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INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE AND LOGIC IN LATER MOISM

I. THE FOCUS OF THE SPECIAL THEME

In this special theme, we have four articles that deal with a set of related topics, that is, definitions, names, truth and reasoning, in later Moism. In terms of philosophical language, different ideas of naming and different definitions of names and other linguistic entities can be used to express different theses in philosophy. For example, based on Chad Hansen's bold and provocative hypothesis of mass nouns in his interpretation of ancient Chinese philosophy, ancient Chinese thinkers can be understood as expressing their ideas without count terms and their language is unlikely used to syntactically theorize the distinction between names and a series of terms (e.g., nonsentential group of words), on the one side, and sentences and that clauses, on the other. If this interpretation is right, the theoretical consequence is that, in general, ancient Chinese philosophers' language cannot be used to motivate a similar kind of philosophy of language and mind in the West. In particular, their philosophical language is unlikely to be used to express the concepts of semantic truth and propositional attitude. Although it seems to most scholars to be a misunderstanding of the classical language and its philosophical capacity, Hansen's idea has been received as interesting and influential. It is not only because he makes an alternative interpretation for ancient Chinese philosophy, but also because his idea can invite discussion into further deep level of understanding of ancient Chinese philosophy. In this special theme, some of the articles enter into in-depth discussions with him and provide different views on the philosophical language of later Moism.

In contrast with the nonanalytic approach in Confucianism and Daoism, later Moism is much more analytic in the sense that the Moists tend to theorize their philosophical arguments with an analytic language. In this special theme, some of the articles will argue that there is a kind of semantic notion of truth and a schematic idea of

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argument explicitly or implicitly expressed in the text of later Moism. Moreover, the names and definitions reflectively used in the text also indicate that the language of ancient Chinese philosophy is significantly comparable with that of Western philosophy.

II. DEFINITIONS

In Western philosophy, Anselm's "ontological proof" for the existence of God cannot be stated without his definition of "God." Similarly, Russell's logistic program cannot be established without a set theoretical definition of "number." It is obvious that definitions often play a key role in making a philosophical thesis and argument. In ancient Chinese philosophy, thinkers seldom explicitly use definitions as a tool to build up their theories, though there are many implicit definitions in the ancient texts such as the *Mencius* and *Yi-zhuan*. It is in the text of later Moism that definitions came to be used widely for theoretical explanations. In this special theme, Thierry Lucas in his "Definitions in the Upper Part of the Moist Canons" gives a clear and salient picture of the later Moists' systematic use of definitions in making their theories of practical or pragmatic philosophy. Some of the most important findings in this article are that without circularity, the later Moists systematically define and organize their concepts in a hierarchical order and, most importantly, use some undefined terms, such as *ran* 然 (to be so), *de* 得 (to obtain), *ming* 明 (illumination), *zuo* 作 (to initiate), and *wei* 為 (to act), as the very basic concepts to build up a long chain of definitions for forming their background ideas.

According to Lucas, "definitions rarely appear isolated but come in organized systems which should first be evaluated as a whole." He sees this in mathematics, biological sciences, and judicial sciences. In legal discourse, for example, it is obvious that all items of law are required to be organized in a consistent way and each term to be strictly defined in the system. Different definitions of "murder" would lead to different legal arguments. According to some definitions, an essential element of this crime is the agent's knowledge of the consequences of the action committed, while other definitions only require that the agent is aware of his acts. Changing or modifying a definition allows one to support different types of conclusions based on the same evidence.

III. NAMES

In dealing with borrowing names, such as "Crane," the later Moists express their view in Canon B8. A. C. Graham follows Tan Jiefu to interpret Canon B8 as the topic on metaphorical naming. If the act of

borrowing a name can be treated as metaphorical naming, it seems to mean that besides conventional naming with collective acceptance, without metaphorical base, anything cannot be named by any name in borrowing names. So Graham thinks that the later Moists would naturally object to the assumption that anything can be named anything, used in the *Qiwulun* (*Discourse on Equalizing Things*) of the *Zhuangzi* to discredit all dialectics.

With special focus on Canon B8, Dan Robins in his “Names, Cranes, and the Later Moists” makes further investigation into the problem of personal names and tries to explain the later Moists’ view on naming in contrast with the current views in the Western philosophy of language. According to contemporary Western descriptivist theory of reference, proper names are regarded as having a Fregean Sinn and can be treated as shorthand for a description or a cluster of descriptions. On the other hand, based on contemporary Western causal theory of reference, proper names are understood as having no sense and a description related to a name can be used to fix its reference only. Although there is great disagreement between these two theories, the Fregean sense still plays some role in both theories: it is either regarded as the meaning of the name or as a medium to fix the object named. It seems that Robins wants to use the personal name, generally, and the linkage name “Crane,” particularly, to explain the different way of naming in the classical Chinese theory of reference. He thinks the later Moists take our ability to use language to be grounded in our ability to distinguish between kinds on the basis of manifest similarities and differences among things. Proper names, however, do not work this way. The later Moists distinguish what they call personal names from names for kinds. But unlike the contemporary Western philosophers of language, they do not go on to inquire how the meaning of a proper name can associate it with just one thing. Instead, they take proper names, and lineage names, in particular, to exemplify the general possibility of borrowing a word for one kind of thing, and using it to refer to something else. In alignment with Graham, Robins guesses that they are probably responding in part to views like those presented in the *Qiwulun* of the *Zhuangzi*, according to which possibility of using any word to refer to anything threatens the stability of language quite generally. Proper names serve the Moists’ purposes because even when proper names borrow from words with existing uses, arguably, they do not undermine those uses.

