

Gongsun Long's *Baima lun*: a Semiotic Argument

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ABSTRACT

The article offers re-reading of one of the most prominent writings on logic in ancient China notorious for its ambiguous and evasive nature—Gongsun Long's *Baima lun*—from the logical semantics and linguistic semiotics point of view. Previous interpretations of *Baima lun*, which attributed to its alleged author either bringing in of abstract universals or introducing of nominalistic speculations into the philosophical debate of the day, serve as a point of departure for the interpretative theory based on re-examination of the two debating points in the contemporary philosophical discussion—*Doctrine of Rectification of Names* and *Debate of Name and Substance*. Present re-reading suggests that Gongsun Long's dialogue effectively challenges the Neo-Mohists' non-problematic assessment of conditions needed for a successful logical discourse by stressing the key importance of a semiotic aspect of the logical reasoning. Moreover, the possibility of restating Gongsun Long's arguments in the wording of Saussurean semiotics indicates the conceivability of *Baima lun*'s interpretation as an implicit theory of linguistic signs.

KEY WORDS

Baima lun
Discourse on White Horse
Gongsun Long
Pre-Qin logic
Neo-Mohist philosophy

Doctrine of Rectification of Names
Debate of Name and Substance
discrimination *bian*
propositional logic
Saussurean semiotics



Introduction

A present reading of *Baima lun* 白馬論 (Discourse on White Horse), an attempt at a semiotic interpretation of one of the most famous writings on logic in the Pre-Qin China,¹ looks for support in Umberto Eco's observation that different intellectual responses stimulated by the most fundamental semiotic problem—the idea of the *aliquid stat pro aliquo*-relationship—should be sought among explicit, implicit or even repressed semiotic theories and practices throughout the ages,² as well as in the encouraging fact that a semiotic approach applied on many well-studied Western philosophical texts of the past helped to reveal “that what has previously been sneered at as medieval scholasticism was in many respects a subtle and highly developed theory of signs.”³

My proposed reading of such a paradoxical and highly elusive text, both from the logical semantics and the linguistic semiotics point of view, seeks its legitimacy in a much debated yet generally accepted fact: that the very prerequisite of human thought and its communication is the existence and use of language. Whenever a language of philosophy is at work, as we are reminded by Ernst Cassirer,⁴ we have to take into consideration processes of symbolisation or semiosis, and we have to employ methods and approaches of semiotics in order to be able to appreciate (often veiled) differences between philosophical theories discussing abstract things and those discussing the very tool of our reasoning, the language itself.

The author of the text under scrutiny, Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (about 320-250 B.C.), a thinker and successful political advisor *shi* 士,

specialising in rhetoric and logic,⁵ must have considered language to be the basic tool of both the art of persuasion and that of demonstration. Indeed, an inevitable presence of reflections on language in his writings is presupposed by the very nature of these two disciplines he was engaged in. Moreover, as a true "practitioner of wisdom,"⁶ Gongsun Long must have been aware of obstacles caused by improper use of language and he must have realised that certain conditions are to be met in order to transform the language into an effective tool of logical discourse. Gongsun Long grew up in the tradition of the Neo-Mohists' philosophy with its manifestly dominant concern for a nominalistic model of language.⁷ However, the problem of whether Neo-Mohists were interested solely in the relation between names and things or whether they incorporated into their theories concepts of mental correlates of names, of general terms, or even a specific theory of logical classes, still remains the matter in dispute.⁸

Chung-ying Cheng in his methodological considerations on the study of classical Chinese logic⁹ singled out two of the most important topics for the research in Chinese logic: the inquiry into the problem of how Chinese thinkers conceived the relationship between linguistic names and objects as well as the investigation of ways names (in the view of Chinese thinkers) represented reality.¹⁰

As obvious from the following outline, different interpretative hypotheses formulated by numerous translators and commentators of the *Baima lun* have been invariably based on their respective interpretations of the above mentioned problems.¹¹ An account of the basic interpretative approaches to Gongsun Long's *Baima lun* will, at the same time, serve as an introduction to the theoretical approaches applied in the text's present study.

Previous Approaches

Reduced to their common denominator, two basic groups of interpretative approaches to *Baima lun* can be marked off: abstract interpretations and nominalist ones.

Abstract theories, inspired by Platonism and its abstract forms,

interpret the text as a discourse on the process of denotation of objects of the real world by words via abstract mental entities. Arguably, the most influential interpretation of Gongsun Long's thought as a philosophy of universals, was formulated by Fung Yu-lan.¹² Another approach, also founded on the epistemological role of mental entities, is represented by Janusz Chmielewski's reading of *Baima lun*¹³ as a discourse "employing a logic based on the language of mathematical classes."¹⁴ Among abstract theories that stem from the Western philological tradition, a number of more or less known interpretations (or commented translations) can be further counted which invariably "attribute to Gongsun Long the invention of theories involving entities that perform the semantic work of classical abstract entities."¹⁵

On the other hand (since it has been generally agreed that the Neo-Mohists' discussion centred on the relation between names and their respective objects), nominalist interpretations—denying the existence of universals and dealing with names and things only—can be regarded as more 'Chinese' in nature. In light of the Mohists' inference 'baima ma ye cheng baima cheng ma ye' 白馬馬也乘白馬乘馬也 ('a white horse is horse, to ride a white horse is to ride a horse'),¹⁶ Gongsun Long's initial proposition 'baima fei ma' 白馬非馬, understood by his contemporaries as 'a white horse is not a horse,' must have been inevitably regarded as a most unacceptable and startling paradox. Indeed, the few Chinese thinkers in the ensuing centuries who commented on Gongsun Long's text unanimously considered it, from the nominalist point of view, absurd.

