

# INNER AND OUTER WORLDS: ON THE NATURE OF THINGS, MATTER, AND THE MIND IN THE GŌNGSŪN LÓNGZĪ\*

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**Abstract.** *The present study provides an overview of the narrative of cognition as described in a largely understudied Classical Chinese philosophical text, the Gōngsūn Lóngzī, drawing meaningful comparisons with other works traditionally associated with the Logicians' (míngjiā) trend of thought. The Gōngsūn Lóngzī especially provides a substantial contribution to our understanding of knowledge construction processes in early China. According to the text, the mind has the ability to operate distinctions. It breaks reality down into meaningful, manageable units, and classifies these units according to appropriate categories. As will be shown, such ability is not only necessary for the individual to cognize the world, but also sufficient to ensure univocal correspondence between names and actualities.*

**Keywords:** *Early China, Logicians, Gōngsūn Lóngzī, cognitive categories, percepts*

In Classical Chinese philosophy, different trends of thought<sup>1</sup> typically assign to the subject different, more or less active prag-

matic and ethical roles. Also, the subject manifests an equally different level of awareness in and of the cognitive process. Despite these discrepancies, in premodern Chinese philosophical texts there seemingly exists a fairly consistent underlying conception of how the human mind works. The functioning and the inner workings of the mind and its relationship with the outer world are largely described in terms of cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses. Emphasis is given especially to the mind's ability to operate significant distinctions, conveniently dissecting reality into meaningful, manageable units, and to categorize such units of knowledge or pieces of information according to appropri-

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars now almost unanimously agree that in premodern China proper organized "schools" of thought did not exist, with possibly the only exception of the Mohists and the Rǔ 儒, and that the term *jiā* 家 had a very different connotation at that time. Accordingly, I render the term as "trend of thought" instead of the traditional "school". On the issue of the interpretation of *jiā* and its different meanings, see Petersen (1995), Ryden (1996), Nylan (2000), Csikszentmihályi (2002), Csikszentmihályi and Nylan (2003), Smith (2003).

ate conceptual categories (Dan 1974). Such ability is not only necessary for the individual to cognize the world, but also sufficient to ensure univocal correspondence between names and their respective actualities.

In particular, the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* 公孫龍子 (Master Gongsun Long),<sup>2</sup> a “Masters text” (*zǐshū* 子書)<sup>3</sup> traditionally associated with the so-called “Logicians” or, literally, “experts on names” (*míngjiā* 名家), provides a substantial contribution to our understanding of knowledge construction processes in early China. According to the text, in order to grasp an otherwise immeasurable and overwhelming reality, brought about by the simultaneous manifestation of the totality of all things (*wù* 物)<sup>4</sup> to the

senses of the cognitive subject, and to interact with the external world in a meaningful way, the human mind needs to break such reality down into circumscribed, intelligible conceptual units or “individualized things” (*wù* 物), and to consider them singularly. Bodily percepts are an integral part of the cognitive process. Percepts are raw data, preliminary impressions that need to be further refined and processed through cognitive categories, thereby filling mental images with appropriate content. This mental step in the cognitive process further ensures that a univocal association is established between names and their corresponding actualities, a fundamental precondition in the broader socio-political project of enacting an orderly and harmonious society. As will be shown, the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* delineates a coherent cognitive theory, describing in detail how the external word is perceived through the senses, and the different stages through which the mind processes the sensory information acquired.

This study explores the narrative of cognition theorized in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*, drawing meaningful comparisons and establishing connections with other texts traditionally associated with the Logicians’ trend of thought, the *Yīnwénzǐ* 尹文子 (Master Yin Wen) and the *Dèngxǐzǐ* 鄧析子 (Master Deng Xi). Despite their heterogeneous nature and somewhat dubious authenticity as actual Warring States texts (Forke 1901-02; Graham 1986), as it will be shown these relatively understudied philosophical texts still convey valuable information about and shed light on conscious and unconscious processes of knowledge construction as conceptualized in early Chinese philosophical literature.

<sup>2</sup> The edition of the text referred to is the one preserved in the *Da Ming dao zang jing* 大明道藏經 (*Zheng tong dao zang* 正統道藏). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> The term is used to identify a cluster of philosophical argumentative texts that were grouped under the homonymous “Masters” (*zǐ* 子) category in the bibliographical catalogue of the Imperial Library, composed by Liú Xiàng 劉向 (79-8 BCE) around 26 BCE., during the Western Hàn 漢 period (206-9 BCE). These texts are easily identifiable thanks to their title that is the name of one of the (pseudo-) historical and semi-legendary “masters of thought” of the Warring States period (475-221 BCE). According to the tradition, these thinkers would have authored the “Masters texts,” or at least they would have been actively involved in their composition. However, such attribution is highly dubious in most, if not all, cases. Masters texts are typically characterized by a high heterogeneity of contents, multivocal styles, and by a complex, multi-layered textual history that largely excludes the possibility of a single authorial hand. On “Masters texts” and their relevance to contemporary studies on early Chinese thought, see Denecke (2010), also Tian (2006). On composite authorship in Classical Chinese texts, see Nylan (2000), Kern (2002 and 2005, in particular Boltz’s contribution to the volume), Beecroft (2010), Schwermann and Steineck (2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Wù* is used to denominate all things taken individually, but also the totality of all things considered as a set, as, literally “everything that exists in the world” [物也者,天下之所有也。].

