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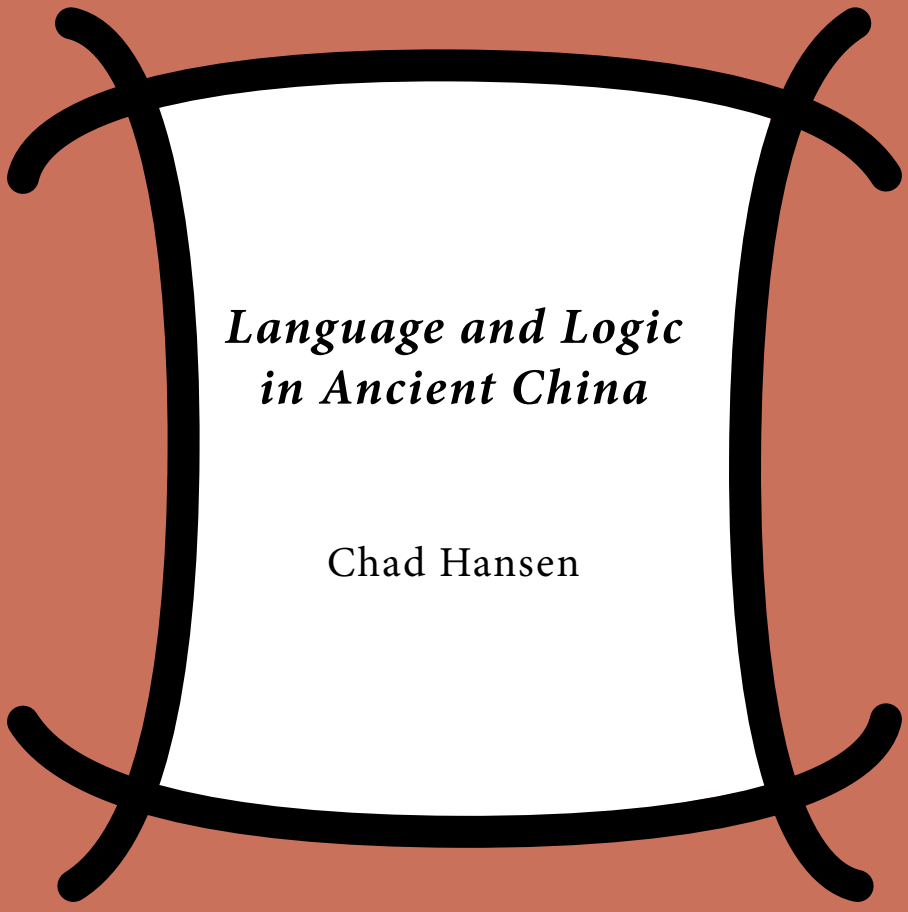

Language and Logic in Ancient China

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Advanced Reasoning Forum

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Preface

For the past half century, Anglo-American "philosophy" has carried the pejorative/honorific "linguistic analysis." Chinese philosophy, christened "nonlinear" and championed by a romantic counterculture, has played the part of the antithesis. This book, in presenting Chinese philosophies of language, challenges that distinction as a way of understanding Chinese thought. Its hypothesis is that Chinese thought is like modern Western thought in that both philosophical traditions focus on language and its role in culture; Chinese thought differs radically from traditional Western thought (as Chinese language differs from Western language) in what it *says about* language and culture.

The stereotypical contrast of Chinese thought and "analytic" Western thought has blinded Sinophiles to the ways in which attention to philosophy of language can aid in understanding Chinese philosophy as a whole. Virtually all students of Chinese thought have fondly contemplated the ways in which Chinese language might explain the differences in Chinese thought, but few convincing stories bridging language and thought have emerged. The chapters which follow set out to tell a plausible story in a focused example (the thought of Kung-sun Lung) by a less ambitious, more indirect strategy. The narrative focuses on philosophy of language as an explanatory link between language and other philosophical theories. The strategy is suggested by insights into language and thought derived from contemporary Western philosophy of language.

The "linguistic turn" in Western philosophy has raised the suspicion that the traditional perennial problems of philosophy are, in some sense, based on assumptions about language. Plato's views about definitions, meanings, and truth are held to explain both his formulation of the one-many problem and his theory-solution based on abstract forms (universals and instantiations). The Cartesian and Empiricist views of the

mind-body problem, philosophy of mind, and theory of knowledge are undergirded by a peculiar view of language—including the identification of meanings with mental representations (ideas) akin to sensations. Neo-Kantians are seen as substituting the effects of language for the structuring activities of the mind in presenting phenomenal experience.

