The Discovery of Chinese Logic

By

Joachim Kurtz
EPILOGUE

That which is written should be studied with sympathetic mildness, and not tortured on the rack, like a helpless prisoner, until it renders what it never received.

John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* (1159)*

The story of the dual translation of logic in late imperial China, as recounted in the preceding chapters, was conceived as an exemplary genealogy of the conceptual changes from which contemporary Chinese discourses have emerged. Like many genealogical studies it aimed at a “denaturalizing critique” of a discourse that has become used to hiding its novelty behind presumably necessary and self-evident assumptions, and the ideas and practices these help to sustain.¹ One of my main goals was to highlight two related points that are all too often ignored in studies of Chinese intellectual history. First, I argued that the languages in which knowledge and experience have come to be articulated in China since the late nineteenth century are the results of complex and contingent processes of translation and appropriation whose implications are not yet fully understood. Secondly, I tried to show that genealogical reconstructions of these languages can offer insights not only into the formation of individual discourses but, more generally, into the dynamics of the conceptual adaptations without which the discoveries of “Chinese logic,” “Chinese philosophy,” “Chinese science,” and related discourses would have remained inconceivable.

* John of Salisbury continues, no less pointedly: “One who withdraws what he never deposited, and harvests what he never sows, is far too severe and harsh a master, as also is one who forces poor Porphyry to cough up the opinions of all philosophers, and will not rest content until the latter’s short treatise teaches everything that has ever been written.” Daniel D. McGarry, trans., *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 148.

1. Translation and Rupture

Intellectual historians have long held that linguistic changes, such as those on which all these discoveries depended, can be seen as markers of epistemic ruptures. The emergence of new vocabularies is in many instances both an indicator of, and a factor in, radical conceptual transformations. As Melvin Richter has observed, “higher rates of neologisms appear in times of accelerated change.” Lexical innovations that gain acceptance in transitional moments thus offer rich evidence for historians aiming to understand reconfigurations of the conceptual frameworks structuring existing and emerging discursive practices. The fertility of this approach has been underscored by a number of large-scale research projects that have enlisted historical semantics as a tool to analyze the emergence of new social and political languages in crucial periods of Euro-American history. More recently, historians of knowledge have also begun to consider linguistic evidence in their accounts of “paradigm shifts” and other forms of epistemic discontinuity. As yet, however, few students of epistemic change have expanded their inquiries from analyzing concepts used within individual communities to reconstructing migrations of meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The price of this reluctance is an

---


7 Melvin Richter, “More Than a Two-Way Traffic: Analyzing, Translating, and Comparing Political Concepts from Other Cultures,” Contributions to the History of Con-
impoverished and overtly static picture of global intellectual history that has allowed wishful claims of continuity to go unchallenged, and has reinforced rather than disassembled reified notions of nations, cultures, and scholarly disciplines.

The adventures of logic in late imperial China can serve as an antidote to such incomplete accounts. By highlighting the complexities customarily ignored in nation-based histories, they illustrate the dynamic nature of the conceptual changes that make domestications of unfamiliar fields of learning across and between languages and cultures possible. At the same time, they elucidate the depth and violence of the epistemic ruptures that can be caused by transcultural migrations of knowledge. Both aspects can only be appreciated when the translation processes on which they depend are embedded in the multilayered contexts in which concrete acts of adaptation and negotiation took place. Accidental or intentional disregard for these contexts may give rise to ahistorical generalizations about supposedly perennial features of actors or ideas involved in transcultural interactions. In the specific case of logic, such generalizations have more often than not led to orientalist, and auto-orientalist, statements about allegedly incommensurable ways of thinking and facilitated dismissive judgments about the rationality, or lack thereof, of the “Eastern mind” in its various guises.

Yet, already the first and undeniably futile episode retold in the opening chapter of this book refutes suggestions of a general incommensurability between Chinese and European ways of thinking. Nothing prevented ingenious translators, such as Li Zhizao and Francisco Furtado, from finding or creating a lexical and conceptual “in-between” that connected Jesuit-Aristotelian logica and late Ming “substantial learning.” If the text emerging from their mind-wrenching exercises proved meaningless outside of Li’s Hangzhou mansion, this was not because the work was impossible to understand but because ideological and historical factors combined, as we have seen, to deprive it of its potential attraction. Likewise, it was anything but incomprehension that led savvy Hanlin academicians to expose Ferdinand Verbiest’s

syllogistic trap and seal the fate of logic in China for more than two centuries.

Nor did the haphazard logical overtures of nineteenth-century Protestant authors end in failure because the missionaries or their audiences were unable to grasp and resolve conceptual dissonances that are inevitably involved in the transmission of a science as alien as European logic continued to be perceived in late Qing China. Rather, neither side showed much interest even to try. Logic ranged near the bottom of what Protestants hoped to sell their prospective Chinese followers as useful knowledge, and for Chinese scholars the need to maintain faith in the authority of the classical canons became more pressing with the signs of each new crisis gathering on the horizon. Still, the scattered Protestant efforts to translate European logic into Chinese documented once again that even the most esoteric notions of this science could be cast in a recognizable Chinese shape. At the same time, the futility of all foreign attempts to translate logic into China throughout the nineteenth century confirmed that Chinese elites, in marked contrast to the political classes of more fully colonized countries, remained in control of the conceptual space in which meaningful discourse could be articulated. Not until influential scholars decided that they could indeed benefit from a discipline promising to restore the certainty that China had gradually lost under the onslaught of foreign encroachment and internal rebellion did logic gain its first secure foothold in the Chinese discursive universe.

