Chapter 1: Classical Philosophy, Religions and Language

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Abstract

The study of Chinese language intersects with the study of Chinese philosophy in several fields. This chapter will provide an overview of three major fields of research, discussing three different questions: How did Chinese philosophers interpret and discuss language? How can linguistic analysis help us to understand and interpret philosophy? Did the characteristics of the Chinese language influence particular characteristics of Chinese philosophy?

Chinese philosophers' views on language

The pre-Qin philosophers' preoccupation with language focused on the question of designations, 名 *míng* 'names', and their relation to referents as things in the world, 實 *shí* 'actualities'. The issue was the pragmatic assertability and acceptability (Tanaka 2004: 192) of terms, rather than the question of whether language represents reality in a way that is "true". Thus, the focus of philosophizing was on how to establish acceptable relations between names and actualities, with a view to the normative functions and the pedagogical and epistemological effectiveness of language.

Confucius (Kongzi 孔子) and Laozi 老子, both major reference points for later thinkers, developed two fundamentally different approaches to the relation of names and their referents, contingent with their respective direction of philosophical inquiry. Preoccupied with questions relating to social order, Confucius focused on the normative function of names in establishing and ordering social relations, while Laozi's philosophical inquiry was directed at questions about the relation of humans to an ultimate reality he called Dao. Thus, Laozi focused on the epistemological question of whether language and names are a viable means to understand, or "grasp", this ultimate reality.

Confucius and the normative function of names in establishing social relations

Confucius, believed to have lived 551–479 BCE in the State of Lu in Shandong, was arguably one of the most influential thinkers of the pre-Qin period. His philosophy has come down to us in a collection of conversations, 論語 *Lunyu* (*Analects*), compiled after his death. A key passage on language is found in a conversation with Zi Lu 子路 (*Lunyu*, 13/3): When the ruler of Wei wanted to employ Confucius in the government, Zi Lu asked Confucius what he would prioritize in governing. Confucius answered, "必也正名乎! It must be to make the names correct!" This answer perplexed Zi Lu, prompting Confucius to specify:

> If names are not correct then what is said in words will not make sense, if what is said does not make sense, then the work (of government) will not be completed, if the works are not complete then rites and music cannot thrive, if rites and the music don't thrive, then penalties and punishments will not be appropriate, if penalties and punishments are not appropriate, then the people have nothing to guide the doing of their hands and feet. Therefore, for the gentleman, names are something that must be possible to say with words, and what he says is something that must be possible to put into practice. The gentleman, with regard to what he says, is never careless. (Makeham 1994: 35)

The focus of this passage is on the normative dimension of language. The narrative sets the question of correct names and their referents in the context of ruling. Names (*míng*) and words, or speech (言 *yán*), are distinguished, and both are causally connected with actions or performances. Correct designations (names) are understood as the fundament of intelligible speech, which leads to directed and productive action. The structure of the argument and the context of the passage suggest that speech—based on correct names and leading to action—is understood in a teleological sense of "ordering"—communicating orders and thereby producing a functioning society. Rectifying the names thus creates coherence of words and their referents with regard to actions—thus, orders can be clearly understood and executed. This is a cornerstone of good government.

Early commentators contextualized this passage in a specific historical context, which effectively narrowed down the possible referents of *míng* in the passage to social or political roles.[1]

According to Makeham (1994: 45–46), in Confucius's conception, the referents of the names he discussed were a small group of established role types, like ruler, father, son, etc. To define these role types, Confucius passed judgement on well-known representatives of these role models. Thus, Confucius "did not regard names as labels but rather as social and hence political catalysts" (Makeham 1994: 46).

Laozi and epistemological enquiry into the relation of language and ultimate truth
Laozi, traditionally considered a contemporary of Confucius, serves just like Confucius does today, as a point of reference and source of inspiration. Laozi is believed to be the author of a short text called 道德經 *Daode jing* (*The Classic of the Way and the Virtue*). There is some debate among scholars as to who Laozi was, and whether he can be considered the author of *Daode jing*; however, the philosophical tradition in China for millennia has accepted him as the author of the text. Laozi focused his philosophical inquiries on the question of how to reach a union with the ultimate, greatest force of being, which he called Dao. This also entailed an inquiry into the epistemological possibility of knowing Dao by means of language.

The first chapter of *Daode jing* begins with the following sentence:

> 道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。無名天地之始；有名萬物之母。

> The Dao that can be spoken of as Dao is not the eternal Dao. The name that can be designated as a name is not the eternal name. Without a name it is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, with a name it is the mother of all beings. (*Daode jing*, 1; translation, F. A.)

The referent of the name here is not, like in the passage in the *Analects* cited above, social or political roles, it is an ultimate reality, origin and rule of all that is. In this context, the relation between the name and its referent is asymmetric and the scope of the referent encompasses all that is, including language and names; thus, a correlation of a name and this referent is inherently impossible, because for any meaningful correlation the name needs to be separate from the referent. Yet Laozi at the same time recognized the human need to use language and names in

the epistemological quest for the object of inquiry (Dao)—he solved this tension with the concept of 強名 *qiáng míng* to provisionally name the referent. In Chapter 25, he stated, "吾不知其名字之曰道，強為之名曰大。I do not know its name, so I give it the epithet Dao, forced to name it, I say: great" (*Daode jing*, 25; translation, F. A.). This opened the possibility of using names to hint at or circumscribe the referent—all the while being conscious that this name will never be a direct correlate of the referent.[2]

The dialectic debate on names and actualities in the Warring States period
The following Warring States period (475–221 BCE) saw a flourishing of different philosophies and intellectual debates. Philosophers oftentimes were itinerant, offering their advice and teachings to various rulers. The received texts from the period show intense interaction among philosophers, in which ideas circulated and were discussed from different perspectives; language and language-related questions were part and parcel of these discussions. The question of names and their referents went beyond the two positions of Laozi and Confucius described above to include all sorts of entities. The conception that correct names (正名 *zhèngmíng*) are foundational for a functioning social organization led naturally to the question of how correct names should be established.