This view of the nature of philosophical problems is controversial, and I do not intend directly to argue for it in these pages. However, the very possibility of such an explanation of traditional Western philosophy should warn against any assumption that absence of these traditional philosophical concerns is evidence of nonrational thought. (And, of course, absence of such philosophical preoccupations by Chinese philosophers does not prove that the traditional problems are nonrational either.) The "philosophical problems are problems of language" view shows us that there could be a coherent theory of language which (1) could plausibly have been held by Chinese philosophers given their language and (2) would be less likely to motivate the traditional theories of abstract reality, mental representation, private meaning, propositional knowledge, and cognitive minds.

We understand the relation of thought and language in ancient China when we can present an account of the theories of language as influenced by the actual language and then an account of other philosophical issues as influenced by actual and implicit theory of language. The picture of ancient Chinese thought which emerges is significantly different from the accepted view. Radical reinterpretation is not the goal, however. This study revises the standard interpretation of Chinese thought only when that interpretation seems to have imputed an interest in issues which (1) are likely to have been generated by linguistic forms or theories about language which are absent in classical Chinese, and (2) are incompatible with other well-confirmed interests and approaches (on the standard interpretation).

The case for this strategy is buttressed by the fact that ancient Chinese thinkers shared modern Western philosophy's intense interest in language. Chinese theories of language have been largely ignored in traditional interpretations both because of their difficulty and because of the obscurity of some central texts (the Neo-Mohist Canon) which contain most of the technical detail of Chinese theories of language. The failure to understand the Neo-Mohist Canon, in turn, hindered understanding of Chuang-tzu and Hsün-tzu, who have the obvious focus on problems of language but presupposed (and drew heavily from) the Neo-Mohist treatment of linguistic issues.

This study touches on many contrasts in philosophical interests. However, it concentrates on one classical issue—the one-many problem.

Sinologists basically agree that Chinese philosophy has no obsession with abstraction, universals, or forms characteristic of the Western Platonic Realist view of the one-many problem. Kung-sun Lung is typically interpreted as the exception. His "white-horse paradox" ("white-horse not horse") is supposed to represent a classical Chinese counterpart to Platonism. The *locus classicus* of the standard interpretation of Kung-sun Lung is in the work of the best-known contemporary historian of Chinese philosophy, Fung Yu-lan. The Fung Yu-lan interpretation is consciously Platonistic. Fung suggests that the Chinese terms *ma* 'horse' and *pai* 'white' are being used to designate abstract objects—horseness and whiteness. Hence the paradoxical statement should be read as "white-horseness is not horseness." Many were skeptical of Fung's Platonizing interpretation, but few more plausible theories have been offered. Thus the abstract view of Kung-sun Lung's enterprise has come to be widely accepted—if without much enthusiasm.

I will argue that there is indeed no Platonic Realism in ancient China (also no theory of abstract sets or classes), that Kung-sun Lung does not constitute an exception, and further, that the nonabstract orientation of philosophy can be (partially) explained using the strategy outlined above. The grammatical features of Indo-European languages which explain the impetus of Platonism in philosophy of language are not found in Chinese. Absent those motivations, there would be, I suggest, less reason to suppose Chinese thinkers have postulated such metaphysical curiosities as abstract or mental objects.

Essentially, I contend that a one-many paradigm for stating philosophical questions goes along with a count noun (nouns to which the many-few dichotomy applies) syntax. Chinese language, during this classical period, tends toward a mass noun syntax (based on nouns to which the much-little dichotomy applies). Mass nouns suggest a stuff ontology and what I call a division or discrimination view of the semantic function of words (terms and predicates).

The grammatical explanans tends to illuminate an extensive difference in "metaphysical" orientation; rather than one-many, the Chinese language motivates a part-whole dichotomy. And I argue that it helps explain not only the absence of Platonism, but, in turn, of mentalism and conceptualist philosophies of mind. These philosophical developments are based on the abstract scheme for dealing with meaning (e.g., conceptualism) and are even less to be expected in Chinese thought.

This study also draws from modern philosophy for its hermeneutic method. Chapter 1 presents an argument for justifying interpretations as we

justify scientific theories, that is, as inference to the best explanation. Informally, the point is that the best way to justify an interpretation (or a philosophical view) is just to lay it out as completely and carefully as possible, then to highlight the advantages of the view one supports over the known rivals.

It will be treated as a drawback that an interpretation attributes a discredited Western traditional theory to a thinker in the absence of any adequate explanation of what could have motivated the doctrine. The tendency of interpreters to "discover" such views in Chinese thinkers seems to be connected with their own acceptance of a culture-invariant interest in the perennial Western philosophical issues. Believing that the problems are the genuine problems of philosophy and that they just "make sense," one charitably attributes the same insight to the Chinese thinker at the barest textual hint, thinking, "What else could this mean?" The insights of modern philosophy, in questioning these traditional issues, tend, therefore, to expand rather than restrict the coherent ways of assigning meanings to philosophical texts.

