's referent. It is rather a pragmatic matter, a matter of carrying on and extending values, truths, and traditions through words or speeches.

While Mo Zi introduced the concept of *shi* as the general referent and criterion of *ming*, he maintained Confucius's emphasis on pragmatics. In his view, *ming* gains its meaning by grounding itself on *shi*; accordingly, speech acts must function in correspondence to *shi*. It is important to bear in mind that by *shi* Mo Zi meant the entire physical and social world of things, events, and affairs. That is, *shi* is not merely the particular concrete referent of a given *ming*; rather, it is a system consisting of historical experience, social reality, and the administrative effects of speech acts (including governing). Since *shi* includes all of the past and the present, institutions and behaviors, as well as values and utilities, *ming* (as words or speeches) can only occur and be construed in the context of *shi*. Thus, *shi* restricts and governs words and speeches and serves as the basis for examining and judging them.

The second position argues that language is inherently limited in grasping Dao and that without a full comprehension of this limitation, speech acts inevitably cloud the understanding of *shi*. To change this situation, we have to go beyond language. In general, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi held this position.

From a Daoist point of view, the realm of *shi* is non-linguistic and holistic, but the realm of *ming* is fragmentary. Therefore, speech acts are a kind of never-ended effort of approaching Dao, the ultimate reality. Hence, according to Lao Zi, we should give up language, avoid what cannot be said, and let *shi* "speaks" for itself because the realm of *ming* is not identical to the realm of *shi*, and human experience is broader and more integrated than speech acts can cover. What cannot be named cannot be grasped linguistically, and what can be named must be transcended in practice. In this sense, Lao Zi's paradoxical dictum that Dao takes no action, but leaves nothing undone[2] can be construed as meaning that keeping silent can find out and accomplish things much more than continually talking. Since *ming* is a corrupt form of *shi*, speech is not useful but harmful in leading one toward Dao.

Like Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi also stressed the gap between *ming* and *shi* and the necessity of reviewing and controlling *ming* in terms of *shi*. In his view, though speech and argument may function as a means of gaining knowledge, achieving Dao requires one to go beyond language *per se*. Zhuang Zi did not suggest giving up language entirely, but neither did he believe language and its use could lead one to a state of freedom. For what *ming* can do at best is to describe the *appearance* of *shi*. To use *ming* correctly, we must avoid distorting the meaning of *shi* and blocking off the *dao* of *shi*. The state of freedom is the state in which we identify our body and mind with the nature of heaven, of earth, and of all things (including human beings). To achieve this state, we have to free ourselves from the biases of *ming* and the distortions that biases introduce into our understanding of *shi*.

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2  *Dao De Jing*, Ch. 37.

The third position argues that all speech acts should be examined in terms of law since law is the nexus where *ming* and *shi* come together. The essence of law is to distinguish right from wrong and thus to maintain sociopolitical order; to examine speech acts in terms of law is to make *ming* correspondent to *shi*. This is the Legalists' position.

According to the Legalists, the concept of *ming* has two basic meanings: generally, it means language and its use, but specifically it means the codification of social norms and political duties. Accordingly, the concept of *shi* also has two major meanings: generally, it refers to the varied things of the world, but specifically it refers to sociopolitical affairs and the consequences of language use. To distinguish the two meanings of *ming* and *shi* is to hold the key to the Legalists' dialectic treatment of the relation between *ming* and *shi*. It is not sufficient, in the Legalists' view, to examine whether or not our use of names corresponds to the things we try to denote because in so doing we cannot judge the sociopolitical values of the things. To evaluate *shi* as sociopolitical affairs and effects, we must appeal to *ming* as social norms and political duties. Since laws are the direct embodiment of norms and duties, they can be used as criteria of sociopolitical affairs. For the Legalists, the ultimate aim of language and its use, and of all sociopolitical activities, is the establishment of an ideal society. This is the ultimate *shi* or the essence of *shi*. All speeches, arguments, and discourses, therefore, have to be examined against it.

It is necessary to note that regardless of the differences among the three positions, they share a common character: that is, they treat the relationship between linguistic practice and the *ming-shi* issue from a pragmatic point of view. Both language use in everyday life and theoretical discourse on sociopolitical affairs should correspond to the settlement of sociopolitical, ethical, and cultural problems, which is *shi* in the ultimate sense. In this view, the rectification of names, the analysis of concepts, and the demonstration of doctrines are neither merely a matter of language analysis nor a matter of seeking knowledge for its own sake. Rather, they are simultaneously based in practice and aimed at practice; they proceed as a means instead of an end, and their truth-value is determined by and manifested in the extent to which they correspond to sociopolitical, ethical, and cultural realities.

## 6.2 Semantic Analysis

While the discourse on *ming-shi* was pragmatically oriented throughout, its formulation around issues of *ming* (names) inevitably entailed semantic analysis.

Semantic analysis is predominantly a characteristic of Western philosophy, particularly twentieth-century Western philosophy, and was not a main interest in the Chinese intellectual history. However, this does not mean that language analysis as a philosophical skill is alien to Chinese culture. On the contrary, ancient Chinese thinkers shared this skill with Western philosophers. This can be seen most clearly in the Neo-Moist analysis of the proposition that "ox-horse is not ox" and in Gongsun Long's analysis of similar propositions (along somewhat different lines though).

The *Mo Bian* contains the Neo-Moists' discussion on the truth-value of the proposition that "ox-horse is not ox."[3] At the outset, the Neo-Moists argued that "ox-horse" is a collective name which denotes an entity combining "ox" and "horse" as two-component items; since a compound system cannot be reduced to (or equated with) only *one* of its parts, "ox-horse" is not "ox." This leads to the counter-argument that if "ox-horse is not ox" is admissible because *one* of the terms ("horse") is *not* "ox," then it must also be admissible to say that "ox-horse *is* ox" because one of the terms *is* ox. However, since the latter proposition ("ox-horse *is* ox") is evidently not acceptable, the former cannot be acceptable either. To this counter-argument, the Neo-Moists replied that given the two contradictory propositions, one of them must be admissible, while the other is non-admissible. If someone believes "ox-horse is not ox" is *not* admissible, he has to hold that "ox-horse *is* ox" for one cannot hold or reject the two propositions at the same time. Moreover, they argued, neither "ox" nor "horse" alone denotes the combination of "ox" and "horse" as two items, but "ox-horse" does; thus, even though "ox" is not "non-ox," and "horse" *is* "non-ox," the ox-horse as a conjunct class is neither the ox-class nor the horse-class.[4]

In this passage, not only is the law of identity presupposed but the law of excluded middle, the law of contradiction, and the law of double denial are applied. By using these laws, the Neo-Moists made clear the distinction between collective names ("ox-horse") and individual names ("ox" or "horse"), between genus (system) and species (parts), and between general negative propositions and specific negative propositions. To the Neo-Moists, the initial proposition "ox-horse is not ox" means "not all items of the class of ox-horse are the items of the ox-class." The class of ox-horse certainly includes items of the ox-class, but it also includes additional items (of the non-ox, i.e., horse-class). Therefore, "ox-horse is not ox." But the opposition construes the initial proposition as "*all* items of the class of ox-horse are *not* items of the ox-class." This proposition leads, through a series of logical steps, either to rejecting both "ox-horse is ox" *and* "ox-horse is not ox" or accepting both at the same time, i.e., a contradiction. Yet the opposition is wrong for it misunderstands the meaning of "ox-horse is not ox" and changes a specific negative proposition into a general negative proposition.

Subtle and rigorous language analysis like this is not an exception in ancient texts. Indeed, wherever speech, argument, and discussion related to or focusing on the *ming-shi* issue appeared, language analysis followed; as language analysis proceeded, a semantic view was constructed. In some cases, notably the Confucian texts, the semantic view is rough and implicit. But in others, it is explicit and highly sophisticated as in the work of Gongsun Long.

Among Gongsun Long's arguments, his analysis of the proposition that "a white horse is not a horse" and his statement that "hardness, whiteness, and stone are not

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[3]  *Mo Bian–Jing* II.

[4]  *Mo Bian–Jing shuo* II.

three, but two."[5] Here, Gongsun Long pointed out that although a stone may be hard and white, hardness, whiteness, and stone are not three comparable items or categories. In Gongsun Long's words "Something may be white, but whiteness is not fixed on it. Something may be hard, but hardness is not fixed on it. What is not fixed on anything is universal."[6] This means that both hardness and whiteness are metaphysical entities; they exist without being the objects of sensation and are independent of concrete things (like stones). Hardness and whiteness as metaphysical entities are different from "hard" and "white" as empirical attributes of physical objects. Gongsun Long treated "hard" and "white" (as well as "one" and "two," "right," and "left") as individual nouns rather than general predicates. Hence linguistically, they function as rigid designators (in Kripke's sense) rather than as syncategorematic factors (in Quine's sense); metaphysically, they stand for universal entities rather than specific qualities.

It was through his analysis of such words that Gongsun Long framed a theory of things, names, and their relation, which can be construed as follows. Names are used to denote things, and things consist of (1) 指 *zhi* (those that are metaphysical entities), e.g., whiteness; (2) 物 *wu* (those that are empirical objects), e.g., a white horse; (3) 物指 *wu zhi* (those that are manifestations of metaphysical entities in real and possible worlds), e.g., the white horse as a combination of "white" and "horse" and the mermaid as a combination of "fish" and "human." In denoting things with names, according to Gongsun Long, we should not confuse metaphysical beings and empirical beings and should not use names of metaphysical beings to designate empirical beings and vice versa for each name has its specific referent and each thing has its specific actuality. To grasp things correctly, we have to rectify names, and to rectify names is to make names correspond to the actuality of things. Indeed, the correspondence between things and names is grounded on (as well as displays) the consistency between existence (ontology) and meaning (semantics).

Granted, among ancient thinkers, the dialecticians and Neo-Moists paid more attention to logical problems and hence were more skillful in language analysis than scholars from other schools. Nevertheless, anyone who participated in the discourse on *ming-shi* had to deal to some extent with semantics. The subject of the discourse itself concerned semantics (how words and things/social affairs are related); more essentially, speech, argument, and discussion as forms of linguistic practice are based inherently on language analysis (in the broadest sense of the term). Even though "names" are interpreted by some thinkers exclusively as indicators of social ranks or political duties, they still appear first of all linguistically. No matter whether they are used as symbols to denote things or as criteria to assess behavior, they always undergo an interpretation of meaning within a particular (discursive, cultural, and sociopolitical) context, and any interpretation of meaning is always an illumination of the relationship between names and things.

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[5]  *Gongsun Long Zi–Jian Bai Luan.*
[6]  Ibid, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 241.

## 6.3 The Paradigm of *Ming-Shi*

From the Chinese point of view, the understanding of the *ming-shi* relationship always relies on language analysis for without grasping the meaning of words, we cannot communicate with each other. But the relationship between *ming* and *shi* is not merely semantic for whenever we say something, we *do* something with words, and when we do something with words, we are *shaping* rather than merely understanding the relationship between language and reality. It means that semantics and pragmatics are two sides of the *ming-shi* coin. It is wrong to over-stress one side, but it is even worse to separate language analysis from everyday moral and sociopolitical practices. The *ming-shi* issue was construed in the discourse as the nexus where words and acts come together; thus, the examination of *ming-shi*, as an intellectual discourse, synthesized semantic and pragmatic concerns. This position is particularly well represented in Xun Zi's work.

Semantically, Xun Zi drew special attention to the forms and rules of speech, argument, and discussion. In analyzing "concept," "judgment," and "inference and demonstration," he in effect advanced a theory of logic.

In regard to "concept," Xun Zi made two points. First, he held that names should be construed as logical concepts rather than merely as linguistic terms. For when names are used to denote things, they distinguish things' similarities and differences and divide them into classes. Thus, what is reflected in a name is people's understanding of the common characteristics of a class of things.[7] Second, Xun Zi revealed the logical relation between genus and species by advancing the notions of "common names" (*gong ming*) and "particular names" (*bie ming*). In his view, though names are general concepts, their generality is relative because of their different intensional and extensional situations. Confusing these situations leads to the mistreatment of names, things, and their relationship.

In regard to "judgment," Xun Zi held that *ci* (sentence/judgment) is that which "links together the names of things to express an idea."[8] This definition implies (1) that a judgment consists of concepts (e.g., "birds" and "animals" are the concepts linked in the sentence/judgment "birds are animals"); (2) that a judgment structures the subject–object relation between concepts (e.g., in this structure, "birds" is a subject-concept, and "animals" an object-concept); and (3) that a judgment unfolds an idea (e.g., "birds are animals" expresses people's understanding of birds' attributes). Obviously, Xun Zi's position on "judgment" not only develops the Neo-Moist view but coincides with that of modern logic. Moreover, he explicitly suggested that "class" is one of criteria in distinguishing right judgments from wrong judgments.[9] Concepts are grounded in the classes of things, and judgments are based on concepts; thus, a judgment can be correct only when it tallies with the classes of things.

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[7] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Xun Zi–Wang Zhi*.

In regard to "inference and demonstration," Xun Zi argued that *ming* 名 (concept) is used when a thing is not understood, *ci* 辭 (judgment) is used when a concept alone is not understood, *shuo* 說 (inference) is used when a judgment alone is not understood, and *bian* 辨 (discrimination) is used when inference alone is not understood.[10] Here, Xun Zi illuminated the logical structure of thinking and speaking, namely that inference is conducted through concepts and judgments, while discrimination is the systematic application of inference. Because speech, argument, and discussion consist of inference and discrimination, their meaning and truth-value are determined by the rules of inference and demonstration. Xun Zi further explored these rules by elaborating the Moist doctrine on *gu* 故 (reason/cause), *li* 理 (pattern/principle), and *lei* 類 (category/class) and discussed the law of identity, the law of contradiction, and the law of excluded middle.

But Xun Zi was not concerned with merely revealing the logical rules and forms of speech, argument, and discussion. In his view, applying these rules and forms is a beginning point, not the ultimate criterion of linguistic practice; otherwise, linguistic practice is at best a cognitive process aimed at understanding *ming* (language) instead of a social process aimed at examining and changing *shi* (reality) in terms of the cultural values embedded in language. Thus, Xun Zi intends not to set up a pure semantic doctrine which excludes ethical and sociopolitical issues from the meaning/truth framework. Rather, he tried to establish a semantic form of pragmatics in which the meaning and truth conditions of language rest upon the practical functions of language use. His work reflects this aim in several ways.

Regarding *ming*, Xun Zi argued that names are used to denote things, and by "denote things," he specifically meant to "make clear the distinction between the noble and the humble, and to distinguish similarities from differences."[11] Specifying this function of denotation takes his work beyond the scope of semantics. For if "to distinguish similarities from differences" is basically a matter of classifying facts by means of concepts, "to make clear the distinction between the noble and the humble" is a matter of attaching *values* to things. It means that to denote things is not merely to make language correspond to reality, but more importantly, to integrate the meaning of words and the values of things into ethical and sociopolitical practice. In Xun Zi's words, if the distinction between the noble and the humble and between similarities and differences is made clear by using correct names, then "there will be no danger of ideas being misunderstood and work encountering difficulties or being neglected."[12] Clearly, language and behavior, or the meaning of words and the effect of words, are inseparable dimensions of linguistic practice.

Regarding *yan* (speech) and *ci* (judgment), Xun Zi repeatedly stressed the importance of *lei* (category/class). He argued that though the sage speaks a great many words and in varied ways, his words are always graceful and well-ordered

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[10]   *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.*

[11]   Ibid.

[12]   Ibid, Chan, 125.

because they are grounded in coherent categories or classes.[13] He further indicated that "category/class" is the key to human understanding and that the basic requirement for inference is to follow the same category/class.[14] These ideas can be construed as pure semantic or logical points. However, Xun Zi also argued that "*li* (propriety) is the great basis of law and the foundation of category/class."[15] Thus, he synthesized thinking and doing by juxtaposing "category" and "law." For "category" is, in Xun Zi's analysis, a rule that guides people's thinking, and all thinking is related to or aimed at what to do in a certain situation. In this sense, "category" shares the nature of "law" as a set of rules regulating people's behavior, and "category" and "law" are interchangeable in their functions. Xun Zi suggested that where law is available, one should be guided by the law; where law is not available, one should be guided by the category of things[16] since both of them coincide with *li*.

Regarding *bian shuo* 辯說 (argument and demonstration), Xun Zi proposed that any *bian shuo* has to be grounded in certain criteria, without which can right and wrong neither be distinguished from each other nor arguments and lawsuits be settled.[17] To him, the Confucian *ren* (humanity) is the most important criterion. If one's words are not in accord with *ren*, then "it is better for one to keep silent than speaking and arguing."[18] *Ren* as a criterion of judgment involves the content and consequences of thinking rather than the form of thinking; it implies that the practical effects of words are equally as important as their logical relations. Setting up *ren* as a criterion, therefore, is far more than a matter of semantic analysis. From Xun Zi's point of view, in understanding language, we cannot separate words' practical consequences from their cognitive and logical significance: only when words are used in accordance with both semantic and pragmatic principles can the integration of facts and values, of truth and good, of thinking and doing, as the manifestation of the harmonious relationship between *ming* and *shi*, come into being. Thus, in Xun Zi's theory, the criteria for judging language and its use include not only logical rules (i.e., reference to "reason," "pattern," and "category") but ethical and sociological standards (i.e., "humanity," "rightness," and "propriety") as well.

## 6.4  Chinese Language and Chinese Thinking

Since linguistic practice involves the understanding and use of language, we need to investigate the role that language plays in communication. The investigation considers two basic questions: First, how are words used to convey ideas and feelings?

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[13]  *Xun Zi–Xing E.*

[14]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.*

[15]  *Xun Zi–Quan Xue*, slightly modified from Burton Watson, 1967, 19.

[16]  *Xun Zi–Da Lue.*

[17]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Lun.*

[18]  *Xun Zi–Fei Xiang.*

Second, how do words lead and restrict thinking and action? Some scholars suggest that while people use a language, they are at the same time used by that language. For example, Edward Sapir argues that the importance of language lies not merely in its function as medium of communication, but more fundamentally in its construction of a real world, which "is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group."[19] His point can be thought of as an echo of Nietzsche's assumption that different languages shape different modes of thinking or philosophy.[20] Then, what is the relationship between Chinese language and Chinese thinking? To answer this question, we need to explore the features of Chinese language first, then, we can take Gongsun Long's "white horse" as an example to analyze the influence of these features on his argument.

There are at least four features that deserve our special attention. The first feature is that nouns, rather than verbs, centers on Chinese language. On the one hand, an adjective can be used as a noun like the term "*bai*" (white) in the sentence "The term of white is used to name a color."[21] On the other hand, a noun can be used as a verb like the term "*shi*" (actuality)  in the sentence "The situation that the actuality fully actualizes its property without any shortage is called position."[22] This sort of examples is not exceptional, but can be found in all ancient Chinese texts. One may wonder why nouns are so dominant and flexible in Chinese language? This is because nouns are in fact names for various real/phenomenal and virtual/transcendental objects. As the world consists of objects, names are the primary means for people to understand the world. In other words, to learn a thing is to get a name for that thing; to communicate about that thing is to talk about that thing through its name; and to grasp that thing is to know the meaning of the thing's name and symbolically operate on that thing through its name. This is a basic reason why all main schools of thought in pre-Qin times have their theories of names.

Then, what is the connection of this feature to Gongsun Long's thought? On the one hand, when the term "white" was employed as a noun, it led Gongsun Long no longer to think of "white" as an attribution of certain objects, but treating it as an independent entity. That means, the "white" has transformed into "whiteness" and obtained an ontological position paralleling to that of "horse." Once this whiteness combined "horse" and became "white horse," it makes this "horse" different from the "horse" that has nothing to do with "white" in semantic, cognitive, and pragmatic sense. Therefore, it was based on the ontological nature of the term "white" rather than the logical relationship between "horse" and "white horse" that Gongsun Long asserted "a white horse is not a horse." On the other hand, because of its ontological nature, a name can function as a verb. That means the thing being named is an actor capable of making changes to other things and giving meanings

[19]  Edward Sapir, *Language* (New York: HBJ, 1921), 209.

[20]  Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 27–28.

[21]  *Gongsun Long Zi–Bai Ma Lun*.

[22]  *Gongsun Long Zi–Ming Shi Lun*.

to them. For example, "white" as a noun can "white" a horse; the whited horse is certainly different from a non-whited horse. Although in the argument it was his opponent who used "white" as a verb, Gongsun Long did not reject that usage because this verb led him to recognize the existence of whiteness as abstract entity and a change-maker. As a result, this verb promoted him to adopt a realist rather than nominalist position.

The second feature of Chinese language is that unlike English, it has no inflection and articles. Thus, a noun can designate either a class of particular things or the attributes of that class.[23] For example, when people discuss whether or not a white horse is a horse, "*ma*" is clearly used as a common term; when people discuss the conceptual relationship between "horse," "cattle," and "sheep," "*ma*" is used to stress the attributes of horses (i.e., "horsehood") and is an abstract term. Furthermore, when the term "*ma*" is mentioned in a sentence, it may refer to either a particular horse or all horses as a kind of animal, depending on its relation to other terms and the context it is located in. As nouns dominate Chinese language, the lack of inflection and articles can cause problems in understanding what a name tends to denote. Yet, this feature can also remind people that the relation between the individual and the collective as well as the concrete and the abstract is not radically exclusive but complementary: while one side sets the other as its condition, both imply the possibility of shifting their status.

The influence of the second feature on Gongsun Long's argument can be seen in three respects. First, when referring pragmatic usages, he used terms on the concrete level and when conducting semantic analysis, he used terms on the abstract level. Thus, we can see that the examples ("white horse," "yellow horse," and "black horse") he took are related to particular objects; but when he talked about what determines a horse as a horse or differentiates a horse from a white horse, he appealed to the attributes of objects. Second, the terms used on the concrete level performed the designative function (i.e., to denote objects), while the terms employed on the abstract level performed the referential function (i.e., to mention terms themselves). On the former level, his concern was with the correspondence of language to reality; on the latter level, his concern was with the accuracy of thinking through concepts. Third, when he used terms on the concrete level, his focus was on pragmatics; when he used terms on the abstract level, his focus was on semantics. But, he did not completely separate these two approaches; instead, the former provided the semantic analysis with a solid basis and convincing examples, while the latter revealed the reason and criteria of pragmatic usages. Because being aware of the dialectical connection between the concrete/individual and the abstract/universal, Gongsun Long combined the two approaches together in his argument. So his semantic analysis was pragmatic orientated and his pragmatic inquiry was semantic based.

