

Mengzi on Rectification of Names

— A Study Within the Context of Pre-Qin Debates over Name and Reality

Yuyu Liu

Abstract. Set in the context of pre-Qin period, Mengzi's contribution to the discussions of language issues connects later debates over name and reality to Kongzi's idea of *zhengming*. Inheriting Kongzi's socio-political concern, Mengzi disclosed the ambiguity and contradictions latent in contemporary philosophical discourse through his argumentation. In response to Mengzi, Gongsun Long and later Moists developed the logico-linguistic strain implied in Mengzi's discussions, but diverged from each other in two oppositional veins. While Gongsun Long attempted to defend Mengzi's project of rectifying reality in terms of the correct use of names, the later Moists proposed the opposite, denying the possibility to use language as the standard to rectify reality. Combining the pragmatism of later Moists with Zhuangzi's anti-language position, Xunzi renounced the logico-linguistic approach and prioritized tradition and common sense over logical and linguistic standards of right and wrong.

1 Introduction

From pre-Qin period to Han Dynasty, *ming* (名 name) was considered one of the key terms for almost all major schools of thought in ancient China. Traditional scholarship usually traced the origin of the discussion of *ming* (name) and *shi* (实 reality) to Kongzi's *zhengming* (正名 rectification of names). Dong Zhongshu of Han Dynasty expounded thus in *Chunqiu Fanlu* (春秋繁露 *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*): “*Chunqiu* (春秋 *The Spring and Autumn Annals*) distinguishes the principles of things, so as to rectify their names, to ensure that names and things are true as they are, without missing even the tip of an autumn hair...The sage is circumspect in rectifying names to such an extent.” On the other hand, the “Records of Confucian Classics” in *The History of Sui* (隋书 • 经籍志) commented:

名者，所以正百物，叙尊卑，列贵贱，各控名而责实，无相僭滥者也。……拘者为之，则苛察缴绕，滞于析辞而失大体。

(《隋书 • 经籍志三》)

Names are to rectify the hundreds of things and to distinguish the superior from the inferior, the noble from the base. Having rectified things in accordance with names, there will be no transgression and confusion of

Received 2023-10-23

Yuyu Liu

English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University
flslyy@mail.sysu.edu.cn

order...But when the stubborn do it, they become rigorous and scholastic, and were led astray from the direct answer; trapped by their fragmented and bigoted language, they cannot see what is central.

(*The History of Sui*)

These texts acknowledge that the study of the relation between name and reality follows the teachings of the “sage”, that is, Kongzi, whereas later generations had gone astray in the process. This line of thinking was largely accepted by Chinese scholars after Han Dynasty, and modern scholarship has further divided the study of names into two branches, one ethical-political and the other logical-linguistic, due to the influence of Western philosophy, and attention has been paid especially to the latter approach. Cao Feng ([2]) criticizes that this has led to the result of a bias in contemporary studies of *ming*. He calls for a return to intellectual history and reconsider the meaning of *ming* in specific historical and intellectual contexts. He argues that we should carefully distinguish between the diverse meanings of *ming* used by different authors that belonged to different schools and historical periods.

Is there a relationship between the Confucian doctrine of *zhengming* and later discussions over the relationship between name and reality? Mou Zongsan admitted that the *mingshi* (名实) discussions of Warring States Period was derived from Kongzi’s *zhengming*, but had since developed into two separate strains: the Confucian “Spring and Autumn Teachings” of moral-political rectification of names, and the pure study of language and logic of the School of Names and later Moists. ([17]) He did not, though, specify how the study of language and logic was to derive from the primarily moral and political concerns. In fact, there has been scarce study on the relationship between Confucian *zhengming* and the *mingshi* debates. Current studies among Western scholarship tend to deny that there were any significant relations. For example, in his *Disputers of the Tao*, Graham did not draw any connection between Kongzi’s rectification of names and the name-reality debates. In a footnote, he cited Waley and Creel who treated the *zhengming* sayings in the *Analects* as interpolations that came into the book no earlier than Mengzi and Xunzi. ([4, p.24]) In his monograph studying the meaning of *mingshi* in early Chinese philosophy, Makeham spends a whole chapter clearing Kongzi out of the entire project. Though he refutes Waley’s claim that the *zhengming* sayings in the *Analects* were later interpolations, he also denies its relation to the debates, for, as he argues, the *zhengming* doctrine was not a response to the language crisis, but rather to a socio-political one. ([10, p.42])

Cao Feng argues that *ming* is a rich and ambiguous concept in the pre-Qin discourse, and “for one hundred people we are left with one hundred understandings of the term”. ([2, p.214]) Contrary to his emphasis on synchronic study of the multiple meanings of *ming*, however, this article would adopt a somewhat “naïve” approach to the issue, that is, choosing to believe the ancients unless proved otherwise. Admittedly, the term *ming* covers a wide range of meaning in pre-Qin philosophy. In

Daoism, *ming* often refers to the mystic center of existence, the mysterious origin of myriad things. For the Legalists, *ming* refers to law or method. Kongzi's use of *ming* is more commonsense and naturalistic. There can be found two meanings of *ming* in the *Analects*, as common names for objects, or as socio-political rank and class differentiation. The *ming* in *zhengming* designates the second meaning.

The belief that Kongzi's idea of *zhengming* had split into two strains, one ethical-political and the other logical-linguistic, is not merely an invention of the moderns. It started at least as early as Xunzi, when he condemned the prevalent debates over "hard and white", "same and different", "with or without volume", (*On Self-Cultivation*, Xunzi 《荀子·修身》) for confusing name and reality, and undermining the sage's cause of rectifying names. In fact, Gongsun Long, the most famous sophist of the time for his paradoxes, claimed that the purpose of his arguments is to "rectify names and reality and enlighten people under heaven 以正名实，而化天下焉。"(Collected Notes, Gongsun Longzi 《公孙龙子·迹府》)

If, as Cao and others pointed out, there might be any direct connection between Kongzi's *zhengming* and the discussions over the relationship between name and reality ([15] Graham, Makeham, etc.), why did Xunzi painstakingly elaborate a theory of naming in his *zhengming* chapter? Why did he, and later Confucians, denounced the School of Names to have gone astray from the right way of the Confucian *zhengming* project? Why did Gongsun Long relate his theory of name and reality to Kongzi? Some may take it to be a mere pretense, as philosophers such as Zhuangzi would also attribute to Kongzi something that he had never said or done. However, it might also be the other way around, that there was in indeed connections between Kongzi's *zhengming* and later name-reality discussions. As Cao himself also acknowledges, though Kongzi did not initiate discussions concerning either the name-reality relationship or socio-ethical ranking, he nonetheless realized that the ambiguity and arbitrariness in language use might lead to grave political consequences. ([15]) Though historical and archeological discoveries did not provide us with sufficient evidence for this line of thinking, this article hopes to contribute a part to it, however tenuous. Specifically, this article claims that, Mengzi's concern with language use provides us with a "missing link" in the seemingly discontinuous development from Kongzi's concern about rectification of reality with names to the name-reality debates in later Mohists and the School of Names, which was finally quenched by Xunzi's pragmatism.

