

Is logos a proper noun?

Or, is Aristotelian Logic translatable into Chinese?

Yijing Zhang

During Jacques Derrida's visit to China in 2001, he held a meeting with the Chinese philosopher Wang Yuanhua.* Derrida opened their dialogue with a sentence that had the effect, no doubt involuntary, of aggravating his interlocutor and all of those Chinese listeners present: 'China doesn't have philosophy, but/only thought [中国没有哲学, 但/只有思想, *Zhongguo meiyou zhexue dan/zhi you lixiang*]'.

This was not actually the original form of the sentence as the French philosopher had pronounced it, but my own later translation of the Chinese translation of the original French sentence, which itself has not been preserved. Regardless, it is the Chinese translation alone that Wang was able to hear and understand. This translation has two versions, or, to be more exact, can be translated in two different ways. All of the nuance resides in the choice of conjunction: either 'but' or 'only'.

First, 'China doesn't have philosophy, it *only* has thought.' This was the version published in the collection of Wang's writings.¹ It was also the interpretation of certain Chinese intellectuals. Consequently, the conversation between Derrida and Wang resuscitated amongst these intellectuals the old debate around the question of whether or not China has its own philosophy.

Second, 'China doesn't have philosophy, but it *does however* have thought.' We believe that this was what Derrida was trying to say. Between 'only' and 'however' there is a difference of stress. Nonetheless, this difference implies two completely opposing conceptions of Chinese thought.

As we know, for Derrida, 'philosophy' is centred on

logos and is prisoner to it; presumably his aim in visiting China was thus not to identify the same structure in Chinese thought. Derrida did not understand Chinese, but we need only refer to his criticism of alphabetic writing, in *Of Grammatology* for example – a writing that is for him intrinsically linked to *logos* -- to understand what he may have hoped for from the Chinese language and Chinese thought. That China had no *logos*, and therefore no 'philosophy', presented an opportunity to Derrida's eyes, as it does to all Western philosophers who find in 'Chinese thought' a way of reviving or regenerating their 'philosophy'.

Unfortunately, those Chinese listeners who heard Derrida's sentence ignored this probable intention and interpreted his words as a negative value judgement, one that placed Chinese thought in an inferior position vis-à-vis Western philosophy. The reaction of his Chinese interlocutor was therefore to establish in 'Chinese thought' those aspects that had most in common with 'Western philosophy', particularly its logic and metaphysics. And yet Derrida went to China neither to find 'philosophy' nor to speak ill of 'Chinese thought'. In fact, to foresee the provocative effect of his comment, he would have needed to understand the history of the modernisation of China to see why the Chinese could not but be extremely sensitive to this kind of assessment. The idea that China has no philosophy, no natural science, has nothing related to Western modernity, was historically regarded as a fatal danger, insofar as China had almost perished at the hands of technologically superior Western powers.

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Derrida was not the first to say that China does not have philosophy. For Wang, for whom the work of Hegel is more familiar than that of Derrida, the condescending simplification of Chinese thought is also found in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where we read:

He [Confucius] is for the most part a moral educator. He was a moralist as such, not actually a philosopher; for in his case we do not find theory that occupies itself in thought as such. ... We have one of his books [the *Lün yü*] in a modern translation; according to the reviews, however, it does little to enhance his reputation. He is not to be compared to Plato, Aristotle, or Socrates.²

Despite their differences, Derrida's valorisation and Hegel's devaluation of Chinese thought have one thing in common. To put it in Foucauldian terms: 'For the West, the East is everything that it is not, yet it must search it to find its own primitive truth'.³ From this perspective, saying that China does not have philosophy isn't really saying anything at all. By reducing China to that which the West is not, all we see in it is the West. In other words, we remain stuck in logocentrism.

Is there philosophy in China?

Undeniably China did not originally have 'philosophy' in the Greek or Western sense of the word, but today in China people speak of both 'Western philosophy' and 'Chinese philosophy'. This is an effect of translation. Philosophy has been given a name in Chinese; it has been ascribed a neologism, 哲学 (transcribed in pinyin as *zhe xue*), which means, literally, the study of wisdom.⁴ *Logos* on the other hand has only been given a phonetic transcription that does not make literal sense. In other words, 'philosophy' has become a common noun – which is why we can talk about 'Western philosophy' and 'Chinese philosophy' – but the word '*logos*' has remained a proper noun. As such, there is no Chinese *logos*. The problem is not that the Chinese language lacks a word into which to translate the word '*logos*'. The fact that the word '*logos*' has not been sinicised when the majority of concepts from Western philosophy, even the most recent, already have a Chinese equivalent, means that the problem is not related to a gap in the Chinese language itself. After all, if Derrida had said that China did not have *logos*, his listeners would presumably not have been particularly shocked.

In the phrase '*logos* is a proper noun', which gives my essay its title, I want to make clear, then, two points. The first is that *logos*, like all foreign proper nouns, has no translation but only a transcription in Chinese. Secondly, *logos* is seen by Derrida, as by other Western philosophers and the Chinese, as something that belongs to the West. The question mark in my title indicates that we are posing the question here of both why the word *logos* is untranslatable, and why it belongs to the West.