Closest to Confucius's time was Mo Di 墨翟 (fl. around 430 BCE), who was highly critical of Confucius's teachings. Mo Di's and his disciples' writings were recorded in the book 墨子 *Mozi*, a compilation of texts from the fifth to the third century BCE. Its core teachings are ethical and political, and a major concern is the search for objective moral standards for society and rulers (Fraser, 2009: 142f). Books 10 and 11 in the current version of the *Mozi* contain two Canons (經 *Jīng*), two chapters on the explanation of the Canons (經說 *Jīngshuō*), and two additional essays (大取 *Dàqǔ* and 小取 *Xiǎoqǔ*), which focus on language, logic and epistemology (Graham 1969/70: 55). Also called the Dialectical Chapters (默辯 *Mòbiàn*) of the *Mozi*, these notoriously difficult sections most likely represent a later stratum of the text from the third century BCE (cf. Fraser, 2009: 140). Mohist thinking about language focused on the question of how to establish relations between names and actualities, proposing for the first time a formal definition of name and referent: "That by which something is called is its name (*míng*);

what is so called is an actuality (*shí*)" (*Mojing*, A 81; 所以謂，名也；所謂，實也). Speaking words (*yán*) consisted of emitting a reference (*Mojing*, A 32; 言，出舉也) that was defined as presenting an analogue to an actuality (*Mojing*, A 31; 舉，擬實也). Fraser (2009: 159) argued that this notion of analogue representation is "part of a broader theory that language enables us to communicate by appeal to shared practices for distinguishing similar and different kinds of things." Effective communication depends on pointing out things by names that refer to 類 *lèi* 'kinds', which have been previously learned. The work of the philosopher is then to decide—and discuss—whether things are the 'same' (*tóng* 同) in the sense that they belong to one kind:

> 1. *Biàn* 辯 [Dialectics] is about making clear the distinction between right and wrong, [true and false], investigating the pattern of order and disorder, accurately assigning sameness and difference, examining the principles of name and object [reality], determining what is beneficial and harmful, and resolving what is doubtful and uncertain. Then there is enquiry into the true nature of the ten thousand things and analysis of the comparison of words and propositions. *Míng* [names, designations] are used to 'pick out' objects [reality] [*shí*]; *Cí* [words, propositions] are used to express concepts; *Shuō* [explanations, statements] are used to reveal reasons [causes]. Through *lèi* [kinds, classes] selections are made; through *lèi* [kinds, classes] inferences are drawn. What is in it for me cannot but be in it for others; what is not in it for me is not to be sought in it by others. (*Mozi*, Xiaoqu; Johnston 2000: 385)

Mohist semantics are closely related to Mohist logic; accessible studies on the subject include Fraser (2009), Graham (2003), and others found in the "Chinese philosophy and the Chinese language" section.

Other philosophers, which Han Dynasty historian Sima Tan 司馬談 (?–110 BCE) in retrospect grouped together as the 'School of Names' (名家 *Míngjiā*),[3] focused specifically on the question of how names relate to referents. The writings of most of these philosophers have survived only in short citations in the extant writings of philosophers like Zhuangzi, Xunzi and Mengzi. The noteworthy exception are five short essays by Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (third century BCE),

collected with a foreword in *Gongsun Long zi*. This book features the famous so-called paradoxes, 白馬非馬 *báimǎ fēi mǎ* 'a white horse is not a horse', and the essay on 堅白 *jiānbái* 'white and hard'. These paradoxes require detailed linguistic analysis, which will be presented in the "Chinese philosophy and the Chinese language" section.

From dialectical debate to the regulation of political discourse

Thinkers that focused on the normative function of language often addressed the "hair-splitting" dialectics of philosophers like Gongsun Long with a negative attitude. The Confucian philosopher Xun Kuang 荀況 (also widely known as Xunzi 荀子, fl. third century BCE) dedicated a whole chapter to correct naming (Zhèngmíng, *Xunzi*, 22). Like Confucius and the Mohists, Xunzi assumed that the ancient sage kings had established names to create order, which was lost in his day, so he sought to counter the loss of ethical standards he perceived in his time by reconstructing order via making names correct: "Thus one must examine the reason for having names, the proper means for distinguishing like and unlike, and the essential points in establishing names" (*Xunzi*, 22; Hutton 2014: 237).

Xunzi's view was that names were conventional, and thus the relation between a name and its object rested on consensus:

> Names have no predetermined appropriateness. One forms agreement in order to name things. Once the agreement is set and has become custom, then they are called appropriate, and what differs from the agreed use is called inappropriate.... Names have no predetermined objects. One forms agreement in order to name objects. Once the agreement is set and has become custom, then they are called names of objects. (Hutton, 2014: 239)

Makeham (1994: 59–60) pointed out that while Xunzi recognized that names were conventional, for him, "'the way of dividing realities into objects to be named' was the prerogative of the ruler."

Xunzi's disciple Han Feizi 韓非子 (d. 233 BCE), who was foundational for the Legalist school of thought that flourished under the first emperor to unite China in 221 BCE, also saw the question of correct names as central to efficient government and an orderly society. However, where Xunzi emphasized the conventional nature of the correspondence of names and actualities in terms of an agreement that had to be reached, Han Feizi emphasized the ruler's prerogative of establishing names. For Han Feizi, one of the main problems of his time was "interpretative anarchy" (Hansen 1992: 361). His remedy for this political problem, therefore, was that the correct correspondence of names and actualities should be established by the ruler, suppressing competing interpretations, thus creating unity of interpretation that would create order in society[4]:

> Actualities are kept under strict control through the application of names. Names are fixed according to their actualities. Names and actualities produce one another. This mutual interaction is in their nature. When names and actualities are in agreement, good government results. When they are not in agreement, disorder results. (Han Feizi, 18.3; Yu-lan Fung 1952: 324)

In the Legalist school of thought, the demand for the correspondence of names and actualities was extended to the actions of Ministers, who had to correspond to the designations that were established for their tasks.[5] Thus, the issue of the correspondence of names and actualities turned from a focus on objects, like a stone in the *jiānbái* debate or a horse in the *báimǎ fēi mǎ* debate, to a focus on the actions and performances of ministers and the autocratic control of discourse.