2 The Logical Dilemma in Kongzi's *zhengming*

Since Kongzi only mentioned the term *zhengming* once in the *Analects* without further exposition, it is in fact difficult to know what he meant by it. In the *Analects*, Zilu asked Kongzi about government, and Kongzi replied with *zhengming*. But it has

also been agreed that some other sayings in the *Analects* are related to *zhengming*. They include:

齐景公问政于孔子。孔子对曰：“君君，臣臣，父父，子子。”公曰：“善哉！信如君不君，臣不臣，父不父，子不子，虽有粟，吾得而食诸？”
(《论语·颜渊》)

Duke Jing of Qi questioned Confucius about government. Confucius replied, Let the ruler be a ruler; the subject, a subject; the father, a father; the son, a son. The duke said, Splendid! For if indeed the ruler is not a ruler, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, then although there is grain, how will I be able to eat it?

(*Analects*, 12.11)

子曰：“觚不觚，觚哉！觚哉！”
(《论语·雍也》)

Kongzi said, “A *gu* is not a *gu*, What a *gu*! What a *gu*!”¹

(*Analects*, 6.25)

子曰：“何哉，尔所谓达者？”子张对曰：“在邦必闻，在家必闻。”子曰：“是闻也，非达也。夫达也者，质直而好义，察言而观色，虑以下人，在邦必达，在家必达。夫闻也者，色取仁而行违，居之不疑，在邦必闻，在家必闻。”
(《论语·颜渊》)

The Master said, “What do you mean by accomplished?” Zizhang replied, “In the domain, invariably well reputed; in the family, invariably well reputed.” The Master said, “That is reputation, not accomplishment. The accomplished man is solid, straightforward, a lover of right. He weighs people’s words, observes their attitude, and is careful to defer to others. In the domain, he is invariably recognized for his accomplishments; in the family, invariably recognized for his accomplishments. The man of reputation pretends to adhere to humaneness but acts quite differently and never shows any doubt in what he’s doing—so in the domain, he is invariably well reputed; in the family, invariably well reputed.”

(*Analects*, 12.20)

Makeham has listed some more examples in his book. He examines the historical records that are said to relate to these sayings, and concludes that Kongzi’s doctrine of *zhengming* was primarily applied to socio-political rank and class differentiation. In these cases, what is pertinent was the ambiguous standards evidenced in the breakdown of social order as encoded in ritual. In the case of *gu*, he argues, it could not be divorced from the breakdown in people’s performing their proper social roles.

¹This article adopts Burton Watson’s translation of the *Analects*, with minor alterations, unless indicated otherwise. See [13].

Makeham is certainly right in this respect. It would still be insufficient, though, to lead to the conclusion that the later name-reality debates were not related to Kongzi's *zhengming*. What had the “stubborn” stuck to and gone astray from the central concern is exactly the linguistic ambiguity of Kongzi's teachings, which, when examined too “stubbornly”, produces logical contradictions. While Kongzi prized action over words, and Mengzi expressed his suspicion whether words may lead us to true meaning, some of their contemporaries might “naively” stick to language.

In the case of Duke Jing of Qi, the four pairs of double characters are expressed in apparent contradictions. How can a ruler not be a ruler, and a father not be a father? To a person who takes language at its face value, this is unacceptable. Unlike the original succinct expression of the *Analects*, Makeham's translation of the saying has more or less obscured the contradiction:

If rulers fail to behave in the manner proper to rulers, then ministers will not behave in the manner proper to ministers; if fathers fail to behave in the manner proper to fathers, then sons will fail to behave in the manner proper to sons.

([10, p.39], *Analects*, 12.11)

君君，臣臣，父父，子子。

(《论语·颜渊》)

We moderns certainly can wave away the contradiction easily. In the double structure of *junjun* 君君, the two characters mean differently. The first jun refers to the actual ruler, while the second refers to the ideal ruler, or the ritual standards that a ruler is supposed to live up to. Some critics maintain that what concerned Kongzi was not the referential, but the regulative, function of language. Makeham, for example, holds that Kongzi's *zhengming* doctrine was applied merely in the socio-political realm, not to the names of things in general.([10, p.39]) Ames, developing on Hansen's mass noun hypothesis, claims that the name-reality relation did not concern Kongzi.([5, p.264]) He even goes as far as to deny that Kongzi's language serves to refer to a world of objects, claiming that “names ‘reference’ functions or roles that are themselves other names”.([5, p.39]) This is in a sense similar to Makeham's interpretation of Kongzi's view of language, though Makeham does not deny the descriptive function of Kongzi's language. “Names, not actualities, were Confucius' primary concern. He did not regard names as passive labels but rather as social and hence political catalysts.” ([10, p.46])

It is true that *ming* in *zhengming* for Kongzi mainly means socio-political rank and class differentiation rather than names of objects, highlighting the regulative instead of descriptive function of language, but this does not exclude the descriptive function from Kongzi's language. Even to Kongzi, the name *fu* 父 (father) refers not only to the position of the familial patriarch, but also, and first and foremost, to the biological fact of being the father. In fact, the later controversy over the name-reality relation may be said to have sprung out of the conflicts between the regulative and

descriptive uses of language in Kongzi's (and Mengzi's) teachings. (The debate over human nature between Mengzi and Gaozi is a perfect example of such conflicts. See below for detailed analysis.)

It is difficult to understand how Kongzi was concerned primarily with names but not reality, even though we may admit that he put names before reality. What concerned Kongzi is how to use names to guide (correct) reality. In expecting a father to be a father, certainly Kongzi's concern is in whether the actual father could meet the name (the ideal notion) of the father.

However, conflicts of word use can be found in the saying "let a father be a father". What should we call a(n) (actual) father who is not like a(n) (ideal) father? If we call both "father", how is the name rectified? Kongzi apparently was not troubled with such "triviality". Mengzi, however, gave his answer while challenged.