I first provide a description of the different key stages in the cognitive process as illustrated in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*, drawing especially from the two so-called “original”<sup>5</sup> chapters, the ‘Báimǎ lùn’ 白馬論 (Disquisition on White and Horse) and the ‘Zhǐwù lùn’ 指物論 (Disquisition on Pointing and Thing).<sup>6</sup> This preliminary analysis is integrated with and corroborated by a selection of pertinent quotes taken from the *Yǐnwénzǐ* and the *Dèngxǐzǐ*. From this cross-textual analysis, it emerges that it is possible to identify a substantial underlying conceptual coherence that runs like a thread through all these texts. There seemingly exists a more or less consistent, shared approach to this issue specifically in the Logicians’<sup>7</sup> intellectual tradition. Accordingly, it can be assumed with a certain degree of certainty that such issue was a well-acknowledged and consistently debated problem especially among thinkers or in textual sources closely associated with this trend of thought that justify their inclusion in a cluster or under the same bibliographical category.

The *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* is a heterogeneous collection of six rather independent texts, including both dialogues and short

essays named after and attributed to the homonymous pseudo-historical<sup>8</sup> dialectician Gōngsūn Lóng 公孫龍. Its core materials seemingly date back to the Warring States period (Graham 1986). In this collection, it is possible to identify two fundamental subsequent phases in the cognitive process: (a) a first phase in which the world, which initially presents itself to us as a mass of unprocessed raw data, is cut down and turned into intellectually manageable, knowledgeable units, as described in the ‘Zhǐwù lùn’; (b) a second phase in which such knowledgeable units are processed through the senses and are elaborated conceptually, as illustrated mostly in the ‘Báimǎ lùn’ and in the ‘Jiānbái lùn’ 堅白論 (Disquisition on Hard and White).

This does not mean that the world in itself is indeed an undifferentiated mass of amorphous matter until the human mind operates on it – in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*, the world is unmistakably understood as being constituted by a multiplicity of separate, individual things, the existence of which is not in question here. However, in a first preliminary stage, the totality of things seemingly appears as such – blurred, unfocused,

<sup>5</sup> This label is used exclusively for these two chapters that are considered as better preserved and characterized by a higher degree of internal coherence (see Graham 1986: 136; Reding 1985: 389).

<sup>6</sup> In most editions, these two chapters appear in this order, respectively as chapter 1 and 2, right after the composite introductory biographical note on the figure of Gōngsūn Lóng, the ‘Jǐfǔ’ 跡府 (Storehouse of Deeds). However, contrary to what is often assumed, the ‘Zhǐwù lùn’ does not appear in all the transmitted editions, nor do the two chapters invariably appear in this order. See Indraccolo (2010: 81-82).

<sup>7</sup> Thinkers traditionally associated with the “School of Names” are variously called (Chinese) “Sophists,” “Dialecticians,” or “Logicians.” See for instance Reding (1985), Graham (1986), Forke (1901-02), Mei (1953), Kou (1953).

<sup>8</sup> Gongsun Long is featured in several narrative anecdotes preserved in the received literature. Attempts have been made to prove that he was also an actual historical character rather than just a *dramatis persona* by drawing a consistent biography through these references (see for instance Qian Mu (1934: 40-42), Yang Jinguang (1991: 130-138)). However, none of these attempts has been successful. The chronology of life events that it is possible to reconstruct relying on quotations in the received literature presents several logical and temporal contradictions and inconsistencies (Indraccolo 2010: 21-38, esp. 22-24). It is to a certain extent likely or at least admissible that the literary Gongsun Long – a highly fictionalized prototypical hair-splitter or sophist – might have been inspired by an actual historical Gongsun Long, but it is ultimately impossible to ascertain.

indistinct – to the cognitive subject because of the sheer physiological limits of human nature. Human senses are simply incapable of grasping all things at once and processing the enormous amount of information that they are thereby exposed to until attention is fully focused on single individual objects (or concepts) one at a time. In the ‘*Jiānbái lùn*’, an anonymous persuader engages in discussion with a generic opponent, and explicitly claims that different percepts are perceived through different senses<sup>9</sup>:

「視不得其所堅而得其所白者無堅也。拊不得其所白而得其所堅。[...]