Zhuangzi: Relativism, scepticism, and metaphorical language
The theories and disputations of the Dialecticians also found resonance with the author or authors of the 莊子 *Zhuangzi*. Traditionally ascribed to Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (ca. 369–286 BCE), a Daoist philosopher also widely known as Zhuangzi,[6] the book *Zhuangzi* was probably not written by a single hand.[7] Its style is unique in that it used philosophic parables rather than systematic expositions of philosophical concepts.

Zhuangzi seems to have accepted Laozi's fundamental scepticism about the possibility that language could grasp, or define, reality, understood as ultimate reality, yet he went beyond Laozi in asserting the relativism of designations and statements regarding objects in the world. The terminology he used in these contexts drew clearly on that of the Mohists and the School of Names (Graham 1969/70: 139). For Zhuangzi, referents of speech were necessarily always changing, depending on the situation and the speaker:

> "夫言非吹也。言者有言，其所言者特未定也 'But human speech is not just a blowing of air. Speech has something *of which* it speaks, something it refers to.' Yes, but what it refers to is peculiarly unfixed…. (*Zhuangzi*, 2; Qiwulun 齊物論; Ziporyn 2009: 11).

Thus, debates on this and that, right and wrong, are futile because right and wrong, the two primary criteria for definition, depend on perspective:

> 是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。

> 'This' is also a 'that'. 'That' is also a 'this'. 'THAT' posits a 'this' and a 'that'—a right and a wrong—of its own. But 'THIS' also posits a 'this' and a 'that'—a right and a wrong—of its own. So is there really any 'that' versus 'this', any right versus wrong?… When 'this' and a 'that'—right and wrong—are no longer coupled as opposites—that is called the Course [i.e., Dao (F. A.)] as axis, the axis of all courses. (*Zhuangzi*, 2; Qiwulun; Ziporyn 2009: 12)

Zhuangzi used the indexical terms "this" and "that" as the most basic terms for relating names to actualities; however, this principle can be extended to all possible referents of names or words. Thus, for its meaning, language depends not on "actualities" or the objects it refers to, but on the perspective of changing speakers and situations; it is thus always relative. This relativism for Zhuangzi opened the possibility of plurality:

Each thing necessarily has a place from which it can be affirmed as acceptable. So no thing is not right, no thing is not acceptable. For whatever we may define as a beam as opposed to a pillar, as a leper as opposed to the great beauty Xishi…there is some course [Dao] that opens them into one another, connecting them to form a oneness. Whenever fragmentation is going on, formation, completion is also going on…. (*Zhuangzi*, 2; Qiwulun; Ziporyn 2009: 13)

Zhuangzi urged his readers to overcome the relative distinctions that men try to impose on reality with the use of language, and instead "harmonize with the Dao (course) of nature," which embraces all the ever-changing perspectives:

Whether the alternating voices of disputation are relative to each other or not, *they may be harmonized within the operation of nature and allowed to follow their endless changes so they may live out their years*. What does 'harmonized within the operation of nature' mean? I would say, '*Right* may be not *right*; *so* may be not *so*. If right were really right, then right would be distinct from not right, and there would be no dispute. If so were really so, then so would be distinct from not so and there would be no dispute. Forget the years; forget (fixed) distinctions. Ramble in the realm of infinity and make it your home! (*Zhuangzi*, 2; Qiwulun; Wang 2004: 198)

Despite this basic scepticism with regard to words and language, Zhuangzi continued to speak or write to argue his point, often using parables, metaphors, contradictions and paradoxes; among the Chinese philosophers, his style was unique and seemed to be designed to deconstruct any preconceived notions of reality held by others.[8]

Philosophy and language after the unification of the empire
After the unification of China under the Qin Dynasty in 221 BCE, and the following Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the process of political centralization and the establishment of the imperial university in 136 BCE under Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), with a curriculum based on the Confucian 五經 *Wǔ Jīng* (*Five Classics*), changed the philosophical focus on

9

language. The pre-Qin preoccupation with names and actualities ceased to be the dominant issue of the philosophical discourse on language. Instead, the focus turned to the language of the *Five Classics*. Highly esteemed as repositories of knowledge from antiquity, there was a general assumption of their coherence; however, due to the growing historical distance, their language was no longer intuitively understood. Thus arose the need to explain, translate and interpret the meaning of the *Classics*. Furthermore, their dominant role in state ideology added some need of control in the interpretation of the *Classics*. All of this gave rise to a new focus on the philosophical occupation with language.

A commentarial tradition evolved, which would become an important means of philosophizing for centuries to come. In the course of these endeavours, the discussion of issues concerning language turned to questions of syntax, lexicon and phonology. This development received much further impetus from the introduction of Buddhism and the intense occupation with foreign languages like Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Pali, etc., and the need not only to translate but also to recite spurred further developments and discoveries.

Chinese philosophy and the Chinese language
A considerable amount of research on the relation between typological characteristics of the Chinese language and the development of Chinese philosophy concentrates on comparing Ancient Greek and Ancient Chinese philosophy and their respective relations to the linguistic characteristics of the Indo-European languages and the Classical Chinese language. Harbsmeier (1998) presented an overview of this discussion.