I accordingly regard the introduction of the discipline of philosophy into the study of Chinese thought as a liberating move. It gives the best hope of making headway on a project that all seem to accept—explaining how Chinese language influences Chinese philosophy. It is rather more than less likely to generate fresh, non-Western interpretations and demonstrate their relation to the unique features of Chinese language.

A defensive reaction, claiming for Chinese philosophy "everything found in Western philosophy," tends, I believe, to be counterproductive. The contexts into which these parallels are introduced fit the classical problems so poorly that any philosophically trained reader will find the Chinese thinkers confusing. The theoretical doctrines are attributed to Chinese philosophers who give no coherent arguments for the theories and demonstrate no insights into the classical positions they are supposed to be discussing. The defense typically asserts that they held the positions but did not believe in argument. Thus the view of Chinese thought as "irrational," "nonanalytic," or "inscrutable," is forced by the very attempt to glorify it.

There are issues of philosophy which Chinese philosophers do not see. The issues they do see are discussed competently. There are issues in traditional Western philosophy which no longer hold the interest of Western philosophers. That classical Chinese philosophers never worried such issues hardly undermines positive evaluation of their philosophical acumen.

Acknowledgments

I began work on these ideas eight years ago and I have received help from individuals too numerous to list completely here. I must, however, thank my teacher, friend, and colleague Professor Donald Munro for introducing me to Chinese philosophy and for his splendid ability to encourage my work while giving criticism and suggestions. Professor Munro first aroused in me the suspicion that concentrated study of Chinese philosophy (unlike the study of Western ethics) makes one a better person. One of his many contributions to the understanding of Chinese philosophy is his recognition of the importance of model emulation. His contribution to his students is himself as a model.

My heavy debt to Professor A. C. Graham is apparent from the notes to this volume. In the early stages of my work, Professor Graham gave me some vitally important advice ("Ignore Kao Heng's commentary on the Mohist Dialectic"). Throughout my development of these ideas I relied heavily on the textual studies and translations of Professor Graham that covered the philosophers I was analyzing. His own superb and massive analysis and translation of the Mohist dialectical chapters was being written at the same time I was working on this book. I had a chance to see the manuscript and profited from it. In places, I have continued to rely on his earlier published analyses. Professor Graham read my manuscript and criticized the translations. He advised revision of many key translations, especially those from the Mohist dialectical chapters. I am responsible for any errors which remain. I started from modern philosophical worries about the nature of 'meaning', but my interpretation of texts depends heavily on the prior work of textual scholars. Since I have selected from among textual emendations and textual theories, I must also take responsibility for any sinological errors in the analysis.

Professor Liu Yü-yün was the only person I could find in Taipei who would consent to guiding my reading of the Mohist dialectical chapters. Professor Liu taught my teacher and my teacher's teacher. So my debt to him goes far beyond the direct influence he exerted on this work.

Professor Chung-ying Ch'eng has also been working on issues which overlapped a great deal with my own work. I benefited from his published bibliographies on Chinese logic and from several lengthy discussions of various chapters of this manuscript. His comments and criticisms have always been appreciated, and his dedication to the growth of the philosophical approach to the study of Chinese thought have contributed enormously to encouraging me in this and related projects.

My colleagues at the Stanford Center in Taipei and the Universities' Service Center in Hong Kong listened patiently as I struggled to develop coherent, intelligible ways of presenting and developing the key ideas in this analysis of what they must have regarded as a historically obscure set of problems. My thanks to them and to those invaluable research institutions for the training and facilities they have provided to students of China.

In addition to Professor Munro, three scholars at the University of Michigan all made careful and helpful comments on the manuscript's early draft. Professor James Dew drew my attention to many problems in notation and linguistic issues related to my central claims. Professor Larry Sklar forced me to understand just what I could and could not claim to have proven and what kind of proof I should have to settle for for certain key claims. Professor Steve Stitch insisted that I should employ formal semantics consistently.

My colleagues and students at the University of Pittsburgh have read or listened to various portions of this work and made helpful comments concerning content, expression, and organization. Professor Henry Rosemont read the entire manuscript and was most encouraging. He gave me detailed criticisms and recommended some important and basic changes in organization which have been incorporated into the present text. Dr. Sally Gressens commented extensively and helped enormously with the final working of the arguments in the manuscript. My colleagues at the University of Vermont, Professors Philip Kitcher and George Sher, made many helpful suggestions, and Leslie Weiger patiently typed and retyped the successive approximations I generated. My thanks to all.

