A DAOIST THEORY OF CHINESE THOUGHT

A Philosophical Interpretation

CHAD HANSEN

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1

An Introduction with Work to Do

A missing text is always an exciting discovery. The later Mohist dialectic chapters are a unique case. They form a missing text that was not physically lost. Chinese archivists had copied and transmitted it down through two millennia after a textual accident had turned it into an incoherent jigsaw puzzle. The interpretive tradition lost the ability to understand the text. A Qing scholar first discovered the key to the puzzle near the end of the nineteenth century. Angus Graham completed the systematic reconstruction of the text in his *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* in 1978.

The Mohist text gives us access to a detailed classical Chinese theory of language. It thus poses a rare challenge and an opportunity. The Mohists exemplify the opposite of the ruling stereotype of Chinese thought. That stereotype treats *analytic thought* and *Chinese thought* as virtual opposites. Now Graham has shown that many Chinese philosophers of the period knew the basic principles of Chinese linguistic analysis. They both understood and applied its technical terminology. Any coherent account of the period must now shoulder a new task. We must explain how that intense interest in language analysis arose out of the philosophical context. This missing text challenges us to revise our entire view of the classical period of Chinese philosophy.

Coincidentally, general studies of the entire classical period are beginning to come back in style. Benjamin Schwartz published his monumental *The World of Thought in Ancient China* in 1985 and Angus Graham followed in 1989 with his *Disputers of Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. Both studies, however, mainly develop the ruling stereotype. Schwartz surveys several new approaches to the classical thinkers but he consistently finds the reasons for departing from traditional interpretations deficient. Graham is intentionally more revisionist. (His theories are among those that Schwartz rejects.) Still, he structures his account around the familiar reason-intuition dichotomy that devotees of Eastern wisdom have used to explain Chinese thought since Northrup first proposed it.[1] I regard both as differing versions of a deeper standard interpretation. Bifurcating the tradition into separate analytic and intuitive components is the trademark of the traditional standard view. Schwartz treats Chinese linguistic analysis as a minor and irrelevant aberration and largely ignores it. Graham, of course, gives it more extensive treatment. Still, he treats analytic reason and intuitive mysticism (spontaneity) as two distinct and incompatible philosophical styles. Analytic reason, he argues, lost out in ancient China.

Both scorn the challenge to revise and unify the interpretive theory that was

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dominant before we understood the analytic Chinese philosophers. Neither challenges our familiar romantic assumptions that antirational mysticism is distinctive of Chinese thought. Both, in different ways, relegate the language theorists to an out-of-tune limbo in Chinese thought. A *unified interpretation* should try *to explain* how these different philosophical directions in Chinese thought emerged from a shared philosophical perspective and problems.

Unifying our interpretive theory of the period requires that we thoroughly rethink the background beliefs we attribute to the preanalytic philosophers. A unified theory must show both how earlier philosophical issues led to the interest in linguistic analysis *and* to the particular line of analysis they followed. The view that Chinese linguistic analysis is an inexplicable aberration in Chinese thought should raise our skeptical eyebrows.

The New Perspective and Philosophical Progress

My motivation in writing differs from that of the two giants of sinology who preceded me. Confucius posed the classic polarity, "To study without thinking is worthless, to think without study is dangerous." The trick, of course, is to find where the balance lies. My instincts are philosophical, not historical. I depend heavily on what other scholars have learned about Chinese thought. But for me, the challenge has always been to make some sense of it. My response to the challenge is also philosophical. Philosophers construct *thought experiments* when exploring theoretical frameworks. We test philosophical positions by detailing how they would *spin out.* We test our intuitions or considered judgments by imagining alternative theories.

In one sense, the philosopher's urge is to start from scratch—the view from nowhere.[2] We can't, of course. But classical Chinese philosophy gave me a chance to do the next best thing. What would it be like to do philosophy with a *radically different* set of assumptions? The assumptions I trace are constrained, but not by the limits on my imagination or current theoretical purposes. Chinese philosophy allowed me to perform a thought experiment removed from the immediate task of solving some outstanding philosophical problem. At the same time, it allowed me to *start over* in a sense—but not from nowhere. The new starting point is a real place that is just very different. I imagine myself retracing the rise of philosophy in *the one place in the actual world* most removed from our own in spatial, temporal, linguistic, cultural, and conceptual terms.

The texts and the language set real and rich limits on this exercise of philosophical imagination. The philosophical and conceptual theories I attribute to Chinese thinkers should meet two explanatory goals. Those theories should both *explain* and *be explainable.* That is, it must explain the text as expressing a theory, and it must explain why thinkers using that language and addressing those philosophical issues would adopt the theory.

My quarrel with the current state of interpretative theory thus goes far beyond its failure to explain Chinese analytic theory of language. It fails adequately to explain a host of things. It has notoriously (and admittedly) failed to make sense of Daoism, it denigrates Mohism as shallow, boring or *excessively Western,* and makes

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Legalism an implausible ideology of official cruelty. So it not only marginalizes the analytic school; it marginalizes *all* the classical thinkers except Confucians. The Confucian theory even fails to make much sense of Confucianism itself. It tends to be filled with defensive claims that objecting to its obvious inadequacies reveals a modern or Western or (horrors!) analytic bias.

I don't quite see the point of denying my guilt. There are many modern, Western, analytic views of many different things. I believe some and disbelieve others. One of the things I believe is that no one I know personally has successfully adopted the view from nowhere. I doubt that my pretending to have done so would increase my credibility except among the gullible, who, I suppose, will already have stopped reading. So I will neither adopt a ''Just the facts, Ma'am'' tone nor represent what follows as the shared conclusions of all serious and competent scholars. I am aware, and the reader will be soon, that I disagree with the wise men of the realm.

Given our inherent limitations, objectivity must take the form of explaining why our perspective would vary. I came to the study of Chinese philosophy just as Graham was working out his account of the Analytic school, with its rich theory of language. I thought about that *first.* Having made some sense of that, I looked at Daoism. It looked philosophically interesting! Then early Mohism, out of which this study grew, looked much richer and more pivotal. Even Legalism seemed more sensible. The conventional theory of Confucianism seemed to fit into a coherent picture that unified the whole period.

The key to my view of Chinese thought is this. I attribute a theory of language and mind to Chinese thinkers that differs fundamentally from the popular Western view. This theory of language makes sense of the philosophical disputes between the ancient philosophers. It is a very different theory. We can explain those differences either as prima facie plausible or as a tenable theory of language for this philosophical tradition—given the Chinese language and their other philosophical presuppositions. It both explains and can be explained.

Attributing a radically different theory of language and mind to the classical tradition reveals good, albeit also radically different, philosophy. But more important, it reveals a unified philosophical point of view that develops and matures in an interesting way until banned, buried, and burned by political authority. The only cost of this new perspective is that Confucianism does not come out on top philosophically. In fact it ends up near the bottom. The same political authority that stifled further philosophical development also awarded Confucianism its high position in history. One of my Daoist biases is against argument from authority—especially political authority.

I will attribute the following perspective on language to all Chinese philosophers of the period: Language is a social practice. Its basic function is guiding action. The smallest units of guiding discourse are *ming*$^{\text{names}}$.* We string *ming*$^{\text{names}}$ together in progressively larger units. The salient compositional linguistic structure is a *dao*$^{\text{guiding}}$

*I will use this superscript notation to refer to Chinese characters in my interpretive metalanguage. When I use such a notation, I am using (or mentioning) the Chinese concept. The translation in superscript is to help readers who know Chinese identify the concept and to help others follow the theory. Use of this notation does not mean that the supplied translation is identical to the intended concept. This whole book, not the superscripts, is my interpretive theory. A change in superscripts does not mean a change in character. I include a glossary of characters with the different superscripts at the end of the book.

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[discourse].* The Chinese counterpart of interpretation is not an account of the truth conditions. Rather, to *interpret* a *dao* is to *perform* it. The interpretation of a *dao*[guiding discourse] starts from the interpretation of the *ming*[names] that compose it. In learning a conventional name, you learn a socially shared way of making discriminations in guiding your action according to a *dao*[way].

The issues that provoke skepticism and drive philosophical reflection in this perspective differ from their counterparts in the Western tradition in intelligibly related ways. These issues include: (1) what standards should guide the social conventions for discriminating and applying a term† (2) whether there are extralinguistic sources or standards of guidance and (3) whether we can find any constant (objective) way of fixing which language to use in guiding behavior or the ways of interpreting it. These questions, I will argue, both motivated the early philosophers and led to the newly discovered Neo-Mohists' theory of language. The Later Mohists proposed a referential semantics for names and embedded it in the larger pragmatic project. All the ancient thinkers viewed languages as a way to coordinate and regulate behavior. No one in this tradition developed a theory that the central function of language was representing or picturing facts or reality.

My theory identifies four progressive stages in Classical doctrines about language and mind. The first stage is the positive *dao* [way] period, what the Daoists call the *Ru-Mo*[Confucian – Mohist] period. The philosophical dispute in this stage concerned what language we should use in guiding a society. Should tradition set the standards of discourse or should we reform those standards? If we are to reform them, we need a standard or criterion such as utility. How could we justify using such a standard? Tradition would reject it and utilitarian justification presupposes it.

The perceived futility of the *Ru-Mo* debate led to the second stage—the antilanguage *dao* period. Both Confucian and Daoist thinkers from this period rejected the earlier ideal of guiding behavior by social conventional discourse. They appealed to a natural, intuitive, or innate guide to behavior. This development led to the doctrines of Mencius and the Laozi form of Daoism.

The third period—the analytic period—exposed the incoherence of the antilanguage position. It led to the realist analysis of the Later Mohist school. But the school of names also included a strain of relativist-skepticism about language. This motivated the skepticism of Zhuangzi.

*The obvious contrast here with Western thought lies in the absence of compositional units corresponding to sentences. Chinese thinkers did not distinguish sentential units as an intermediate structure. Thus they did not focus on truth conditions. Similarly, their philosophy of mind did not include the theory of beliefs (sentences in mentalese). And their moral theory did not focus on rules (universal prescriptive sentences). The Later Mohists did begin to analyze compositionality but mainly analyzed how names are compounded and included in noun and verb phrases.

†The issue of realism versus conventionalism (of word use) still drives ancient Chinese versions of skepticism. Classical Chinese skepticism questioned the constancy of naming, not the descriptive accuracy of beliefs or perception. That skeptical premise lead to the conclusion that no scheme of linguistic guidance was constant or reliable in guiding action. The postanalytic philosophers faced this specter of skepticism with two results. Daoists, like Zhuang zi, playfully romped in skeptical freedom from convention. Confucians and their offspring, the Legalists, viewed linguistic skepticism as criminally dangerous and disorderly. Since language played a role in coordinating and regulating cooperative behavior, skepticism threatened society with a deep kind of anarchy. They advocated using authoritarian methods to impose and stabilize social control of how people use names.

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The perception that analysis bred conceptual anarchy motivated the final, authoritarian period. Xunzi's conventional authoritarianism filtered through his ruling class student, Han Feizi, yielding the ideology of controlling language and expression exclusively in the interest of the political ruler.

This unified theory thus identifies a central and dominant philosophical problem that informs classical discussion of a whole range of issues. I shall argue that the problem of practical interpretation of terms—How do we project the distinctions associated with a term in concrete settings to guide our behavior?*—dominated the classical Chinese period.

In using words, we must make distinctions correctly in new settings.† The guiding ideal of this classical period of Chinese thought is to get a constant *dao*—a form of discourse that *reliably* guides behavior. The crux of the issue in the Daoist analysis is that a constant *dao* requires constant naming. There are many possible standards. Any actual *dao* arbitrarily picks out one of the possible standards as the constant guide to naming.

Normally an introduction should end here. But as my title suggests, this introduction has much more work to do. I propose to do more than merely state a novel view. I shall argue that the theory I attribute to Chinese thinkers better explains their writings as a unified and coherent philosophical tradition. This argument requires identifying a rival theory and explaining in what sense the theory I will set out is better. The arguments are based on a theory of the connection between philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. The casual reader may find the going a bit heavy in what follows. I suggest three possible routes through the rest of this argumentative preface and introduction. The first is to skip it entirely and go directly to the narrative, starting with Confucius. The second is to read only the main text and skip the footnotes. I have tried to place the more recondite lines of argument and analysis in those notes. I warmly invite potential critics and rival interpretive theorists to follow the third route.

The Ruling Interpretive Theory

I present my new interpretive theory in contrast to what I will variously call the *standard,* or *orthodox,* or *traditional,* or *ruling* theory of Chinese thought. Of course, other interpreters have proposed *many* theories with significant differences. Together they make up the received view of the classics of Chinese philosophy. No one specifically is a model of the standard theory. From the perspective of this Daoist theory, all the different interpretive theories with which I am familiar have some strong

*My assumption is that any productive, energetic philosophical period has a central dominant focus. The search for an account of meaning and truth in metaphysical terms dominated the classical Greek philosophical period. The problem of sense skepticism and conceptualist philosophy of mind and meaning dominated the early modern European period. Similarly, describing the metaphysical attitude that characterizes the awareness of the sage dominated the Neo-Confucian period.

†This is a Chinese version of Kripke's Wittgenstein puzzle. See Kripke (1963). What counts as following a rule for the use of a term? How do we project the term correctly into situations that are different from the learning situation?

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similarities. They share a set of related features and assumptions. The shared assumptions of these theories constitute *the ruling theory.*

I will state the features of the ruling theory that most concern me besides the introductory one—that they bifurcate the tradition. They are all (perhaps unwittingly) pro-Confucian. To varying degrees, they identify Chinese philosophy with Confucian philosophy. Either they talk only or mainly of Confucianism, or their explanations exaggerate the centrality of Confucianism. They discuss other schools mainly from the perspective of Confucian thinkers. A standard account typically includes defensive apologies for Confucianism. For example, it dismisses obvious philosophical objections to Confucianism as Western or modern anachronisms and hints that critics who raise these objections have an unfair analytic bias.

Standard theories commonly take a philosophical stand in favor of doctrines congenial to Confucianism, for example, intuitionism, traditionalism, elitism, right-brain aesthetic sensitivity, antiutilitarianism, virtue and special-relations ethics, and so forth. Taking a position, again, is not objectionable on its face. I am simply less sympathetic to the alleged Confucian positions. But I am sympathetic to other positions that I take to be common to the entire tradition: naturalistic theories of mind and pragmatic theories of language.

My objection, accordingly, is not merely to the defects that I see in these philosophical positions. Nor is it directly to the pro-Confucian bias. My objection is that the ruling strategy for making Confucianism look good exacts too high a theoretical cost *on the rest of our interpretive theory* of the period.* Standard theories buttress

*Schwartz warns us of the dangers in proposing to revise the received interpretation as I do. To propose a basic revision of the received view, he warns, commits us to what the calls "the doctrine of the privileged or transcendental vantage point" (Schwartz, 1985, p. 50). His skepticism of our ability to take a radically detached perspective grounds his own comfortable acceptance of the inherited ruling interpretive theory. But this is to *retain* the ideal of the privileged vantage point. It *privileges* the tradition and *burdens* any proposed alternative.

Treating interpretation as theory allows us to understand interpretive progress *without* assuming a privileged or transcendantal viewpoint. Schwartz is correct that we can never start from a blank slate and assume an unmediated direct access to Chinese thought. Theoretical advance in interpretation is like theoretical advance in any scientific theory. We float, as Neurath's famous metaphor has it, in the ship of previous theory even as we repair it. We rely on the received theory to justify the very hypotheses we use in revising it. As scholarship progresses, we find ways to make the interpretive theory explain the texts better. We work for more adequate interpretive explanations. My interpretive hypotheses, however radical, do not amount to a totally new theory. The revisions I propose start at a higher level of abstraction, but my Daoist version still follows the logical form of a progressive revision of received theory to eliminate problems in that theory.

The riddle each interpreter must face is what to revise and how to revise it. The scientific parallel gives us the account of *confirming* any proposed theory. That same model also reminds us that we still have no plausible account of the logic of discovery. Perhaps Schwartz's worry is about how we could imagine the alternative theory to subject to the test of explanatory adequacy. When we find a consistency problem in the standard theory, which of the two incoherent elements do we reject? What do we put in its place? Since we do not have any direct privileged access to the original facts, how are we to tackle these problems?