Chinese is one of the few languages in which an early philosophical and logical system developed independently of an influence from any systems in Indo-European languages. Since Chinese lacks an inflectional morphology comparable to that of the Indo-European languages, the Chinese language has sometimes been considered not complex enough linguistically for the generation of philosophical systems of a complexity and abstraction similar to that of the Greek philosophers. Even if this hypothesis has been challenged by a number of modern analyses of the philosophical systems of Ancient Chinese, a Eurocentric worldview and an interest in

comparison with the philosophies of the West persists, which tends to obfuscate a hermeneutic analysis of the genuine Chinese philosophical schools.

Some remarks on Chinese grammar

Typologically, Chinese has been identified as monosyllabic and isolating (i.e., it lacks any morphology comparable to that of the Indo-European languages). At the time when these characteristics of the Chinese language became established in Western linguistics in the eighteenth and particularly in the nineteenth centuries, a number of facts about the Chinese language were still unknown. The oracle bone inscriptions had not yet been discovered, hypotheses on a derivational morphology in the earliest stages of Chinese had yet to be proposed, and systematic studies on the different Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman languages did not exist, to mention only a few fields in which important advances have been achieved beginning in the twentieth century. Despite these achievements, many analyses of Chinese philosophical reflections, in particular more recent interests in "the history of logical concepts in China" (Harbsmeier 1998: xxii) in the "no-man's-land on the common borders of linguistics, philosophy, and sinology" (xxii), have started with "totally obsolete assumptions" about the Chinese language (xxiii). As Graham (2003) put it, "[t]o speak of Chinese sentences as 'strings of names' is to revert to the grammatical knowledge of the Ancient Chinese themselves" (cf. Harbsmeier 1998: xxiii). Graham (2003), discussing Mohist grammar, pointed out the relevance of grammar for the analysis of philosophical and scientific texts, while Harbsmeier (1998) discussed a number of grammatical features of Chinese relevant in the analysis of logical concepts. This included a discussion of the semantic features of nouns as a reaction to Hansen's (1973) dissertation, which introduced the semantic concept of mass versus count nouns and aroused a lively debate in the field. Hansen (1973) proposed his theory based on the lack of plural marking in Chinese and on the fact that Modern Chinese uses quantifiers to count nouns, but he did not apply any syntactic tests in arguing for his hypothesis. In general, the systematic analysis of the constraints of the Chinese language has been neglected in discussions on Chinese philosophy and its relation to Chinese language. The following intends to demonstrate how linguistic tools can be applied to enhance our understanding of Ancient Chinese philosophy.

One of the foremost claims made regarding the grammar of Chinese is that it does not have morphologically distinct word classes (Harbsmeier 1998: xxii); for example, nouns cannot be distinguished from verbs morphologically.[9] Example (1a) below shows the employment of nouns as verbs in Classical Chinese in the *Analects*, as well as the normative function of names (i.e., words) in establishing social relations:

(1) a. 君君, 臣臣, 父父, 子子。
         Ruler ruler, subject subject, father father, son son
         'Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius answered, "Let the ruler be ruler-like (i.e., have all the characteristics necessary for a ruler), the subject subject-like, the father fatherly, the son sonly."' (*Analects*, XII, 11; translation, B. M.)

In (1a), only a confined number of nouns (i.e., nouns which can express an attitude or a characteristic feature) seem to be employed in this manner: ruler > be like a ruler (> act like a ruler) (i.e., as an adjective derived from a noun). The negated version of this phrase is shown in Example (1b) below; the predicate is negated by the negative marker for verbs 不 *bù*. This indicates that syntactically the predicate is not a noun, but an adjective, expressing the appropriate behaviour of the referent of the subject:

b. 信如君不君, 臣不臣, 父不父, 子不子?
         indeed if ruler NEG ruler, subject NEG subject, father NEG father, son NEG son
         'If indeed the ruler is not ruler-like, the subject is not subject-like, the father is not fatherly, the son not sonly, though I may have grain, could I obtain and consume it?' (*Analects*, XII; translation, B. M.)

If the predicate functioned as a noun, the nominal negative copula 非 *fēi* 'is not' would have been required (see Example [4]). Adjectives are verbs in Chinese; they are regularly negated by the negative marker *bù* for verbs. Although they can be employed as nouns, they are not nominal, and they also do not seem to constitute a separate class of their own.[10] In Classical Chinese, most adjectives are characterized by the fact that they can be freely transitivized by adding an object,

resulting in a causative or denominative construction; this is one of the features that classify them as verbs. Syntactically, two word classes, noun and verb, can be distinguished without any difficulties. Parallels can also be found in Indo-European languages, particularly in those that have lost most of their inflectional morphology such as English: for the word "cut," for instance, the distinction between noun and verb is only possible according to its syntactic context (i.e., the syntactic slot it fills).

Verbs and nouns can also be differentiated morphologically in Ancient Chinese. One of the best studied morphological distinctions in Ancient Chinese is the so-called 四聲別意 *sì shēng bié yì* 'derivation by tone change' (e.g., Sagart 1999: 131), which is attested by words from any of the tonal categories A (平 *píng*), B (上 *shǎng*), and D (入 *rù*) that are transformed into category C (去 *qù*). Category C supposedly developed from the former derivational suffix *-s*, which changed into *-h* and further into 四聲 *qùshēng*.[11] This latter change most likely took place at the end of the Late Archaic Chinese (LAC, fifth to second century BCE) and in the Early Middle Chinese (EMC, starting in the first century BCE) periods; the tonal differences resulting from this change were reflected in the 反切 *fǎnqiè* glosses in the *Classics* from the Han period on. This tone change affected the derivation of nouns from verbs, abstract nouns from adjectives, adverbs from verbs, etc. (see, e.g., Downer, 1959), in addition to a differentiation of different verbal aspects. The following three examples in (2) show this kind of derivation:

(2) a. verb > noun: 乘 (OCM **m-ləŋ*)[12] *chéng* 'to mound, ascend, ride, drive' > 乘 (OCM **m-ləŋh*) *shèng* 'chariot, team of four horses'[13]

b. adjective (verb) > abstract noun: 長 (OCM **draŋ*) *cháng* 'long' > 長 (OCM **draŋh*) *zhàng* 'length' (a noun derived from a gradable adjective [Baxter and Sagart 1998: 55])

c. verb > adverb: 復 (OCM **buk*) *fù* 'to come back, return, restore' > (OCM **bukh*) 復 'repeatedly, again'

Because differences in pronunciation are usually not represented in the character writing system of Chinese, a distinction of the different word classes independent of the syntactic context is difficult to obtain unless the two cognates are written using different characters. Additionally, many of the tone changes have been lost in Modern Mandarin. This is one of the characteristics of Chinese that led to the assumption that Chinese does not have word classes and that the existing classes are very flexible.