The Chinese discovery of European logic shortly before 1900 and the rapid naturalization of the discipline in the final decade of the Qing dynasty proved how swiftly a new and unfamiliar science could be integrated into China’s conceptual space once sufficiently influential voices were found to sing its praises. In our case this role was performed with great relish by Yan Fu, whose sustained advocacy almost single-handedly secured a place for logic on China’s intellectual map. Yan’s success was all the more remarkable in view of the widespread criticisms of the translations that he considered his most valuable service to his scholarly peers. Once curiosity had been ignited, Chinese audiences did indeed find more convenient ways of learning about the discipline than working their way through Yan Fu’s painfully manneristic renditions.

The integration of the discipline into the curricula of normal schools and universities was the next important step in the Chinese domestication of European logic. Although little evidence survived as to how
effectively instruction in logic was implemented, especially at the prov-
cvincial and local levels, the subject quickly came to be regarded as an
indispensable, albeit not the most exciting, branch of the disciplines
taught in the empire’s new schools. New-style textbooks that added
flesh to the bones of curricular requirements further reinforced the
presence and visibility of logic in China’s discursive space. Although
none of the introductory primers that were produced in great haste
was written with much theoretical interest, most presented reliable
images of late traditional syllogistics and illustrated the discipline’s
practical applications. Thanks to their sheer numbers the new text-
books secured a wider circulation of the field’s emerging technical
vocabulary. By 1904, logical terms began to percolate into various
domains of public discourse, and a debate about the most appropriate
name for the science mushroomed into a controversy about the ques-
tion of how foreign notions in general should best be accommodated
in Chinese.

“Chinese logic” appeared on the stage not until well over two hun-
dred and fifty years into the history of logic in China. Prior to the turn
of the twentieth century no Chinese or foreign author had hinted at
similarities between the seemingly esoteric notions of European logic
and the hidden or forgotten insights preserved in the center or even
at the margins of the Chinese canons. This changed rapidly once logic
became an object of public interest, thanks to Yan Fu’s lobbying and
the official embrace of the new school curricula. Almost overnight,
prominent scholars began to lament the lack of explicit logical theoriz-
ing in classical texts as a fatal deficit of traditional Chinese civilization.
Due to their labors, the unsettling suggestion that the vast archives
of China’s past did not contain any trace of a discipline portrayed
as being central to science, and hence modernity, soon proved to be
untenable. Following tentative identifications of native equivalents
in China and Germany, and inspired by more substantial anticipa-
tions in Japan, several of the most influential writers of the late Qing
period discovered fragments of logical insights in texts that had been
neglected for centuries. Relying on an emerging language of logic and
the extended conceptual lexicon it provided, the four authors exam-
inied in the final chapter of this study translated their findings into a
contemporary idiom that reinterpreted the objects of their discoveries,
notwithstanding their partially mutilated shape and enigmatic brevity,
as an integral part of what they perceived to be a global discourse of
great significance. Although virtually all of their specific interpretations
have been rejected, their fundamental assertion that ancient Chinese thinkers were able to formulate explicit insights whose subject matter paralleled key concerns of European logic has become common knowledge today, in China and beyond. So common, indeed, that the epistemic rupture without which this assertion would have remained impossible tends to be forgotten.

2. From Discovery to Invention

Like its sudden and unexpected appearance, the triumphant success of this assertion was by no means a foregone conclusion. As did the discovery of Chinese logic itself, the development from tentative looks at scattered fragments to the self-confident invention of an independent tradition spanning more than 2,500 years depended on a host of contingent factors. Without determined personal commitment, interpretative genius, and an institutional setting and ideological climate favorable to the production of master narratives supporting claims of national and cultural continuity, Chinese logic may well have had a far less glamorous career than it ultimately came to enjoy.

In the turbulent years leading up to the fall of the imperial order in 1911, the discovery of Chinese logic remained an academic feat too marginal to cause much excitement beyond a small community of philosophically minded scholars. Not even the new textbooks on logic published in the first years after the fall of the dynasty included more than fleeting, if any, references to Chinese equivalents of this unwieldy science. Efforts to build on the creative findings of late Qing authors only began to take shape in the context of the New Culture Movement. The political failure of the young republic led many aspiring scholars to question the viability of traditional Chinese culture with renewed urgency. For those who were not willing to condemn their country’s legacy wholesale, the search for alternative traditions offered a way to maintain a measure of continuity in view of undeniable ruptures.

---

8 The two most popular textbooks of the 1910s did not refer to Chinese logic at all; see Fan Bingqing 樊炳清, *Lunlixue yaoling* 論理學要領 (Essential outline of logic) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1915); and Zhang Ziche 張子則 (trans.), *Xin lunlixue* 新論理學 (New logic) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1915). Another widely circulated title stated emphatically that ancient China “never knew logic”; see Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬 (trans.), *Lunlixue jiangyi* 論理學講義 (Lectures in logic) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1912), 1.
without being forced to refrain from advocating the adoption of new
knowledge or criticizing what they too regarded as debilitating aspects
of China’s mainstream tradition. In this heated climate, the discov-
eries of indigenous roots for a quintessentially modern discipline gained
fresh appeal. Beginning with a long essay on “Our Ancient Logical
Heritage” (Bianxue guyi 辨學古遺), serialized in 1916 in the schol-
arily periodical Da Zhonghua 大中華 (The Great Chung Hwa Magazine), a
wealth of publications set out to expand upon the first assessments of
the nature and essential elements of Chinese logical thought. Over the
ensuing decades, these efforts moved the discussion in several distinct
steps from the identification of occasional correspondences between
classical texts and logical theorems to the invention of an unbroken
Chinese tradition, equivalent in every respect to its European and
Indian models.