3 Mengzi's Response to the Dilemma

Though Kongzi did not discuss the name-reality relation specifically, it was widely debated by all the major philosophers from Mozi, later Moists, the School of Names and the Daoists to Xunzi and later Confucians. A considerable amount of research has been done on the name-reality debates in early Chinese philosophy. Most studies either focus on the socio-political agenda set by Kongzi and Xunzi, or on the logico-linguistic debates among the later Moists, the Daoists and the School of Names, or on the latter's influence on Xunzi. Few of them, however, seems to take Mengzi into consideration.²

This is not only because Mengzi never mentioned the term *zhengming*. A more important reason is perhaps that his argumentative style has always puzzled the modern-minded scholars. Waley, for example, complained that "as a controversialist [Mengzi] is nugatory. The whole discussion about whether Goodness and Duty are internal or external is a mass of irrelevant analogies...". ([12, p.194]) Hansen heartily adores Waley's judgement. "I find his analogies atrociously inept and unconvincing. "([6, p.188]) He seems difficult to be persuaded by Mengzi's modern defenders such as D. C. Lau and A. C. Graham, who had produced thorough-going accounts of Mengzi's analogies about human nature. Still, most sympathizers focus on Mengzi's analogical argumentation, which, from a logical point of view, is indeed hard to defend. Mengzi's analogies may count more as rhetorical devices than "logical arguments". The fact that, in pre-Qin philosophical argumentation, the logical form is not a much-valued thing does not mean that the philosophers were illogical or irrational. In my opinion, Mengzi did make significant and indispensable contributions to the language debates in pre-Qin period, but not so much in the aspect of analogical reasoning as in

²Liu Wei published an article explaining the debate over human nature by Mengzi and Gaozi within the context of pre-Qin discussion of names. See [16].

the field of semantics, that is, in the scrutiny of the name-reality relationship which became central to later philosophical inquiry.

Interestingly, it is still Hansen who provides me with the most inspiration in understanding Mengzi's contribution to the name-reality debates. In his *Language and Logic in Ancient China*, Hansen draws connections among the linguistic views of Kongzi, Mengzi, Zhuangzi, the neo-Moists and Gongsun Long, thus implicitly laying out a map for the name-reality debates in pre-Qin philosophy. ([7]) While he studies these philosophers synchronically in order to provide a background for Gongsun Long's White Horse Paradox, it would be even more productive, I think, to consider them diachronically, that is, as a succession of responses to previous theories of language. Hansen is right to criticize the school-based interpretative tradition. The rectification of names took very different forms in Kongzi, Mengzi and Xunzi. Being Confucian masters of different times, they not only inherited from their Confucian predecessors, but, more importantly, were influenced by their contemporary rivals respectively: Mengzi by the Moists and the Jixia Academy, and, possibly, in turn influenced later Moists and the School of Names, and Xunzi by the School of Names, the later Moists and Zhuangzi. In propounding the Confucian doctrines, they were at the same time addressing to different *problematiques* of their time.

The following dialogue in *Mengzi* has traditionally been related to the Confucian socio-political project of rectifying names:

齐宣王问曰：“汤放桀，武王伐纣，有诸？”孟子对曰：“于传其君，可乎？”曰：“贼仁者谓之‘贼’，贼义者谓之‘残’。残贼之人谓之‘一夫’。闻诛一夫纣矣，未闻弑君也。”（《孟子·梁惠王下》）

King Xuan of Qi asked, “Is it true that Tang banished Jie and King Wu assaulted Zhou?” Mencius replied, “It is so stated in the records.” “Then can a minister be allowed to slay his ruler?” “One who offends against humaneness is called a brigand; one who offends against rightness is called an outlaw. Someone who is a brigand and an outlaw is called a mere fellow. I have heard of the punishment of the mere fellow Zhou but never of the slaying of a ruler.”³ (*Mencius*, 1B.8)

In this example, Mengzi rectified the name of “ruler” by denying the name to an actual ruler who does not meet the moral and political standards of an ideal ruler. Similar examples can also be found in other classical texts, not exclusively Confucian. In “Opposing the Offensive War 非攻” of *Mozi* 墨子, there is a very similar dialogue:

“昔者禹征有苗，汤伐桀，武王伐纣，此皆立为圣王，是何故也？”

³This article adopts Irene Bloom's translation of the Mengzi, with minor alterations, unless indicated otherwise. See [1].

子墨子曰：“子未察吾言之类，未明其故者也。彼非所谓‘攻’，谓‘诛’也。”
(《墨子·非攻下》)

“In the past King Yu fought against Youmiao, Tang assaulted Jie, King Wu assaulted Zhou. All three were remembered as Sage Kings. Why was it so?” Mozi answered, “You have not made clear how my words are distinguished (according to difference and similarity), so don’t understand the reason. It was not ‘aggressive wars’ that the three kings launched, but ‘punitive wars’.”
(*Opposing the Offensive War, Mozi*)

Moreover, *Hanshi Waizhuan* (韩诗外传 *An Unauthorized Biography of Poets* by Han Ying 韩婴) recorded an episode about how Kongzi righted the position of ruler and minister by rectifying the use of words.

孔子侍坐于季孙。季孙之宰通曰：“君使人假马，其与之乎？”孔子曰：“吾闻君取于臣，谓之取，不曰假。”季孙悟，告宰通曰：“今以往，君有取，谓之取，无曰假。”孔子曰：“正假马之言，而君臣之义定矣。”《论语》曰：“必也正名乎！”
(《韩诗外传》卷五)

Kongzi was accompanying Ji Sun. Ji Sun’s minister reported, “His Majesty sent someone to borrow the horse, should I give it to him?” Kongzi said, “I heard that when His Majesty takes something from his minister, it is called ‘take’, not ‘borrow’.” Ji Sun understood and said to his minister, “From now on, when His Majesty sends for anything, use ‘take’, not ‘borrow’.” Kongzi said, “Rectifying the words of ‘borrowing horse’, the rightful order of ruler and minister is thus fixed.” As is recorded in the *Analects*, “It is certainly the rectification of names (that comes first)”.

(*An Unauthorized Biography of Poets*)

It is not sure whether this is what Kongzi meant by *zhengming*, but it was how later scholars understood the doctrine. If we follow this line of interpretation, we may be able to trace the *zhengming* which later developed into the name-reality debates that contribute so much to Xunzi’s *zhengming* doctrine.

Let’s return to Mengzi’s case. In order to maintain the rectifying function of names, Mengzi’s strategy is to deprive the name *jun* of those who do not deserve it, renaming them either “brigand” or “outlaw”, so that the name could be reserved for whoever deserves it. In this case, only those who accord their conduct with the ritual standards could be rightfully called *jun*. In other words, Mengzi intended to determine the descriptive meaning of language by its regulative meaning. The contradiction left in Kongzi’s saying thus disappears. But this also means we have to reform the ordinary language use in order to meet the moral demand. Language is thus conceived by Mengzi as a social institution that is subject to intentional modification. One can

regulate the meaning of words at will in order to maintain the ethico-political order. But who is to decide whether an actual ruler should be called a ruler or not?

If a brigand or outlaw is not a ruler, what about a despotic ruler (暴君 *baojun*)? Mengzi had also used *baojun* to name those undeserved rulers, as in “暴君代作 The despotic rulers rose one after another”(《孟子·滕文公下》, *Mencius*, 3B.9) and “是故暴君污吏必慢其经界 This is why despotic rulers and corrupt officials are prone to neglect the setting of boundaries”(《孟子·滕文公上》, *Mencius*, 3A.3). Following Mengzi’s line of thought, a despotic ruler certainly does not deserve being called a ruler, either. As a matter of fact, expressions like “the ruler is not a ruler” in the *Analects* and “a brigand is not a ruler” or especially “a despotic ruler is not a ruler” in Mengzi are structurally similar to Gongsun Long’s paradox “a white horse is not a horse”. Though this could hardly be the concern of Kongzi or Mengzi, it might puzzle those “stubborn” people such as Gongsun Long. Neither Kongzi, Mengzi nor the later Xunzi would bother to think about the question that, while it is acceptable on the regulative level to say “a despotic ruler is not a ruler”, why it sounds unacceptable on the descriptive level to say “a white horse is not a horse”. While Mengzi attempted to right the descriptive function of language with its regulative function, Gongsun Long seemed to attempt just the opposite.