The grammar of the later Mohists

The importance of a strict grammatical analysis cannot be overestimated in the interpretation of philosophical texts. Graham (1979, 2003) has claimed that the grammar of the later Mohists as it is represented in the essays in Books 10 and 11 (*Dàqǔ* and *Xiǎoqǔ*) of the *Mozi* is of particular clarity and strictness, as well as devoid of any rhetorical means. This precision of grammar is well identified in an analysis of an excerpt from the essays in Example (3) presented below:

(3) 名, 達, 類, 私。

Name, reach.to, category, private

名：物, 達也, 有實必待之名也。

Name: thing, unrestricted YE, there.is reality NEED require this name YE

命之馬, 類也, 若實也者必以是名也。

Give.name OBJ horse, category YE, be.like reality YE ZHE NEED take this name YE

命之臧, 私也, 是名也止於是實也。

Give.name OBJ Zang, private YE, this (the said) name YE stop at this reality YE

'Name, unrestricted, category, private.'

(Explanation) "'Thing' is 'unrestricted'—is there an actuality that necessarily requires this name (*míng*)? Naming (*mìng*) something 'horse' is 'a category'—'like the actuality' necessarily uses this name (*míng*). Naming (*mìng*) someone 'Zang' is 'private'—this name (*míng*) is confined to this actuality." (Canon, A79; translation B. M.)

Three different kinds of *míng* (words or terms) are distinguished in this short passage: a general term with an unrestricted use (i.e., it does not belong to either of the following categories), 物

wù; a categorical and classificatorial term, 類 *lèi*; and a private term, 私 *sī*, exemplified by a proper name. The categorical term and the private term are exemplified by words with the sematic feature [+ANIMATE]. It is tempting to assume that this also accounts for the term *wù*, referring to living beings, but there is no evidence in the corpus of the *Mozi* for this assumption. Although the term *míng* is exemplified by nouns here, this is not a general constraint on the employment of *míng*. Of these terms, *lèi* in particular has been extensively discussed in the literature on philosophy and language in Ancient China (e.g., Chong 1997; Harbsmeier 1998; Lucas 2005) and different translations have been proposed; these include 'kind/of a kind' 'class/classifying', 'similar-stuff', 'similarity', etc. Chong (1997) and Lucas (2005) emphasized the relevance of *lèi* in the analysis of *Gongsun Long zi*,[14] while Harbsmeier (1998: 218ff) devoted a comprehensive discussion to the historical development of the term *lèi* and the concept of a class. In Example (3), a clear distinction in the employment of nominal 名 *míng* (OCM *min ~ *meN) 'name' and verbal (i.e., causative) 命 *mìng* (OCM *mrin* ~ *mreN >* *mreNh*) 'give a name' is shown. This distinction is consistently maintained within the Canons, although maybe not in the entire *Mozi* corpus. In this example, the falling tone resulting from a former *-*s* suffix has a causative function (Jin 金理新 2006; Mei 2015), clearly distinguishing the noun *míng* 'name, term' from the verb *mìng* 'to name/call'. This provides some evidence for Graham's (1979, 2003) claim of a strict employment of grammar in the later Mohist literature, even on a morphological level. This aspect has generally been disregarded in discussions of the relationship between language and philosophy in China.

In the following, some linguistic features that are representative of the later Mohist texts and that are partly present in Example (3) will be pointed out.

(i) Logical necessity is consistently expressed by 必 *bì* NEED/NECESSARILY, which, although it predominantly expresses epistemic necessity, is the only way to express deontic necessity (obligation) in a direct way in Late Archaic Chinese (Meisterernst 2017).

(ii) Definitions constitute a considerable part of the Mohist Canons; they are typically expressed by nominal predication or by stative, declarative verbal predicates, typically marked by the

sentence final and nominalizing particle 也 *yě*. Graham (1979) quoted a number of different ways to express definitions in the later Mohist texts besides nominal predication with *yě* and the negative copula *fēi* 'is not'. Identification can be expressed by 為 *wéi* 'constitutes, counts as, is deemed', which is an activity verb, and by the copula of pre-Classical Chinese 唯 *wéi* 'is and only is', which in LAC was usually employed as an adverb expressing exclusiveness 'only'. When negated, both 為 *wéi* and 唯 *wéi* take the verbal negative marker 不 *bù* (Graham, 1979: 44f). In Example (3) both nominal and verbal predication is concluded by *yě*; both predications are marked as stative and declarative and as independent of temporal location.

Some remarks on the grammar of 白馬非馬 *bái mǎ fēi mǎ*
The negative marker 非 *fēi*

(4) 白馬非馬。

white horse is.not horse
'A white horse is not a horse.' (*Gongsun Long zi)*

The negative marker of the nominal predication *fēi* has been analysed as a fusion of *bù wéi* 不唯 (e.g., Pulleyblank 1995: 22)[15]; more functions are listed in Graham (1979: 80). *Fēi* can also function as the verb 'be wrong'; in this case it is negated by the negative marker 不 *bù*, clearly identifying *fēi* as a verb and not the copula (see Example [1b]). As the negative marker of nominal predication, two functions relevant for the analysis of philosophical concepts can be distinguished: (1) to negate identity or 'sameness' (see Examples [5a] and [5b]): A ≠ B 'A is not (the same as) B'; and (2) to deny membership to a category, a class or a subset of a category (see Example [5c]): A ≠ B 'A is not (like/is not of the same category as) B'. Differences in the syntactic structure and the semantics of *fēi* can be involved: in (5a) both the subject and the predicate are nominal, with singular and specific references; in (5b) the respective subjects are sentential and refer to a particular behaviour or action, as in both cases *fēi* expresses the lack of identity: and in (5c) *fēi* does not negate identity, but rather denies membership to a category or a subset of a category. This leads to two possible interpretations of the phrase *bái mǎ fēi mǎ* 'white horse is not (identical with) horse/white horse is not (like/of the same category as) horse' (see also Harbsmeier 1998: 301).