Contributions to the revived debate came in multiple forms. Works
of textual criticism resolved many of the remaining philological riddles
besetting the emerging canon of Chinese logic. Liang Qichao, who
had avoided the subject for more than a decade following the stinging
criticisms of his apparent logical incompetence, staged an unexpected
comeback in this context. The “Mohist Canons,” Collated and Annotated
(Mojing jiaoshi 墨經校釋), published in 1920, offered a new explication
of the way in which the “Canons” and “Explanations” needed to be
connected that became widely accepted as the most plausible reading,
outshining even Sun Yirang’s path-breaking structural reconstruction.10
In an accompanying series of essays, Liang revoked many of his earlier
interpretations as flawed but insisted that a complete and recover-
able system of logic lay encoded in this still enigmatic text.11 Liang’s
work was but one among many spirited exercises in philological rigor
stimulated by the effort to “reorganize China’s learned heritage” that
gained traction in the first half of the 1920s.12 A new generation of

---

9 Gao Yuan 高元 [Gao Chengyuan 高承元], “Bianxue guyi 辨學古遺 (Our
ancient logical heritage), Da Zhonghua 2, no. 8 (1916): 1–9; 2, no. 9 (1916): 1–16; 2,
10 Liang Qichao, Mojing jiaoshi 墨經校釋 (The “Mohist Canons,” collated and
annotated) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1920), reprinted in Liang Qichao, Yin-
bingshi zhuangyi, 38:1–104.
11 Liang Qichao, Mozi xuean 墨子學案 (Case studies on Mozi’s learning) (Shanghai:
Shangwu yinshuguan, 1921), reprinted in Liang Qichao, Yinbingshi zhuangyi, 39:1–87.
12 See, e.g., Irene Eber, “Hu Shih and Chinese History: The Problem of Cheng-Li
aspiring scholars, including Wu Feibo 伍非百 (1890–1965), Luan Tiaofu 李淵甫 (1889–1972), and Tan Jiefu 諜戒甫 (1887–1974), won reknown through painstaking recensions that made more and more passages of the “Mohist Canons” and the extant writings of the School of Names intelligible and strengthened the textual foundations for explorations of China’s logical legacy. Even if philological versatility did not always coincide with interpretative clarity, let alone plausibility, these and other pioneering works ushered in a new and more critically self-aware period in the development of the reenergized discourse.

Equally bold as these advances in the realm of philology and ultimately more influential were the first book-length attempts to secure a place for ancient Chinese logical thought in the global history of the field. Hu Shi’s *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China* was the first monograph on Chinese logic written in any language. The work was initially submitted as a Ph.D. thesis under the direction of John Dewey at New York’s Columbia University in 1917. Before the original English version appeared in print in 1922, Hu rephrased many of its arguments in Chinese for his *An Outline History of Chinese Philosophy* (Zhongguo zhexueshi dagang 中國哲學史大綱), a longer and more ambitious study published to immediate acclaim in 1919. Despite differences in emphasis, language, and tone, both books made similar points. In his introduction to the English version, Hu Shi described the agenda animating his project in emphatic terms. The general problem facing “New China” and its “intellectual leaders,” he wrote, was, “How can we Chinese feel at ease in this new world which at first sight appears to be so much at variance with what we have long regarded as our own civilization?” Hu was convinced that the deficits of modern Chinese thought, especially in the realm of logic,
could not be overcome by simply transplanting “into China the scientific and philosophical methods which have developed in the Western world from the time of Aristotle to this day.”\(^1\) To avoid an “abrupt displacement,” the domestication of Western knowledge needed to proceed by way of an “organic assimilation.” But a less disruptive appropriation depended “on the foresight and the sense of historical continuity” of his scholarly peers and “on the tact and skill with which they can successfully connect the best in modern civilization with the best in our own civilization.”\(^2\) Hu’s interest in the “re-discovery of the logical theories and methods of Ancient China” was thus “primarily a pedagogical one.” To show the compatibility of Chinese and Western civilization, he felt it necessary to study “these long-neglected native systems in the light and with the aid of modern Western philosophy.” For only when “the philosophies of Ancient China are re-interpreted in terms of modern philosophy” and, as he hastened to add without substantiating how and by whom, “when modern philosophy is interpreted in terms of the native systems of China,” only then “can Chinese philosophers and students of philosophy feel truly at ease with the new methods and instrumentalities of speculation and research.”\(^3\)

Although Hu claimed that he had to overthrow “a tremendous burden of tradition,” the magnitude of which “it is impossible for an occidental reader to imagine,”\(^4\) his agenda, as should be clear from the preceding chapters, was not entirely original. Rather, Hu presented a pointed summary of the aims and methods that had fuelled the initial discovery of Chinese logic over a decade earlier. Perhaps because his Chinese readers would have been aware of this fact, Hu couched the introduction to his \textit{Outline History} in much less dramatic terms. Abstaining from general pronouncements about China’s “larger problems,” he did not dwell on the necessity to maintain, or construct, cultural continuity, his most pressing concern in the English version. Instead, he presented his project as a purely academic effort to write a history of ancient Chinese philosophy, a subject he had been assigned to teach at Peking University after his return from the United States.\(^5\) Despite this changed focus, Hu advocated essentially the same

\(^1\) Ibid., 6.
\(^2\) Ibid., 7.
\(^3\) Ibid., 9.
\(^4\) Ibid., 1.
approach. Because ancient China’s schools of thought had never been recorded as “philosophical systems” (zhexue xitong 哲學系統) and traditional works of Chinese intellectual history did not provide models for treating them as such, there was no alternative to framing his discoveries in European-derived terms. Thus, in scope and method both versions of his project remained securely on the path paved by his predecessors. Hu acknowledged as much by crediting Zhang Binglin with the insight that foreign terms were indispensable tools for “rediscoveries” of forgotten treasures within one’s own tradition. But he was perhaps even more indebted to Liang Qichao, whose repeated calls to recover ancient China’s “logical systems” lay at the heart of his didactic enterprise.