In this respect, it seems useful to recall Heidegger's conversation 'between a Japanese and an Inquirer'. In the version recounted by the German philosopher (as translated into English), we discover an exchange that seems like an anticipation of the misunderstanding that would arise decades later between Derrida and Wang:

Inquirer (Heidegger): The danger of our dialogues was hidden in language itself; not in *what* we discussed, nor in the *way in which* we tried to do so.

Japanese: But Count [Shūzō] Kuki had uncommonly good command of German, and of French and English, did he not?

I: Of course. *He* could say in European languages whatever was under discussion. ... it was *I* to whom the spirit of Japanese language remained closed – as it is to this day.

J: The languages of the dialogue shifted everything into *European*.

...

J: The language of the dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of saying what the dialogue was about.

I: Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than East-Asian man.

J: Assuming that the languages of the two are not merely different but are other in nature, and radically so.

I: And so, a dialogue from house to house remains entirely impossible.⁵

Heidegger, while praising German as 'more Greek than Greek' because it is the language of philosophy, remains imprisoned in his own 'house of Being' and could only hopelessly imagine the possibility of a dialogue with 'the man from the Far East'. Similarly, Derrida discovers that his wish to escape from logocentrism turns back upon itself. For both philosophers, given that they cannot

think in the language of their interlocutor, and so continually draw non-European thought back into European logic, their dialogues are fated to remain monologues – ones in which they can only hear themselves.

The dilemma of the Heideggerian ‘house of Being’ is that it serves simultaneously to confirm man in his relation to Being and to enclose the Europeans in their own house, since they have no other language than that of Greek and European *logos*. I would like to propose, however, another reading of the dialogue between Heidegger and his Japanese interlocutor. From the thesis that languages are radically other in nature, we do not have to conclude that a conversation between houses remains entirely impossible. That the language of the dialogue constantly destroys the possibility of saying what the dialogue is about is only true if there is only one language of dialogue, in this case German or French, or, indeed, any European language. But what if there is more than one? What if Heidegger and Derrida spoke the language of their interlocutor, Japanese or Chinese, and could therefore understand its differences from their own tongue?

We can agree with Heidegger: there is a fundamental difference between languages. And with Derrida: China does not have philosophy in the sense given by logocentrism. Yet, this does not entail a belief in *logos* as the house of Being. Humanity does not dwell in its house in the same way that Being dwells in *logos*: Being can only exist in *logos*, in Greek and German, whilst humans can and must communicate with their neighbours, be welcomed into their homes and receive them in turn. This is linguistic and cultural pluralism, and it is the very condition of human existence, today more than ever. The possibility of communication between houses and cultures comes through translation, because translation is the very dialogue between languages. By translation, however, I do not mean the work of translators who appear to save speakers from linguistic barriers while in fact keeping them locked within them, but, rather, the recognition of linguistic differences by the speakers themselves.

The first encounter of China and *logos*

My aim here is not to answer, therefore, the question of whether China has philosophy, but, rather, to tease out the complexity of the question itself with the help of one of the foundational texts of philosophy and of *logos*; a

text that was also one of the first Western philosophical texts to be translated into Chinese: Aristotle’s *Organon*.

The text that served as the basis for the Chinese translation of the *Organon* is to be found in a book entitled *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis, e Societate Jesu, in Universam Dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritae* (‘Comments from the Coimbra College of the Society of Jesus on the whole dialectic of Aristotle of Stagire’), which was published in Cologne in 1611. The Chinese translation, *Ming li tan* (名理探), which dates from 1631, was, like most Jesuit translations of the period, the result of a collaboration between a foreign missionary and a Chinese scholar: in this case, Francisco Furtado, a Portuguese Jesuit, and Li Zhizao, a mandarin who had converted to Christianity. Unlike Derrida, Furtado had the advantage of speaking Chinese and of living in China. By comparison with contemporary Chinese scholars, Li also had a ‘parental’ link with traditional Chinese thought, a link that has in a sense been broken in the process of Chinese modernisation. Furtado was among the first Westerners to learn Chinese, while Li was among the first in China to encounter Aristotle’s philosophy.

The Jesuits’ reason for translating Western philosophy into Chinese was recorded anecdotally in a letter from Andrea Lubelli, S.J., to the General in Rome from 15 December 1683:

When the Emperor of China heard Father Verbiest speaking of our [European] philosophy, he bestowed the task upon this Father to transmit this [philosophy] in Chinese characters; because in China there is no philosophy in whatever form, unless one takes into account some philosophical sayings, acutely published by *literati* and written unsystematically, without [philosophical] bases [*sine fundamento*], improvised [*ex improvise*] ... and without [logical] order [*sine ordine*].⁶

This is probably the first version of the thesis that ‘China does not have philosophy’, given that the Jesuits were the first Westerners to establish an intellectual exchange between Europe and China. Indeed, Lubelli’s words seem almost a paraphrase of Derrida’s and Hegel’s formulations cited above. Or rather, Derrida and Hegel only repeat what the Jesuits had already said centuries earlier.