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[23] Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. D. Bodde (New York: Free Press, 1948), 90.

The third feature of Chinese language is that it lacks a linking verb similar to the English word "be" ("is/are"); the word *shi* 是 in ancient Chinese is a pronoun, substituting a subject or a statement and does not have ontological meaning.[24] But a linking verb is key to the recognition and understanding of a thing (subject) as a being. Thus, there must be some Chinese words similar to "be." As a matter of fact, *zai* 在 and *you* 有 are the words employed in ancient times to express ontological meaning. According to Wu Xiaoming, while *zai* confirms the existence of a particular thing, *you* convey an ontological sense more fundamental than *zai*.[25]

In his argument, Gongsun Long did use the word *you*. By this word sometimes he meant "to have" (e.g., "horses do have color") and sometimes he meant "there is" (e.g., "Had horses no color, there would be 'horse' only, how can one get [such a name as] 'white horse'?").[26] Nevertheless, we cannot see any semantic or metaphysical analysis Gongsun Long made on this word. What we do see is his discussion about the difference between "horse," "white," and "white horse." Because lacking an exact Chinese counterpart of "be," he was unable to define the three names in the form of "X is Y" and further explore the ontological character of these names by enquiring into the meaning and implication of "be." However, a metaphysical analysis was vital to his argument on the proposition "a white horse is not a horse" since the truth-value or correct use of terms lies in and determined by the ontological status of these terms. He must find a solution to the lack of a linking verb. What he found was not appealing to the word *zai* or *you*, but to the contradiction between names that his argument focused on. On the pragmatic level, it was a contradiction between a common sense and a witty statement (i.e., "a white horse is a horse" vs. "a white horse is not a horse"). On the semantic level, it was a contradiction between using a term and mentioning a term (i.e., horse as an animal vs. horse as a symbol). And on the conceptual level, it was a contradiction between an object and an attribute (i.e., "horse" vs. "white"). By deliberately creating this contradiction, Gongsun Long aimed to draw people's attention to the nature and importance of names as well as to claim that his philosophy or his theory of language (and actually that of his school) was name-centered.

The fourth feature of Chinese language is that it is a radical (or isolating) language; the grammatical functions of words are performed not through morphological changes but through the fixed positions of different types of words. For example, the form of a noun does not change in terms of gender and quantity, nor does that of a verb in terms of subject and tense. One can only figure out the exact meaning of a word in light of its conventional sense and its relation to other words in the same sentence, or with the assist of a form word. As a result, it is not easy to

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[24]   In her article published on a Chinese website on phenomenology, Xiao Yanan holds a different view, believing that "*shi*" was already used as a linking verb in pre-Qin times. But, few researchers suggest that it was a linking verb in the *Gongsun Long Zi*. (This article is no longer available online.)

[25]   Wu Xiaoming, *You yu Cunzai* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), 100.

[26]   *Gongsun Long Zi–Bai Ma Lun*.

differentiate the concrete (e.g., horse) from the abstract (e.g., horsehood) and the particular (e.g., one) from the universal (e.g., oneness).[27]

Regarding the proposition of the white horse, the three terms "horse," "white," and "white horse" play a key role in Gongsun Long's argument. One crucial point he made was that the term "white horse" combines "horse" and "white;" under this condition, it is completely different from the term "horse." Here, "white" refers not simply to a color but to an attribute; thus, it should be marked by the term "whiteness." To Gongsun Long, whiteness is not another term for "white"; instead, it represents a distinct entity. Once acting upon "horse," it changes the nature of that "horse" (i.e., horsehood) into a different kind (i.e., white horsehood). In other words, Gongsun Long treated "horse," "white," and "white horse" as different beings that are independent from one another and possess the equal ontological position. Yet, because having no relevant linguistic devices (such as suffixes) to employ, he had to use the same term to express different concepts. Unfortunately, his opponent and critics were limited to the daily usage or concrete sense of these key words and thus could not understand his worldview or metaphysical assumption.

Among the main schools of thought in pre-Qin times, the School of Names is very distinctive. While other schools explored the relationship of language to moral or sociopolitical problems and discussed how these problems could be solved through the rectification of names, the School of Names concentrates on the relationship of language to knowledge and investigates how truth could be achieved through the analysis of names. In ancient China, the *Gongsun Long Zi* is the most comprehensive and analytic work on language and its usage in understanding and acting upon the world. It reveals that the world is only open and meaningful to human beings in a symbolic way and that our comprehension of objects and their attributes cannot be separated from the language we use. It displays the connection between words and the metaphysical or realistic sphere as well as the correspondence between accurate thinking and proper employment of words. More importantly, it pursues linguistic analysis, that is, to review the nature and function of language by examining how words (1) connect to one another; (2) relate to things; (3) present meanings; (4) lead or mislead reasoning; (5) derive knowledge; and (6) are justified as correct words. Gongsun Long's linguistic analysis focuses mainly on nouns and nouns are interpreted as names. The reason that Gongsun Long and other thinkers in ancient China paid special attention to names is because in general names possess a triangular status: cognitively they are concepts, standing for ideas of real and virtual things; metaphysically they refer to entities, which provide foundations for linguistic operation and analysis; practically they can function as the criteria of thinking and behavior since each of them consists of a set of definitions. Yet, as most thinkers' examination of names is practical driven, using

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[27] The lack of punctuations also resulted in problems in communication. However, I do not discuss how it affects Gongsun Long's thought and its interpretations, considering that no punctuations were used in ancient Western texts either.

language as a tool to serve their sociopolitical projects, Gongsun Long's analysis of names is semantic driven, utilizing the use-mention distinction to illuminate the linguistic secrets of cognition and communication.[28] In doing so, he actually explains why language is vital to basic issues in philosophy and spotlights the connection between linguistic analysis and analytic reason.

According to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, the norm of thinking and worldview in a culture is shaped by the language the culture uses. What Gongsun Long's proposition encountered in the past 2,200 years suggests that Chinese language encourages holistic rather than analytic thinking as it has no devices to differentiate the concrete from the abstract and the particular from the universal. Gongsun Long's contemporaries and critics in later times misunderstand him and criticize him as a sophist. This is to a large extent because they do not recognize the use-mention distinction, nor do they realize that Gongsun Long used the same name in different senses (i.e., as a concept, or an entity, or a norm). Their misinterpretations are derived from the features of Chinese language mentioned above. However, one cannot draw such a conclusion that this language prevents its users from conceptual thinking or semantic analysis since it never dominates Chinese thought as a whole. Although the second part of this conclusion is true, namely the ancient Greek model of philosophy or pursuing knowledge as the ultimate goal is not the mainstream of Chinese culture, its first part is unverifiable. Gongsun Long's work alone indicates that abstract thinking and analytic reason is not alien to the Chinese mind at all.[29] What we can say based on the case of the white horse is that in expressing abstract ideas and analyzing complicated sentences, Chinese language seems not as efficient as Western languages. It is necessary to point out that the analytic spirit manifested in the School of Names was lost for more than 2,000 years and not reevaluated until Western logic and philosophy of language was introduced to Modern China. When discussing the reasons behind this phenomenon, many scholars believe that this is due to the fact that Chinese culture is practice-orientated; it prefers action to speech, experience to theory, and the current life to next life. Moreover, it treats language with significant reservation. For example, Confucianism claims the truth-value of language lies in its practical effect; Daoism holds that language should be abandoned or used only as a temporary tool; Chan 禪 Buddhism even suggests replacing language with intuition and sudden insights. One may wonder why it is the case as communication lives by language and all discussions on language are conducted through language. Most likely, the features of Chinese language once again play a key role in shaping cultural orientation and people's attitude toward, and actual use of, language. In other words, because this language is not very convenient in addressing highly abstract issues, people tend to talk about the topics on which this language works most effectively; in turn, these topics and the manner this language functions discourage people to pursue complicated linguistic analysis.

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[28]   For a more detailed analysis of this issue, see my article "Cracking the White-Horse Puzzle" *Journal of East-West Thought* 3, no 3 (September 2013): 97–106.

[29]   The Neo-Moist work is also an example in point.

To conclude, although Chinese language does not prevent its users from conceptual reasoning and semantic analysis, it does lead its users to confuse its designative and referential function as well as particular objects and universal attributes; therefore, the analysis of the white horse seems to support linguistic relativity or a weak version of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis.

# Chapter 7
# Speech

It is necessary to point out that linguistic practice is a vital issue in Chinese culture (and actually all cultures in the world) not only because culture cannot be separated from language but because the discourse on *ming* and *shi* itself exemplifies linguistic practice. Thus, the following three chapters will make a more detailed analysis of this issue by discussing three dimensions of discourse: speech, argument, and *dao*.

The graphic form of 言 (*yan*) consists of two symbols: The lower one 口 stands for "tongue," the upper one 三 means "to go up" in ancient time; the tongue goes up leads to one's speech. Because what one utters is words, *yan* is used as both a verb ("to speak") and a noun ("word"). According to the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, *yan* is a sort of "direct" (直 *zhi*) speech different from argument. Direct speech can be construed as follows: First, it refers to the straightforward statement of an idea, a feeling, or a fact; second, it is speaker oriented, i.e., it aims not at influencing the audience's attitude, but at expressing the speaker's position or assisting the speaker's behavior; third, it appeals to the meaning that words carry rather than to the rhetorical means of language. Ancient thinkers, especially the Confucians, Daoists, and Moists, paid special attention to the concept of *yan*. They examined *yan* from different positions and arrived at different conclusions. These conclusions together express Chinese understanding of *yan*.

## 7.1 Confucian Perspective on *Yan*

Confucius's view on *yan* fully confirms the above three points. In the first place, Confucius thought of speech as an ethical issue; suggesting one's *yan* is a mirror of one's nature; without knowing people's *yan*, you cannot really know their character.[1] Thus, *yan* is to him not merely a medium of communication, but a matter of self-cultivation as well. What to speak, how to speak, and with what attitude to handle speaking directly displays the extent of one's self-cultivation. He pointed out

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[1] *Lun Yu–Yan Yue*.

that the superior man is always careful with his *yan*[2] and does not say what is contrary to *li* (propriety).[3] In the second place, Confucius stressed the complementary relationship between language and behavior and thought of matching words with deeds as a necessity for the superior man. He claimed that "The virtuous will be sure to speak *correctly*, but those whose speech is good may not always be virtuous."[4] The distinction between the two sorts of people stresses the correspondence between what one says and what one does. Furthermore, the meaning of a speech is finally fulfilled in the act following that speech; thus the truthfulness of speaking depends on its practicability or consequences. In the third place, Confucius appreciated the function of words in carrying meaning and thought of playing with words as a lack of veracity. According to him, since "The business of laying on the colors follows (the preparation of) the plain ground,"[5] the requirement in speaking is simply to express meaning.[6] Any effort made beyond this requirement is unnecessary, and in many cases, fine words are far from true virtue.[7]

Confucius's followers further explored the relationship of *yan* to behavior, truth, and meaning. According to them, one's *yan* should be in harmony with one's behavior. As a basic Confucian text, the *Zhong Yong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*) argues that balance and harmony are the ideal characteristic state of mankind and the universe, and so are the principle of *yan* (words) and *xing* (acts); a superior man's "words correspond to his conducts, and his conducts correspond to his words."[8] Then, how could one bring words into correspondence with acts? Another Confucian text, the *Li Ji* (*Book of Ceremony*), gives an answer: If a thing can be said, but cannot be done, the superior man would not say it; if a thing can be done, but cannot be said, the superior man would not do it. Thus, neither his words go against his acts nor his acts go against his words.[9] If what one says is what one does, and what one does is what one says, words and acts are balanced and harmonious. Hence, the key to the relationship between language and behavior is not the *structure* of language and its *function* in behavior; rather, it is the extent to which a speaker's words *correspond* to his acts.

In the Western tradition, the correspondence of words to facts is the core of the relationship between language and truth. In ancient China, however, the central consideration is the correspondence between words and acts, so the truth-value of words is manifested in virtue more than in facts. To the Confucians, what can be called truthful must be sincere, and sincerity is a virtue that comes from the correspondence of words to acts. The *Zhong Yong* points out that it is the mutual

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[2] *Lun Yu–Xue Er.*

[3] *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan.*

[4] *Lun Yu–Xian Wen*, trans. James Legge 1970, 276.

[5] *Lun Yu–Ba Yi*, trans. Legge, 157.

[6] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong.*

[7] *Lun Yu–Xue Er.*

[8] *Zhong Yong*, Chap. 30.

[9] *Li Ji–Zi Yi.*

respect of his words to his acts that marks the superior man.[10] The *Li Ji* indicates that in his conduct, the superior man keeps in mind what he says; this makes him to be sincere.[11] Hence, truthfulness is defined in terms of sincerity, and sincerity refers to a person's speech and behavior. In other words, not only is good the nature of truth, but the good itself is first of all an individual and immanent requirement for the person's character. In this sense, language is not merely a tool of discovering and displaying truth; more importantly, it is a means through which one cultivates himself. When one makes words and acts fully correspond to each other, one does it in the sense of "bringing truth into action."

Because the Confucians inquired into the truth of words as continued with acts, they also judged the meaning of words in terms of conducts. This may be construed as a practical understanding of the meaning of "meaning." The *Li Ji* suggests that after addressing his clothes, the superior man makes virtual appearance; after making virtual appearance, he speaks virtual words; after speaking virtual words, he practices virtual conducts. The superior man feels shame if he speaks virtual words, but does not do virtual things.[12] Here, the meaning of appearances is displayed by words, and the meaning of words is displayed by behaviors. The Confucians never looked down at the importance of words. They thought of words as more essential than appearances in expressing one's character. But becoming a real person is by its nature a practical matter; so, one's words can only gain their meaning by corresponding to acts.

Among the Confucians, Mencius's idea of *yan* is more remarkable. For he not only cared about one's own words, but stressed analyzing others' words. Moreover, he paid attention to both the practical effect and the semantic meaning of words. Eventually, Mencius advanced a doctrine of *zhi yan* 知言 (understanding words). According to him,

> When words are one-sided, I know how *the mind of the speaker* is clouded over. When words are extravagant, I know how *the mind* is fallen and sunk. When words *are* all-depraved, I know how *the mind* has departed *from principle*. When words are evasive, I know how *the mind* is at its wit's end. *These evils* growing in the mind, do injury to government, and, displayed in the government, are hurtful to the conduct of affairs.[13]

From this passage, we can read the following points: First, an adequate understanding of *yan* includes how one as a speaker uses words to express his own meaning and how one as a listener grasps others' meaning through their words; by grasping others' words, one can understand better his own words. Second, words are the voice of the mind, what words say represents the mind of the speaker. How the speaker uses words to contact the social world corresponds to how the speaker disciplines his mental world. Third, if words represent the mind, and the mind can

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[10]  *Zhong Yong*, Chap. 13.

[11]  *Li Ji–Zi Yi.*

[12]  *Li Ji–Biao Ji.*

[13]  *Meng Zi–Gongsun Chou* A, trans, James Legge 1970, 191–192.

be judged as good or evil, then different kinds of speech can cause different effects. Thus, words are indeed a medium and transmitter between one's mental state and sociopolitical conducts.

These points, nevertheless, are not the essence of "understanding words." By understanding words, Mencius went beyond the sociopolitical implications of words and linked them to moral cultivation. When being asked how he surpassed Gao Zi, Mencius replied that "I understand words. I am skillful in nourishing my vast, flowing passion-nature."[14] By "passion-nature" he meant the "mate" and "assistant" of rightness and reason. The passion-nature is produced by the accumulation of right deeds.[15] Since Mencius suggested human nature is good, it is evident that nourishing one's passion-nature is certainly a practice of moral cultivation. But moral cultivation is not limited to nourishing passion-nature. It also includes understanding words as a complimentary factor. By "nourishing passion-nature," one keeps the right deeds in human nature, and by "understanding words," one develops the ability of distinguishing good from evil and right from wrong. Because of "nourishing passion-nature" "understanding words" receives an immanent basis from, and transforms into, moral realm, and because of "understanding words" the passion-nature displays and extends rightness and reason to sociopolitical affairs and acts. It is both nourishing passion-nature and understanding words that realize one's moral cultivation.

Mencius's theory of "understanding words" implies three levels of meaning. The first level is moral. On this level, "understanding words" is a means of exploring the mind and nourishing human nature. The second level is sociopolitical. On this level, "understanding words" is judgment about words as right and wrong and an evaluation of their impact on political and social affairs. The third level is semantic. On this level, "understanding words" is apprehending the meaning of words by tracking the context of words. This point can be seen as an important development of Confucius's theory of language.

As we said earlier, Confucius is the first thinker who explored the moral implication of language. He thought of striking a balance between words and acts as a sign of the superior man. His view of *yan* is speaker-centered. The significance of Mencius's "understanding words" is to understand words from the viewpoint that one is both a speaker and a listener. From the speaker-centered viewpoint, the core problem is how to *use* words. Thus, Confucius suggested that as far as words convey meaning, they meet the requirement; if going beyond this, words will confound virtue.[16] From the viewpoint of speaker–listener, however, the core problem is how to *interpret words* for even the speaker needs to interpret the words before he uses them. But not everyone has the same interpretation of the same words. Hence, an adequate Confucian theory of language has to present a semantic view. This job is done by Mencius.

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[14]  Ibid, trans. Legge, 189.

[15]  Ibid, trans, Legge, 190.

[16]  *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*.

One example of this is in discussing the meaning of a poem, Mencius suggested that those who explain the odes may not insist on one term so as to do violence to a sentence, nor on a sentence so as to do violence to the general scope. They must try with their thoughts to meet that scope.[17] Here, Mencius made two points. The first one is that the general "scope" (i.e., the whole context) determines the meaning of a word or sentence, and the sum of words or sentences does not equal to the general context. The second point is that an understanding of a text (or speech) comes from a fusion of the reader's ideas and the context. Underlying the two points is the assumption that words can carry meaning, but the meaning is not inherent in the words; rather, it is an outcome of both the context and the listener's interpretation. In this sense, words are the intermediate between the context and the reader (or listener).

This assumption is key to the Confucian semantic view of the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. On the one hand, words (*ming*) are important for words function as a starting point in grasping and examining a (linguistic, sociopolitical, and moral) context (*shi*). It is through words that the listener (or reader) enters into a meaning-world which combines their experience and the spiritual and empirical situations in which they live. On the other hand, words are a means rather than an end. As the meaning of words is derived from the context, the process by which the listener (or reader) grasps the meaning through the words is a process by which they communicate and react to that context. Hence, words (*ming*) are themselves understood and examined in terms of the (linguistic, sociopolitical, and moral) context (*shi*).

Because of the importance of words, Mencius thought of speech as a serious matter, and held that whereas the superior man knows when he should speak and when he should not, the mean men speak when they should not, and do not speak when they should.[18] Because of the intermediate function of words, Mencius believed that principles could be contained in language; he also stressed that a good speech is the one that uses simple words to convey far-reach meaning.[19]

## 7.2  Daoist Perspective on *Yan*

To understand better Mencius's theory of understanding words, we can compare him with Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, the two most well-known Daoists. As mentioned earlier, Lao Zi recognized the linkage between language and knowledge for names symbolize forms and things, hence people can grasp the characteristics of forms and things through names. However, in Lao Zi's view, what names symbolize are

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17  *Meng Zi–Wan Zhang* A, trans. Legge, 353.

18  *Meng Zi–Jin Xin* B.

19  Ibid.

concrete things, but not the eternal Dao that hides behind yet determines varied things. This is the limitation of language.

Mencius shared Lao Zi's point of view. Like Lao Zi, he did not believe language can fully capture the Dao, no matter whether it is metaphysical or moral. Mencius expressed his point by criticizing Gao Zi's view that "What is not attained in words is not to be sought for in the mind; what produces dissatisfaction in the mind, is not to be helped by passion-effort."[20] Mencius said: "This last, -when there is unrest in the mind, not to seek for relief from passion-effort, may be correct. But not to seek in the mind for what is not attained in words cannot be conceded."[21] Because the *xin* 心 (mind) is chief, the *qi* 氣 (passion-nature) is subordinate to the mind, and language (*yan*) is from and understood by the mind. To Mencius, the mind (or human nature) is innately good, and the good is always combined with rightness and reason. Since rightness and reason are the essence of the Heaven, the mind thus shares the Dao with the Heaven. The point, namely, "not to seek in the mind for what is not attained in words" is not correct for language is not the only access to the mind; and in the final sense, the meaning of language as well as the right and wrong of words can only be distinguished by the mind.

However, though both Lao Zi and Mencius were aware of the limitation of language, their attitude toward language are different. In terms of Lao Zi, what language can do is, at the best, to convey knowledge. Yet what knowledge brings to society is not benefit, but harm. To save society from harm, he claimed, language should be given up. As a contrast, Mencius never suggested abandoning language. On the contrary, he recognized the importance of understanding words in self-cultivation. To him, the limitation of language does not blot out the necessity of understanding words. And since language is the voice of the mind, it is always *a* means of understanding the mind and of self-cultivation.

Like Lao Zi and Mencius, Zhuang Zi also pointed out the limitation of language by saying that "The Dao cannot be heard; what can be heard is not It. The Dao cannot be seen; what can be seen is not It. The Dao cannot be expressed in words; what can be expressed in words is not It. Do we know the Formless which gives form to form? In the same way, the Dao does not admit of being named."[22] Following Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi thought of the Dao as an ultimate substance from which flow various myriad things. Things can be symbolized in words because of their concrete forms. The Dao provides things with forms, but the Dao Itself is formless, thus cannot be named.