I do have a strategy. I do not start from a privileged transcendental point of view. I practice Daoist reversal of opposites. The standard theory seeks primarily to make sense of Confucianism and accepts the consequence that the rivals are vulnerable to criticism. I start by making sense of Daoism. The discovery comes by systematically removing pro-Confucian (anti-Daoist, anti-Mohist, anti-Legalist) bias from the standard theory. That is the discovery strategy. The *proof* strategy comes from the scientific parallel—comparative evaluation of the explanatory power of the new theory.

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this tilt toward Confucianism with a theory of other schools that makes them, at best, hard to motivate. Mohism becomes a shallow, unattractive, low-class, hyperreligious moralism and Daoism becomes a notoriously incomprehensible and contradictory mysticism. The analytic school of names becomes pointless logic chopping, and Legalism becomes an implausibly horrific and baseless celebration of cruel despotism. Even Confucianism does not fare all that well—hence the need for apologetics. The problem is that the standard theory is deficient in explanatory power.

The advantage of abandoning Confucian bias is that we can still make the *same* sense of Confucianism that the standard accounts do. We simply avoid lavish approbation and defensive claims that its predilections are quintessentially Chinese. The Confucian positions may be defended, but there are some obvious attacks. Did no one in the tradition think to make them? If we look for the natural philosophical criticisms of Confucianism, we will find that contemporary philosophical rivals of Confucianism did make them. Thus, we can make these rivals straightforwardly intelligible. Clearly developing these criticisms of the philosophical positions of standard theories will give us the handle we need to make clear sense of the entire tradition. The standard strategy makes only partial sense of Confucianism.

Another feature of the standard theories is that they attribute the conceptual structure of a Western theory of mind and language to Confucian writers. This results from the translation paradigm that tempts us to regard English as fixing the possible meaning structure of Chinese.* Linking Chinese and English words further tempts us to view their philosophical theories as straightforward counterparts of our own. I shall discuss this feature of standard theories further in the next section.

The ruling interpretive theory of Chinese thought is an evolutionary product of the theory Westerners first learned in the initial encounters of our two cultures. We became conscious of China during the late medieval dominance of what Western historians call the Neo-Confucian school.† The Neo-Confucian period came after a long period of Buddhist domination of Chinese thought. Our description, *Neo-Confucian,* introduces the skeptical possibility that those medieval Confucians *did not correctly* interpret classical philosophy.[3]

The Translation Paradigm

A standard methodology accompanies the standard interpretive theory. The implicit methodology is part of our training in Chinese. It instills a translation focus. The translation tradition camouflaged the theoretical nature of translation. We assumed

*I call this the English-is-the-only-real-language fallacy in honor of my son, who first formulated it in those words. "Why," I asked him, "do you say that English is the only real language?" "Because every other language means something in English."

†Chinese accounts speak instead of at least three late medieval Confucian schools: of principle, of mind, and of Han learning. There were significant internal disagreements among these schools. Clustering the three in one classification endures among Western scholars for good theoretical reasons. It draws on the historical theory current in the Neo-Confucian traditional schools. That historical theory suggests that a philosophical dark age brought on by political oppression followed the classical age. An eight-hundred-year period of Buddhist intellectual domination followed. So this is a Confucianism separated from its own classical tradition by two radical intellectual gaps in transmission.

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we were learning *the* meaning of a term when we consulted a dictionary. From a realist perspective, a dictionary is a widely accepted interpretive theory—albeit in an inelegant and unargued form.* We learned that translation precedes interpretation. When you propose an interpretation, you should cite a translation as *evidence*. That makes translations analogous to observations. But the translation itself presupposes an interpretive theory. The alleged *evidence* is circular unless we can independently support the interpretive theory embodied in the translation. Being in a dictionary is not the support we need. The dictionary is an inherited, piecemeal, fragmented interpretive theory.†

*Students of Chinese learn a set of dictionary equivalents among which we choose in different contexts. We also learn grammar in the form of a vague set of conventionally accepted heuristics for generating sentences of English from sentences of classical Chinese. A scientifically adequate grammar should consist of a set of recursive rules for generating a potentially infinite set of meaningful strings. A translation manual for pre-Han philosophical Chinese embodies a model for generating functionally equivalent sentences of English. The rules for translation thus follow from an interpretive model or theory of *both* languages. We assume that we natively know the interpretion of English.

English in this case, is the language in which we construct our interpretive theory—the metalanguage in contrast to the target language that we are interpreting. It does not presuppose that English is privileged. We construct a theory of a language that we strive to explain using the resources of one we know. Our idiomatic ways of talking about meaning together with the translation paradigm tempt us to what I have called the English-is-the-only-real-language fallacy. We talk as if the meaning *is* an English language structure.

Sinological training is dominated by the translation paradigm. Sinologists focus attention and analysis on what term to use more than on what theory to adopt. Searching for the closest possible familiar term, they unwittingly translate the conventional conceptual assumptions into their accounts. They accept each seemingly small incoherence that results from translation. They dismiss these with the conventional line, "Translation can, after all, never be exact." They never pursue the hypothesis that the accumulation of small errors might be an indication of a quite different conceptual scheme. If we imaginatively and coherently elaborated an alternative, it may turn out to fit the texts better.

The deeper problem is the translation paradigm itself. Whether one accepts conventional dictionary equivalents or suggests new ones, the translation paradigm confuses theory and observation. Translators assume that determining the right English translation equivalent is a relatively straightforward, empirical matter that *precedes* interpretation. We simply check that the expression *makes sense of* each context where the Chinese term is used. What the translation paradigm ignores is that many alternative translation equivalents could make sense of each isolated sentence containing the term. To decide among these requires some principle for evaluating the implied theory of what beliefs the writers held. Meaning cannot be determined independently from belief.

†The translation model motivates the conventional cliché, but the problem with this cliché becomes acute when the translator proceeds with the interpretation. She assumes that what she did before—the translation—is objectively verifiable and what she is about to do is subjective and speculative. The translator's speculations are then guided by inferences that she draws from the scheme of beliefs and theories in which *the English word* functions. This naturally tempts us to the interpretive hypothesis that Chinese philosophical theories are like our own. The result is a circular argument that their philosophy must have the same conceptual structure that ours does.

There are two manifestations of the translation-priority malady. One arises because the translator has chosen an ambiguous English word as the translation. The translation always works because there is always *a meaning* of the English term that makes sense. But then the interpreter draws inferences from the other meanings. An example is *know*. I will argue that Chinse *zhi*^{know} works only like English *know-how, know-to,* or *know-about*—but not *know-that*. The translations therefore always make sense, but interpreters end up attributing Western epistemological assumptions to Chinese thinkers despite the fact that there is no equivalent *belief* verb or a concept of *truth*. They are talking about knowledge, they reason, so Chinese writers must be talking about the same thing Western philosophers talk about (true belief) when *they* talk about knowledge.

Another example is *argument*. It has two distinct senses in English. In one sense it is roughly syn-

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I remember fondly how often the phrase ''that's not the way it is traditionally understood'' came up in all my classical Chinese classes. Our training thus inculcated a Confucian cognitive strategy—conformity to traditional or conventional interpretive standards. The accepted standard of *good* scholarly translation is that one must consult and cite commentary supporting one's translation.* This suggests to students that the correct form of argument is appeal to traditional authority.

The personal nature of this work is a consequence of my focus on theory. I cannot claim to report a scholarly consensus or the conclusions of the last fifty years of sinology. This sometimes feels more like a confession of frustrated inadequacy. Those who claimed to know Chinese assured me that if I knew Chinese, I would see that *this* is the meaning. After years of study, it never happened to me. I *always* had to *theorize* about the meaning and then test my theories. To attribute a particular meaning to a section seemed to require that I attribute a certain doctrine to the author.

onymous with *quarrel*. In another it is synonymous with *proof*. Graham translates *bian*[dispute] as *argument* and deduces himself into finding the study of logic and a theory of reason in Chinese philosophy. If they were talking about argument, then this must be the theory of argumentation—proofs and reasons.

The opposite error occurs when we find ourselves using several English terms for different uses of a Chinese concept. When translators choose which term to use, they assume that the Chinse writer is using it in the sense of the chosen English word—as if he had English in his mind. They fail to try proposing a unified theory of the conceptual role of the term. This leads them to the sinological shibboleth that Chinese words have lots of separate meanings, and, in turn, to the fragmentation to which I have been objecting. The translation paradigm buries the conceptual connections between different theorists and the different aspects of their theories. The examples here are a multitude but some important examples include *ming*[to name:command:fate], *shi*[this:right:assent:is], *dao*[doctrine:way:speak:guide], *fa*[standard:laws], *yan*[words:language:doctrine], *wei*[do:deem:make:for the sake of], etc. We must remember that the speaker uses the same term in these different contexts, he need not suppose that there are *two* concepts merely because we use two different English equivalents. Nor must he even suppose that what we identify as nominal and verbal uses are different. Of course, we may conclude that he is wrong about this. But it is not plausible to attribute *even our allegedly true belief* about the character to the Chinese writer. It is motivated for us mainly by the requirement that we use the appopriate part of speech when we translate it to English. No Chinese writer will have had his attention focused in that way.

In deciding on an interpretation, further, it is not enough to make sense of individual sentences. We must make sense of the attributed scheme of inferentially related beliefs and philosophical theories. The translation is a good one *only* if we can argue that the pattern of inferences among attributed beliefs is intelligible. We can say that a philosopher has a certain concept *only if* we can give a reason for him to adopt the theory associated with the concept. The pattern of inference among attributed concepts must explain the Chinese philosophical texts better than available alternatives. If the pattern of inferences among terms is not intelligible, then the translation is mistaken.

The dictionary model of translation merely bungles this issue a bit worse than the translation model by itself. It takes the dictionary writer's theory of meaning as given. Then, when faced with the lack of the confirming pattern of inference among concepts, it concludes that Chinese thinkers have special, exotic inference strategies. Thus, reliance on the dictionary paradigm leads quickly to the conclusion that Chinese thinkers use a special logic. Dictionary translation virtually guarantees that one's interpretative theory will be unoriginal, wooden, inconsistent, and obscure. Philosophers regard a dictionary, therefore, as nothing more than a choppy, unstructured, unreflective, and theoretically irresponsible semantic theory.

*The state of art in accounts of Chinese syntax consists mainly of heuristics for translation in connection with a dictionary. Otherwise, specialists in Chinese language concentrate either on phonology or etymology. They construct rival theories of *the* original pronunciation of various characters or trace how graphic shapes developed from hypothetical ideographs or actual graphs on oracle bones and bronzes. In the absence of any credible recursive semantic or interpretive theory, scholars tend to treat theoretical approaches to interpretation as inherently undisciplined unless buttressed by claims from phonology or etymology.

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To do that, I needed to see a plausible reason why the author would hold such a theory. I could see little plausibility in what the commentaries said was the obvious reason.

Unable to see either the obvious meaning or make any sense of the attributed obvious doctrine that those who knew Chinese saw, I felt like the youngster viewing the emperor's new clothes. Was I meaning-blind? Was I narrow-minded? Should I just accept that fundamentally different kinds of things could be reasons for Chinese thinkers? How could I discover that liberating truth unless I had that elusive direct access to the gossamer threads of meaning that others seemed to see? But try after try, I could only see characters. No aura, no shimmering flashes of meaning met my eyes. The challenge was to say what else it could reasonably mean. That is what I will now attempt to do.

My instinctive assumptions are realistic. An expression has a meaning. Commentaries propose *a theory* of what that meaning is. The dictionary is a theory. A translation of a passage *presupposes* the translator's theory; it is not evidence for it. When we adopt different meaning theories we attribute to the writer different beliefs. If I say that the character *niu*[ox] means *dog* and you say that it means *horse,* I attribute to the writer the belief that there is a dog over there and you attribute to him the belief that there is a horse over there. An interpretive theory of a language is more plausible when it better explains the beliefs it attributes to those who wrote it.

The standard theory attributes an incoherent, mystical, irrational set of beliefs to Daoists. I will propose a theory that makes them not only reasonable but incisive in critique of Confucianism. That, and not appeal to authority or circular citation of translations, is the evidence for my revised interpretive theory.

Suppose a defender of the standard theory says, "But it's not a failure of our interpretive theory that the Daoists seem irrational. They in fact are!" This simply begs the question. If they add, "Look, here is what they say," and produce a translation, they rely on the very interpretive theory that is in dispute. Suppose they add, "Chinese may reason differently from the way we reason." We simply ask how they could know such a thing. "Well, look at the Daoists!" That begs the question again. The only way to confirm the "it doesn't matter if Daoism seems irrational" hypothesis is to show that *on no plausible interpretive theory* can we make sense of it.

I propose to show that it is possible to make sense of Daoism. This meta-argument shows that, if possible, such a theory is in that regard better than the standard theory. It shows why appeals to authority or tradition in meaning theory are invalid. A better theory of meaning and background beliefs is a better theory—period. Nothing, of course, can force one to give up bad theories. But if it is a better theory, we ought to adopt it.*

*A simple question clarifies this realistic instinct. What makes an interpretive theory the correct one? The answer is not as simple. We need some principle to select among alternate interpretive theories: for example, the Confucian principle is conformity to tradition. What feature of one interpretive theory makes it scientifically better than some alternative?

Philosophers have proposed and discussed two such principles: the principle of charity and the principle of humanity. The principle of charity is a natural extension of the motivation of the formal logic-based origin of the philosophical theory. It endorses the interpretive theory that makes more of the corpus of expressions of the target language *true*.

Advocates of the principle of humanity worry that application of the principle of charity poses a danger, since in practice, it foists upon users of that language a body of truths which we (with a com-

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The Fragmented-Schools View

My list of possible Confucian prejudices is incomplete and, as I argued, inconclusive. On their face, they do not make the ruling theory objectionable. I object to them because they undermine our ability to make sense of the rest of the tradition. I want now to focus on other bias-inducing structural features of the ruling interpretive theory.

Our current versions of the Neo-Confucian theory have two related dubious assumptions. First, they accept in varying degrees a piecemeal- or isolated-schools view of the classical period. They exaggerate similarities within schools and deemphasize influence among the schools. The Neo-Confucian orthodoxy minimizes the degree to which philosophical projects and assumptions cross school boundaries. It also downplays philosophical progress. Schools analysis treats typical philosophical progress as merely deepening or elaborating the insights of the semi-divine founder. It tends to downplay how engaging in philosophical debate with rival doctrines motivates theory change.

The fragmented-schools view underlies a static presentation of classical Chinese thought. A typical account discusses Chinese philosophy with an encyclopedia organization in which Confucianism and Daoism are simply two different entries.*

pletely different scientific and cultural background) accept. So, they proposed that we maximize *reasonableness* rather than truth. We assume that humans reason in similar enough ways that we can understand them. We should be able to appreciate what would motivate a Chinese philosopher to adopt one theory instead of another. We can recognize what would count as a motivating reason for another rational human to adopt or express a doctrine. The principle of humanity thus allows us to attribute philosophical doctrines that are different from any we now adopt or have historically adopted. Our interpretive theory must simply explain why, given people's other beliefs, they accept the belief in question. That it now seems (or ever seemed) true to us is not crucial.

Because they begin with the notion of an interpretive *theory* of a language, both principles reinforce the assumption of the holistic nature of meaning. We attribute meaning to *a language* in a single systematic theory. The principle of charity selects that translation manual that makes the greatest number of the expressions true. Still, the effect of the principle of charity in the ordinary sinological method puts quicksand under piecemeal studies. An interpreter purports to prove an interpretive hypothesis (e.g., that a certain translation is correct for this character). He cites a sentence containing the character and translates it using the chosen term or phrase. If it seems true to the translator (or if it resembles a familiar Western philosophical doctrine), then he rests his case. The result is that we tend to attribute to Chinese philosophers a cluster of familiar but unsystematic philosophical doctrines.

The principle of humanity also requires that the interpretation makes sense of a fragment of the text. The sense conferred by the proposed interpretation is, however, not the immediate sense it makes to the translator *now,* pondering the sentence *in isolation.* The sense required is counterfactual. Using the principle of humanity, we implicitly ask the question. "Would that passage so construed make sense to a philosopher who accepted the background doctrines and operated with the theory-laden terms current in her time?" The principle of humanity, thus, forces us to recognize that we presuppose an interpretive theory of the whole tradition in each translation. We attribute beliefs and meaning in the same theory. So a fundamental revision of the interpretive theory is unlikely to emerge as a summary of more focused research topics. A researcher is likely to take the outlines of the received theory for granted in narrower studies.