Finally I must thank Judy, my companion during all the time I was working on this project. I thank her not only for her support and patience but for all she taught me about writing.

Contents

Chapter 1

Methodological Reflections

Imagine a scene: A half darkened room is filled with incense and anticipation. A small huddle of humanity concentrates under the direction of a medium who is chanting. They are contacting a dead person to talk with him. A voice or voices are heard (perhaps that of the medium). The other participants ask questions to which the voice responds. If successful, the conversation should be the same as it would have been with the dead person. It should answer questions about the attitude of the dead person to issues which concern the participants.

The theory of the seance is that when people die their conscious life continues. The conscious life is embodied in an entity called a spirit. The rituals practiced by the medium or the mystic "contact" that spirit (a process analogous to finding the telephone number). The spirit's "speech" typically goes through the medium since the spirit lacks vocal cords, tongue, or lips with which to articulate its answers to the questions. The answers and responses are present in the spirit, as in our living mind, as curious things called "thoughts" or "ideas." The theory usually ignores the question of how the spirit hears, without eardrums. Presumably a parallel story could be told in which the spirit's thoughts are somehow conditioned by the thoughts in the minds of the participants. The conversation is just a convenient "linearization" of these spiritual interactions.

Now consider a second scene: The room is well lighted and dominated by a blackboard. The only smoke is from scholarly pipes. The people participating come from a quite different stratum of society. Papers, pens, books, and glasses are the main paraphernalia at this gathering. One participant reads from a paper. The topic of the paper is also what a dead person thought. But this is not a seance. No one here ever knew the deceased. It is a meeting of academic interpreters—intellectual historians,

philosophers, anthropologists. They are concerned with a famous philosopher—specifically a Chinese philosopher, perhaps Confucius.

There are no subterfuges; the speaker uses his own voice and most typically uses *he* in discussing the views of the dead philosopher. He speaks in English in expressing his view, though we all know that Confucius spoke a precursor of modern Chinese dialects which no one now could understand. There are questions and answers. "If Confucius really meant that, why did he say . . . ?" "What would he say about a case where . . . ?" But these do not resemble a conversation with Confucius as much as a challenge to the speaker to defend his claim to be speaking for Confucius—a challenge from rival interpreters.

I describe these two activities to dramatize the differences between a theory of interpretation and a theory of spiritualism. An interpretation deals directly with a text, not a mind. Its first task is an account of the logical structure of that text and not directly of the psychological state of the author. It is first a theory about how best to understand that text; second, via some additional hypotheses, it can provide evidence for claims about the beliefs and attitudes of the author. The first aspect of an interpretive theory—how best to understand a text—may apply even to texts for which we think there was no single author. We can reasonably dispute about what is the best interpretation of a text whose compilation we agree was accidental. The interpretation would attribute presuppositions and generate implications of a text which no single author might have believed, formulated, or thought about.

One helpful metaphor used in illuminating the interpretation of texts is that of a conversation. Interpreters are not engaged in ordinary conversation but in radical translation which requires theory construction. Theorizing, even in the natural sciences, can be viewed as conversation with nature. But the conversational metaphor and the seance image together lead to the confusions involved in what I call the Chinese mind approach to methodology.

To see how the seance differs from the seminar, consider two different senses of meaning: the meaning (significance) of an expression in a language, and the meaning (intention) of a person in using that expression. In an ordinary conversation, we can use clues from our knowledge of our friends, the environment at the time of speech, or habits of expression to help tell when someone has intended an expression to have other than its normal meaning. In studying ancient Chinese philosophy we are under different constraints. We know almost nothing about the psychology of the

authors of texts except what is revealed in the texts themselves. So interpretation cannot be based on any independent knowledge of a writer's psychology. Thus an interpretation must be concerned with the objective meaning first. Faced with apparent contradictions or conflicting approaches in a text, an interpretive theory attempts to reconcile the contradictions or select one of the approaches as more important, more central than the other. We are tempted to say, "This is what the author really believed," but the author might have had contradictory beliefs. That this does not invalidate this interpretive procedure shows we are concerned with objective meaning. We need not suppose that interpretation is a process of contact with the brain states, the thoughts, or the feelings of any supposed writer of the sentence. An interpretation is not a claim to have done what the medium does. It initially has nothing to do with psychological facts about some author. Talk of, for example, what Confucius really thought about *X* is just a metaphor misplaced from the seance room.