Since language cannot grasp and express the metaphysical substance, how should we treat language? In answering this question, Zhuang Zi was different from Lao Zi and similar to Mencius. He suggested that "Words have what is valuable: the ideas they convey. But those ideas are a sequence of something else, and what that

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[20] *Meng Zi–Gongsun Chou* A, trans. Legge, 188.

[21] Ibid.

[22] *Zhuang Zi–Zhi Bei You*, trans. James Legge 1971, 256.

something else is cannot be conveyed by words."[23] In order to grasp that something else (meaning or the Dao), one should first use words as an access, instead of thoroughly giving up words, and second bypasses words as a tool, instead of totally sinking into words. This is also Mencius's position. Although their purposes of using words are different, they shared a similar understanding of words as a tool of serving their purposes.

In the foregoing comparison, we have touched the Daoist perspective on *yan*. If the core of Confucian perspective on *yan* can be said to be how to do things with words, then the core of Daoist perspective may be said to be how *not* to do things with words. For the key problem in linguistic practice is to the Daoists the harm words do to our life and our understanding of the Dao. Zhuang Zi explored this harm as manifested in different realms, and proposed his solution to the problem. His view on *yan* developed Lao Zi's thought and represented a Daoist theory of language in ancient China.

What is *yan*? In a general sense, it is words that people speak. To Zhuang Zi, though all *yan* is the voice of humans, the voice comes from and represents two sources: One is *zhen xin* 真心 (the true heart), the other is *cheng xin* 成心 (the predetermined mind). The true heart is the dominator of the real I who's mind is not polluted by any bias and who's conduct spontaneously tallies with the Dao. On the contrary, the predetermined mind is the one that has preconceived ideas. One who is dominated by this kind of mind losses his nature as a real human being and acts against the Dao. Accordingly, those words that are from the true heart "are inherently out of joint with things, and when they seem to be saying least may be saying most."[24] And those words that are from the predetermined mind divide the oneness into *ci* 此 (this) and b*i* 彼 (that) as well as judge *ci* and *bi* as *shi* 是 (right) or *fei* 非 (wrong).[25]

Here, Zhuang Zi drew a picture of the relationship between reality, mind, and language. On the one hand, there is a world that is independent from language, and all things in the world are equal because they are derived from the same Dao and exist in terms of their inherent rules. On the other hand, language enables (mis) understanding of realty in two ways: It either forces people to reconstruct reality in terms of a linguistic criterion of classification, or transfers people from limited and involved situations into the infinite and transcendent world. By nature, according to Zhuang Zi, the mind is structurally correspondent to reality since humankind shares the Dao with varied things. Yet the mind can correctly view and resonate with reality only when it uses language as a tool and is able to go beyond the limitation of language.

Zhuang Zi further revealed the limitation of language by analyzing three categories of reality. The first category is the grossness of things, the second one is the subtlety of things, and what is beyond the grossness and subtlety is the third category.

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[23] *Zhuang Zi–Tian Dao*, trans. Legge, 166–167.

[24] Angus Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (La Salle: Open Court 1989), 201.

[25] *Zhuang Zi–Qi Wu Lun*.

Zhuang Zi suggested that at the best, what words (*yan*) can deal with is the grossness of things. The subtlety of things can only be reached by *yi* 意 (ideas). Though people get ideas via the bridge of words, ideas cannot be reduced to words. Since words cannot even reach the subtlety of things, they are far from touching the third category of reality.[26] To Zhuang Zi, the range of reality is much larger than that of words. To talk about the appearance of things, people can use words; but to get the deep meaning of things, people should forget words; moreover, to search what words cannot reach, people have to keep silent, and let the true heart function.

The limitation of language, however, is manifested not only in what people cannot do with words, but also in what they do the most with words. In terms of Zhuang Zi, whereas some people speak fiercely and lay linguistic traps, some indulge in argument and play words carefully. Yet what they say is not derived from the true heart, but from the predetermined mind. Thus, the "this" and "right" in one's view are thought of as the "that" and "wrong" in another's view, and vice versa; consequently, no view can be set as a standard. Hence, what one says sounds like not speaking at all. Furthermore, the Dao is obscured by limited comprehension, and speech is obscured by florid expression.[27] The reason for this situation is that in speech words can be meaningful only when being used to indicate particular things or particular aspects of a thing. While a word is bound to a thing, it establishes a boundary for the thing, cuts off its relation to other things, and directs the speaker's attention to *some* of its features. That means the more specific a word's semantic implication, the more vague a word's metaphysical context. Starting from the predetermined mind, people use words to distinguish one thing from others, and build their understanding of reality on the word basis. Because a word can be used in different ways, the relation of the word to a particular thing varies from person to person. This leads to conflicts in views about the meaning of words and their relation to things.

To Zhuang Zi, this is a pseudo problem, namely, it is not so much ontological as epistemological. Whereas speech distinguishes "this" from "that" and "right" from "wrong," things themselves go beyond these distinctions; thus, examining from a dialectical point of view, "this," "that," "right," and "wrong" are relative or identical.

In his words,

> There is nothing that is not the "that" and there is nothing that is not the "this." Things do not know that they are the "that" of other things; they only know what they themselves know. Therefore I say that the "that" is produced by the "this" and the "this" is also caused by the "that."
> The "this" is also the "that." The "that" is also the "this." The "this" has one standard of right and wrong, and the "that" also has a standard of right and wrong. Is there really a distinction between "that" and "this"? Or is there really no distinction between "that" and "this"?[28]

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[26]  *Zhuang Zi–Qiu Shui.*

[27]  *Zhuang Zi–Qi Wu Lun.*

[28]  Ibid, trans. Wing-tsit Chan 1963, 182–183.

The answer is clear. It is in using words that we make distinctions for things. When talking about these distinctions, we believe we are dealing with things, but in fact we are dealing with images of things that words compose. Hence, to grasp the true face of things, we must break through the superficial distinctions between things, save our mind from being indulged in words, and find the axis of the Dao. Only after finding the axis, can we respond to the complexities of things and to the infinity of "right" and "wrong."[29]

Like the Confucians, Zhuang Zi recognized speech as a form of life and juxtaposed *tian lai* 天籟 (the voices of heaven), *di lai* 地籟 (the voices of earth), and *ren lai* 人籟 (the *speeches* that have no predetermined views). But unlike the Confucians, who enquired into what aim we should pursue and what rules we should follow in our everyday speech, Zhuang Zi was concerned about how we may view things in the shadow of words and get things done without falling into the linguistic trap. While the Confucian perspective reveals the social and political significance of speech, the Daoist perspective explores the ontological and epistemological implication of speech. Nevertheless, a full understanding of *yan* needs a conceptual and semantic perspective. This did not appear until the Neo-Moists developed their theory of language.

## 7.3   Moist Perspective on *Yan*

As early as in the work of Mo Zi, thinkers of the Moist School tried to conceptualize the relationship between *ming* and *shi* systematically. Mo Zi's three standards are not only rules of speech but criteria of ideas. Although these standards are based on, as well as aimed at, realistic sociopolitical situations, they are themselves a formal expression of the concepts of *ming* and *shi*. As followers of Mo Zi, the Neo-Moists inherited Mo Zi's orientation by defining varied topics of the *ming-shi* issue on the ground of criticizing existing views on language. In the *Mo Bian* (*Moist Disputation*), *yan* and *yan*-related notions function as a basis of all linguistic and logical issues.

According to the Neo-Moists, *yan* (speech) is to express conceptions, and a conception is based on a name that reflects the nature of a thing being denoted by the name; thus to speak is to represent the characteristics of that thing. The *Mo Bian* reads: "*Yan* is to emit a conception;"[30] that is to say, "*Yan* is to speak of names and is possible for anybody. To name a thing is like drawing a picture of a tiger. *Yan* is to make a statement which consists of names."[31] At least three points can be noted in this passage. First, *yan* no longer means any kind of speech, but refers only to those that focus on the understanding of a thing. Hence, *yan* might emerge as a

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[29]  Ibid.

[30]  *Mo Bian–Jing* A32.

[31]  *Mo Bian–Jing Shou* A32.

statement or proposition. Second, instead of being an activity of making arbitrary symbols, naming is a process of representing realistic things. Hence, *yan* is a true-or-false judgment, rather than random word-playing. Third, although it is constructed by individual names, what *yan* represents is a semantic relation between names. Hence, *yan* should be understood as a logical form of this relation, rather than merely a string of names.

In the *Mo Bian*, the point that *yan* is the emitting of a conception is supported by some related notions. These notions reveal *yan* on different levels or in different categories, and thus form a comprehensive theory of *yan*; in turn, they gain clear meaning and position in the setting of *yan*. These notions include *wei* 謂, *ci* 辭, and *shuo* 說. The *Mo Bian* reads: "*Wei* (calling): 'to name,' 'to present,' 'to make use of'."[32] For example, to give a dog the name "dog" is to name the dog; to refer to a dog by the term "dog" is to present the dog; and to do something by calling a dog is to make use of the word "dog."[33] This passage displays the three situations of *wei*,[34] and its point is threefold. First, *wei* is based on as well as aimed at a certain name instead of an idea. Its focus is either the relation between a name and a thing or the position of a name in a name group. Second, the core of *wei* is *ju* 舉: to present. For to name a thing implies an epistemic beginning of the thing, to present a thing with a name is derived from a understanding of the thing, and to make use of a name is a practical extension of the comprehension of a name. And third, *wei* is to present a name as a concept rather than merely a term. As the *Mo Bian* claims, calling a name is at the same time to present the substance of the thing being named for encoded in the name "dog" is people's understanding of the dog as a kind of animal; in using the name, people refer not only to an individual dog but to some characters shared by all dogs.[35] Because it is based on a name and is to present the name as a concept, *wei* can be said to be a concept-centered *yan*.

In contrast to *wei*, *ci* (judging) is focused on an idea, and its primary logical form is a judgment. According to the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, *ci* is etymologically related to the settlement of a lawsuit. And in the *Yi Jing* (*The Book of Changes*), *ci* refers to phrases used to judge good fortune or misfortune.[36] It is because of its relation to judgment that the *Mo Bian*, as Yang Fusun points out, treats *ci* as a logical terminology;[37] for example "To express ideas through judgment."[38] This point reveals that whereas the function of a *wei* (calling) is to present a concept, the essence of *ci* (judging) is to display an idea. Logically speaking, an idea can be a statement or

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[32] *Mo Bian–Jing* A79.

[33] *Mo Bian–Jing Shou* A79.

[34] It is necessary to indicate that "*wei*" (謂) in ancient Chinese language is interchangeable with "*ming*" (命): "to name a thing" or "to give a thing a name.".

[35] *Mo Bian–Jing* A31, *Jing Shou* A31.

[36] *Yi Jing–Xi Ci* I.

[37] Yang Fusun, et al. *Zhongguo Luoji Sixiang Shi Jaocheng* (Gansu: Gansu Renmin Chuban She 1988), 100.

[38] *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu*.

proposition, which implies a judgment on a thing. To the Neo-Moists, logical judgments have to meet certain requirements. They held that a judgment comes into being in accordance with reason/cause (*gu*), fully grows by means of corresponding to a pattern/principle (*li*), and is carried out in terms of a category/class (*lei*). It is unreasonable to make a judgment without clearly knowing where it is from.[39]

To the Neo-Moists, *gu* (reason), *li* (pattern), and *lei* (category) are not only the three necessary matters for judging, but more importantly, the features of things themselves. To make a logical (reasonable and proper) judgment is to make the words used in a saying correspond to the things being said. This is how the principle of things merges into the principle of thinking as well as how the Moists apply their doctrine of the *ming-shi* relationship to linguistic practice.

If *ci* (judging) can be said to be an idea-centered *yan*, then *shuo* (demonstrating) can be construed as a view-centered *yan*. For the aim of *shuo* is to illuminate the view about a statement. The *Mo Bian* reads: "*Shuo* is that which makes plain";[40] to make a view plain is "To bring out reasons (*gu*) by means of demonstrating."[41] Thus, *gu* is the key to *shuo*. According to Mo Zi, it is very important to distinguish and understand the *gu* of things.[42] His three standards of speaking are actually identical in spirit with distinguishing and understanding the *gu* of things. Following Mo Zi, the Neo-Moists further defined the concept of *gu*. The *Mo Bian* reads: "*Gu* (reason) is what a thing has to get before it comes into existence."[43] It divides *gu* into two types: *xiao gu* (necessary reason) and *da gu* (sufficient reason); having *xiao gu*, a thing may not be necessarily so; but without it, a thing must not be so; having *da gu*, a thing will be certainly so; and without it, a thing must not be so.[44] Undoubtedly, to bring out the reasons of a thing, and to distinguish necessary reasons from sufficient reasons is far more than making a judgment. Moreover, the aim of *shuo* is not merely to bring out reasons; rather, it needs to verify a (group of) judgment(s), to explain the relationship between reasons, and even to indicate the rules of verification and explanation. Only by so doing, can a view be illuminated.

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[39]   *Mo Bian–Da Qu*.

[40]   *Mo Bian–*Jing A72.

[41]   *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu*.

[42]   *Mo Zi–Jian Ai* B, *Fei Gong* C.

[43]   *Mo Bian–Jing* A1.

[44]   *Mo Bian–Jing Shou* A1.

# Chapter 8
# Argument

The Chinese word for "argument" is 辯 *bian*. Its graphic form consists of two characters: One is 辡 (*bian*), which means "two parties involved in a lawsuit"; the other is 言 (*yan*), which means "speaking." Any Chinese word that has 言 as its radical or component necessarily refers to speaking-related matters. In the graphic form of *bian*, *yan* is placed between the two arguing parties of a lawsuit. This metaphorically displays three aspects of the semantic scope of the word. First, *bian* originates in argument; where there is no argument, there would be no lawsuit. Thus, an argument is the basis of *bian*. Second, to settle a lawsuit is to make a judgment by examining the argument in the lawsuit. Hence, examination is the means of conducting *bian*. It is in this sense that the word "*bian*" is defined in the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*. Third, to make a judgment by examining the argument in a lawsuit is to distinguish right from wrong. Only when right has been distinguished from wrong is an argument settled. So discrimination is the aim of *bian*. It is important to mention that the discourse on *ming* and *shi* was itself an argument about how to understand the relationship between language and reality. Being aware of this fact, ancient Chinese thinkers necessarily discussed three questions: Why is there *bian*? How does "great *bian*" (大辯) differ from "small *bian*" (小辯)? And what are the criteria of *bian*?

## 8.1 The Roots of Argument

In the first place, ancient philosophers explored how *bian* comes into existence. Their exploration can be categorized in four respects: ideology, linguistics, politics, and human nature.

As a matter of fact, the Confucians encountered serious challenges from the Moists. In defending Confucianism, Mencius engaged in argument. He enquired into *bian* from an ideological perspective. To Mencius, *bian* derives from the conflict between the challenge to the *dao* of humanity and rightness as well as the defense of the *dao*. When being asked to comment on the saying that the non-Confucians all think of him as fond of disputing, Mencius replied: "Indeed, I am not

fond of disputing, but I am compelled to do it."[1] He claimed that it was because the world had fallen into decay and principles had faded away that Confucius promoted the *dao* of humanity and rightness. Yet, Yang Zhu's individualism and Mo Zi's universal love blocked Confucius's *dao*. The perverse doctrines of Yang Zhu and Mo Zi deluded the people, led to one-sided acts, and injured the conduct of social affairs and of government. Under these conditions, Mencius was compelled to dispute in order "to rectify men's hearts, and to put an end to those perverse doctrines, to oppose their one-sided acts and banish away their licentious expressions."[2]

This passage tells us that *bian* comes from the conflict of different doctrines. Whenever a doctrine appears, it often encounters challenges from some people. In order to verify a doctrine, one needs not only to explain the points that constitute the doctrine, but to refute those ideas that are different from or even opposite to his own. In this sense, *bian* is not merely a means of defending a doctrine, it is also a form of refining it. Mencius's view that human nature is innately good is actually a case in point. It is by arguing with Gao Zi that Mencius developed Confucius's idea of *ren* (humanity)  into a moral theory.

Yet, one may raise a question: Since *bian* is a form of developing a doctrine, it should be positive rather than negative in nature; then why did Mencius stress that he was not "fond of" disputing, but "compelled" to do so? The answer is embedded in Mencius's aim of engaging in *bian*. Mencius did not see winning the argument as his final purpose; instead, he treated *bian* as a means to fulfill sociopolitical ideals. In other words, since perverse doctrines seemed to block Confucius's *dao* of humanity and rightness, and to injure the conduct of sociopolitical affairs and of government, he was obliged to be involved in arguing with others. He did so, we may add, because spiritual power cannot be destroyed by material weapons, and faulty doctrines can only be criticized and replaced by correct doctrines through argument. Thus, in terms of its role in establishing an ideal society, *bian* stands in an indirect and secondary position; but in terms of its ideological function, *bian* is a necessary and powerful component for maintaining and developing the moral and cultural way of life. Mencius was keenly aware of this. That is why Mencius's work is grounded in both critical manner and eloquent style.

In contrast toMencius, Zhuang Zi took a different approach to *bian*. In his view, the reason people argue with each other is that they get stuck in and are fooled by superficial distinctions, or the relative right–wrong of things. For example, there was contention between the Confucian and Moist views on right–wrong. One side affirmed what was denied by the other side, and vice versa.[3]

According to Zhuang Zi, things are not only relative but share one identity. The distinctions among things derive not from things themselves; instead, they come from different standpoints. For instance, "When we look at them in the light of the

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[1] *Meng Zi–Teng Wen Gong* B.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Zhuang Zi–Qi Wu Lun*.

[D]ao, they are neither noble nor mean. Looking at them in themselves, each thinks itself noble and despises others. Looking at them in the light of common opinion, their being noble or mean does not depend on themselves."[4] Different standpoints make distinctions among things; looking at things from the standpoints other than that of the Dao makes people argue with one another. While a standpoint may discover a certain characteristic of a thing, it covers at the same time the identity of all things. Under this condition, *bian* leads people to confuse, rather than better understanding, things.

To this problem, Zhuang Zi's solution is to avoid *bian*. He held that the great Dao has no name, and the great argument needs no words.[5] His point is that a name or word is a distinction; to denote a thing with a name is to draw a dividing line between that thing and others. As a thing's individuality is described with greater linguistic clarity, its universality becomes ontologically vaguer. Both standpoint and argument consist of words. A standpoint possesses its orientation through the tendentiousness of words and defends its orientation by means of argument; in turn, a debate encourages different standpoints to strengthen their distinction at the expense of weakening their relativity. Consequently, words convert the ontological identity of things into linguistic distinctions and lead people to wallow in linguistic distinctions rather than following the nature of things. This is the reason that *bian* exists and that it should be given up, according to Zhuang Zi.

Like Zhuang Zi, the Legalists also believed that *bian* should be renounced. But the reason they gave is different from Zhuang Zi's. To the Legalists, *bian* is merely word-playing and can bring no benefit, only harm, to the state and government. Shang Yang (ca. 395–338 BCE) held that argument is one of the ten matters that must lead a state to destruction. Those who are good at talking and arguing please the ruler and take higher positions by playing at words. Though their talk and argument is useless, the ruler likes it. Influenced by these debaters, more and more people concentrate on playing at words, and no longer pursue material production. Thus, the state becomes weaker and weaker.[6] To Shang Yang, the connivance of the ruler is the main reason that useless talk and argument exist. His point was echoed by Han Fei, the most influential Legalist.

According to Han Fei, argument derives from the ruler's lack of sagacity. He explained that in a state ruled by a sagacious ruler, decrees are the final criterion of all speeches, and laws are the final criterion of all conducts. If a speech is in accord with decrees, the speaker will gain great benefit; otherwise, he will be guilty of felony. Under these conditions, foolish persons fear being punished for speech, and wise persons do not contend with each other. Hence, there would be no argument. Things are different, however, in a chaotic state. The ruler not only likes those speeches that go beyond common sense and seek wide knowledge, but respects those behaviors that separate one from the masses and go against one's superiors.

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[4]  Ibid, trans. James Legge, 1971, 194.

[5]  Ibid.

[6]  *Shang Zi–Nong Zhan*.

Consequently, while the number of scholars increases, the number of farmers and soldiers decreases. While heretical beliefs and doctrines expand, decrees and laws wither.[7]

In Han Fei's view, a sagacious ruler is the one who examines and controls speeches with decrees, stifles, and punishes argument with laws. A non-sagacious ruler is the one who allows the free expression of different opinions and encourages argument for any issue or affair. This Legalist standard assumes that decrees and laws have set the patterns of speeches and behaviors and have already distinguished right from wrong. Thus, argument cannot further people's understanding of the patterns and distinctions, but damages the authority of decrees and laws. Since law and argument are diametrically opposed to each other, the ruler's choice between law and argument will decide the fate of a state. In the Legalists' eyes, the ruler's will is far more powerful than people's epistemic interests. Hence, only with the connivance of the ruler can argument exist and develop.

But, one may ask: Does argument necessarily violate laws? Or, could existing laws fully display right and wrong in all issues and affairs? The Legalists did not give an answer to this question. Actually, they did not care about this kind of questions at all. What they were concerned was the political result of all things, including the utility of language. *Bian* must be prohibited because it can bring no benefit to a state and government. Looking at *bian* from the Legalist viewpoint of *ming* (names), decrees and laws are seen as political names, which should be used to rectify things; but the essence of *bian* is to challenge and rectify these political names. Looking at *bian* from the Legalist viewpoint of *shi* (things), any speech should be examined in terms of its sociopolitical utility; but, *bian* is full of sophistic words that violate the nature of things and has nothing to do with the productivity and strength of a state. In spite of the fact that the Legalists' understanding and treatment of *bian* corresponded to their doctrine of *ming-shi*, they nevertheless oversimplified the reason that *bian* exists and blotted out the rich significance of *bian*.

In contrast to the above perspectives and solutions, Xun Zi took a very positive position on *bian*: He not only held that the gentleman must engage in *bian*, but believed all people are born with a natural capacity for it. In other words, *bian* cannot and should not be given up, for *bian* is itself a human characteristic. To blot out *bian* is to blot out one of the ways in which humans differ from animals.