Thus the idea of interpretation as an explanatory theory plus the principle of humanity makes the importance of interpretive holism inescapable. We presuppose an entire theory of the classical period in our interpretation of any part.

*Confucius invented Confucianism. Mencius and Xunzi elaborated and filled out the theory with a slightly different emphasis. Laozi invented Daoism, which again, is a single theory. Laozi and Zhuangzi

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The other schools are simply object lessons in the necessary failure of any alternative theoretical path. The ruling theory brooks no hint that Confucianism may have grown from reacting to criticisms of opponents—especially the much-despised Mozi. Thus the ruling theory fragments the classical period into theoretically isolated schools.

I shall not reject school analysis entirely. The traditional assignment of schools represents some shared attitudes. The closest things to schools were text-based communities focused on texts. They studied, maintained, and updated the master's words and debated with other communities. When we collect these communities into the traditional schools we group together different, often incompatible, and progressively more advanced theories. I propose to understand the advances and changes as a result of their debate with other such communities.[4] They do not consist of a few core ideas that simply mature in an internal and unexplained process of theory growth. Philosophy advances through conversation, not private reflection. As Laozi puts it, each *dao* changes. I shall stress the developmental view and trace the growth of philosophical sophistication and understanding through all the schools.*

Even if we cannot occupy Schwartz's neutral vantage point, we should at least experiment with this interpretive theory that reverses the standard bias. Daoist method may recover Daoist content. We should explore the possibility that the rival theories have more depth and value than the standard interpretation recognizes. We look carefully and sympathetically at the criticisms of Confucian opponents and look critically at the adequacy of Confucian defenses. We treat the entire period as an ongoing dialogue in which the motive to philosophical progress comes from criticism and skepticism. The ruling interpretations, by contrast, undercut the force of each opponent's criticism. I shall try to sharpen those criticisms. The ruling interpretation may

accept the same core beliefs. They, too, differ only in emphasis. Now, in addition, there was Mohism (a strange and shallow doctrine), Legalism (a despotic and dirty one), and the Logicians (who were both impenetrable and irrelevant).

Chan's *Source Book* is the paradigm of this organization. But Schwartz's more historically organized *World* still exemplifies the residual tendency. Both Schwartz and Graham start with Confucius and follow historically with Mozi. But then Schwartz isolates Laozi and Zhuangzi in a chapter called "The Ways of Taoism" and Mencius and Xunzi are treated together in "The Defense of the Confucian Faith." Graham has an even more historical and original organization. But again, his middle section chapters are "From Confucius to Mencius . . ." "From Mozi to Later Mohism . . ." and "From Yangism to Chuang-tzu's Taoism . . . ." Each suggests that philosophical progress is some kind of self-contained maturation process of thought. The main beneficiary of these organizational schemes is Mencius. It buries the weakness of his case against Mozi and loses sight of Laozi and Zhuang-zi's attack on innatism.

*My developmental view of the philosophy of the period will spotlight instead the ways Confucius is similar to Mozi, Mencius to Laozi, and Zhuang zi to Xunzi. Confucius and Mozi both agreed that the task of social leadership is to foster some guiding discourse. They disagreed about what linguistic content public guiding discourse should officially promote and encourage. Mencius and Laozi form an antilanguage reaction to the irresolvability of the *Ru-Mo*[Confucian–Mohist] dispute. They share an appeal to naturalness and an aversion to letting language distort natural dispositions. Laozi, moreover, gives an account of how we might get apparent intuitions in the very process of learning a language. The Later Mohists formulated a decisive refutation of the antilanguage views and argued for basing language on the similarities and differences in the world. Zhuang zi argued that the world favored no unique way of marking similarity and difference. He showed that the arguments for both innatist intuitionism and Mohist realism presupposed disputed standards. Xunzi rehabilitiated traditionalism on relativist pragmatic grounds as an attempted solution to Zhuang zi's challenge. Han Fei zi followed Xunzi's pragmatic and conventionalist argument and scraped historical traditionalism. He simply urged that the ruler promote any discourse that is useful to the ruler and the state and ban all others.

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remove the motivation or clarity of an opponent's rival theory. I shall try to restore it. The ruling theory may distort even Confucian theory to make it immune to the attacks of its contemporary critics. I shall note the weaknesses in Confucian arguments with emphasis and undisguised Daoist glee.

The Meaning-Change Hypothesis

A second metatheoretical feature of the ruling interpretation buttresses this *isolated schools analysis*. Standard accounts use *meaning-change* hypotheses promiscuously. Meaning-change hypotheses make the isolation of the schools from common concerns a matter of language. Each meaning-change hypothesis entails that the schools were talking about fundamentally different things. The two most prominent examples of meaning change hypotheses concern the terms *dao*$^{\text{guiding discourse}}$ and *fa*$^{\text{standards}}$. Standard interpretations say that *dao-jia*$^{\text{Daoists}}$ and *fa-jia*$^{\text{Legalists}}$ changed the meaning of their focal terms. When Daoists spoke of *dao*$^{\text{metaphysical absolute}}$ or Legalists spoke of *fa*$^{\text{laws}}$ they changed the subject. Thus, the meaning-change ploy effectively isolated Confucianism from its critics and rivals.

The isolated-schools approach of the ruling theory needs to render Daoist, Mohist, and Legalist arguments irrelevant to Confucianism. We persist in the classifications despite recognizing that neither Daoism nor Legalism was a school in the standard sense. Intellectual historians during the Han dynasty (which established Confucian political orthodoxy) retrospectively invented both these names and used them to identify and distinguish certain trends in classical thought. These historians named each school with a term that they took to be the unifying concern of a set of thinkers, *dao*$^{\text{way}}$ for the Daoists and *fa*$^{\text{law}}$ for the legalists.

The ruling theory artificially forces these writers together and separates them from the mainstream of philosophical discourse. The standard view not only gives them a single conceptual focus, but also a single core theory about that key concept. Daoists, they allege, changed the meaning of *dao*$^{\text{way}}$ from moral doctrine to metaphysical monistic absolute—the Chinese equivalent of Parmenidean being. Legalists also changed the meaning of the term that defines their school from *fa*$^{\text{standards}}$ to positive *fa*$^{\text{law}}$.*

*These are only the most egregious uses of the meaning-change hypothesis. The shibboleth that Chinese words have many meanings dominates the sinological mythology of Chinese language. The most common diagnosis of this analysis is that the interpreters have confused a writer's *theory* about some topic with the meaning of the word he uses in expressing that theory. So Confucius says that a gentleman is concerned with *yi*$^{\text{morality}}$, a small man is concerned with *li*$^{\text{benefit}}$. The common practice is to suggest that for Confucius *yi*$^{\text{morality}}$ *meant* the opposite of benefit. When the Mohists define *yi*$^{\text{morality}}$ as *li*$^{\text{benefit}}$, that forces us to say that either the meaning has changed or one of these two is misusing it. For the tradition, Confucius defines correst usage. Mozi is derided as lacking linguistic and sylistic expertise; he is semantically confused. Respect for Confucians entails that Mozi's moral theory must be an oxymoron.

We should say, instead, that Confucius has one theory of morality and Mozi proposes a rival theory of morality. An adequate theory of meaning should treat *yi*$^{\text{morality}}$ as having the common meaning that explains how rival theorists could adopt these two contrasting moral theories. That enables us to see substantive disagreement between the schools. The Confucian strategy of asserting meaning change when-

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The ideological effect of illicit use of the meaning-change hypothesis is this. We cannot see the theories of the rival schools as critical comments about and attempts to improve on Confucian theories. Sinologists present the meaning-change hypothesis (words change meanings in China as actors change costumes in plays) as empirical, observational fact. It is as if meanings were perceptible auras that surrounded the character. Those who *know* Chinese have learned to see the aura and can directly perceive when it has changed. As I have admitted, I cannot claim to have seen the gossamer threads of meaning. So I cannot empirically prove that they have not changed. But any theory of meaning that makes words change meaning whenever we find a rival theory makes philosophical disagreement hard to explain. It reinforces the tendency to treat schools as self-contained points of view with only an internal dynamic—effectively different languages.

We have reason, therefore, to suspect ideologically motivated biases in both the standard interpretation's details and structure. The meaning-change hypothesis props up the fragmentary account imposed by the isolated-schools view. These feed into the practice of characterizing Confucian rivals in ways that protect Confucianism from local philosophical criticism. Apologetic Confucian accounts then dismiss most philosophical criticism of Confucianism as reflecting Western philosophical bias. If we treat meaning as shared between rival theories, however, we will find that the obvious criticisms were clearly stated within China's own classical tradition.

Indo-European Theory of Language and Mind

A different type of suspicion arises from our awareness of the Buddhist influence on Neo-Confucianism. This source of distortion is considerably more complex and difficult to sort out because Western biases collaborate with Neo-Confucianism in imposing it on Classical thinkers. Buddhism came from a philosophical culture with extensive historical contact with ancient Greek and Middle Eastern civilizations. The conceptual structure of its theory of language and mind closely resembles that of our own Western folk psychology. The Neo-Confucian absorption of this theory of language and of mind would, therefore, be harder for us to isolate and neutralize. We fail to bracket and examine it precisely because it seems like obvious common sense. It too closely resembles our own, two-thousand-year-old tradition of beliefs. We hardly even notice it.

ever there is a disagreement makes all philosophical dispute merely verbal. Then, by hypothesis, they expect us to acknowledge that Confucian usage is correct.

Another source of this widespread view of Chinese comes from confusing our theories of dictionaries. The Western dictionary tradition flows out of our Euclidean and Platonic heritage. We assume the notion of a *meaning* that the definition should express. The Chinese dictionary tradition is more historical. It collects different historical examples of use and lists possible character (or phrase) substitutes in each use. It also gives a causal-historical theory of the character—a purported etymology and routinely a pictographic or ideographic analysis. We tend to treat each such entry as a different meaning.

Now, the notion of meaning is vague enough to allow us to run different uses together with different meanings. But, our interpretive theory will be more coherent if we propose a core meaning that explains the different uses. That way, when different philosophers disagree with each other about philosophical topics, we will not dismiss their dispute as merely verbal. Not all philosophical disagreement is the result of using their key terms with different meanings.

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Neo-Confucianism was a scholastic Confucian movement with *only* Buddhism as a serious philosophical foe.* In its attempt to recover the ancient Confucian *dao,* it typically painted Buddhism and Daoism as functional twins—the foil against which it distinguished Confucianism. It used Daoism as the classical place-marker against which to present its theory of the special merit of Confucianism. This colored the entire presentation of the classical period. Buddhist metaphysics and the presupposed similarity between Daoism and Buddhism dominated the Neo-Confucian reconstruction of philosophical issues. These familiar facts suggest that the orthodox interpretation might have *two* sources of inaccuracy: (1) it may favor Confucian theory or (2) it may presuppose a Buddhist conceptual framework.

The schools analysis leads us to postulate an obscure and mystical Chinese logic that is irrational by Western lights. The Buddhist influence leads us to assume the Chinese thinkers shared Western traditional psychological theories. On the face of things, one could make a more plausible case for precisely the opposite analysis that their inference strategies (their actual cognitive psychology) resembles ours more than their psychological theory does. It is possible to have different theories of our shared linguistic, intellectual, and social capacities. Western popular mentalist psychological theory is dubious and seriously controversial even among Western thinkers and cognitive psychologists. It is far less likely to be true than is Western logic.

The Buddhist impact on the standard theory coincides with the loss of the Chinese linguistic analysis in China's philosophical dark age. Dark-age philosophers clearly failed to appreciate the highly technical, deep, and involved theories of the Later Mohist theory of language. The long period of Buddhist intellectual domination of medieval China that followed the dark age thus takes on special significance. The Confucianism that reemerges from the Buddhist overlay may interpret its own ancient theories in terms of a *Buddhist theory of language and mind.* Western transmitters would unconsciously perpetuate and exaggerate this distortion. The Buddhist theory shares so much with that of ancient Greece that the result looks very much like our own inherited philosophical views on language and mind.

The Neo-Confucian movement and Western theorists are unwitting coconspirators in this inadvertent self-deception. But, unlike the Confucian bias I targeted earlier, this slant does *not necessarily* favor Confucianism. The framework set by alien assumptions about language may also distort Confucianism's philosophical base.

We know of substantial prehistorical cultural contact between India and the birthplace of Western philosophy in Western Asia. The recognized boundaries of the Indo-European language family are only one indication of the pattern of early cultural

*The received theory's own account of Chinese intellectual history guides our skepticism. Its abiding obsession lay in revitalizing classical Confucianism against a changed intellectual background. The emergence from the philosophical dark age was gradual. The Han dynasty changed the focus of Chinese philosophy to an eclectic, yin-yang cosmology. The *Dark Learning* school of the Wei emerged next. It reinterpreted Daoism by combining it with the yin-yang and tai-ji cosmology of the *Yi Jing* and tried to make the result compatible with Confucianism. Buddhism spread in China by putting its doctrines in a *Dark Learning* framework and dominated the long period up to the Tang dynasty. The Wei, cosmological prototype shaped Buddhism and in turn Neo-Confucianism. It gave them a model for making Mencius' innatism into a cosmology. They viewed Daoism on that same model distinguished only by its amoral cosmic view. Thus, the Neo-Confucians reconstructed their account of classical Confucianism and Daoism on a Buddhist metaphysical and mystical model. Ancient Confucianism was to Daoism as their Confucianism was to Buddhism.

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migration. Our history of Greek philosophy traces its origins to contact with cultures in the Middle East in the Ionian parts of Asia Minor.* Historians also assign an Aryan origin to the philosophical Brahmin class in India. Finally, we know from history that Aristotle tutored Alexander the Great, who spread Greek military and political power as far as India.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Indian philosophy shares many vital concepts with Greek linguistic and psychological theory.† At root, Indian thought views the function of language as primarily representative or descriptive. Buddhist logic shows a clear conception of an argument or a proof as a series of sentences with subject-predicate structure. It has a full-blown sense of logic as a theory of the structure of argument. Indian logic, like Aristotle's, focused on a syllogistic form.

Its theory of mind shows striking parallels as well. It revolves around the intentional notions of belief and of reason as the way beliefs are arrived at, modified, and discarded. Beliefs are contrasted with desires. Together belief and desire explain human action. Indian thought, like more modern Western thought, developed a mind-body metaphysics. Mind is a realm of mental objects just as the physical world is a realm of material bodies. The skeptics in both traditions challenged the alleged correspondence between the realms. Were the mental objects illusions? Do mental objects correspond to the objects in the physical world?

The common Indo-European theory of mind centered on the cognitive faculty. The model of knowing was representing accurately through mental contents—true beliefs. The mental items arrange themselves into beliefs—mental compositions or sentences of *mentalese*. These mental constructions (thoughts) picture possible physical configurations of objects. Beliefs are true if the pictures are accurate, false if they are not. This model breeds skepticism of belief through doubt of the senses as causes of (evidence for) our beliefs. Radical skepticism ensues because we can never objectively test whether our mental contents correspond to the world. Our only access to the world is through our senses, which are under skeptical attack.

Like traditional Western thought, the Buddhist view of language meshes with its view of mind. It similarly concentrates on how language relates to reality. The theory treats the mental ideas as interpretations of words. Ideas have pictorial content. That pictorial content relates them to sensed objects. Thus the language has semantic value in virtue of its link to ideas. The theory of ideas explains meaning and it explains how we understand the words or sounds of language and apply them in the world.‡

*The philosophical similarities of Indian and Greek philosophies of language and mind can be explained by either cultural transmission or independent discovery *or both*. Since the languages have a family resemblances, we can easily understand their adopting similar theories of their language. Cultural transmission could be from India to Greece or Greece to India or from some other common origin (the Middle East) to both.

†I make this claim with some trepidation, since I am not a Sanskrit scholar. I rely on other's description of Indian philosophy. See for example Zimmer (1951), pp. 4 and 333–63, and Chaudhuri (1979), pp. 22–24 and 64–83, Obviously someone who did the same with Chinese would conclude, with the standard theory, that Chinese thinkers had a theory of consciousness, meanings, beliefs, sentences, mind-body, sense data, etc.