(5) a. 莊子曰：「子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？」

Zhuang zi say: you not.be me, how know I NEG know fish GEN happiness

'You are not me, how do you know that I do not know the happiness of the fish?'

(*Zhuang zi*, 17/7/3; translation, B. M.)

b. 故樂通物，非聖人也；

therefore enjoy communicate thing, not.be wise man SFP,

有親，非仁也；

have affection, not.be benevolence SFP;

'Therefore, who likes to get through/bring success to the things, is not a sage; having

affections is not benevolence;…' (*Zhuang zi*, 6/1/9; translation, B. M.)

c. 吾與孔丘，非君臣也，德友而已矣。」

me and Kong Qiu not.be ruler subject SFP, virtue friend CON end SFP

'Me and Kong Qiu, we are not (like) ruler and subject (do not belong to the category/

are not a case of), we are just friends in virtue.' (*Zhuang zi*, 5/4/11, translation B.M.)

Adjectives again

As already mentioned above, adjectives were verbs in LAC, and thus there is a linguistic difference between the phrases 白馬 *bái mǎ* 'white horse' and 牛馬 *niú mǎ* 'ox horse'. Another phrase frequently discussed in the context of language and logic is the phrase 堅白 *jiān bái* 'hard white'. In discussions about these phrases (the term compound is deliberately avoided here) the syntactic differences between them must be pointed out: (a) *niú mǎ* is composed of the two coordinated nouns 'ox + horse'; (b) 堅白 *jiān bái* is composed of the two coordinated adjectives (i.e., of the two verbs) 'be hard + be white'; and (c) *bái mǎ* is composed of the modifying adjective *bái* 'white' and the modified head *mǎ* 'horse'. These syntactic differences cannot be disregarded in an analysis of the semantic differences of the phrases in question.[16] Although both nouns and adjectives refer to properties, a clear distinction between the reference to things and the reference to qualities, such as colour, shape, hardness, length, etc. (all expressed by

17

adjectives in Chinese), can be perceived. In general, colour adjectives can differ from other adjectives. Colour terms function as nouns and as adjectives; as nouns, they are mass nouns.[17] When they are adjectives, the "semantics of the noun can feed into the adjective," according to Kennedy and McNally (2008: 94), but a difference should be made between gradable and non-gradable adjectives. Gradable adjectives are analysed in the same fashion as other gradable predicates (i.e., as denoting functions from objects to degrees), "in this case, degrees that represent the extent to which the object manifests the color named by the noun" (Kennedy and McNally 2008: 95). Example (6), which discusses different kinds of white, may hint at the fact that *bái* might belong to the category of gradable adjectives. This example also demonstrates that like in English, *bái* can function as an attributive adjective and as a noun without any morphological change.

(6)　「白羽之白也，猶白雪之白；

　　　White (*bái*) feather GEN white (*bái*) SFP, like white snow GEN white;

　　　白雪之白，猶白玉之白與？」

　　　white snow GEN white, like white jade GEN white SFP/Q

　　　'Is the white of a white feather like the white of white snow; and is the white of white snow like the white of white jade?' (*Meng zi*, 6/1/3; translation, B. M.)

The following examples in (7) below demonstrate that colour adjectives are verbs and that they do not differ from other adjectives in LAC. In (7a) the adjective/verb *bái* appears in its regular intransitive and in a transitivized, denominative variant marked by the object pronoun 之 *zhī*. In the second clause, it appears in a complement clause nominalized by the genitive marker 其 *qí*. In (7b) *jiān* and *bái* appear in parallel sentences; both are preceded by the object relativizer *suǒ*, which can only combine with verbs.

(7) a. 猶彼白而我白之，從其白於外也，

　　　be.like that white CON I white OBJ, follow GEN white at outside SFP

　　　故謂之外也。」

　　　therefore call OBJ outside SFP

'It is as if that one is white and I consider him as white, following the fact that he is white on the outside; therefore I call it "outside" (followed by a comparison of a white man with a white horse).' (*Meng zi*, 6/1/4; translation, B. M.)

b. 「得其所白，不可謂無白。

get GEN SUO white, NEG can called not.have white

得其所堅，不可謂無堅。

get GEN SUO hard, NEG can called not.have hard

'When we get to that which we consider white, it cannot be called not to have white [colour], when we get to that which we consider hard, it cannot be called not to have hardness.' (*Gongsun Long zi, jian bai lun*; translation, B. M.)