4 Mengzi’s Contribution to the Name-Reality Debates

The relationship between Mengzi and the name-reality debates is not limited to the above structural similarity. Mengzi was living at a time when

圣王不作, 诸侯放恣, 处士横议。杨朱、墨翟之言盈天下。天下之言, 不归杨则归墨。(《孟子·滕文公下》)

[O]nce again sages and kings do not appear, the lords have become arbitrary and intemperate, and unemployed scholars indulge in uninhibited discussions. The words of Yang Zhu and Mo Di flow through-out the world; the teachings circulating in the world today all go back to Yang or Mo. (*Mencius*, 3B.9)

Thus Mengzi exclaimed, “予岂好辩哉, 予不得已也 How should I be fond of argument? I am compelled to do it.” (《孟子·滕文公下》, *Mencius*, 3B.9). At Mengzi’s time, philosophical debates were rampant, and the philosophers honed their art of argumentation in the process. Mengzi was no exception. Worried that “the unemployed scholars indulge(d) in uninhibited discussions”, Mengzi decided to right this trend with his own argumentations. What, then, did Mengzi contribute to the art of argumentation and the later name-reality debates?

The most famous and controversial passages are those in which Mengzi argued with Gaozi about human nature.

告子曰：“生之谓性。”孟子曰：“生之谓性也，犹白之谓白与？”
曰：“然。”“白羽之白也，犹白雪之白；白雪之白，犹白玉之白与？”
曰：“然。”“然则犬之性，犹牛之性；牛之性，犹人之性与？”

(《孟子·告子上》)

Gaozi said, “*sheng* (生 life) is what is called *xing* (性 nature).” Mencius said, “When you say that ‘*sheng* is what is called *xing*’, is this like saying that ‘white is what is called white’?” “Yes.” “Is the white of a white feather like the white of snow, and the white of snow like the white of white jade?” “Yes.” “Then is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox like the nature of a human being?”

(Mencius, 6A.3)

告子曰：“食色，性也。仁，内也，非外也；义，外也，非内也。”

孟子曰：“何以谓仁内义外也？”

曰：“彼长而我长之，非有长于我也；犹彼白而我白之，从其白于外也，故谓之外也。”

曰：“异于白马之白也，无以异于白人之白也；不识长马之长也，无以异于长人之长与？且谓长者义乎？长之者义乎？”

曰：“吾弟则爱之，秦人之弟则不爱也，是以我为悦者也，故谓之内。长楚人之长，亦长吾之长，是以长为悦者也，故谓之外也。”

曰：“耆秦人之炙，无以异于耆吾炙。夫物则亦有然者也，然则耆炙亦有外与？”

(《孟子·告子上》)

Gaozi said, “The appetites for food and sex are human nature. Humane-ness is internal rather than external; rightness is external rather than internal.”

Mencius said, “Why do you say that humaneness is internal while rightness is external?”

Gaozi said, “One who is older than I, I treat as an elder. This is not because there is in me some sense of respect due to elders. It is like something being white and my recognizing it as white; I am responding to the whiteness, which is external. Therefore I call rightness external.”

Mencius said, “There is no difference between the whiteness of a white horse and the whiteness of a white man. But is there no difference between the age of an old horse and the age of an old man? What is it that we speak of as rightness—the man’s being old or my regarding him with the respect due to one who is old?”

Gaozi said, “Here is my younger brother; I love him. There is the younger brother of a man from Qin; him I do not love. The feeling derives from

me, and therefore I describe it as internal. I treat an elder from Chu as old, just as I treat our own elders as old. The feeling derives from their age, and therefore I call it external.”

Mencius said, “Our fondness for the roast meat provided by a man of Qin is no different from our fondness for the roast meat provided by one of our own people. Since this is also the case with a material thing, will you say that our fondness for roast meat is external as well?”

(*Mencius*, 6A.4)

Hansen rejects Mengzi’s argumentative style as “full of embarrassingly loose analogies, non-sequiturs and apparently deliberate confusions and distortions.” ([6, p.154]) The first quotation above is used by Hansen as an example of such a style. He thinks that Mengzi was almost fully responsible for the stereotype that Chinese philosophy depends more on intuition than on reason. However, the above quoted passages, and many others in the book of Mengzi, show that Mengzi built his argumentation not on intuition alone.

In the first quoted passage, what puzzles the modern reader most is the parallel between “*sheng* is what is called *xing*” and “white is what is called white”, for *sheng* and *xing* are apparently two separate characters, how can these two structures seem parallel? Both Lau ([9]) and Graham ([4]) proposed an explanation based on the etymological change of the word *sheng*, which nonetheless fails to convince Hansen. “Lau’s attempt to remove this impression (that the argument seems pointless and irrelevant), however, does not depend only on the formal structure of the argument, but the familiar ploy of elaborate and clever interpretive theories about the character *xing* (nature).” ([6, p.191]) However, it is Hansen’s insistence on the “formal structure” that prevents him from seeing the significance of Mengzi’s argumentative strategy. Isolated from the context, Mengzi’s analogies might seem pointless, but set in the larger background, they were highly related to the name-reality discussions in pre-Qin China.

In order to understand the dialogue, we must first try to make out why Gaozi replied “yes” when Mengzi asked if “*sheng* is what is called *xing*” was the same as “white is what is called white”. If we do not assume both conversers to be dummies talking nonsense, we have to assume that they really mean something.

In ancient Chinese, the two characters *sheng* and *xing* were sometimes interchangeable. This makes the parallel plausible, for if *sheng* and *xing* are represented by the same character, “*sheng* is what is called *xing*” certainly forms a surface tautology, just like “white is what is called white”. Indeed, as Hansen points out, this structural parallel is more what he calls “sentence/phrase matching” than analogy, in that the two sentences have similar sentence structures. Hansen argues that, even if this is the case, it would be curious why Gaozi would start a conversation with such a

pointless tautology. But the point is that this is not a tautology! For *sheng* (the living process) and *xing* (its natural direction) must be different even to Gaozi and Mengzi, otherwise there wouldn't be any argument. But as Graham pointed out, their difference does not seem to be clearly distinguished at the time of the debate. ([4, p.118]) Let's reconstruct the dialogue between Gaozi and Mengzi in a more formal way:

A=*sheng*, B=*xing*.

A is B.

By saying "A is B", do you mean the relation between A and B is just like that in "X is X"?