Xun Zi suggested that what makes the human being human is not that the human has two feet and no fur; instead, it is that the human is capable of *bian*.[8] Here, *bian* refers mainly to discriminating among human relationships set by *li* (propriety). In Xun Zi's view, the nature of *bian* is discrimination, and the rules of discrimination consist in propriety.[9] In this sense, to be human means to make discriminations in everyday life and to distinguish right from wrong in human affairs. Thus, where

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[7]  *Han Fei Zi–Wen Bian*.

[8]  *Xun Zi–Fei Xiang*.

[9]  Ibid.

humans exist, there is *bian*. It is nonsense to ask whether or not we should avoid *bian*, since *bian* is a manifestation of human nature.

To Xun Zi, however, making discriminations does not equal to engaging in *bian shuo* 辯說 (argument and demonstration). Discrimination is far more than a linguistic and epistemic matter. Argument and demonstration is, however, the most basic means of discrimination for the aim of discrimination is to differentiate *shi* 是 (this or right) from *fei* 非 (not-this or wrong). But, whereas the wise person affirms this (or right) and denies not-this (or wrong), the foolish person affirms not-this (or wrong) and denies this (or right).[10] Hence, there is no clear discrimination between *shi* and *fei*, and propriety, as the *dao* of human society, does not function. Under these conditions, the gentleman can only rectify epistemic and social chaos by argument and explanation. As Xun Zi put it, "Now the sage-kings have passed away, the world is in confusion, and evil doctrines arise. The gentleman has no power to control the people and no punishments to prohibit them from evil. Therefore, he must have recourse to argument and explanation."[11] It is through argument and demonstration that confusion can be clarified, evil doctrines criticized, right affirmed, and wrong denied. Thus, "the gentleman must make *bian*."[12]

"The gentleman must make *bian*." The "*bian*" here means both argument and discrimination: because of argument, discrimination can be established and carried out, and because of discrimination, argument gains its social justification and epistemic value. Since the essence of discrimination is propriety (*li*), i.e., the *dao* of human society, then argument belongs to the realm of the *dao* by virtue of revealing, illuminating, and defending the *dao*. To Xun Zi, *bian* is on the one hand a general human characteristic, and on the other, a specific charge of the gentleman. This makes *bian* unavoidable.

## 8.2  Great Argument and Small Argument

In exploring the reasons why there is *bian*, Chinese thinkers came to question the nature of *bian*. They were aware that even if *bian* is unavoidable, not every argument or discrimination is equally acceptable and valuable. Thus, they divided *bian* into two classes: *da bian* 大辯 (great argument) and *xiao bian* 小辯 (small argument) and analyzed their difference.

As we know, it was by arguing with the Confucians that Mo Zi and his followers presented their doctrine. This led them to pay special attention to the nature of *bian*. What, then, is the nature of *bian*? The Neo-Moists held that

> *Bian* is to (1) clarify the distinction between right and wrong, (2) enquire into the rules of order and chaos, (3) illuminate the points of similarity and difference, (4) seek out the

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[10]  *Xun Zi–Xiu Shen*.

[11]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*, slightly modified from Burton Watson, 1967, 146.

[12]  *Xun Zi–Fei Xiang*.

principles of words and things, (5) settle the beneficial and the harmful, and (6) resolve confusion and doubt. To *bian* is to explore the reasons for varied things as well as to study the correspondence between words and things.[13]

This passage is brief, but it clearly expresses the Moist view about the aim, function, and essence of *bian*. To clarify the distinction between right and wrong, to illuminate the points of similarity and difference, and to seek out the principles of words and things, these are the aim of *bian*. Hence, the aim of *bian* is epistemological in nature. To inquire into the rules of order and chaos, to settle the beneficial and the harmful, and to resolve confusions and doubts are the function of *bian*. They can be construed as the practical application of *bian*'s epistemological outcomes. To explore the reasons for varied things and to study the correspondence between words and things, this is the essence of *bian*. With such an aim, function, and essence, we may say that *bian* not only realizes the identity of logical thinking and truth-expounding, but settles the relation between words and things.

Based on their understanding of the aim, function, and essence of *bian*, the Moists actually disclosed the nature of *bian*. While one may still be confused by the semantic tension between *bian* as argument and as discrimination, the Moist view on *bian* transforms the tension into a logical consistency. Argument is thus a form of discrimination for to argue is to shape the meaning of things through differentiation. In turn, discrimination is part of the content of argument for the process of arguing is the process of distinguishing one thing from another. Once the discrimination is clarified, confusions and doubts can be resolved, and the beneficial and the harmful settled; furthermore, the rules of order and chaos can be figured out, and the distinction between right and wrong made clear. It seems that in the final analysis, any discrimination is a language-related act: Not only are similarity and difference manifested in corresponding things to words, but also the understanding of similarity and difference as well as the expression and demonstration of the understanding relies on words. Hence, language entails the mutual dependence between discrimination and argument.

To the Moists, discrimination is the core of argument, and argument is the way toward discrimination; because neither of them can come into existence without language, language becomes the key to *bian*. *Bian* is to discriminate by arguing the correspondent relation between things and words. This is the nature of *bian*. For the Moists, great *bian* are those disputes that reflect the aim, function, and essence of *bian*, and small *bian* are those that do not.

The Daoist stand on *bian* is contrary to the Moist viewpoint. The Daoists maintained that those disputes that are aimed at discrimination are small *bian*, and those that transcend language are great *bian*. As we know, Lao Zi discredited language. He consequently rejected argument, claiming that "True words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not true. A good man does not argue; he who argues is not a good man."[14] To Lao Zi, words are artificial, hence can neither be equal to

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[13] *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu.*

[14] *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 81, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 176.

the nature of things nor display the eternal Dao. While words are used to talk about things, things that are being talked about are no longer as true as things in Nature for "Nature says few words."[15] The more beautiful words are, the farther away from Nature they are. By the same token, argument has this character, too. In using words, people have departed from the nature of things; in arguing with each other, people actually engage in playing at words rather than in returning to Nature. And the more analytic people are, the more bombastic they become. In this sense, all arguments are small *bian* because they must rely on language, and the only great *bian* is not-to-argue.

Like Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi also discredited argument and separated great *bian* from language. He held that great Dao has no name, great argument says nothing; the Dao manifests, but does not speak; speech argues, but does not work.[16] In terms of Zhuang Zi, even if the Dao has no name, it functions everywhere, and although great argument says nothing, everything is as clear as it is. Under the condition that people always try to grasp things through names and to make discrimination through argument, it is extremely important to understand "the argument that requires no speech or the Dao that cannot be named."[17]

Both Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi argued that great *bian* remains independent from the thinking model and the value pattern that language establishes, and small *bian* indulges itself in that model and pattern. But the focus of each of their positions is different. Whereas in Lao Zi, it is language that leads people to distort the nature of things; in Zhuang Zi, it is language that transforms the relativity and identity of things into discrimination.

According to Zhuang Zi, because discrimination between "this" or "right" and "that" or "wrong" is a linguistic matter and has no ontological necessity, losing or winning an argument is meaningless. In other words, "this" is "that," "that" is "this," and "right" can be "wrong," "wrong" can be "right." All these differences are at the same time similarities; thus, argument experiences no victory, just as it experiences no defeat. For all these opposite concepts and values as well as all debates based on these concepts and values are interdependent and complementary, and consequently "relative and arbitrary because they are external to the intrinsic nature of things under consideration."[18] It is in this sense that Zhuang Zi believed that argument about who is right and who is wrong between the Confucians and the Moists was futile and that the distinctions the School of Names made between hardness and whiteness as well as similarity and difference were small *bian*.

From Xun Zi's point of view, however, the problem of Daoism is that it over-stresses Heaven and ignores the importance of humans.[19] If one ignores humans,

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[15]  Ibid, Chap. 23, trans. Chan, 151.

[16]  *Zhuang Zi–Qi Wu Lun.*

[17]  Ibid, Chan, 187.

[18]  Michelle Yeh, "The Deconstructive Way: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Chuang Tzu," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 10, no 2 (June 1983), 104.

[19]  *Xun Zi–Jie Bi.*

one may not really understand Heaven, for "those who are good at discussing Heaven must show proofs from the human world."[20] The Daoist view of *bian*, especially Zhuang Zi's view, overstresses the nature of things and ignores social values; and it asks *bian* merely to recognize and follow the natural existence of things and denies the necessity of discrimination. This certainly goes against the true aim of *bian*.

Then, what is the true aim of *bian*? Xun Zi suggested that it is to bring the mind into accord with *dao*.[21] *Dao* here mainly refers to the principles of the human world, including *ren* (humanity), *yi* (rightness), *xin* (truthfulness), and especially *li* (propriety). To Xun Zi, it is because of following the *dao* that humans are different from animals, a state can exist and be in order, and the dividing line between right and wrong can remain clear. Thus, the *dao* is the very standard of language and behavior. All speeches, arguments, and discourses should be in accord with the *dao*. If one's words are not in accord with the *dao*, then "it is better for one to keep silent than to speak and argue."[22]

Based on his understanding of the aim of *bian*, Xun Zi described three states of argument and demonstration: the sage's *bian*, the gentleman's *bian*, and the mean man's *bian*. The sage's *bian* is such that it is not considered and designed in advance, but once started, it must be proper in content, refined in form, and it can handle varied situations without exhaustion. The gentleman's *bian* is such that it is considered and designed in advance; though being short, it is worthy of being listened to; its form is literary, its content is truthful, and it is not only knowledgeable but honest. The mean man's *bian* is such that it has no guiding principle and practical effect; it can neither assist the king nor unite people; even if it sounds well balanced, it can only exaggerate and stand out as arrogant in nature.[23]

The difference between the sage's *bian* and the gentleman's *bian* is one of degree, not essence. For although the sage speaks a great deal and illuminates the principles of human *dao*, and the gentleman speaks less and follows these principles, both are based on the *dao* of humans, and aim at the realization of an ideal society. So their *bian* belongs to great *bian*. But the difference between the sage and gentleman's *bian* and the mean man's *bian* is in kind, not in emphasis for the mean man speaks a great deal, yet none of his words fit the *dao* of humans. On the contrary, he glosses over evil doctrines and beautifies heretical ideas so that the distinction between right and wrong is confused and social order is replaced by chaos. Therefore, his *bian* belongs to the category of small *bian*.

Comparing Xun Zi's view to the Moist and Daoist view on great *bian* and small *bian*, we can clearly see the difference. Whereas the Moist view stresses the logical and epistemic character of *bian*, and the Daoist view focuses on the linguistic and conceptual bias of *bian*, Xun Zi paid much attention to the social and political

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[20]  *Xun Zi*, trans. Watson, 163.

[21]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

[22]  *Xun Zi–Fei Xiang*.

[23]  Ibid.

function of *bian*. There is no doubt that a full understanding of *bian* can only result from a synthesis of all these views. Xun Zi's view, however, has an added significance. For it not only stands for the Confucian position, but also displays a general trend of its own time. As we can see, the Moists always incorporated sociopolitical matters into their logical and conceptual analysis. Even the thinkers from the School of Names did not exclude the practical function of *bian*. Consider a passage from the *Deng Xi Zi*:

> So-called great *bian* is that which identifies the performance of heaven and earth, indicates all things under heaven, chooses the good and eliminates the evil, and makes proper responses in different situations. By so doing, it makes contributions and realizes virtues. On the contrary, small *bian* consists of heretical words and comes from an alien *dao*. It indulges in offending others with words and acts so that people do not know its principle. The only reason that causes small *bian* is that the knowledge it relies on is too meager.[24]

Here, the fundamental criterion by which the *Deng Xi Zi* distinguishes great *bian* from small *bian* is ethical rather than logical. This criterion is actually the one that Xun Zi employed.

## 8.3  Criteria of Argument

To the Chinese thinkers discussed here, the difference between great *bian* and small *bian* is manifested not only in the aim, function, and essence of a particular debate, but also in the principles, rules, and styles that disputers used to participate in argument. These principles, rules, and styles closely relate to, and evidently display, the aim, function, and essence of argument. Thus, they can be thought of as the criteria of *bian*. To further analyze the difference between great *bian* and small *bian*, Chinese thinkers discussed in detail these principles, rules, and styles.

By principle of *bian* is meant the general laws people should obey in dealing with *bian*. Xun Zi had a comprehensive understanding of *bian*. He thought of *bian* as a discourse consisting of explaining, listening, and arguing; suggested such a principle of *bian* as "to explain ideas with a benevolent mind, to listen to others' words with a mind willing to learn, and to argue with others with a fair mind."[25] The meaning of this principle is twofold: On one hand, it reveals the logical components of *bian*, and on the other, it exposes the ethical character of the gentleman's *bian*.

In the first place, to engage in *bian* is not to wrangle or simply to aim at winning over the opponent's words; rather, it is aimed at distinguishing right from wrong and justice from injustice. This entails listening and explaining. To listen is to learn what may be reasonable or acceptable in the opponent's words; to listen is also to learn what mistake one may have made but not been aware of until it is pointed out

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[24] *Deng Xi Zi–Wu Hou*.

[25] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

by an opponent. Hence, listening excludes the simple intention of overpowering the opponent.[26] To explain is to explore and display the reason or foundation of the thing under discussion, and to explain is to examine and demonstrate the points one holds in argument. Hence, explaining makes *yan* (speech) fit the principles[27] and enables *bian* to expose all the reasons for whatever is under consideration.[28] Surely, without arguing, right and wrong, justice and injustice cannot be distinguished. But without listening, arguing would go to extremes, and without explaining, arguing would fall into irrationality. Considering listening and explaining as part of *bian* means *bian* is not merely an event of disputing with others for private purposes; instead, it is a process of seeking truth and good for public interests.

In the second place, the key to *bian* is the Dao. Xun Zi maintained that the true aim of *bian* is to make the mind accord to the Dao, which consists of basic virtues and values. Just as the Dao entails the benevolent mind, the fair mind, and the mind willing to learn, so only can the gentleman with the benevolent mind, the fair mind, and the mind willing to learn display as well as realize the Dao. Xun Zi thus described the gentleman engaged in argument as follows:

> [He] is not moved by the censure or praise of the mob; he does not try to bewitch the ears and eyes of his observers; he does not cringe before the power and authority of eminent men; he does not feign delight in the words of the ruler's favorites. Therefore he can abide by the Way [Dao] and not be of two minds, can endure hardship without betraying his ideals, and can enjoy good fortune without overstepping the bounds of good conduct.[29]

This passage portrays the performance of the benevolent mind, the fair mind, and the mind willing to learn in argument. It also implies that we cannot separate the epistemic contents of *bian* from its ethical character for seeking truth is at the same time to behave morally; right and wrong can only be distinguished when the disputer has the virtue of sincerity.

Similarly, The *Lü's Spring and Autumn* takes the Dao as the key to the principle of *bian*, too. It suggests that people should engage in timely discussion to reveal the Dao and should not rashly argue with others; once an argument starts, it has to fit the rules of *bian*.[30] Here, *bian* is construed as the means of seeking the Dao, and in turn, the Dao gives meaning and boundary to *bian*. In other words, the ultimate aim that engages us in *bian* is not to wrangle for personal reasons but to understand the Dao. To understand the Dao is to grasp the principles of heaven, earth, and humankind. This is a serious task that we should not take lightly. And since we reveal the Dao through *bian*, how we carry on *bian* determines whether we can reach the Dao. It is in this sense that the *Lü's Spring and Autumn* holds that argument has to fit the rules of *bian*.

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[26]  *Xun Zi–Xing E.*

[27]  *Xun Zi–Ru Xiao*.

[28]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

[29]  *Xun Zi*, trans. Watson, 148–149.

[30]  *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Zun Shi.*

The second criterion of argument is the rules of *bian*, which means the standards that people follow to carry out *bian*. With respect to this issue, different schools have a similar understanding. The rules include, in terms of the *Lü's Spring and Autumn*, (1) knowing reasons, (2) grasping patterns, and (3) examining categories.

Regarding knowing the reasons of things, Mo Zi claimed that "exploring reasons"[31] and "illuminating causes"[32] are the key task of *bian*. And the Neo-Moists gave a further clarification to the term *gu* (reason/cause) by saying that "The *gu* of something is what it must get before it will come about."[33] The *Lü's Spring and Autumn* indicates that a thing that exists must have its reason; if one only knows the existence of the thing, but does not know its reason, one actually knows nothing about the thing.[34] That is why the *Lü's Spring and Autumn* suggests the standard of "knowing reasons."

Regarding the second rule of *bian*, it is Deng Xi who first maintained the notion of following the *li* 理 (pattern) of things.[35] Since to understand things is to grasp their pattern, *li* is also the criterion and basis of speech and argument. Chinese thinkers assumed that the rule of thinking aims to grasp the pattern of things; when speech and argument follow the rule of thinking, they at the same time reflect the pattern of things. This assumption is manifested in Mo Zi's three standards of language use. When the Neo-Moists claimed a proposition grows up according to *li*,[36] the term "*li*" stands for an identity of logic and history. It is based on this assumption that the *Lü's Spring and Autumn* holds that the *li* is the criterion of right and wrong; argument that does not meet the *li* must be false, and understanding that does not fit the *li* must be spurious.[37]

Regarding the third rule of *bian*, i.e., examining categories, Deng Xi suggested that the purpose of "*bian* is to distinguish different categories so that they may not hinder each other, and to organize different bases so that they may not disturb each other."[38] This point reveals the importance of "types/classes" in understanding and thinking. To Mo Zi, "type" is a core concept. He thought of "knowing types"[39] and "enquiring into classes"[40] as the basis of cognitive activity and sociopolitical practice. The Neo-Moists further indicated that the class is the ground on which

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[31]  *Mo Zi–Jian Ai C.*

[32]  *Mo Zi–Fei Gong C.*

[33]  *Mo Bian–Jing* A, trans. Angus Graham, 1978, 263.

[34]  *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Shen Ji.*

[35]  *Deng Xi Zi–Wu Hou.* The word *li* (理) is defined as "to process a jade" in the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*. Duan Yucai explains that *li* originally refers to the grain of an unprocessed jade and that to process a jade is to reshape it in terms of its grain. The grain of a jade is actually its structure.

[36]  *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu.*

[37]  *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Li Wei.*

[38]  *Deng Xi Zi–Wu Hou.*

[39]  *Mo Zi–Gong Shu.*

[40]  *Mo Zi–Fei Gong* C.

induction and deduction can be carried out.[41] Influenced by the Moists, Xun Zi
suggested that "category" is the key to understanding things and the key to par-
ticipating in argument. "Category" defines the nature of things; "things that are not
contrary to each other in category share the same rule."[42] On the other hand,
"category" is the basis of inference; "to infer without going against the category"[43]
is a requirement for *bian*.

The last criterion of argument is the styles of *bian*, which means the manners of
the people participating in argument. Generally speaking, the styles of *bian* can be
determined by the principles of *bian*, and what they display is not only the debaters'
understanding of *bian* but their ethical character as well.

The Moists stressed the logical aspect of *bian*. Thus, their discussion focused on
a manner related to logic. Mo Zi held that in argument, those who have no *gu*
should give in to those who have *gu*.[44] Here, the "*gu*" means both "causes" and
"reasons": In referring to things, it means "causes," in referring to thought, it means
"reasons;" surely, when reflected in thought, the causes of things become the
reasons for the argument and the inference. To the Moists, reasons are the only key
to argument; whoever grasps the reasons wins the argument. That is why they
insisted on "illuminating causes" and "exploring reasons." Of course, "illuminating
causes" may unfold throughout the whole process of a particular argument, and
reasons may not be the prerogative of one side alone. Being aware of these situ-
ations, the Neo-Moists distinguished "sufficient reason" from "necessary reason"
and analyzed various relations between the premise and the conclusion. All this
work was done by maintaining the importance of the reasons in *bian*.

The Moist style of *bian* is mainly based on logic. The Moists displayed the
extent to which they explored the universal rules of thought and how they employed
logical categories in argument and inference. This is, however, not merely a logical
matter. Trust in reason and the spirit of seeking truth are implied in the Moist style.
This kind of trust and spirit tally with the aim of great *bian* and keep argument and
inference on the right track.

Similarly, Xun Zi construed the styles of *bian* as not merely a logical issue. If a
certain style of *bian* is determined by the aims of *bian*, then it must have ethical
implications. Thus, Xun Zi revealed the styles of *bian* from a synthetic position.
This can be seen in his suggestion of the three prohibitions in argument.

The first prohibition is not to wrangle with the other party.[45] To Xun Zi,
argument is different from wrangling. Whereas argument appeals to explanations to
bring out reasons, wrangling does not give reasons at all. "To argue without giving
reasons is to wrangle.[46] When one does not bring out reasons in argument, what one

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[41]  *Mo Bian–Xiao Qu*.

[42]  *Xun Zi–Fei Xiang*.

[43]  *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming*.

[44]  *Mo Zi–Fei Ru* B.

[45]  *Xun Zi–Bu Gou*.

[46]  *Xun Zi–Rong Ru*.

seeks is not discrimination between right and wrong, but emotional fulfillment. This certainly goes against the true aim of *bian*. Thus, the gentleman can neither allow his emotions to appear in argument "nor argue with those who replace reasons with their emotions."[47]

The second prohibition is not to seek winning a victory in argument. The reason that Xun Zi proposed this prohibition is that to win a victory is not identical to holding onto the truth. For in many cases, people involved in argument aim not at distinguishing right from wrong and justice from injustice; instead, all they desire is to overpower the other party. They believe the one who stops last wins the argument. This is called by Xun Zi "the understanding of the menial."[48] If one thinks of victory as the first or even the only task of *bian*, one will change arguing into wrangling, and wrangling is what the gentleman wishes to avoid.

The third prohibition is not to overdo word examination. It is necessary to analyze words in argument; but this cannot be overdone. To Xun Zi, the value of gentleman's *bian* is manifested not in excessive word examination, but in maintaining appropriate propriety (*li*) and rightness (*yi*).[49] Only in meeting propriety and rightness can *bian* function in solving sociopolitical problems.