The object of interpretation is not a mind but a text. We intend to understand the text. An interpretation is a proposal about how best to understand it in our language. When we admit the obvious fact that there can be many ways to understand a text, the metaphor of the seance seems to provide us with a standard of objectivity. The "correct" interpretation, we suppose, is the one which harmonizes in some way with the subjectivity of the supposed author of the text. However, this characterization of the goal of interpretation is quite useless in deciding between competing interpretive theories. We have no access to the author's mental states except through the writings via a theory of translation and interpretation. So to justify an interpretive theory we must appeal to other standards of adequacy. This chapter spells out how we might construct arguments for interpretations of Chinese philosophical texts once we have realized that the mental metaphor is a useless runaround. I shall present an account of how to justify an interpretive theory and consider the most typical objections to the application of a coherence methodology of interpretation in dealing with Chinese philosophy.

The Coherent Theory Methodology of Interpretation

The method advanced is based on an analogy between understanding in the sciences and in interpretation of different cultures. Consider the initial state of a student of Chinese thought. She finds a book on some library shelf that

is filled with inscriptions which she takes to be tokens of a written language. The book she holds was most likely printed twenty or thirty years before. It was set in type by reference to some other extant version of the text that was, in its turn, supposedly copied from a still earlier authoritative reconstruction of what is held to have been the original. The reconstructed version, however, was not produced by any direct contact with this original, but by comparing, consulting, reconciling, and theorizing about a number of earlier versions. The principles used in this reconstruction are sometimes conscious and deliberate and sometimes implicit and unformulated. The earlier versions were similarly compiled from still earlier ones (though, no doubt, the principles have changed) and so on to hand-copied or memorized versions reaching back beyond the horizons of textual history.

The text on the shelf was produced by someone who held an implicit textual theory. A textual theory explains the existence of the differing versions at present and through history. It may further postulate the existence of a single "original" which is represented by the reconstructed version. This textual theory is an empirical theory that seeks to explain the existence of versions of the text given an original version. Its aim is the "discovery" of a particular set of historical facts; for example, this graph was originally in this position on this line, or this sentence was added by a commentator not the author.

In the present study the concern is not as much with textual theory as with interpretive theory. I rely for empirical textual theories either on well-established tradition or on the textual research of clever textual detectives and theorists. Choices among the different textual theories is sometimes dictated by the ways they enhance the interpretation, and in some cases (though rarely) I have departed from both tradition and the authorities on textual matters on such interpretive grounds.

Interpretive theory is typically directed at the text selected by a textual theory as the most plausible candidate for the original. We can, in principle, interpret *any* of the versions of the text, and interpreting some version does not presuppose that it is the original version. It makes sense to say that two interpretations of competing versions of a text are both correct *for those different versions*. For example, disputes about the correct interpretation of the Wang Pi texts of the *Tao Te Ching* and the correct interpretation of the recently discovered Ma Wang Tui "legalist" version of that same work need not be rivals except via the rivalry of the respective textual theories—which version is closer to the "original."

There are good reasons for the usual assumption that we are interpreting the original. An interpretive theory, like a textual theory, can function in an attempt to explain the production of the text. An interpretation postulates a meaning for the sentences, terms, and expressions in the text in a way which is designed to explain how the author could have come to hold the theories hypostatized in the text. The interpretation of the original seems important because it is the main evidence for a historical psychological claim about the beliefs, desires, or assumptions of the author or authors of the text. The interpretation gives the grounds for further theorizing by fixing the referents of expressions in the text in the language of interpretation—say modern English. Thus an interpretation of the *Analects* furnishes evidence that Confucius believed that humans are good if, according to that interpretation, the doctrine in the *Analects* entails or presupposes that humans are good.

While the "best" interpretation of the "original" is the only access we have to historical claims about the beliefs of ancient Chinese philosophers, the correctness of the interpretation does not *entail* that the author had those beliefs. We all have the experience of saying or writing something we "don't mean." Still, the sentences we utter or write do mean something—albeit not what we actually believe. Also, an interpretation yields the set of sentences implied by the doctrine of the text, and no one believes all the logical consequences (most of which have never occurred to him) of his sincerely expressed views. Besides, quite simply, an author may lie, mislead, or deliberately confuse us. An interpretation is a theory of the meaning of expressions which may be used in a further explanation of beliefs but does not entail that all the ramifications of the theory given by the interpretation are "beliefs" of the author.

If we assume a common psychology, the interpretive theory can be part of an explanation of the "original" text. It will explain the expressions as arising from other expressions which are the presuppositions or reasons for the expressions or inscriptions in our library version. It functions as an explanatory theory via a principle of interpretation which Richard Grandy has tagged the "principle of humanity."[1] The explanation is relative to some audience, and we regard an explanation or interpretation as adequate when it reveals a "pattern of relations among beliefs, desires, and the world as similar to ours as possible." When we can "see" why, for instance, Mencius would have held some doctrine, then we have the grounds for the explanation of the utterance of sentences of Chinese which are consequences of his theory.