Yes.

It is clear to see that what Hansen accuses of Mengzi is in fact Gaozi's mistake. If "*sheng* is what is called *xing*" is just like "white is what is called white", then it is certainly analytic truth, because they are tautologies. We may reconstruct Mengzi's argument in this way:

If "*sheng* is what is called *xing*" is just like "white is what is called white", then it is tautology (analytic truth).

If from "white is what is called white" we can infer "the white of white feathers, white snow and white jade is the same white",

Then, similarly, from "*sheng* is what is called *xing*" we can infer "the *xing* of dogs, oxen and humans is the same *xing*".

But this is something unacceptable (here Mengzi was assuming that human nature is different from the nature of animals)

Therefore we cannot say "*sheng* is what is called *xing*". (It is not analytic truth.)

The trick here is the ambiguity of "*xing*". If, as Gaozi defined it in another conversation, human nature is "food and sex", why didn't Gaozi simply admit that "the nature of dogs, oxen and humans is the same nature", since "food and sex" is not unique to human beings, but shared by all animals? If so, "*sheng* is what is meant by *xing*" is acceptable. Gaozi did not respond to Mengzi's challenge, but we doubt whether he would accept this.

In conclusion, what Mengzi attacked is Gaozi's view that "*sheng* is what is meant by *xing*" is tautology, that *sheng* and *xing* mean the same thing just like white and white mean the same thing. Hence, in this dialogue, Mengzi's logic is impeccable. What is in question is in fact the parallel between white and nature. A modern reader would find the two incomparable because white is a property that can be conceived independent of objects but nature is not; it depends on what kind of object the nature

is of. However, study shows that the distinction between property and substance was absent in early Chinese philosophy. ([11]) Hence Mengzi or his contemporaries could not possibly perceive the mistake. Mengzi certainly did not give a “valid argument” to prove that “*sheng* is what is called *xing*” is logically false. What he showed is simply this analogy is unacceptable (as what Hansen believes). As to why from the similar structure of the two sentences we cannot infer human nature is just like the nature of animals, it would wait till the later Moists to provide a systematic explanation. (See below for an analysis of what Hansen calls “sentence matching” by the later Moists.)

Mengzi refuted Gaozi in the second dialogue in a similar fashion. Both disputes arise partly from the semantic ambiguity of Chinese characters. Just like the character *sheng* can mean either “the living process” or “its natural direction”, the character *zhang* can mean either “to recognize someone as elder” or “to respect someone as elder”. Apparently, Gaozi failed to make the distinction, while Mengzi was semantically more acute. The distinction is crucial to the debate because it implies a contradiction between “what is” and “what ought to be”. Just as in Kongzi’s case of *junjun* (treating the ruler as ruler), *zhangzhang* (treating the elder as elder) also involves both the factual and ritual (regulative) dimensions. Gaozi compared the case with the color white, which does not have any evaluative implications. He attempted to reduce the ritual into the factual, but Mengzi pointed out to him that they were different and not to be confused. If we compare these passages with those of later Moists and Gongsun Long, we will find how similar they are both in the way of argument and in what they attempted to argue for. Though, unlike later debaters of names, neither Mengzi nor Gaozi focused their attention on pure language issues. Their debate demonstrates how ethico-political concerns eventually veered towards logico-linguistic ones. The later Moists and Gongsun Long not only inherited and developed Mengzi’s way of semantic analysis, but also attempted to solve the logical dilemma Mengzi left them. From Mengzi to the name-reality debates, we may trace how, through philosophical argumentation, the ambiguous Chinese language were honed to express more precise meanings, as we can find in later-Moists and Gongsun Long.

5 Two Different Responses to Mengzi

Apart from the Confucians, the Daoists, the Moists, the Legalists and the School of Names all responded to the *zhengming* project. But as Cao ([2]) points out, these philosophers tended to interpret the term in very different ways. Only the later Moists and the School of Names attempted to solve the logical dilemma and linguistic ambiguity in the *zhengming* project of Kongzi and Mengzi.

There may be two different strategies to cope with the contradiction between “what is” and “what ought to be” in Kongzi and Mengzi as discussed above. Those who do not deserve the name of jun Mengzi called them “brigand” or “outlaw”. Since

they are not real rulers, killing them then does not count as regicide, thus circumventing the question of King Xuan of Qi. But sometimes Mengzi also called those undeserved “despotic rulers”, as in “the despotic rulers rose one after another” and “this is why despotic rulers and corrupt officials are prone to neglect the setting of boundaries”. According to Mengzi’s doctrine of *zhengming*, these despotic rulers did not deserve the name of ruler either. The problem is, the term “despotic ruler” already contains the name “ruler” in the expression. Generally we consider either a despotic or benevolent ruler a ruler, just like we consider either a white or a yellow horse a horse. How, then, is it possible to defend Mengzi’s idea that “killing a despotic ruler is not killing a ruler”? Logically there may be two different strategies to do so. In order to prove “killing a despotic ruler is not killing a ruler”, we must show either that “a despotic ruler is not a ruler”, or that “killing a despotic ruler” cannot lead to “killing a ruler (regicide)”. (Note that since the ancient Chinese did not make any distinctions between the factual and evaluative dimensions of language, killing a ruler to them equals regicide.) Gongsun Long adopted the first strategy, trying to find a way to regulate reality in terms of the correct use of names (or the internal rules of language use), while the later Moists adopted the second strategy, considering it more appropriate to rectify names in terms of reality when the two contradict.

Just like in the case of Mengzi, modern scholars have long disputed as to whether Gongsun Long was a qualified philosopher or simply applying chop logic to fool people. The White Horse Paradox obviously contradicts with our common sense, making it difficult for people to make sense of it. Even some of his defenders, such as Graham and Hansen, either dismiss him as playing with words or being logically incompetent. This is a grave misunderstanding and undervaluation of Gongsun Long. What Graham and Hansen fail to see is the real significance of the paradox in the context of pre-Qin philosophy.

Suspensions have arisen as to whether the extant Gongsun Longzi was really written by Gongsun Long. Graham, for example, believed that only the “White Horse” and the “Zhi and Wu” are genuine, while the others are later interpolations. ([3, p.164]) The point here, however, is not whether there had been a person called Gongsun Long who had written all these chapters. Though some of the texts are heavily damaged, the five chapters of Gongsun Longzi, unlike other paradoxes and debates which had virtually nothing left but the name, all focus on the same subject matter, namely, the name-reality relationship. Even if they were not of the same author, the shared subject matter and method applied in these chapters are clear to see. There might be reasons other than mere chance that, among all the paradoxes and debates of the day, only these chapters survived in the form of a single anthology.

“On Name and Reality 名实论”, though put at the end of the book, serves as an introductory chapter for the whole book. It proposes the one-name-one-reality principle which underlies other chapters, especially “White Horse” and “Hard and

White”.