"Not wrangling with others" is desirable for rational analysis is much more valuable and reliable than emotional display. "Not seeking to win a victory" is wiser than a desire for satisfaction since truth speaks louder than words in the long run. "Not overdoing word examination" is preferable to mincing phrases because nothing is more important than finally distinguishing right from wrong. The gentleman's style of *bian* always keeps in mind and carries out the three prohibitions. To seek the unity of logical thinking and moral cultivation is the Confucian ideal of *bian*.

In terms of their stands on argument, Chinese thinkers can be divided into two groups: The first consists of the Daoists and the Legalists, who faulted argument and suggested prohibiting it; the second includes the Confucians, the Moists, and the scholars from the School of Names and the Syncretist School, who affirmed argument and believed it is necessary. The Legalist School went too far in taking political utility as the only criterion of argument so that it failed to recognize the positive effect of argument on sociopolitical practice. This is one of the reasons why it has no powerful influence on scholars' discourses in Chinese culture. The Daoist position revealed the limitation of language by examining the roots of argument. Although their suggestion of giving up argument is not practicable, their revelation of the limitation of language leads the understanding of argument to a deeper level, that is, we cannot judge the truth-value of an argument without grasping the nature of the words on which the argument is based.

Undoubtedly, the Confucians not only developed a theory of argument but actively participated in debates. To them, argument is a powerful means of

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[47] *Xun Zi–Quan Xue*.

[48] *Xun Zi*, trans. Watson, 169.

[49] *Xun Zi–Bu Gou*.

distinguishing truth and good from falsity and evil. Moreover, it follows that argument is itself a form of sociopolitical practice in the sense that while it aims at illuminating the universal truth, argument in fact comes to realize that truth in seeking the good life. In other words, not only can argument push forward the understanding of problems under discussion, but it is also a necessary part of the practice of approaching the political and moral ideal of the lifeworld. This entails the balance between social argument and self-cultivation. It is because of this balance that the Confucians proposed their criteria of argument.

We can say that the Confucian perspective on argument is ethics-centered, while the Dialecticians and especially Neo-Moists' perspective is logic-centered. To them, argument is based on language analysis and logical rules. Then, it is proper to infer that the direct aim of all arguments is to illuminate the points of similarity and difference and to seek out the principles of words and things. In doing so, we make our thinking follow the nature of things under discussion; when the words we use are in accordance with the things we treat, we grasp the truth and win the argument. From the Moist point of view, the key to argument is not to persuade the other party to accept this party's stand; rather, it is to find out the correct relation between language and reality and continually to adjust our understanding of this relation in everyday communication. This can be done only in the form and process of argument.

It is essential to point out that no matter what differences remain among the views on argument, Chinese thinkers who affirmed argument shared a common position, that is, the nature of argument is not merely epistemic or rhetorical, but more importantly, it is synthetic and practical. That is to say, displaying truth and knowledge is neither the only purpose nor the ending point of argument; on the contrary, it is a means and the starting point of seeking the good life. Argument is the linguistic dimension of ethical and political practice; its values and beliefs are verified and manifested in the social action of distinguishing right from wrong and of replacing conflicts with harmony.

# Chapter 9
# Dao

The graphic form of 道 (*dao*) consists of a radical and a character. The radical "辶" (*chuo*) means "to walk" or "to pass through." It is natural to assume that a way logically enables a walk. Yet, a walk is not an object but an action. Thus, while "*dao*" signifies an object: a road, it also implies an action: to lead one to some destination. This is certainly a basic function of *dao*. The character "首" (*shou*) initially means one's "head" and metaphorically refers to the leader, the primary, or the original. This character designates the features of *dao*, that is, unlike a *jing* 徑 (path) that is small, indirect, and even evil, a way is great, major, and correct.[1] The *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* interprets "*dao*" as a road on which people walk. Thus the English term "way" is the most appropriate counterpart of "*dao*." Consequently, *dao* as a noun designates "pattern" or "principle" for what is head, primary, and correct must represent the logic of things or events. Originally, this word was written as 衜: meaning a person, who is symbolized with hair, a head, and a foot, on the middle path. It indicates one's head guides one to walk toward a place. Thus, the *Shi Ming* interprets "*dao*" as to "guide." So, while "*dao*" as a noun has a dual meaning, it also has a dual meaning as a verb. On the one hand, "*dao*" is used to mean the act of saying.[2] In this sense, *dao* is to say and to say is to make something show up as an active being or present some meaning in a particular context. Here, being and saying are not only dependent on each other but also enliven each other. On the other hand, "*dao*" (道) is interchangeable with "*dao* (導)": to guide or lead. Originally, *dao* refers to controlling rivers through a certain means.[3] Because guiding water in terms of a given direction is the same as leading one to a given destination, "*dao*" (導) and "*dao*" (道) were used to interpret each other in classical texts.

   The multiple usages of "*dao*" actually display the word's four semantic dimensions, i.e., way, pattern, saying, and guiding. Then, what is the nature of each dimension? How do these dimensions relate to and affect one another? And what role does philosophical discourse play in the manifestation and understanding of

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[1] For example, "周道如砥, 其直如矢" (*Shi Jing*); "行于大道, 唯施是畏, 大道甚夷, 而人好径" (*Dao De Jing*).
[2] For instance, "中冓之言, 不可道也" (*Shi Jing*); "夫子自道也" (*Lun Yu*).
[3] For example, "导河积石" (*Shu Jing*);"为川者决之使导" (*Guo Yu*).

"*dao*"? These are the major questions this chapter is going to answer. Specifically, I suggest that *dao* discursively opens up a way through which the eternal Dao manifests itself in a symbolic context and gives meaning to humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances. In the meanwhile, *dao* leads to a harmonious state that breaks down the opposition between metaphysical world and human world, objectivity and subjectivity, as well as knowledge and action.

## 9.1 *Dao* as Way

According to Tang Junyi, Confucius is the first thinker who used *dao* as a philosophical concept[4] for Confucius claimed that *dao* is the key that goes through his thought.[5] Since Confucius, almost all ancient thinkers employed the term "*dao*" to express their understanding of theoretical and practical issues. Among them, the Confucians and Daoists discussed this concept most creatively and thoroughly.

In *the Analects of Confucius*, *dao* is the most-often-used term besides *ren*. It appears about one hundred times. Each time, it is used in a particular context. This displays its variety. But, there are three categories that pervade the variety. First, in terms of its nature, there are the *dao* on which the will can set,[6] the *dao* according to which the gentleman acts,[7] the *dao* on which one is not afraid to die for insisting,[8] and the *dao* as the only aim the gentleman should pursue.[9] Second, in terms of its existence, there are the *dao* of Heaven,[10] the *dao* of society,[11] the *dao* of the state,[12] the *dao* of the gentleman,[13] and the upright *dao* and the crooked *dao*.[14] Third, in terms of its relation to human praxis, there are the *dao* that can be heard,[15] the *dao* that can (or cannot) be exercised,[16] the *dao* that can be learned, sought, and realized,[17] and the *dao* that can be enlarged by humans.[18]

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[4] Tang Junyi, *Zhongguo Zhexue Yuan: Daolun* (Taibei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1986), 50.

[5] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*.

[6] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*.

[7] *Lun Yu–Tai Bo*.

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*.

[10] *Lun Yu–Gong Zhi Chang*.

[11] *Lun Yu–Ba Yi*.

[12] *Lun Yu–Gong Zhi Chang*.

[13] *Lun Yu–Zi Zhang*.

[14] *Lun Yu–Wei Zi*.

[15] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*.

[16] *Lun Yu–Gong Zhi Chang*.

[17] *Lun Yu–Ji Shi*.

[18] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*.

Indeed, the three categories display the Confucian understanding of the meaning of *dao*. The first category suggests that *dao* is the top Ideal, absolute Truth, and ultimate Principle of the whole world (humankind, nature, heaven, and earth). It is from this kind of *dao* that various beings gain their reasons, social life possesses its meaning, and human thought and behavior attain their criteria. In this sense, this kind of *dao* is *the* cosmo-ontological substance and thus should be capitalized as Dao. On this level, the Dao is metaphorically *a preexisting Way*, the source of varied beings, and the aim humans go forward.

The second category suggests that *dao* is not transcendent to, but immanent in varied beings and social life. This kind of *dao* concertizes the top Ideal, absolute Truth, and ultimate Principle in terms of the differences of varied beings and leads social life to refine itself in terms of the Ideal, the Truth, and the Principle. In this sense, this kind of *dao* is a link between One and many or Being and beings. On this level, *dao* is metaphorically *a cross path* where object and subject, universality and particularity, and possibility and reality transform each other.

The third category suggests that *dao* is practical. That means, *dao* is not only a subject of humans' understanding and knowledge, but more importantly, an aim and process of human praxis. In practicing *dao*, humans illuminate the meaning of *dao* and in turn the meaning of *dao* illuminates human life. In this sense, this kind of *dao* is a creative humanization of the cosmo-ontological substance. On this level, *dao* is metaphorically *an active course* in which humans cultivate themselves in light of the oneness of Heaven and humans.

Confucius did not directly discuss the relation of *dao* in these three categories. But the context in which he used the term has divulged this relation. To him, there is an eternal Dao: The *nature* of things and humans and the *source* of rules by which things and humans are guided. But Dao is not alien to the human world; on the contrary, the human world is the best means through which Dao can be understood. Moreover, it is human praxis of *dao* that can link Dao and humans together and make Dao great.

"*Dao*" in the *Dao De Jing* is given a more philosophical explanation. The text consists of about five thousand words; to construe its meaning, however, one million words may not be enough.[19] The reason is at least threefold: First, the content of the text is related to many areas of philosophy such as cosmology, ontology, epistemology, axiology, ethics, political, and linguistic philosophy; second, the author of the text possesses a superb wisdom and a distinct way of thinking; third, the language of the text is brief and sublime and used very often in paradoxical forms. All these features are manifested in the context of *dao*. Thus, Fang Dongmei suggests that "*dao*" should be analyzed in terms of its own context as well as its conceptual structure, that is, the substance of Dao, the function of Dao, the character of Dao, and the manifestation of Dao.[20]

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[19]  Fang Dongmei, *Yuanshi Ru Jia Dao Jia Zhexue* (Taibei: Liming Wenhua Shiye Gongsi, 1985), 235.

[20]  Ibid, 200-201.

In the first place, Dao is the ultimate and infinite substance of the whole world. It is the origin of Heaven and Earth and has existed before the Lord.[21] All beings come from Dao and can be named in relation to It, but Dao Itself is not a being, It is *Wu* 無 (nothingness) and cannot be named.[22] In the second place, Dao functions as the source as well as the home of all beings. Dao gives life to all beings[23] and lets them act by virtue of their own nature. When beings are exhausted, Dao lets them come back[24] and gives them new life or energy. In the third place, Dao is a unity of its own substance and its function. Its substance is manifested in its function and its function is determined by its substance. Dao is a unity of Non-being and beings. It exists in the two-way movement: from Non-being to beings and from beings to Non-being. Dao is also a unity of taking-no-action and nothing-left-undone.[25] As Non-being, Dao takes no action; as the origin of beings, Dao leaves nothing undone through beings' varied conduct. In the fourth place, Dao is manifested in two realms: In the realm of things, its manifestation is called "*de*" 德 (virtue), and in the realm of humans, its manifestation is called "*sheng*" 聖 (sage). The sage is a human body (肉身 *rou shen*) of Dao. The sage possesses the ideal personality and saves people and things in light of Dao.[26]

To Lao Zi, Dao is primarily a cosmo-ontological substance, and it is from Dao that realities, acts, and understandings arise. Thus, all inquiries into knowledge, value, and even ways of thinking should take Dao as their ground. For all epistemological, axiological, moral, and linguistic problems are, in the final analysis, cosmo-ontological problems since all of them are human-related problems.

The similarity or common stand between Confucius's doctrine of Dao and Lao Zi's doctrine of Dao can be pointed out as follows: There exists a metaphysical substance or eternal Dao, which provides varied beings, including the humankind, with lives, principles, and values. This eternal Dao does not isolate itself from, but pervades, all beings. And its best manifestation is the sage. Thus, in understanding Dao, its relationship to the humankind is a key issue. It is from this issue that the differences between the two doctrines of Dao grow out.

From the Confucian point of view, humankind possesses the center of Dao; hence, humankind is both the starting point and the ending point of a doctrine of "*dao*." This is because the world of humans is determined by the eternal Dao, the *dao* of humans belongs to the eternal Dao. Thus, to grasp the *dao* of humans is the best and nearest way of grasping the eternal Dao. More importantly, Dao cannot make humans great, but humans can make Dao great. For only humans can illuminate the meaning of Dao, practice the principle of Dao, and realize the value of

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[21]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 4.

[22]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 1.

[23]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 42.

[24]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 40.

[25]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 37.

[26]  *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 27.

Dao. The extent to which humans practice in light of Dao is the one to which Dao manifests Itself.

Based on Confucius's position, Xun Zi construed Dao by virtue of a human centeredness and went even further. Although Confucius seldom talked about the *dao* of Heaven  or the metaphysical Dao, he did not replace it with, or reduce it to, the *dao* of humans. But in Xun Zi's view, the so-called Dao is neither the *dao* of heaven nor the *dao* of earth, but the *dao* of humans and especially of the gentleman.[27] For him, the *dao* of humans is in nature the principle of ruling;[28] thus, the *dao* of humans is also the *dao* of the ruler.[29] The ruler who governs in terms of *dao* is called the sage-king; the sage-king is the ultimate manifestation of Dao.[30]

However, to the Daoists, humankind can be a starting point of Dao only in the sense that humankind grasps Dao in virtue of following the models of heaven and earth; Dao displays itself by means of humankind, but humankind cannot be the end point of Dao for humankind is but one of beings that comes from Dao. Moreover, to understand the characters of humankind, to overcome the limitations of humankind, and to go back to, and unify itself with, Dao, humankind must liberate itself from one-sided views, small knowledge, the yoke of material things, and the trap of language as well.

According to Lao Zi, Confucians put humans in the center of Dao and try to cultivate humans in terms of *li* (propriety), *yi* (rightness), and *ren* (humanity). This does not raise human life to the realm of Dao, but leads it to chaos. For *li*, *yi*, and *ren* are in nature artificial, and artificiality is opposite to *de*. What is *de*? In Lao Zi's eyes, *de* is the naturalness of beings. Beings gain their lives from Dao and exist because of their naturalness.[31] To keep the naturalness is to follow Dao since naturalness is the essence and model of Dao. When humans seek *ren* (humanity), *yi* (rightness), *zhi* (knowledge), and *li* (benefit), they go against their naturalness. Thus, Lao Zi suggested abandoning humanity, rightness, knowledge, and benefit.[32] And he believed that only by so doing can humans live a better life.

Preserving naturalness and taking-no-action, this is the way Lao Zi pointed out for humans to treat their relation to the environment. Like Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi did not take humans as the end point of Dao either, thus supported Lao Zi's position. But at the same time, he transformed the negative meaning of Lao Zi's position into a positive metaphysical state. To Lao Zi, the more humans make an effort in their lives, the more troubles they cause. Hence, to preserve the naturalness of beings and take-no-action is the only way for humans to solve contradictions between humans and nature as well as conflicts among humans. In this sense, to follow Dao is a passive acceptance rather than an initiative choice. To Zhuang Zi, however, the

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[27] *Xun Zi–Ru Xiao.*

[28] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.*

[29] *Xun Zi–Jun Dao.*

[30] *Xun Zi–Li Lun.*

[31] *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 51.

[32] *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 19.

reason humans are not the end point of Dao is that all the difference between life and death, right and wrong, knowledge and ignorance, past and present, and finally, humankind and nature can be transformed to and identified in the sage's *dao*.[33] Because the sage can break down all limitations of human language, behavior, and understanding; he can thus arrive in the state of living with heaven and earth together and identifying himself with varied things.[34] This state is the state of Dao. Therefore, there is no necessity to think of humans as the ending point of Dao.

What the Confucians and Daoists told us is that all the different categories of *dao* are closely related to each other. While Dao as the ultimate Way yields diverse ways, diverse ways share and display the nature of the ultimate Way. Without the ultimate Way, diverse ways could be either not come into being or be isolated from each other and meaningless. On the other hand, because of diverse ways, the ultimate Way shows up and demonstrates its power. It is through diverse and creative ways that the ultimate Way keeps active and manifests greatness. Heidegger interprets the relationship between the ultimate Way and diverse ways as such that Dao "could be the way that gives all ways" and that Dao "moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way."[35] The idea that "all is way" is a holistic theme. It illuminates the dialectics of the great Being and varied things as well as the reciprocity of understanding and practicing Dao. Since Dao penetrates the world and everything comes from and designates Dao, the world and everything in the world can only be comprehended in light of Dao. In this sense, Dao is not only the ontological way but the epistemic way as well. It opens up the world to people, i.e., giving them a way to see the world. More importantly, it enables people to grasp the very truth of everything, i.e., leading them to the right way of interpreting the meaning of everything. Here, the epistemic way is not separated from the ontological way; instead, the two ways innately connect to one another. They are associated because both of them are derived from Dao. However, Dao is far more than a metaphysical or epistemological issue. Because it is necessarily related to human praxis: A way is meaningful only when it is linked to real life, that is, when it helps people arrive at their destination. As Confucius claimed, "It is man that can make the Way great, and not the Way that can make man great."[36] That means, people's practices in understanding the world, learning the truth of varied things, and achieving universal values actively represent the nature of the eternal Dao because of the very fact that truths and values are identical with Dao. In other words, the eternal Dao displays its existence, meaning, and function through people's actions in all the walks of human life. In turn, to learn and practice Dao is

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[33] *Zhuang Zi–Da Zong Shi*.

[34] *Zhuang Zi–Qi Wu Lun*.

[35] Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1982), 92. It is significant to point out that Heidegger is clearly aware of the metaphorical meaning and metaphysical function of the *dao*. He suggests that the *dao* is "the original giver and founder of ways," and is "the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos*, properly mean to say" (1982, 92).

[36] *Lun Yu–Wei Ling Gong*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 44.

to illuminate truths and to realize values; to illuminate truths and realize values is to make Dao great.

"All is way" because the great Being, varied things, understanding, and praxis are not separated from each other. While metaphysical Being gives rise to myriad things, understanding, and praxis, which are nothing but vivid and lasting manifestations of the metaphysical Being. This is the logic of the four categories of Dao.

## 9.2 *Dao* as Pattern

By "pattern," it is meant the principle and model that present the nature of a thing, shaping its function, determining its course, and managing its relation to other things. Because the *dao* of a thing is the pattern of the thing, one can only understand a thing correctly when grasping its *dao* and deal with the thing successfully when acting in terms of its *dao*. As Zhuang Zi argued, "To understand the [D]ao is to understand the principle. If you understand the principle, you know how to deal with things as they arise. Knowing this, you can ensure that nothing detrimental to yourself occurs."[37] Knowing and following Dao is the primary proposition of Daoism and the very reason why Lao Zi believed in taking-no-action and "yet there is nothing-left-undone."[38] Knowing and following Dao is also the basic teaching of Confucius. He said that "In the morning, hear the Way; in the evening, die content!"[39] And he claimed the *dao* of the gentleman is threefold, i.e., benevolent, wise, and brave. Confucius himself was thought of by his pupil Zi Gong as such kind of gentleman.[40]

*Dao* as pattern is first of all an ontological issue. For the pattern of a thing is not given by an outsider, but innately associated with the thing itself; thus, it is identical to the thing and can be thought of as an abstract but essential being. As pattern, *dao* has four features. First, it decides the existence and function of a thing; this means pattern is the soul of a thing. As Lao Zi claimed, "The myriad things obtained the One and lived and grew. Kings and barons obtained the One and became rulers of the empire."[41] Here, the One means the original unity. Original unity is derived from Dao and Dao is the ultimate system. Thus, the One can be thought of as the pattern manifested in myriad things. Though everything has its pattern, the individual pattern is not separated from the ultimate system. Second, it is consistent in all situations; this maintains the identity of a thing. To Zhuang Zi, this is the case because everything in the world, from the titles and duties of rulers and officials to

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[37] *Zhuang Zi–Qiu Shui*, trans. Martin Palmer, 1996, 142.

[38] *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 37, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 158. .

[39] *Lun Yu–Li Ren*, trans. Chan, 26.

[40] *Lun Yu–Xian Wen.*

[41] *Dao De Jing*, Chap. 39, trans. Chan, 159.

the fulfillment of varied things, gains its legitimacy from Dao.[42] Third, it keeps distance from a thing's appearance or one of its aspects; this requires differentiation between essence and phenomenon. Such a situation is like the example taken by Lao Zi that "the sage wears a coarse cloth on top and carries jade within his bosom."[43] Fourth, it is independent to human will; this restricts the realm and mode of people's action in dealing with a thing. Zhuang Zi explained this point through his story of Cook Ding.[44]

*Dao* as pattern is also an anthropological issue. Although being independent to human will, pattern does demand human understanding; a thing and its pattern can only be meaningful when it establishes a connection to humankind. Meaningfulness is the special nexus between human beings and myriad things. While a thing shows its meaning through human understanding, humans grasp the thing by comprehending its pattern. In other words, a thing (and its pattern) is not alive until it enters into humans' lifeworld, i.e., being a target of thinking, a symbol of language, or an object of action. In this regard, language is of special importance. Here, the word "language" is used in a broad sense to cover all kinds of symbols including pictures people draw. Needless to say, language is exclusively human: It is reciprocal with humankind, guides as well as restricts humankind, and develops via humankind. Meaning cannot be separated from language. Reasoning as human faculty can only take place through language. Human behavior is associated with verbal or written symbols. And saying is itself a kind of behaving.

*Dao* as pattern is a cognitive issue as well. Because the meaning of a thing manifests in human understanding, pattern entails reasoning, i.e., to think about, to investigate, and to interpret. It is by reasoning that humans capture the pattern of a thing. Likewise, it is through reasoning that the pattern of a thing opens up to humans. While understanding is the outcome of reasoning, reasoning is not purely a subjective matter. For on the one hand, understanding itself is an encounter between the object (i.e., the known) and the subject (i.e., the knower); without the thing to be known, there would be no basis to talk about the knower. On the other hand, both pattern and reasoning are based on and share the same foundation: the eternal Dao, which entitles pattern and reasoning. That is to say, the great Being not only gives rise to varied things but also makes reasoning illuminate the pattern of these things. Seen from this point of view, reasoning is not merely related to the finding and formulation of truth and knowledge, it, moreover, directly represents a character of humankind as one of the world regions and indirectly displays a function of the great Being.