IV. TRUTH

In “Truth in Moist Dialectics,” Chris Fraser adopts Brandom’s prosentential theory of truth to explain the semantic notion of truth used in

the text of later Moism. He agrees with Hansen that the three standards are not criteria of truth, specifically, but of a more general notion of the correct *dao*. But he argues that this pragmatic inclination does not preclude the later Moists using utterances with semantic truth.

Fraser follows Brandom to suggest that it is an anaphoric prosentence-forming operator (such as “is true”) that can be applied to any term that is a sentence nominalization (say, “That snow is white is true”) or that identifies a sentence token to form a “prosentence” (say, “It is true” or “That is true”) with that token as its antecedent (say, “Snow is white”). The prosentence can be used with assertoric force to endorse an assertion expressed by the antecedent sentence as when someone asserts “‘Snow is white’ is true.”

Here, I think this idea of anaphoric reference is also held by Davidson with respect to the problem of propositional attitude. Davidson thinks that in an indirect discourse, a *that* clause can be paraphrased as a pair of paratactic sentences in which the complementizer or subordinating conjunction “that” can be regarded as a demonstrative pronoun that has the function of referring back to the antecedent sentence.

Although there is no clear example of that clause in classical Chinese as defined in modern Western grammar, there are functional equivalents in the ancient text. This is also related to the idea of anaphoric reference. For example, in the *Mencius*, “I have heard [that] zero form of complementizer the chief of the West knows well how to nourish the old”¹ is equivalent to “[the chief of the West knows well how to nourish the old] *zhe* 者 nominalizer: I have heard *zhi* 之 demonstrative.” or “I have heard *zhi* demonstrative: [the chief of the West knows well how to nourish the old] *zhe* nominalizer.” Here, the word “*zhi*” (that/this) in the second sentence is used to demonstrate the nominalized sentence or used to refer back to the antecedent sentence. In the first sentence, there is an ellipsis of “*zhi*.” This can be understood as, through a process grammaticalization, transforming from the second sentence, which is embedded with the *zhi* construction (functionally equivalent to that construction). That is, the structure of the first sentence “I have heard [zero form of *zhi/that*] S” can be understood as transforming from the structure of the second sentence “S: I have heard *zhi/that*” or “I have heard *zhi/that*: S.”

Based on some solid textual evidence, Fraser argues that the three standards are indeed most likely criteria of some broader notion of correctness in distinguishing *shi-fei* 是非 (right/wrong, this/not this). In contrast with Hansen’s sharp demarcation between the Western semantic notion of truth and the Moists’ pragmatic notion of correctness, he suggests that the three standards are not concerned with pragmatic or normative issues *as opposed to* semantic or descriptive

ones. He concludes that the criteria as a set play a dual role in determining the semantic content and pragmatic use of words of an utterance.

V. REASONING

In “A Logical Perspective on the Parallelism in Later Moism,” Yiu-ming Fung tries to explain the informal inference of parallelism in later Moism as embedded with a schematic mechanism that can be used to check validity and is in accordance with the decision procedure of Western formal logic, though in terms of perspective, the former idea is semantic-cum-pragmatic-oriented while, the latter is formal or syntactic-oriented.

Based on his mass-like interpretation of the paralleling language, Hansen interprets the tone of *Xiao-qu* as being defeatist. He thinks that the later Moists’ language is capricious, arbitrary, and merely conventional. On the contrary, Fung disagree with Hansen to attribute to the later Moists a view of linguistic skepticism in the sense that they can be understood as believing the instability of language and thus rejecting the validity of logical inference.

In this article, Fung tries to provide a logical analysis of the paralleling inference and a constructive rather than defeatist interpretation of parallelism in *Xiao-qu* and other relevant chapters. In terms of methodology, he will demonstrate that the Chinese thinkers, including the later Moists, are less formal and syntactic sensibility in theory construction and argue that, with a kind of semantic and pragmatic sensibility, they tend to express their ideas in the “material mode of speech” to elaborate their philosophical views, especially in the thinking of parallelism.

In regard to the later Moists’ theory of inference, Fung thinks we should not treat their paralleling inference as a kind of material inference in the sense that their validity is not dependent on formal rules but semantic content, as claimed by Brandom. Rather, the validity of their paralleling inference depends on some paradigmatic examples in comparison with some anomalies. This mechanism seems like a model theory of checking correctness and is in accordance with the decision procedure based on formal rules. In this regard, the informal inference of parallelism in later Moism has no primacy in comparison with formal reasoning. Instead, they are hand in hand together.

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further study. In comparison, this special theme is more focused on language and logic in later Moism. When the chief editor, Chung-ying Cheng, contacted me to talk about the idea in January 2011, we both agreed that the aim of the special theme is to disclose a much clearer picture of the analytic discourse in later Moism. Here, I would like to express my gratitude to Chris Fraser, Thierry Lucas, and Dan Robins for their contributions to the special theme and for their cooperation with me. I would also like to thank Chung-ying Cheng and Linyu Gu for their full support for this project.

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ENDNOTE

1. *Mengzi Jinxin*, 2: 22 and *Lilou*, 1: 13.