An interpretation, then, is a theory. Like other scientific theories, we judge the interpretation by how well it "fits" the facts to be explained. There is no exhaustive and definitive criteria of the "best fit" of a theory to a body of data. Philosophers of science have typically used such expressions as "elegance," "simplicity," or "neatness" in explaining the standards of theory choice. These standards, vague as they are, seem necessary because there can be a number of possible interpretations which fit the facts.

So the test of an interpretive theory, like that of a textual theory, is not a matter of comparing that theory with either the "original" or the psychological facts (what Confucius actually believed). We have no access to either fact *except* via the theories. What we must do is compare rival interpretive theories as we compare rival versions of the text. Anyone who rebuts an interpretive theory with the claim that the philosopher did not believe what the interpretation gives as the theory of the text has begged the question. We can only find out what some ancient Chinese philosopher believed by comparing and finding the best interpretation of what he allegedly wrote or uttered.

In the case of scientific theories, we can sometimes choose from among rival theories by testing their predictions. For most practical purposes we do not have this technique of theory choice available to us. In this respect, textual and interpretive theories are more like scientific theories that explain the origin of Earth or the evolution of certain species. These events happen only once, but the theories try to explain them on principles which have universal application. Usually the test of theories accounting for unique events involves the comprehensiveness of the theoretical account. Analogously, one of the criteria of a good interpretive theory is its coherence with more comprehensive theories about the corpus of texts of Chinese thought.

So an interpretation of a passage in a classical Chinese philosophical text should be coherent with an interpretation of the chapter, and that with one of the book. Our interpretive theory for a book, in turn, should be a coherent part of a theory of the author's philosophy, and that with a theory of the school of which he is a part, which should be a coherent part of the philosophical milieu of the time, which should be a coherent part of the theory of that tradition of philosophy, which should form a coherent part of one's theory of the nature of philosophy itself. The coherence test of an interpretation is not just relative to the doctrines, of course. We prefer an interpretive theory which is more coherent with our theories of political

activity, social life, religious perceptions, and so forth wherever these overlap.

An interpretation, as opposed to other kinds of explanation for the production of a text, is an account of the background assumptions, theoretical motivations and considerations, and grammatical pictures involved in the production of the text. These explain in the sense of giving the rationales for the philosophical claims in the book. What counts as a reason or a rationale for some theory, as noted before, depends on our imputing to the Chinese thinkers roughly the same kinds of relations among beliefs we have. This is not a prejudice that ours is the only way to reason, but a formal requirement of any theoretical approach to interpretation. If we did not make such an assumption we should never know when one interpretation is a better explanation of the text than another. Judging among interpretations would be impossible without the principle of humanity or some similar principle.

The requirement that we compare interpretations with regard to how coherently, consistently, neatly, and elegantly they explain the statements in the corpus we call Chinese philosophy does not presuppose that the corpus can have no contradictions in it. It does not require that all Chinese philosophers must be consistent. But the principle of humanity does favor an interpretation which either renders the theory coherent *or* gives a coherent, elegant, persuasive account of why the inconsistency occurred, that is, what beliefs, presuppositions, or overgeneralizations might have led *us* to a similar error.

The concept of the best interpretive explanation is thus relative to an intended audience. It may be, for example, that a theoretically clear, elegant explanation of a text can be expressed in the language of fifteenth-century Urdu pirates. Even if that were true (and discoverable), it would be of minimal interest to us since we still have to produce an interpretation of the pirates' version of Chinese philosophy in English—our own conceptual apparatus. We might as well do it directly (though we can glean whatever hints are available from the Urdu account). Logically, of course, the same applies to modern Chinese and Japanese interpretations of ancient Chinese thought.

For the present purposes, the audience is the philosophically interested English-speaking student. The explanatory background is that of the philosophically informed native speaker of this particular modern language. The comparative features of the study of Chinese thought are not part of some special "comparative" methodology, but the inherent require-

ments of a theory-based understanding or interpretation in one language of philosophical texts in another language. The interpretation must be in the language and invoke the concepts and distinctions which are available in our own philosophical tradition. The comparisons and contrasts drawn with Western philosophy contribute to the informal task of explaining in our terms the production of philosophical writings which differ remarkably, as Chinese writings do, from our own background tradition.