While looking at it [the stone], you do not perceive its hardness, but you perceive its whiteness without the hardness. While touching it [the stone], you do not perceive its whiteness, but you perceive its hardness.

The opponent supports the hypothesis that a “hard and white stone” is constituted by three fundamental elements: “hard(-ness)”, “white(-ness)”, and “stone”. According to his view, these three elements combine together to form a new compound, in which they are homogeneously amalgamated. Through this process, these elements become indissoluble constituents of the newly formed object “hard and white stone”, to which they are permanently attached. According to the persuader instead, a “hard and white stone” is made of two composite components, a “hard stone” and a “white stone”. Not only are different per-

cepts perceived through different senses, but also these different percepts are perceived at different times, and remain separate products of two different sensory moments. As the persuader clarifies, the perception of a “hard and white stone” is achieved in two distinct, subsequent sensory moments, since apparently the human mind cannot elaborate more than one kind of percept at a time (Chan Chi-ching 1998: 37-38; Pang Pu 1989: 15-17):

「無堅得白其舉也二。無白得堅其舉也二。」

When you do not perceive its hardness, you perceive its whiteness. It expresses two qualities. When you do not perceive its whiteness, you perceive its hardness. It expresses two qualities.

The ‘*Zhǐwù lùn*’ illustrates in detail the first stages of the human cognitive process. In particular, the essay claims that things necessarily have to be pointed at in order to be called ‘things,’ and that the act of pointing *per se* is not the same as the process in action of pointing at things. The text deliberately plays with an extremely limited, repetitive vocabulary, and the bewilderment of the user/reader (Richter 2013) of the text is mainly provoked by the deliberately ambiguous use of the term *zhǐ* 指 (“to point”).

The term *zhǐ*<sup>10</sup> literally means “finger”<sup>11</sup> and, accordingly, “to point, to indicate”.

<sup>9</sup> “Gongsun Long assumes that two different occasions of perception are exclusive and separate [...] hardness is not revealed in seeing the white and whiteness is not revealed in feeling the hard” (Cheng Chung-ying 1997: 157-158). See also Chen Guimiao (1975: 138-139), Hu Quyan and Chen Jinkun (1987: 38-39), Yang Junguang (1991: 164).

<sup>10</sup> A sample of different definitions of *zhǐ*, by various Western scholars is provided by Reding (2002: 190) and Graham (1955: 282). A summary of different interpretations given by Chinese scholars can be found in Yang Junguang (1991: 193) and Chen Guimiao (1975: 42-43).

<sup>11</sup> The *Shuōwén jiězì* 說文解字 defines *zhǐ* as 「指，手指也。」. See *Shuowen Jiezi*, 1981: 607 (十二篇上593下).

Almost all scholars who confronted themselves with this text developed their own personal interpretation of *zhǐ*, translations of which are innumerable. I am inclined to stick to the etymological meaning, “to point.” According to Cheng Chung-ying, Chan Chi-ching and Kou Pao-koh, it seems appropriate to distinguish among three different meanings<sup>12</sup> of the term, corresponding to three aspects of *zhǐ*. I am providing here my own reading of these three different aspects, which partly elaborates on and is indebted to Cheng Chung-ying’s interpretation:

- 指 *zhǐ*: the theoretical ‘(act of) pointing’, pointing-as-such, as an object of thought.
- 指物 *zhǐwù*: things pointed at, objects of the concrete act of pointing-in-action; individualized objects singled out from the totality of things (*wù* 物), once they have been effectively reached by a single act of pointing-in-action.
- 物指 *wùzhǐ*: “pointing”; the temporary denotation and conceptualization of things resulting from the act of pointing having come into contact with things,<sup>13</sup> that is when things have been pointed at but have not been named yet; a mental representation formed via a process of sensory perception that radically differs

<sup>12</sup> Cheng Chung-ying distinguishes “the symbol or name used to refer to a thing (物指), the act or process of reference (指) and the object of reference (指物).” (1997: 169-168). Also Chan Chi-ching identifies three different aspects of *zhǐ*, of which he provides a “saussurean” interpretation, calling them respectively sign (指), signifier (指物), and signified (物指). See Chan Chi-ching, 1998: 36. [Characters in brackets are mine]. See also Kou Pao-koh’s distinction among “signe,” “signifié,” and “signifiant”. (Kou 1953: 37-43, in particular p. 39 note 1).

<sup>13</sup> 「指是未與物結合而自離自藏的屬性存在。物是未與結合而單獨表現的材料存在。指與物結合，就成為[物指]。」(Wang Dianji 1979: 193).

from and precedes the conscious intellectual endeavour of naming, hence as pre-verbalized knowledge.