‡The focus on pictorial correspondence led Buddhists, like the Greeks, to give reality (like logic) a subject-predicate form. The subject corresponds to things and the predicate to features, attributes, properties, essences, and characteristics. They assumed, as the Greeks did, that using a word presupposed the

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The familiar Western conceptual separation of mind and body that also marks Indian thought carries in its wake other familiar mental concepts. Indian thought, like Western thought, blends semantics and psychology with subjectivist theoretical terms like *experience* and *consciousness*. These structure a subjective picture of individual psychology. As we noted, these inner pictures of a world generate, in Buddhism as in England, a radical phenomenological skepticism about the external world. The lever of philosophical discourse pries against the fulcrum of a contrast between an inner, private subjectivity and an outer, abstract, objective, transcendental reality.*

Thus Indian thought and Greek and Western thought share a focus on metaphysics and epistemology. They view the function of language as communicating informational content. It does this because words refer to particulars (objects) in the world. Words do this by means of some semantic mediator—an idea, essence, or meaning. Since many objects bear the same name, the name must relate directly to some essence or property that each object has. That shared essence puts them into a natural collection of objects. Mental ideas link names to these collections. Buddhist thought, like Western thought, thus accepted what Blackburn has called the *dogleg* theory of meaning.[5] A meaning is something that mediates between a word and particulars in the world.

Translation of Indian mental theory into Western terms has been relatively straightforward. Semantic content (meanings, concepts) are carried in mental objects (ideas).[6] Syllogistic logic and the proof model of reasoning bolster this mental semantic theory. Reasoning operates on beliefs (the cognitive, semantic, subjective contents of mind). The mind constructs mental proofs with its beliefs and desires as premises. This practical reasoning produces deliberate, morally responsible action.

The shared-proof model carries in its wake the concept of truth. Truth is the semantic value of sentences and therefore of beliefs. The concluding sentence in a proof inherits truth from the sentences that make up the premises of the proof. Reasons are premises. In a practical syllogism the conclusion is an action, and desires and beliefs are reasons for action.

existence of permanent substances. When an ordinary object changes we use different predicates with the same subject. We uttered "Peter is young" years ago. Now we utter "Peter is old." Peter must refer via our ideas to some underlying, unchanging thing that once had the property of being young and now has its opposite property. Change thus presupposes some underlying permanence that *has* the changing attributes. For similar reasons, the appearance of multiplicity demands explanation in terms of an underlying unity. This is a chair. That is a chair. There must be some deep essence that they share that justifies calling them by the same name. That one behind many essence is the unchanging essence. That abstract essence, this reasoning goes, is what our idea is an idea *of*.

Like the Greeks, therefore, Indian philosophers drew on a contrast between reality and mental appearance. Their full-blown conception of proof and argument gave them a familiar notion of reason which, like the Greeks, they contrasted with experience. The function of reason in revising beliefs was to make them accurate pictures of the real world. That meant passing suspicious judgment on the world of changing appearance. The result was the striking assumption that Greek and Indian rationalism share: reality is permanent. Anything that changes is, to that degree, unreal.

*The contrast of reason with emotion (and the consequent deprecation of the latter) arises from the same structure. The psychology of belief and desire correlates with mind-body dualism. Belief and desire together cause action. But beliefs are paradigm mental entities. They could not directly act on physical objects. So we theorize that desires arise from our physical nature. They are like perceptions which reality introduces into the mind. The are perceptions of the state of our body. Desires conflict with the idealized activity of reason. They tend to disorder, disrupt, and distort its generation of an accurate, philosophical inner picture of the external world.

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I have tried in this brief account to emphasize how this cluster of concepts in semantics, logic, psychology, and moral theory work together. These are not random, isolated notions, but part of the central conceptual structure of both Western and Indian philosophy.*

The reader may now appreciate my motive in this section. These ideas are not separate items like packages of cereal that one may take off the shelves of the supermarket of ideas. To attribute one of these ideas to a philosophical culture is to attribute the *network* of ideas to them. The reasonableness of attributing one belief from the set depends on their having a theory in which it functions along with the others. Something counts as the same idea only if it has the same theoretical connections. Obviously, I intend to deny that Chinese thought has *the entire network* of this Indo-European subjectivist psychology and linguistic theory.

Even in the ruling theory, it is a commonplace that Chinese thought does not exhibit a mind-body dichotomy. The ruling theory, however, treats that dichotomy as an isolated doctrine. It does not notice these deep connections to our familiar folk psychology of private mental contents, the distinction of ideas and emotions, consciousness, awareness, and experience. It ignores how central mind-body dualism is to our conventional view of meaning in language—that is, our theory of ideas. The result is that we uncritically interpret the thinkers of the pre-Buddhist period against the background of an Indo-European theory of psychology and language.

So, again, my strategy experiments with reversal of opposites. Where the ruling theory uses our familiar psychological assumptions in explanation, I work for an interpretation free from those assumptions. Still, this second source of skepticism presents a deep problem. I can target any assumption that attributes this Indo-European theory of language and mind to ancient Chinese philosophers. But how do we improve on mentalist theory? Can we conceive of an alternate model? Our difficulty lies in constructing and stating an intelligible alternate. Our Indo-European conceptual perspective is so familiar that any alternate seems blatantly wrong. We can only confirm it if we can construct it.

The Computer Analogy

Why do we experience such difficulty in entertaining the hypothesis of deep differences in another culture's thought? One reason might be that our own beliefs have changed so little over our history. We assume a similar psychological theory because we can hardly imagine believing other than what Indo-European culture has *always* believed. These evidently *eternal truths* must be universal and obvious truths.†

*It even has echoes in Indo-European religious thought. This metaphysical conception of the mind as a realm in which ideas are the objects helps validate the philosophical proofs of immortality in both traditions. It generates the familiar association of death with body, desire, and sin. Life, meaning, and value correlate with consciousness, the mind, thought, and reason. The aspiration to purity in mental transcendence stems from the parallel-world structure of the theory of mind.

†Our folk psychology has changed, but only slightly, from its Greek origins. The main change came in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cartesianism made the realm of meaning and thought private and subjective. Plato's version was of an objective, intellectual realm of cognitive and semantic *forms*. Modern *common sense* about psychology, language learning, and meaning has remained largely unchanged since Descartes's individualistic, subjectivist revision. Modern cognitive psychology is a different matter. See Stich (1983).

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We have reason to be suspicious that the ruling interpretation has imposed an Indo-European theory of language and mind on the text. What other philosophical psychology could we substitute? We are lucky, in this regard, that very recent philosophy and empirical psychology have not only cast doubt on the traditional Western view, but have also begun to develop an alternative conception of mental functioning.* We now have a way to characterize reasoning without assuming the *arguments-on-paper* view of the mind.[7] Substitute the notion of a computational program for the familiar picture of the mental-arguments concept of reasoning. Use the computer model to explain how a physical being can process language and how language guides action in a real world context. We need not explain a computer's operating by attributing to it mental or semantic content, inner consciousness, or experience.

A computer operates with a program. We input the program—load it into the computer. That process changes the computer's *dispositions* in complex ways. It will now behave differently to different inputs. We may use the language of stimulus-response or even of intuition, but the relation of input and output need not be simple minded. It can come from a very complicated program. The computer's dispositional state has a physical realization (an electronic functional state) that may produce very subtle behavioral responses after a complicated calculation.

The explanation of the computer's behavior does not require our habitual contrast of belief and desire. The program itself causes the behavior (of course, using energy supplied as electricity and oil, requiring a dust-free environment, and resting—cooling off). The now-familiar science-fiction images of robots, cyborgs, or droids have made this new model somewhat familiar. (I suspect that it also creates some image problems that I will address below.)

If we accept that the Chinese philosophy of mind did not rest on a mind-body dichotomy, then we surely could use something like the computer analogy to explain intelligent human behavior. The computer analogy illustrates how a physical thing could reason, act, be moral, and function in the world as humans do. A computer can print out the result of a complicated calculation when we input the data. It does a calculation though it does not have beliefs.[8] We do not suppose that the computer reflects on the meaning of the premises and sees the conclusion of its proof in a kind of rational insight.† Informally, it helps us see why we do not *need* to assume that Chinese philosophers took the traditional Western theory of the relation of mind, language, and the world for granted.

This is not to suggest that the ancient Chinese had invented computers. The computer analogy of mind helps mainly because it frees us from reliance on our inherited Greek view of psychology. It allows us to imagine an alternative to this doctrine of a mysterious, internal mental realm. It gives us a model for understanding

*I propose to use the resources of these modern philosophical challenges to the semantic-centered theory of language and traditional Western folk psychology. We draw on naturalistic epistemology, cognitive psychology, and the computer analogy of mind. Together, these give us a *syntactic* analysis of the nature of thinking to replace the *arguments on paper* (Kornblith, 1985) view of reasoning.

†That is what I mean by saying that the model of the mind is syntactic rather than semantic. What we call reasoning can be understood as calculating according to a program. We understand computers as having a *physical* potential to do the caclulation. We created that potential when we altered its electromagnetic state by loading our program. That physical state explains how it can reliably take the input and yield a correct output.

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both how our minds might work while conceptually identifying mind and body. It does not require a separate inner mental realm to parallel the natural physical realm. Rational and emotional outputs are equally physical responses to inputs.

Trying this out on the classical Chinese philosophers, we get a model that explains the central position of *dao*[way] in Chinese philosophy. A *dao* is analogous to a program. Confucius viewed education as inputting the inherited *dao*[guiding discourse] of the sages. We study and practice a *dao*. We learn to speak and act properly by studying the *Book of Poetry* or the *Book of Rites*. This view accounts for Confucius' distinctively non-Western attitude that instilling tradition is a realization and fulfillment of human nature instead of a limiting constraint. The *de*[virtuousity], as the traditional formula had it, is the *dao*[way] within a person. It is the physical realization of the program that generates the behaviors. When we have good *de*[virtuosity], our behavior will follow the *dao*[way]. The program runs as intended in us. Good *de*[virtuousity], therefore, is like a combination of virtue (when compiling a moral *dao*[way]) and like power (because executing instructional programs enables us to do things). Our virtuosity is the translation of an instruction set into a physical, dispositional potential.

Daoist thinkers make this view of things especially clear. The *Laozi* introduces the idea that we create desires by learning guiding discourse—gaining knowledge of what to do (know-to). The programming model explains many issues of classical Chinese thought. Notice first that we are, in a sense, programming each other. Our outputs include language that is input to others. The importance of maintaining cultural traditions, the family, the father model of the ruler and the educational role of political society all have clear motivations once we adopt this model. Let us look briefly at more of the explanatory value of the computer model of mind.

Instantly this model gives us a new conception of the roles of language and mind. Pragmatic (action centered) rather than semantic analyses now make more sense. Language guides and controls behavior. It does this by restructuring our behavior guiding mechanism, the *xin*[heart-mind]. The common translation of *xin* as *heart-mind* reflects the blending of belief and desire (thought and feeling, ideas and emotions) into a single complex dispositional potential. We need not attribute separate structures of reasoning and feeling to computers to explain their behavior.

Now what do we say of the source of mental, cognitive content in the Greek psychology—experience or consciousness? This question reveals a deep difference between these explanatory models. Western thought, in effect, treats experience as the programming step: experience generates the inner language of ideas with which we calculate. Chinese thought treats the programming as the social process of reading in guiding discourse. Experience then merely triggers execution of the program. The computer has *program control* tied to the external state of affairs. The senses provide discrimination—branching input to trigger different parts of the socialized program.*

*The program works by stimulus-response but not necessarily *simple-minded* stimulus-response (see Dennett, 1981). We can imagine fine-tuning the response and making it as complicated as we think human behavior to be. Certainly, we would expect the model to include an account of thinking. It need not be an account of inner reflection on meanings or thoughts. It would instead amount to calculating and adjusting response to reflect the complex situation. Still we would not need the internalist, consciousness-based view of thinking. Experience, similarly, need not be a picturelike inner world. The programming model requires only that our sense organs discriminate between features of the outer world. Experience is not data but an interface (input-output device). We would respond to the actual situation insofar as our

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So this model gives us what we wanted. We can explain the focus on *ming*[names] and *bian*[distinctions] in the school of names in a way that is continuous with the surrounding philosophical tradition. The crucial philosophical problem lying in the path of this social theory is that of the projectability of names. What counts as having used a name correctly? How do we project the distinction we make here to future cases?*

The computer analogy also gives us a way to interpret classical Chinese disputes about innateness without importing our reason-intuition distinction. We can convert a *dao*[way] to our machine language only if we already have a compiler or translator in the machine. Obviously someone must have hard-wired some structure into the unit before we can input any programs. One question about human nature that dominates this period amounts to asking how much behavior guidance is hard-wired (innate)? Do we need *any* social *dao*[guiding discourse]? Is it appropriate to use *dao*[guiding discourse] or *yan*[language] to change the behavioral features that *tian*[heaven] has hard-wired in us?

senses could provide discriminatory categories for use in program control. So our *xin*[heart–mind] and the sense receptors together explain how we can test for a condition in following the program. Does the name "father" apply here? Then execute the instruction that lowers your eyes and say "father" in a respectful tone.

Instead of cognitive content, then, we have cognitive-response sensitivity. Executing a *dao*-program requires that we correctly register the external conditions and sensitively adjust our responses. At the base of that requirement is this: we should know the boundary conditions for applying each name used in the guiding discourse. This explains the role of rectifying names and its importance in the Confucian model. Confucius does not use definitions. His concern would be with correct behavioral response, not with cognitive content or meaning. Having control of the word amounts to triggering the *right procedure* in response to external conditions. Besides, giving a definition would merely duplicate the interface problem. More words or internal programming can help only if the programmer has already properly adjusted our *de*[virtuousity] to the external conditions for application of those words. A definition can only help if we correctly apply the words in the definition, so it cannot be the general solution to the problem of adjusting behavior. The basic solution is the equivalent of debugging. Run the program in real time and have the teacher (programmer) correct errors. Rectifying names is essential to achieving the goal of a *dao*[guiding discourse]. It is the job of the social elite.

*The computer analogy yields many interesting corollaries that explain other features of Chinese thought. We think of programs in sentencelike units (commands) with sentential syntax. The *machine language* translations, however, consist of a *stack of words*. The order in the stack is important from top to bottom, not just in sentences. Sentential segments of the stack have no uniquely important status. The Indo-European fascination with the sentence reflects two interesting differences in our theory of language. One is inflectional grammar that operates mainly within sentence boundaries. Sentential role-marking (part-of-speech inflections) directs our attention to the sentence as the linguistic unit in which each part of speech plays a role. The syntactical rules requiring both a subject and a predicate also draw our attention to the notion of a complete, freestanding unit. The other difference is the theoretical focus on semantic content—truth. Here the sentence represents the complete thought, the map of a state of affairs, the fact. Truth is a property primarily of sentences. It should not, therefore, surprise us if we do not discover this cluster of linguistic concepts in Chinese thought.

The lack of sentential focus will also have implications for ethics. Our conception of an obligation makes it the prescriptive correlate of a fact. The is-ought distinction postulates two different sentence types. The types suggest two different roles that language plays (describing and prescribing). The computer model, by contrast, suggests that language is primarily prescriptive, behavior guiding. If we attribute a picture of reality to the computer, it will only be as a guide to generating some output. Chinese moral debates will not be analytical theories of rules or duties. Moral debate will be about what *dao*[guiding discourse] to use in social programming and how to adjust names and distinctions to guide execution of that *dao*.

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The Computer Analogy and Human Dignity

A problem now arises that is almost as difficult as conceiving of a different psychological model than the one we traditionally take for granted. Being able to understand the model may mean that we find it emotionally cold and evaluatively demeaning. The problem is not merely in the science-fiction cliché of intelligent androids that lack feelings and emotions. Conventional wisdom ties our notion of the special status of being human to our theory of mind, intellect, and reason. The model of an alternate psychological theory that I am offering is likely to evoke cries that it deprives us of humanity and dignity: that it makes us just like animals—merely responding to external stimulation (albeit with somewhat more complexity than other animals). This model, religiously inclined champions of human dignity will insist, denies the unique human ability to transcend our nature that makes us better than animals. It denies us the Godlike results of our having partaken of the tree of knowledge and lost our innocence. We paid a terrible price for the biblical choice between knowledge and everlasting life. We can hardly imagine giving up the model of ourselves as knowers or of our minds as cognitive.

Ancient Greek humanism took the now familiar road of elevating humans out of nature into the intellectual realm. It placed us in a hybrid tension between the physical world of common sense and experience and an intellectual, rational world of meaning, knowledge, and value. We are neither of this world nor free from it (until we die). The identification of human worth with the impulse to transcendence has a flip side, since we accordingly devalue the physical, the material. These twin elements of Greek thought became the mainstays of Christianity and our view of our special relation to God.