The number of Western scholars who adopted basic tenets of nominalism as an underlying interpretative theory for their reading of *Baima lun* is much more limited than the number of those who approached the text from the abstract point of view; however, at least two of them have to be mentioned here.

A. C. Graham,¹⁷ commenting (and often questioning) conclusions made by Chmielewski, Kou Pao-koh¹⁸ and other authors of studies on Gongsun Long prior to his own, argued that the incoherence and strangeness of the Gongsun Long's class logic (admitted also by Chmielewski) can be eliminated by applying a nominalist

approach to the text. His solution to the problem (and at the same time his defence of the acceptability of Gongsun Long's paradox) rests in the substitution of (real) objects manifesting a certain (abstract) quality for the quality itself.¹⁹ Thus, "The sophist's [i.e., Gongsun Long's] proof that the two names ['white horse' and 'horse'] are not synonymous is at the same time a proof that they do not point out the same object."²⁰

A substantially different approach from Graham's, yet also a nominalist one, at least as its proponent stresses it, is advocated by Chad Hansen.²¹ He is highly critical towards those readings of *Baima lun* based on abstract theories arguing that "we can satisfactorily interpret Chinese philosophical writings without attributing a philosophical commitment to abstract or mental entities."²² In Hansen's view, Chinese philosophers share a "common model or picture of the relations between language and the world and between language and the mind,"²³ which means for him that they were "not committed to any entities other than names and objects," and that "there is no role in Chinese philosophical theories like that played by terms such as meaning, concept, notion, or idea in Western philosophy."²⁴ Hansen supports his own interpretation of the key problem of *Baima lun*—the problem of logic of names—by an observation made by W. A. C. H. Dobson, who argued that words of archaic Chinese "used nominally denominates indifferently both species and specimen or specimens of the species."²⁵ This presupposed unity of class and member in one single word justifies Hansen to replace the class-member model (which requires the existence of universals) by a "masslike part-whole" model, which is functional, as Hansen claims, without any refuge to ideas or concepts. The assumption that Chinese names do not undergo pluralization, and the presumed lack of general terms in Chinese, leads Hansen to the conclusion that Chinese philosophers (contrary to their counterparts in the West) were not motivated towards abstract theorising. The absence of mental ideas or meaning correlates to general terms in the Chinese philosophical tradition Hansen explains, among others, by the peculiar relation of Chinese words to an extralingual reality. He argues that Chinese language differs substantially

from languages in which the sound is associated “with its written phonemic representation, and the mental image with the sound, and the object with the mental image which it resembles.”²⁶ In his view, the pictographic or ideographic character of the pre-Han Chinese script, which was not “a representation of the sound but of the thing,” allowed Chinese to “rely on picturing or representing as the method of tying language to things without having to invent a detour through the mind and mental images.”²⁷ Hansen concludes his interpretation of the philosophy of Chinese language by a rather questionable claim that “the medium of thought, in the ancient Chinese view, is language, not ideas.”²⁸

Interpretative Theory

The aim of my study resides neither in competing with those predominantly on textual criticism-oriented approaches toward *Baima lun*,²⁹ nor in striving after its exhaustive and definite interpretation. My proposed reading of the text will be based on a newly established context brought about by a reconsideration of the two mutually related philosophical issues typical for the Pre-Qin period: the *Doctrine of Rectification of Names* 正名 and the *Debate of Name and Substance* 名實之辯。

The *Doctrine of Rectification of Names*, traditionally interpreted as a political institution concerned predominantly with the regulative function of language and striving for a unity between names and actuality, can be, in the context of Neo-Mohists' and Gongsun Long's philosophy, viewed as a manifestation of the growing anxiety about the proper use of language and of the necessity to create some important preconditions, which would facilitate a mastery of correct axiomatic-deductive reasoning.³⁰ A dialogue which appears to be a causal debate on a paradoxical statement can be thus viewed as a discourse about the rigorous use of language, as a sophistically constructed controversy with one important goal: to define conditions needed for a meaningful logical discourse—i.e., to point out that words must be used consistently in the same way, and their accurately

defined meanings, agreed on by both debaters, cannot vary throughout the discourse. A discourse in which these preconditions are not met, in which it is unclear whether certain words are used to denote themselves, whether they refer to their meanings or whether they are used to testify about extralingual objects (where no distinction is made between the use of a word and its mentioning) leads inevitably not only to a disagreement on the verbal level but also to practical consequences—the impossibility of settling the problem risen in the dispute.

Hansen's model of the philosophy of Chinese language summarised in the previous section will provide us an introduction to another aspect of my theoretical approach toward *Baima lun*—the reconsideration of the Pre-Qin *Debate of Name and Substance* from the Saussurean semiotics point of view.

It is obvious that Hansen, when speaking about mental entities or mental images, does not distinguish between the use of the terms in logical semantics and their use in linguistic semiotics. He employs these terms indiscriminately when discussing the problem of entities which perform the semantic work of classical abstract entities (abstract forms, universals or classes), or when discussing the semiotic issue of mental mediators between words and objects. This lack of discrimination inevitably results not only in his questionable repulsion of the concept of mental entities from Chinese logical theories but more seriously, also in his unacceptable claim about the exceptional nature of Chinese linguistic sign. Hansen draws an erroneous conclusion when he (implicitly) challenges the validity of one of the central concepts of semiotics—the existence of mental images associated with sounds in Chinese language because of its alleged lack of phonemic quality, by claiming that “the written form [of a Chinese character] is not a representation of the sound but of the thing. Hence the mediation between sounds and objects in the world is not provided by the inner, private subjectivity (an idea or other ‘affection of the soul’) but by shared social convention—by the character.”³¹ Even if the majority of pre-Han characters were of pictographical or ideographical nature, as suggested by Hansen,³² his assertion of the direct

representational function of Chinese characters still would have remained unacceptable. Pictographs can be neither determined by external objects in themselves nor can be their relationship to objects in the world defined as “one-to-one copying.” As it necessitates their semiotic nature, a mental entity has to be inevitably introduced into the relationship, which would “serve to mediate the sign and its object.”³³ Whereas it might be conceivable on the level of logic to deny interpretations of the text under scrutiny based on the presupposed existence of abstract entities like universals or mental concepts, and to claim that for Chinese philosophers of the period “the medium of thought . . . is language, not ideas,”³⁴ similar claims applied as a sweeping statement on the Chinese language, as done by Hansen, are unacceptable.