One respect in which Hu deviated from his forebears was his understanding of logic itself. Hu’s view of the discipline was shaped by the “experimental logic” of his teacher John Dewey, who aimed to overcome purely formal conceptions and integrate experiential knowledge into the process of determining validity. As such, logic became essentially coterminous with “the procedure of thought manifested in modern science,” as Dewey succinctly put it in an essay Hu cited as a major inspiration for his research. Hu found in Dewey’s broad notion an alternative to the “wastefulness in teaching the old-fashioned textbooks of formal logic in Chinese schools” that he had experienced in his youth. Reframed as the general methodology of science and thought, logic not only regained its relevance to the pragmatic concerns around which both Hu and his mentor built their philosophical outlook; it also allowed Hu to cast a much wider and more flexible net when searching for anticipations of logical theories in the historical record of ancient Chinese thought. Since every thinker adhered to some implicit or explicit “method” (fangfa 方法) in teaching his doctrines, there were

24 Ibid., 1.
28 Hu Shih, Development of the Logical Method, 10.
no obvious grounds for excluding anyone from the purview of Chinese logic. Both his English and his Chinese accounts consequently discussed many texts that the early discoverers had carefully purged from the discourse they envisioned. Confucius and Laozi thus made their first appearances as logical thinkers, as did the Zhuangzi and several Legalist authors. This expansion proved to be more influential than any of Hu Shi’s concrete interpretations. As later writers soon realized, it implied that the discourse of Chinese logic could move beyond the “re-discovery” of scattered fragments and aim instead at “re-constructing” a more or less continuous development—a possibility that would have appeared so remote just two decades earlier that none of the first discoverers had even faintly hinted at it.

While stretching the boundaries of the emerging field, Hu left no doubts which schools and thinkers he wished to be remembered as ancient China’s most insightful logicians. True to his pragmatist convictions, he particularly exalted the achievements of Mozi and the “Mohist Canons.” But he also took pride in the discovery of the logical import of the *Classic of Change* that he located in rudimentary theories of ideation and judgment. Moreover, Hu claimed to have originated the view that the School of Names was a retrospective and misguided invention since insights into the properties of “names” had not been the exclusive prerogative of any one group but a shared concern of all ancient thinkers. One consequence of this revisionist opinion, which, as we have seen, had been anticipated by Zhang Binglin, was that Hu had to find a new affiliation for dialecticians such as Gongsun Long and Hui Shi who had been discussed as representatives of the School of Names since the Han dynasty. His solution of ranking both among the Later Mohists drew immediate criticisms because it violated well-established chronologies but ultimately helped to move both thinkers closer to the mainstream of what was more and more confidently asserted to be China’s logical heritage. Even if many of Hu’s claims struck contemporary and later commentators alike as idiosyncratic, the two versions of his project secured Chinese logic hitherto unparalleled attention. His English text retranslated the discovery of the field into non-Chinese terms and paved the way for an understanding of

---

29 Ibid., ii and 28–45.
31 Ibid., 162–172. See also Hu Shih, *Development of the Logical Method*, 109–130.
“Chinese logic” as a global concept. Despite the problematic notion of logic with which he operated, his works came to be seen as indispensable references for anyone writing on the subject in China and abroad and shaped opinions about the scope and nature of Chinese logic throughout the twentieth century.

Not quite as influential, though certainly neither less ambitious nor sophisticated, was Zhang Shizhao’s monumental Essentials of Logic (Luoji zhiyao 邏輯指要), the second monograph on Chinese logic written amidst the intellectual ferment of the New Culture Movement. Zhang, as we have seen, had received extensive training in logic during his studies in Scotland and provoked the debate on the most appropriate Chinese name for the discipline after his return. As the editor of several leading journals as well as a renowned scholar and political thinker, Zhang was one of the most respected intellectuals of the early Republican period. It was therefore a coup of sorts when Cai Yuanpei, then the president of Peking University, managed to persuade Zhang to teach courses in logic there beginning in 1918.32 Despite the discipline’s dull image, Zhang’s lectures drew unprecedented crowds. According to one listener, four or five hundred students from Beida and other local schools regularly crammed the university’s largest lecture hall, and many more crouched outside the open windows trying to catch the gist of Zhang’s deliberations. This level of interest stood in such stark contrast to contemporary students’ habit of skipping classes and relying on transcripts of lectures alone that it was reported in local newspapers.33 Zhang drafted his Essentials of Logic in preparation for these lectures. Proofs of a first version were circulated in a limited number of copies in 1917. Although the complete manuscript was not published until 1939,34 his arguments gained currency at about the same time as those of his colleague Hu Shi.