其正者，正其所实也；正其所实者，正其名也。其名正则唯乎其彼此焉。谓彼而彼不唯乎彼，则彼谓不行；谓此而此不唯乎此，则此谓不行。
(《公孙龙子·名实论》)

Rectification is to rectify reality. To rectify reality is to rectify its name. When the name is rectified, then it designates specifically “this” or “that”. If the designation of “that” does not correspond uniquely to “that”, then the name of “that” is not applicable. If the designation of “this” does not correspond uniquely to “this”, then the name of “this” is not applicable.

(*On Name and Reality, Gongsun Longzi*)

至矣哉，古之明王。审其名实，慎其所谓。

(《公孙龙子·名实论》)

Great indeed were the illumined kings of old! They investigated names and reality, and were careful with regard to what the names name.

(*On Name and Reality, Gongsun Longzi*)

The one-name-one-reality principle serves Mengzi’s purpose of rectifying reality with the correct use of names. Attempting to reduce the evaluative dimension into the descriptive one, Gongsun Long hoped to provide a theoretical basis for the doctrine of rectifying names. If one name designates one and only one reality, then certainly different names must designate different reality, otherwise there wouldn’t be the necessity to use different names. Let’s put the White Horse Paradox in this context. If Gongsun Long can prove that “a white horse is not a horse”, then similarly we can prove that “a despotic ruler is not a ruler”, consequently killing a despotic ruler is not killing a ruler.

While what concerned Mengzi is the ethico-political issue, Gongsun Long attempted to reduce the issue into a logico-linguistic one. This approach attempts to show that sentence structure may serve as inferential rules of factual states of affairs, thus we can use linguistic rules to guide our behavior in reality. Through the White Horse Paradox, Gongsun Long had in fact proposed a new insight of seeing how language is related to the world. The only difficulty remains how to understand the “reality” that the names refer to.⁴

Contrary to Gongsun Long, later Moists adopted the second strategy, rejecting to use the syntactic structure of language as a form of inference. Since the structures the later Moists examine remind us of inferential rules in modern logic, many consider it the Moist equivalence to modern logic. However, as Hansen points out, “The inferences studied and the semantics offered are not directed at formal relations among

⁴More detailed explanations can be found in [11].

premises and conclusions, nor at logical connectives or other logical constructions.” ([6, p.125]) Unlike Gongsun Long who attempted to correspond reality to the structure of language, the later Moists refused the claim that language rules could be used to guide people’s behavior in reality.

The later Moists based their conclusion on the study of “sentence matching”, which may be understood as a form of inference via algebraic addition or subtraction. For example, from “white horse is horse”, we can get “riding white horse is riding horse”. However, what the later Moists did is simply giving ample examples and counter-examples to show that this sentence matching cannot serve as a rule of inference.

夫物或乃是而然，或是而不然，或一周而一周，或一是而一不是也。
(《墨子·小取》)

Things are partly thus and so, partly thus and not-so, partly not thus and yet so, partly general and partly not, partly one thus and one not.⁵

(*Choosing the Lesser, Mozi*)

“Thus and so” and “thus and not-so” refer respectively to cases in which the rule works or not. If we compare the study of sentence matching with the arguments of Mengzi and Gongsun Long, we will see how this logico-linguistic enterprise is related to the Confucian ethico-political project of rectifying names.

白马，马也，乘白马，乘马也。丽马，马也，乘丽马，乘马也。获，人也，爱获，爱人也。臧，人也，爱臧，爱人也。此乃是而然者也。
(《墨子·小取》)

White horse is horse; riding white horse is riding horse. Black horse is horse, riding black horse is riding horse. Huo is man; to love huo is to love man; Tsang is man, to love tsang is to love man. These are thus and then so.
(*Choosing the Lesser, Mozi*)

The later Moists then listed counter-examples to show that in some cases this is not “thus and so”.

获之亲，人也，获事其亲，非事人也。其弟美人也，爱弟，非爱美人也。车，木也，乘车，非乘木也。船，木也，入船，非入木也。盗人，人也，多盗，非多人也；无盗，非无人也。(《墨子·小取》)

Huo’s parents are men, Huo’s serving parents is not serving men. Her younger brother is handsome man, her loving her younger brother is not loving handsome man. Carriage is wood; riding carriage is not riding

⁵This article adopts Hansen’s translation of Mozi. See [7].

wood. Boat is wood; entering boat is not entering wood. A robber is man, but abounding in robbers is not abounding in men; being without robbers is not being without men. How shall we make this clear? Hating its abounding in robbers is not hating its abounding in men. Wishing to be without robbers is not wishing to be without men.

(Choosing the Lesser, Mozi)

The later Moists were satisfied with the conclusion, without going any further to investigate under what circumstances it is “thus and so” and under what it is not. In admitting, for example, “a robber-man is a man” but denying “killing a robber-man is killing man (murder)”, the later Moists had thus denied the one-name-one-reality principle defended by Gongsun Long. In a similar fashion, we can classify Mengzi’s statement “killing a despotic ruler is not killing a ruler” under the category of “thus and not-so”, while admitting “a despotic ruler is a ruler”. But in this way the later Moists had abandoned Mengzi’s *zhengming* project. While Mengzi attempted to regulate the ethico-political order by the correct use of language, the later Moists rejected to right reality in terms of language use. On the contrary, they did not acknowledge the final authority of language. They had set up conventionality as the final standard of language use, thus resorting to commonsense, or intuition, to decide the relation between name and reality.

此与彼同类，世有彼而不自非也，墨者有此而非之，无他故焉，所谓内胶外闭。

（《墨子·大取》）

The whole world agrees that these are right; but if such is the case there is no longer any difficulty in allowing that, although a robber is a man, loving robbers is not loving men. Not loving robbers is not not loving men. Killing robber-men is not killing men. The latter claims are analogous to the former; the world does not think itself wrong to hold the former, but thinks the Mohists wrong for holding the latter. Is there any reason for it but being, as the saying goes, “clogged within and closed without”?

(Choosing the Great, Mozi)

Thus, the later Moists rejected the one-name-one-reality principle. As to the cases when name and reality do not correspond respectively, they resort to “speaking according to circumstances”.

诸圣人所先，为人欲名实。名实不必名。苟是石也白，败是石也，尽与白同。是石也唯大，不与大同。是有便谓焉也。

（《墨子·大取》）

What the sages did first is to verify the relation between name and thing. A name does not need to correspond to a reality, a reality does not need

to correspond to a name. Suppose that this stone is white, even if you break the stone, the resulting pieces of the stone are still white. Suppose that this stone is big, but it is not the same as “big”. This is because of speaking according to circumstances. (*Choosing the Great, Mozi*)

6 Xunzi’s Pragmaticism

Ames holds that the Confucian “allusive” uses of language suggest an “aesthetic order” as compared to the western “logical order”. ([5, p.297]) According to Hansen, Kongzi is an intuitionist, Mengzi is “anti-language”, and Xunzi criticizes argumentation vehemently. However, although all the three Confucian masters had expressed their intention to stop argumentation, their strategies are different. Kongzi did not engage himself in argumentation. Instead, he sets himself up as the authority, answering questions raised by his disciples and giving them guidance for their conducts. He contrasts speech with conduct and considers it better do than say.