My reading suggests that *Baima lun*, traditionally interpreted as a talk of abstractions or of a one-to-one relation between the name *ming* 名 and object or substance *shi* 實 it refers to—i.e., as a discussion about what a name means—should be rather understood as a discourse which shifts a reader’s attention toward semiotic aspects of the language, toward the question how a name means (without neglecting, however, semantic or even practical aspects of the matter). The contemporary *Discussion of Name and Substance*, which centred on the controversy about the proper scope of extralingual reference of single and compound names, was not confused, as claimed by his opponents,³⁵ by Gongsun Long’s rigid view of naming embodied in a one-name-one-thing model of separation he allegedly advocated; it was rather elevated by him on the new (if only implicit) level of semiotics. The proposed reading of *Baima Lun* indicates that Gongsun Long might have been aware of the necessity of introducing, when reasoning about the relation between a name and its object, of a third constituent of this relationship—a mental concept, or, if we use Saussurean terminology, a mental image or *signified*. The mental concepts Gongsun Long is talking about should neither be understood as instances of universals (he does not say “what universals are or how they are related to particulars, . . . the objects which instantiate them”)³⁶ nor as instances of logical classes (he does not discuss the

problem of classes which mirror the relationship between universals and particulars). They should be rather understood as unique entities or unities of meaning inseparably tied to names, regardless of their simple or compound form.³⁷

Arbitration of the Paradox

The inception of Gongsun Long's dialogue, consisting of a brief question followed by a laconic answer, invariably inspired its translators and commentators to identify both debaters (one as the representative of the Neo-Mohist school of thought or of the common-sense point of view, whereas the other as the author of the text himself), to point out the paradoxical character of the initial statement, or to ponder on the philosophical implications of the stylistic register of the polemical discourse which follows. However, the initial pair of propositions deserves a closer look at its logical structure—an observation of its form can provide us a clue for deciphering of the text's indwelling meanings. To do so, we have to overview briefly some of the important tenets of Gongsun Long's predecessors, the Neo-Mohists, from the field of logical reasoning, which predestined Gongsun Long's own logical method.³⁸ To judge by the six chapters of the book *Mozi*, traditionally referred to as *Mobian* 墨辯,³⁹ the discussion of the Neo-Mohists', who were interested in form of the logical discourse perhaps more than in its content,⁴⁰ was governed by the efforts to set up formal criteria for a peculiar kind of discussion called discrimination (*bian* 辯) and thus sanction its validity.⁴¹ The Neo-Mohists' metalogical formulation of discrimination *bian* in the statement 'bi bu ke liang bu ke ye' 彼不可兩不可也 literally: "With regard to That: It is not admissible that the two are admissible,"⁴²—in other words, their formulation of "exclusive disjunction of two statements (about one object) . . . of which one (only one) must be true and one (only one) must be false,"⁴³ was in principle, as Chmielewski puts it, "the most explicit statement (in metalogical terms) of the conjunction of the laws of non-contradiction and of excluded middle which the Chinese ever made until modern times."⁴⁴

It is in the two opening lines of the Gongsun Long's dialogue where its formal closeness to the Mohists' *bian*—the rudimentary pattern of a discussion in which two opponents put forward two different theses, each of these theses being regarded, from the opponent's point of view, as unacceptable—appears most distinctly. The initial interrogative sentence 'baima fei ma ke hu' 白馬非馬可乎 belongs to the category of rhetorical questions, and as such, it has to be interpreted as a "statement in question's clothing,"⁴⁵ as an accentuated assertion expressed by the means of interrogative grammatical form. Thus, one debater starts the dialogue with a rather emphatic denial of the admissibility of the statement 'baima fei ma,' whereas his counterpart's one-word answer maintains the contrary, namely its admissibility. For logical purposes, the opening sentence can be rewritten by the introducing of the statement 'bai ma fei ma' by the phrase "It is not true that . . .," whereas the response can be reworded into more formal (and explicit) one by the introducing of the (omitted) statement 'bai ma fei ma' by the phrase "It is true that . . ." Hence, a formal equivalent of the first proposition we have formed will read:

$\neg p$ (it is not true that 'baima fei ma')⁴⁶

The formal equivalent of the second proposition we have formed will read:

p ' (it is true that 'baima fei ma')⁴⁷

Consequently, the formal equivalent of the compound proposition (made of the two atomic ones formalised above) will read:

$\{\neg p \vee p'\} \wedge \neg\{p \vee p'\}$ ⁴⁸

As it is apparent, the exclusive disjunction of the two mutually conflicting propositions which open Gongsun Long's dialogue fits smoothly into the Mohists' pattern of discrimination *bian*, described above.