Our tradition also contrasted the reasoning faculty (the mind) with the irrational, base, physical desires and passions (the heart). Our beliefs, our ideas, come from the mind—from the reasoning faculty. Our bodies supply us with our desires. We tied our conception of dignity to our possible independence from natural desires. Rational worth lies in obedience to the law of reason alone. Only then can we understand our actions as free, voluntary actions. To be free is for our reasoning faculty to control us. We detach ourselves from mere bodily, physical determination.

The ruling interpretive theory of Chinese thought reacts defensively to this impulse to value transcendence in Western thought. That defensive reaction mistakes having the theory of reason (and worshiping it) with being capable of reasoning. Clearly, I believe that Chinese thinkers reasoned competently, but I do not think that they developed *a theory of reason.* To suggest that Chinese thinkers did not have the reason-emotion dichotomy amounts, in the view of some, to a condemnation—almost a racist one. Reason is the source of our moral dignity. Certainly the idea of philosophy without the theory of reason would challenge our deepest assumptions.

The Eastern-guru theory of Chinese philosophy deals with this issue in a thoroughly confusing way. First, it defensively insists that classical thinkers *implicitly* had a theory of reason. However, they say, the Chinese philosophers consciously *rejected* the notion of controlling one's life by reason. They did so, the theory goes, for good reasons. They appreciated a mysteriously higher, more profound view of the value of the right brain, of intuition.[9] This response reveals a failure to appreciate both the complex and the deeply normative character of the Western theory of rea-

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son. It is not merely a descriptive term for an isolated psychological faculty (the left brain). Its textual problem, however, is sufficient reason to reject it until we see if an alternate theory can explain the texts. We will find no clear formulation of any reason-intuition dichotomy in classical Chinese writings.

I would like further to meet the ruling theory's valuation of transcendence head on. It is now commonplace both to recognize and appreciate the Daoist view of the unity of humanity and nature. Understanding ourselves as continuous with nature, as animals in a natural ecological brotherhood, is currently fashionable enough to defy this medieval distaste for the *natural man.* The antitranscendence view is surely consistent with science—no doubt, still opposing Western religion on this issue. Plenty of room remains for religious awe in the mysteries and complexity of nature, the working of our marvelous minds and language. If we are to worship, it makes sense to worship the wonders that lie before us. Why worship an imagined and unseen creator of them? We no longer need transcendence for awe.*

Mentalese and Conventional Language

Resistance to the computer model may come from still another direction. It may still seem that the mental content view is the only (or the best) way to explain our mastery of language. The current disputes in philosophical psychology and psycholinguistics address just this issue. These disputes offer us the chance to take a new perspective on our traditional assumptions about mind and language. Some philosophers and cognitive psychologists suggest that the ancient Greek picture of the relation of mind, language, and the world is simply false.[10] That old, useless theory is destined for the same historical fate as the theory of phlogiston, Newtonian absolute space-time, witches, and magic. I certainly do not hope to settle that issue here. I shall merely summarize the kinds of puzzles that first drew critical attention to the deep problems in the common-sense, received version of the theory of ideas.

Part of the source of the controversy is that different philosophers disagree on

*The emerging ecological consciousness surely will find Daoism a more congenial home than the Christian transcendent scorn for *this world.* Even before that, it should have been obvious that this Greek and Christian conception of human dignity not only cut us off from animals, but also made our relation to our earlier selves and our children conceptually puzzling. It was used historically to distinguish men from women and freeholders from slaves. We castigate those inferiors as lacking in sufficient cognitive rational ability to deserve our elevated status. The historical track record of this unique conception of human dignity has not been as stellar from our present perspective as its remaining religious defenders pretend. It perhaps took a mind as unorthodox as Nietzsche to show us this Christian attitude as a *sick* moral psychology, a form of self-hate. We learn to hate all natural passions and desires. We long for *the other life* only half conscious that we are implicitly hoping for death. Perhaps only Nietzsche could have shown us this deep kinship of Buddhism and Christianity. The hoped for transcendence, as Socrates first recognized, is possible only with death—the natural man is an enemy of God!

I expect I will not have totally blunted the tendency to think of human dignity and worth as tied to transcendent reason and cognition. This is one of those places where I can merely openly announce my perspective. I, therefore, give fair notice to critics. This theoretical focus may tempt them to accuse me, as Graham did, of "cretinizing" Chinese philosophy (Graham 1985, p. 698) and of promoting an anti-Chinese bias. If it does, let me turn the pointing finger of attribution of bias back on them. It is precisely this Western *evaluative bias* that needs defense, not my interpretation of Chinese philosophers. What bias lies behind the view that this model demeans us? Daoist nature worship certainly appeals more to *me* than Christian otherworldly transcendence does.

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what phenomenon the theory of ideas is to explain. For our purposes, let us look at one aspect of the use of language that Chinese thinkers share with us. How can we make the distinctions needed to use a word correctly in following directions? A traditional Western mental account goes as follows. Merely learning a word (a mere sound or visual representation of a sound) cannot explain this ability. We theorize that, from our experience and memory traces of a class of things, we have abstracted a vague image—an idea of the *type*. Only after we have this idea or concept can we hope to learn the English (or German, or Chinese) word for that type. We learn to associate the word with the idea, and the idea helps us to make the distinction among the objects we see. The analysis has two parts: (1) it associates the inert, meaningless sound with an idea in the mind, and (2) something like pictorial resemblance links the idea and the class of intended objects.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, accordingly, raised two serious problems for this view—one for each side of the explanation. First, consider the relation of the words and ideas. The original ability we intended to explain was the ability to distinguish some object, say an eel, from others, say a fish. We must do this to follow a program or a command using the word. This proposed solution assumes that on hearing the word *eel* we can pick the idea of an eel out from all the other ideas stocked in our mind. Now, the analysis set out *to explain* how we pick out the eel from the fish in front of me. The proposed explanation merely puts the same puzzle into my mind. How do I pick out my *mental picture* of the eel from my mental picture of a fish? If we think of the mental items as objects in a mental world, the proposed explanation assumes the very ability it purports to explain: the ability to distinguish eels from fish.

The other side of the explanation raises a similar problem. The ideas themselves, as we saw, work like a language. The ideas, corresponding to words, combine into thoughts or beliefs, which correspond to sentences. Philosophers[11] have dubbed this language of thought *mentalese*. We explain meaning as translation into mentalese. Notice that on the received view, mentalese is similar to a pictographic or ideographic language. We assume that the pictographic nature of this language removes the interpretive problem. But on reflection we will see that it doesn't. The pictures, after all, do not look exactly like the items before us and the question of whether to extrapolate from the eel picture or the fish picture remains. An ideographic or pictographic language needs standards of interpretation as much as does the ordinary language. (Chinese philosophers would surely appreciate this fact!) If a deep puzzle about how language can guide discrimination exists, it applies to pictographic mentalese as well.*

This familiar Western solution to the problem of explaining our ability to use language simply divides it into two related problems. One is how sounds pick out types, and the other is how language can consistently project to new or novel cases from past examples. Instead of solving the problem, it merely duplicates it on two sides of the mysterious, postulated, mental entity. We envision a kind of translation from a phonemic to a pictographic language that requires the very ability we seek to

*In the Chinese case, the possibility that one can misapply a pictograph to an object would have been obvious to them. They recognized their graphs as both social and conventional. Mentalese theory postulates *a private language* of semantic signs. This removes the normal criteria for identifying a correct and incorrect application of a sign. No one can *catch us* making a mistake in applying our own mental signs. So we assume that we cannot apply them incorrectly.

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explain. Then it merely recreates the problem of explaining how a language (now pictographic) refers to the world.

I should note that the computer analogy and the Chinese theory of language are not intended as a solution to this problem. Their use here lies in showing that the traditional, Western, mentalese solution begs the question. So if our reason for believing it is that it explains how language works, then we have no reason for believing it. Better to accept that language learning simply requires that humans can learn to discriminate using names. It is part of our physiological hard-wiring.*

The Theory of Ideas and Chinese Language

We have seen that the theory of ideas begs the question. It assumes what it seeks to explain. It still seems an alluring theory. Even if it is wrong, it is too naturally tempting an explanation not to have occurred to anyone thinking philosophically. How could it possibly not even occur to Chinese philosophers? We can only answer that question by analyzing the historical lines of argument that have led to the theory. The only way to explain the absence of something is by showing the absence of its normal causes. If these arguments would not have tempted a Chinese philosopher, then their conclusion would not naturally have occurred to him.

In the next chapter, I consider the philosophical relevance of the Chinese language. I will describe some interesting features of Chinese spoken and written expression. There I will contrast the common-sense theory of language in China with our own conventional wisdom about language. This, I hope, will allay the sense of the inevitability of our folk theory of language and psychology. Then I will explain how the distinctive Chinese theory of how language works motivates their more social, naturalistic theory of heart-mind. My hypothesis is that real differences in the languages can explain differences in the popular theories of language. Since theory of language and theory of mind influence each other, a different language can inspire a different theory of the mind.†

*This argument, however, should give us an important liberating insight. The theory of mentalese is not only a theory of mind and language; it spills over into other philosophical theories, in particular epistemology. We assume not only that the ideas are private, but also that they are self-evident and incorrigible. It should be impossible for anyone to doubt them. This feature of our inherited psychology led critics to worry that my earlier theories were a form of linguistic determinism. If Chinese had no account of things that were so obvious, something must *stop them* from thinking of them. Our own acceptance of the theory made it inconceivable that others did not accept it.

Even if we do not settle this question (whether a computer analogy better explains our use of language), it has this advantage: it does show that our inherited Greek psychological theory *is one of many possible explanatory theories* and is not pure observation. It may or may not be a good theory, but it is not obvious and inescapable to anyone who thinks about the human use of language. Even if we go on accepting that theory, our conception of it as a theory should give us the distance we need. We can at least imagine a philosophical culture with a radically different view of the relation of human beings to their language and the world.

†I realistically expect that this strategy will again evoke accusations of *linguistic determinism*. The careful reader of this introduction will, I trust, remember that I argue that classical Chinese thinkers had a different *theory of* psychology, not a different *psychology*. Similarly, I shall not be arguing that our languages are as different as are our *theories* of languages. The Chinese theory can be applied to English just as the Western theory can be applied to Chinese. I shall argue that we can raise serious doubts about aspects of the common-sense Western theory when we consider classical Chinese. But I focus on the conclusion that the Western theory would not be either natural or obvious given certain other prima facie plausible beliefs about Chinese language.

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The Philosophical Worth of Chinese Thought

Clearly, Chinese thought has a conceptual content drastically different from that of Western thought. This wide gulf in conceptual structure and interest has fueled skepticism that Chinese has any real philosophy. That skepticism generates a defensive reaction in the standard accounts. The defense consists typically of insisting that "this is an example of some familiar Western philosophical doctrine or theory" or "this is a rebuttal of some familiar Western theory." My approach undermines that defensive strategy.

The strategy was never worth much, in my view. The piecemeal tactic of defending the worth of Chinese philosophy by finding here and there a doctrine that is "just the same as . . ." defeats itself if the goal is to get acknowledgment from the discipline of philosophy. Philosophers are not looking merely for well-known or traditional puzzles. They value coherent unified philosophical points of view. The defensive tactic backfires because it saddles classical thinkers with a list of unconnected, ad hoc, unmotivated, curiously stated, undigested, and undeveloped fragments of the allegedly *same theory*.

A unified theory based on the theory of language offers much more promise to rehabilitate the flagging image of Chinese thought. Language is a central interest of modern and ancient philosophers. If the classical Chinese philosophers held a radically different theory of language, that fact could explain many other differences in a coherent, unified way. It would reveal their doctrines as a fully coherent alternative to the Western philosophical perspective. It could do so without having to resort to uncritical praise or even to the assumption that they got it right. It is enough that they had a credible theory and developed it in philosophically challenging and interesting ways.

The ruling account, relying on their prior sense of philosophical worth, tended to downplay the linguistic import of these doctrines. Often they translate them away. Paradoxically, the mistake is due to the ruling theorists' uncritical acceptance of traditional Indo-European theories of ideas. The interpreters thought literal renderings of Chinese doctrines would turn them into superstitious views of *word magic*. They downplayed the linguistic doctrine and translated them into the more sophisticated sounding language of *ideas, meaning,* and *belief.*

This study, by contrast, starts with the faith that we can have a unified conception of what philosophy is and still appreciate two quite different philosophical traditions. What makes them both philosophy is not their content or shared theories. It is their shared interest in and philosophical analysis of how language, mind, and society interact.

The Rehabilitation of Daoism

I call this a Daoist theory because the linguistic insight yields a new way to understand Daoism. The ruling theory has treated Daoism as the essence of Chinese antirational mysticism. Daoists, it alleges, theorize about *dao* and their theory of *dao* is

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that language cannot express it. The ruling theory's explanatory strategy in conveying this paradoxical view is *itself* paradoxical. The interpretive theory tries to discuss what *dao is* such that discussing it is impossible. That strategy, predictably, simply befuddles us more. They suppose that their failure to make any sense of Daoism with this strategy confirms their interpretation of Daoism as rationally inaccessible. How unintelligible is Daoism? It is so unintelligible that we cannot intelligibly explain why it is unintelligible.

The proposed focus on the theory of language allows us to turn our attention from *dao* to language. If language cannot express *dao* it must be due both to something about *dao and* something about language. Now we can look at the other, possibly intelligible, side of the Daoist puzzle. What do Daoists take to be the function and limits of language? Why is language so limited? An intelligible Daoist theory of the limits of language can explain in what sense something might resist linguistic expression.

I shall argue that if we change the implicit theory of language we attribute to Daoists their position will become much more lucid. The ruling theory had understood ineffability through the Buddhist theory of language with its metaphysical focus. Language is about the world, so *dao* must be a metaphysical object. It must be an unchanging, abstract one behind the many. The Neo-Confucians triggered this view because they understood the Daoists as similar to Buddhists. Daoism thus inherited Buddhism's mysticism of the one, permanent, ineffable Buddha-nature. They structured that mysticism along the lines of the Greek one-many, permanence-change contrasts. We have learned to read Daoism as if Daoists were Parmenideans, characterizing *dao* as a monistic or unchanging pure being—except that, paradoxically, it is also nonbeing.*

Getting a philosophically lucid Daoism is an unexpected by-product of spelling out a naturalist Chinese theory of mind and language. The Daoist love of nature should have given us the hint. Daoism contrasts starkly with the Platonic and Kantian myths of transcendent realms of meaning. Where Western theorists talk of having a concept or knowing the meaning, Daoism begins with a naturalistic focus on a socially learned skill at discriminating. The Daoist theory *does* tend toward relativism. The Confucians reacted as our own cultural conservatives would: A little relativism is a dangerous thing! Let us ban it! We must act as if our local parochial ideas are

*The ruling theory has it that the appearance of multiplicity and change required Daoists to reject sense experience, as Parmenides did. Interpreters have therefore read an aversion to the physical senses into Daoism that blatantly conflicts with its obvious naturalism (and its exuberantly libidinous sexual practices). Inevitably, they filled out the story with all the rest of the traditional Western theory-laden terminology that accompanies our theory of language: subjective-objective, subject-predicate, object-property, noun-adjective, and member-set. They also rely heavily on the Buddhist importation of the Western mind-body, reason-emotion, belief-desire, reality-appearance dichotomies. For none of this do we find any sound textual basis in the Daoist classics themselves.

The ruling theory chose a line of explanation that led to the impenetrable mysticism of a single subject. A *One* exists that embraces the *many* and yet is not a collection. It never changes and yet embraces all changes. Westerners understood Buddhist mysticism, therefore, as similar to Christian mysticism. They, accordingly, treated *dao* as a rough counterpart of God. This forces typical accounts to speak of Daoism using the subjectivist language of a mystical *experience*. They assume that Daoists must have had such a mystical experience of ineffable oneness. This familiar assimilation forces us, next, to attribute skepticism of the senses to Daoists. Medieval Western biases conspired perfectly with the Buddhist distortion to hide Daoism from us.

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universally appropriate from a cosmic point of view! We must ban all this philosophical controversy! Love the old doctrines and accept conventional standards or face anarchy!