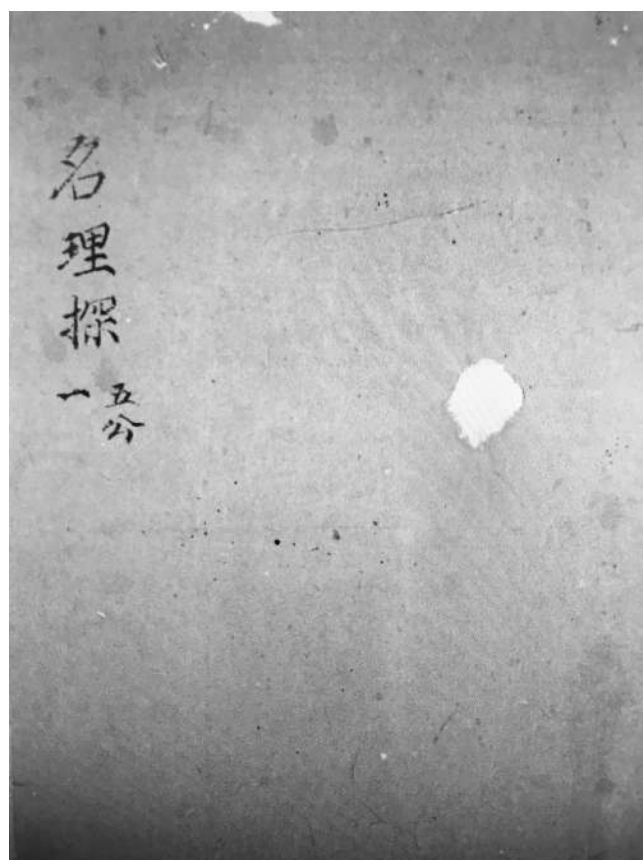
From the perspective of the Christian mission, the Jesuits were not in China searching for the irreducible otherness of the West. Their strategy of ‘assimilation’⁷ had the opposite intention: searching the Chinese classics,

especially Confucius, to find elements that could echo the Sacred Scriptures. A later group of Jesuits, known as the ‘Figurists’, went as far as interpreting the hexagrams of the *Classic of Changes* as messages from the bible. The Jesuits therefore had no interest in drawing out the difference between China and the West. Why shouldn’t China have philosophy like that of the West? It would certainly make conversion easier.

Yet Lubelli’s letter can also be read from the other side of a strategy of assimilation: as a way of attracting the attention and interest of Chinese academics to Western culture by presenting what it did best from all different branches of knowledge.⁸ It was with this intention in mind that mathematics, astronomy and cartography were brought to China by the Jesuits, and this also explains why Lubelli speaks proudly of ‘our philosophy’. In short, portraying China as bearing traces of Christianity, or as being devoid of philosophy, are two ways of thinking that serve to justify the same end.

Thus, those theses according to which China has no philosophy, or Chinese language has no grammar, were first pronounced by the Jesuits. Today the tendency in sinology is rather to say that the Chinese language does not lack grammar and that China, even if it does not have philosophy, does at least have sophists, logicians, mathematicians, etc. Have we got past the Jesuits then? The answer is no. Everything was already there in nucleus in the first encounters between the West and China. Perhaps the Jesuits’ most important legacy is to have shown that it is always possible to claim China as either the same or different to the West, depending on what one wants to do. In fact, to say that China lacks a certain thing that exists in the West, or on the contrary that China does have something in common with the West, comes to the same thing: we never escape ethnocentrism, because this kind of comparison continues to draw on the Western system of reference; it is a reduction rather than a comparison, which thereby undermines the coherence of Chinese thought that is simply not built upon the same questions. For both comparativists and anti-comparativists, the difficulty of avoiding such a practice comes from the fact that there is no understanding of the other that is not conditioned by our prior self-understanding. In the case of Chinese culture, for both Westerners since the Jesuits and Chinese people who are today under the influence of the West, there is

no prior understanding of Chinese culture other than that formed through a Western lens. For Japan, which became westernised in slightly different circumstances to China, the existence of ‘Japanese philosophy’ is still questioned in a very similar way.⁹ It is therefore useless to want to refuse comparative philosophy – whether for an Eastern or Western researcher – as concerns the East, because the background is itself always Western.



Unable as we are to extract ourselves from Western pre-understanding, we can at least take critical distance from such comparative philosophy with the help of the *Ming li tan* because this text was written before the modernisation of China; that is to say, in a non-modernised, non-westernised China. In what follows, I want to place this text under the microscope in order to focus solely on one thing: the translation of the word ‘logic’ as *ming li* (名理), or ‘name-principle’. It is this translation which already contains an answer to the question of whether China has philosophy.

The translation of Aristotle’s *Organon* by Furtado and Li is the first attempt in Chinese history to seek, at the lexical level, a Chinese equivalent to the word ‘logic’. Strictly speaking, their translation is a new creation in

that before them there was no Chinese equivalent. It is not completely new however, as the translation was not made by means of a neologism; the words *ming* and *li* were already part of the Chinese language. The problem is that the mode of reasoning implied in *ming* and *li* is not at all the same as that of Aristotelian logic.

