

## Chapter 2

# Four Notions of Names

As analyzed in the first chapter, the collapse of Zhou *li* was the basic sociopolitical situation of Eastern Zhou dynasty, and the conflict between *ming* and *shi* was a sharp symbol of the collapse of Zhou *li*; moreover, Deng Xi's relative view of right and wrong went beyond the area of legal affairs and raised a deep epistemic problem. Under these conditions, the relationship between *ming* and *shi* became a key issue that had both practical meaning and theoretical value and forced statesmen and scholars to think about and seek for answers.

It was Confucius who first advanced a theory of rectifying names and thought of rectifying names as an important means in solving sociopolitical problems. From then on, many thinkers proposed their theories of names; consequently, a discourse on *ming-shi* occurred. Starting from Confucius's rectifying names, ending at Lü Buwei's examining names, this discourse lasted about two hundred years and attracted all major schools of thought in pre-Qin times. By reviewing these schools' theories of *ming-shi*, we can find this discourse developed along with four notions of *ming*, i.e., *zheng ming* 正名 (rectification of names), *wu ming* 無名 (abandonment of names), *bian ming* 辨名 (analysis of names), and *shen ming* 審名 (examination of names). In this chapter, I shall review this discourse in terms of the four notions.

### 2.1 Rectification of Names (*Zheng Ming*)

The notion of *zheng ming* comes from the *Lun Yu* 論語 (*The Analects of Confucius*). When answering the question: What would be the first thing to do if he is asked to administer Wei State, Confucius said that 必也正名乎 "It must be to rectify names."<sup>1</sup> This notion was quite popular in pre-Qin times. For example, the *Guo Yu* reads: 正名育类 "to clarify names and promote virtue."<sup>2</sup> The *Guan Zi* reads: 守慎正名 "to stay cautious and correct names."<sup>3</sup> All the three messages refer to the same

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<sup>1</sup> *Lun Yu-Zi Lu*.

<sup>2</sup> *Guo Yu-Jin Yu* 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Guan Zi-Zheng Di*.

situation: A name (title, position, concept, etc.) has its defined meaning and proper referent; but, when being frequently misused, the name could cause cognitive confusion and social problems; under this condition, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the name and its relationship to the thing signified by the name, that is, to correct the misuse of the name.

Confucius repeatedly stressed such a point that government means rectification (e.g., *Lun Yu–Yan Yuan*), and the first thing of government is to rectify names (e.g., *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*). When his student Zi Lu asked his suggestion for government, Confucius explained his point as follows:

It will certainly concern the rectification of names.... If names are not rectified, then speech will not be in accord with truth. If speech is not in accord with truth, then things cannot be accomplished. If things cannot be accomplished, then ceremonies and music will not flourish. If ceremonies and music do not flourish, then punishment will not be just. If punishments are not just, then the people will not know how to move hand or foot.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, Confucius told his student that a correct name and its correct use are the starting point of all things and are therefore the base of an ideal society; on the other hand, an incorrect name and an incorrect use of a name are the sources out of which grow linguistic, moral, and sociopolitical problems. In Confucius's thinking, the term "*ming*" refers at the same time to *san ming* (common terms), *xing ming* (legal provisions), and *jue ming* (ranks and titles). If the name is wrong, then speech cannot be in accord with truth; for first, communication and cognition cannot proceed with confused words; second, lawsuits and punishments cannot be conducted under obscured legal provisions; and third, government and duty cannot be carried out if titles and ranks are incorrectly assigned.

The significance of Confucius's position on rectification of names can be better understood when it is compared with Deng Xi's relative view of right and wrong. While Deng Xi focused mainly on the meaning of words in legal affairs, Confucius examined the function of words in all social dimensions. While Deng Xi cared about how to gain benefit by using the gap between the word and the thing, Confucius enquired into how words are related to social order and human behavior. While Deng Xi put forward metaphysical statements that go against common sense,<sup>5</sup> Confucius advanced a linguistic theory that address urgent realistic problems. Because of these differences, Mo Zi (ca. 480–420 BCE) joined the discussion of rectifying names on the side of Confucius's theory rather than that of Deng Xi's view.

The reason I believe that Mo Zi's theory of *ming-shi* is consonant with the orientation of Confucius's theory is that Mo Zi did not limit the *ming-shi* issue to legal affairs; instead, like Confucius, he thought of this issue as an important means to solutions of urgent sociopolitical problems. However, Mo Zi proposed his ideas on *ming-shi* by arguing with the Confucians.

<sup>4</sup> *Lun Yu–Zi Lu*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, 40. In Chan's translation, *yan* (言) is interpreted as language. I disagree and change it into speech. See Sect. 4.1 for detail.

<sup>5</sup> For Deng Xi's statements, see *Xun Zi–Bu Gou*.