Zhang Shizhao shared Hu’s concern with historical continuity but construed it in a very different manner. One obvious difference was the language in which he laid out his claims. Hu Shi imparted his

---

message of continuity in the new vernacular style he championed in hopes of bringing about a “literary revolution” and relied on the Japanese-derived lexicon of logic that the “old-fashioned” textbooks he so detested had brought into wider circulation. In contrast, Zhang Shizhao, who was one of the most outspoken opponents of the vernacularization of written Chinese, insisted on using Yan Fu’s antiquarian terminology and upheld a classicist ideal of terse stylistic economy.35 As such, his Essentials were a perfect exemplar of the “logical style” that gained popularity in the late 1910s.36 Unlike Hu, Zhang did not conceive his text as a work of history but, in accordance with his teaching assignment, as a general course in logic. His book was structured along the conventional lines of the discipline in its contemporary European shape, starting with an introduction of the laws of thought, moving on to discussions of terms, propositions, and the various ways of converting them, continuing with presentations of deductive inferences and categorical and hypothetical syllogisms as well as techniques of definition and classification, and concluding with a review of the methods of inductive reasoning and some remarks on analogies and fallacies. However, the way in which Zhang envisioned teaching this material had little to do with standard practice. As he declared in his preface, he wanted his students and readers above all to understand that “although the name logic first emerged in Europe, the rules of this science are universal.”37 This intention corresponded to his stated belief “that the science of names in the pre-Qin period and European logic are like two wheels of a carriage; they rotate each other in moving forward.”38 To substantiate this point, Zhang set out in his work “to try and take European logic as the warp and our nation’s patterns of names as the weft, weave the two intimately together, and disseminate them as a single science, thus opening a new page for this discipline.”39

---

36 Qian Jibo, Xiandai Zhongguo wenxueshi, 350–361.
37 Zhang Shizhao, “Zixu,” 293.
38 Zhang Shizhao, Luoji zhiyao, 295.
Zhang’s attempt to “weave together” European and Chinese thinking required both a magisterial grasp of logical intricacies and enviable erudition. His dense work demonstrated that he lacked neither. In his explanations and illustrations of the basic tenets of logical theory, Zhang enlisted an intimidating array of the most diverse sources, “without distinguishing between old and new, Chinese or Western,” and intentionally disregarding their “developmental history.” Freed from all contextual limitations, he was able to create a thick, hybrid tapestry that impressed upon his listeners and readers the forceful impression that at some point in history every logical subtlety had been anticipated in one or more Chinese texts. In his discussion of the law of identity (tongyilü 同一律), for instance, Zhang used not only examples from works that had already been identified as logically relevant, such as the Mozi, the “Mohist Canons,” and the Xunzi, but cited also a string of Chan-Buddhist sayings, passages from the fifth-century “Ode to Mulan” (Mulan shi 木蘭詩), and the ancient glossary Progress toward Elegance (Erya 爾雅) to highlight more or less appropriate formulations of this principle in natural language. As in other chapters of his book, his analysis culminated in the claim that the “spirit” of this fundamental law had nowhere been captured in more concise fashion than in an ancient Chinese text—in this case Wang Chong’s The Balance of Discourses (Lunheng 論衡): “When a man is born and his shape is fixed to be, say, A, then, until he gets old and dies, he will always stay in this shape A. Even when, as a lover of the Way, he becomes an immortal, he will never be able to change his shape from A into B.”

One persistent, and perhaps not unwelcome, risk of Zhang’s innovative mode of exposition was that it blurred the distinction between explicit theoretical statements made in ancient Chinese texts and arguments with implicit logical structures that lent themselves for analyses in logical terms. Less attentive students may thus have gained the impression that logic was ubiquitous in classical Chinese philosophical literature when, in fact, Zhang himself emphasized that the brief “Dialectical Chapters” of the Mozi remained the richest repository of Chinese logical thinking. On the other hand, the virtuosity with

---

41 Zhang Shizhao, Luoji zhiyao, 310–312.
42 Ibid., 311.
which Zhang guided readers of his fast-paced text through a panoply of rarefied quotations certainly made the subject of his course look much more appealing than it must have appeared in the dry textbooks used in standard classes. The interest was further increased by Zhang’s eagerness to engage other scholars venturing into his territory. Although he admired Yan Fu’s creative genius, Zhang rejected some of Yan’s logical terms as reflecting an insufficient grasp of their technical meaning.43 Liu Shipei was similarly taken to task for his misunderstanding of induction and deduction in his remarks on Xunzi.44 Zhang’s most public disagreement, however, was with Hu Shi’s claims that the School of Names never existed and that the early Chinese debaters were offspring of the Later Mohists, assertions he criticized not only in his Essentials but also in a series of widely read articles.45

Despite all differences, Hu Shi and Zhang Shizhao pursued several common goals. Both aimed to construct a basic historical continuity between classical Chinese thought and modern logic. To do so, both expanded the range of ancient literature to be considered as relevant to the discipline’s Chinese history. By demonstrating that Chinese thinkers had made original contributions to logic as conceived in twentieth-century Euro-America, both also hoped to show that China deserved a place in the global history of the field. Their enterprises were based on fundamentally universalist assumptions and as such directed at participation in, rather than separation from, a still unmistakably Western-dominated discourse.

To break or at least challenge this dominance became the mission of the next generation of scholars devoted to reconstructions of Chinese logic and its history. One of the most successful strategies for asserting the particularity, or “independence,”46 of Chinese views on the subject was to introduce a terminological distinction between European and Chinese logic. The first thinkers arguing for such a separation