The word *Ming*

Ming means 'name'. To begin with Confucius:

When names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not be exactly right; when punishments are not exactly right, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot. Thus when the gentleman names something, the name is sure to be usable in speech, and when he says something this is sure to be practicable. The thing about the gentleman is that he is anything but casual where speech is concerned.¹⁰

This is the famous Confucian theory of the 'rectification of names', which is essentially a theory of the art of governing. Given the way in which Confucius approaches the question of names, Hegel's remark quoted earlier is unsurprising: 'He was a moralist as such, not actually a philosopher; for in his case we do not find theory that occupies itself in thought as such.' Yet, it should be noted that Confucius' names refer to individual titles in the family and society, such as sovereign and minister, father and son. The importance of names consists in each person behaving in accordance with his or her name; not their own name, but their title or social position.

In China as in Greece, the theory of names is above all a theory of the relation between *ming* (名), 'name', and *shi* (实), 'reality', the thing designated by the name. However, there are two principal differences. First, for Chinese thinkers, a name is not any noun, but relays an individual's 'reputation'; reality does not refer to any given worldly thing, but mainly to people's behaviour in society. Second, following Confucius' example, almost all Chinese thinkers concerned with language have accorded particular importance to the rectification of names. By contrast, Greek logic is concerned with predication: the combination of noun and verb, subject and predicate. For Aristotle the link between language and reality is

apophatic; language designates an extralinguistic fact. The verb 'to be' is what brings out the structure of predication, as Aristotle demonstrates in the *Metaphysics*: 'The senses of essential being are those which are indicated by the figures of predication; for "being" has as many senses as there are ways of predication. ... There is no difference between "the man is recovering" and "the man recovers"; or between "the man is walking" or "cutting" and "the man walks" or "cuts".'¹¹

The word *Li*

The notion of *li* is closely linked to the Study of *li* (理学/*lixue*), a current of thought that dates from the eleventh century and that provides the context for the philosophical and religious exchanges between the Jesuits and Chinese academics in the sixteenth century. *Li* is usually translated into English as 'principle' (or *principe* in French).¹²

Ming li tan begins by presenting the notion of philosophy: 'The love of wisdom, which Westerners call *fei-lu-suo-fei-ya* (斐录琐费亚), is the name for all the knowledge concerned with *principles*'.¹³ The guiding maxim for the Study of *li* is *ge wu qiong li* (格物穷理), 'examining things and fathoming principles'. *Li* in the sense of principle can be seen as an alternative term for *dao*. But unlike the ancient thinkers of *dao* who saw it as a union of human and heaven and the principles of the human behaviour, the grand masters of the Study of *li* had a strong interest in the internal principles of ordinary things; for them the understanding of such principles was an indispensable step towards achieving the union of human and heaven. It is this importance of *li* that led to the analogy between the Study of *li* and philosophy, the supreme knowledge of the West. This is why, for those Chinese academics in contact with the Jesuits, Western philosophy corresponded to the Study of *li* in Chinese thought.

Nicolas Standaert sees in *li* the element that allowed the Jesuits to introduce Western knowledge into China, the common ground between the Study of *li* and Jesuit teaching being a shared interest in the real. *Li* is reached by examining real things, while, for the Jesuits, understanding of the real world leads to God.¹⁴ The only common point is in the means, but these means serve two completely different ends: the experience of God in Christianity, and the self-cultivation in Confucianism,

i.e. becoming a sage. Although *li* has a common element with positive knowledge, its pursuit is the realisation of Confucian morals.

The literal meaning of *li* is 'to carve in jade'. This means that it originates in a verb. Among the figurative meanings of the verb are: to manage, to handle, to put in order, etc. From the verb *li* there is also the noun *li*, referring to the veins in jade and other related ideas such as wood fibre, blood vessels, order, norm, reason. The *Grand dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise* provides the following definitions of the word:

1. The lines that guide the constitution and determine the qualities of beings and things: the natural structures of the animation of a being;
2. the sensible qualities of beings and things;
3. the structuring principle that determines the form and fate of everything that exists (neo-Confucianism);
4. the principle of things, which makes possible and determines the substantial expression of vital energy 气 (*qi*);
5. to reason: to find the lines of force in beings and events.

Obviously the first definition is closely related to the veins in jade. Given the central role of jade in Chinese culture since ancient times, it is unsurprising that it is at the origin of an important philosophical concept. The date of birth of the word *li* is difficult to establish, but it appears in the oldest literature of pre-imperial China.

If *li* is usually translated into French as 'principle', it is in the sense, it seems to me, of principle as origin of the universe, as in the Greek *arkhê*. All the definitions from the *Grand Ricci Dictionary* could be united under the word 'principle' understood in its widest sense. For traditional Chinese thinkers, it is always the same principle that determines the natural world and human society. As the principle of human society, *li* also comes close to the other definition of 'principle' as law or rule. As the Chinese sage lives in the union between man and heaven, so the principle of the two worlds, natural and social, must be the same.

