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INTRODUCTION: METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The theme of this special issue is to discuss Gongsun Long's "white-horse-not-horse (*bai ma fei ma*)" thesis and his relevant thoughts in view of their relevance and significance to contemporary philosophy. This introduction consists of two parts. In the first part, I will briefly introduce the basic views of four contributors' distinct accounts of Gongsun Long's thesis and arguments; I then will briefly explain the engaged approaches adopted by this volume. In the second part, I shall draw readers' attention to the two emphases as a whole and their related methodological orientations and reflective purposes. My focus is on the second part when making some methodological notes concerning the reflective examination of Gongsun Long's philosophy and its relevance and significance to contemporary philosophy.

I

It has been recognized that Gongsun Long's thesis "[the] white horse [is] not [the] horse" together with his arguments is reflectively interesting and significant. Though the thesis appears to be odd or even absurd, it is certainly not dogmatically claimed but is supported, directly and explicitly, by a number of articulate arguments in Gongsun Long's essay *Bai Ma Lun* (On the White Horse) and, indirectly and implicitly, by some ideas in his other writings; there are some fundamental issues even touched on metaphysics, philosophy of language, logic, and epistemology, which are thus addressed in philosophically interesting ways. Nevertheless, Gongsun Long's texts seem to be open to a variety of interpretative understandings. Modern scholars elaborate their substantial contents and philosophical significance through seemingly competitive interpretations. As far as their understandings of Gongsun Long's arguments are concerned, the four contributors' basic views are as follows.

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Chung-ying Cheng and Yiu-ming Fung give their distinct elaborations of a representative and influential Platonic-realistic interpretation which was originally suggested by Fung Yu-lan.¹ Fung Yu-lan renders Gongsun Long Platonic-realistic: Gongsun Long's arguments are intended to argue that "white horse" and "horse" represent two distinct Platonic universals (or universal/abstract qualities) and thus the universal of white-horseness is not (identical to) the universal of horseness. Chung-ying Cheng makes his defense, and a further elaboration, of a Platonic-realistic interpretation in terms of his version of Platonic abstract ontology, though he does not talk of universals but instead of qualities; it emphasizes the phenomenological source and basis of Gongsun Long's ontology of forms, which is intended to unify the subjective versus the objective and phenomenology versus the ontology.²

In contrast, Yiu-ming Fung gives his own defense and elaboration of the realistic account in terms of his new realistic understanding of universals, which takes it that Gongsun Long's universals exist in their separate, transcendent, and unchanged world but they can emerge, and participate, in the phenomenal world in some interesting way.³ Chad Hansen proposes a radical shift in his interpretation based on mereology (part-whole logic) and his mass-noun hypothesis: "white horse" is a mass noun and refers to a mass-sum whole of horse-mass and white stuff, distinguishing it from a mutually pervasive compound like *jian bai* (hard-white) which is a mass-product; the whole of white-part and horse-part is not its horse-part. Hansen's mereological interpretation is to bypass class-member relation but resort to whole-part division alone.⁴

Bo Mou suggests a modest mereological interpretation: The denotational semantics and deep structure of Chinese common nouns are like those of collective nouns, and its implicit ontology is a mereological one of collection-of-individuals with both part-whole structure and member-class structure; the denotation of "white horse" is neither a realistic universal nor a mereological sum of white and horse nor an empty set but a collection of white horses with member-class structure.⁵ As far as the metaphysical characterizations interpreted by the four contributors are concerned, Cheng's and Fung's accounts respectively demonstrates two distinct versions of realism concerning universals, Hansen's account presents a strong version of nominalism, while Mou's account is involved with conceptualism.

In their contributions to the current theme, the four contributors not only (explicitly or implicitly) give their substantial perspectives in treating Gongsun Long's thesis and arguments, but also present their distinct meta-philosophical and methodological approaches in view of contemporary philosophy: Hansen does this through his critical

examination of some competitive theories of interpretation and their underlying principles; Fung does this through his systematic evaluation on some representative interpretation of Gongsun Long; Mou does this through a general account concerning referring names and its related conceptual and explanatory resources; Cheng does this through his critical comments on the above three approaches.

Indeed, as suggested above, this issue is organized in a way that manifests itself at two levels. At the first level, Yiu-ming Fung's, Chad Hansen's, and Bo Mou's views engage with each other in a regular form. At the second level, Chung-ying Cheng gives his critical commentaries on the three essays from a vantage point of his general philosophical endeavor as well as from the point of view of his own perspective in treating Gongsun Long's arguments. It is hoped that readers would find the issues addressed in this issue philosophically interesting and significant, and all approaches presented here are reflectively worthy and challenging.