Besides the premise that p has to contest p' and vice versa,

another point of crucial importance was imposed by the Neo-Mohists on the discrimination *bian* in order to be regarded as valid: the necessity of reaching a clear-cut victory *sheng* 勝 by the one of the debaters in the course of a polemical discourse formulated by the tenet, “if there is victory in discrimination (the discrimination) is valid [*dang* 當]” and “if there is no victory in discrimination (the discrimination itself) must be invalid [*bu dang* 不當].”⁴⁹ Moreover, Chmielewski voices the opinion that the word *sheng* (victory) in this context has to be “rendered as ‘proper victory’ (implying that the victorious thesis should be objectively true).”⁵⁰ Chmielewski supports his observation by the assumption that the character *dang*, translated by him as ‘valid,’ was “a technical term of Mohist dialectics used somewhat ambiguously in the sense of both ‘valid; tautologically true’ (in reference to the *pian* [*bian*] taken as a whole, or rather the disjunctive formula underlying the *pian* [*bian*] and ‘objectively true, fitting the facts’ (in reference to a single *pi* [*bi*] (that is to one of the two single propositions) involved in the disjunctive *pian* [*bian*]).”⁵¹

The striking consimilarity of logical structures of the Neo-Mohists’ disjunctive formula *bian* and that of the Gongsun Long’s initial juxtaposition of statements gives strong support for the interpretation of the whole *Baima lun* as a single, if considerably enlarged, discrimination *bian*. If so, Gongsun Long’s text, besides complying with the basic *bian* pattern—the mutual contradiction of two statements—should also comply with the demand on both, the logical validity of the whole discrimination, and the factual validity of one of its single propositions, which would ensure for only one part involved in the discussion an unquestionable victory.

In this respect Gongsun Long’s dialogue does not fit into the Neo-Mohists’ (logically successful) defining of the exclusive disjunction *bian*, which (as it is obvious from present reading) obviously fails to rule out the possibility of a subjective assessment of validity of single and compound propositions, and thus to secure an objective victory for one of the debaters. Gongsun Long’s text successfully challenges the Neo-Mohists’ non-problematic view of logical discourse by pointing at the key importance of a semiotic aspect of the

logical reasoning.

A methodological strategy based on the combining of propositional logic with semiotics will help to elucidate the phenomenon that the two parties involved in the debate are actually addressing two different issues, one on the relationship between name and object in logical semantics, and the other on the relationship between signifier and signified (of the one linguistic sign) in linguistic semiotics.

Technical Remarks

A better understanding of the meanings of single and compound propositions, as well as a deeper insight into their logical structure achieved by applying of basic proceedings of formal propositional logic, will facilitate a disclosure and description of mutual correspondences and discrepancies between the factual and logical meanings of utterances of both debaters.⁵²

Some of the debaters' arguments will be formalised by the use of four basic connectives of propositional logic. The propositional calculus of those propositions will be explicated and logical validity of compound propositions will be verified by the use of the truth-value tables, whose function rests in determining a truth-value of the respective compound proposition (e.g. a validity of its inference) for all possible evaluations of the single propositions it consists of. Symbols \wedge , \vee , \neg , \rightarrow , will stand respectively for basic connectives *and* (conjunction), *or* (disjunction), *it is not true that* (negation), and *if . . . then . . .* (implication or inference). The truth-value of propositions will be marked by symbols 1 for value *truth* and 0 for value *false*.

In order to unveil semiotic implications of Gongsun Long's text, it has to be re-examined both its signification (the way messages are encoded by their addressers) and communication (the way messages are decoded or, rather, as it is often the case of *Baima lun*, how messages fail to be correctly decoded by their addressee). This task is seriously complicated by the fact that in classical Chinese there were available no instruments (like quotation marks or italicisation) which would serve as a marker for distinguishing the mention of a word

from the use of a word, that would de-semanticise the word or the sentence by making it non-referential.

The problem of a semiotic rendering of the text by the means of translation into English (and most probably into any of the modern languages) proves to be an even more toilsome task, because more often than not those formulations, considered from a semantics point of view as the right ones, will be regarded as grammatically unacceptable and vice versa. For this reason, translated passages will be followed by analytical sections providing necessary explanations.

An Annotated Reading of *Baima lun*

O : 白馬非馬可乎

D : 曰可

Objector: (a) “‘A white horse is not a horse,’ is this statement admissible?”

(b) “‘*White horse* is not *horse*,’ is this statement admissible?”

Defender: “It is admissible.”

- Since there is only a plain statement at the beginning of the discourse, and no definition or explanation of the meaning of the whole statement or its parts is provided, there can be many different readings of it.
- The admissibility of the statement presented here is questioned by an Objector, a person who considers it to be a strange paradoxical saying which goes against common sense. As a point of departure, let us assume that the Objector understands the above statement on the object level, as it suggests translation (a).
- Defender of the admissibility of the statement sees in it no paradox at all. As a point of departure, let us assume that for him the above statement is a proposition which says that *white horse* and *horse*, should be treated as two different names, as it suggests translation (b).

O : 曰何哉

D : 曰馬者所以命形也白者所以命色也命色者非命形也故曰白馬非馬

Objector: "Why?"

Defender: "*Horse* is used to name form. *White* is used to name colour.

What names colour is not what names form; therefore I say '*White horse* is not *horse*.'"