43 Ibid., 378–379. In another chapter Zhang offered detailed criticisms of Yan’s translation of the term “syllogism” by lianzhu ‘linked verse’ (see chapter 3). There, perhaps out of respect for his stylistic mentor, Zhang did not simply dismiss Yan’s fanciful suggestion but went through a long list of lianzhu examples to demonstrate that it was “absolutely inadmissible to force them into the form of the syllogism.” See ibid., 391–393; 391.
44 Ibid., 385–386.
may have taken their clue from Zhang Shizhao himself who, with quite a different purpose in mind, once described the theoretical teachings of the “Mohist Canons” as instances of a distinctly Chinese “science of names” (mingxue 名學) that combined basic formal insights with strong ethical aspirations. Several authors interpreted Zhang’s statement as claiming an independent identity for Chinese logic as a whole. Guo Zhanbo, for instance, a historian of philosophy with Marxist inclinations, argued in his *A History of Pre-Qin Logic (Xian Qin bianxueshi 先秦辯學史)* that Chinese logic was not so much concerned with the properties of names but rather—similar to and yet significantly different from traditional Western dialectics—with the nature and strategies of “disputation.” It was therefore more fitting to treat it as a “science of disputation” (bianxue 辯學). As a result of Guo’s redefinition, the dialecticians Gongsun Long and Hui Shi came to occupy for the first time a central place in the saga of the forgotten discipline, notwithstanding their moral failures. Wang Zhanghuan 王章煥 concurred with this argument but added that the term mingxue could still serve to designate a sub-field devoted to the “logic of names” within the wider “science of disputation” that Guo envisioned reconstructing. The renowned Buddhist scholar Yu Yu offered yet another opinion and suggested in his *Chinese Logic (Zhongguo mingxue 中國名學)* to adopt lunlixue 理論學 ‘the science of reasoning’ as a general name for the field that should then be differentiated into the three branches of luozi 邏輯 ‘Western logic’, mingxue 名學 ‘Chinese logic’, and yinming 因明 ‘Indian logic’. 

Despite these efforts, well into the 1940s no agreement could be reached as to which name was the most appropriate for what was more and more confidently proclaimed to be China’s very own kind of logic. Some writers tried to end the prevailing uncertainty by introducing a neologism that combined two aspects singled out as distinguishing features of China’s logical heritage: mingbian 名辯 or mingbianxue 名辯學 ‘the science of names and disputation’. Initially, these hybrid

---

47 Guo Zhanbo, *Xian Qin bianxueshi* 先秦辯學史, i–v.
49 Yu Yu, *Zhongguo mingxue 中國名學*, 3. For other suggestions affirming the terminological separation between “Chinese,” “Western,” and “Indian” logic, see, e.g., *Zhongguo luojishi ziliaojuan* 論理史資料彙編, vol. 5.1, 232–239 and 434–439.
50 The terms mingbian and mingbianxue can be traced back to the mid 1930s; see, e.g., Du Shousu 杜守素, *Xian Qin zhuzi sixiang 先秦諸子思想* (The thought of the
creations were mainly used in polemical contexts, for instance in Guo Moruo’s 郭沫若 (1892–1979) Ten Critical Essays (Shi pipan shu 十批判書). As positive designations for Chinese logic they have been advocated only since the 1980s. Pointing to an early essay by the influential Marxist philosopher Zhang Dainian 張岱年 (1909–2004) in which ming and bian were portrayed as key concerns of ancient Chinese thought, contemporary Mainland historians of logic, such as Liu Peiyu and Zhou Yunzhi, have aggressively promoted the terms mingbian and mingbianxue as the only fitting designations for their field of expertise.

In order to gain acceptance, calls for terminological separation depended on convincing arguments for the particularity of Chinese logic vis-à-vis its alleged European or Indian counterparts. Different versions of such arguments were proposed in “comparative logical studies” whose popularity increased throughout the Republican period. Initially limited to brief remarks in the margins of philological works, such as those by Wu Feibo, Luan Tiaofu, and Tan Jiefu mentioned above, comparative studies grew in sophistication and ambition with the professionalization of research and teaching in logic and philosophy at Chinese universities. Perhaps the most elaborate assertion of a distinct identity of Chinese logic was formulated in 1939 by Zhang Dongsun 張東荪 (1886–1973), a renowned professor of philosophy.

noncanonical masters of the pre-Qin period (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), 80–114.

51 Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Shi pipan shu 十批判書 (Ten critical essays) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957 [1945]), 248–308.

52 Zhang Dainian 張岱年, “Zhongguo zhexue zhi ming yu bian” 中國哲學之名與辯 (Names and disputation in Chinese philosophy), Zhexue pinglun 知學評論 10, no. 5 (1947): 8–19. Another early characterization of Chinese logic as knowledge about names and disputation can be found in Zhao Jibin 趙紀彬, “Xian Qin luoji shigao” 先秦邏輯史稿 (A draft history of logic in the pre-Qin period), a work completed in 1948. See Zhao Jibin, Zhao Jibin wenji 趙紀彬文集 (The collected works of Zhao Jibin), 3 vols. (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1985–1991), vol. 3, 2–3. An excerpt from this unpublished study appeared in 1949 under Zhao’s pen name Ji Xuanging 紀玄冰; see idem, “Mingbian yu luoji” 名辯與邏輯 (Chinese logic and logic), Xin Zhonghua 新中國 12, no. 4 (1949): 28–33.

53 For an account of these efforts, see Zhou Yunzhi, Mingbianxue lun 名辯學論 (Comparative studies of Mohist and Aristotelian logic) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2004), 13–21.
at Yanjing University. In a series of dense essays on the relations between language, thought, and culture, Zhang argued that all kinds of knowledge and philosophy were shaped by the “cultures” in which they emerged. An integral part of his culturalistic position was the claim that there was no universal “logic as such” (weiyi de luoji 唯一的邏輯) but only particular, culturally bounded forms of logic that reflected divergent structures of language as well as different social needs, religious beliefs, political dispositions, and historical experiences. Of all these factors, linguistic features had the most decisive influence on the Gestalt of the logic governing a specific culture’s thinking. Zhang portrayed European logic in its entirety, from Aristotle down to the most recent advances in symbolic logic, as an attempt to clear up confusions arising from the peculiar structures of Indo-European languages. Many of their basic features had no equivalents in Chinese, most notably the verb “to be” that had determined the “standard form of proposition” examined in both traditional and mathematical logic as composed of subject and predicate linked by an explicit or implicit copula. Since this type of proposition was rare in Chinese, it was hardly surprising that Chinese thinkers had spent little effort studying its properties. Nor had they felt the need to expound the “law of identity,” which was similarly rooted in the peculiar suggestion of a fixed substratum underlying all reality implicit in the way the verb “to be” expressed existence in Indo-European languages. Zhang argued that Chinese thought as a whole was fundamentally “non-Aristotelian” due to the different grammatical structures of the language in which