Accordingly, pointing-as-such, meant as the act of pointing in itself, could be an object of reference too, since “a name can point to an abstract entity as well as a concrete physical reality” (Kao and Obenchain 1975: 286). However, there is something ambiguous about the very nature of the act of pointing-as-such that sets it apart from all other things, including both concrete realities and abstract entities. As the text clarifies, *zhǐ* apparently cannot point at itself.<sup>14</sup> According to the ‘*Zhǐwù lùn*’, once *zhǐ* is activated, and as long as it is a process in action and not yet attached to things, *zhǐ* is what does *not* exist in the world.<sup>15</sup> Thierry Lucas states, “chih are and are not in the world. [...] chih are always chih of some objects” (Lucas 1993: 249). Therefore, it is necessary to operate one further, subtler distinction, between *pointing-as-such* (the theoretical act of pointing) and *pointing-in-action* (the concrete act of pointing).

Since the very beginning, the ‘*Zhǐwù lùn*’ introduces two fundamental polar terms, *zhǐ* and *wù*. As we are told, *wù* is all that exists in the world (「物也者天下之所有也。」), the collective set of all potential actualities taken together as a whole. At the same time, the term is used synecdochically to identify also any and

<sup>14</sup> 「此作用係指向於物而並非指向於其自身... 其活動亦非指向於指之自身。」(Xu Fuguan 1982: 16-17; see also 18).

<sup>15</sup> “As a concrete action the act of reference is not an object of reference.” (Cheng and Swain 1970: 141; see also 144-145). Cheng and Swain distinguish between “act-of-reference-as-pure-act” (what I call “pointing as such”), and “act-of-reference-as-the-act-which-concretizes” (“pointing in action”).

every single actuality that, like a particle or a cell in a living organism, constitutes a fundamental element in and partakes of the totality of reality.

According to the ‘Zhǐwù lùn’, individual things initially present themselves to the senses in a somewhat unfocused and undifferentiated form.<sup>16</sup> This is due to the limits of human intellectual capacity rather than to any lack of intrinsic ontological definiteness of things in themselves. Things consistently possess their singular, well-defined quiddities, no matter how approximate or inadequate our imperfect human perception of them might be.<sup>17</sup> Things impress our senses and automatically trigger a cognitive response in our mind that activates *zhǐ*, the “faculty that discriminates the boundaries of the substances or stuffs referred to by names” (Hansen 1983: 30), thereby forcing us to better focus the object of our perception and progressively refine our understanding of it through a set of stages. The intellectual faculty of *zhǐ* operates on the totality of reality (*wù*) in order to make

it understandable for us, mentally dissecting reality into its constituent elements that are visualized as such in our minds.<sup>18</sup> Once *wù* are individualized (Zhou Changzhong 1991:32) and appear to us as tangible, delimited objects with clear-cut borders,<sup>19</sup> our intellect is put into condition to correctly perceive and cognize individual things.

*Zhǐ* acts as a principle of individuation (Cheng and Swain 1970: 139): it identifies and distinguishes among individual things by delineating their boundaries. Thereby, *zhǐ* cuts *wù* down into knowledgeable and understandable objects of our intellectual discourse (Wang Guan 1992: 50). In the moment in which it is pointed at (*zhǐwù*), the totality of reality (*wù*) appears to us as constituted by a myriad of individual things (equally *wù*). In order to be successfully processed by our intellect, potential objects (*wù*) first have to be pointed at and singled out by the act of pointing (*zhǐ*).<sup>20</sup> By the act of pointing at things (*zhǐ*), cognitive references are produced (*wùzhǐ*). Still, this is not the final stage of the cognitive process.

Before the human mind eventually gains an adequate knowledge of things and is capable of filling them with the appropriate meaning, percepts have to be

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<sup>16</sup> This is truly what Angus C. Graham calls “the experience of the undifferentiated world which precedes language.” Though the definition refers to the *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 (Master Zhuang), it fits conveniently also into the present discourse. (1967: 25).