As mentioned above, the essence of Confucius's theory of rectifying names is to correct those things that violated the meaning of names (terms, laws, and titles) as they had been established in or recognized by tradition and especially Zhou *li*. In other words, so-called rectification of names is to examine present things in terms of traditional names. Mo Zi realized the importance of names, but he disagreed with examining things in terms of names. On the contrary, he suggested reviewing names in terms of things. He held that

Everyone agrees that the ways of the sage kings constitute a standard of righteousness. Yet many of the feudal lords of today continue to attack and annex their neighboring states. They claim they are honoring righteousness [i.e., *ming*], but they fail to examine the truth of the matter [i.e., *shi*]. They are like blind men, who talk about black and white in the same way as ordinary men, but in practice cannot distinguish between them.<sup>6</sup>

What we can read from this passage is not merely the two thinkers' divergence on how to treat the relationship between *ming* and *shi*, but their difference in the categories they used to talk about this relationship. Although Confucius suggested rectifying names, he did not construct a conceptual category that would distinguish names themselves from their semantic and sociopolitical *referents*. Although by rectifying names he meant to rectify things by means of names, he did not use the term "*shi*" to conceptualize things.<sup>7</sup> It was Mo Zi who first used the term "*shi*" philosophically and treated *ming* and *shi* as a pair of juxtaposed categories. This was certainly a significant contribution Mo Zi made to the discourse on *ming-shi*. It attracted other thinkers' attention to this issue and played a key role in pushing forward the Chinese understanding of the relationship between language and reality.

Mo Zi's chief contribution is, however, not simply embodied in the way he used *shi* as a philosophical category; it also lies in the three standards he advanced for examining words and their usage. Mo Zi held that the use of words, either in speaking or writing, must rely on certain standards of judgment; speaking and writing without standards "is like determining the directions of sunrise and sunset on a revolving potter's wheel. In this way, the distinction of right and wrong and benefit and harm cannot be clearly known."<sup>8</sup> Then, what should be the standards? Mo Zi suggested that

[1] There must be a basis or foundation [for a word's use]. [2] There must be an examination. [3] And there must be practical application. [1] Where to find the basis? Find it in the experiences of the ancient sage-kings above. [2] How is it to be examined? It is to be examined by inquiring into the actual experience of the eyes and ears of the people below. [3] How to apply it? Put it into law and governmental measures and see if they bring about benefits to the state and of the people.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Mo Zi, ch. 19, trans. Burton Watson, 1967, 52.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Lun Yu*, *shi* appears two times: one refers to substantial, the other means fruit. Similarly, *ming* and *shi* do not appear in the *Dao De Jing* as a pair of categories either.

<sup>8</sup> Mo Zi, ch. 35, trans. Chan, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

It is quite logical for Mo Zi to advance these standards, since he suggested examining names in terms of things. Actually, his three standards could be construed not only as three methods of examining *ming*, but as three dimensions of *shi*, that is, historical experience, social reality, and administrative effect. Thus, the conflict between *ming* and *shi* is to Mo Zi the non-correspondence of words to things: speaking and writing that cannot be supported by historical experience, that cannot tally with social reality, and that cannot bring about positive administrative effect. This kind of speaking and writing should be corrected.

On a superficial level, Mo Zi's theory appears opposite to and critical of Confucius's theory: Whereas Confucius sought to change incorrect *shi* on the authority of *ming* settled by Zhou *li*, Mo Zi suggested changing incorrect *ming* on the authority of *shi* for its own sake. But on a deeper level, the two theories are complementary: Whereas Confucius's conception of *ming* emphasizes the importance of language in solving sociopolitical problems, Mo Zi's conception of *shi* stresses the critical role of sociopolitical reality in understanding and using language. Without Confucius's conception of *ming*, Mo Zi's conception of *shi* would lose its theoretical basis; without Mo Zi's conception of *shi*, Confucius's conception of *ming* would lack its practical references. Thus, both Confucius and Mo Zi played a formulating role in the discourse on *ming-shi*.

## 2.2 Abandonment of Names (*Wu Ming*)

The notion of *wu ming* comes from the *Dao De Jing*, which reads

The [D]ao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal [D]ao;  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The Nameless is the origin of heaven and earth;  
The Named is the mother of all things.<sup>10</sup>

The term “*wu* 無” initially means “nothing”; thus, *wu ming* can be translated as “namelessness.” To Lao Zi (ca. 570–490 BCE.),<sup>11</sup> namelessness is the situation of early history, and names are created by humans to grasp things. But, names are one of major causes of sociopolitical problems as well; in order to solve these problems, names should be restricted or even given up. Hence, *wu ming* can be also construed as “abandoning names.”

A common point expressed in the *Lun Yu*, *Mo Zi*, and *Dao De Jing* is that names (words) are a means made and used by humans to serve their social purposes. In regard to this point, Lao Zi explores how and why names come into being. According to him,

<sup>10</sup> *Dao De Jing*, ch 1, trans. Chan, 139.

<sup>11</sup> There are different ideas regarding Lao Zi and the *Dao De Jing*. In this work, I follow a popular one, that is, Lao Zi is a real figure in history and older than Confucius, and the *Dao De Jing* as a philosophical text is not written by Lao Zi, but presents his thought.

The thing that is called [D]ao is eluding and vague.  
 Vague and eluding, there is in it the form.  
 Eluding and vague, in it are things.  
 Deep and obscure, in it is the essence.  
 The essence is the very real, in it are evidences.  
 From the time of old until now, its name (manifestations) ever remains.  
 By which we may see the beginning of all things.<sup>12</sup>

This passage implies three points: First, names are derived from forms and things (this indicates the relationship of language to reality); second, names embody the characteristics of forms and things being named (this is meaningful particularly in the case of Chinese language as a pictographic language); third, people can acquire knowledge of forms and things through their names (this displays the function of language in helping people to deal with the world).

