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Zhengming: pragmatism, pragmatics, and the historical narrative—Xunzi: a case study

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Abstract   The Confucian concept of *zhengming*, especially as found in Xunzi, has long been approached from a semantic viewpoint. However, the traditional logical-semantic approach is not useful for studying *zhengming* in so far as Confucian judgment prioritizes "appropriateness" over "semantic truth" as it is expressed through its historical narrative. It is in the roles and relations that stem from the family through the whole society within which people are constantly cultivating their persons. This sets the aesthetic context for the art of attuning names. Therefore, *zhengming* can be seen as pragmatics within the historical narrative.

Keywords   Attuning names · Rhetorical semantics · The art (*cao shu*) · Historical narrative

The problem with logical-semantics as hermeneutical studying of *Zhengming*

Xunzi's 荀子 concept of *Zhengming* 正名 has long been approached through the methodology of semantics. Since Cua, in 1985, correlated its ethical argumentation together with the logical-semantic dimensions, the two aspects have seemed to be deeply entangled. Just like Cua, a lot of scholars seem committed to drawing on logical instruments to address the semantic problems of the ethical discourse. However, the particularity of ethical argumentation has threatened its compatibility with logical semantics, leaving only never-ending confusions. Cua also acknowledged that "an analogical projection is projectable in prospective significance. But we have in ethical reasoning nothing as compelling or binding as a legal

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precedent…"In this regard, the Confucian quest for historical moral knowledge is understandable."[1]

In other words, analogical projection in ethical reasoning aims at analogizing new moral knowledge from the historical. This can also be regarded as consistency in name and actuality that should resort to a "reflective agent" who exercises the search for optimal appropriateness and meaning (yi 义) to cope with changing situations (Cua 1985, p. 99). On the other hand, Cua still maintains that the approach to achieve the ethical aim rests with "conceptual aspects" such as basic logical-semantics, instead of "pragmatic aspect" which is only the "motivational background" (Cua 1985, p. 105, 103). Here Cua quotes Austin's "linguistic phenomenon" to address the correspondence of name and actuality. That is, the ethical projection is ultimately determined by logical patterns that represent the relation between name and actuality.

Instead of interpreting semantic meaning through unchanging logical relations between name and actuality in this way, Lin, a scholar in logical semantics, proposes his "semantic inferentialism" that ties the meaning of a name to the justificatory or inferential properties in which it might reside. Thus, a name is decided by all related social activities in which "we assume various roles, demand a certain type of treatment in accordance with our self-perception, recognize others as having the right to make certain kinds of moves within our speech-community, and give rationale to others to explain or to justify what we are doing."[2] All these activities can be deemed familiar occurrences in the process of one communicating with others and forging relationships with the outer world that as Dewey says "[attaches] itself to the possibilities of nature and associated living."[3] Though acknowledged the pragmatic influence in semantics, Lin failed in recognizing that his conception of *pragmatics semantics* is actually pragmatics. Rather, he would give weight to the conceptual aspect over pragmatic one, just like Cua. But it could not be denied that Robert Brandom from whom he cited the word "inferentialism", has been deeply affected by pragmatics and pragmatism in that he prioritizes pragmatics over semantics.[4]

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[1] A. S. Cua, "Ethical Reasoning and the Uses of Definition", in *Ethical Argumentation: A study in Xunzi's Moral Epistemology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 96.

[2] Lin Chung-I 林从一, "Xunzi as a Semantic Inferentialist: Zhengming Bian-Shuo and Dao-Li", *Dao* 10 (2011): 311–340, at pp. 328–330. By "semantic representationism" Lin means the semantics that represent the fixed logical relations between a term and its object, such like sufficient and necessary conditions. While his "semantic inferentialism" refers to a conception of *pragmatics semantics* that subordinates pragmatics under semantics. In fact, it is on pragmatic foundation that a term's meaning lies not only in reference but also in normative network embedding the reference. (pp. 312–314) In this sense, it is actually pragmatics instead of semantics.

[3] John Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*, *The Collected Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (1972–1985; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008) (Late Works 4: p. 244). If there is no other illustration, all quotations from Dewey are referenced to this collection.

[4] Jaroslav Peregrin, "Tales of the Mighty Dead (book review)", *Erkenntnis* 59 (2003), 421–424. In this essay, a notion of IHFPR (inferentialist-holist-functionalist-pragmatist-rationalist tradition) has been proposed, and Robert Brandom can be regarded as the representative of it. In other words, Brandom's inferentialism is rooted in pragmatic thoughts of the priority of practice of theory, as can be seen in what Lin quoted in his "semantic inferentialism", although he does not acknowledge it is pragmatics.