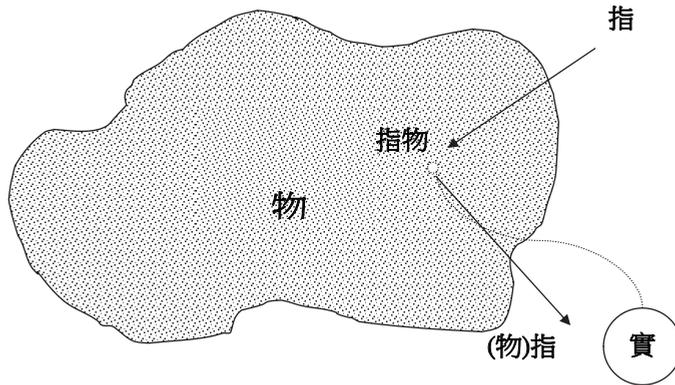
<sup>17</sup> Their essence or true nature, determined by the characteristics that make something be what it actually is. The text does not explicitly make use of such a term, which however seems to provide an accurate description of the characteristics of “qualities” as described in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*. For a definition of “quiddity”, see Armstrong (1989: 44, 55, 59; 1997: 168-169). The term actually first appears in Avicenna’s (980-1037) commentary to Porphyry’s *Logica*. In his commentary, Avicenna provides a threefold classification of the different possible aspects in which quiddities (or essences) can manifest themselves: (1) quiddities in themselves, as universal definitory terms; (2) quiddities as individual material objects (quiddity in the individual); (3) quiddities as mental concepts (quiddity in the mind). See Bos (2013: 84-89).

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<sup>18</sup> Note that this is a *mental* process that happens in the human mind. As such, it alters our own perception and conception of things, without actually changing reality or having any concrete effect on the external world. Reality is not modified by neither are things “created” through *zhǐ*. Rather, our perception of reality is modulated and informed by *zhǐ*.

<sup>19</sup> Things already are individual entities *per se*, but they initially do not appear as such to the human intellect until they are processed first through the senses, and through our cognitive categories thereafter.

<sup>20</sup> See Xu Fuguan 1982: 13-18, 48-49, though I personally would not talk of the formation of “images” in the subjective conscience for the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*, as the author does.



Picture 1

filtered through our sense organs and then be interpreted and re-elaborated cognitively, a process that culminates into the act of naming.<sup>21</sup> Through this process, things are turned into actualities (*shí* 實) – that is, things-for-us, not only intelligible to our human understanding, but also further imbued with meaning (Zhou Changzhong 1991: 25-27). As Cheng Chung-ying has pointed out, “names could be seen as signs we use to mark our understanding of things via perception and conception” (Cheng Chung-ying 1997: 169-168). Names are a conscious human product, a further, more conceptually sophisticated elaboration of the primitive denotation of things (*wùzhǐ*) through which individualized things are eventually integrated into a corresponding articulated system of normative naming conventions.<sup>22</sup> Naming is not the same as designating things by pointing at them, where by designation I mean “using linguistic terms to point to or call attention to certain aspects of physical reality, and especially to things” (Rieman 1980: 305). The different stages of the cognitive process as described in the

‘*Zhǐwù lùn*’ can be represented graphically as in *Picture 1*.

To illustrate in more detail how this latter phase in the cognitive process actually works, a good example is provided by the most famous argument associated with the figure of Gōngsūn Lóng, the paradoxical statement “white horse is not horse” (*báimǎ fēi mǎ* 白馬非馬) discussed in the ‘*Báimǎ Lùn*.’

The ‘*Báimǎ Lùn*’ is a dialogue between two fictional characters, a persuader and his opponent. The whole argument revolves around the persuader’s apparently paradoxical claim that a white horse would not be a horse. The persuader’s reasoning process resembles that of a polynomial decomposition. According to the persuader’s point of view, by decomposing “white horse” (*báimǎ* 白馬) down into its basic component terms, we would obtain: “white colour” (*báisè*

<sup>21</sup> “Every thing has a pointing and a name” 「物各有指, 亦各有名。」 (Tan Jiefu 2006: 21).

<sup>22</sup> “For Kung-sun a designation is an act involving an intentional relationship between a person, a noun and a thing” (Rieman 1977: 187).

白色) and “horse-like shape” (*mǎxíng* 馬形). What mostly hinders the understanding of the “white horse” argument is the difficulty to operate with the unconventional horse-like shape, which is neither intuitively nor immediately identifiable as a proper shape as would be, for instance, a more common geometrical figure such as a pyramid or a sphere. What is most relevant to our present discussion is that, the horse-like shape is a necessary attribute for a horse to be visually recognized and mentally acknowledged as a “horse”, while the white colour is just an “accidental quality” and belongs to a subsidiary category of attributes.

Angus C. Graham already remarked that “in Chinese philosophy things are generally conceived *not as being* their shapes, but as ‘having shape and colour’ (*yu hsing yu se* 有形有色). [...] Colour as much as shape is conceived as inside the thing [...]” (Graham 1986: 100, my emphasis).<sup>23</sup> However, a few adjustments to this statement are needed. First, things necessarily have a shape, but, apart from colour, they can also be further qualified by odour, flavour, texture, sound, and other sensory attributes. Second, two fundamentally different kinds of qualities must be distinguished. Colour belongs to the category of “accidental qualities”, a

denotation which encompasses all sensorial qualities (Cheng Chung-ying 1997: 159-160), including also taste, odour, flavour, sound, texture, and so on. “Accidental qualities” further qualify things, but are *not indispensable*. Shape, instead, provides crucial information and therefore predominates over colour. Shape actually belongs to a different kind of qualities – “structural qualities”, which have to be considered on a different ontological level<sup>24</sup> from “accidental qualities”.