The term *Ming li*

Christoph Harbsmeier notes that the term *ming li*, which is at least as old as the Han dynasty (third century BC), came into regular usage during this period and served as a 'vague general word for logic' until the twentieth century.¹⁵ He adds that the word can also be anachronist-

ically translated as 'analytic philosophy'. Yet, arguably, translating it as 'logic' is no less anachronistic. Analytic philosophy is a more recent development than logic in the history of Western philosophy, but in both China and the West – or in Western sinology – the branch of knowledge known as 'Chinese logic' and the sorting of certain ancient doctrines under this heading only began at the start of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Chinese of the third century never used *ming li* as 'the vague general word for logic'. In fact, Furtado and Li were the first to translate *ming li* in this way.

Ming li is a common noun that can be found in dictionaries. The *Grand Ricci Dictionary* gives the following example:

名理 'Names and principles': distinguishing denominations and analysing constitutive principles, a discipline practiced by the neo-Taoists (dyn. 晋 Jin), which involves going back to principles through right and proper names.

Why, in the *Ming li tan*, does the term *ming li* become the translation for the word 'logic' in the sixteenth century? Does the definition of the *Grand Ricci*, which is only valid in the context of the Jin dynasty, give a precise reason? Or is it worth taking Harbsmeier's position on the term into account? The following discussion thus focuses on two further queries: First, what is the concrete subject of this discipline that distinguishes denominations and analyses principles? Second, what does the term *ming li* usually mean in its 'vague and general' sense?

The movement that characterises the period from the third to the sixth centuries of China's intellectual history is known as *qing tan* (清谈), 'pure conversations'. The link between *ming li* and *qing tan* resides in the fact that *ming li*, as names and principles, designates the object and content of *qing tan*. The expression *ming li* comes from *bian ming xi li* (辩名析理), 'to distinguish names and analyse principles'. It is this link that no doubt led Harbsmeier to translate *ming li* as 'analytic philosophy'. *Qing tan* covers names and principles, and takes the form of a kind of discussion that has much in common with dialectic in the Aristotelian sense of the word.

The names (*ming*) in *bian ming xi li* are initially the same as those in Confucius's 'rectification of names'. Their scope also include the qualities of a governor, humanity's general moral qualities and other related ideas, like heaven and *dao*, and it is this scope that explains

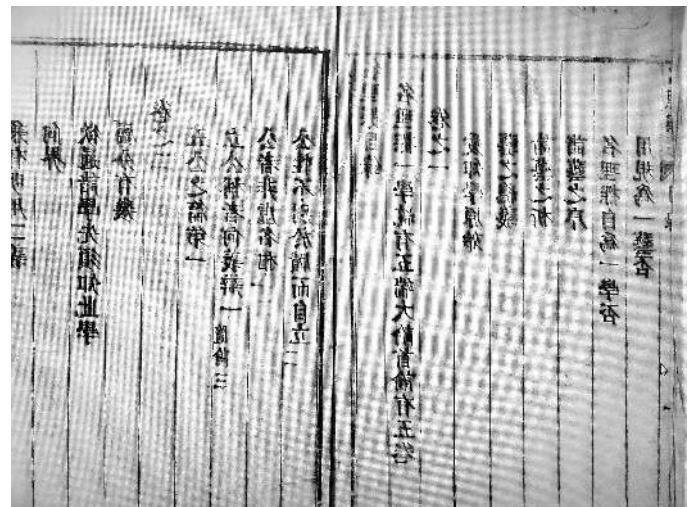
the relation between names and principles. The criteria for distinguishing names are founded on human nature, itself justified by *li*, the ultimate principle and foundation of everything. To correctly differentiate between names, one should analyse principles.¹⁶ We can thus say that in *qing tan*, which aims to distinguish names and analyse principles, names and principles relate to the same notions of *ming* and *li* that were treated separately above.

It is primarily the object of its research that distances *qing tan* from Aristotelian logic. While its original motivation was political, *bian ming xi li* eventually transformed into commentaries on Confucian and Taoist classics. The horizon for intellectual reflection in this period, as is generally the case in all periods of traditional China, was still centred on the moral ideal of the sage. The way in which this was considered and discussed was fairly subtle and speculative in this period compared to others, but the validity of arguments was not a primary concern, as it is in Aristotle. It would be a little too optimistic to believe in the possibility of genuine communication between a way of thinking born of the need for good governors, and a philosophy that was stimulated by the Greeks' awe at natural phenomena.

Let us now turn to the problem of the term *ming li* taken as a 'vague and general' word. The expression *kong tan ming li* (空谈名理), 'idle discussion of names and principles', became in the third century a common term by which to indicate a dismissive evaluation, often conveyed solely with the term *ming li* itself: to talk about names and principles means to do nothing useful. The *literati* of the Wei and Jin dynasties turned against Confucianism because of their disengagement from politics, and subsequently *ming li* has been retained as a way of describing a mind inclined towards questions that are theoretical, abstract, speculative; in short, contrary to the political ideal of Confucianism.