II

What I plan to do in the following is to highlight and briefly explain two methodological emphases or orientations⁶ that are more or less jointly shared by the four contributors, although they take their distinctive approaches in treating Gongsun Long by pointing out how it is relevant and contributes to contemporary philosophy.⁷

(1) The first emphasis is on the philosophical interpretation⁸ of an ancient thinker instead of mere historical description. It is noted that, generally speaking, the primary purpose of this orientation is to enhance our understanding of a thinker's ideas and their due implications of philosophical significance via relevant effective conceptual and explanatory resources, whether or not those resources were actually used by the thinker himself/herself. It is clear that a purely historical approach does not fit here: To elaborate and understand the thinker's ideas does not amount to figuring out exactly what resources the thinker actually used and exactly what explicit ideas she actually thought of; instead, such interpretation and understanding might include the interpreter's elaboration of the thinker's points including their subtle implications, which might not have been explicitly considered by the thinker himself/herself; and/or the interpreter's representation of the thinker's point in clearer and more coherent terms or in a more philosophically interesting way, which the thinker himself/herself might have not actually adopted.⁹ In both cases, given a thinker's ideas (in one tradition or account) under interpretation, some effective conceptual and explanatory resources well developed

in another tradition or account can be consciously used to enhance our understanding of, and to elaborate, the thinker's ideas.¹⁰

It is noted that, when those explanatory and conceptual resources are used, they are not intended to assign the same degree of articulated systematization and of mastering some conceptual and explanatory resources to an ancient thinker but to enhance our understanding of her ideas delivered in the text. For this interpretative purpose, it is not merely legitimate but beneficial to employ more explicit or clearer conceptual resources to elaborate some otherwise implicit and hidden thing (say, coherence and connectedness) in a thinker's ideas that was sometimes less clearly delivered or even ill-expressed for the lack of those contemporary explanatory and conceptual resources that are unavailable to the ancient but to us. It is also noted that, when a thinker's line of thought and her ideas lack in articulated systematicity in their language expressions, that does not amount to saying that the thinker's line of thought and her ideas, go without (implicit and hidden) coherence and connectedness deep in a thinker's ideas. Consequently, we cannot base ourselves merely on this lack of articulated systematicity in language expression and therefore judge that the thinker's text itself is not a philosophical work when the text was indeed intended to deliver her reflective ideas. At this point, with the previous and current methodological considerations, some further elaborations of the thinker's line of thought and her surrounding reflective ideas via adequate conceptual and explanatory resources available to us are genuinely needed, instead of being the mere issue of preference.

It is also noted that a project in studying Chinese philosophy with the interpretation-concerned orientation, instead of the historical orientation, is free to focus on a certain aspect, layer, or dimension of a thinker's ideas, as being guided by the purpose of the project and the reflective interest of the person who carries out the project, etc. Let us agree that any project in studying Chinese philosophy should be guided by a more comprehensive understanding. But a reflective thinking in philosophy (including those studies of Chinese philosophy) that takes a certain methodological perspective through focusing on one aspect of the object of study is not incompatible with a comprehensive understanding. At this point, what needs to be recognized is an important distinction between a methodological perspective as a current working perspective and a methodological guiding principle that an agent presupposes when taking the methodological perspective and that would be used by the agent to guide or regulate how the current perspective would be applied and evaluated in view of some other relevant perspectives. One's reflective practice in taking a certain methodological perspective amounts to neither reflectively

rejecting some other relevant methodological perspectives nor presupposing an inadequate methodological guiding principle which would render irrelevant or relevant methodological perspectives (if any). Indeed, what is important is that the interpreter has assumed an adequate methodological guiding principle in this connection.

(2) The second emphasis of mine is on their relevance and significance to contemporary development of philosophy. This emphasis is intrinsically related to one methodological orientation in studying Chinese or comparative philosophy, that is, the philosophical-issue-concerned orientation aiming at contribution to common philosophical concerns and issues. The primary purpose of this orientation in studies of ancient thinkers is to see how, through reflective criticism and self-criticism, ancient thinkers could constructively contribute to the common philosophical enterprise and/or a series of common concerns and issues of philosophical significance, rather than to focus on providing a historical or descriptive account or on interpreting some ideas historically developed in a certain tradition or account. Typically, in addressing a certain commonly concerned issue of philosophy, some substantial ideas historically developed in distinct philosophical traditions or accounts are explicitly and directly compared by aiming at how they could jointly and complementarily contribute to a joint issue in philosophically interesting ways. Insofar as constructive engagement in dealing with various common concerns and issues of philosophical significance is most philosophically interesting, the philosophical-issue-concerned orientation and its methodological strategy directly, explicitly, and constructively conducts philosophical engagement and is thus considered to be most philosophically interesting.