Lao Zi was the first thinker who made prominent the linkage between language and knowledge. In so doing, however, he did not appreciate, but criticized this linkage. His criticism begins from exposing the limitation of language. By claiming “The Nameless is the origin of heaven and earth” and “The Named is the mother of all things,” Lao Zi indicated such a paradox: While reality cannot be known apart from language, the world is prior to language; therefore, language can allow us to understand varied things, but it cannot grasp the constant Dao that hides behind, yet determines myriad things. “The [D]ao that can be told is not the eternal [D]ao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name.” Thus, language is inescapably limited, and its limitation is manifested even in describing and naming the Dao itself. Lao Zi said that

Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change.  
 It operates everywhere and is free from danger.  
 It may be considered the mother of the universe.  
 I do not know its name; I call it [D]ao.  
 If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to point out that although Lao Zi was clearly aware of the metaphysical limitation of language, he intended to do nothing in overcoming this limitation. On the contrary, he preferred a life without language, holding that “[D]ao is eternal and has no name” and “As soon as there were regulations and institutions, there were names (differentiation of things).”<sup>14</sup> In other words, while language enables people to attain knowledge, what knowledge brings to people, however, is no benefit, but harmful. To Lao Zi, it is because of language and knowledge that people become dishonest and greedy; this is the major source of sociopolitical problems. Lao Zi’s prescription for the social disorder of his time, therefore, was to abolish sageliness and knowledge as well as to go back to the simplicity of namelessness.

<sup>12</sup> *Dao De Jing*, ch 21, trans. Chan, 150.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, ch. 25, trans. Chan, 152.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, ch. 32, trans. Chan, 156.

Lao Zi's suggestion of abandoning knowledge and language was echoed by another Daoist, Yang Zhu (ca. 440–360 BCE).<sup>15</sup> In contrast to Lao Zi who recognized the linkage between language and knowledge, Yang Zhu sought to give up language by breaking the linkage between *shi* and *ming*. He argued that things have no names and that names are not the things named; names are but an artificial ploy.<sup>16</sup> In this view, most modern linguistic philosophers would say, Yang Zhu is correct because language is a set of symbols, and there is no “natural” relationship between the symbols and what they signify. Moreover, just like names are not innately derived from things, the existence of things, in Yang Zhu's words, “is not given by names.”<sup>17</sup> But, to indicate this fact was not Yang Zhu's purpose. Rather, he unfolded his argument on language to provide a theoretical foundation for his philosophy of individualism.

Among ancient thinkers, Yang Zhu was well known for stressing the supremacy of individual life and individual interests. He believed that human being is the wisest of creatures because he has knowledge and that the value of knowledge lies in benefiting individuals' existence and development. In his view, the ideal world would come into being when everyone neither “loses even one hair” nor makes any contributions to society.<sup>18</sup> However, individual life and interests have suffered many limitations, primarily as a result of the varied social titles and duties established by names. Since these names are not endogenic to individuals' life and are harmful to individuals' interests, they should be abandoned forever. This is the solution Yang Zhu proposed for the conflict between *ming* and *shi*.

Obviously, Lao Zi and Yang Zhu's notion of abandoning names was formed by criticizing Confucius and Mo Zi's theories of names. To Confucius, “correct” names are important, for they are necessary means to realize an ideal society; but to Yang Zhu, what names do is to hinder individuals' freedom in pursuing personal interests and development. To Mo Zi, knowledge is useful in examining and adjusting the relationship of names to things; but to Lao Zi, what language and knowledge do is to make existing sociopolitical contradictions more acute and complex. Of course, Lao Zi and Yang Zhu's suggestion of abandoning names is impracticable: They had to use names to express their idea of namelessness, and although the beginning of heaven and earth cannot be fully articulated linguistically, humans have had to indicate its existence and meaning through a name, “*dao*.” Hence, their suggestion did not convince later thinkers to give up language and knowledge, but led the discussion on *ming* and *shi* to a new notion.

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding Yang Zhu, scholars from the past to the present have different views. In Hu Shih's opinion, Yang Zhu might live between 440–360 BCE; the text of *Lie Zi*, which describes Yang Zhu's life and thought, is on the whole reliable (*Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Shi*, 1986, 155–156). I agree with him.

<sup>16</sup> *Lei Zi–Yang Zhu*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.3 Analysis of Names (*Bian Ming*)

The notion of *bian ming* originates in the *Yin Wen Zi*, which argues that since names are used in regulating things, names themselves have to be analyzed first.<sup>19</sup> This idea is reflected in the theories of two groups of scholars: the dialecticians and the Neo-Moists. The dialecticians belonged to the School of Names and were called *bian zhe* 辯者 (those who argue out) in pre-Qin times. The Neo-Moists' thought was presented in a text called *Mo Bian* 墨辯 (*The Moist Disputation*) by Lu Sheng (265–316 CE). The term “*bian*” in ancient Chinese means “to argue out” (e.g., in the *Xun Zi*, ch. 1), “to distinguish” (e.g., in the *Zuo Zhuan*—Duke Xi: 4th Year), and “to demonstrate” (e.g., in the *Mo Bian*—Canons A). *Bian* is first of all a linguistic matter: It uses language, it refers to language, and it can only be carried on in language. Thus, *bian* provided the School of Names and the Neo-Moists with a shared orientation in the *ming-shi* discourse: They focused on the semantics of names, they enquired into skills of argument, and they proposed abstract statements or paradoxes to express their thoughts. In short, they concentrated on language analysis.