It is probably just a coincidence that Daoists seem to value iconoclasm and presenting unconventional views. It only serves the Confucian interest to treat them as incomprehensible. The proclivity to iconoclasm makes the present project Daoist in form and content. If the awareness that our conventions might be very different leads to anarchy, then we should give anarchy a try. Philosophers may react more fondly to Daoists than to Confucians. Confucians have an affinity for history. Starting from Confucius himself, they interested themselves more in transmitting than creating. Daoists incline in the opposite direction. That does not *make* Daoists better philosophers. But they are better philosophers!

Summary

This study sets out to revise the standard theory to make the later Mohist theory of language consistent with its larger tradition. I must admit that independent considerations also motivate my revision. The standard theory is notoriously incoherent, philosophically murky, and intellectually insipid. The challenge that Graham's work set us is also an opportunity. We can finally make philosophical sense of classical Chinese thought. The strategy for constructing the alternate theory depends on some preliminary hypotheses. One of these is that the standard theory, derived from Neo-Confucians, may have a Confucian bias. Another is that it may have an undetected Buddhist influence. The Confucian bias may emerge in many details of the interpretation both of Confucian thinkers and of their rivals. I further identified two systemic features of the standard theory that protect Confucianism. The isolated-schools view and the meaning-change hypotheses tend to isolate Confucianism from theoretical challenge.

The second source of skepticism about the ruling theory is both more directly involved in theory of language *and* more difficult to correct. Its difficulty comes from the almost inevitable familiarity of the theory in our own common sense. Our philosophical psychology of consciousness, experience, ideas, beliefs, emotions, reason, mind has been with us since the dawn of Western philosophy. I have argued that the theory has deep problems and suggested that we use the computer analogy in its place.

In the chapters that follow, I will argue for attributing different assumptions about psychology and language to the classical Chinese tradition. Doing so will make the rival theories of the Daoists, the Mohists, the dialecticians and the Legalists more intelligible. This result should tend to confirm the hypothesis since it bears out our initial suspicion. The twin Neo-Confucian biases explain the persistence of the view that Chinese thought is rationally inaccessible. This defensiveness in the standard theory has made it *seem* unintelligible and inaccessible to Western thought. We found three kinds of defensiveness. The first is the Confucian defensiveness. The second is defensively trying to import our most familiar assumptions about ourselves and our language and human dignity into their philosophical motivations. The third is trying to force parallels of traditional Western philosophical doctrines on the texts. The

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awareness of the bad fit totally overcomes any comfort we get from the familiarity. Precisely the failure of these defensive explanations required the additional assumption that Chinese thought was rationally inaccessible.

In the abstract, we have no reason to expect more similarity between Chinese and Western philosophy than we have to expect similarity between Chinese music and Western music. Many current writers follow Needham in accepting the possibility that Chinese conceptions might be more like modern physics than Newtonian physics. Yet, other historians who criticize trying to do this still tend to a connected mistake. They suppose that something fixes *the course* of rational philosophical or scientific thought. I cannot count the number of times others have lectured me that the only appropriate comparison for classical Chinese is ancient Greek thought! I remain unconvinced and unrepentant. I know of no argument that shows that ancient Chinese music, physics, or philosophy should any more resemble ancient Greek philosophy, music, or physics than it does modern versions of each. I reject the Hegelian myth of the unfolding of reason in history. No law of theories dictates that all early societies must adopt the same theories in the same order.

The unified theory, of course, will not take the form of laws and mathematical deductions. That should further calm those worried about the determination of ideas. I strive for the modest goal of a more coherent narrative explanation of the fertile initial period of Chinese thought. Significantly, it is the period before the invasion of Buddhism with its Indo-European conceptual structure. Confucianism was a powerful school in that context. Yet it did not have the dominance that it held throughout most of the Neo-Confucian medieval and early modern period in China. The other schools in classical China constantly had Confucianism on the defensive. Later, its political orthodoxy secure, Confucianism tended more to eclectic incorporation of those other schools.

The strategy opens, I hope, an exciting possibility. We can come to understand a radically different theory of language. With that basis, we can journey through time and space and have a philosophical conversation with an unusually rich philosophical tradition. These philosophers are linguistically and conceptually as far as possible from us—while we stay in the real historical world. This conversation began in the sixteenth century between various Western travelers and the late-medieval Neo-Confucian scholars of China. This is merely another interpretive step. The standard Western theory is already an accretion of insights transmitted from generation to generation of Western theories. We have gradually refined our theory of classical thought through a process not unlike that seen in scientific theories. Open discussion and criticism is the engine of theoretical insight. It is in the spirit of that progress that I offer these revised interpretive hypotheses.

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The Context of Chinese Philosophy: Language and Theory of Language

Geographical Setting

I do not suppose that language is the only explanation of features of philosophical thought. I have heard plausible, suggestive accounts of how geography, for example, might contribute to a culture's having a certain broad philosophical direction. I am a philosopher of language, and neither a geographer nor a historian, so I cannot vouch for the accuracy of these suggestive accounts. But they can serve to give us some general sense of the context in which philosophy played its role in Chinese culture.

One obviously significant feature of Chinese geography—a physical barrier—explains the relative lack of philosophical exchange between China and the Indo-European tradition. Philosophical tenets are social products. They spread as technology, sculpture, language and music do. When two cultures come in contact they may talk about things. In this way they learn each other's technology, religion, philosophy, astronomy and so forth. A physical barrier to travel normally inhibits the spread of philosophical theories because it inhibits the wandering of philosophers—who are, after all, not notoriously physically adventurous.

Early Chinese and Greco-Indian philosophical traditions materialized on opposite divides of a great physical barrier—the Himalaya mountains and Xinjiang barrens. Greece and India formed the extreme poles of a Middle Eastern philosophical world. They shared a conceptual perspective. Chinese philosophy had a similar relation to Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Each large region, however, apparently exerted far less influence on the other.[1] Sinologists have noted that early Chinese philosophers show startlingly little interest in the familiar staples of early Western thought. They were not enchanted with the creation myths and cosmology that pervaded ancient Indo-European culture.[2]

Agriculture dominated Chinese economic life. This may explain the pervasive emphasis on natural cycles, interest in the constancy of nature, and the stress on harmony with nature. Greek thought, by contrast, grew up where shipping, trade, and commerce dominated the economy. We suppose that contributed to their early

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interest in the stars, astronomy, navigation, and eventually geometry that fed into Classical Western philosophy and science.

The natural tendency of agriculture is toward self-sufficient small units. Yet, a large-scale challenge countered this natural tendency in ancient China. Chinese civilization grew up along the Yellow River. It is yellow because its contents are (and were) one-third earth. This meant that river channels silted quickly and the river frequently shifted course and flooded farms. Flood control required wide-scale social cooperation and therefore large political units. Significantly, the Chinese culture hero myths focus on their control of water (despite the apparent absence of a myth of a worldwide flood).

Prehistoric Influences

Any explanatory theory must leave something unexplained. History of philosophy must start somewhere and assume that some religious or other doctrines that explain philosophical developments are in place. Again conventional accounts of Chinese prehistory have suggestive explanations for some features of Chinese philosophy. As a nonhistorian, I cannot vouch here for the accuracy of these historical claims, but offer them to give some historical context for the emergence of philosophy in China.

Written history in China began in the Zhou period (1111–249 B.C.). We know an unusual amount, still, about the immediately preceding (technically prehistorical) Shang dynasty (1700?–1112 B.C.), deriving our knowledge largely accidentally from their divination practice. Shang priests used oracle bones (turtle shells or large mammal scapulae) in divination, heating the bones until they cracked and *reading* the cracks. They carved questions on the bones and sometimes added instructions gained from the divination. Typically a question asked for guidance and the divination helped select one course of action from alternatives. The diviners stored the bones and shells, probably both as sacred objects, as a record, and as an accumulated store of guidance. Frequently the inscription would also include a record of the outcome—what validity the divination had—on the bone. The discovery of these oracle bone collections has provided scholars with an accidental, indirect, prescriptive history.

If we think of this practice as the origin of Chinese written language, then it suggests one reason why the priests would think of language as guiding behavior. The record keeping would be viewed as accumulating valuable guidance rather than a descriptive history. The practical Chinese conception of divination survives in popular form in the *I Ching*. It instructs us to start by formulating a practical ("Should I . . . ?") question. Typical Western divination, by contrast, focuses, like science, on prediction of future events.

We regard the Shang characters carved on the oracle bones as the etymological ancestors of the Chinese writing system.[3] This descent contributes to a traditional Chinese theory of the pictographic origin of language. Many of these Shang graphs were more recognizably pictographs than are the more stylized descendants. The modern graphs became standard around the Han dynasty (221 B.C.–220 A.D.). A

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higher proportion of early Chinese graphs were pictographic and those more obviously picturelike than the now standard graphs.

The storing of the result of past divination signals another, equally important and enduring Chinese attitude toward language. Chinese culture values the historical accumulation of guiding literature—*dao*. Good guiding words are a precious resource and culture accumulates guiding knowledge as a capital investment and a cultural inheritance.

The divination practice also suggests a pre-historic precedent for the importance and power of an educated priest class in giving guidance and advice to rulers. The divining priests may have been the precursor of the *Ru*$^{\text{Confucian}}$ school.[4] The traditional birthplace of Confucius is in a region that many scholars have argued was a seat of the late Shang culture.

Other features of Shang religion also survived the Zhou conquest, which traditionally marked the beginning of historical China. Its influence on Zhou thought radiated enduring Shang attitudes throughout Chinese history. Especially important, the traditional Chinese religion of ancestor worship appears already to have existed in the Shang. It signaled a religious view that society is continuous across even the boundary of life and death. It contributed to the view of the spiritual realm as continuous with the natural world. The doctrine underwrote the Confucian view of society as an extended family. It also gave religious sanction to the family-role morality that marks Confucianism.

The ultimate ancestor was the Shang deity, the Emperor on High. The Zhou substituted their own deity—*tian*$^{\text{heaven}}$ as the source of guidance. The character suggests an anthropomorphic origin of the concept.[5] Theoretically, however, Zhou thinkers tended steadily to depersonalize *tian*$^{\text{heaven}}$. Ultimately the Zhou *tian*$^{\text{heaven}}$ cult came to resemble nature worship, although *tian*$^{\text{nature:heaven}}$ retained its role as the source of the guiding *dao*$^{\text{way}}$ except among Daoists.[6]

Tian$^{\text{nature:heaven}}$ played a central role in the Zhou theory justifying their conquest of the Shang. The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven gave the Zhou a moral and religious claim to social authority. Heaven *ming*$^{\text{commands}}$ the most virtuous family to rule. The command may pass to another family when the ruling virtue of the old dynastic family declines. This doctrine became the underpinning for the interpretation of the Chinese history as dynastic cycles. The decline in family virtue is apparently inevitable, a Chinese law of moral entropy.

Students of comparative political rationalizations will note interesting contrasts with the Western *divine right of kings*. The mandate is a command, not a right, and it implicitly justifies revolution by the same mechanism that justifies rule.

The history of *tian*$^{\text{nature:heaven}}$ signals the tendency in Chinese philosophy to naturalize norms. Heaven comes to stand for the constant course of things. Moral conclusions follow from the natural context of social action. Normative concepts, such as legitimacy, come to depend on implied conformity with nature (or natural will). Ultimately, the tradition will give naturalistic explanations of the mandate itself, which derives from the natural consequences of running a well-ordered state. Causal explanations regularly displace magical connections in Chinese philosophy.

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Language

I have a good deal more to say about language than about either geography or history, since language lies in the background of my argument for much of the theory that follows. I will adopt the practice, again, of putting argument that draws on extensive familiarity with Western philosophy or Chinese in footnotes. The reader may, again, choose three routes through this material. She may read the text *and* notes, read the text and skip the notes, or, again, skip directly to the narrative chapters that follow. This discussion is necessary more to the argument for my position than to understanding the later narrative. Again the detailed argument is necessary because I am challenging widely held assumptions within sinology about classical Chinese and its relation to Chinese philosophy. The ruling theory, as I outlined it in the preface, assumes that Chinese thinkers all implicitly adopted the familiar Indo-European view of language and mind. Potential defenders of that standard view, therefore, are not invited to skip this section.

In the Introduction (pages 16–18), I introduced that Western dogleg semantic theory of language, meaning, ideas, and the mind. I said there that in this chapter, we would look at some features of Chinese languages that would motivate a different theory on these matters. Indo-European languages are part of the context that influences Indo-European mental theory. In this presentation, I will highlight some ways in which Chinese common sense about language differs from our own. I assume that some general features of modern Chinese spoken languages (tonality, regional variation, sentence final particles) had analogues in ancient times.* The features of writ-

*These assumptions are defeasible, of course, but the evidence, at this point, seems to support their initial plausibility. *The Analects* has passages that suggest that Confucius used an official pronunciation in preference to a colloquial local one. Some thinkers seem to deny these assumptions on a priori grounds. Linguists regularly represent themselves as reconstructing *the* sound of ancient Chinese. Some such systems regard it as important to *explain the emergence of tonality* from other features of language. In the absence of empirical argument for these contrary assumptions, we should assume continuity with current Chinese rather than with Western languages.

The linquistic diversity of China poses a terminological problem. The ordinary criteria for appying both *word* and *language* in English are linked to the written form. We tend to individuate words mainly by their written form. (When we say, "That is one word, not two!" we are normally giving instruction on how to write, not how to speak.) This criterion partly explains why English speakers refer to Chinese characters as words. We also tend to individuate languages by written form. Where speakers share a written form, ordinary usage terms the spoken variations as dialects. Thus we characterize Chinese regional variations as dialects, despite the fact that the actual linguistic diversity in the spoken languages of China is roughly equivalent to that of Europe. I assume that the classical period had analogous linguistic variety.

The theoretically best linguistic chracterization of a *word* and a *language* is a different, difficult, and unsettled matter. The first step is to distinguish a word-token from a word-type. The previous two sentences contained five tokens of the word(-type) *a*. Some tokens of word-types are spoken tokens; some are written tokens. A word-type is an abstract theoretical object. So, therefore, is a language that consists of words. Written and spoken language are different embodiments of the abstract language.

Chinese linguists frequently criticize anyone who describes Chinese as monosyllabic. That characterization is appropriate if we individuate words by spaces in writing—as *zi*$^{\text{characters}}$. I do not find the available arguments for rejecting the view that characters are words particularly compelling. A phrase-structure grammar and a semantic model of ancient Chinese, particularly, could quite consistently place single characters at terminal nodes. That character compounds are more frequent in modern Chinese does not

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ten language I will be describing apply mainly to classical written grammar. I do not necessarily assume that classical written grammar can be identified with the spoken grammar of any particular region of that time. Classical written grammar may have differed from the various ancient spoken grammars as much as it does now.*

The ancient Chinese theory of language was systematically different from Western popular theories. Our respective assumptions about language are not the result of private observation and empirical experience. We learn our theory of language from our community and absorb a shared communal set of assumptions about language from our elders as we learn the language. When others correct our speech, they frequently give us a conventional rationalization for the instruction. Thus they teach us a bit of the conventional theory of language. When they train us to read and write, our teachers may impart a widely accepted theory of writing.

These socially imparted theories of language are not necessarily descriptively accurate.† Consider our Western grammar school theory of language—the one that

convince me that a character base would not work for modern languages as well. The modern compounds mainly have systematic syntactic and semantic structures: verb-object, resultative verb compound, synonym compound, contrastive compound, etc. The fact that translators normally render these compounds with single English words does not settle the theoretical issue.

*Paradoxically, many writers on Chinese language seem to make the opposite assumption. I have tried to trace the source of this surprising view among its adherents. Their objection relies more on conforming to an alleged linguistic consensus than on its explanatory power in dealing with Chinese. They take the priority of spoken language to be a settled linguistic universal and deal with the Chinese counterexample only by struggling to bring it into line with this linguistic generalization. A scientific inference procedure would have stimulated someone to raise doubt about the generalization in the face of the classical Chinese counterexample. As far as I know, only Rosemont (1970) has done this.

The linguistic school that sinologists take to be orthodox assumes that all written languages must be transcriptions of spoken language. Once we understand the type-token distinction, this view seems to lose all plausibility. The written tokens are indeed tokens of word-types in the language. But it does not follow that they must be transcriptions of spoken tokens to play this role. My sources, in any case, suggest that this bias is far from established doctrine in linguistics. Even if it were, we should wonder how the generalization stands in the face of classical Chinese. (Other problems for the generalization include logic, mathematics, sign languages for the deaf, computer languages, drums, smoke signals, and so forth.)