- *Horse* and *white* are for Defender names which, when used, create in our minds two different mental concepts. He does not speak about words and the objects they stand for. Thus second sentence can be retranslated as follows: "The name which creates in our minds a concept of colour is different from the name which creates in our minds a concept of form, therefore I say '*White horse* is not *horse*.'"
- Both Objector and Defender would certainly agree on determining the truth-value of all single propositions p, q, r as *truth* except the last one s (see first two lines of the truth-value table below). Objector, who thinks about words and their objects, is unable to understand the meaning Defender has in his mind when saying, '*White horse* is not *horse*,' and he considers the statement s to be *false*. Thus Defender fails in explaining his point not only because of misunderstanding on the part of Objector but also because Defender's whole compound proposition seems to be in Objector's eyes logically incorrect. It is *false* indeed, at least from the formal logic point of view, as can be seen from line two of our truth-table.

p - *horse* names form

q - *white* names colour

r - *white* is not *horse* (what names colour is not what names form)

s - *white horse* is not *horse*

(p	∧	q)	→	R	→	s
1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	0	0
1	1	1	0	0	1	1
1	1	1	0	0	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	1	1

1	0	0	1	1	0	0
1	0	0	1	0	1	1
1	0	0	1	0	0	0
0	0	1	1	1	1	1
0	0	1	1	1	0	0
0	0	1	1	0	1	1
0	0	1	1	0	0	0
0	0	0	1	1	1	1
0	0	0	1	1	0	0
0	0	0	1	0	1	1
0	0	0	1	0	0	0

O: 曰有白馬不可謂無馬也不可謂無馬者非馬也有白馬為有馬白之非馬何也

Objector: “If there is a white horse, then it cannot be said ‘there is no horse.’ [The premise] ‘it cannot be said there is no horse’ implies that it is no horse?”

Thus, ‘there is a white horse’ means [the same as] ‘there is horse’, [to admit this and at the same time argue that] horse when white is not *horse*, is this possible?”

- “If [you admit that] there is a white horse . . .” Objector talks about objects and about the possibility of naming them by words, about the possibility of using the word *horse* in order to name the object, a white horse. This interpretation is supported by the presence of the word *wei* 謂 (to talk about, to call, to style), which serves as a marker reminding us that Objector switches from the extralinguistic level of discourse to the name-object level of semantics. Objector insists that the name *horse* can stand for the object, a white horse, and therefore he rejects Defender’s proposition “horse when white is not horse,” which he understands as follows: “as for white horse (object), it cannot be named by *horse* (word).”
- As it can be seen from the second and third line of the truth-value table (which deals with last two propositions only), if Defender would not agree about the truth-value placed on propositions p and q by Objector (1 0), and if he would choose the opposite values of his counterpart (0 1) (which is a plausible hypothesis), the truth-

value of the whole compound proposition would not change. It means that the compound proposition remains, from the formal logic point of view, true for both sides.

p - 'there is white horse' means [the same as] 'there is horse'

q - horse when white is not *horse*

p	→	¬	q
1	0	0	1
1	1	1	0
0	1	0	1
0	1	1	0

D: 曰求馬黃黑馬皆可致求白馬黃黑馬不可致使白馬乃馬也是所求一也所求一者白者不異馬也

Defender: "When asking for a horse then you can obtain both a black horse as well as a yellow horse. When asking for white horse then you cannot get black horse nor yellow horse. If *white horse* stands for a horse, then what you are asking for will be identical, if what you are asking for will be identical, then there will be no difference between *white horse* and *horse*."

- Defender accepts the word-object level of discourse for the time being and he uses names *white horse* and *horse* by turns as names or as objects. The word *qiu* 求 (to ask for), used at the very beginning of his statement, reminds that language is at play: when asking for something (Objector is reminded by his counterpart) we have to do it by use of words. Thus Defender's statement could be retranslated as follows: "In the case you will use *horse* (name) when asking for a horse (object) then you can get both a black horse (object) as well as a yellow horse (object). In the case you will use *white horse* (name) when asking for a horse (object) then you cannot get a black horse (object) nor a yellow horse (object)."
- Defender's statement: "If *white horse* stands for a horse . . ." ⁵³ suggests that there is a possibility to make the name *white horse* stand for a horse—object of the real world. So what will be the

consequence of “making *white horse* a horse”? “The mental concept created in our minds by words when asking for something will be identical . . .”; i.e., as for their concepts, there will be no difference between the names *white horse* and *horse*.

- Defender seems to be not only aware of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, but, more importantly, he seems to be aware of possible troubles caused by improper use of language. He continues on a more abstract level:

D: 所求不異如黃黑馬有可有不可何也可與不可其相非明故黃黑馬一也而可以應有馬而不可以應有白馬是白馬之非馬審矣

“If you make no difference when asking for things, then sometimes both a yellow horse as well as a black horse will be acceptable and sometimes not. How is it so? The reason is there is no clear distinction between what is acceptable and what is not. Thus if there is no difference between [names] *yellow horse* and *black horse*, then they can respond to a horse but they cannot respond to a white horse; from this the meaning of proposition ‘*White horse* is not *horse*’ is crystal clear.”

- The names *yellow horse* and *black horse* will respond to a horse because they will be, as for their concepts, identical; but they will not respond to a white horse. Similarly, the names *white horse* and *horse* are two different entities because the concepts created in our minds by them are different.

O: 曰以馬之有色為非馬天下非有無色之馬也天下無馬可乎

Objector: (a) “In your opinion a horse with colour is not a horse, [but] there are no colourless horses in the world. So are there no horses in the world?” (b) “In your opinion [name] *horse* with [names of] colour added to it cannot stand for a horse, [but] there are no colourless horses in the world. Is it then admissible to say that there are no horses in the world?”