Then, what is the relationship of *dao* as pattern to *dao* as way? In the first place, pattern is certainly derived from the eternal Dao; and in turn, it enlightens people's understanding of the eternal Dao. Second, pattern equals to the particular manifestation of the eternal Dao in all areas of the world, casting the characteristics of a

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[42]  *Zhuang Zi–Tian Di.*

[43]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 70, trans. Chan, 172.

[44]  *Zhuang Zi–Yang Sheng Zhu.*

specific thing. Third, pattern can be transformed from ontological essence into cognitive method, which enables people to understand things in question. Last, pattern guides people's practices in seeking truth and knowledge and in realizing universal values. Once again, the key to the relationship between way and pattern is reasoning. While pattern bonds to a thing, it opens to reasoning and shows the meaning of the thing to humankind. Though understanding is a subjective matter, it is limited and clarified by pattern. What brings pattern and understanding together is reasoning. Reasoning is a course through which pattern reaches humankind and understanding encounters pattern. Reasoning is neither purely objective nor thoroughly subjective; it links the subjective and the objective and melts them into a creative state. One may argue that if reasoning is a human faculty, how could it get rid of its subjective identity? The answer lies in the means reasoning appeals to, that is, language. "Language is the house of Being"[45]; it is through language that people approach Being. What people think and how people behave are determined by language. This is the case because language precedes individuals' existence. To further understand the connection of reasoning to Being, we shall enquire into the third dimension of *dao*.

## 9.3   *Dao* as Saying

*Dao* as saying (verb) is as primary as *dao* as way (noun). The graphic form of the word clearly indicates the reason: A way can be meaningful only when humans go through it, and the function of a way is to guide or lead humans to a certain destination. Ancient texts prior to Confucius provide us with many examples. In the *Shu Jing*, as Hall and Ames observe, "*dao*" "is used a significant number of times in the context of cutting a channel and "leading" a river to prevent the overflowing of its banks."[46] In the *Guo Yu* and *Zuo Zhuan*, when "*dao*" is used as a noun, it refers in most cases to the *dao* of Heaven, and when it refers to human affairs, it is often used as a verb. The *Guo Yu* reads: "to *dao* with poetry,"[47] and "to *dao* with words."[48] The *Zuo Zhuan* reads: "to *dao* with ritual rules,"[49] and "to *dao* with instructions."[50]

To look at these examples closely, we can find that "to *dao*" is not merely a personal behavior, but a moral-political event as well. For example, if "to *dao*" in the *Shu Jing* is a water conservancy project aiming to adjust the relation of humans

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[45] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 193.

[46] David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 227.

[47] *Guo Yu–Zhou Yu.*

[48] *Guo Yu–Chu Yu.*

[49] *Zuo Zhuan–Wen Gong* 6th Year.

[50] *Zuo Zhuan–Zhao Gong* 5th Year.

to nature, then "to *dao*" in the *Guo Yu* and *Zuo Zhuan* is a cultural project aiming to adjust the relation among humans and to transform them into real humans. For without exception, the object of "*dao*" in the two texts is humans, and the things with which to *dao* humans are the cultural essence of Zhou dynasty. It is note-worthy that these things were rightly the subjects Confucius taught his students.

The shift of *dao* from natural realm to cultural realm is very significant. It reflects ancient thinkers' such an understanding that when *dao* represents a kind of ultimate substance and universal principle, it is far from humans in the sense that there exists a long course for humans to grasp the *dao* and finally identify them with it. To reduce the distance, humans must cultivate themselves in light of the *dao*. In so doing, they change *dao* as an aim into *dao* as a practice, (thus switch *dao* from a noun to a verb,) and entails *de* (virtue) to be the individualization of the universal principle. This understanding was first clearly expressed by Confucius.

Confucius said that if the people "be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good."[51] In this passage, the term *dao* is used exactly as a verb in the context of cultivating people with *de* (virtue) and *li* (propriety). Hence, "*dao*ing" becomes a process of virtuous transformation toward Dao. It provides realistic linkage and access to Confucius's requirement for living an ideal life, that is, "Set your will on the Way. Have a firm grasp on virtue. Rely on humanity. Find recreation in the arts."[52]

After the meaning and nature of *dao* is clarified, we need to enquire into the forms of "*dao*ing." Undoubtedly, as a verb, "*dao*" necessarily implies words. Although not all kinds of "*dao*ing" are speaking, its basic form is certainly discursive.

In ancient texts, "*dao*" is used sometimes as "to say" or "to talk about." For example, in the *Analects*, "*dao*" refers to what Confucius himself "said,"[53] and to talk about the goodness of others.[54] However, what "*dao*ing" talks about is not trivial matters; instead, it should be philosophical and sociopolitical issues. This can be better understood when "to say" (or "to talk about") is put in the background of "to guide" (or "to lead"). It is not difficult to imagine the inner relation between "guiding" and "saying:" to guide people is to talk about something with people so that they can do something related to what has been talked about.

Surely, to *dao* is in many cases to speak; yet, to speak is aimed to guide people's thinking and action. Consider the passages in the *Guo Yu* and *Zuo Zhuan* that suggest guiding people with poetry, propriety, and instructions. Embedded in the essence of Zhou dynasty are ideals of life, patterns of behavior, truths, values, and traditions. Before functioning in guiding people, these things must be first fully understood, well explained, and their reason, legitimacy, and applicability in

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[51] *Lun Yu–Wei Zheng*, trans. James Legge, 1970, 146.

[52] *Lun Yu–Shu Er*, trans. Chan, 31.

[53] *Lun Yu–Xian Wen.*

[54] *Lun Yu–Ji Shi.*

linking the past to the present, in setting social and cultural aims, and in realizing human ideals and values have to be convincingly demonstrated. In this sense, to guide is not merely speaking; more importantly, it includes enquiring, discriminating, expounding, criticizing, and even arguing. Without these, there would be no such a thing as guiding.

It is essential to point out that the meaning of "*dao*" as a noun is not contrary to that of "*dao*" as a verb. Rather, they are mutually dependent and complementary for to guide is to lead (oneself, people, or a state) to a certain direction or aim. While "guiding" needs a "way" as its presupposition; the "way" can only be found and gone over by virtue of "guiding." Moreover, in referring to a direction or aim, "guiding" is an absolute means. Without this means, it is impossible to reach the direction or aim. In this sense, "guiding" is itself a cognitional and practical "way."

The mutual dependence and complementarity of "*dao*" as both noun and verb roots in the term's graphic or metaphorical implication: one's head guides one to walk toward a place along a way. The way is objective, no matter it already exists or needs to be built. If it already exists, it stands for a valuable aim, an ideal realm. If it is needed, it stands for an intermediary between one's position and one's goal. Guiding is transformative. It internalizes the objective way as one's cognitive and practical target. At the same time, it transcends one's subjective limitations cognitively and practically. The way is meaningful when the guiding occurs, and the guiding is meaningful when the way exists or comes into being. The way entails one's action, the guiding directs one's action. In turn, one's action links the way and the guiding together and makes them interchangeable.

The tension between "*dao*" as a noun and as a verb is creative for it breaks up the dichotomy between the metaphysical world and the human world, between objectivity and subjectivity, and between knowledge and action. It does not mean there is no difference between these opposites. The fact that "*dao*" can be used either as a noun or as a verb has settled the difference in language. But to the Chinese mind, what is more important is the continuity and complementarity between these opposites. It is important because the key to these opposites is humans as users of language and controllers of the semantic tension. Humans are both a knower and an agent. "*Dao*" as a noun reflects the status of humans as knower and what they know. Meanwhile, "*dao*" as a verb reflects the status of humans as agents and what they do. If what humans know makes them exist and guides what they do, then what humans do makes them progress and deepens what they know. Hence, the tension of "*dao*" as both a noun and a verb is an ontological and semantic manifestation of humankind as both knower and agent.

## 9.4   *Dao* as Guiding Dialogue

In his discussion of *dao*, Tang Junyi classifies it into three categories: First, the way of humans and all beings as well as the way of their activities; second, the way of knowing humans, all beings and their activities; third, the way of explaining to

people the first and second way.[55] To put his suggestion into the background of linguistic practice, we may say that *yan* (speech) is in a sense a basic way of living a human life; *bian* (argument) is to a large extent the way of knowing humans, all beings and their activities/appearances; *dao* (guiding dialogue) is definitely the way of explaining to people the first and second way.

Here, we should (1) look for the interconnection between *yan*, *bian*, and *dao*; (2) reveal ancient thinkers' ways of *dao*; (3) explore the nature of *dao* as philosophizing. I suggest that *dao* refines the outcome of *yan* and *bian* and thus illuminates the ways of praxis. It is through their guiding dialogue  that ancient thinkers explained to people the ways of humans, all beings, and that of their activities/appearances. In so doing, they philosophized the form and content of humans' knowledge about humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances.

Let us turn to speech and argument for a moment. As analyzed in the last two chapters, whereas speech is a way of expressing one's position or belief and assisting one's behavior, argument (which includes making discriminations) is a way of identifying the *shi* (this, or right) or *fei* (not-this, or wrong) of a thing, an affair, or a process. In this regard, what *yan* presents is the direct appearance of humans and beings as well as their activities. This kind of appearance can provide people with a way to knowledge about humans and all beings. But the appearance is itself not the knowledge. For it has not undergone a fact analysis and a value judgment; hence, its meaning has not been clear and recognized as truth. To transform the appearance into knowledge, people have to rely on *bian* because *bian* is in nature a process of analyzing facts and judging values. It is by means of *bian* that people understand humans, all beings, and their activities (including speech), and grasp the moral and sociopolitical effects of these activities.

Then, based on what metaphysical presuppositions and with what epistemological criteria should argument take place? This question goes beyond the nature and function of argument and cannot be answered by any argument itself. Though argument does have its own principles and criteria, to prove its rationality and legitimacy, argument has to seek a kind of "metaprinciple" and "metacriterion." This is provided by *dao*.

As I have indicated, *dao* is guiding dialogue. It guides people to understand the eternal Dao; it leads people to ground their praxis on the understanding of the eternal Dao; it directs people to make creative connections between the eternal Dao and the varied *dao*s of human life and beings. The reason that *dao* can guide people's thought and action is not because it possesses transcendent authority, be it from either religious or political power. Rather, it is because *dao* is the choice of free will and the operation of human reason. One form of *dao* is discourse; discourse is dialogue of different voices focusing on common problems. In other words, *dao* guides people philosophically. It illuminates the meaning of the world by generalizing all beings; it enlightens the mind of humans by critically reviewing different ideas; it bridges subjectivity and objectivity by appealing for a common

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[55]  Tang Junyi, *Zhongguo Zhexue Yuanlun: On Dao*, Part 1 (Taibei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1986), 30.

and ultimate source. In so doing, *dao* becomes a way through which the eternal Dao manifests itself in a symbolic context and gives meaning to humans, all beings, and their activities/appearance. It is from being this special way that the status of *dao* grows as the provider of the metaphysical presuppositions and epistemological criteria of speech and argument.

Structurally speaking, speech, argument, and *dao* cannot be independent from one another. Whereas speech needs argument to judge its truth-value, argument needs *dao* to set its presuppositions and criteria. By the same token, without speech, argument will lack a component; but without *dao*, both speech and argument will lack a soul. Finally, *dao* is based on speech and argument for speech and argument provide *dao* with not only rich contents but necessary forms. In other words, *dao* formulates what speech and argument deal with as well as takes speech and argument as its means of demonstration. In terms of their nature and function, speech and argument cannot equal to or replace *dao*. But, this does not mean *dao* cannot use speech and argument as its forms. The systems of belief shaped by *dao* can be expressed through speech (particularly statements) and argument (including discriminations). In this sense, *dao* is the logical crystallization of speech and argument, while speech and argument is the functional field of *dao*.

The interconnection between speech, argument, and *dao* is a two-way transformation. On the one hand, from speech via argument to *dao*, this is a semantic process. In this process, the content of speech, as active reflections of humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances, is filtrated and reshaped in argument, and finally changed into systems of belief by *dao*. On the other hand, from *dao* via argument to speech, this is a pragmatic process. In this process, the content of *dao*, as justified beliefs of humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances, is employed and reconstrued in argument, and finally pervades everyday life through speech.

Of course, the two-way transformation can never and should not ever, stop. Whenever humans and all beings exist and continue their activities, linguistic practice is always necessary. For not only is the two-way transformation itself a *form* of life, but to understand humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances as well as to quest for truths have no end at all.

Since *dao*, as guiding dialogue, is to explain to people the ways of humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances, we need to review how ancient thinkers did this through their own ways; then we can gain a better understanding of *dao*. Here, the focus is on the following schools: the Confucians, Moists, Daoists, and Legalists.

What is the *dao* of the Confucians? Obviously, it is *ren* (humanity). To the Confucians, *ren* is the key to the nature of humans and thus to sociopolitical problems. That is why *ren* holds a central position in Confucius's discourse. There is no doubt that Confucius guided people with *ren*. For him, *ren* is the *dao* of humans. It represents the ideal state of human cultivation. A fully cultivated human being is identified with the nature of heaven and earth. Hence, *ren* is the human manifestation of the eternal Dao on the one hand and is a realistic way of fulfilling cultivation on the other. *Ren*, as a concept, not only explains what humankind is but indicates how to become a real human being.

What is the *dao* of the Moists? It can be said to be *li* (benefit). For the Moists believed that all sociopolitical problems are caused by partial benefit, so mutual benefit must be the only way to solve these problems. To them, the real *li* is not partial, but mutual; only mutual *li* can benefit all people. Being mutually benefitted, people will wipe out differences among them, and replace particular love with universal love. Mo Zi guided people with *li*. His discourse focuses on what role *li* plays in social relation and political structure, how mutual *li* is interconnected with universal love, and why *li* is the key to understand humans and their activities. Evidently, he treated *li* not merely as a sociopolitical subject, but a theoretical concept and a practical way.

What is the *dao* of the Daoists? It is definitely the nameless Dao. To call the nameless Dao "Dao" is Lao Zi's way to understand Dao, and is a necessity for Lao Zi to guide people following nature. Lao Zi's discourse on Dao is metaphysical. For it addresses issues in cosmology, ontology, epistemology, and philosophy of language. However, Lao Zi's metaphysics is not totally isolated from realities of human life. Rather, it derives from and aimed at human life. To Lao Zi, human life is a dimension of Dao and thus is determined by the principles of Dao. Whenever humans' activities follow the rules, there is order in society; whenever human activities violate the principles, there is chaos in society. So, to understand Dao is by no means a mere theoretical matter, it has deep practical implications.

What is the *dao* of the Legalists? It is surely *fa* (law). To the Legalists, what laws represent is the nature of things; thus, laws should be rules for people to follow in doing things. Moreover, laws as the criteria of right and wrong are based not on the ruler's will but on .human nature. This makes laws have universal significance and lets them become ultimate principles. From the Legalists' point of view, the basis of laws is a collective understanding of human beings and their activities; the essence of laws is to transcend individual interests and behaviors by transforming the subjective understanding of human beings and their activities into a set of objective rules of human conduct; the function of laws is manifested in adjusting and standardizing all relationships among human beings.

In the first chapter, I have discussed the background of the discourse on *ming* and *shi* and indicated the common sociopolitical problem that the different schools of thought faced and tried to solve. Undoubtedly, *ren*, *li*, *dao*, and *fa* represent the above four schools' general understanding of, and their solution to, this problem. Although the four concepts are different from or even contrary to one another, all of them share the same character, that is, they are the outcome of a guiding dialogue, which influences a society's orientation and the people's thought and action by revealing the nature of humans and their activities as well as the relation of humans to their environment.

Because the essence of *dao* as guiding dialogue is first of all to contemplate and thus to formulate knowledge of humans, all beings, and their activities/appearances, there exists an innate connection between *dao* and philosophy. Specifically speaking, the form of *dao* is a philosophizing process, and the contents of *dao* are philosophical conceptions. Let us take Confucius as an example.

Confucius focused his discourse on *ren*. It was through the concept of *ren* that he reshaped and structured individual virtues, explained the nature of human beings, and proposed a fundamental way to solve sociopolitical problems. In so doing, Confucius transformed *ren* from being a simple term meaning "dearness" into a moral-sociopolitical theory. Surely, *ren* was Confucius's *dao*; he used *ren* to guide people in understanding themselves as human beings, and how to behave in everyday life. One may not totally agree with his *dao*. But one cannot deny that he has some insights embodied in the concept of *ren*; more importantly, one cannot reject the meaningfulness of his inquiry into the questions about the right way to live. This is exactly where philosophy originated and is the very issue of Socrates' work. His discourse on *ren* provided people, at least Chinese people, with an immanent transcendent path toward an ideal moral state. Compared to Immanuel Kant's external transcendental path, the philosophical value of Confucius's *ren* is no less than that of Kant's.

Besides the philosophical content of Confucius's discourse, the philosophical form of his discourse is also remarkable. As we can see from the *Analects*, Confucius developed his thought in friendly conversations; he explained the meaning of *ren* in a dialectical manner, and defined many points through argument. On the surface, the details of inference are not fully displayed in the *Analects*. But, it does not mean Confucius did not use inference to make and refine his doctrine. Actually, the passage of rectifying names clearly shows a reasoning chain from the correct use of language to the correspondent behavior. It was from the formatting of conversation, dialectics, argument, and inference that Confucianism was derived. Significantly, we should keep in mind that Socrates' philosophy was formatted in the same discursive way.

One may argue that *dao* as a guiding dialogue inclines far more to action than to theory, thus has nothing to do with philosophy. For to guide is always to let people "know how" (to do something) instead of "knowing that." The core of Confucius's teaching is rightly to tell people what is the correct conduct in a certain situation.

Surely, discourses on *ren*, *li*, *dao*, and *fa* were aimed, in one way or another, at solving urgent sociopolitical problems, and in this sense can thus be construed as discourses on "know-how." But it is wrong to overstress the practical character of these discourses and further to blot out their dimension of "know-that." It is even worse to separate philosophy or metaphysics from these discourses. For we cannot imagine any real "knowing-how" that is not founded on "knowing-that" because only by "knowing-that" can one really "know-how" to do things; in other words, know-how is the basis of know-that just like semantics relies on pragmatics. Moreover, we cannot mix up the practical content of these discourses and their theoretical form and replace the latter with the former. This is extremely important in dealing with Chinese culture. In this culture, there is no such thing as a dualism of theory and practice. Knowledge and action can only be distinguished from each other in the context of Dao or Oneness. The unity of knowledge and action is by no means merely an empty slogan; rather, it is a *way* of life.

Confucius's career and doctrine is once again a good example. He not only presented a doctrine of *ren* but tried very hard to practice the doctrine in his political activities. He not only taught his students how to handle things in light of *ren* but explored what *ren* is and why we should practice *ren*. In so doing, Confucius illuminated the transcendent meaning of everyday conduct, seeking for the right way to live. Through his intellectual conversations, he actually opened a way to a moral metaphysics in which cosmo- ontological problems are transformed into or interpreted through human life. Thus, Confucius's *dao* of *ren* as a guiding dialogue is both practical because of its close relation to everyday life and theoretical because of its deep philosophical implications.

# Chapter 10
# Practical Zhi

Having discussed the background of the *ming-shi* discourse, its four notions and orientations, and its relationship to three dimensions of Chinese praxis, I shall explore in this chapter how practical *zhi* as a central characteristic of Chinese culture was shaped by this discourse. I suggest that it was in and through the discourse on *ming* and *shi* (as well as other intellectual discourses) that Chinese *zhi* was theoretically refined and practically oriented; moreover, this discourse and practical *zhi* together convincingly displayed the essence and power of *dao* as Chinese wisdom and worldview.

The graphic form of *zhi* (知) consists of two characters: one is 矢, which literally means "arrow" and metaphorically refers to "fast"; the other is 口, which literally means "mouth" and metaphorically refers to "speech." Xu Shen's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* interprets *zhi* as "words" and by "words" it actually means "knowledge" for knowledge is encoded in words. But, *zhi* in Chinese is not merely a noun; it is also a verb "to know." Thus, Duan Yucai suggests that Xu Shen's interpretation of *zhi* (knowledge) coincides with his interpretation of *zhi* (wisdom), meaning "to know words." Duan Yucai's suggestion displays two facts. On the one hand, the action and capacity of achieving knowledge is as important as the body of knowledge in the Chinese mind. That is why later linguists stressed the psychological feature of "knowing." They argue that the meaning of *zhi* is derived from "mouth" and "arrow," signifying "to know clearly so as to speak quickly." On the other hand, *zhi* as "knowledge" was popularly used interchangeable with *zhi* as "wisdom," for the two words in ancient time shared the same meaning and thus were used to interpret each other. The graphic form of *zhi* 智 (wisdom) has 知 (knowledge) as its component. Hence, one is wise because one has knowledge, and one knows words and things so one is wise.[1]

Based on the etymology of the word, I want to further map the semantic and pragmatic realm of *zhi*. First, *zhi* refers to "knowledge," which is a kind of expertise in knowing names and things and their relation to human action. Xun Zi suggested

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[1] For more details about the etymology of the two words, see Ding Fubao's *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Gu Lin* (Taibei: Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1959).

that *zhi* is to affirm "this (or right)" as "this (or right)" and to negate "that (or wrong)" as "that (or wrong)."[2] This point indicates that *zhi* entails beliefs about "this (or right)" and "that (or wrong)"; these beliefs are derived from the verification of the difference between "this (or right)" and "that (or wrong)." Second, *zhi* signifies "intelligence," which is a kind of competence in determining knowledge and applying it to deal with reality. The Neo-Moists thought of *zhi* as the ability "by which one knows one necessarily does know."[3] Moreover, the Neo-Moists were clearly aware that *zhi* is a process in which one's intelligence connects the knower to what is being known.[4] Third, *zhi* means "wisdom," which is a kind of general knowing that fuses the inner world and the outer world. Xun Zi claimed that the human capacity to know something is called "intelligence" and that wisdom consists of one's understanding of something that truly represents the nature of the thing.[5] In the Neo-Moist terms, wisdom is *ming* 明 (illumination), "by means of one's intelligence, in discourse about the thing, one's knowledge of it is apparent."[6] In other words, *zhi* can be construed as knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom and defined as a structure of knowing consisting of three components: (1) a set of beliefs on names, things, and lifeworld; (2) a kind of capacity of determining knowledge and solving problems through linguistic practice; and (3) a creative and balanced way of treating the relationship between One (the self, subject, inwardness, and language) and Environment (the other, object, outwardness, and reality).[7] It is helpful to note that in the West.