John DeFrancis has led the sinological crusade to accept this generalization and reinterpret the Chinese case to conform to it. His argument seems to rely mainly on citing the emphatic rhetoric of Bloomfield. His pleonisms seem to have become orthodoxy among Chinese language teachers. Bloomfield suggests, somewhat tongue in cheek, that "written language"is an oxymoron. "Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by visible marks." See DeFrancis 1989, p. 48. With the type-token distinction in hand, we can say the same thing about spoken language. Spoken language is not language, but a way of tokening language in an oral-aural medium. But DeFrancis clearly interprets Bloomfield's generalization to mean that written tokens can only be transcriptions of spoken tokens of language. So interpreted, Bloomfield's linguistic generalization is implausible and controversial even for European languages. In the case of Chinese, it simply directly contradicts the normal interpretation of the phenomenon. Searching DeFrancis at length for a justification, just when I would hope to find an argument, I find only appeal to authority: "Most linguists believe this." Therefore, on pain of embarrassing Chinese, we twist and turn to make the appearance conform to the perceived orthodoxy.

Writing grew in China as a ritual practice connected to divination and constrained by its medium—carving on bones. Its telegraphic terseness could reflect ordinary speech only if every Chinese speaker were far more laconic than any Gary Cooper character.

†Note, therefore, that we do not really have to decide whether Bloomfield's claims about the priority of spoken language are true. The relevant question here is whether they are likely to be part of the theory of a culture with Chinese written language and regionally diverse spoken languages. Whether these Western claims are true or not, they are far more likely to become conventional wisdom in a culture with a phonetic alphabet than one with Chinese characters.

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acompanies our linguistic training. Our high school grammar is notoriously not a scientifically sound account of English syntax. Its role is different: to explicate and induce a conception of *correct* formal usage. So we would naturally expect school and folk ideologies of language to exaggerate some features of their respective languages and ignore others. When languages differ, therefore, we may expect their teaching theories to differ perhaps even more markedly. Understandably, we further tend to generalize our own teaching theory. We tend to understand the theory not merely as an account of *our* language, but of the *nature of language* itself.

So we have quite nonmysterious reasons to suppose, then, that where our languages differ, our popular theory of language also will differ. In Western language socialization, for example, spelling accuracy plays a more important role in our evaluation of a person's linguistic competence than does calligraphy. We not only tolerate that well educated people might have unattractive handwriting, we even expect it in doctors. In Chinese language socialization, good calligraphy plays a much more important evaluative social role; their training theory emphasizes calligraphy more than our own.

To understand the background assumptions about language in classical China, we should note the features of our respective languages that contribute to these different popular ideologies. Let me describe some features of Chinese that illustrate the different folk theory of language in classical China.

Pictographs and Ideographs

For Westerners the most familiar element of Chinese is that it is a pictographic or ideographic. The nonalphabetic character of Chinese writing immediately captures our attention—as it does traditional Chinese theory. Unfortunately, the sinologists under Bloomfield's spell assume that the development of writing traces an inevitable path from primitive pictographs to modern phonemic structures. To characterize Chinese as ideographic suggests the demeaning conclusion that Chinese writing is primitive. As a result, some self-styled historical linguists have virtually made a cottage industry of challenging the established use of *ideographic* to describe Chinese.* They bend over backward to keep from taking the unique nature of Chinese writing at face value.† So we find Chinese linguists indignantly trumpeting the Western folk theory that *all* writing is merely a recording of speech.‡

*John DeFrancis's corpus of writings are the locus classicus of this reaction: "The cumulative effects of a professional lifetime in which I have had to put up with error about Chinese have finally propelled me to take up arms against the misrepresentation of its system of writing" (1989, p. xi). His sense of isolation puzzles me. In fact, his view seems to be the conventional wisdom of Anglo-American sinology—which, of course, leads me to question it.

†DeFrancis, for example, insists that all full written languages are "visible speech." He represents Chinese as continuous with German, French, and English, different only in its degree of phonemic accuracy. Correspondence between sounds and symbols "decreases somewhat for systems such as German, Spanish, and Russian. It drops further for French, still further for English, and even further for Chinese" (ibid., p. 51).

‡DeFrancis, as I noted above, openly embraces Bloomfield's dictim: "Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by visible marks" (ibid., p. 48). He acknowledges (1989) that other linguists dissent from this view even as it applies to Western languages. DeFrancis adopts the posture of defending the honor of Chinese against the offensive biases he sees lurking in the accepted characterization

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The slender factual basis of this frenzy of debunking is straightforward. We conventionally divide Chinese graphs into pictographs, ideographs, and phonetic compounds. The pictographs include characters for horse, sun, moon, oxen, sheep, person, and mountain—most of the radicals. The ideographs include such obvious ones as numbers, above and below, middle, and also complex graphs formed from pictographic radicals such as *shen*[forest] (three trees) and *ming*[bright] (sun and moon). The phonetic compounds typically have a pictographic radical and a component that contributes phonetic information.*

DeFrancis's opponents in this mortal struggle are not, as he pretends, Western thinkers bent on ridiculing China. They include Chinese folk theory itself. Popular Chinese language learning aids construct elaborate purported etymologies of most of the phonetic graphs. It assigns a meaning-based rationale to the entire character even while characterizing those elements as phonetics.† As we noted, Chinese language ideology links language, poetry, and painting in a way that contradicts the assumptions of Western folk theory. For our purposes, this hostility to using words like *ideograph* is blind to a distinctive character of the traditional Chinese style of thinking about language. DeFrancis's distaste for this characterization of Chinese comes from his uncritical acceptance of the Western folk theory.

Presumably, the Chinese advocates of the significance of written Chinese do not share our Western ideology of language as a system of sounds. Our popular history of the *invention of (Western) written language* tempts us to view pictographic languages as primitive. DeFrancis's passionate assimilation of Chinese writing to "re-

of Chinese as ideographic. Yet, paradoxically, DeFrancis openly *embraces* the offending *evaluative* premise. Ideographic writing systems, he says, are primitive and phonemic ones are mature. This makes his defense of the honor of Chinese less than ringing. He characterizes Chinese as a grossly "defective" and "abysmally bad" phonemic writing system that is "incomparably more deficient than English" (DeFrancis 1984, p. 128–29). This reminds one of the condemnations of sexism that insist that there are no physical differences between females and males. Surely, the reasonable place to correct such prejudice lies in the evaluative premise that insists that male physiology has special value, not the descriptive premise that states the difference. Let us simply deny the bias: phonemic writing systems are no better than those based on ideographic principles. Then we can accept the normal English characterization of Chinese without moral indignation.

*The DeFrancis line is that since it contributes phonetic information, the graphic structure and meaning of the phonetic element is irrelevant. Since it contributes phonetic information it contributes *only* phonetic information. I can find no justification for this persistent non sequitur.

†Studies have argued that these popular etymologies are not always reliable history. Nonetheless, DeFrancis's puritanical conclusion about phonetic compounds is implausible on its face. The phonemic part may also contribute semantic information. Possible phonetic elements for the sound *li*, for example, include *li*[road], *li*[profit], and *li*[sacrificial vessel]. It hardly seems irrelevant that *li*[ritual] uses *li*[ceremonial vessel] with a religion radical and *li*[pattern] uses the *li*[road] with a jade radical and *li*[clever] uses *li*[profit] with a human radical.

Graham has argued that philosophers apparently designed many characters for expressing philosophical distinctions they thought important. He notes that the phonetic in both *zhong*[loyalty] and *shu*[reciprocity] are relevant to the implicit theory of each (the phoentic *ru*[be like] as explaining *shu*[reciprocity] as likening to oneself, and the phonetic *zhong*[center] for a notion both of loyalty to the ruler *and* wholeheartedness on behalf of inferiors) (Graham 1989, p. 21). He offers similar arguments for *qing*[feelings] (p. 98), *xing*[nature] (p. 56), *cheng*[sincerity] (p. 133), *bian*[dispute] (p. 36), and a host of other important terms in classical philosophy. Graham argues that the Mohists used character-construction techniques deliberately to make what they took to be important philosophical dinstinctions. Even if DeFrancis *were* right about the bad consequences of allowing ourselves to call Chinese characters *ideographs*, the view of language enshrined in such a characterization is very plausibly that of the classical philosophers themselves, not merely of Western dilettantes.

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cording of speech'' shares this bias. He writes, ''Error about the Chinese system of writing can subtly lead to bias against the Chinese people themselves.''* The proper attack, again, on this bias is the premise that phonemic writing is more highly developed writing. Leaving that premise in place will demean Chinese writing even if we manage to ''correct'' the quaint view of Chinese as totally pictographic to a more accurate view that it is 25 percent phonetic. It will still seem relatively primitive until we dethrone that baseless value assumption about possible writing systems.

The real culprit here is the assumption that sound and speech are integral to the very concept of language. The proper corrective, as the type-token distinction directs, is to treat language as an abstract symbolic system. Sounds are *one familiar example* of linguistic symbols, not their essence. Pictures, gestures, electromagnetic modulations, graphs, map conventions, eyebrow movements, ideographs, logical notation and so forth are other possible symbol systems that can token words of a language. The assumption that language consists essentially of sounds—even without the Chinese example—has seldom captivated philosophers. We refer to our logical systems, to mathematics, and to computer languages as *languages*.† The argument that we should stop speaking our accustomed way about these things is far from compelling.

Suppose we speak only of natural languages, those that children can learn *at their mother's knee*. This turns out empirically to be mainly spoken, verbal language. But that seems largely an accident of physiology, not a consequence of the very concept of a language. Deaf children, for example, can learn a first language that is not based on sound.‡

The deeper problem is that the sinologists, shying away from acknowledging any significance of Chinese writing, miss the ways it could be philosophically interesting. First, the issue here is not whether ''pictographic'' or ''ideographic'' is a *correct* description of written Chinese. Our question is whether the Chinese language ideology would naturally so describe it. DeFrancis's treatment would make it seem that our tendency (and the traditional Chinese tendency) to characterize Chinese as ideographic lacks *any* factual basis. The alleged error is a total fantasy. I would think that something in the difference between written English and written Chinese demands an alternate explanation. It will hardly do to say written Chinese is just like English, only deficiently so.

What tempts us to remark on the uniqueness of Chinese characters is not merely

*Ibid., p. xi. As we noted, this is not subtle. It is a consequence of the bias that DeFrancis embraces: the view that the natural line of development of writing is from pictographs to phonemic systems. See, for example, his comment on page 221 that all systems of writing are alike in ''tracing their ancestry back to pictographic symbols. . . .''

†DeFrancis dismisses formal languages like mathematics on the grounds that they are *incomplete*. He does not give this claim a clear alternative sense from that used in logic. Given the logical sense, all languages complex enough to include ordinary arithmetic are incomplete. Given the common-sense reading, his argument would be easily derailed by formal results in metalogic. The Lowenheim-Skolem theorem shows that *any* language with denumerably many sentences has an interpretive model in first-order logic plus arithmetic. I presume that a language would count as complete in DeFrancis's sense if it has *infinitely many possibilities* for the expression of thoughts.

‡DeFrancis dismisses sign language used by deaf people with the observation that all actual communities of deaf people have incorporated elements of the language of their larger society. That does nothing to show that a natural gesture language is either conceptually or even humanly impossible.

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that they look like pictures of their object (they don't, normally). Nor is it that historically, they seem to be derived from pictures. What really tempts us is the interlanguage aspect of Chinese graphs. DeFrancis's parallels with English and Finnish are misleading because Chinese seems a hybrid between a single language and a language family. *Many different* Chinese languages share a *single* written form. A Chinese written graph no more represents a sound in one of those languages than in any other.

Chinese writing thus plays the interlanguage role of Plato's realm of meanings and its philosophical descendant, private mentalese ideas.* Chinese writing tempts us to describe it as ideographic or pictographic because it plays the interlanguage role that Western theory envisions for its pictographic mental ideas. Chinese graphs give a model that explains how to relate the sounds of different spoken languages. But the model is a social-conventional model, not a mental, abstract, or metaphysical one.

In theory, we need not limit the possibility that characters play such a role to languages in the Chinese family. For a long time in early Japanese history, the main writing system (for males) was classical Chinese. It had as little relation to Japanese spoken language as it would to English. We could also write English in Chinese characters using similar techniques.†

I find the implicit Chinese view eminently reasonable. Our ability at language

*This is what makes the word *ideograph* seem appropriate. Ideographs do not *represent* ideas; they play the analogous explanatory role in Chinese theories of language that ideas play in the Western counterparts. Chinese *zi*$^{\text{characters}}$ are in this sense analogous to ideas. The theory of ideas treats them as picture-like, interlanguage items. A causal chain ties both ideas and *zi*$^{\text{characters}}$ to the objects in the world to which the words of language refer. They anchor the dog-leg theory because they *purport to* substitute straightforward pictorial representation for the mysterious power of semantic representation.

The main difference is that Plato's version paints the ideas as the ultimately *real objects* in an objective realm of reason. He treats only the sound as constituting the *conventional* aspect of language. Our seventeenth-century mentalese version of Platonism also makes the pictographic language in the head nonconventional. This individualist version makes the mental ideographs purely subjective and private. (They are still, however, the product of reason—now combined with experience.)

Chinese *zi*$^{\text{characters}}$ are unmistakably conventional, social, and public. Classical Chinese theorists do not give into the temptation to make picturing the explanation of the language-world relation. History (Sage king's coining) and convention (our intentions to conform to their usage) tie language to the world. The Chinese counterpart of this pictographic interlanguage language is different mainly in being an on-the-earth, conventional language rather than a private, mental, intellectual or other-worldly one. Chinese writers easily recognize that even a pictographic orthography is a social convention. A picture language stands in need of intentional interpretation as much as does a system of sounds. They would not be tempted to the naive assumption that postulating a pictographic mental language into which one translated sounds would solve the riddle of language. It could not provide the required *constant* relation of language and the world. Even if they were pictures, their usage still would depend on the surrounding conventions, not on their pure pictographic content.

†DeFrancis lampoons this possibility in a burlesque titled "The Singlish Affair." He describes an fictional plot by the Japanese, together with Koreans and Vietnamese, to force Westerners to write in Chinese characters after the war. DeFrancis apparently hoped that the account would lay this *silly idea* to rest as a bit of quaint chinoiserie. Unfortunately, he reports, many readers took the spoof seriously. He seems to have missed the point of that reaction. What it shows is that the story has just enough *conceptual plausibility to make a good hoax.* DeFrancis thinks the story shows the incoherence of the idea and just how it is supposed to do that is an enormous mystery. Of course, the story does show political, social, and cultural naïveté. It is certainly bizarre to think that this particular conceptual possibility is sensible policy. To note the *conceptual possibility* of such a thing is not to *advocate it as linguistic policy.*

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presupposes a distinctive human ability to identify categories of shapes, what artificial intelligence theorists characterize as *pattern recognition*. Our ability to read presupposes this ability to recognize categories of shapes. So does our ability to apply language in guiding our behavior in the world. Both require that we can recognize a set of *similar* shape tokens as a type. We learn to recognize a conventional shape or to assign a word to a conventionally determined range of shapes. Pictographs are early forms of writing because a communally shared shape recognition capacity must exist for any language development.*

The popular Chinese ideology is not unlike our own in this regard. The written form influences both folk theories of language. Even illiterates will learn their respective culture's theories. They would adopt their culture's theory of language as they their culture's theory of the sun, the moon, psychology and spirits, and death. They need not have learned to write themselves to acquire the community's ideology of their language. All they must do is talk about language with others who do accept the theory.

Meaning, Translation, and the Mental

So the feature of Chinese that tempts us (even if mistakenly) to describe it as pictographic or ideographic is philosophically important. It shows why Chinese language theorists would *not be tempted* to anything like the Western dogleg theory of meaning. Western ideology introduces meaning to explain interlanguage translation. Since the theory of meaning has such extensive historical and theoretical links to the notoriously obscure notion of an idea, we lack one important motivation to postulate Chinese counterparts of ideas, beliefs, meanings, thoughts, or the apparatus of mental, cognitive content.