In the “white horse” example, for instance, it is the horse-like *shape* that makes a horse be what it is – a horse.<sup>25</sup> When asked to think of a (generic) “horse”, everyone will produce a different mental image. What all the possible disparate mental images of a “horse” will have in common is the horse-like shape. All the images thereby produced will be mental representations of a quadruped with hooves and a flowing mane and tail. However, if no further information is provided, these images will invariably represent horses of different breeds and colours. Consequently, shape must be somehow predominant compared

<sup>24</sup> Graham was the first to notice that “white is subordinate to horse” (1986: 209), an intuition further elaborated upon by Christoph Harbsmeier, who remarked that “there is no symmetry between ‘white’ and ‘horse’. They are not construed as part of the same order” (1998: 307) and “*pai* ‘white’ and *ma* ‘horse’ are not perceived as being of the same order” (1998: 310, n2; see also 321). See also Zhou Changzhong (1991: 24-26) and Cheng Chung-ying (2007: 544). Im Manyul on the contrary claims that both colour and shape “exist on the same level of abstraction” (2007: 171-172; quotation at p. 172).

<sup>25</sup> Reding remarks that “Notons encore que la forme ‘xing’ [...] désigne une propriété inaliénable; la couleur ‘se,’ par contre, une propriété indéterminée” (1985: 413).

<sup>23</sup> Graham further clarifies that “‘a white horse is white’ affirms not that it is the part which is the colour but merely that it ‘has the colour’ (*yu se* 有色) [...]. Nor is it denied that a white horse has the shape of a horse, only that it *is* the shape.” (1986: 210-212). The original text seemingly hints at the existences of an underlying “Aristotelian” ontology, however it does never openly address the topic, nor any more detailed explanation or overarching, coherent theory is provided. I thank Elena L. Lange and David Machek for their useful comments regarding this topic.

to all other (accidental) qualities<sup>26</sup> we have identified so far.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A more detailed treatment of this topic goes beyond the scope of the present article. A very preliminary analysis of the ‘Báimǎ lùn’ along these lines can be found in my Ph.D. dissertation (Indraccolo 2010: 114-122). I have presented a broader description of the nature and the role of ‘accidental’ and ‘structural qualities’ in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* in a conference paper “Of Stones and Horses – Reading the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* in Terms of Concrete Universals” presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy (SAGP) with the Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy (SSIPS) (Fordham University, New York, October 2012). A revised and expanded version of that paper will appear in a forthcoming article.

<sup>27</sup> Concerns have been raised regarding the fact that such taxonomical system of qualities according to graded relevance would be invalidated if applied to other animal examples, as for instance the two hypothetical cases of “black crow is not crow” and “red fox is not fox” formulated for this purpose by Jean Levi (1993: 31-32) along the lines of Gongsun Long’s “white horse” example. According to this line of criticism, in such cases colour would be a quintessential quality of the animal, and provide a fundamental contribution to make it be what it actually is. Therefore, colour would have to be considered as a ‘structural quality.’ Thus, the “white horse” argument would be an ad hoc example, and represent rather the exception than the rule. However, the two examples raised by Jean Levi not only do not disprove the above postulated theory, but they rather end up supporting it: 1) foxes do come in different colours, red being only one possible variant among different pelages, in a way not too dissimilar from different breeds of horses that are distinguished by their colour patterns and assume different names accordingly; 2) “crow” indicates rather a genus (a sub-category of an animal family) than an individual animal species; “black crow” is not redundant since crows can also assume different colours, being a raven specifically a black crow. “Crow” is of course used in everyday language and communication to indicate a raven, but this term is somewhat improper. Both examples are eventually consistent with the structure of the “white horse” argument and the proposed distinction between “structural qualities” and “accidental qualities”. I am not claiming here that the ancient Chinese would have established exactly the same taxonomies that were developed later in the West, nor that they necessarily would have been aware of the classification of the animal kingdom we use today, but then these two paradoxical statements were not formulated by them either. What Levi is trying to do here is to show that a species characterized by a unique colour would invalidate the distinction between “structural qualities” and “accidental qualities”.