Lin is actually a representative of the victory of pragmatics over the failure of semantics. Pragmatics was first deemed as the extension of semantics in formal language containing indexical names related to "both the person asserting the sentence and his space-time position". However, formal language in pure semantics is blamed for its formalization that limits its usage in oblique contexts, thus pragmatics tends to be applied to ordinary language with non-denoting names and tenseless expression. In addition, pragmatics is also featured by its particular viewpoint of truth. James says: "On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is 'true'."[5] Pragmatic truth is never absolute, but is only the expedient way of bringing most mutual benefits and satisfying people's interests to the largest extent. Therefore, it cannot be deprived from ordinary experience and language. Similarly, truth for Dewey is also most close to ordinary language, in which facts and ideas are not separate in the working inquiry, so truth is not antecedent to the inquiry process. James and Dewey set the foundation of pragmatics that may be the best fit for *Zhengming* study.

In the field of *Zhengming* studies, there has been a transition of the focus from logical- semantic one to somewhat of a more pragmatic one. A case in point is Hagen's viewpoint that interprets *Zhengming* as a constructive project.[6] Nevertheless, the trend remains questionable, and some criterion should be given as the reason for this substitution. The core topic of logical semantics is the concept of truth, as Tarski defined the concept of "true" sentence in the Convention T.[7] However, he acknowledged that the convention is based on Aristotle's well-known judgment for what is true and false.[8] For Aristotle, "what is" means the reality, and "that it is" or not refers to how to call or describe the reality. In other words, "to say that it is" expresses a judgment that correspond the name to the reality, and the truth rest with the accordance of name to reality.

In contrast, the definition of truth is rather vague in Xunzi.

The person who apprehends different realities uses different terms for them; hence he who refers to different realities should never use other than different terms; thus there could not be any confusion.[9] (*Zhengming Pian* 正名篇)

It seems that what matters is just to clarify similarity and difference in order to keep the term and actuality separate, or that what is true is determined only by the

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[5] William James, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis ·Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 299.

[6] Kurtis G. Hagen, "Confucian Constructivism: A reconstruction and application of the philosophy of Xunzi" (a dissertation of University of Hawaii, 2002).

[7] Alfred Tarski. *The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages*. Logic, Semantics, Mathematics, trans. J. H. Woodger (1st Edition by Oxford University Press, 1956, 2nd Edition by Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 187–188.

[8] Tarski says in the footnote of this page that the correct semantical definition of truth means similarly the well know words of Aristotle: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true." (A1fred Tarski. *The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages*. Logic, Semantics, Mathematics), 155.

[9] Homer H. Dubs, *The works of Hsuntze* (London W.C.: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), 286. 知异实者之异名也，故使异实者莫不异名也，不可乱也。Most translation of citation from Xunzi is from Dubs or Knoblock as indicated. Some that are modified on their basis according to my interpretation would not be indicated.

pragmatic aim of clarity of expression. Maybe it is even more clearly illustrated in these famous words:

> There are no terms assuredly appropriate of themselves. There was an agreement and things were named. When the agreement had been made and had become customary—that is called an appropriate designation. That which is different from what is agreed upon is called an inappropriate designation.

> Terms have no corresponding realities appropriate of themselves. There was an agreement and things were named; when the agreement had been made and had become customary—these were called terms appropriate to realities.[10]

It is not that name should correspond to reality as in logical-semantic concept of truth, for there is no such unchangeable reality where "truth" rests inherently. Instead, "appropriateness" is the substitute for "truth". "Appropriateness" is achieved by agreement from within a community to the outer world, and is always attuned as situations change with time and space. For instance, when we talk about "true friend", we do not mean a definition of friend in reality that is never changed. Rather, it refers to a feeling of optimal appropriateness in the process of making friends. It lies in what we think as the fittest relation between and among friends. So, "truth" is neither intrinsic for names nor antecedent to reality, it is no more than "appropriateness" that is achieved in the process where name and its object are never separated. Thus, truth of an idea is not the conformance of name to reality, but the appropriateness achieved in the process where both name and actuality find their niche.

Xunzi puts it in *Discourse on Ritual Propriety Principles*: "Ritual Propriety principles have three roots. Heaven and Earth are the root of life. Forebears are the root of kinship. Lords and teachers are the root of order."[11] The appropriateness of names should resort to the nature, issue from the forebears, and ultimately be inherited from lords and teachers. It is through living with people around and learning from the more sophisticated that our speech and behavior become appropriate. Indeed, we learn about our nature and forebears through teachers around us, thus both our idea and the reality are given through learning. The appropriateness of name lies just in the roles and relations between and among people, lies in the mutual-entailing process people seeking for their interests and establishing agreements. It is totally different from "truth" in logical semantics context where name corresponds to reality as is assigned to constant, separated atom. Dewey says: "The logical result was to cut off 'consciousness', as the collectivity of immediate qualities, from nature, and to create the dualism of physical nature and mind which is the source of modern epistemological

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[10] Homer H. Dubs, *The works of Hsuntze* (London W.C.: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), 286–287. 名无固宜, 约之以命, 约定俗成谓之宜, 异于约则谓之不宜. 名无固实, 约之以命实, 约定俗成谓之实名。。

[11] 礼有三本。天地者, 生之本也; 先祖者, 类之本也; 君师者, 治之本也。Teachers here are not limited to those who teach in the classroom, but include ordinary people all around who are more sophisticated in some aspect. So people could reap harvest in the mutual-entailing process of learning in ordinary experience.

problems."[12] While in Chinese Philosophy, there is a kind of "correlative thinking" characterized by the "alteration and transformation" in a process, in which nature and mind, one and many, are never separated. This contextual interpretation of Confucianism is called "correlative cosmology".[13] Taken this as our departure, we can go forward to unfolding the pragmatic meaning of Xunzi's *Zhengming*.