It is noted that, if a project in studying Chinese philosophy, which explicitly has one of the previously mentioned orientations (the interpretation-concerned one, the philosophical-issue-concerned one, and the historical-description-concerned one), is considered as a project-simplex, a project in reflective practice concerning Chinese philosophy might be a complex that goes with a combination of two or more orientations. For example, a comparative project concerned with a historical figure (say, Gongsun Long) often consists of such a combination. Recognition of the characteristic features of the aforementioned three distinct orientations/purposes and their respective methodological approaches would help us discriminatively treat, and evaluate, different stages or parts of a project-complex of studies of Chinese philosophy.

The current project with the foregoing emphases is the one as a whole primarily with the aforementioned interpretation-concerned orientation and the philosophical-issue-concerned orientation; never-

theless, such a project certainly would not deny the legitimacy and due value of the historical-description-concerned orientation as one effective approach but stresses the constructive compatibility and mutual enhancement of these orientations. It is my hope that the reader will see: First, the authors base their interpretations on their first-hand reading and knowledge of the relevant original texts without compromising the attentive reading of them; second, the articles illustrate how the three aforementioned orientations can be constructively related to, and mutually enhance, each other.

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ENDNOTES

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1. See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (2 vols), trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952–53).
2. See Chung-ying Cheng, “Kung-sun Lung: White Horse and Other Issues,” *Philosophy East and West* 33, no. 1 (1983): 341–54.
3. See Yiu-ming Fung, *Gongsun Longzi (Gong-Sun-Long-Zi)* (Taipei: Tung-tai Book company, 2000).
4. See Chad Hansen, *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983).
5. Mou’s account is based on his collective-noun hypothesis as given in Bo Mou, “The Structure of the Chinese Language and Ontological Insights: A Collective-Noun Hypothesis,” *Philosophy East and West* 49, no. 1 (1999): 45–62. Its earlier sketch appears in Bo Mou, “Gongsun Long,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Thomson-/Macmillan Reference USA, 2006): 472–73.
6. The presentation of those methodological points in this article is an adapted version of some of the contents in section 2 of my article: “How Constructive Engagement of Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy Is Possible: A Theme Introduction,” in *Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement*, ed. Bo Mou (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 1–33. An early version of the mentioned contents appears in “Three Orientations and Four ‘Sins’ in Comparative Studies,” *APA Newsletters* (in the portion on comparative philosophy edited by Chenyang Li) 2, no. 1 (2002): 42–45. Though the discussion there is primarily concerned with some methodological issues involved in comparative studies of Chinese and Western philosophy, I contend that its basic methodological points should hold for reflective studies of Chinese philosophy.
7. For a detailed examination of the relevant methodological issues, see Bo Mou, “On Some Methodological Issues Concerning Chinese Philosophy: A Theme Introduction,” in *Routledge History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bo Mou (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
8. Here I use the term “interpretation” in a narrow but straightforward sense as specified here (in terms of elaborating and understanding) rather than in a broad but implicit sense in which all the three orientations discussed here could be somehow identified as “interpretation-concerned.”
9. Then, can these implications be said to belong to the thinker’s ideas in the text (and thus fall into what the thinker *truly* means/meant or what the thinker’s ideas *truly*

has/had)? In an important sense, the answer would be yes, for these implications are *truly* implied by the ideas delivered by the thinker, although one can surely say that these implications were not *actually* expressed by the thinker, and one thus might say that they are not what the thinker actually means/meant. (At this point, one can see that such expressions as “what a certain thinker truly means/meant” or “what she truly has/had” tend to be ambiguous and vague and thus deserve clarification, especially when one intends to make claims about what a thinker truly means/meant or what her ideas truly has/had.)

10. From the point of view of a comparative engagement, those conceptual and explanatory resources used are thus tacitly and implicitly, but constructively, in comparison and contrast to those original resources by means of which the insight or vision was somehow delivered, insofar as such comparison of the two distinct sorts of resources is not expressly and directly conducted. The term “constructively” here means such tacit comparative approach intrinsically involves how the interpreter of the thinker could learn from another tradition or account regarding resources, in order to enhance the interpreter’s understanding; therefore, a constructive philosophical engagement between distinct resources in different traditions is tacitly involved in this orientation and its corresponding methodological approach.