Finally, an interpretive theory never starts from scratch. It inevitably inherits and builds on a tradition of interpretation of Chinese. In the first place, we get off the ground in interpreting by learning Chinese with the aid of dictionaries. Dictionaries are partial interpretive theories for the writings of a period in general. A dictionary purports to give us, for certain terms of Chinese, the term or terms of English which play the same roles in making English sentences true. Translation is not prior to interpretation in any other sense than this—that we construct interpretations against a background of interpretive theory in the form of translation conventions which we take for granted until problems, contradictions, incoherencies, or anomalies arise. *Then* we are likely to question a dictionary definition and to say that in the *Analects* the character *tao* 'way' has some special or more detailed interpretation than that captured in a dictionary entry. We also build on a tradition of interpretation of the philosophical works themselves and again usually depart only to avoid some problem in the explanation. Innovations in an interpretive theory are motivated only by conflicts and inconsistencies in traditional interpretations.

The "ideal" goal of an interpretive theory can be represented as a formalized semantic theory for the entire corpus found in the texts. It would translate each expression of the corpus into a formula in a calculus from which one could "calculate" the logical consequences and presuppositions. The calculus used for this purpose would have to be particularly precise and clear. It would have to be a language that could pair reference-fixing formulae to Chinese expressions with more elegance than ordinary English. Modern philosophy, in particular modern formal semantics, is concerned with the construction of languages which have that kind of precision and generality. Supplementing English with selected conceptual and logical tools from philosophical analysis should help render the precise logical and semantic structure of Chinese. The goal of such an interpretation is not a "literate" translation but a logically perspicuous one that brings to the surface the logical structure of the text. For purposes of philosophical analysis and exposition an accurate translation is not neces-

sarily a word-for-word translation but a translation which reflects how the structure of Chinese sentences influences or explains the presuppositions and conclusions of the text. Most frequently, in fact, a literal translation hides this structure, with the result that we go from not understanding the Chinese original to not understanding the English translation.

Constructing an adequate interpretive theory is, accordingly, enormously aided by use of language which places a premium on conceptual clarity and clear distinctions. Philosophical language drawn from modern work on logic and semantics offers a wide range of tools of analysis which increases the means of accurate representation of the semantic structure of the Chinese philosophical theories studied here. Our taking precision and accuracy as desiderata in interpretive theory, again, does not assume that Chinese writers themselves were precise or were not precise. The point is that we have a clear account that aids our understanding only if the account itself is relatively transparent and precise. Assuming some Chinese term is vague, we need clear language tools to represent the broad reference potential of that term accurately. It is no help in understanding to be as elusive and imprecise as the original text, however much that might be a goal of beautiful or impressionistic translation.

The interpretation which follows will not be a formal theory in the above sense. I will appeal to tools and distinctions from modern philosophical analysis in giving a general account of how the structure of language affects the assumptions and outlooks of Chinese philosophy. Otherwise, this work will take the traditional form of a narrative, running commentary accompanied by translations. Still, the commentary will be theoretical. It is an informal theory of the assumptions and implications, the logical relations, and the model of reality which lie behind the philosophical doctrines from the classical Chinese period. It will draw on technical vocabulary when doing so can highlight the logical form of the text. Despite the common interpretive injunction "Think like a Chinese," thinking like a modern Western philosopher is the most reliable method of stating and defending a theory of what the injunction calls for. We must, that is, use our own language, and preferably precise and clear language, in giving interpretive theories. An interpretive theory of Chinese thought in classical Chinese is quite irrelevant.

Sociological, psychological, political, and other factors do enter into the comparison of interpretations. The approach of this study itself starts with hypotheses about some "psychological" motivations of philosophy—for instance, that philosophical issues are partly shaped and generated by

reflection on puzzles which arise when thinkers try to describe the structure of their language. This is especially true of philosophies discussed in these pages that concentrate on philosophy of language, logic, and mind. We accordingly assume (1) that these texts are dealing with philosophical problems concerning language, problems set either by language or the implicit theories of the language in which they carried on their disputes; and (2) that the texts are partly to be explained as contributions to a philosophical dialectic—with some texts responding to, deepening the insights of, challenging, or presenting alternatives to others. That is a sociological assumption which justifies taking the texts also as falling into schools of thought sharing certain approaches and assumptions. The theory would, quite naturally, place texts at times that reflected their position in this dialectic—depending on what other texts they seem to be responding to or refuting.

Let us now consider a common objection to the method outlined here. In sinology the most common objection to an appeal to coherence, consistency, or rational standards in interpretations takes the form of what I shall call the Chinese mind approach developed through the special logic retort.