55 For a comprehensive, if controversial, biography of Zhang Dongsun, see Dai Qing 戴晴, *Zai Rulaifo zhang zhong: Zhang Dongsun he tade shidai* 在如來佛掌中: 張東荪和他的時代 (In the hands of the Buddha: Zhang Dongsun and his time) (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2009).


it was articulated, and that the same was true of its inherent logic.\textsuperscript{61} Zhang characterized this logic as one of “correlation” rather than “identity” and defined its basic mode of inference as that of “analogy” instead of “deduction.”\textsuperscript{62} In contrast to Hu Shi and Zhang Shizhao, who presented Chinese logic as a more or less complete equivalent of its European model, Zhang Dongsun thus described it as the latter’s negative mirror image. Although he never provided a detailed account of the rules that this alternative logic allegedly followed, his crisp assertion of a clear-cut alternative to Western ways of thinking resonated with many readers. By lending unprecedented philosophical dignity to claims of a distinct identity, his skillful construction invigorated attempts to secure a separate space for Chinese logic in an increasingly globalized discursive environment.

Still, before 1949 neither Zhang nor any other author favoring terminological segregation or claiming a unique identity for Chinese logic went so far as to propose that explicit logical theorizing had played a significant role in each and every period of China’s intellectual history. This final step on the road from discovery to invention was part of a decidedly Maoist project rooted in the 1950s. The sinicized Marxist framework in which all historiographical work had to be conducted during the first decades of the People’s Republic was in many ways conducive to studies of China’s “cultural heritage” (\textit{wenhua yichan 文化遺產}) that were more assertive and expansive, even in areas as marginal as logic. Put very crudely, the agenda underlying Maoist interest in China’s logical past amounted to a convenient marriage of Marxist ideology with nationalistic impulses. If historical materialism scientifically proved that societies developed in ultimately identical directions according to universal laws, and that social and economic practices determined the range of theoretical reflection emerging in specific locations and historical moments, then, a new generation of historians proclaimed, the emergence and development of Chinese logic must have followed a trajectory that corresponded to, and at times anticipated, global trends. The Maoist philosopher Zhan Jianfeng 谭剑峰 (1902–1982) formulated a typical version of this soon-to-become orthodox view in 1956 in the preface to his \textit{Mohist Formal

\textsuperscript{61} Zhang Dongsun, “Cong Zhongguo yuyan gouzao shang kan Zhongguo zhexue,” 169.

Logic (Mojia de xingshi luoji 墨家的形式邏輯), the first monograph on Chinese logic published in the People’s Republic:

We know that logical forms and laws are the results of practices humans have repeated billions of times. Once social development advances to a certain stage, abstract thought also achieves considerable sophistication, the various sciences are established in elementary form, and spontaneous logic becomes self-aware. This means that people begin to study thinking itself, summarize the thought experience of their forebears, abstract its forms and laws, and establish a scientific discipline—in our case, logic. Since logic emerged in ancient India, and then again emerged in ancient Greece, it had to emerge in ancient China, too. Had it failed to do so, this would have violated the laws according to which thought develops.63

The specific tasks of studies in the history of Chinese logic following from this new article of faith were formulated in a series of programmatic essays by Wang Dianji 汪奠基 (1900–1979), who established himself as the leading authority in Chinese logic soon after entering the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1955.64 Wang derived two consequential lessons from his understanding of the Marxist laws of development. First, he argued that histories of Chinese logic could no longer be limited in scope to the pre-Qin era. Instead their authors had to trace the necessary progress of Chinese logical thinking throughout all periods of the nation’s history, from the sixth century BC to the fall of the Manchu empire.65 Secondly, historians needed to explore not only passages in premodern texts that contained insights relevant to formal logic as defined by the Euro-American experience. To clarify and reinforce the “particular features” (tezheng 特徵) of China’s own logical tradition they rather had to examine the full range of past utterances about “names” and “disputation,” including excerpts from works that

63 Zhan Jianfeng 詹劍峰, Mojia de xingshi luoji 墨家的形式邏輯 (Mohist formal logic) (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1956), 2–3.
at first sight seemed unrelated to logical concerns. The ultimate goal of these innovations was the compilation of a “comprehensive history” (tongshi 通史) of Chinese logic that clearly distinguished its achievements from the “common logic” (gongtong de luoji 共同的邏輯) to which earlier studies had erroneously tried to assimilate them.

One indication that even the propagators of this inflated agenda were well aware of the challenges it entailed was the ferocity with which they strove to set their project apart from previous histories of Chinese logic. No study published during the 1950s refrained from joining, more or less gleefully, the vicious campaign against Hu Shi. In addition to ad hominem invectives that accused Hu, among other things, of acting as a pawn of imperialist interests with “escapist” tendencies and misread his call for “wholesale Westernization” as a “denial of the value of Chinese culture,” both Hu’s dissertation and Outline History were reviled as “unscientific and ahistorical” works steeped in “subjective idealist illusions.” But venomous critiques did not stop with Hu Shi. Wang Dianji and others extended them to virtually all major works that had prepared the ground for the Maoist redefinition of the “object and scope” of research in Chinese logic. Wang himself leveled charges of national “nihilism” at Guo Zhanbo, Zhang Shizhao, and Yu Yu, who allegedly had “faithfully spread the lie fabricated by imperialist historians of philosophy that ‘China had known no logical science.’ ” The politically expedient claim, echoed in many works, that anyone who doubted the existence of explicit logical theorizing in any moment of China’s long history was led astray by “Japanese” and other “foreigners from capitalist countries” or their Chinese mouthpieces who “mindlessly parroted” their denigrating views was among the longest-living and most damaging tropes inserted into the discourse on Chinese logic at the height of the Maoist fervor.