To show this, consider a typical, standard account of how our folk theory generates puzzles about meaning. Notice that implicit in our grammar-school ideology is a requirement that meanings be objects of some sort. Our assuming language has a descriptive function and our focus on objects as the building blocks of reality inclines us to require objects for any meaningful term in our language.†

> How can a word—a noise or a set of marks on paper—*mean* something? There are some words, like "bang" or "whisper," which sound a bit like what they

*Neutrally, we can say that language consists of intelligible symbols. Gestures, sounds, pictures, smoke puffs, and dance steps can be symbols. The only a priori limit on symbols is that humans be able to learn to recognize them: can we make sense of the principles of combination that allow the generation of new symbols and complex symbols from simple ones? Beyond that, contrary to sinological dogma, we find no a priori objection to treating a language of conventional written symbols as distinct from any particular spoken language.

In English, as I argued above, we individuate words and languages by criteria based on the written form. We regard *fit out* as two words and *outfit* as one. We do not say that *biscuit* and *cookie* are the same word in British and American English. We tend to say, instead, that *the same word* means something different in British English. Chinese speakers refer to the character to disambiguate their utterances. When someone asks what they mean, they may write the character on their hands, in the air or describe it. Some characters have familiar descriptions such as "three-line Wong." They also can use character combinations to identify the character such as "the *zhong* in *zhongguo*."

†Actually, more sophisticated versions of the representational theory require that there be objects backing up only the *logically proper* names of the language. Other terms are then construed as complex names. This analysis is necessary to deal with the problem of reference to nonexistent objects.

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> refer to, but usually there is no resemblance between a name and the thing it is the name of. The relation in general must be something entirely different. . . . The mystery of meaning is that it doesn't seem to be located anywhere—not in the word, not in the mind, not in a separate concept or idea hovering between the word, the mind and the things we are talking about.[7]

However familiar and intuitive this notion of a meaning hovering around our use of language may seem to us, we need not attribute it to classical Chinese philosophers. The Western theory came to invoke the private pictographic language. Since, unlike sounds, ideas *do* resemble their objects, they form the explanatory link between sounds and objects in the world. We identify those mental pictographs as the person's meanings for the words of whatever language she learns. These mental objects explain our ability to learn conventional languages. Western folk theory supposes that we translate our mother tongue into this private language of mental pictographs.

Traditional Chinese theorists would have no parallel motivation to postulate private, subjective meanings. Chinese folk theory treats the alleged pictographs as having a historical, causal relation to the world (as do our ideas). But the history is the history of a linguistic community, not that of an individual, and the Chinese use of the graphs conforms to historical conventions. Their theories note explicitly the conventional nature of language and the crucial role of acceptability of use. Chinese theorists emphasize the relation of language and society, perhaps even more than they emphasize the relation of language and the world.

Chinese thinkers don't get caught up in the familiar problems of meaning. They do not start with a conception of philosophy as a search for definitions. That doesn't mean they are not philosophical. They simply adopt an intuitively more social theory of language. Social conventions govern all aspects of language—the graphs themselves, the distinctions, and the sounds we have for the character. Language depends on social agreement, convention, or coincidence. The shared pattern of use has customary normative status. These conventions, Chinese skeptics note, could be different from what they are. Chinese skeptics draw on cultural relativism for their doubts instead of inner, private subjectivity.

Emotionless Tone

The Western student's difficulty with spoken Chinese usually comes before she deals with characters. It starts with tones. This is not because tone is an inherently difficult aspect of pronunciation or even that tone is lacking in English. The problem is that our early linguistic training taught us to disregard tone in identifying words. Our grammar school ideology of language normally overlooks tone. We learn pronunciation and grammar while focusing on our written symbols—alphabet letters. Tone does play a role in speaking English but not in writing it. The intonation on a sentence signals different speech roles—expressing sarcasm or skepticism, accusing, flirting questioning, persuading, demanding, and so forth. This, however, we seldom teach in our grammar books. The role of tone strikes us as too amorphous to train explic-

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itly; we assume that one gets it naturally or not at all. Sincerity cannot be taught. In our popular theory, we effectively treat tone as extralinguistic.

We instead use the word *tone* in the denotation-connotation distinction. In our folk theory of language, the tone of voice does not change the *substance* of what we say. It only changes the affective overlay, what we call *emotional* tone. One may adopt a sneering tone, a questioning tone, a surprised tone, and so on. Westerners thus learn a folk theory of language that links the phenomenon of tone to another aspect of our philosophy of mind. It reinforces the folk theory's split between intellect and emotion, idea and feeling, belief and desire, reason and passion. Words express pure rational ideas. Tone expresses emotion or feeling. You learn words, but the emotional tone is just a natural result of your emotional state.

In modern Chinese languages (presumably also in classical Chinese languages) tone plays a linguistic role more like that of letter-phonemes in Indo-European languages.* This feature of Chinese is a source of the stereotype that Chinese has a singsong quality.† This also may have contributed to the stereotype of Oriental inscrutability. In fact, Chinese speakers may be as uncomfortable with allowing the tone to vary *emotionally* as Western students are with making the tone constant.

Given that tone plays the word-identifying role, we might wonder how one can *express emotions* in Chinese? For example, Cantonese—a modern language closer to ancient Chinese—has a rich vocabulary of words in sentence final position that convey sarcasm, surprise, doubt, persuasive force, and so forth. One simply adds that word to the end of an utterance to change what we would call its *emotive* role.‡

One could say that Chinese language exhibits the social, or emotive, impact of what we say straightforwardly. This feature of language reveals explicitly that we do things with language, especially social things. Western language ideology, by contrast, treats the key role of language as conveying ideas, facts and descriptive content. Chinese language training more naturally portrays language as a way people interact with and influence each other. In Chinese we use a particular explicit word to quote, to command, to persuade, and otherwise to affect people.

My hypothesis is that Chinese language training would not motivate the Western bias toward understanding language as descriptive.§ Chinese theorists could plausibly

*That is, tone is crucial to word identification. The phonetic qualities associated with letters—rounded versus unrounded *(o* versus *e),* bilabial versus dental *(b* versus *d),* are important distinctions in English. They determine which English word we token. In Chinese, level versus rising, upper versus lower tone do that as much does change in vowel quality or consonant.

†This is especially true of Cantonese, from which many of our stereotypes descend. Cantonese has more tones, a greater tonal range, and less tone sandhi than Mandarin, so that each word is usually said in its full tone. The conversational enthusiasm of Cantonese speakers reinforces the impression.

‡I believe that this phenomenon is less an expression of emotion than signaling the speech-act role or illocutionary force of a sentence. The same sentence with the addition of a final word may be used to persuade, to order, to question, to criticize, etc. My describing this as expressing an emotion is a temporary concession to the Western folk-theory of language.

§I do not assume that this feature of Chinese is the *cause* of their viewing language in its social context. Chinese philosophy arose in a context of prior interest in transmission, conformity, mastery, and practice of ritual as means of socialization. Western philosophy arose in the context of prior interest in astronomy, navigation, geometry, etc. These dominant interests probably account most directly for the different context in which the two traditions viewed language. Western thinkers looked at language in its relation with the world (semantics), Chinese thinkers looked at language and its relation to language users

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assume that language socializes us.* I will argue that Chinese thinkers treat skill in applying names as a learned ability. We conform to the community in marking distinctions. This shared linguistic skill enables the community to coordinate behavior. In philosophical terms, the Chinese theory of language starts from pragmatics—the relation of language and user; Western theory focuses first on semantics—the relation of language and the world.

Ordered Grammar

For the struggling Western student, the simplicity of Chinese grammar may partly compensate for the tonal difficulty. Students sometimes put the point inaccurately by saying Chinese lacks grammar. The kernel of truth in this cliché is that Chinese grammar does not use grammatical inflection.† Our conventional expression comes, again, from our grammar-school ideology of language. Our formal language training focused strongly on number, tense, and case inflections. Since we seldom find it necessary to teach word-order to native speakers, we emphasize grammatical agreement in urging students to speak correctly. The conventional examples of bad grammar are such things as absence of subject-verb agreement and mistakes in case and number. So we tend to think of these features as exhausting the range of *grammar.* Our struggle with the grammar of other Indo-European languages also focuses on the tedium of declining verbs for tense and number and mastering the gender and case inflections.‡

Chinese, in this respect, resembles logic more than English does.§ In ancient written Chinese especially, word order determines grammatical role.|| As long we order terms strictly, case inflections are superfluous.

and social convention (pragmatics). This feature merely reveals a particular way that each culture elaborated that direction of analysis.

*Classical Chinese thinkers eventually do *derive* a theory of the descriptive role of language *from* this more basic role of guiding behavior. Their theory of term reference grows from accounting for how we should make social usage *constant.* External reference was one theory of how to regularize name use.

†This statement of the difference depends on a restrictive conception of an inflection. Chinese uses characters—sometimes after verbs, sometimes as sentence finals—that might be described as tense markers. I would describe them as aspect markers (completion, continuation) rather than tense markers. A completion marker may be used grammatically along with the word *tomorrow,* for example. If we think of inflection as affecting a word *and* think of a character as a word, then these would not count as inflections. Of course the same could be said of the plural pronoun *zi*[character], *men* (Mandarin), or *dei* (Cantonese).

‡Our grammar-school folk-theory rationalizes our investment in mastering these perplexing features of Indo-European languages. We believe that this complicated system of inflections is essential to clear communication. Studying Chinese liberates us from this prejudice. The Indo-European way of marking sentence functions will come to seem unnecessary. Studying logic would have had the same effect. Logical notations also dispense with most inflections. (I say "most" because we could regard the difference between variable and predicate letters [usually capitalized and small letters] as a counterpart of syntactical inflection.) Logical notations rely mainly on order and operators. If your sentence contains words like *yesterday,* tense is redundant. If *seven* precedes a noun, we hardly need a *marker* on the verb to tell us it is that seven is *two or more.* Nouns occur in subject and object position (in English) without case marking. Pronouns *could* do the same.

§Linguists call languages which rely on word order rather than inflections *analytic.* English is among the most analytic of Western languages. Classical Chinese may well be the most analytic of actual human languages.

||As in logic, classical Chinese predicates have several ordered *slots* or *places* for terms. A transitive

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Our folk theory of language stresses another accidental feature, especially of English. Our grammatical training includes the imperative to speak and write in complete sentences. A complete *sentence* expresses a complete *thought*. Our ideology emphasizes that a complete sentence has both a subject and a predicate. In English, even in slightly bizarre contexts, we grammatically require the subject term (as in "It is raining"). Although, logically, the typical sentence is equally *about* all the terms used in it, our grammar ideology teaches us that the predicate says something about the subject. Thus a standard thought is *about* some object and describes that object in a certain way.

Classical Chinese written language regularly omits the subject *and* other preverbal nouns. We should not, therefore, assume that our sentence-based ideology will be part of the intuitive Chinese theory of their language. If we do not attribute a belief in a subject-predicate distinction to Chinese philosophers, then we would have no reason to attribute its elaboration in ontology or theory of mind to them. Chinese philosophers need not believe that expressions are *about particular objects*. We need not assume their ontology analyzes reality as consisting of substances (objects, particulars) with attributes (properties, characteristics). We need not assume that they share the psychological theory of *subjectivity* versus *objectivity*. We need not assume they will treat language as conveying a unit of thought (belief or other counterpart of a sentence) or a fact.

These familiar, almost instinctive, aspects of our folk theories surrounding language training need not be part of the folk theory conveyed in teaching a language as different as Chinese. We cannot treat these as default assumptions in our interpretive theory. Each attribution would require constructive argument from the text.

Building Blocks of Language

We learn our grammar by means of a theory that breaks language down into several individual structural parts. Our grammar-school ideology does closely associate spoken and written language. So we individuate first the letters (sounds) that compose words in the written form. Our theory then individuates words mainly by our writing conventions—where we leave spaces. Our theory treats a word as a string of sounds with a syntactical role (part of speech) and a meaning (an association with an idea). Words (parts of speech) fit together to make sentences. The sentence is a key structural fragment in our linguistic ideology. Sentence boundaries govern most grammatical agreement. We think of grammar as the rules for constructing sentences. Our way of teaching our grammar therefore stresses the sentence.* Sentences express

verb has two ordered places, a verb that takes an indirect object has three, an intransitive verb one, and so forth. Prepositions increase the number of places in a predicate where terms can be inserted. The instrumental preposition *i*$^{\text{with}}$ comes between the subject position and the verb. The locative preposition *yu*$^{\text{in}}$ comes after the objects. The preverbal term-slots may be emply. The postverbal ones require variables (pronouns) if the term is missing.

*Wittgenstein treated our concept of *a fact* as a structure of reality that shares its logical form with the structure of a sentence. A typical sentence consists of a set of terms and a relational element. A fact consists of the corresponding configuration of the objects referred to by the terms. A fairly recent trend in Western syntax is dialogue-based grammar. Logicians can be said to study the grammar of a *series of sentences*, an argument.

Western semantic thought gave Western thinkers other reasons for treating sentences as important.

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beliefs (complete thoughts composed of ideas). Sentences map onto our mental world. Sentences share a logical form with our inner thoughts and beliefs.

Chinese theories of the structural units that make up language would, of course, differ. If the Chinese also drew on their written form, they would not treat sound as the basic building block. As they learn to write, they learn a different theory about the origin and nature of writing, a theory that would not start with phonemic letters or an analysis of syllables into components. The Chinese merely note that the *zi*[characters] are pronounced in a certain way in their dialect. They would not describe themselves as *writing sounds.* The basic structural unit Chinese language training emphasizes is the brush stroke.*

The next unit in Chinese folk theory is the radical—the graph or that part of a graph that contributes meaning.† There are radicals for *human, water, tree, mouth, heart, language, fish, bone, knife,* and so forth. Complex characters contain radicals in configurations with character elements that contain the phonetic information.‡

Here Chinese popular theory links writing up with spoken language in a different way. Characters do *not* represent sounds. They note, simply, that different Chinese

Our concept of truth applies properly only to sentences. Our traditional theory of language dealt mainly with semantics or theory of meaning. As these developed, we understood the meaning to depend on the notion of the truth of a sentence. Similarly our epistemology focused on propositional attitudes—the difference between belief and knowledge. Belief and knowledge contrast only at the level of the sentence or proposition, the complete thought. We also call them *sentential* or *propositional* attitudes.

Chinese pragmatic linguistic theory, by contrast, deals with assertability more than truth. This contrast is a genus-species contrast, not an exclusive one. We can think of *truth* as a species of *assertability.* Distinguishing truth pragmatically from other species of assertability appeals to the theory of the faculty of reason and the doctrine of belief-content. We do not limit assertability, as we do truth, to sentences. We may assess words, phrases, sentences, arguments, even whole dialogues for assertability.

Chinese thought does deal with *zhi*[knowledge] but not with propositional knowledge. Classical Chinese has no grammatically parallel verb for propositional belief. The grammatical object of *zhi*[know] is always a noun or a verb phrase, not a subject-predicate sentence. The kind of knowledge that makes sense of Chinese views is knowing-how to do something, knowing-to-do something, or knowing-of (about) something.

The closest counterparts to a belief context in classical Chinese also focuses on the term, not the sentence. Where we would say, "He believes it is good," classical Chinese would use a structure something like, "He goods it" or "He, *yi*[with] (with regard to) that, *wei*[deems] [it] good." We capture its theoretical force best by talking about a disposition to use a term of some object. Some translators render this belieflike structure as *deeming* or *regarding* something as being of a kind.

*The brush stroke links calligraphy and painting in Chinese folk theory. It obviously does not emphasize the alleged gap between words and pictures familiar to Western students. Chinese painting, conversely, comfortably includes language in the frame. Even landscapes scrolls typically incorporate a peom, proverb, or couplet. The continuity of calligraphy and painting is a deep and important cultural feature of Chinese aesthetics and theory of character. The Chinese theory of excellence in painting and calligraphy stress the *quality* of the brush strokes. That accounts partly for the emphasis noted above on the importance of calligraphy as revealing a person's character. The stark dichotomy of pictures and words, so familiar in our "worth a thousand" proverb would hardly make sense as a feature of Chinese language teaching.

†Traditional dictionary organization uses radicals and Chinese folk etymology stress the pictographic origin of the radical component of characters.

‡The phonetic information may be more accurate for some characters and in some dialects (languages) than others. As I noted above, Chinese folk theory typically assigns meaning to the phonetic element as well. Historians of Chinese language, remember, regard these folk etymologies as mostly fanciful. Whether or not we agree, the Chinese folk theory is certainly easy enough to motivate. Typically a number of phonetic structures are available to signal the approximate sound of a character. It is hardly obvious that the phonetic element selected from the range available has nothing to do with meaning.

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