Moreover, as Cheng Chung-ying (2007: 546) has convincingly argued, not only do shape and colour belong to two different kinds of qualities of different, graded importance, but they are also perceived simultaneously.<sup>28</sup> The shape of an object can be perceived through sight and touch. Also, the sensory moment in which an “accidental quality” is perceived and elaborated through the senses might coincide and overlap with that of a “structural quality”, which can apparently be conveyed at the same time without interfering with the sensory process. This does not happen when a thing is qualified by more than one accidental quality. Due to the physiological limitations of human nature, our senses cannot perceive more than one “accidental quality” at a time, though such “accidental quality” can be perceived simultaneously with the most basic constitutive “structural quality” characterizing a thing. It remains unclear how “structural qualities” are actually perceived, or through which process or medium they become known and are consciously acknowledged by the human mind. It seems unlikely that they are perceived exactly in the same way as percepts. Still, the text seems relatively positive about the fact that knowledge conveyed by “structural qualities” is present in the same moment in which sensory knowledge is acquired. Whether the acquisition of such knowledge actually precedes or is basically simultaneous with the acquisition of sensory knowledge is eventually open to question.

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This is correct in principle but harder to do than it might seem, since most species are actually differentiated according to different colour patterns.

<sup>28</sup> “‘White’ and ‘horse’ are perceived to receive their meanings from perception of colour and shape” (Cheng Chung-ying 1997:155).

This preliminary analysis shows that it is possible to identify a coherent theoretical structure underlying the whole *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*. In sum, two different kinds of qualities can be distinguished, “accidental qualities” and “structural qualities”. “Accidental qualities” express characteristics that a thing has the potentiality and, under the appropriate circumstances, the possibility to express. However, this kind of qualities does not affect the very nature of the thing they are attached to, as these characteristics may or may not be expressed without altering the essential features of the thing under scrutiny. “Structural qualities” instead describe fundamental characteristics that a thing necessarily has to express in order to be what it actually is. Not only can “structural qualities” be perceived through different senses, but they are also invariably perceived simultaneously with “accidental qualities”. As a consequence, each sensory moment is characterized by the perception of both an “accidental quality” and an underlying “structural quality” (or qualities) that let a thing be what it is. “Accidental qualities” can only be made sense of when combined with “structural qualities”, the awareness of which is fundamental to conceptualize and eventually *know* a thing.

Let us now take a look at another text associated with the Logicians, the *Yīnwénzǐ*. The *Yīnwénzǐ* is a received “Masters text” in two chapters traditionally attributed to the thinker Yīn Wén that was most probably compiled during the Medieval period on the basis of earlier materials dating back to the Warring States. The *Yīnwénzǐ* undertakes a similar reflection upon and supports an interpretation of things, qualities, and names and their mutual relationship consistent with the one illustrated in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*.

In particular, the text emphasizes the necessity to rectify names and to ensure that a univocal correspondence is established between names and their respective actualities. Moreover, it further underlines the fundamental conceptual distinction existing between things and their attributes, as it merges quite clearly in the first chapter ‘Dà Dào shàng’ 大道上 (The Great Way – Upper Chapter):

好牛[……]「好」則物之通稱，「牛」則物之定形[……]。設復言「好馬」，則復連於「馬」矣，則「好」所通，無方也。設復言「好人」，則彼屬於人矣，則「好」非人，「人」非好也。則「好牛」、「好馬」、「好人」之名自離矣，故曰：名分不可相亂也。

In the expression “good ox”, “good” is the commonly acknowledged appellation of a thing, while “ox” defines the fixed shape of a thing [...]. If again we say “good horse”, [good] is once again attached to horse, therefore “good” is a general term without a fixed collocation. If again we say “good man”, then this (quality) does indeed belong to man, though “good” is not (the same as) man, and “man” is not (the same as) good. Therefore, in the expressions “good ox”, “good horse”, and “good man” names stay separate from one another. This is the reason why we say that names must be distinguished and cannot be confused one for another.

The text introduces a complex taxonomy that classifies words used to qualify things according to three distinct categories, shifting the focus of attention from things to attributes, and in particular qualitative attributes. As Forke also remarks, the *Yīnwénzǐ* “distinguished three categories of words, or properly speaking, of attributes: (1) words describing things, such as square and round, white and black; (2) words approving or

disapproving, e.g. good and bad, noble and mean; (3) comparative words, e.g. wise and stupid, to love and to hate” (1901-02: 10):

名有三科[……]一曰命物之名，方圓白黑是也；二曰毀譽之名，善惡貴賤是也；三曰況調之名，賢愚愛憎是也

There are three kinds of names. Names of the first kind are terms that designate things, like “square” and “round,” “white” and “black;” names of the second kind are terms for praise and blame, like “good” and “bad,” “eminent” and “humble;” names of the third kind are terms for comparative appellations, like “wise” and “stupid,” “love” and “hate.”