Zhengming as a matter of pragmatics

Although names have neither intrinsic unchangeable appropriateness nor fixed object, there is indeed something good intrinsic in names, as said in *Zhengming*: "Names do have intrinsic good qualities. When a name is direct, easy, and not at odds with reality, it is called a 'good name'." The three properties of a good name are also expressed in another way:

> The "use" of a particular name consists in the object being clearly understood when the name is heard. The beauty of names consists in compositions being formed by stringing words together. When both the use and the beauty are grasped, that is called knowing the name.[14]

In this passage, the "use" of a name means it is easy, direct, and not at odds with its object, just as stated in the properties of "good name". While the beauty (*li* 丽) of the name always refers to the beautiful rhetoric in its linkage with other names connected with it. Yang Liang interpreted "beauty" as "magnificence of names that are linked together to build up writings." Wang Tianhai had something similar in mind when he explained it as gorgeousness. Another explaining is an "association of more than two words", as is supported also by both Yang Liang and Liang Qixiong. The two viewpoints are both approved of by Liu Nianqin.[15] In fact, the gorgeousness of names is embodied in the consistence of expression when they are connected into a whole writing. The aesthetic sense of name lies in wording and phrasing, and that is also closely connected with the "use" of a name in that both the "beauty" and "use" of a name are mutually entailing in the choice of words and building of sentences. When an article is well built, the names in it would be easy and direct, without conflicting with their objects; and when the words in an article

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[12] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, (Late Works 1: p. 113).

[13] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), 48.

[14] John Knoblock, "On the Correct Use of Names", Xunzi: *A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) Volume III, 131. 名闻实喻, 名之用也; 累而成文, 名之丽也。用丽俱得, 谓之知名。 In this passage, "linkage" is substituted by beauty in Dubs' translation. For Xunzi, both are the meanings of *li* 丽, for structure of language rests on the aesthetic implication in linking words in speech that is also related to behaviors, attitudes and aesthetic feeling in people's communication.

[15] Wang Tianhai 王天海, *Collation and Annotation of* Xunzi 荀子校释 (Shanghai: Shanghai Rarebooks Publishing House 上海古籍出版社, 2005) Volume II, 909. Liu nianqin 刘念亲, *Exegetical Annotation of* Xunzi's Zhengmingg Pian 荀子正名篇诂释, Wu Qiu Bei Zhai Collected Works of Xunzi 无求备斋荀子集成, ed. Yan Lingfeng 严灵峰(编), (Taibei 台北: Cheng Wen Publishing House 成文出版社有限公司, 1977), 33.

are easy and direct, the whole writing will be fluent and elegant. These two aspects are regarded by Xunzi as indispensable for knowing a name.

Actually, it is these two aspects that constitute the intrinsic good qualities, as is Xunzi calls "easy, direct and not at odds with actuality (*jing yi bu fu*)". Robert Eno has illustrated this relationship as follows,

> Although individual words are initially chosen arbitrarily, their consistent use and syntactic relations in language create a perfect correspondence between the elements and structure of language and the objects of the world and their relations. It is this characteristic of language that allows the text explicitly to limit its conventionalism: "Names can be intrinsically good: those that are straightforward and simple, without contradiction (fu) are called good names".[16]

Originally, the proposal of this viewpoint is to refute conventionalism, which Hagen separated into two schools. The first is referred to as realist or absolutist in that "what get name" is predetermined, and the other is regarded as pure conventionalism in which both name and its relationship with object are casually decided.[17] It can not be denied that Eno's proposal is different from the two schools in that he insists either the structure of linking a name to others or the meaning of a name is determined by the appropriate use of the name in language. Xunzi calls using a name appropriately grasping both use and beauty of a name, and it is also regarded as easy and direct without contradiction.

As stated above, the word "beauty" (*li* 丽) has the meaning of gorgeousness that is most frequently referred to as rhetoric, while it is also connected with syntactic structures of language. Interestingly, the two meanings are intricately entwined with each other, so that even the famous annotators like Yang Liang were forced to acknowledge the double meanings of the word. It can be assumed that the "true" relationship between a name and its object lies in the rhetorical one. In other words, truth is nothing but the art of our ordinary expression with concrete references to myriad things and people around us, and the art is featured by an aesthetic feeling of appropriateness in ranging things and names in every particular context.