先行其言而后从之。 (《论语·为政》)

Only after accomplishing the deed does he say about it.

(*Analects*, 2.13)

刚毅木讷近仁。 (《论语·子路》)

Being firm, resolute, honest and rare in speech is close to humaneness.

(*Analects*, 13.27)

Mengzi’s attitude towards language is more complicated. On the one hand, he sees the limitation of language.

不以文害辞，不以辞害志。 (《孟子·万章上》)

One should not allow the word to distort the phrase, nor allow the phrase to distort the meaning.

(*Mencius*, 5A.4)

On the other, however, he did not deny the function and importance of argumentation. He would have hoped there were no arguments at all. The way to stop argument, for Mengzi, however, is not to prevent people from arguing, but to help people see what is right with his own argument.

Can arguments or debates decide what is really right and what is really wrong? Mengzi believed so, but Xunzi did not. Hansen finds Xunzi contradictory in his philosophical sophistication and political dogmatism. He remarks that the book of Xunzi seems to be written by at least two writers. “One is a philosopher, aware of the philosophical issues motivating Zhuangzi’s skepticism. The other is a dogmatic, toadying, propagandist for a draconian authoritarian social-political dao.” ([6, p.308]) Hansen

believes that, like Mengzi, even when influenced by “the best non-Confucian philosophy”, Xunzi still remained a stylistic apologist for authoritarian practices and points of view. In other words, the contradiction on Xunzi appears to be an irreconcilable battle between the Confucian “dogmatism” and non-Confucian (mainly Daoist) “philosophy”. However, the influence Xunzi received from Zhuangzi and later Moists might be much more important than many would admit. Xunzi’s authoritarianism is not a mere dogmatic, non-philosophical legacy of Confucianism, but a natural outcome of the anti-rational theories of later Moists and Zhuangzi.

Unlike Kongzi and Mengzi who attempted to find a rational and somewhat individualist (internal) basis for tradition, Xunzi presupposes the authoritarian position of tradition and its inventor, the sage king. To Xunzi, the key to a good government is the unification of thought. In the *zhengming* chapter, Xunzi proposes that, the only way to unify people’s thought is the rectification of names by sage kings. Once the name is rectified, the noble and the lowly all know their position in the society, so that everyone would know what is appropriate to do, and all things in the world will be distinguishable in terms of similarity and difference, so that there will be no confusion of language and reality. Xunzi’s way of stopping argument is to expect the appearance of “the illumined lord”, who could “preside over (the people) with the authority of his position” and “forbid them with punishments”. He distinguishes between the argumentation of the junzi 君子 (gentleman) and that of the little man.

小人辯言險而君子辯言仁也。言而非仁之中也，則其言不若其默也，其辯不若其訥也。 (《荀子·非相》)

Whereas the petty man engages in discriminations to discuss threats of danger, the gentleman engages in them to discuss the principle of humanity. If a line of discussion does not coincide with the requirements of the principle of humanity, its words are worse than remaining silent and the discrimination not as good as stuttering.⁶

(*Contra Physiognomy, Xunzi*)

But how do we distinguish between the argumentations of the junzi and the little man? Xunzi simply resorts to the ancient kings and ritual and rightness.

凡言不合先王，不順禮義，謂之奸言，雖辯，君子不聽。(《荀子·非相》)

Every doctrine that is neither consistent with Ancient Kings nor in accord with the requirements of ritual and moral principles is properly described as a “treacherous doctrine”. Although they may be the product of a discrimination, the gentleman will not heed it.

(*Contra Physiognomy, Xunzi*)

⁶This article adopts John Knoblock’s translation of Xunzi. See [8].

These doctrines, even though eloquent and convincing, are dangerous if they are neither submissive to the illumined kings nor able to harmonize the people. Xunzi considers those who upheld such doctrines even more dangerous than robbers and thieves, and that they ought to be “the first to be executed 所以先诛也”, because it is possible to reform the robbers and thieves, but not these men. In other words, while Mengzi hopes to stop the argumentations of Yangists and Moists by his own argumentation, Xunzi resorts to direct political suppression.

This authoritarian position seems to contradict with our impression that Xunzi is the most “philosophical” and “rational” of the three Confucian masters. Hansen finds his rationality and authoritarianism contradictory. However, I would argue that authoritarianism is a natural outcome of his “rationality”. As Hansen rightly points out, “The concept of rational coherence itself, not the particular conception of coherence is the issue. Appealing to coherence as the standard is a Western fetish. Chinese interpreters have a different interpretive practice. They may appeal to an interpretation’s impact on the community’s moral behavior or to its conformity with a tradition of interpretation.” ([6, p.266])

How is it possible, judging from a rational point of view, for such a position to be coherent in itself? Xunzi’s attitude towards argumentation is not merely pragmatic requirements of the rulers, as Hansen suggests. It is an anti-rational interpretation of the language theories of later Moists and Zhuangzi. To Xunzi, *zhi* 知 is not knowledge based on rationality (justified true belief), but on perception and intuition. The means to obtain *zhi* is our perception of the similarity and difference of myriad things.

然则何缘而以同异？曰：缘天官。凡同类同情者，其天官之意物也同。故比方之疑似而通，是所以共其约名以相期也。……心有征知。征知，则缘耳而知声可也，缘目而知形可也。（《荀子·正名》）

This being so, what is the basis of deeming something the same or different? I say that it is based on the sense organs given us by nature. As a general rule, whenever things belong to the same category of being or have the same essential characteristics, the representation of them presented by the senses is the same. Thus, when put side by side and compared, they resemble each other and are fully interchangeable. ...this is the awareness that the mind has of defining characteristics that distinguish things. Only when it rests on the evidence provided by the ear is it possible for this awareness of the defining characteristics to know sound, and only when it rests on the evidence provided by the eye is it possible to know shape.

(*On the Correct Use of Names, Xunzi*)

According to Xunzi, true knowledge cannot be obtained through argumentation. On the contrary, influenced by Zhuangzi’s anti-rationalism, Xunzi believes that argumentation not according to ritual and rightness can only deceive and mislead people. In

response to the debates over language, Zhuangzi, attempting to get himself out of the circle of right and wrong, denounces argumentation completely. He believes that the reason why people argue about what is right and what is wrong lies in our restricted point of view. Everyone argues from their own point of view. Thus, blocked by their one-sidedness, no one can see the complete picture of the Dao. Therefore, Zhuangzi claims, the sage never argues (make discriminations), but deems everything as one.