Yin Wen (ca. 350–270 BCE) is classified as an important member of the School of Names in the *Han Shu* 漢書 (*The Han History*).<sup>20</sup> His theory of *ming-shi* not only accepted other schools' ideas but also influenced later thinkers of his school. Like Lao Zi, Yin Wen held that Dao has no name, for it has no particular shape; what names designate is *qi* 器 (objects), for objects have their shape, and names are derived from shapes.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he was aware of the limitation of language. But unlike Lao Zi, Yin Wen did not argue that language should be abandoned because of its limitation; on the contrary, he stressed the necessity of Confucius's rectification of names, for “There exist ten thousands things; if not being regulated by names, these things must be in disorder.”<sup>22</sup> Unlike Confucius, however, Yin Wen drew special attention to the relationship of *ming* to *shi*. He first indicated that *xing* 形, i.e., the natural or physical condition of things, is the source of names; without *xing*, there would be no names. Then, he suggested that once names come into being, they become means of identifying and examining things; without names, there would be no standards to judge things. Finally, he claimed that the conflicts between *ming* and *shi* come from the misuse of names, and the misuse of names comes from either sociopolitical disorder or semantic misunderstanding.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Yin Wen Zi*—Da Dao A.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding Yin Wen's life and thought, scholars have different viewpoints (for details, see Li Xianzhong, *Xian Qin Ming Jia Ming Shi Sixiang Tanxi*, 1992, 107–111). I concur with Wang Dianji that on the whole the *Yin Wen Zi*, a text in which Yin Wen's thought is recorded, is reliable (*Zhongguo Luoji Sixiang Shi*, 1979).

<sup>21</sup> *Yin Wen Zi*—Da Dao A.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

One of the most valuable points of Yin Wen's theory is his dialectical investigation of the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. On the one hand, Yin Wen insisted on the dependence of names on things, arguing that without names, things may not lose their characteristics, but without things, there is no basis for identifying and correcting our mistakes in using names (i.e., in thinking, speaking, behaving). Thus, names are established and examined through things. In this sense, he was in line with Mo Zi. On the other hand, he fully recognized the critical role of names in how we understand and treat things. He pointed out that things are grasped and distinguished by names, and from the past to the present, all gain and lose come from whether or not names are properly used.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, Yin Wen corrected Mo Zi's bias of overstressing the importance of *shi*.

It is in recognizing the critical role of names that Yin Wen proposed to find out the principles of *ming-shi* through *bian ming* (analyzing names). This project pushed the *ming-shi* discourse from its earlier focus primarily on the sociopolitical implications of the *ming-shi* issue toward a new focus on the semantics of names. The fullest development of this work, however, was accomplished in the writings of another thinker of the School of Names, Gongsun Long (ca. 325–250 BCE).<sup>25</sup>

Undoubtedly, Gongsun Long's work on *ming-shi* is the most profound and systematic one of the School of Names. The *Gongsun Long Zi* reads:

Heaven, earth, and their products are all things [物 *wu*]. When things possess the characteristics of things without exceeding them, there is actuality [*shi*]. When actuality actually fulfills its function as actuality, without wanting, there is order [*wei*]. To be out of order is to fall into disorder. To remain in order is to be correct. What is correct is used to rectify what is incorrect. [What is incorrect is not used to] doubt what is correct. To rectify is to rectify actuality, and to rectify the name [*ming*] corresponding to it.<sup>26</sup>

Although the English translation here does not reflect the linguistic subtleties of the original, the Chinese version indicates three important points. First, Gongsun Long defined *shi* in terms of *wei*: a spatial and social order. That means *shi* is not empty or vague, but possesses concrete and actual characteristics. Moreover, as a spatial and social order, *wei* is further concretized in *wu*: varied things. In the natural area, these are objects, and in the social area, they are affairs. By providing these definitions, Gongsun overcame the limitation of Mo Zi's conception of *shi*, which lacks clear intension and extension. Second, *wei* is pivotal in dealing with the relationship between *shi* and *ming*, for *wei* is not only the nexus where things and names link together, but is the context in which things, names, and their linkage are examined and against which they are judged. By stressing the importance of *wei*, Gongsun Long provided a theoretical basis for, and strengthened Confucius's argument on, the rectification of names. Third, Gongsun Long emphasized that

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Besides the *Gongsun Long Zi*, Gongsun Long's life and thought is also introduced in the *Kong Cong Zi*, *Zhuang Zi*, *Lu Shi Chun Qiu*, *Zhan Guo Ce*, and *Shi Ji*.