> [k]*nowledge* often refers to a particular domain of expertise, and in this sense *intelligence* is more general and refers to broader capacities, which include having knowledge, sagacity, and the ability to *know*... But the broader meaning of *knowing* refers to wisdom, the exercise of sound judgment, discernment, and the ability to perceive. Wisdom entails skills (which may include skill in magic or occult arts), expertise, knowledge, and learning.[8]

The general understanding of the three terms juxtaposes the semantic scope of the Chinese word *zhi*.

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[2] *Xun Zi–Jie Bi.*

[3] *Mo Bian–Jing* A and *Jing Shuo, trans.* Angus Graham, 1978, 267.

[4] *Mo Bian–Jing* A.

[5] *Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.*

[6] *Mo Bian–Jing* A and *Jing Shuo A*, trans. Graham, 267.

[7] Here "the self" and "the other" as a pair of categories consist of three levels of meaning. The first level is psychological. On this level, "the self" refers to the ego and "the other" refers to the id. The second one is social. On this level, "the self" refers to the individual and "the other" to the society. The third is metaphysical. On this level, "the self" refers to humankind and "the other" to Nature.

[8] Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992), xi, fn.

## 10.1  Action and Knowing

In referring to the issue of knowledge, practical *zhi* suggests that action (practice) and knowledge (theory) are not isolated from each other, but have a polar relationship in that they depend on and transform each other. Moreover, in so far as knowledge can only develop through being justified by and applied to action, knowing is itself a form of human practice.

The Neo-Moists held a comprehensive interpretation of knowing. This can be seen clearly from the following passages:

> *zhi* (knowing): by hearsay, by explanation, by personal experience; names, things; how to unite, and how to act.
> Having received it as second hand is knowing by "hearsay." Knowing that something square will not rotate is by "explanation." Having been a witness oneself is knowing "by personal experience." What something is called by is its "name." What is so called is the "thing." The matching of the name and the thing is termed "uniting." The practicing of intention is "acting."[9]

In these passages, the Neo-Moists not only indicated the means of achieving knowledge but also recognized, as Christoph Harbsmeier observes, four objects of knowing. They are as follows: (1) names, (2) things, (3) how names apply to things, and (4) human action.[10]

The Neo-Moist notion of knowing displays an essential point, that is, the *ming-shi* relationship is not merely a core problem in linguistics; it is a basic problem in epistemology as well. Knowing cannot stop at applying names to things, it also includes getting things done by using or abandoning names. In fact, this problem pervaded the thinking of almost all schools of thought in pre-Qin times; to a large extent, the epistemological significance of the *ming-shi* discourse lay in the four objects of knowing.

To understand this point better, we should have a close examination of the four objects of knowledge. First of all, ancient Chinese thinkers construed names as normative knowledge, i.e., knowing names is to know norms and values. As discussed earlier, names in ancient texts are used as titles or terms in particular and as language in general. In the former case, a name designates a role or a standard accompanied by a set of determinations established historically and sociopolitically. Thus, to know names is to know social duties, behavioral standards, and their cultural determinations. This is indeed the criterion Confucius proposed to rectify the names of "ruler," "minister," "father," and "son." In the latter case, a society's traditions, its moral property, and its rules of treating social relationships are carried in language. Thus, to know names is to know history, values, norms, and truths. This is the reason why Confucius taught his students with the *Shu Jing*

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[9]  *Mo Bian–Jing* A and *Jing Shuo* A, slightly modified from Graham, 327.

[10]  Harbsmeier, "Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China," in *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. H. Lenk and G. Paul (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

(proclamations of the rulers of Zhou and pre-Zhou dynasties), the *Shi Jing* (anthology of early Zhou verses), the *Chun Qiu* (chronicle of Lu State to the time of Confucius), and Zhou *Li* (Zhou propriety).

In contrast to *normative* knowledge, knowing things is a kind of knowledge in descriptive sense; *descriptive* knowledge designates an objective understanding of reality. Mo Zi's three standards of language use clearly illuminate the essence of this kind of knowing. On the one hand, the *foundation* of what he took as standards was historical experience, social reality, and administrative effect; these were things that actually happened or historically existed. On the other hand, embedded in his standards was some *understanding*, which was not related to abstract ideas but to concrete things. Mo Zi, in fact, suggested that the prerequisite for solving socio-political problems and for properly using language is a deep comprehension of reality. For what normative knowledge provides people with is the aim and values of life; to realize the aim and values, people need a reliable knowing of all social (external) and personal (internal) realities. Thus, a descriptive knowledge is entailed.

One may raise such a question: Can knowing names or knowing things be construed in terms of propositional knowledge? Actually, this kind of question has been answered in claims such as ancient Chinese philosophy "did not use the concept of sententials, propositional attitudes, or semantic truth."[11] It is hard from the classical Chinese texts to find the counterpart of Western form of knowledge, i. e., "knowledge that" (S knows/believes that X is Y); instead, what can be found easily is the form of "knowledge of" (S knows/believes X).[12] As a response to this kind of claim, we shall make clear that whereas knowing things necessarily involves propositional form, knowing names is a kind of nominal formation of values and norms which should be construed as abbreviations of descriptions or statements *per se*. Thus, the difference between "knowledge of" and "knowledge that" in the Chinese case is but a difference between normative knowledge and descriptive knowledge, not one between "non-propositional knowledge" and propositional knowledge.

In regard to the nature of knowing things, the Confucian text *Da Xue* (*Great Learning*) suggests that in order to extend one's knowledge, one needs to inves-tigate things, when one has investigated things, one will have extend one's knowledge. This point shows that ancient thinkers were aware that investigation of things is the means of achieving knowledge, and things being investigated consist of the content of knowledge. Hence, knowing things refers not only to facts of reality but also to statements about reality. Since all facts are cognitive, and all cognitive facts lie in mental or verbal statements, the essence of such kind of

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[11] Chad Hansen, "Term-Belief in Action: Sentences and Terms in Early Chinese Philosophy," in *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, ed. H. Lenk and G. Paul (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 46.

[12] Hansen's claim and his theory of Chinese philosophy and Chinese language have been strongly criticized by scholars such as Chung-ying Cheng (1983), Harbsmeier (1989), Feng Yaoming (1989), Chi-yun Chan (1990), and Roetz (1993). A common point these scholars share is that ancient Chinese culture does have a concept of truth and propositional knowledge.

statements is not a *form of words*, but "a *semantic content* that may be expressed by a form of words in certain contexts".[13] It is in this sense that knowing things can be said to be syntactically sentential knowledge, characteristically descriptive knowledge, and logically propositional knowledge.

In regard to the nature of knowing names, ancient Chinese thinkers never treated names as simply the labels on isolated things, but as carriers of concrete relations. To them, names are propositionally meaningful because they bear certain facts or beliefs, which are accumulated and refined through the social use of the names. The name "father," for example, "carries the implication that the father will 'act like a father' as well as the assumption that the language will provide information on how to do so."[14] The semantic content of the name "father" is not manifested in the name as a designator of a biologic role; rather, as Benjamin Schwartz points out, it is in the role-norm that the name stands for.[15] Though the implication and assumption that the name "father" carries normatively define the name "father," they at the same time hint at its semantic significance, and hence can be construed as the normative-propositional knowledge of the name.

It is true that ancient Chinese thinkers paid more attention to practical knowledge than theoretical knowledge, and consequently did not make a subtle analysis about knowledge as identity with things and knowledge as true judgment about things. For the primary concern of Chinese, *zhi* is how to unify normative and descriptive knowledge in seeking and living a good life; this led Chinese theories of knowledge on a path different from Western theories of knowledge.

In the Chinese mind, achieving pure knowledge is not the end of knowing or learning; on the contrary, the true aim of knowing or learning is to understand things that people face and to treat them properly to meet people's will and interests. This kind of knowing has cognition as its foundation, but by no means excludes a practical orientation. Thus, whereas Western philosophers were concerned with a "theory of knowledge" focusing on people's relation to propositions via the mediation of the mind, Chinese thinkers were concerned with an "epistemological behaviorism" (to borrow Richard Rorty's term) focusing on people's relation to things via the mediation of names. Their epistemological behaviorism was aimed at promoting the correspondence between *ming* (names) and *shi* (things) in moral, sociopolitical, and linguistic practices. This is indeed the matter of the third object of knowledge: knowing how to apply names to things.

To be sure, the relationship between names and things was not only the one between language and reality but also between knowledge and action as well. For in promoting the correspondence between names and things, people should first of all have necessary knowledge of names and things; in turn, promoting the

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[13] Christoph Harbsmeier, "Marginalia Sino-logica," in *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, ed. R. Allinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 141. My own emphasis.

[14] Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1985), 92.

[15] Ibid.

correspondence itself is an action grounded on existing knowledge and seeking new knowledge. Given such understanding, we may say that if "knowing names" is knowledge in evaluative and directive sense or knowledge of values and norms, and "knowing things" is knowledge in descriptive and reflective sense or knowledge of facts and reality, then "knowing how to apply names to things" is knowledge of *fusing* values and facts, ideal and reality, and theory and practice.

Undoubtedly, the Confucians stressed the importance of knowing names because names represent values and norms. But, since any value or norm can only be meaningful and necessary in referring to what is not valuable or not normal in the lifeworld, the Confucians consciously based their stress on knowing reality. For them, to apply names to things is to judge things in terms of values and to do things in terms of norms. In contrast to the Confucians, the Moists focused on the importance of knowing things because one cannot properly use a name without understanding the thing being named. Yet, since any understanding of a thing involves, explicitly or implicitly, a value judgment (such as useful or harmful? beautiful or ugly? good or bad? true or false?), the Moists logically set their focus in the field of knowing values. For them, to apply names to things is to rectify the use of names by discriminating things.

In a certain sense, knowing how to apply names (values and norms) to things (facts and reality) is the deep structure of knowledge. On the one hand, it breaks down the value-fact dichotomy, and illuminates that "every fact is value loaded and every one of our values loads some fact."[16] Lao Zi's concept of *ziran* (naturalness) is a good example in point. When Lao Zi suggested that human beings model themselves on "naturalness," "naturalness" is actually a name designating both a norm and a value in the sense that it tells one how to behave and what to seek in everyday life. (Indeed, any norm embodies a certain value, and thus is the formalization and legitimation of that value.) Nevertheless, "naturalness" as a value includes as a fact that Nature and all its components have their own rules; in dealing with Nature and its components, one has to follow its pattern (理), otherwise, one's effort may not only fail but also cause harm. In turn, whereas this fact implies the pattern of Nature, it represents the value of following naturalness. Lao Zi did not simply seek what "naturalness" is, but exposed what it means to human life. That is to say, behind each fact as a descriptive statement, there exists a value judgment, which determines what is eligible to be a fact and what significance the fact may carry. In this sense, to follow "naturalness" is to apply one's understanding of "naturalness" as a value to one's practice in dealing with "naturalness" as the fact of Nature and all things.

On the other hand, knowing how to apply names to things breaks down the understanding-acting dichotomy, and suggests that "Being true and good, one becomes enlightened in understanding. Being enlightened in understanding,

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[16] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 201.

one becomes true and good."[17] This Confucian insight teaches us that in applying names to things, we are not merely the knower of the relationship between a name (norm or value) and a thing (fact or reality); more importantly, we are the agent of realizing values of all things including ourselves. Certainly, the "true" and "good" are of great value. But, understanding the value of the "true" and "good" is far more than achieving the knowledge of them because "[i]n knowing values and norms one is engaged in becoming them and in creating them."[18] It is in becoming the "true" and "good" that we know them deeper and deeper; in turn, with our deeper knowledge and practice of the "true" and "good," they become more valuable and meaningful. In this sense, knowing how to apply names to things is to know how to transform realities in terms of values, or how to combine knowledge with action. This kind of knowing has great ontological significance and is indeed related to the top level knowledge: knowing how to act and live.

To ancient Chinese thinkers, the ultimate criterion of knowledge is knowing how to act and live. Thus, while knowing names and things provides us with norms and facts, and knowing how to apply names to things grounds our acts on a comprehensive understanding of values and realities, knowing how to act and live paves a way for us to solve problems as well as to realize and create values. The Confucian ideal of *ren* (humanity) requires the action of self-cultivation. The Moist doctrine of *jian ai* (universal love) implies the action of mutually benefiting. The Legalist position of *fa* (law) calls for the action of carrying out the same rules in the whole society. Here, knowing humanity, universal love, and law is no longer intellectual understanding, but ontological practice. It is ontological because it manifests itself as a living form of changing reality in light of human values and the principle of Dao.

In grasping the significance of knowing how to act and live, we should pay special attention to Lao Zi's outlook, for Lao Zi suggested giving up knowledge and taking no action. Does this position mean that Lao Zi excluded in any sense the necessity and importance of knowing how to act and live? My answer to this question is "No," and in fact, Lao Zi's position coincides with that of other schools in a dialectic way.

First, by "taking no action," Lao Zi meant taking no action that violates the naturalness of things (in both natural and social realms); thus, the essence of "taking no action" is to follow the naturalness of things. Only by so doing, could nothing be left undone. Obviously, "following the naturalness" is itself a higher level action.

Second, the knowledge Lao Zi suggested giving up is the knowledge that goes against the naturalness of things and is carried in language. Though he believed language cannot grasp Dao, he did not preclude the possibility of knowing Dao in a

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[17] *Da Xue*, ch. 21. I use Chung-ying Cheng's translation of this passage (1991, 271). He interprets the term "誠*cheng*" as "being true and good" to bring out its metaphysical connotation. I am indebted to his insight.

[18] Chung-ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 271.

nonlinguistic way; it is most likely that Lao Zi supposed a kind of knowledge and a way of knowing that goes beyond language.

Last, but not least, Lao Zi's ultimate concern is how to live a life that fulfills the real nature and attains the true aim of human beings. Life should not be lived at the price of destroying the naturalness of things, but must continually refine itself along with achieving the comprehensive harmony between individuals and society as well as humankind and Nature. Undoubtedly, this kind of life relies on knowing how to act in a natural and harmonious mode.

The reason why knowing how to act is at the top level of knowledge is that, to the Chinese, the central issue in philosophy is neither knowledge nor wisdom but living a good life. Life is in nature practical and dynamic; knowledge is necessary because it can serve as a means leading to a good life, and wisdom lies finally in the choice and creation of a good life. Both knowledge and wisdom can be meaningful and functional only when they are tightly bound to human life, and it is through human action that knowledge and wisdom are kept fresh. Some Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Aristotle, seemed in line with Chinese philosophers in that the primary question they asked was "what is the best and desirable life." They thought of seeking knowledge as *a form of life* because knowledge is valuable when it serves the realization of a good life.

As mentioned above, a misleading method and conclusion in the studies of epistemological issues in ancient China is to examine whether the Chinese used the syntactical form of "knowing that"; because "knowing how" was their main form, they should not be given credit for advancing epistemological theories in the Western sense.[19] Does the concept of knowledge really exclude "knowing how to act"? I suggest the answer is "No"; even from the Western point of view, "knowing how to act" should be counted in the realm of knowledge. William James, for example, claims that "pragmatic writers have laid more stress than any previous philosophers on human action."[20] Clarence Lewis argues that "knowing exists for the sake of action."[21] Robert Brandom coins the term "fundamental pragmatism" to emphasize "one should understand knowing *that* as a kind of knowing *how*,"[22] for "*knowing how* to do something is the basis for *knowing that*."[23] In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard indicates that "what is meant by the term *knowledge* is not only a set of denotative statements, far from it. It also includes

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[19] Hansen is a representative holder of this position. He argues that the Chinese *zhi* is "knowing the way to do something (knowing how)" (1989, 102), and "Chinese philosophy has no concept of truth" (1985, 492). In his view, since knowledge is popularly defined as justified true beliefs, and any belief is a propositional statement, "knowing how" is merely pragmatic and has no epistemic and semantic significance.

[20] William James, *The Writings of William James* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 448.

[21] Clarence Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1946), p. 3.

[22] Robert Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2011), 9.

[23] Richard Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 120.

notions of 'knowing how,' 'knowing how to live,' 'how to listen,' etc."[24] For Lyotard, to take "knowing how" into account in knowledge makes a crucial difference between the traditional interpretation of knowledge and the postmodern interpretation of knowledge. In the former case, knowledge is mainly a question of competence in determining and applying the criterion of truth. In the latter case, however, knowledge is extended to "the determination and application of criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or color (auditory and sensibility), etc."[25] That means, whereas the former is limited to the cognitive dimension of humankind and treats knowledge as the exclusive value, the latter is open to all the living walks of humankind, and treats knowledge as diverse voices. The postmodern condition of knowledge is concerned not only with what to know, but also with what to decide, to perform, to evaluate, to seek, as such. In the final analysis, it transforms "knowing that" into "know how," for it "finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject-humanity."[26]

The ancient Chinese notion of knowledge can be thought of as akin to the pragmatic and postmodern notion of knowledge. The Chinese notion stresses a full manifestation and development of human nature in seeking and making the true, good, and beauty of the lifeworld. It treats knowledge as an open system: open not only to other values which cooperate with denotative statements, but also to actions which justify and enrich denotative statements. It goes beyond the limitation of cognition and sets up performance as an orientation; by doing so, it transforms knowing into a cognitive acting and acting into a performative knowing. In short, within the context of lifeworld, there is no conflict between "knowing that" and "knowing how"; since life is practical and dynamic, "knowing that" is a form of action aiming at knowing how to live.

## 10.2 Discourse and Reason

In referring to the dimension of intelligence, practical *zhi* suggests an axis of *problem-solving/reasoning/discursive practice*, that is, intelligence manifests itself in the proper solving of problems, both theoretical and practical. Any problem-solving resorts to reasoning, which involves using knowledge of names and of things as a means. Yet, determining and applying knowledge as well as solving sociopolitical problems must in the end be fulfilled not only through individual

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[24] Jean Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brain Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 18.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 35.

contemplation, but also through discursive practice. Reasoning and discursive practice must come together in a continuum, which entails dialogic reason .

To be sure, the *ming-shi* discourse was necessarily aimed at problem-solving. The *ming-shi* problem was comprehensive in that it set up the relationship between language and reality. Thus, in pre-Qin times, all sociopolitical problems, including moral, epistemological, and metaphysical problems embedded in them, manifested themselves as *ming-shi* problems. Certainly, in solving sociopolitical problems, ancient Chinese thinkers had first to understand the relationship between *ming* and *shi*, and the process of understanding *ming-shi* was the process of reasoning. Here, we must be aware of two important facts: on the one hand, reason reveals itself only along with discourse (speech, discussion, and argument) among participants; on the other hand, the semantic and pragmatic rectification of names served as a necessary means of solving sociopolitical problems. Hence, not only was the discourse rational *per se*, but also the reasoning itself was dialogic in nature.

As indicated earlier, the sociopolitical background of the *ming-shi* discourse was the collapse of Zhou *li* (propriety). Facing terrible social chaos caused by the collapse of Zhou *li*, ancient Chinese thinkers shared a common understanding that properly solving the problem of *ming-shi* is highly necessary in recovering or reestablishing an ideal order for society at large. The ways they took to solve this problem were different, but each way made a contribution in a different perspective to the shaping of Chinese culture.

The Confucian way of solving the *ming-shi* problem was to clarify the meaning of names as norms and values, and to use these norms and values as criteria to regulate human behavior. *The Confucian line of reasoning was historical*.

To the Confucians, the significance of names is embodied not merely in that they stand for traditions, but more importantly, they also represent the accumulation of cultural essence. That is to say, human history is a history of human cultivation at both the individual and the social level, and the cultivation is a process of understanding and practicing universal norms and values which make humans different from animals and guide them to live a good life. Thus, the Confucians always put names in an ethical-political context and interpreted names in terms of a historical point of view. They suggested that it is worthy to insist on these names (norms and values) even at the price of giving up the immediate benefit one might gain in a particular situation or a short period of time. They proposed the doctrine of rectifying names not in order to go back to the past but to step toward the future as a person can become a real human being or a society can develop only by following some universal norms and values.

The Moist way of solving the *ming-shi* problem was to judge the truth-value of speeches or doctrines in terms of their correspondence to realities. *The Moist line of reasoning was realistic.*

To the Moists, whether a speech or a doctrine is acceptable depends on whether it is grounded on *gu* (reasons). Here, *gu* is first of all logical for it stresses the necessary relation between premise (cause) and conclusion (effect). Without displaying *gu*, speech would have no truth-value at all. Yet, *gu* within the lifeworld is not merely a logical matter because *gu* is always rooted or involved in human

behavior rather than merely derived from some eternal or divine source. A *gu* is valid only when it is verified by historical experience, social reality, or administrative effect. Thus, in the Moist thinking, *gu* as a criterion represents a unity of logical principle and realistic principle. Seen from the perspective of this unity, the *ming-shi* problem is not merely a problem created by using names without giving necessary reasons; it is a problem that one's speech or doctrine goes against sociopolitical realities.

The Daoist way of solving the *ming-shi* problem was to deconstruct the correspondence between names and things and to free humans from the prison of language. *The Daoist line of reasoning is critical*.

Whereas both the Confucians and Moists presumed or sought a correspondence between names and things, the Daoists did not believe in such a correspondence at all. To them, names are artificial, finite, and rigid, but things are natural, infinite, and changeable; thus, names are doomed as limited. Their limitation lies not only in the realization that some things (especially the eternal Dao) can never be grasped through names, but also in the awareness that those things being described by names appear distorted. According to the Daoists, to solve the *ming-shi* problem, one has to understand the bias of language and be critical in dealing with existing knowledge, norms, and values since they are tightly bound to language.