That is actually the pragmatics of *Zhengming*. It is rooted in the processual cosmology, as is described in Defoort's words: "Rather than in truth for truth's sake, the focus of these texts lay in the best way (*dao* 道) to lead one's person, family, and state to order".[18] To achieve the order, a continual negotiation is processed among people from a family to a community till a consensus is reached in the whole world. As quoted above, this can be seen in the other crucial consideration in instituting names that Xunzi calls a principle of "the agreement being made and becoming custom" (*yue ding su cheng*). However, fixed agreement and established custom does not necessarily entail conventionalism. An alternative may have something to

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[16] Eno Robert, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Deference of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 272.

[17] Kurtis Hagen, "Xunzi's Use of Zhengming: Naming as a constructive project," *Asian Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2002): 35–51, at pp. 36–37.

[18] Defoort, C, *The Pheasant Cap Master: A rhetorical reading* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 103.

do with the art of process in which words are made easy, direct and not at odds with actuality. Hagen quotes Xunzi: "Among the myriad things, different concrete things have similar appearances. There is no intrinsic appropriateness, but there is a use for people. This refers to the art of discriminating regular patterns (*shu*)."[19] In the footnote for this passage, Hagen says that he believes the process of art is how people choose categories and build up "myriad things" on the foundation of the "patterns of regularity out there".[20] The realization of establishing customs and making agreement rests with a process of art (*shu*). This art could be described as making the words easy to know, the categories directly understandable, and making the name and actuality not conflict. In a word, the process of art is easiness, direct without confliction (*jing yi bu fu*). The same goes for the realization of establishment of agreements and customs in the form of names (*yue ding su cheng*). Just as Xunzi puts it in *Nothing Indecorous* 不苟篇: "When he refines his speech, those who are of his kind respond".

Since the art of *jing yi bu fu* can be ascribed to this rhetorical use of words to forge a sense of appropriateness, it is indeed what James and Dewey calls pragmatics. In the following, pragmatics as the art (*shu*) of realizing the establishment of names within a historical narrative will be explored.

Pragmatics in historical narrative

As is known to all, *Zhengming Pian* 正名篇 begins with "the established names of later kings". And this is emphasized by Xunzi from time to time to scrutinize the way of both the later and the earlier kings.

> The beginnings of Heaven and Earth are still present today. And the way of all True Kings is in that of the later kings. The exemplary person carefully scrutinizes the way of the Later Kings before arranging in their proper grades the various kings of earlier times, as though he were deliberating in court robes with arms folded in formal stance. He derives guidelines from proprieties and moral principles, makes sharp the division between right and wrong, binds together the essentials of the world, and makes well ordered the multitude within the seas, as though in the service of a single man. Hence the art is very small, but the tasks he undertakes are extremely large.[21]

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[19] Kurtis Hagen, "Xunzi's Use of Zhengming: Naming as a constructive project," *Asian Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2002): 35–51, at p. 42. Here, "the art of discriminating regular patterns" is very like the art 术 we mean here.

[20] Kurtis Hagen, "Xunzi's Use of Zhengming: Naming as a constructive project," *Asian Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2002): 35–51, at p. 49.

[21] John Knoblock, "Nothing Indecorous", Xunzi*: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), Volume I, 179. 天地始者, 今日是也; 百王之道, 后王是也。君子审后王之道而论于百王之前, 若端拜而议。推礼义之统, 分是非之分, 总天下之要, 治海内之众, 若使一人, 故操弥约而事弥大。*Cao* 操 shares the same meaning with *shu* 术, *cao shu* 操 术 or the art, and I make some modification of *cao* on the original translation.

The method to retrieve to the beginning of Heaven and Earth and to know the way of kings in earlier times is deliberating. This means scrutinizing how the later kings arranged all the earlier kings in appropriate grades. That is what Xunzi calls the art (*cao shu* 操术), which is also the same art (*shu*) mentioned above. This emphasizes the role of establishing categories and names in the art of pragmatics, while the categories to be fixed are deliberated regarding things and occurrences in the past, so the way to know today through past lies just in the art.

Sarah A. Mattice has drawn on Dewey's "deliberation" as a "dramatic rehearsal" to illustrate how to intersect past, present and future in Confucian names-attuning.[22] That is to say, giving the proper meaning to a name implies all the directions and behaviors related to the role expected in this name, and all these directions or actions should be played out through deliberation, which refers to thinking through the past to figure out the present. As can be seen, Mattice supports the viewpoint that there is no distinct line between language and action. People's behavior is a kind of language that is integrated into the actuality, and serves as the basis for the establishment of names and customs throughout the history. As Ames puts it: "It is not just language, mind, or indeed, a human face, that penetrates our reality, but our persons in their entirety."[23] It is because speech and action are never separated in Confucian role ethics that the art of clarifying speech is also that of attuning behavior in a historical narrative.