· Did Objector completely miss the point and is he really talking about the existence or, the non-existence of real objects in the world as it suggests translation (a)? Objector's return to the extralinguistic, pure object level of the discourse seems unlikely because it was he who switched to the name-object level of discourse and who stuck to it. A more plausible reading would offer translation (b). This reading assumes that Objector keeps arguing about the relationship between names and objects of the real world. Objector's argument sounds almost like an accusation against Defender, as if Defender would argue that the very existence of real objects in the world depends on the existence of words which are used to name them. Moreover, Objector seems to argue as a cunning sophist, who tries to push his opponent into a corner. Since he regards the proposition *p* as *false*, his evaluation of all three single propositions would be (0 1 0) (see sixth line of our truth-table). As it can be seen from our truth-table, Objector has prepared a logical trap for his opponent and can be sure that (from the formal logic point of view) he will be right in all cases except one, namely if Defender would put value *truth* to the proposition *r* ("there are no horses in the world"), which is, of course, out of the question. Thus the compound proposition will be valid in all cases, no matter what truth-value is given to single propositions except evaluation (1 1 1) (see first line of our truth table).

p - horse with [name of] colour added to it cannot stand for a horse

q - there are no colourless horses in the world

r - there are no horses in the world

<i>p</i>	\wedge	<i>q</i>	\rightarrow	\neg	<i>r</i>
1	1	1	0	0	1
1	1	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	1
1	0	0	1	1	0
0	0	1	1	0	1
0	0	1	1	1	0
0	0	0	1	0	1
0	0	0	1	1	0

D: 曰馬固有有色故有白馬使馬無色有馬如已耳安取白馬故白者非馬也白馬者馬與白也馬與白馬也故曰白馬非馬也

Defender: "It is natural for horses that they have colours, therefore there is [name] *white horse*. If horses were without colours, then there would be only [name] *horse* and nothing else, why should we then pick up [name] *white horse*? Therefore *white horse* is not *horse*. As for *white horse* there is [a notion of] 'horse' and [a notion of] 'white' in it and there are [two different mental concepts] 'horse' and 'white horse,' therefore I say *white horse* is not *horse*."

- Defender avoids entering the trap and instead of arguing idly whether or not there are horses (of any kind) in the world, he responds to Objector's hint that the existence of things depends on the existence of words. He argues that words stand for their objects which existed before them. Our reading ". . . therefore there is [name] *white horse* . . . there would be only [name] *horse* . . ." is supported by the presence of the character *qu* 取 (to pick up, to choose), an expression which serves here as a marker of the semantic level of discourse.
- In Defender's opinion, understanding of the initial proposition '*white horse* is not *horse*' requires awareness of the relationship between two names and different concepts created by them in our minds. He keeps explaining to his opponent, who stubbornly sticks to the name-object level of discourse, that he should be aware of the fact that the possibility of using two different names for naming one single object does not say anything about their mutual identity or difference.

O: 曰馬未與白為馬白未與馬為白合馬與白復名白馬是相與以不相與為名未可故曰白馬非馬未可

Objector: "[Name] *horse* still not combined with [name] *white* is [as you suggests] *horse* and [name] *white* still not combined with [name]

horse is [as you suggests] *white*, if we combine [name] *horse* with [name] *white* then we have a compound name *white horse*; [the point is] we just use single words to make compound name. Therefore it is not admissible to say: '*White horse* is not *horse*.'"

- Objector misunderstands Defender's explanations once again and is convinced, when Defender speaks about what the name *white horse* consists of, that his opponent speaks purely on the word level, in which compound names can be easily divided into single names. From this point of view it seems to him quite clear that the proposition '*White horse* is not *horse*,' where *horse* is thought to be one of the two single words needed for creation of the compound name *white horse*, is false. For Objector, there are two single words *white* and *horse* and a compound name *white horse* respectively, whereas for Defender, as it can be seen from our reading of his previous statements, there are two different names *white horse* and *horse*: one which creates in our minds a joined concept of colour and form and another which creates in our minds only a concept of form. On this level, the admissibility of the proposition '*White horse* is not *horse*' cannot be rejected.

p - *horse* without *white* is *horse*

q - *white* without *horse* is *white*

r - *white horse* is compound name

s - *White horse* is not *horse*

(p	∧	q)	→	r	→	¬	s
1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0

0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0

- As for the propositions p, q, r, Objector would give them truth-value *truth* because of his analysis of the name *white horse* on the name level, and since it is easy for him to “find” *horse* in *white horse* he would give the proposition s truth-value *false* (evaluation 1 1 1 0). Therefore, from the formal logic point of view, the whole proposition’s truth-value will be *truth* (see second line of our truth table).
- Defender has two options how to assess the logical invalidity of his counterpart’s reasoning:
 1. To agree on the truth-value for the propositions p, q, r as *truth* with Objector, and, at the same time (since he thinks of *white horse* and *horse* as a pair of names marked by the unity of name and its respective meaning), to insist on the truth-value for s as *truth* (evaluation 1 1 1 1). In such a case, Objector’s proposition would be incorrect not only semantically (the meaning of the proposition r [antecedent] is irrelevant to the meaning of the proposition s [consequent]), but the whole compound proposition would be *false* from the formal logic point of view as well (see first line of our truth-value table).
 2. To reject all Objector’s arguments as unacceptable, namely as for the propositions p, q, r, to give them truth-value *false*. Such assessment of the whole Objector’s proposition as logically *false* would be correct even from the formal logic point of view, as proven in the second to last line of our truth-value table.

D : 曰以有白馬為有為謂有白馬為有黃馬可乎

O : 曰未可

Defender: “You consider *white horse* to be *horse*; is it then admissible to say *white horse* is the same as *yellow horse*?”

Objector: "It is not admissible."