The mass noun hypothesis

The analysis of Chinese nouns as mass nouns constitutes a substantial argument in the analysis of the 'White-Horse Paradox'. The mass noun hypothesis for Chinese has been proposed by a number of scholars (Cikoski 1977; Dobson 1959; Graham 1986) and, in particular, with regard to *Gongsun Long zi*, by Hansen (1983). The hypothesis has been challenged by Harbsmeier (1998), who proposed some syntactic tests for the distinction between mass, count, and generic nouns. Robins (2000) defended the mass noun hypothesis for Classical Chinese by providing some counter-arguments to Harbsmeier's (1998) approach. According to Robins (2000: 151), "the distinction between mass nouns and count nouns involves principles of individuation" and it applies at "the level of word occurrence"; that is, it appears "between noun functions rather than noun classes." In arguing for his proposal, Robins provided a number of syntactic arguments, but he did not elaborate these in detail; instead, he claimed that nouns cannot function as count nouns in neutral contexts (2000: 176), but that all "Chinese nouns can function as mass nouns in neutral contexts, and since all classical Chinese nouns are free to occur in neutral contexts, all classical Chinese nouns are free to function as mass nouns" (Robins, 2000: 170). He concluded that there is no need to classify Classical Chinese nouns as either mass or count nouns, but he presented contexts such as count contexts and the employment of the adjective 大 *dà* 'big', which forces a count reading on nouns (Robins 2000: 171f). Although Robins' (2000) treatment of the 'mass noun hypothesis' with regard to LAC is well argued, it disregards the "signature

19

property" of mass nouns proposed by Chierchia (Li 2013: 43): "in general, mass nouns do not allow direct modification of numerals *[Num + N_{MASS}]." According to this criterion, "all nouns in Mandarin are mass nouns, since…Mandarin nouns cannot be modified by numerals without a classifier" (Li 2013: 42). Chierchia's (2010) "signature property" would argue against the mass noun analysis of those nouns in LAC that can be counted directly. As Example (8) demonstrates, the noun 'horse', which played a predominant role in Hansen's (1973) analysis, can be counted directly in LAC; in this regard LAC is very different from Modern Mandarin:

(8)　『汝惡能乎？吾嘗以六馬逐之江上矣，

　　　you how able SFP/Q I once YI six horse chase OBJ Jiang above SFP,

　　　而不能及；

　　　CON NEG able reach

　　　'How are you able to? I once chased him with six horses up to the Jiang, but could not reach him.' (*Lüshi Chunqiu*, 11.3.2; translation, B. M.)

Li (2013: 69), in his analysis of nouns in Mandarin Chinese, quoted Joosten (2003: 216) in the qualification that the term "mass-count distinction" is misleading: "It incautiously takes together a primarily grammatical criterion (the (non-) countability of nouns) with a non-grammatical, ontological criterion (the denotation of mass vs. discrete entities)." Semantic and cognitive criteria can be consistent: (a) liquids and substances are frequently considered mass, such as 'milk', 'water' and 'gold'; (b) small objects tend to be mass; and (c) entities high on the animacy scale tend to be count (Li 2013: 69, cf. Smith-Stark 1974). However, semantic and cognitive criteria might also diverge; this is the case in mass nouns such as 'jewellery', 'silverware' and 'furniture'; these nouns are "fake mass nouns" according to Chierchia (2010) (Li 2013: 69). Different types of languages can be distinguished according to their mass/count distinction (Li 2013: 71f): Type I, mass count languages, can have a mass count distinction, even if plural marking is not available, if nouns can be counted directly (Li referred to Dëne Suliné, analysed in Wilhelm [2008], which showed a mass/count distinction dependent on the "natural atomicity" of nouns); in Type II, count languages, all nouns can be counted; and Type III languages are mass languages (Li 2013: 72). These languages do not have plural markings, but they have a general classifier system, and nouns "can never be modified by numerals unless a classifier is

used between numeral and noun" (Li 2013: 72). According to Li, number marking is not a reliable test for the mass/count distinction of languages. Following this typology, Classical Chinese seems to be a mass/count language, a claim that still must be confirmed. A more consequent application of syntactic tests is required to argue for or against the mass noun hypothesis proposed for Classical Chinese and its validity in theories about the philosophy of the language of LAC.

Religion and language

The discussions so far have referred to language as an object and instrument of philosophical inquiry, with a special focus on the question of content or the meaning of words. Yet language, once it is fixed in writing, is arguably not only representative of meaning but also has a definite form. This form may refer not only to syntactic and grammatical construction, but to the written characters embodying the words and thereby the content as well. Thus, language fixed in writing can become a "written object"—blurring the borders between language and art, for example; the high value still attached to Chinese calligraphy today comes to mind as an obvious example.

In the context of China's autochthonous religion, Daoism, some noteworthy conceptions related to language embodied in written form can be found, conceptions that seem at first sight diametrically opposed to those associated with the philosophical inquiry of Daoism, which holds that human language is not fit to designate ultimate truth and being: namely the idea that language fixed in written form is a powerful object that affords special powers to legitimate holders of these written objects. This phenomenon has been called "empowered writing" (Bumbacher 2012). The question of whether this category of objects should be considered as pertaining to language, art or religious objects is difficult to answer, yet it is precisely this difficulty which points to the fact that language may have multilevel uses that go beyond questions pertaining to communication, interpretation, semantics, etc.

The most ancient notion of written objects, where not only the writing and its meaning but also the written object itself were of essential importance, are ancient tallies of different types (契 *qì*, 券 *quàn*, or 符 *fú*) and materials (bamboo, wood, bronze), which served as means of recognition, perhaps comparable to a passport today. Text was written on an object (wooden boards, bamboo

21

tubes, or bronze objects; cf. Bumbacher 2012: 24), which was then cut in two, and one piece each remained with the lord/vassal, king/general, lord/messenger, creditor/debtor, etc. Recognition of the legitimacy of a person, order or contract was achieved by joining the two parts of the tally.

This ancient usage of written objects is reflected in a particular category of writs in Daoism: the *fú* talisman. Talismans in Daoism were used in the earliest Heavenly Master Communities (天師道 *Tiānshīdào*, founded by Zhang Daoling 張道陵 in 142 CE). Daoist *fú* consist of signs similar to written characters but are changed by the alienation of elements or a combination of images with elements of writing, or by superimposing several characters in one sign (Drexler 1994, 2001; Wang 1996: 288f). The written signs were understood to be heavenly signs, created by the gods, and they serve, just like the ancient *fù*, *qì* and *quàn* tallies, as signs of recognition and legitimation—a contract between men and gods (Hsieh 2005: 75f). Thus, the second part of a Daoist *fú* talisman was thought to be held by divine beings in the heavens, of whom, through the contractual power implied in the possession of the earthly half of the *fú* talisman, men could ask for or order them to help in times of need.