In this light, the art (*cao shu*) is always correlated not only with people's arrangement of words, but also with their behavior, facial expression, and even emotions. For example, Xunzi has described the demeanor of scholars and exemplary people:

> When he plays the role of father or elder brother, his cap should protrude straight out and his robes be full, his demeanor should be relaxed and his manner should be dignified, grave, inspiring, correct but comfortable to be around, noble and imposing, broad-minded, enlightened, and calmly at ease. When he plays the role of son or younger brother, his cap should protrude and his robes be full, his demeanor should be attentive, and his manner should be temperate, confident, helpful, honest, constantly striving, respectful, exemplary, and assuming.[24]

According to the role one plays, the exemplary person would take on behaviors and countenance particularly fit for the situation. That is, "he is responsive to every transformation, modifying as necessary to obtain for each thing its proper place. For only in this way can he ultimately become a sage." It is worth noting that the art of action has something to do with that of speech. Xunzi says in *Zhengming Pian*: "The

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[22] Sarah A. Mattice, "On 'Rectifying' Rectification: Reconsidering Zhengminggg in Light of Confucian Role Ethics," *Asian Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2010): 247–260, at p. 255.

[23] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011), 106.

[24] John Knoblock, "Contra Twelve Philosophers", Xunzi: *A Translation and Study of the Complete Works,* Volume I, 228. 其冠进, 其衣逢, 其容良, 俨然, 壮然, 祺然, 蕼然, 恢恢然, 广广然, 昭昭然, 荡荡然, 是父兄之容也。其冠进, 其衣逢, 其容悫, 俭然, 侈然, 辅然, 端然, 訾然洞然, 缀缀然, 瞀瞀然, 是子弟之容也。.

discourses of exemplary people are wide-ranging in subject yet contain the essence of the matter, are simply presented yet are precisely applicable to the subject, and are diverse in content yet have unity."

That is how to use words correctly, the embodiment of the art. The words used are simple and concise, but closely related to the problem at hand. That is what Xunzi regards as "difficulties of persuasion".

All the difficulties of persuasion lies in this: that the highest must be juxtaposed with the lowest, that the most orderly must be connected with the most chaotic, and that this may never be done by the most direct route. If one adduces distant examples, they are annoyed at the exaggerations; if one cites recent examples, they are annoyed by their commonplace. A true expert in this pursuit is sure to avoid both difficulties by adducing only distant examples that are not exaggerated and by citing recent examples that are not commonplace. He modifies and changes them with the occasion, adapting and adjusting them to the age, sometimes indulgent, sometimes urgent, sometimes expansive, other times restrictive. Channel them like canal ditches, force them like the press-frame, accommodating them to the circumstances so that your audience will get hold of the idea under discussion, yet will not be given offense or be insulted.[25]

It can be seen here that the difficulties of persuasion lies in the intricate situations that change all the time. Faced with different audiences, one should choose words and arrange sentences differently. The persuasion process is never straightforward, but must mutually accommodate both audience and particular circumstances, like introducing water through a channel. The arrangement of words is very similar to modifying behaviors in that both should respond to different roles in changing circumstances. In other words, the art of language rests with roles and relations correlated with certain circumstance. Strictly speaking, it is not only the art of language, but also that of persuading experience shared with others, including the body and mind as a whole. In fact, it is through love and tolerance for others that the speaker becomes the model of the world. In this way, Xunzi generalizes the art of persuasion like this:

Introduce the topic with dignity, dwell on it with modesty and creativity, hold to it with firmness and strength, illustrate its meaning with parables and praiseworthy examples, elucidate its significance by making distinctions and drawing boundaries, and present it with exuberance and ardor.[26]

In the same way, the ardor and creativity are pivotal to the successful arrangement of words, as is the distinction between the petty man and the exemplary person. So Xunzi says next: "Whereas the petty man engages in discriminations to discuss threats of danger, the exemplary people engage in them to discuss

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[25] John Knoblock, "Contra Physiognomy", *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Volume I, 208–209.凡说之难, 以至遇至卑, 以至治接至乱。未可直至也, 远举则病缪, 近世则病佣。善审于是暗也, 亦必远举而不缪, 近世而不佣, 与时迁徙, 与世偃仰, 缓急嬴绌, 府然若渠匽檃栝之于己也, 曲得所谓焉, 然而不折伤。。

[26] 矜庄以莅之, 端诚以处之, 坚彊以持之, 分别以喻之, 譬称以明之。。

benevolence in authoritative conduct. If a line of discussion does not coincide with
the requirement of the principle of authoritative conduct, its words are worse than
remaining silent and the discrimination not as good as stuttering." Only in creativity
(诚) and authoritative conduct (仁)[27] can exemplary people respond to others
according to certain circumstances, Xunzi puts it, "his sense of what is morally right
to change in response to every situation", and that is where the optimal
appropriateness and meaning (义)comes. In fact, authoritative conduct and
creativity are indeed closely interrelated in Xunzi's art (*shu*). In *Nothing Indecorous*,
Xunzi puts the two together with the art (*cao shu*).