<sup>26</sup> *Gongsun Long Zi* ch. 6, trans. Chan, 243.



things are denoted by names, thus to regulate names is key to regulating things. It is impossible to understand a thing without naming it, but to grasp a thing through a wrong name can have harmful consequences. In effect, Gongsun Long argued, whenever people try to understand a thing, they are actually doing so by handling language, and it is the misunderstanding or misuse of language that produces harmful consequences. Gongsun Long did not think that giving up language is the correct way to solve sociopolitical problems, as Lao Zi held. Rather, he believed that clear understanding of the *ming-shi* relationship is necessary.

It is essential to point out that though Confucius was the first thinker who indicated the importance of names, and though Mo Zi was the first thinker who construed of *shi* as a juxtaposed category of *ming*, it was not until Gongsun Long that *ming* (as well as *shi*) was theoretically defined. What is *ming*? Gongsun Long said that “A name is to designate an actuality.”<sup>27</sup> This point seems obvious to modern readers, yet in the context of the *ming-shi* discourse, it represented a major step toward more abstract logical analysis. In earlier thinkers’ usage, *ming* means personal statuses, social titles, proper names, and nouns. But Gongsun Long treated *ming* as a general term, more like the English term “words” than “names.” In his famous statement that “*bai ma fei ma*” 白馬非馬 (a white horse is not a horse),<sup>28</sup> he meant that “*ma*” as a name does not designate any particular horse; rather, it is a concept signifying the generality of all horses. By calling attention to the difference between an abstract term and a proper name, Gongsun significantly advanced the project of name analysis; and because of his analysis, the Neo-Moists further developed Chinese theory of *ming-shi*.

Under the strong influence of Mo Zi, the Neo-Moists focused on studies of logic, in which *ming*, *shi*, and their relationship are a key issue. According to the *Mo Bian* (*The Moist Disputation*), “To call a name of a thing is to reflect the substance of the thing.”<sup>29</sup> Here, for the first time, we meet *ming* and *shi* defined not in terms of the correspondence between language and reality, but in terms of their logical relationship. This refines Gongsun Long’s point that the function of *ming* is to designate *shi*. In this logical relationship, not only is *ming* used as a concept, but *shi* means both appearance and substance. In analyzing a statement in the *Mo Bian* that contains the phrase, “to reflect things through names,”<sup>30</sup> the Neo-Moists commented: “To reflect is to abstract *shi*.”<sup>31</sup> If *shi* refers merely to the appearance of things, they argued, it is not necessarily an abstraction. Therefore, what *ming* reflects is not only *shi* but *shi gu* 故, that is, “the rule behind things,” or “the substance of things.” Moreover, since substance is both abstract and general and *ming* reflects substance, *ming* is both abstract and general, too.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, ch. 2, trans. Chan, 235.

<sup>29</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shou A.

<sup>30</sup> *Mo Bian*–Xiao Qu.

<sup>31</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing A.

Of course, only to enquire into the logical nature of names is not enough to fully understand names. The pragmatic functions of names and their meanings must also be studied, for language is alive in its use in everyday life. Thus, the Neo-Moists examined how names are actually used, and distinguished three situations of name-use. The *Mo Bian* reads: “Calling: to name, to conceptualize, to make use of.”<sup>32</sup> And it takes the term “dog” as an example to explain the three situations. First, “*ming* 命:” to give the dog a name. In this situation, the term *stands for* or *identifies* the thing called by it. Second, “*ju* 舉:” to conceptualize the dog by using a name. In this situation, the term reflects the “nature” or “substance” of the thing named, i.e., its general category. Here, “dog” as a name is a concept: It expresses the understanding of the dog as a specific kind of animal. Third, “*jia* 加:” to behave toward the dog in a particular way. In this situation, the name of a thing functions as a means of governing people’s action related to the thing; it expresses people’s attitude or behavioral intention as it is being uttered.<sup>33</sup> The Neo-Moists classified names in several different ways to uncover further the relationship between *ming* and *shi*. First, in terms of their extension, names in the *Mo Bian* are divided into *da ming* 達名 (categorical terms), *lei ming* 類名 (general terms), and *si ming* 私名 (proper names).<sup>34</sup> The *Mo Bian* reads that “*wu*” (object) is a categorical term, similar to “*shi*”; “*ma*” (horse) is a general term: All things that possess the shape and character indicated by the term “*ma*” can be called “*ma*”; “*zong*” is a proper name: It can be used to call only a particular person or thing.<sup>35</sup> Second, in terms of the scope they cover, names are divided into *jian ming* 兼名 (collective nouns) and *ti ming* 體名 (individual nouns). The *Mo Bian* explains that “ox-horse” is a collective noun: It refers to oxen and horses. But neither “ox” nor “horse” equals to “ox-horse”; those are individual nouns.<sup>36</sup> Third, in terms of the nature they indicate, names are divided into abstract terms, relative terms, and concrete terms. The *Mo Bian* takes “whiteness” as an example of abstract terms, and “bigness” as an example of relative terms, for, while “whiteness” indicates a characteristic that is possessed by all white things, “bigness” indicates a relation that is changeable; on the other hand, while those names that signify non-shape of things (such as spatial-temporal distance) are abstract terms, those names that signify shapes of things (such as “mountain” and “water”) are concrete terms.<sup>37</sup>

The Neo-Moists were not the first to classify names. When Yin Wen discussed the *ming-shi* issue, he once divided names into (1) *ming wu zhi ming* 命物之名 (natural names), which indicate objects and their characteristics such as “black” and “white,” (2) *hui yu zhi ming* 毀譽之名 (moral names), which express ethical judgments such as “good” and “evil,” and (3) *kuang wei zhi ming* 況謂之名

<sup>32</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shuo A.