Ming li is therefore both part of ordinary Chinese today and a word that is 'vague and general'. It is not however the 'vague and general word for logic' that Harbsmeier claims it is, but a word that carries in itself the idea of a discourse that is vague and general. The *Ming li tan* discusses the names and principles of language and thought as opposed to the names and principles of things, and is thereby aligned more or less to the tradition of *qing tan*. *Ming li* can also be taken as 'the principles of names'.

Insofar as Chinese language philosophy is a philosophy of names, the principles of names are no other than the principles of language. In the expression *ming li*, 'name' and 'principle' are therefore not of the same order; the 'name' is ruled by the 'principle'. This makes sense from the perspective of the subordination of logic to philosophy in the case of the West, and of the *Ming li tan* to the Study of *li* for the Chinese.



Translating the word 'logic' after the *Ming li tan*

Between the *Ming li tan* and the twentieth century, the number of nouns that the Chinese have invented to translate the word 'logic' is estimated to be more than fifty.¹⁷ I will discuss two of them. Both were put forward by people who were pioneers of Chinese 'modernisation'; Yan Fu (1854-1921), translator and advocate of Western science, and Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), revolutionary and founder of the Chinese Republic. The fact that these two men each offered their own translation of the word 'logic' based on their own understanding of logic as a Western science is proof enough of the importance accorded to this science in the process of modernisation – as well as in the survival of their country.

Yan translated J. S. Mill's *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* under the title *Mu le ming xue*, meaning 'Mill's science of names'. In his preface he justified this translation choice against Furtado and Li's:

Titles like '(Ming li) tan' and 'Bian (xue qi meng)' capture neither the depth nor the scope of this science. In an effort to stay as close as possible to the original language,

we will render it provisionally as *Ming xue* [science of names]. In Chinese, only the word *ming* has an intention as subtle and rich as the word *logos*.¹⁸

It is interesting to note that, while defending his own translation of the word ‘logic’, Yan does not translate but only transcribes the word *logos* as 逻各斯 (*luo ge si*). His translation of ‘logic’ as *ming xue* – *ming* here is the same as in *Ming li tan*, and thus makes reference to the general theory of names from ancient China – has not been retained by posterity. His phonetic transcription of *logos* has however come into official usage. Ultimately, Yan reconsiders the word ‘logic’ with more prudence: ‘This science [of logic] contains so much. What our country possessed in the pre-imperial era simply cannot accommodate the entirety of its content, but relate only to its very earliest preoccupations.’¹⁹

After the revolution that put an end to the imperial regime, Sun, as President of the Chinese Republic, published a series of articles under the title 建国方略 [*Jian guo fang lue*], or *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction*, to share his ideas about how Western science was necessary for both the conservation of traditional Chinese culture and the construction of a new modern country. He believed that writing was one of the reasons why China was lagging behind Western countries, and since grammar and logic were two things that had until then belonged to Western languages but were lacking in China, their absence was the cause of this delayed development.

However remarkable it was, Chinese literature had never developed an awareness of itself, because there was neither grammar nor logic in Ancient China. If today we can speak about ‘Chinese grammar’ and ‘Chinese logic’, this does not prove Sun wrong, but simply shows that these notions have since been constructed according to the framework of the Western versions of these sciences. Sun himself introduced these two sciences in the following way:

I deliberately use the expression ‘reasoning in writing’ (文理) as a translation for the word ‘logic’ not because it is the best fit, but because in my view logic applied to writing implies a process of reasoning. Modern authors generally apply this science to the act of establishing correct conclusions. Others define logic as ‘the science of argumentation’ [论理学], while still others call it ‘the science of names’. In reality these definitions are not exact. The science of correct deductions comprises only

one aspect of logic; Yan’s translation as the ‘science of names’ is proof of his lack of culture. These definitions are imprecise, and do not cover logic as a whole. ...

What is logic therefore? What does the word mean? Those familiar with this science know that it is the basis for all others, the science of sciences, which controls both thought and action. Many think logically without ever having learnt it directly. In China, this science has no name. It could, in my view, be given that of *li ze*.²⁰

Sun thus proposes two neologisms for the word ‘logic’: 文理 (*wen li*) and 理则 (*li ze*). The first could be rendered as ‘writing a reasoning’, but I prefer to translate it as ‘principles of writing’. The expression *wen li* recalls 文法 (*wen fa*) in the same text. The latter is Sun’s translation of the word ‘grammar’. *Wen fa* is literally ‘the law of writing’. In the case of both *wen li* and *wen fa*, the word *wen* is not the verb ‘to write’, even though it can have this meaning, but a noun that is able to modify the domain of the ‘law’ or of ‘principles’ given its relation to the law and principles of (written) language. Sun is talking first and foremost about written language. His second neologism, 理则 (*li ze*), could be translated as ‘principles and rules’.²¹ The word *li* in the expressions *wen li* and *li ze* is the same *li* that we saw earlier with the name ‘principle’. It can mean the purpose of a thing, specifically of a well-argued text, but not that of human reasoning. Sun does not say what he means by *li ze*, but the translation ‘principles and rules’ makes sense in terms of what Sun says about the content of this science: ‘the basis for all others, the science of sciences, which controls both thought and action’. From my point of view, however, the word *li ze* is inconvenient because, while rejecting Yan’s ‘science of names’ and its failure to encompass all of logic, Sun’s translation lacks the link between logic and language that is suggested by the word *ming*, ‘name’.