> For the gentleman to nurture his mind, nothing is more excellent as creativity.
> If a man has attained perfection of creativity, he will have no other concern
> than to uphold the principle of authoritative conduct and behave with the
> optimal appropriateness and meaning. If with creativity he upholds the
> principle of authoritative conduct, it will be given form. Having been given
> form, it becomes divine. Having become divine, it can produce transmutation.
> If with creativity he behaves with the optimal appropriateness and meaning, it
> will accord with natural order. According with natural order, it will become
> clear. Having become clear, it can produce transformation. To cause
> transmutation and transformation to flourish in succession is called the
> "power of Nature".

> It is to just such creativity that the exemplary person cleaves, and just this
> creativity forms the foundation of his government, so that wherever he may
> dwell, those who are of his own kind will come to him. If he persists in it, he
> will obtain it; but if he gives up, it will be lost.[28]

"Persistence" is the translation for *cao* 操, and how to persist in creativity is just
what Xunzi deems as the art (*cao shu* 操术). The art can respond to or even produce
transformation in its embodiment as the values of authoritative conduct and the
optimal appropriateness and meaning. Authoritative conduct refers to the tolerance
and love for others, in which a power to retrospect and prospect begins to form. It is
the sprout of transmutation. The optimal appropriateness and meaning represents
reasoning and patterns that can be seen clearly, which are the basis for
transformation. The two are mutual entailing and constitute what Xunzi called
"power of Nature" (*tiande* 天德). As we can see from above, "deliberation" quoted
by Mattice relates to both the two. In authoritative conduct, we take into
consideration all the people around us preemptively, and propose any calculating

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[27] The translations for 诚 and 仁 are creativity and authoritative conduct here, according to Ames.

[28] John Knoblock, "On the Correct Use of Names", Xunzi: *A Translation and Study of the Complete
Works* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) Volume I, 178. 君子养心莫善于诚, 至诚
则无它事矣, 唯仁之为守, 唯义之为行。诚心守仁则形, 形则神, 神则能化矣; 诚心行义则理, 理则明,
明则变矣。变化代兴, 谓之天德。……夫诚者, 君子之所守也, 而政事之本也。唯所居以其类至,
操之则得之, 舍之则失之。The original translation for *cheng* 诚 is truthfulness, which is substituted by
creativity, and the original translation of justice for *yi* 义 and *ren* 仁 are also changed into the optimal
appropriateness and meaning and authoritative conduct separately. Similarly, the translation of
intelligible for *shen* 神 is also substituted by divine, which is in accord with the same meaning in
Discourse on Nature. These changes are to make the translation works more consistent.

and choice making to call for transmutation. And according to the optimal appropriateness and meaning, we reflect on the desirable and the detestable, the beneficial and the harmful, weighting desires and aversions, and at last make the choice among the patterns for formulating and transforming rituals and institutions of government. This is how transformation comes to pass. In this way, people would be united together, and in turn they would love others more. In fact, there is not much difference between the meanings of "transmutation" and "transformation". They flourishing in succession represent the "power of Nature". Thus, a sense of history is embodied by the succession of authoritative conduct and the optimal appropriateness and meaning.

For Dewey, the sense of history lies in deliberation as "a dramatic rehearsal of various competing possible lines of action"[29] The rehearsal is played out in the imagination, while for Xunzi it is in the heart's creativity represented by the other two. If it is not for the love, the past would not be brought to present, nor would the present bear a future would not be brought out. And if not for this reasoning, the proper patterns of future action could not be figured out. The two senses are deeply entwined with each other to make the world known to us, in as a particular historical narrative. Irene Bloom has put it like this: "Deep yet un-testable sense for what the world is like— and why— and to an equally un-testable sense for what we can make it through our efforts."[30] It is through this un-testable sense of creativity that we retrieve the past, face the present, and prepare for the future.

The art originated from family

As is stated above, the art (*cao shu*) persisted in creativity, which is represented by authoritative conduct and the optimal appropriateness and meaning in succession; and this succession gives the particular historical narrative a sense by retrieving the past and previewing the future. However, this sense per se needs further illustration. First, Xunzi does not suppose human beings are born with such a sense of creativity; instead, the sense can only be acquired through cultivation in society. Second, Xunzi does think that every one can acquire this sense. He says in *Man's Tendency is Evil* that "a man in the street can become a *Yu* (禹)." The question is, how and why do people acquire this sense? Though it is acknowledged that persisting in the art represents *tiande* 天德, it is not yet to be seen what *tiande* means for every person. In other words, it is not known to us yet whether or not the sense of creativity represents certain value that should be held. We are not sure whether our sense of the optimal appropriateness and meaning can bring out "the optimal appropriateness" of new circumstances. Besides, even if it did, the proper way to acquire the sense of creativity still needs to be explored, since it is not innate.