<sup>33</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shuo Shang.

<sup>34</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shang.

<sup>35</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shuo A.

<sup>36</sup> *Mo Bian*–Jing Shuo B.

<sup>37</sup> *Mo Bian*–Da Qu.

(expressive names), which signify personal characters or emotions such as “love” and “hate.”<sup>38</sup> The difference between Yin Wen and the Neo-Moists’ classifications lies not only in the number of name-type they proposed: Yin Wen offered only one set of categories, the Neo-Moists, at least four (the more the ways to analyze, the deeper people’s understanding of language), but also in the standards they used to taxonomize names: Yin Wen’s categories reflect sociopolitical considerations, the Neo-Moists’ categories reflect primarily linguistic and epistemological issues. Both Yin Wen and Gongsun Long’s theories of *ming-shi* indicate a consonance between the Confucians and the School of Names, to the extent that both schools attempted to solve the conflict between *ming* and *shi* by rectifying or regulating names. But whereas Confucius rectified names in terms of *li* 禮 (properties), Yin Wen and Gongsun Long regulated names in terms of *li* 理 (logic/pattern). It was the School of Names that led the discourse on *ming-shi* in an analytic direction, which recognized the independent value and importance of the *li* (logic/pattern) of names and their use. The Neo-Moists contributed the most refined and systematical language analysis in pre-Qin times. Their theories not only provided later thinkers with a model of thinking, but afforded the impetus for the subsequent development of the notion of *shen ming*.

## 2.4 Examination of Names (*Shen Ming*)

The notion of *shen ming* originates in both the *Han Fei Zi* and the *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* (*Lü’s Spring and Autumn*). The *Han Fei Zi* reads: “You must examine names carefully in order to establish ranks and clarify duties in order to distinguish worth.”<sup>39</sup> The *Lü Shi Chun Qiu* reads: “Names should be examined in terms of the things that bear the names so that the situations of these names and things can be understood.”<sup>40</sup> It is clear that these two points recognize the importance of names in grasping things, so the position of these texts is definitely opposite to that of *wu ming* (abandoning names). As the term “*shen* 審” (“to examine”) implies, the position of *shen ming* overlaps, to a certain extent, that of *bian ming* (analyzing names). However, while the work of *bian ming* set forth enquiring into the logic of names as its *direct* objective, the work of *shen ming* is to study names with respect to sociopolitical situations. This makes *shen ming* different from *bian ming*, but in line with *zheng ming* (rectifying names). Xun Zi’s theory of *ming-shi* typically embodies the position of *shen ming*. And his examination of names consists of three major parts: (1) the definition of *ming*, (2) the classification of *ming*, and (3) the function of *ming*.

<sup>38</sup> Yin Wen Zi–Da Dao A.

<sup>39</sup> *Han Fei Zi*, Ch. 8, trans. Watson, 37–38.

<sup>40</sup> *Lü Shi Chun Qiu–Shen Fen*.

What is *ming*? Xun Zi said that “A name is that which abstracts a class of things.”<sup>41</sup> The key terms in the original text are *qi lei shi* 期累實. According to the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, “*qi*” means “to get together,” and “*lei*” means “to organize properly.” Thus, a name is derived from a combination of a thing and the mental process of abstracting or categorizing it. This is similar to the Neo-Moists’ point that “When a name corresponds to a thing, this is a situation of combination.”<sup>42</sup> Both definitions point out that a name is a reflection of a thing; but it is also an organization of the thing’s characteristics, in other words, an outcome of classification of a (class of) thing(s). Thus, so-called *qi lei shi* is a mental process in which a thing is abstracted; in this sense, a name is a concept. Before Xun Zi, Gongsun Long tried to define *ming* and in fact thought of a name as a concept, but his definition itself is vague. Obviously, Xun Zi developed Gongsun Long’s idea, and his definition of *ming* is more precise and informed than Gongsun Long’s. This is undoubtedly one of Xun Zi’s contributions to the discourse on *ming-shi*.

Moreover, Xun Zi distinguished names in terms of three standards: historical content, social custom, and logical meaning. In terms of historical content, there are *xing ming* 刑名 (legal terms), which come from the Shang dynasty; *jue ming* 爵名 (ranks and titles), which come from the Zhou dynasty; and *wen ming* 文名 (names of rites), which come from ritual practice.<sup>43</sup> What Xun Zi showed here is the fact that to a large extent names in ancient times meant not popular terms or proper names, but legal provisions, titles of nobility, and Zhou *li*. These kinds of names have particular historical contents; thus, to understand these names depends on an understanding of history. And only after grasping these names and their historical significance, can one comprehend Confucius’s argument for the rectification of names.