As mentioned above, there is also another text closely associated with the Logicians that should be brought into consideration in the present analysis, the *Dèngxīzǐ*. The *Dèngxīzǐ* is a “Masters text” traditionally attributed to the homonymous Spring and Autumn (770-475 B.C.) lawyer and scholar Dèng Xī 鄧析. However, the received text was most probably forged during the Six Dynasties (220-589 A.D.) (Forke 1901-02 :17-26; Wilhelm 1947: 41-96, esp. 54-58; Harbsmeier 1998: 286-289) and today only two chapters survive. Still, despite its composite nature and troubled transmission, the *Dèngxīzǐ* can substantially add to our overall understanding of the cognitive process as conceived in this trend of thought.

Significant references to the topic under discussion that are seemingly consistent with the description of the knowledge process provided in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ* are scattered throughout the text. The first chapter ‘Wúhòu’ 無厚 (No Mercy) clarifies that it is through the close observation of the external appearance of what surrounds us that it is possible to get to know their shapes. Only through such close scrutiny

of surrounding reality are we eventually capable of grasping the fundamental structural principle lying at the very heart of and informing their truest nature. Consequently, we are eventually capable of producing an appropriate corresponding appellative through the very act of naming.

16. 見其象，致其形；循其理，正其名。

Looking at their external appearance, one gets to know their shapes. Abiding by their fundamental intrinsic principles, one rectifies their names.

Eventually, names play a crucial role in maintaining social order and equanimity, as they are the ultimate criterion of truth and the primary concern of a ruler:

2. 循名責實，君之事也。

To ensure that names correspond to actualities is the ruler’s duty.

And again

5. 循名責實，察法立威，是明王也

He who ensures that names correspond to actualities and establishes his authority through a strict scrutiny of fundamental standards<sup>29</sup> is an enlightened ruler.

The *Dèngxīzǐ* actually takes the discussion one step further by introducing a supersensory dimension that transcends the scope and limits of ordinary human perception. This dimension is only accessible to those who are capable of establishing a more immediate and genuine relationship with the external world. This is possible due to their heightened sensory sensitivity and

<sup>29</sup> I would like to thank one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to Chad Hansen’s article (1994) on the meaning of *fǎ* 法 (“laws” or “standards”). The first to propose a translation of *fǎ* as “standard” instead of the usual “laws, regulations” was apparently Herrlee G. Creel (1974: 32; 144-148). On this topic see also Schwartz (1985: 321-323).

sharper intellectual capacity. Such talented individuals immediately evoke the image of the sage as described in several Classical texts, a “perceptual virtuoso” endowed with “sharper faculties of sight and hearing, and ultimately, [to] comprehensive knowledge of the world [...], distinguished by his ability to perceive underlying patterns.” (Brown and Bergeton 2008: 641, 647, 649). As Forke points out, “Têng Hsi discriminates between ordinary perceptions, ordinary knowledge and real perceptions or real knowledge” (Forke 1901-02:20) a theoretical differentiation that goes somewhat beyond the apparently more detached, almost “scientific” assessment of the cognitive process as described in the *Gōngsūn Lóngzǐ*:

4.誠聽能聞於無聲,視能見於無形[.....]不以耳聽,則通於無聲矣。不以目視則照於無形矣。不以心計則達於無兆。不以知慮則和於未然矣。

He who can actually listen for real hears what emits no sound; he who can actually look for real sees what has no form [...]. Not listening with their ears, they perceive what emits no sound; not looking with their eyes, they discern what has no form; not scheming with their heart-mind, they grasp what is not manifest; not reflecting with their intellect, they conform to what has not happened yet.

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Finally, the present analysis shows that through a close reading of the texts traditionally attributed to thinkers belonging to the Logicians, it is possible to reconstruct a more or less consistent, highly structured theory of human knowledge that presents minor variations cross-textually. These texts provide detailed information about how the overwhelming complexity of reality is broken down into manageable knowledge units. At a subsequent stage, information about such units under the form of sensible data is filtered and processed through our sensory system first, and intellect thereafter. The cognitive process eventually culminates with the conscious act of naming, through which univocal descriptive and prescriptive appellatives are bestowed upon things. It can be concluded that there is a substantial underlying agreement among this group of texts about the different stages that characterize the cognitive process through which we relate ourselves perceptually and cognitively with the world that surrounds us. Therefore, these texts are not only far from being a fragmentary, inconclusive array of scattered thoughts, but they also succeed in presenting a coherent, overarching trans-textual theory of human knowledge.

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## VIDINIS IR IŠORINIS PASAULIAI: DAIKTŲ, MATERIJS IR PROTO PRIGIMTIS PAGAL GŌNGSŪN LÓNGZĪ

Lisa Indraccolo

**Santrauka.** Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiamas pažinimo naratyvas, pateikiamas nepelnytai mažo dėmesio su-  
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