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[29] John Dewey, *Human nature and conduct* (Middle Works 9: 190).

[30] Irene Bloom, "Biology and Culture in the Mencian View of Human Nature," in *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations,* ed. Alan K. L. Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); 91–102, at pp. 100–101.

When Xunzi speaks about the art (*cao shu*), he has a goal in mind:

By persisting in it (the art) and obtaining it, it will become easy for him. Having become easy for him, his conduct will become personal. Being personal and not giving up, he will be fulfilled. Brought to fulfillment, his talents completely realized, continually progressing, and never reverting to its beginnings, he has indeed undergone transmutation. [31]

One's talents (*cai* 材) refer to the inborn tendencies, such as the desire for food, clothing, and parental love. The fulfillment of the art is to realize one's talents completely, and if the persisting of the art is continually progressing, one's talents will be ceaselessly realized. In this process, the transformation of talents will never revert to its original state. The art of *Zhengming* is supposed to realize human talent completely, and institute appropriate ritual terms as well. As said in *Discourse on Ritual Propriety Principles*: "Ritual Propriety is sedulous in giving order to matters of birth and death, for birth is the beginning of man and death is his end. When both beginning and end are good, the proper way of man is complete." Here, "the proper way" of a person refers to using the art to realize the person's talent completely, which is embodied by adorning the beginning with joy and lamenting the end with reverence. In this way, "the exemplary people take the strict reverent care with beginnings and are conscientious about the end, so that end and beginning are as one. That is the proper way of exemplary people and principle of appropriateness of ritual propriety."[32] In a word, the art is aimed at making the beginning and end united, making them one.

One begins life in a family, where one is given the first personal identification from parents; and the end of one's life is also with a family, where one is condoled and lamented by family members. It is ritual propriety that penetrates the process from birth to death to make it complete, and so Xunzi attaches great importance to funeral. Different funerals are assigned to different people. These differences are particularly manifest in scale and participants. For instance, "the funeral of a senior knight affects a single prefecture and brings together his friends. The funeral of an ordinary man unites his kin and neighbors and affects his district and community."[33] It is worth noting that even when a criminal dies, his wife and children are still supposed to attend his funeral, although no one else need be present. Family can never be evaded through out one's life, and it is in family that the beginning and end are united as a whole. In this light, one's talent is first the "immediate family feeling". As Roger Ames says:

Immediate family feeling is not only the entry point for an educated moral competence, but is also an inspiration and model for optimizing order in all the

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[31] John Knoblock, Xunzi: *A Translation and Study of the Complete Works,* volume I, 178–179. 操而得之则轻, 轻则独行, 独行而不舍则济矣。济而材尽, 长迁而不返其初则化矣。Here, The original translation for *du* 独 is "individual", but it is substituted by "personal", which is more appropriate for Xunzi's thought of personal growth in grouping process.

[32] 君子敬始而慎终。终始如一, 是君子之道, 礼义之文也。。

[33] John Knoblock, Xunzi: *A Translation and Study of the Complete Works,* volume III, 63. 修士之丧动一乡, 属朋友; 庶人之丧合族党, 动州里。。

dimensions of human life; indeed, family feeling is the foundational moral epistemology of Confucian philosophy.[34]

Therefore, the effort to unite the beginning and end as one begins in one's family. As said in *zhongyong*: "The proper way of exemplary persons has at its start the simple lives of ordinary men and women, and at its furthest limits sheds lights upon the entire world."[35] It is in every ordinary family that both one's talents and ritual terms are developed completely, and is the proper way of exemplary people. As Xunzi puts it in *Discourse on Ritual Propriety Principles*:

> Ritual Proprieties reach their highest perfection when both emotions and form are fully realized. In proprieties of the next order, emotions and form in turn prevail. In the lowest order of proprieties, all reverts to emotion through returning to the conditions of Primordial Unity.[36]

Emotions here refer to people's talents of natural emotions, such as grieving for the death of family members. When the realization of emotions is united with proprieties, the "highest perfection" has been achieved. The perfection manifests in an aesthetic sense of happiness, as Xunzi says in the sentence before the one above: "All proprieties begin with coarseness, are brought to fulfillment with form, and end with pleasure and beauty." The beginning of proprieties corresponds to "the lowest order of proprieties", which is coarse and concerns only emotions. However, it can still bring Primordial Unity to the realization of emotions in progressing to the higher order of proprieties. The next order is "fulfillment with form", which means the prevailing of emotions and form. In this level, one takes effort in maintaining the balance between ritual terms and realization of emotions, which is attained in the last order of proprieties. In the highest order, developments of emotions and terms are united in the aesthetic sense of "pleasure and beauty". From the lowest to the highest order, one is persisting in the art (*cao shu*) of attuning names till one's talents and the names are both completely realized. In the persistence of the art, one starts with natural emotions in family; through loving and considering other members, she develops a sense of creativity, which is embodied in authoritative and the optimal appropriateness and meaning; and this sense is rooted in the aesthetic feeling of pleasure and beauty, in which both the names are attuned properly and the talents are realized thoroughly.