Fú talismans were given to Daoist adepts at initiation, together with 錄 *lù* or 籙 *lù* registers, which were lists of the secret names of deities and spirits of the other world. After learning these names, the Daoist adept acquired power over the deities or spirits whose names he knew (Miller 2008: 39). This might be interpreted as an adaptation or variant of the concept of establishing correct names for things and actions (*zhèngmíng*) to insure proper flows of commands, which formed the basis of the normative conception of the language of Confucius and Xunzi.

There were thus two important conceptions related to language in the earlier Daoist religion. First, the names of deities played an important role in registers (*lù*), which contained the secret names of deities. Knowledge of these secret names allowed the Daoist adept to command the deities.

Second, *fú* talismans, written objects understood to be the earthly part of a tally, whose other half was held by deities in heaven, allowed the Daoist adept to legitimately request and access divine

22

assistance from deities (e.g., in cases of natural disasters like drought or floods, war, sickness, etc.). Early Heavenly Masters would at times even ingest *fú* talismans as medicine—the written paper was in this case soaked in water or honey and eaten (Bokenkamp 2008: 36). In all of these cases, it should be noted that there was a close relation between the objects carrying the script and the content written on them. While in some cases of talismans the script might be graphic or ideographic rather than "language," in others the precise wording of spells and invocations was of importance; thus, the dimension of "language" was certainly not completely absent in these phenomena.

The motif of writs in the heavens was greatly expanded by early medieval Daoist traditions in the Jiangnan area, in particular by the Lingbao 靈寶 scriptures dating to the early fifth century CE. Construed around a core of ancient talismans relating to five mythical emperors and five holy mountains (五篇真文 *wǔpiān zhēnwén* and 靈寶五符序 *língbǎo wǔfúxù*), these scriptures proposed a concept of script that originated in Dao, forming flickering light appearances in the original void, preceding and initiating cosmogony.[18] The writs were thus cognate with the highest deities, created by Dao. The deities then transmitted them among each other and then to carefully chosen human beings.

The Lingbao scriptures show some interaction with and co-option of Buddhist notions, which had entered China from India in the first century CE. However, whereas Buddhist monks and intellectuals laboured to translate the Indian language into Chinese, so it could be understood by the local Chinese audience, the Daoist authors of the Lingbao scriptures went about it the other way round, producing written characters considered to be "heavenly Brahma script"—as Zürcher (1980: 109ff) has shown, a kind of pseudo-Sanskrit sound transliteration believed to represent the divine sounds of the gods but was unintelligible to humans. These were completed by talismanic characters alleged to be the heavenly writs. Recitation of the unfamiliar sounds was supposed to have strong apotropaic functions, while carrying the written texts on one's body offered protection against disasters and sicknesses. None of these functions were related to language as a means of communication among humans or as epistemological tools, yet undeniably language was a key element in these religious usages, from apotropaic and talismanic functions to communications with the gods.

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[1] Makeham (1994: 36–44) noted that Sima Qian read the passage as a remonstrance in a specific historical context; a later reading, traceable to Zheng Xuan, extended the possible reference of *míng* to all possible entities.

[2] Compare *Laozi* 14, 21, and 25.

[3] Cf. Smith (2003: 129–130) and Yiu-ming Fung (2009: 164). They were also known as 刑名之家 *xíngmíng zhī jiā*, or 辩者 *biànzhě* ('sophists', 'disputers').

[4] See especially Han Feizi 8, Yang Quan.

[5] Cf. Makeham (1994: 67–83) and Fung (1952: 325).

[6] While tradition places Zhuangzi firmly in a Daoist lineage associated with Laozi, more recent research has challenged that and placed him in closer proximity to the School of Names, in particular Hui Shi, one of the Dialecticians who appears frequently as an interlocutor in the book (Graham, 1969/70).

[7] The received version of the text was compiled by the commentator Guo Xiang (252–312 CE). It does not seem to have originated from a single hand (see Graham, 1979; Liu, 1994).

[8] Wang Youru (2004) argued that Zhuangzi's writing may best be understood in terms of Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication as non-teleological reader- and situation-focused.

[9] Harbsmeier (1998) demonstrated that Shakespeare's flexible employment of words of different classes in atypical syntactic environments was very similar to that of Ancient Chinese.

[10] Baker (2003) proposed a universal separate class of adjectives. Adjectives in Modern Mandarin have been discussed by Paul (2015), but their exact constraints in Ancient Chinese still must be figured out.

[11] This hypothesis was first presented in Haudricourt (1954, cf. Sagart 1999: 131f)

[12] OCM=Minimal Old Chinese according to Schuessler (2007).

[13] According to Schuessler (2007), this is an exopassive derivation of 'what is mounted'; Jin 金理新 (2006) analysed cases like these as perfective forms employed as nouns.

¹⁴ Thompson (1995: 483), in a somewhat different approach, employed the 'use-mention' system to analyse the 'white horse' debate. According to Thompson, Gongsun Long focussed on differences between terms in "significance and communication function."

¹⁵ This means that *bái* 白, by default, had to be negated by *bù* when appearing as the predicate, and that "X is white" and "X is a horse" are not identical linguistically (contrary to Hansen, 1973: 27).

¹⁶ Chong (1997: 148f) also pointed out that the *niúmǎ* and the *jiānbái* distinction is clearly a distinction between things and qualities; however, none of the authors discussing this phrase acknowledged the fact that the combination *niúmǎ* consists of two nouns and the combination *jiānbái* consists of two adjectives.

¹⁷ Chong (1997: 148) suggested that this was the approach adopted in Hansen (1973).

¹⁸ Compare, for example, DZ 87 *Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin sizhu* 元始无量度人上品妙经四注, 1. 2:5a, translated in Bokenkamp (1997: 415).