So while Yan kept the word *ming* as his name for logic, Sun preferred the word *li*. They made the same choice as the translators of *Ming li tan*. Clearly in traditional Chinese thought, *ming* and *li* are two of the closest concepts to that of *logos*.

Starting with Furtado and Li, this long quest to find a semantic equivalent to the word ‘logic’ ended up in a purely phonetic translation, 逻辑 (*luo ji*). This is probably because with their advancing understanding of the Western science of logic, the Chinese become more aware of its specificity. Sinicising logic would risk masking some

of the richness proper to this science. It can thus be argued that 'logic' has no Chinese equivalent, and since the word 'logic' is derived from 'logos', it is unsurprising that 'logos' too lacks a translation.

The problem of translating the word 'logic' into Chinese reveals the differences, then, between two ways of thinking. Logic, as established by Aristotle, consists in the determination of reasoning's formal conditions of truth at their most general and universal. But what the Chinese example could question is precisely this claim to universality. The universality of thought has been challenged for as long as thought has been linked to language, or, more precisely, to linguistic pluralism. Is *logos* universal if it does not even translate into Chinese? The debate around this question has resulted in diametrically opposed positions. For example, Benveniste has shown how Aristotelian logic is dependent upon the Greek language, in particular for the ten categories.²² Does this dependence, in the words of Pierre Aubenque, 'lead us to relativise the metaphysics of being in line with the Greek language, or, instead, to exalt the Greek language in the name of metaphysics, which is, as Heidegger wrote, the most powerful of all languages and closest to the language of the mind?'²³

The Heideggerian position also gives rise to variations that are opposed. For Derrida, given that *logos* is Greek, China cannot have philosophy. For Aubenque however, given that metaphysics is only ever Western, and that this metaphysics engendered the science and technology that have conquered the entire world, Greek *logos* cannot *not* be universal, and even China cannot escape it. As Aubenque writes, 'Aristotle's philosophy constitutes a decisive mutation in the essence of language ... making it available to all the demands of scientific representability, mathematical calculability, and even the technical transformation of the world. ... [W]hile it is possible to do without metaphysics, the fact remains that there is only Western metaphysics and that this metaphysics has generated the science and technology whose planetary domination shapes the relationship of all humanity to the world.' For Aubenque, 'we are provided with a verification of this fact by civilisations that did not undergo a revolution like that under Aristotle, no doubt because their language was less suited to it.'²⁴ Sun provides just such a verification in his 'attributing of the technical and political delay in China to the fact

that the Chinese had no logic and their language had no grammar'.²⁵ One can agree that without logic there is no science or technology, because this is what historical reality shows. However, the question remains of whether the fact that Western technology has dominated all other civilisations, and that capitalism has spread worldwide, is in itself 'logical' proof that Western logic is universal.

In fact, I would argue, the history of the translation of the word 'logic' in Chinese is exemplary of Barbara Cassin's notion of *untranslatability*: 'I suggest to call "untranslatable", not that which we do not translate, but that which we never cease translating, and thus also that which we never cease not translating.'²⁶ As concerns the philosophical exchange between Europe and the East, untranslatability is not opposed to translation, but is the process of translation itself.

I would like to end with a further translation of the word *logos*, the only 'translation' of which I am aware, which appears in the Chinese version of the Bible. The Gospel of Saint John begins with the following sentence:

In Greek: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In English: In the beginning there was the Word.

In Chinese: 太初有道 (*Tai chu you dao*).²⁷

To translate the Chinese: 'In the beginning there was the *dao*'. In this translation, the word 'logos' is both translated and not translated into Chinese. It is rendered as *dao*, which, like *logos*, is a polysemic word that serves as the central concept for a whole system of thought. As for its meaning, the translators got it right: *dao* can mean, among other things, the word. John's sentence also recalls Laozi's famous line: 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物 ['*Dao* gives birth to one, one to two, two to three, and three to ten thousand things']. *Logos* and *dao* are therefore both at the origin of everything. Since *dao* is not usually translated but transcribed in French, as is also the case for other Western languages, the word 'logos' is arguably still a proper noun in this sentence because *dao* is a proper noun too. In other words, the great untranslatable word of Western thought for the Chinese is translated as the great untranslatable word of Chinese thought for the West. It is both translatable and not, because from the beginning there has been, on the one side, *logos*, and, on the other, *dao*.

Translated by Sophie Eager

Yijing Zhang is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Philosophy at Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China.