- For Objector there is no other choice than to answer his opponent's question as *no* ("it is not admissible"). In spite of the fact that both debaters agree on the inadmissibility of proposition *q*, their evaluation of proposition *p* differs. Objector, who understands the proposition on the name-object level regards the proposition *p* as *truth*, whereas Defender, who speaks about two different names (linguistic signs) regards the same proposition as *false* (see second and last line of our truth-table). From the formal logic point of view, it leads to the same result—both debaters see their own reading of the whole proposition as (logically) correct and Objector cannot be convinced by his opponent's argument.

p - white horse is horse

q - white horse is yellow horse

<i>p</i>	→	¬	<i>q</i>
1	0	0	1
1	1	1	0
0	1	0	1
0	1	1	0

D: 曰以有馬為異有黃馬是異黃馬於馬也異黃馬於馬是以黃馬為非馬以黃馬為非馬而以白馬為有馬此飛者入池而棺槨異處此天下之悖言亂辭也

Defender: "To consider *horse* different from *yellow horse* implies differentiation between *yellow horse* and *horse*. Differentiation between *yellow horse* and *horse* implies considering *yellow horse* to be not the same as *horse*. To consider *yellow horse* to be not the same as *horse* and [at the same time] consider *white horse* to be the same as *horse*, resembles a bird flying into a pool or inner and outer coffins placed separately; these are the most contradictory and confusing words in the world."

- Defender seems to be fed up with his opponent's contradictory

arguments, with his merging of what cannot be merged (*white horse is horse*) and separating of what is inseparable (*white horse is white and horse*); In order to elucidate his point in a more expressive way and in order to stress possible political and social implications of the matter, he uses the only rhetorical figure in the whole debate: “[this kind of reasoning] resembles a bird flying into a pool or inner and outer coffins placed separately. . . .”

O: 曰有白馬不可謂無馬者離白之謂也是離者有白馬不可謂有馬也故所以為有馬者獨以馬為有馬耳非有白馬為有馬故其為有馬也不可以謂馬馬也

Objector: “If there is a white horse it cannot be said there is no horse, [because] if *white* is separated from it then it is [named] *horse*. Those who do not accept separation [of names], if there is a white horse, cannot say *horse*. Thus what is taken into consideration when deciding whether there is *horse* or not is solely the *horse* and nothing else, and *white horse* is not taken into consideration when deciding whether there is *horse* or not. Thus about what has been [once] considered as *horse* cannot be said *horse* and [at the same time] another [different] *horse*.”

- “Those who do not accept separation . . .”, i.e., you who do not accept separation of names . . . “cannot say ‘*white horse is horse*.’” Objector repeats his claim again: It is not admissible to say *white horse is not horse*. His proof is: “if *white* is separated from *white horse*, then name *horse* can be used.”
- The decisive factor is the meaning ‘horse,’ explains Objector further, one cannot claim that there is one *horse* and another (different) *horse*; that means meaning ‘horse’ from name *horse* and meaning ‘horse’ from name *white horse* is one and the same ‘horse.’
- Objector approaches a level of discourse which seems to be much closer to the Defender’s; now the compatibility or inclusiveness of the two names is under scrutiny. Objector claims that both names, *horse* and *white horse*, possess the same (basic) meaning ‘horse,’

and that as for *white horse* there is just *white* added to it, which can be separated from it without change of the meaning common for both names. By saying this, Objector is much closer to the concept his opponent has in mind; he leaves not only the name-object level, he even leaves the pure name (word) level of the discourse. Now is he considering mutual inclusiveness of the meanings of names *horse* and *white horse*. He proposes that meaning 'horse' is included in the meaning 'white horse' (just as it is with a single name *horse* included in a compound name *white horse*). Therefore, the proposition '*White horse* is not *horse*' remains inadmissible for him.

D: 曰白者不定所白忘之而可也白馬者言定所白也定所白者非白也馬者無去取於色故黃黑皆所以應白馬者有去取於色黃黑馬皆所以色去故唯白馬獨可以應耳無去者非有去也故曰白馬非馬

Defender: "*White* does not fix anything as white, so it can be ignored. *White horse* says it does fix something as white. [But] what fixes something as white is not white as such. *Horse* neither excludes nor selects colour, thus it can respond to both *yellow horse* and *black horse* as well. *White horse* selects colour, thus *yellow horse* or *black horse* are excluded on ground of colour, therefore only *white horse* will respond to it.

What does not exclude [colours] is not the same as what does exclude [colours]. Therefore I say: '*White horse* is not *horse*.'

- *White* is different from *white* in *white horse* because the second *white* fixes horse as white, explains Defender. That means it is impossible to separate *white* from *white horse* because in the case of *white horse* there are two mutually interwoven mental concepts created by this name, embedded one in another in a such way that prevents us from separating them.
- Similarly, *horse* is different from *horse* in *white horse*. *Horse* is regarded by Defender to be a name which creates in our minds a mental concept which does not exclude colours, whereas *white horse* is regarded to be a name which creates in our minds a mental

concept which does exclude colours, therefore the admissibility of the proposition '*White horse* is not *horse*' is proven.

- Defender closes the debate by reminding his opponent to be aware of the fact that what can be mechanically separated on the pure name level or what can be analysed as inclusive on the pure meaning level, cannot be treated in a similar way when one is aware of the unseparable unity of name and its meaning. Or, if we express Defender's argument in the wording of Saussurean semiotics: Separation conceivable on "signifier-level" or on "signified-level" is unthinkable on "linguistic sign-level."

NOTES

¹ *Baima lun* is the second chapter of the book *Gongsun Longzi* 公孫龍子. For a discussion on the authenticity of the book generally attributed to Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (between about 320-250 B.C.), see, for instance, Mei, 407-413.

² "The *aliquid pro aliquo*-relationship rules the micro as well as the macro universe of signification and communication. The whole story of human thought has been haunted by the idea of this relationship . . .," Eco, 78.

³ Culler, 22.

⁴ "All truly strict and exact thought is sustained by the symbolics and semiotics on which it is based." Quoted in Salomon, 5.

⁵ For an account of Gongsun Long's intellectual career, see Mei, 405-407. For the bilingual, Chinese-English publication of the first (auto)biographical part of the book *Gongsun Longzi*, the chapter *Jifu* 跡府, see Mei, 415-420.