In terms of social custom, there are *san ming* 散名 (common terms), *shi ming* 實名 (conventional terms), and *shan ming* 善名 (concise terms). Common terms are names of varied things in the world; conventional terms are terms established and recognized through common use; concise terms are terms that are easy to understand and use for their simplicity and clarity.<sup>44</sup> Actually, the two categories of *shi ming* (conventional terms) and *shan ming* (concise terms) can be construed as explanations of *san ming* (common terms). Xun Zi pointed out that *san ming* come from social custom that has been popularly recognized, namely, they are themselves not innately proper or improper, but are thought of as proper, or have been accepted by social custom and common use. This point displays that Xun Zi distinguished names as terms from names as concepts. Names as terms are just socially determined symbols that neither need a logical relationship to what they signify nor imply reflection to what they stand for.

<sup>41</sup> Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.

<sup>42</sup> Mo Bian–Jing Shuo A.

<sup>43</sup> Xun Zi, ch. 22, trans. Watson, 139.

<sup>44</sup> Xun Zi–Zheng Ming.

In terms of logical meaning, there are *dan ming* 單名 (single terms), *jian ming* 兼名 (compound terms), *gong ming* 共名 (general terms), and *bie ming* 別名 (particular terms). While a single term is one that consists of only one character, e. g., *ma* (horse), a compound term is one that consists of two (or more) characters, e. g., *bai ma* (white horse). If one character can indicate a thing, Xun Zi suggested, one should use the single term to refer to that thing; otherwise, one should use the compound term. Single and compound terms, Xun Zi pointed out, are not contradictory, but may both refer to the same thing. For example, a white horse may be called either a horse or a white horse, since a white horse shares the features of the general category “horse.”<sup>45</sup> Of course, neither single term nor compound term designates simply a concrete thing; rather, both of them refer to general concepts (e. g., “horse” or “white horse”). What Xun Zi expressed in the “single/compound” distinction is his understanding of how Chinese nouns are constructed. On the other hand, while a general term is a term that stands for a system of things, e.g., “animal,” a particular term is a term that stands for a part of the system, e.g., “horse.” According to Xun Zi, a term that is extended until nothing can be excluded is a broad general term 大共名 (*da gong ming*), and a term that is contracted until nothing can be included is a great particular term 大別名 (*da bieming*).<sup>46</sup>

Xun Zi’s categories of general term, particular term, broad general term, and great particular term show that Xun Zi was clearly aware of the relationship between genus and species, and deeply grasped changes of concepts in their intension and extension. In contrast to the Neo-Moists’ category of *da ming* 達名 (categories), *lei ming* 類名 (general terms), and *si ming* 私名 (proper terms or names), Xun Zi’s one is more profound and subtle.

In the meantime, Xun Zi interpreted the functions of names as (1) to indicate things, (2) to communicate ideas, and (3) to unify people.<sup>47</sup> In the first case, to indicate things is the *epistemic* function of names. It is through names that humans establish their relation to the world in virtue of understanding varied things. Here, by “indicating things,” Xun Zi meant not only that words name things in terms of their characteristics, but also that words distinguish one thing from another and/or group similar things together. To name things in terms of their characteristics is the symbolic function of names; and to distinguish similarity and difference is the logical function of names. Together, these functions make the meaning of language complex and the use of language flexible.

In the second case, to communicate ideas is the *social* function of names. Xun Zi held that the gentleman “employs the correct *ming* 名 (concept) and chooses a suitable *ci* 辭 (sentence) in order to insure that his meaning is clear.”<sup>48</sup> As one name can reflect one thing, a combination of several names can express a combination of several things. An idea consists of several things, and its expression relies on a

<sup>45</sup> *Xun Zi* ch. 22, trans. Watson, 143.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, trans. Watson, 144.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, trans. Watson, 140.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, slightly modified from Watson, 149.

combination of several terms.<sup>49</sup> While Xun Zi recognized that “*ci*” (creation of complex word structures) can communicate ideas, he warned that concepts and judgments should be used only to express ideas. If people go beyond this limit and are involved in playing with words, that is *jian*, an evil.<sup>50</sup>

In the third case, to unifying people is the *political* function of names. Following Confucius’s idea on the rectification of names, Xun Zi suggested that names enable people not only to distinguish similarities and differences but to understand the “eminent and humble,” that is, the political hierarchy.<sup>51</sup> Like Confucius, Xun Zi treated *ming* partially as tokens of social order. To rectify names is to correct misuses of social titles and the overstepping of boundaries of political authorities. Therefore, to rectify names is to bring people’s behavior into line with the hierarchy, order, and laws that names stand for or imply.

In Xun Zi’s theory of *ming-shi*, we find a sharp contrast between its analytic character and its pragmatic orientation. While illuminating the origin and nature of language and set forth a variety of rules for conceptualization, Xun Zi stressed the aim of examining names, that is, to solve sociopolitical problems by rectifying names. This is a critical feature of the notion of *shen ming* (examining names), a feature even more prominent in Han Fei’s (ca. 280–233 BCE) theory of *ming-shi*.