The Legalist way of solving the *ming-shi* problem was to evaluate all speeches in light of its sociopolitical effect. *The Legalist line of reasoning was instrumental*.

To the Legalists, names themselves are neutral, their value depends on how they are used in speech; those speeches that tally with society's laws and all people's interests are good and should be encouraged, those speeches that violate society's laws and all people's interests are evil and must be prohibited or punished. In other words, names and speeches should be construed as a means serving an ideal end. Since the end is embedded in society's laws and all people's interests, the laws and interests stand for the ultimate *shi*. Accordingly, the ultimate *shi* is the final criterion; all *ming* or uses of language are supposed to benefit the actualization of *shi* (laws and interests).

The Dialectical and Neo-Moist way of solving the *ming-shi* problem was to enquire into the semantic and ontological characteristics of *ming* and *shi* and to ground the practical solving of this problem on a theoretical understanding. *The Dialectical and Neo-Moist line of reasoning was analytic*.

To the Dialecticians and Neo-Moists, the *ming-shi* problem is derived from misunderstandings of the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. Though these misunderstandings occur in varied areas of human life, they come from the same linguistic or epistemological origin. Thus, logical and semantic analysis of names is highly necessary and crucial to any pragmatic regulation of the *ming-shi* relationship. As a result, the Dialecticians displayed the complexity of the ontological-semantic relation through discussing some non-commonsense propositions, whereas the Neo-Moists strictly defined many key terms used in pre-Qin times and generalized a set of principles of logical thinking.

Generally speaking, human intelligence is a kind of capacity for raising and solving problems related to the lifeworld. When Chinese thinkers interpreted "*zhi*"

(intelligence) in light of "knowing," they must have kept the view in mind that knowing in the broad sense involves knowing how to raise and solve problems. I would like to add that, because any practice of raising and solving problems is based on a certain desired end, knowing necessarily entails reason, namely, knowing how to realize a desired end in virtue of a right means. It is in this sense that Bertrand Russell argues " 'Reason' has a perfectly clear and precise meaning. It signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve."[27] Here the term "choice" is essential. What, among many others, can be chosen as a possible means? Is the means being chosen the right one? Is there only one means that is right to the desired end? These are some questions that need to be discussed and even argued in making a choice. That is to say, "reason" refers not merely to means/end thinking but, more importantly, it derives from discourse.

Given the *ming-shi* problem, schools of thought in pre-Qin times dedicated their energy to seeking a right means to solve it. Although the means they chose were different from each other, all of them were reviewed, criticized, and refined in the *ming-shi* discourse. Thus, this discourse shaped Chinese culture. This can be seen clearly from the notion of rectifying names, which influenced the whole discourse.

As discussed in Chap. 2, the *ming-shi* discourse began from Confucius, the first thinker to indicate the necessity of rectifying names in solving sociopolitical problems. After Confucius presented his theory, Mo Zi proposed a doctrine against Confucius. Unlike Confucius, who suggested correcting things in terms of names (norms and values), Mo Zi insisted on correcting names (ideas and uses of language) in terms of things. To Mo Zi, the Confucian way of solving the problem was wrong, for elevating names above things means to value the past over the present and to review ever-changed reality in light of rigid vision; this would hinder the state and the people in achieving mutual benefits  (*li*). In Mo Zi's view, achieving mutual benefit among all the people is the final aim or very nature of *shi* (things or reality), and thus is the ultimate criterion of names (ideas and uses of language).

As a key figure of the Confucian school , Mencius developed Confucius's theory by criticizing Mo Zi's doctrine. According to Mencius, to correct things in terms of names is the right way to solve the sociopolitical problems of his time; in the final analysis, sociopolitical problems are ethical problems, i.e., how one as a real human being lives a good life. In becoming a real human being, it is absolutely necessary to cultivate oneself in terms of names as norms and values. These norms and values, particularly *ren* (humanity), *yi* (rightness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), represent the characteristics of humankind and can guide one in how to act in everyday life, and distinguish right from wrong. Hence names as such are indeed universal principles; without them, there would be no human life, social order, and mutual benefit.

Mencius's defense of Confucius's position deepened the meaning of rectifying names. Whereas names in Confucius referred mainly to sociopolitical matters, they were addressed mainly as ethical matters in Mencius. As a result, Confucian politics

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[27] Bertrand Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1955), vi.

(outward kingliness) and Confucian ethics (inward sageliness) fused into or showed up through a Confucian theory of language. The argument between Confucian *yi* (rightness) and Moist *li* (benefit) can be seen as an extension of the argument between Confucian *ming* and Moist *shi*. Mo Zi pushed forward the discourse on *ming-shi* by criticizing Confucius's notion of *ming*, and Mencius refined Confucius's notion by criticizing Mo Zi's notion of *shi* in turn. Their mutual criticism led later thinkers to a higher level understanding of the *ming-shi* relationship.

Following Mo Zi, the Neo-Moists paid a lot of attention to the studies of *shi*. Yet, their study took a logical turn, that is, not examining things as they occur in the sociopolitical realm, but as they appear in the semiotic realm. They were aware that it is not enough to simply ask about all uses of language to promote practical effect; instead, as the user of language, one has to comprehend under what conditions a name can make good sense and speech can influence people's behavior. *Ming* is not a vague mirror, but a regulator, of *shi;* to what extent one achieves practical effect depends on the extent that one understands *ming*'s meaning and how to use it. Under these conditions, it becomes absolutely necessary to analyze carefully the intension and extension of names and review the rules of speech and argument.

Certainly, the Neo-Moist approach to language and logic stood for the highest level of analytic spirit and skill in ancient China. This approach, however, was not an isolated and accidental event. Rather, it was a logically necessary development that the *ming-shi* discourse moved from the rectification of names to the analysis of names. In other words, ancient thinkers who participated in this discourse before the Neo-Moists provided them with enlightened ideas about the *ming-shi* problem so that the Neo-Moists could make use of previous discussions and continue this discourse through their new approach.

Xun Zi's theory of language should be seen in the same vein. Xun Zi used the phrase "rectification of names" as a title for one of his works. That means, he deliberately followed Confucius, i.e., taking rectification of names as a means of solving sociopolitical problems. Nevertheless, the fact that he based his theory on language analysis displays the Neo-Moist influence on his reasoning. He stressed names' function in designating things and sentences' function in representing the nature of realities. This indicates the difference between his understanding of language and that of the Daoists.

In addition, Xun Zi objected to playing on names and confusing things with names; this shows his critical attitude toward the *bian zhe*. On the surface, Xun Zi's theory of language was a return to Confucius's theory of language. However, it is important to note that this return was a dialectical synthesis. It insisted on the practical position of Confucius while at the same time critically absorbed some views of other schools. In this sense, Xun Zi's theory of language represents not merely a Confucian understanding of the relationship between language and reality but the cream of the whole discourse.

It is essential to point out that the axis of problem-solving/reasoning/discursive practice is a key to Chinese thinking. One crucial reason why some people misinterpret Chinese culture is that they ignore this axis and do not review Chinese intellectual tradition in light of discourse. Thus, in characterizing Chinese thought,

some scholars divide it into rationalism and antirationalism (e.g., Graham, 1989), or speculative reason and practical (and cunning) reason (e.g., Raphals, 1992); some others claim that Chinese philosophy had nothing to do with reason because it did not have any core conceptions resembling Western "reason" and deductive principles (e.g., Hansen, 1992), or because reason is bound to the essential, the universal, and the permanent, but Chinese thought dealt with the concrete, the particular, and the changeable (e.g., Hall & Ames, 1995). I would like to argue that the above characterizations are misdirected, for (1) genetically, reason does not arise from conceptions of reason but from argumentative discourse; (2) primarily, reason is *dialectic* more than analytic[28]; (3) functionally, reason refers to the choice of the right means for solving problems instead of to the features of problems themselves.

In the first case, as philosophy is *performed in dialogue* rather than spoken in words, "[r]eason cannot be demonstrated; it reveals itself in philosophical dialogue."[29] When tracing back to the beginning of reason in the West, we find that "[i]n the beginning was the word or, more accurately, the logos. And in the beginning, 'logos' meant story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, thought."[30] That is to say, reason and rationality[31] is bound to and unfolds along with discourse (or dialogue); in other words, reason and discourse are symbiotic and reciprocal. This is certainly the case in ancient China. Many Chinese thinkers presented their philosophical conceptions in the *ming-shi* discourse and demonstrated their points by arguing with thinkers from other schools. Although the Daoists suggested abandoning language, they gave reasons why one has to do so. It was in the soil of argumentative discourse that Chinese philosophy grew and reason manifested itself.

In the second case, because reason comes to be associated with discourse, it should be considered as dialogic interaction *per se*. Hence, we cannot understand the rationality of a culture until we interpret this culture as a series of discourses. Although any discourse yields analysis to some extent,[32] "analysis" is not the crucial condition of reason. Argument and dialectic are more essential than analysis in discourse. In regard to this point, we should pay special attention to Georg Hegel

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[28] To some scholars, particularly Graham and Hansen, "reason" in its strict sense means "analytic reason" only. In my view, it is true that some thinkers (e.g., the Confucians) were less analytic than others (e.g., the Dialecticians and Neo-Moists), as Graham suggested. But, it is not equally true that "less analytic" is "less rational" because the quintessence of reason is dialogic more than analytic.

[29] Jurgen Mittelstrass, "On Socratic Dialogue," in Chales Griswold, Jr. ed. *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 140.

[30] Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 5.

[31] To my observation, the two philosophical concepts "reason" and "rationality" are not clearly defined in many publications. In this work, I use "reason" in most cases to designate human faculty to seek truth, develop knowledge, and solve problems in light of some rules. By "rationality" I mean a human ideal manifested in the course of seeking truth, developing knowledge, and solving problems.

[32] As Gadamer points out, one's practice of willing and reasoning is done "by means of an analytical procedure." (*Reason in the Age of Science*, 1981, 81). That means, analysis is a *necessary* condition of reason and discourse.

and Jurgen Habermas' theories. Hegel elevates dialectical reason above analytic thinking and suggests that "it is only by carrying on an interpretative dialogue with past or alien cultures that one is stimulated to reflect on one's situation and thereby overcome the limits of one's own parochial understanding."[33] Habermas raises the concept of communicative reason (or rationality). This concept suggests that argumentative discourse (1) is the key to reason; (2) is dialectical-centered and is communicative action; and (3) yields consensus, which is the basis of a good society. Construed from the perspective of argumentative discourse, the focus of rationality and knowledge has been changed. As Habermas indicates, "rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with how speaking and acting subjects *acquire and use knowledge*."[34] We have seen that in and through the *ming-shi* discourse, ancient Chinese philosophers shared a common moral-intellectual identity, argued with each other on key questions, sharpened their critical spirit, and attained emancipation by virtue of that critical spirit. They sought possible means for solving varied problems in the lifeworld, obtaining consensus toward a higher level of difference or explicated difference, and arriving at a higher level of consensus. It was in and through intellectual discourses that ancient Chinese thinkers argued, criticized, and communicated with each other; thus, they performed reason.

In the third case, whereas discourse (or collective thinking) is aimed, generally speaking, at appropriately solving problems (either general and abstract or particular and concrete), reason is not prior and transcendent, but instrumental and practical. John Dewey suggests that in the reconstruction of philosophy, reason "becomes actualized in the methods by which the needs and conditions, the obstacles and resources, of situations are scrutinized in detail, and intelligent plans of improvement are worked out."[35] It should be clear that the actualization of reason can only take place within the structure of discourse. That means the rationality of a culture is shaped by the *form* of its thinking or the structure it thinks *within* instead of by the *content* of its thinking or the things it thinks *about*. Thus, we find no reasons to claim Chinese thought was nonrational simply because it dealt with concrete and particular problems rather than with abstract and universal ideas.

In short, Chinese culture appeared as featuring *dialogic reason* . Being shaped in intellectual discourse, particularly the *ming-shi* discourse, Chinese culture did not totally throw off the theoretical character of cognitive reason and the practical function of instrumental reason; rather, it placed them in a dynamic and dialectic context. It did not see reason as a purely subjective and psychological phenomenon; on the contrary, it construed reason as an extra-subjective and social activity. And it did not separate universality from particularity, knowledge from action, and regulation from creation; instead, it treated them as structurally complementary and functionally reciprocal.

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[33] David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic Reason* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1987), 2.

[34] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 8.

[35] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 174.

## 10.3  Dao: Chinese Wisdom and Worldview

Karl Jaspers claims that the Greek word for "philosopher" signifies the lover of wisdom. It demonstrates "the essence of philosophy is not the possession of truth but the search for truth"[36] because this essence of philosophy is always on the way, and defines itself by its realization. "Philosophy then becomes the realization of the living idea and the reflection upon this idea, action, and discourse on action in one."[37] What we can read from Jaspers is this: there is no standard model of philosophy, for philosophy is formulated in discourse on various problems about the lifeworld. Different ways of raising and solving problems shape, as well as display, different types of wisdom, philosophy, and culture. To be sure, the notion of *dao* is the key to Chinese wisdom. To understand *dao* as Chinese wisdom, we focus here on two pairs of polarities which derive from, and thus can illuminate *dao*. They are *yin-yang* and *ming-shi*.

According to the *Yi Jing*, *dao* is a metaphysical substance. (Thus, whenever referring to this substance, I capitalize it as Dao.) It is not only the source of all things but also the origin of infinite changes. This is because Dao consists of two opposite but also complementary parts: *yin* and *yang*. All things and infinite changes come from the oppositeness and complementarity of *yin* and *yang*. In Chinese language, *yin* initially means "dark" and metaphorically signifies night, earth, female, softness, and rest, whereas *yang* initially means "light" and metaphorically signifies day, heaven, male, firmness, and motion. Accordingly, "*[y]in* is always the phase of difference, and *yang* always the phase of identity in the process of change (*yin*). Therefore, *yin* represents the potentiality changing into the actual and *yang* the actuality changing into potentiality."[38] In this sense, Dao is the dynamic unity of being (ontology) and becoming (cosmology).

Like the *Yi Jing*, the *Dao De Jing* also treats Dao as the unity of *yin* and *yang*. According to Lao Zi, Dao produces one, the one produces two, the two produce three, and the three produce ten thousand things.[39] Chung-ying Cheng gives this passage an insightful interpretation, suggesting that the "one" means the original unity and the great ultimate for all things, it is from the oneness that all things in the world derive. "But this cosmogenesis of all things must proceed from the unity of opposites and complements. Hence one produces two,"[40] which are identified as *yin* and *yang*. Along with the creative interaction of the two forces (i.e., *yin* and *yang*)

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[36]  Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1954), 12.

[37]  Ibid, 13.

[38]  Chung-ying Cheng, "Chinese metaphysics as Non-metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality," in *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, ed. R. Allinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 177.

[39]  *Dao De Jing*, ch. 42.

[40]  Cheng, 1989, 198.

grows out of a third, the fruits of *yin* and *yang*. "Hence a whole world of things is produced from the process of unity (one)-complementary opposition (two)-creative fruits (three)."[41]

The Confucian view and the Daoist view combined represent ancient thinkers' metaphysical thinking and worldview. In them, Dao is primarily a cosmo-onto-logical substance, and it is from Dao that realities, acts, and understandings arise. Accordingly, all inquiries into knowledge, values, and even ways of thinking should take Dao as their ground. Heidegger is clearly aware of the metaphorical meaning and metaphysical function of Dao. He points out that Dao is "the original giver and founder of ways," and "the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos*, properly mean to say."[42] In the final analysis, all episte-mological, axiological, moral, and linguistic problems are cosmo-ontological problems, since all of them are human-related problems, and humankind is but one of various beings. In this sense, the notion of *dao* is a root (or first order) metaphor.

In Stephen Pepper's view, a root metaphor refers to a set of common sense facts, is accepted as self-evident and indubitable, and is used to interpret all other facts. He claims that "[i]n the course of this interpretation, the root metaphor itself may undergo critical analysis and refinement which reciprocally increases its range and power of interpretation. When it assumes unlimited range, or worldwide scope, then it is a metaphysical hypothesis."[43]

In fact, *dao* is rightly such a kind of root metaphor in Chinese culture. Ancient Chinese thinkers used this metaphor to review the world, interpret the meaning of human life, and handle problems raised in the lifeworld. Because Dao is the unity of *yin* and *yang*, all things must share the nature of *yin* and *yang*; hence, all things should be understood in light of mutual dependence, interaction, and continued change; moreover, all human practice in dealing with all things in the world should treat opposites (or antitheses) as polarities (or syntheses). To a large extent, this can be thought of as the core of Chinese wisdom and worldview.

As we have seen, *ming* and *shi* were crucial subject matters of intellectual discourse in ancient China; few other concepts or problems attracted so much attention from almost every school of thought. This was not only because people depended on language for their daily thinking, communicating, and discussing, but also because the *ming-shi* issue played a pivotal role in dialogue and debate over an array of problems in onto-cosmology, epistemology, ethics, axiology, rhetoric, and sociopolitics.

Examining the views on *ming-shi*, we find that covered under this issue were four groups of relations. The first group of relations consisted of *ming* as "role" and "repute" and *shi* as "conduct" and "deed"; the *ming-shi* relation was thus seen as

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper Collins Press, 1982), 92.

[43] Stephen Pepper, "The Root Metaphor Theory of Metaphysics," *The Journal of Philosophy* 32, no 14 (July 1935), 369.

"role-conduct" and "repute-deed." The Confucians and the Legalists paid more attention to this kind of *ming-shi*. The second group of relations consisted of *ming* as "norms" (or laws) and "values" and *shi* as "behaviors" and "realities"; the *ming-shi* relation was thus seen as "norms-behaviors" and "values-realities." The Confucians and Legalists were more interested in this kind of *ming-shi*. The third group of relations consisted of *ming* as "concepts" and "knowledge" and *shi* as "facts" and "action"; the *ming-shi* relation was thus seen as "concepts-facts" and "knowledge-action." The Moists and Dialecticians made more points on this kind of *ming-shi*. The fourth group of relations consisted of *ming* as "words" and "the symbolic" and *shi* as "things" and "the real"; the *ming-shi* relation was thus seen as "words-things" and "the symbolic-the real." The Daoists, Neo-Moists, *bian zhe*, and Xun Zi were more concerned with this kind of *ming-shi*.

Despite the differences in focus or stress, there was a theme that served to unite the *ming-shi* discourse, that is, all the relations derived from the "*ming-shi*" categories were examined as polarities or syntheses in light of the *yin-yang* scheme; moreover, the examination was aimed not at achieving pure knowledge of *ming-shi* for its own sake, but at helping people to practice Dao through the knowledge of *ming-shi*. Hence, when Confucius suggested rectifying names (social roles), what he considered was how one carries out the duty corresponding to one's role. When Han Fei claimed to enquire into the correspondence between *ming* (names) and *xing* (形 things), his attention was focused on putting human behavior under the regulation of norms (or laws). When Mo Zi advanced the three standards of *yan* (speeches or doctrines), he was arguing that knowledge should not only be grounded on, but also promote action. When Gongsun Long argued "a white horse is not a horse," what he cared about was how to use the symbolic to serve the real. And when Xun Zi made an effort to rectify words and discriminate things, he thought of this as a means of establishing an ideal society.

It is important to point out that whereas *ming* and *shi* were understood and treated in light of the *yin-yang* scheme, they were refined as an exemplar of this scheme. That means *ming* and *shi* not only share the ontological and epistemological principles of Dao, but also cover and explain language-related facts or phenomena. In this sense, *ming-shi* was a branch (or secondary order) metaphor of Chinese culture (in contrast to the Dao of *yin-yang* as its root or first order metaphor).

Considering the order of the four groups of relations mentioned above, it was not arbitrary; rather, it reflects the progress of ancient thinkers' understanding of the *ming-shi* issue. And this progress indicates an extension of *ming-shi* from the sociopolitical realm to the philosophical realm (i.e., from "role-conduct" to "the symbolic-the real"). That is to say, *ming-shi* was no longer a conjunctive term referring to concrete things in a limited area; instead, it was transformed into a concept which signifies a "linguistically mediated world." This world consists of two parts: one is the real (*shi*) and the other is the symbolic (*ming*). The real refers to all things (concrete and abstract) and events or activities that take place physically. The symbolic refers to linguistic formalization of these things, events, and activities.

As the two parts of a world, *ming* and *shi* are necessarily complementary and transformative. They are complementary because without *ming*, *shi* would not be understood and hence be meaningless, and without *shi*, *ming* would have nothing to designate and hence be empty. They are transformative because *ming*, as norms, values, and knowledge, can influence, or in some cases even determine, reality by guiding (enlightening and criticizing) people's action; in turn, *shi*, as reality and people's action, can change (deepen and renew) norms, values, and knowledge. When *ming* influences *shi* and *shi* changes *ming*, they take the other's part not only as the means of its existence, but also as a generator of its development. The real existence of a being is meaningful only when it is symbolized in language. Anything that is totally beyond language hardly exists as a being for humans. Although the Daoists suggested the eternal Dao is nameless, they did not deny language can hint or indirectly signify its existence.

To be sure, the complementarity and transformativeness of *ming* and *shi* are rooted in humankind's moral, sociopolitical, and linguistic practice. Human praxis is the absolute medium between *ming* and *shi* as well as the ultimate regulator and authoritative interpreter of *ming* and *shi* for it is the praxis that establishes the connection of the symbolic to the real, and thus builds the ontological ground of *ming-shi*. It is the praxis that shapes the meaning of words and things, and thus builds the epistemological ground of *ming-shi*. To ancient Chinese thinkers, human praxis is theory-based practice; it entails and aims at a harmonious relationship between *ming* and *shi*. Seen in this light, any practical treatment of the *ming-shi* relation is at the same time a theory-based treatment  and any theoretical understanding of the *ming-shi* relation is practice-orientated understanding. This displays the nature of *ming-shi* as a metaphor and an example of the *yin-yang* scheme.

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