⁶ The literal translation of the Greek word *sophista*. It has to be stressed that in the case of Gongsun Long, who has been often labeled by this word used in its pejorative sense, the term should be used in its original meaning which implied neither scrupulousness nor unscrupulousness of those who were labeled by it.

⁷ Gongsun Long's writings are generally regarded as one of the most important contributions to the *Great Debate of Name and Sub-*

stance 名實之辯.

⁸ For an account of Neo-Mohists' nominalism see, for example, Hansen, 110-120.

⁹ Cheng Chung-ying. "Inquiries into Classical Chinese Logic."

¹⁰ Cheng, 202.

¹¹ For an outline of the most influential interpretations of *Baima lun*, see Hansen, 143-148.

¹² See Fung, 203-5.

¹³ Chmielewski. "Notes on Early Chinese Logic I."

¹⁴ Hansen, 162. Chmielewski summarizes the results of his logical analysis as follows: "I hope to have demonstrated . . . that the reasoning in the *Pai-ma lun* can be best interpreted in terms of a specific calculus of classes and that, consequently, the idea underlying the *Pai-ma lun* was a kind of theory of classes, narrow and incomplete as it was." Chmielewski I, 17.

¹⁵ Hansen, 144.

¹⁶ Quotation from Mohists' *Xiaoqu* 小取, cited in Graham, 138.

¹⁷ Graham. "Two Dialogues in the *Kung-sun Lung Tzu*."

¹⁸ Kou Pao-koh. *Deux sophistes chinois: Houei Che et K'ong-souen Long*, Paris, 1953.

¹⁹ Graham argues that "One difficulty in the dialogue centers on the word *pai* 白 'white'. Placed in nominal position . . . , the word sometimes refers to the colour, sometimes to 'that which is white.'" Graham, 141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

²¹ Chad Hansen. *Language and Logic*.

²² *Ibid.*, 39.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵ Dobson, quoted in Hansen, 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁹ There were attempts to rearrange the order of the 'writing strips' in order to establish more satisfactory pairs of questions and

answers in the dialogue. See, for example, Graham 130-138. Since I agree with Hansen's view that "We can, in principle, interpret any of the versions of the text, and interpreting some version does not presuppose that it is the original version. It makes sense to say that two interpretations of competing versions of a text are both correct for those different versions" (Hansen, 4), I am using a standard version of *Baima lun*: Chen Guimiao 陳癸淼. *Gongsun Longzi jinzhu jinyi* 公孫龍子今注今譯. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu, 1986.

³⁰ It is obvious that the *Doctrine of Rectification of Names* had been understood even before Gongsun Long in a much broader sense than that suggested by its label. One of its goals was to make the language an improved instrument of logical reasoning. See, for example, Hu Shih, 47-50.

³¹ Hansen, 49.

³² Hansen interprets written Chinese as a model of "nonphonemic," that is, "pictographic" or "ideographic" language. Hansen, 49. In fact a substantial part of the Pre-Qhin characters were already ideophonographs.

³³ See Chang, 35.

³⁴ Hansen, 49.

³⁵ See, for example, Hansen's account of the criticism of Gongsun Long's paradox by Xunzi 荀子 (298-238). *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁶ Sparkes, 15.

³⁷ It should be noted that written Chinese lacks any conventions which would facilitate division of words as units of meaning. However, even in languages which employ phonemic script, the conventions of word separation are more or less adventitious.

³⁸ Hu Shi speaks about the striking mutual closeness between the Neo-Mohists and Gongsun Long, "sometimes in substance only and very often in exactly the same phraseology." Hu Shih, 60.

³⁹ Hu Shi even does not rule out the possibility that it was Gongsun Long himself or one of his immediate predecessors who was the real author of these six chapters of the book *Mozi*, or at least that these chapters "were a product of the period approximately identical" with the period in which Gongsun Long lived. *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁰ For the outline of the Mohists' conception of logic, see Hu Shih, 93-108.

⁴¹ Janusz Chmielewski points out, that it is Hu Shi who "appears to be the first modern scholar who realized some fifty years ago that for the Mohist dialecticians the principle of contradiction [non-contradiction] was the canon of argumentation." Chmielewski VI, 33.

⁴² Translation quoted from Chmielewski VI, 48-49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁵ Sparkes, 3.

⁴⁶ The phrase serves here as the so called "truth-functional logical operator" because the truth value of the proposition "It is not true that 'baima fei ma'" depends on the truth-value of the original proposition 'baima fei ma'. See Sparkes, 152-3.

⁴⁷ "That-clause" in a sentence beginning "It is true that" is an instance of *oratio obliqua*, and in this case the truth-value of the proposition remains unaffected. It follows from the Fregean Assumption that the sentence "It is true that p" has the same sense as the sentence p. See Strawson, 52-3. For an outline of Fregean Assumption, see Epstein, 13.

⁴⁸ The formula is to be understood as an expression of exclusive "or," that is an exclusive disjunction of the propositions p and p': "It is not true that p or it is true that p' and (at the same time) it is not true that p or p'." Note that the symbol \wedge introduced in my study as a symbol for conjunction can be used in another notation as a symbol for exclusive disjunction itself.

⁴⁹ 辯勝當也 and 辯無勝必不當, quoted in Chmielewski VI, 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵² I will mark the opponent in the debate as *Objector* (O). However, instead of calling his counterpart *Sophist* (as Graham and Hansen do), I have chosen more formal and less symptomatic name *Defender* (D).

⁵³ Another possible translation of the character *shi* 使 at the beginning of the sentence is "to cause" or "to make." Thus another reading of the sentence would be "If you cause [the name] *white*

horse to stand for a horse”

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