The pragmatic character of Han Fei’s theory manifests first in his understanding of the two terms: *ming* and *shi*. Following Yin Wen, Han Fei used the term “*xing* 形” to mean *shi*. But unlike those thinkers who interpreted *shi* in its general meaning, i.e., “the varied things in the world,” Han Fei in most cases narrowed *shi* down to particular affairs, actions, and their results. And he defined *ming* as the content of speech, the positions of officials, and the provisions of law. In his assertion that “words and ideas are what are used in examining *xing* and *ming*,” “*xing*” means “affairs,” and “*ming*” means “speeches.”<sup>52</sup> In advocating “to give officials titles in terms of defined duties, and to examine *shi* in terms of *ming*,” “*ming*” means “governmental positions,” and “*shi*” means “governmental achievement.”<sup>53</sup> In “The ruler makes *ming*, ministers carry out *xing*,” “*ming*” means “legal provisions,” “*xing*” means “legal actions.”<sup>54</sup> The *Han Fei Zi* reads: “The ministers come forward to present their proposals; the ruler assigns them tasks on the basis of their words, and then concentrates on demanding the accomplishment of the task. If the accomplishment fits the task, and the task fits the words, then he bestows rewards; but if they do not match, he doles out punishment.”<sup>55</sup> In this

<sup>49</sup> The Chinese term “*ci*” compresses into one word both the meanings: “a structure of words or concepts” and “a reflective choice guiding that structure.” In the second sense, a “*ci*” can also be thought of as a “judgment.”

<sup>50</sup> *Xun Zi* ch. 22, trans. Watson, 149.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, trans. Watson, 141.

<sup>52</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Er Bing*.

<sup>53</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Ding Fa*.

<sup>54</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Yang Quan*.

<sup>55</sup> *Han Fei Zi*, ch. 7, trans. Watson, 32.

passage, not only does “*ming*” mean “speech” or “what people say,” but “*shi*” is construed as “what people do and its outcome”; hence, the relationship between names and things becomes the one between what is said and what is done.

Then, how should people treat the relationship between *ming* and *shi*? In answering this question, Han Fei once again showed his pragmatic intention. He suggested that like a body and its shadow, a thing and its name must correspond to each other.<sup>56</sup> But this does not mean *ming* and *shi* are equally important, at least in the genetic sense. Han Fei held that when one does not know the name of a thing, one must check the thing itself to learn what to call it.<sup>57</sup> To Han Fei, *shi* is physically and thus logically prior to *ming*; therefore, one cannot understand *shi* only by means of *ming*. In this sense, Han Fei’s statement that a name must match a thing 形名參同<sup>58</sup> does not so much indicate the complementarity of *ming* and *shi* as stress the dependence of *ming* on *shi*. In this respect, Han Fei’s position follows Mo Zi’s.

Han Fei argued that the objective of examining names is “to judge right and wrong in terms of things and their names.”<sup>59</sup> Here, he seemed to treat *ming* parallel to *shi*, and to imply that when *ming* is correct, it can even be the starting point in judging right and wrong. A similar emphasis on the central role of names is reflected in his advice “to use the single Way ([D]ao) and make names the head of it. When names are correct, things stay in place; when names are twisted, things shift about.”<sup>60</sup> But elsewhere, Han Fei argued that in order to parallel to *shi*, *ming* itself must always be checked against reality. In Han Fei’s words, “When words are used, one needs to estimate them with earth, consider them with heaven, examine them with objects, and check them with humans; words are acceptable only when they match the four kinds of reference.”<sup>61</sup> It would not be wrong here to construe “earth, heaven, objects, and humans” as dimensions of “reality.” But it would be wrong to think of them simply as objective existence and hence interpret this point as merely an epistemological or semantic requirement, that is, the equivalent of saying that a term is meaningful only when it has a definite reference, or a sentence is true only when it corresponds to a fact. For what Han Fei cared about is the function of *ming* and the results that speech brings about. As he said, “In listening to words, one must enquiry into their usefulness; in watching actions, one must check their achievements.”<sup>62</sup> This is the final criterion of examining names; its essence is clearly pragmatic.

Like the *Han Fei Zi*, the *Lü’s Spring and Autumn* also proposes a pragmatic theory directly linking names with social order. The work reads, “If names are

<sup>56</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Gong Ming*.

<sup>57</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Yang Quan*.

<sup>58</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Zhu Dao*.

<sup>59</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Jian Jie Shi Chen*.

<sup>60</sup> *Han Fei Zi*, ch. 8, trans. Watson, 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Ba Jing*.

<sup>62</sup> *Han Fei Zi—Liu Fan*.

correct, society will be in order; if names are wrong, society will be in disorder.”<sup>63</sup> By “names are wrong” it means they do not match things. For example, one is called “smart” and “bright,” but in fact is silly and muddled; or a person is base, but is praised as noble-minded; or a person is described as “pure,” but behaves in a corrupt and morally degenerate way, or claims to be “just and honest,” yet takes bribes and bends the law; or, while holding a reputation for “bravery,” behaves in a cowardly way. The *Lü's Spring and Autumn* thinks of these five examples as to naming an ox a “horse,” and a horse an “ox.” Such misuses, it argues, not only renders language useless, but threatens the very existence of the state.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*–Zheng Ming.

<sup>64</sup> *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*–Shen Fen.



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