Objection: The Chinese Mind and the Special Logic Retort

Theories of method often face paradoxes. If they are plausible it must be because they accurately represent the logic of the practice they are trying to make explicit. But then they begin to appear useless. Consider the above view that an interpretation is a theory and that a theory would be deemed the "correct" theory if it is the best of the competing theories (interpretations) of the text, and that we show which is a better theory by showing which is more plausible, more coherent, more clear and precise an account of how those who fashioned the texts would have come to hold the views attributed to them by the interpretive theory. "Surely," a colleague has argued to me, "that is the way we in fact come to adopt interpretations. So is there anyone who ought to revise her method in the light of your reflections? Aren't you without significant opponents?" "Don't we inevitably think like Western philosophers in giving interpretations?"

Indeed, judgments about interpretations of Chinese philosophy *are* more or less in accord with the theory. The Fung Yu-lan interpretation of Chinese thought is influential *because* it is a comprehensive and uniform

explanation of Chinese thought which *we* understand—since it is drawn from Plato and the Western tradition of abstract philosophy. The Needham interpretation, similarly, is a comprehensive vision of Chinese thought linked by its acceptance of a post-Einsteinian and anti-Newtonian scientific world view. In both cases the objections and reservations expressed to these theories is that while they do offer structures which could explain many of the philosophical theories in the tradition, they do not sufficiently explain why those philosophers would have come to hold such outlooks which in our own tradition are supported by elaborate theorizing and argument. In both cases the appeal, as this methodology urges, is that it is implausible to attribute the underlying theory without showing a rationale for the theory from the presuppositions of *these* ancient Chinese philosophers.

Still, there are opponents to this methodology even though normal interpretive practice may quite closely (and inevitably) reflect its basic outlines. There is widespread appeal to slogans and principles in criticizing and evaluating interpretations which are diametrically opposed to the coherent theory approach outlined here. The obstacle in the coherent theory approach is the principle of humanity which requires that in the judgment of the plausibility of the account we must take ourselves as a model or as a guide to what is a sufficient explanation of a belief from presuppositions, what considerations would incline us to a certain view or outlook. The opposed slogan is that we must "think like a Chinese" rather than like modern philosophers. The implied conclusion is that Chinese philosophers have a "special logic" which blocks rational understanding by "Western minds." Let us consider the two slogans and their validity as alternative methodological principles.

The slogan "Think like a Chinese" is quite an imposing one in the community of comparative philosophers. One hardly dares contradict it when talking about Chinese philosophy. But I want to argue that as a methodological suggestion it is either misleading or impossible to follow. As a purported aid in understanding ancient Chinese thought, it is a case of "going to Yüeh today and arriving yesterday." If we knew how to apply the slogan we should hardly need professional interpreters. We can establish how the Chinese philosophers in question thought only by determining the correct interpretation of their writings. Fully to think (ancient) Chinese would be to think in that same language, and not to interpret at all. In interpreting one must use some "home" language (metalanguage) or other. Earlier I argued that the home language should

include many of the tools of modern philosophy. Thus one approach suggests that using the resources of our own language supplemented by the careful analytical tools of philosophy will help us in constructing clear, coherent, illuminating interpretive theories for Chinese philosophical writings. The other approach seems simultaneously to abandon the normal purpose of interpretation, that is, rendering understanding to an audience, and at the same time to presuppose that the audience one is addressing already knows the interpretation—without which they could not understand or apply the slogan.

The "Think Chinese" slogan could, of course, be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the interpretive approach suggested here. It could merely enjoin us to be consistent with our theories of the social, political, linguistic, and religious world of ancient China and to bear in mind the assumptions, attitudes, and presuppositions generated by the best interpretive theory that fits that cultural background to the philosophical texts that were produced. But if it is (as its use in criticism indicates) an objection to the coherent theory approach and especially to taking ourselves as models in judging what are explanations and motivations for holding certain theories and views, then it seems to be a theoretical sister to the claim that the dispositions of Chinese philosophers to accept theories are not reasonable or logical, in the ordinary (Western) sense of those terms—the special logic retort.

The special logic retort is an informal move in arguments about the correctness of interpretations of Chinese thought. It is used to attack interpretations and to defend them. As an attack, it suggests that an interpretation has relied on Western logic in reconstructing the philosophical views and hence has distorted the original intent of the Chinese philosopher in question. As a defense of an interpretation, it provides a catchall rebuttal to all objections that one's interpretation is inconsistent, incoherent, unclear, or imprecise.

Talk about "Chinese logic" emerged in a much earlier generation of sinologists. It is charitable to assume that it was initially motivated by a sincere effort to understand in a sense analogous to the one I developed earlier, namely, giving rationales for Chinese philosophical doctrines. But the doctrines themselves often appeared so bizarre (especially to the missionary generation of interpreters) that they could be characterized as reasonable only if logic were suspended or altered beyond our normal recognition. The talk was a manifestation, I believe, of tolerance and open-mindedness.