Notes

1. Yuanhua Wang, 王元化, *Qing yuan jin zuo ji* 清园近作集 [Recent Collected Works from Qingyuan] (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2004), 23–34. The meeting is recorded in Chinese in the form of an interview by a third person. We therefore cannot know which exact words Derrida used. Given that Derrida didn't speak Chinese, and Wang didn't speak English, the dialogue, organised by the French General Consulate in Shanghai, required a translator as an intermediary, and fell prey to all the problems of translation and assumption.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, vol. 1, trans. R. F. Brown and P. C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 240–241.
3. '... l'Orient est pour lui tout ce qu'il n'est pas, encore qu'il doive y chercher ce qu'est sa vérité primitive.' Michel Foucault, 'Préface de *Folie et Déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*', in *Dits et Écrits*, tome I (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 161.
4. In the seventeenth century, the Jesuits created the first Chinese translation for the Latin word *philosophia* with *qiong li xue* (穷理学), 'study of the principle'. The meaning of the word 'li' (principle) is explained below. The neologism *zhe xue* (哲学) was created by Japanese translators of Western philosophy in the nineteenth century and then reintroduced into Chinese.
5. Martin Heidegger, 'A Dialogue on Language', in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 4–5.
6. Noël Golvers, 'Verbiest's introduction of *Aristoteles Latinus* (Coimbra) in China: New Western Evidence', in *The Christian Mission in China in the Verbiest Era: Some Aspects of the Missionary Approach*, ed. Noël Golvers (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 40–41.
7. Jacques Gernet, 'Ciel des Chinois, Dieu des Chrétiens', in *Chine et christianisme. La première confrontation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).
8. Hubert Verhaeren, 'Aristote en Chine', in *Bulletin Catholique de Pékin* 22 (1935), 417.
9. Cf. Sugimura Yasuhiko, 'Auto-éveil et témoignage – philosophe autrement: L'école de Kyoto en comparaison avec la philosophie française post-heideggérienne', in *Philosophie* 125 (2015), 44–62.
10. Confucius, *The Analects*, Book 13, trans. D.C. Lau (Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1983), 121.
11. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Treddenick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 237.
12. We reserve judgement on the translation of *li* by the English 'theory' in Robert Wardy, *Aristotle in China, Language, Categories and Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and as 'pattern' by Joachim Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011).

13. P. Francisco Furtado, *Ming li tan. Traité de logique*, accessed 4 April 2019, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9006070t/f1.image.r=Ming%20li%20tan>
14. Nicolas Standaert, 'The investigation of Things and the Fathoming of Principles (格物穷理/*Gewu Qiongli*) in the Seventeenth-Century Contact Between Jesuits and Chinese Scholars', in *Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688): Jesuit Missionary, Scientist, Engineer and Diplomat*, ed. John W. Witek (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994), 396–99.
15. Christoph Harbsmeier, *Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 7, *Language and Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 353–54.
16. Tang Yijie 汤一介, *GUO Xiang yu weijin xuanxue* 郭象与魏晋玄学 [GUO Xiang and the Xuanxue of the Wei and Jin dynasties] (Beijing: Peking UP, 2000), 19–38.
17. Zhou Zhenghe, et al. 周振鹤等, *Zhishu wuya* 智术无涯 [The Cross-Disciplinary Art of Thinking] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2002), 161–162.
18. '曰探、曰辨，皆不足与本书之深广相副。必求其近，姑以名学译之。盖中文惟“名”字所涵，其奥衍精博与逻各斯字差相若...'. Cf. Yan Fu 严复, *Mule Mingxue* 穆勒名学 [Mill's Logic] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1981 [1905]), 2.
19. '此科所包至广，吾国先秦所有，虽不足以抵其全，然实此科之首事...'. Cf. Sun Yingxiang and Pi Houfeng, eds., 孙应详 皮后峰, *Yan Fu Ji Bubian* 严复集补编 [Further Selected Writings of Yan Fu] (Fujian: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2004), 100.
20. Cf. Sun Zhongshan 孙中山, *Jianguo fanglue* 建国方略 [Fundamentals of National Reconstruction], accessed 18 November 2018, <https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/心理建设/第三章>; Sun Yat-sen, *Souvenirs d'un révolutionnaire chinois*, trans. E. Dalter, (Paris: Les éditions d'aujourd'hui, 1933), 59–61.
21. The French translator of Sun's text paradoxically transcribes this as 'litchich', as though Sun were rendering the word 'logic' as a proper noun.
22. Emile Benveniste, 'Catégories de pensée et catégories de langue', in *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 63–74.
23. Pierre Aubenque, 'Aristote et le langage', in *Problèmes aristotéliens* (Paris: Vrin, 2009), 26.
24. Aubenque, 'Aristote et le langage', 29.
25. Aubenque, 'Aristote et le langage', 29.
26. Barbara Cassin, *Parménide, sur la nature ou sur l'étant. La langue de l'être?* (Paris: Seuil 'Points bilingues', 1998), 9.
27. There are several Chinese translations of the Bible made by different groups of missionaries at different points in history. This phrase, which is familiar to Christian and non-Christian alike thanks to its formulation in Chinese terms both linguistically and conceptually, comes from the 'Chinese Union Version' (1906), the official edition of the Chinese Protestant church. The 'Studium Biblicum Version' (1968), used by the Chinese Catholic Church and only recognised by the Roman Curia, translates the same phrase as: 在起初已有圣言. The word 'logos' is translated as 'sheng yan' (sacred word).