其分也，成也；其成也，毀也。凡物无成与毀，复通为一。唯达者知通为一，为是不用而寓诸庸。（《庄子·齐物论》）

Their dividedness is their completeness; their completeness is their impairment. No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again. Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories] but relegates all to the constant.⁷

(Discussion on Making All Things Equal, Zhuangzi)

Xunzi ignores Zhuangzi's relativism and skepticism, but adopts his idea of true and complete knowledge:

万物为道一偏，一物为万物一偏。愚者为一物一偏，而自以为知道，无知也。（《荀子·天论》）

The myriad things constitute one aspect of Dao, and a single thing constitutes one aspect of the myriad things. The stupid who act on the basis of one aspect of one thing, considering that therein they know Dao, are ignorant.

(Discourse on Nature, Zhuangzi)

Argumentation does not tell people what is right and what is wrong. On the contrary, because argumentation is based on one-sided point of view, it can only lead people farther and farther away from Dao. The more people argue (discriminate), the more fragmentary is Dao. The "one who comprehends" is the sage king. While Zhuangzi's "sage king" is merely an empty reference, Xunzi sets him up as the true authority of knowledge, from whom the great tradition of ritual and rightness is inherited. In other words, unlike Kongzi and Mengzi who believe that everyone could attain to Dao, Xunzi upholds that only the sage king can know the Dao in its completion. As a result, what ordinary people should do is not to discover the Dao from argumentation, least to believe the "treacherous doctrine" and go astray. What they need to do is simply listen to the edicts of the sage king and do as told.

Another possible influence on Xunzi is the language theories of the later Moists. The later Moists' analysis of sentence matching shows that, at least on the syntactic

⁷Translation by Burton Watson. See [14].

level, language does not correspond to reality. Again, this study of sentence matching also invites two different responses, one logical, the other anti-logical. The first response is to stick to the correspondence principle and try to determine on what conditions the sentence matching is “thus and so”, and on what conditions it is “thus and not so”. The second response is to draw a conclusion directly without any further scrutiny, that, since sentence structure does not seem to correspond to actual states of affairs, it is unreliable as a rule to infer what is right and what is wrong from language uses. Xunzi apparently followed the anti-logical one: because what the little men have to say does not conform to ritual and rightness, the best way to stop their argument is not arguing with them, but silencing them altogether with the “authority of position”.

This response to forming inferential rules through language structure seems to be a reversed version of Plato’s Euthyphro dilemma, in which Socrates is recorded to ask Euthyphro, whether the gods love the pious because it is pious, or whether the pious is pious only because the gods love it. But the dilemma is a dilemma for Socrates and his conversant because they implicitly take logical reasoning as the highest standard of what is true and what is false. It would not constitute a dilemma for Xunzi, who takes the sage king, instead of any independent standard of truth, as the authority of knowledge. Truth cannot be attained through argumentation, but depends on the perception or intuition of the sage king. Arguments arise only when people do not fully understand Dao as the sage king does. Thus, even if what the debaters advocate “may be the product of a discrimination, the gentleman will not heed it”, but sticks firmly to ritual and rightness inherited from the sage king.

Following this logic of reasoning, the highest standard of right and wrong is the tradition of ritual and rightness. When tradition fails to help us reach a perfect answer, we should resort to intuition and commonsense. If logical reasoning leads us to conclusions that are against ritual and rightness, or against our commonsense, then it is the reasoning that has gone wrong, not tradition or commonsense.

7 Conclusion

Set in the context of pre-Qin period, Mengzi’s contribution to the discussions of language issues connects later debates over name and reality to Kongzi’s idea of *zhengming*. Inheriting Kongzi’s socio-political concern, Mengzi disclosed the ambiguity and contradictions latent in contemporary philosophical discourse through his argumentation. In response to Mengzi, Gongsun Long and later Moists developed the logico-linguistic strain implied in Mengzi’s discussions, but diverged from each other in two oppositional veins. While Gongsun Long attempted to defend Mengzi’s project of rectifying reality in terms of the correct use of names, the later Moists proposed the opposite, denying the possibility to use language as the standard to rectify reality.

Combining the pragmatism of later Moists with Zhuangzi's anti-language position, Xunzi renounced the logico-linguistic approach and prioritized tradition and common sense over logical and linguistic standards of right and wrong. Rather than Mengzi's "irrational" and "intuitive" argumentative style, it is this swerve that is more responsible for the intuitive, anti-rational characteristic in ancient Chinese philosophy.

References

- [1] I. Bloom, 2009, *Mencius*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- [2] F. Cao, 2008, "A return to intellectual history: a new approach to pre-Qin discourse on name", *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, **3**(2): 213–228.
- [3] A. C. Graham, 1986, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies.
- [4] A. C. Graham, 1989, *Disputers of the Tao*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.
- [5] D. L. Hall and R. T. Ames, 1987, *Thinking Through Confucius*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- [6] C. Hansen, 1992, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [7] C. D. Hansen, 1983, *Language and Logic in Ancient China*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- [8] J. Knoblock, 1988, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- [9] D. C. Lau, 1979, *On Mencius' Use of the Method of Analogy in Argument*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- [10] J. Makeham, 1994, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- [11] Y. Ren and Y. Liu, 2019, "A pro-realist account of gongsun long's 'white horse dialogue'", *Philosophy East and West*, **69**(2).
- [12] A. Waley, 1939, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- [13] B. Watson, 2007, *The Analects of Confucius*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- [14] B. Watson, 2013, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- [15] 曹峰, "孔子 '正名' 新考", 文史哲, 2009 年第 2 期, 第 61–69 页。
- [16] 刘伟, "人性之为本性的名学释证——对《孟子·告子上》'生之谓性' 章之解读", 人文杂志, 2017 年第 4 期, 第 12–21 页。
- [17] 牟宗三, "名家与荀子", 2010 年, 吉林: 吉林出版集团有限责任公司。

先秦名实之辩背景下的孟子正名思想

刘玉宇

摘 要

近代以来,由于受到西方哲学的影响,学界一直视孔孟的“正名”理论与先秦时期的名实之辩为两种不相关的哲学体系。本文将孟子的语言观置于从孔子到荀子的先秦哲学发展脉络之中,探讨孟子的论辩如何将孔子的正名说与战国中后期名实之辩联系起来。有理由认为,尽管孟子没有对名实关系作出直接论述,但他在哲学论辩中所揭示的语言问题与后来的名实之争有明确联系。从孔子的正名说到战国中后期名实之辩的发展进程中,孟子是个不可或缺的重要环节。孟子一方面继承了孔子正名学说的社会政治关怀,但另一方面又通过论辩揭示了孔子的正名理论中事实描述与价值判断之间的矛盾。公孙龙与后期墨家关于名实问题的论争,恰恰建立在对孟子所遗留的语言难题的回应之上。但他们的回应形成了两条对立的路线。公孙龙试图发展孟子以名正实的正名学说,而后期墨家则提出了相反的主张,否定了语言可以用作矫正现实的标准。荀子将后期墨家的实用主义与庄子的反语言立场相结合,摒弃了以名正实的逻辑语言进路,认为判断是非依赖的是传统和常识,而不是逻辑和语言规则。