Furthermore, a sense of creativity can only be acquired from family, for it is rooted in the aesthetic feeling, which is first experienced and acquired within the familial context. Since family is inevitable for every person, so everyone can acquire the art. However, what can be acquired does not mean what should be acquired. Why should we develop the aesthetic feeling, and why is it the embodiment of highest order of proprieties?

Despite the fact that Nature 天 is still the last resort for Xunzi, it is not the metaphysical premise as what Paul Goldin presumed. Instead, the way of Nature can

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[34] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A vocabulary*, 13.

[35] Roger T. Ames, and David Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: a Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 115.

[36] 故至备, 情文俱尽; 其次, 情文代胜; 其下, 复情以归大一也。.

only be expressed in the proper way of people. It is Primordial Unity, in uniting beginning and end through family, that represents the proper way of exemplary people to behave in accordance with the "power of Nature" (*tiande* 天德).

But Nature cannot be known outside of the experience of people living with others. It is maintained by Xunzi that "each of the myriad things must be in harmonious relation with Nature in order to grow, and each must obtain from Nature the proper nurture in order to become complete"; however, "we do not perceive the process, but we perceive the result—this indeed is why we call it 'divine'. All realize that Nature has brought completion, but none realize its formlessness—this indeed is what we call it 'Nature'."[37] Nature is not what can be seen and formed, but is the process in which myriad things become completely realized and get their form. In authoritative conduct people love each other and consider all the circumstances retrospectively and prospectively, and that is divine of Nature; in the optimal appropriateness and meaning people weigh different possibilities and make just choices, and that is order of Nature. In a word, Nature is nothing but creativity that starts from living in a family and manifests in the aesthetic feeling for beauty and harmony.

In this light, the value that represents the highest order of proprieties which can be seen in people's experience from families to the world. It is only in people's everyday roles and relations that right and wrong is determined, so one need not look for the value anywhere other than concrete experience. And thus, it seems easy for us to find value in the progressing relations around us. In loving and considering family members and friends, we learn to attune names to the norms and rites for every specific activity we attend. Thus, our circles of relations become wider. In this way, value becomes complete at any moment of our lived roles, and at the same moment we completely realized the talents of both ourselves and others. That is the "easy" persistence of the art of attuning names. Xunzi said: "By persisting in it (the art) and obtaining it, it will become easy for him." (*Nothing Indecorous*).

Dewey supposes that deliberation is indispensible for the inevitable conflicts in society, thus correlating with a persistent moral character; and so does Xunzi, when he describes the exemplary person in history as "rose up from conflicts, brought their old selves to perfection through cultivation and conscious exertion, and only become complete when all the talents are realized completely." (*Of Honor and Disgrace*) Since the talents of myriad things are realized at every moment by transmutation and transformation in authoritative conduct and the optimal appropriateness and meaning, the character of exemplary person manifests in the responsiveness to conflicts and the consciousness of transforms. The evolvements of people and the myriad of things together embody the transformation of all relations. This is the process of attuning names. For Xunzi, the art of attuning names is indeed the moral evolvement of grouping (群), which manifests in personal growing from family to larger and larger environment in a radiating process. Dewey makes similar comments:

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[37] John Knoblock, Xunz*i: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works,* volume III, 15. 万物各得其和以生, 各得其养以成, 不见其事而见其功, 夫是之谓神。皆知其所以成, 莫知其无形, 夫是之谓天。.

The family is something other than one person, plus another, plus another. It is an enduring form of association in which the members of the group stand from the beginning in relations to one another, and in which each member gets direction for his conduct by thinking of the whole group and his place in it.[38]

The Conclusion

Attuning names, or Zhengming, is actually the learning process that Xunzi most highlights. As he puts in the first sentence of the first chapter: "Learning must never be concluded." (An Exhortation to Learning) The topic can be approached from a pragmatic viewpoint instead of a logical semantic one. Ames has remarked that "language has syntactical and morphological implications as well as semantic force, and as such, requires a sensitivity to 'position and place' (位) as being integral to its meaning."[39] The "position and place" here has the reference to all the roles and relations experienced from one's family to the world, and, although he has not pointed out that it is just in the process where every moment of confusion and conflicts is expected and every transformation is continually achieved in the art with an aesthetic feeling of creativity that names are attuned in a way of pragmatics. In a word, pragmatics is the way of persisting the art of language, in which pragmatism is best manifested, and Xunzi's thoughts of *Zhengming* can be viewed as a good case study.

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[38] John Dewey, *Ethics* (Late Works 7: 299).

[39] Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A vocabulary*, 102.

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