67 Ibid., 43.
69 All these defamations, which are representative of many others, are found in the two texts just cited. See Zhan Jianfeng, Mojia de xingshi luoji, 1–2; and Wang Dianji, “Guanyu Zhongguo luojishi de duixiang he fanwei wenti,” 42–43.
70 Ibid., 42.
71 See, e.g., Zhan Jianfeng, Mojia de xingshi luoji, 1–2.
Yet, clearing the field of competitors did not alleviate the difficulties Maoist historians faced when attempting to live up to their ambitious goals. The first “comprehensive histories” of Chinese logic, among them the study to which Wang Dianji devoted the remaining years of his life, were not published until 1979, more than twenty years after the new agenda had been set. It was to take another decade before the hopeful assertion that it was possible to write a continuous history of Chinese logical theorizing from the Zhou dynasty to the modern era was substantiated by a multivolume anthology compiled at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that brought together quotations about “names” and “disputation” from thinkers of all periods and persuasions, and the publication of an accompanying historical outline that synthesized these excerpts into a narrative tracing the progress of Chinese logical thought in step with advances made elsewhere. From the outset, this purposeful narrative was designed to be enshrined as the authoritative view of Chinese logic and its history in philosophical seminars throughout the country. Its eventual publication and the further dissemination of its central claims in a host of derivative works marked the completion of an arduous process of invention that none of the earliest discoverers of Chinese logic could have foreseen.

3. De-modernizing Chinese Logic

Although the Maoist paradigm dominated the direction of Chinese logic in the People’s Republic well into the 1990s, it did not entirely silence more nuanced opinions. The first works trying to understand aspects of Chinese logic in terms of mathematical logic began to appear already in the 1950s. These and other careful studies of individual texts and notions elucidated many issues earlier works had failed to resolve. In addition, scholars working at a certain distance from the political center, most notably in Tianjin and Guangzhou, managed
to publish less ideological accounts of the nature and development of Chinese logical thought alongside the officially sanctioned story.75

Scholars from these alternative centers of logical inquiry have also been the first to raise more substantial critiques of the Maoist enterprise.76 Pointing, *inter alia*, to the flimsy textual basis on which the orthodox narrative was based, the epistemic violence it inflicted on the decontextualized fragments from which it was stitched together, and the nationalistic motives driving the project of an unequivocally “affirmative” (*kending de*肯定的) history of Chinese logic, a number of critics have begun to replay arguments rehearsed about a decade earlier in the debates about the “legitimacy” (*hefaxing*合法性) of Chinese philosophy as a whole.77 As in the earlier controversy, the questions of whether there was such a thing as “Chinese logic,” or why it could or could not develop in the first place, have occupied center stage in the increasingly polemical exchanges between detractors and defenders of the orthodox position.78 While the chances for an eventual consensus

---

75 See, e.g., Wen Gongyi and Cui Qingtian, *Zhongguo luojishi jiaocheng* (xiuding ben); and Yang Peisun, *Zhongguo luojishi xinxi jiaocheng*.


78 Perhaps the best example is the extended controversy between Cheng Zhongtang, the most outspoken critic of orthodox views of Chinese logic, and Ma Pei 马佩, a notoriously dogmatic philosopher and logician. See Cheng Zhongtang 程仲棠, “Jin bainian ‘Zhongguo gudai wu luojixue lun’ shuping” 近百年“中國古代無邏輯學論”述評 (A critical review of ‘theories that there was no logic in ancient China’ during the past hundred years), *Xueshu yanjiu*, no. 11 (2006): 5–12; idem, “Jin bainian ‘Zhongguo gudai wu luojixue lun’ shuping (xu)” 近百年“中國古代無邏輯學論”述評(續) (A critical review of ‘theories that there was no logic in ancient China’ during the past hundred years [continued]), *Chongqing gongxueyuan xuebao* 21, no. 11 (2007): 15–20; idem, “Wenhua zhongji guanhuai yu luojixue de mingyun—jian lun Zhongguo wenhua buneng chansheng luojixue de genben yuanyin” 文化終極關懷與邏輯學的命運—兼論中國文化不能產生邏輯學的根本原因 (Culture’s ultimate concerns and the fate of logic—with a discussion about the fundamental reasons why Chinese culture could not produce logic), *Zhongguo zhexueshi*, no. 1 (2008): 35–43; and idem, “Zhongguo gudai you luojixue, dan meiyou luojixue—da Ma Pei jiaoshou” 中國古代有邏輯學，但沒有邏輯學—答馬佩教授 (There was logical thinking in ancient China but no logic—a response to Professor Ma Pei), *Jinan xuebao*, no. 6 (2008): 1–9; and Ma Pei 马佩, “Bo ‘Zhongguo gudai wu luojixue lun’—yu Cheng Zhongtang jiaoshou shangque” 部“中國古代無邏輯學論”—與程仲棠教授商榷 (A refutation of ‘the theory that there was no logic in ancient China’—a debate with Professor Cheng Zhongtang), *Henan daxue xuebao* 47, no. 6 (2007): 50–55; idem, “Bo Zhongguo wenhua buneng chansheng luojixue lun—zaici yu Cheng Zhongtang jiaoshou shangque” 部“中國文化不能產生邏輯學論”—再次與程仲棠教授商榷 (A refutation of the theory that there was no logic in ancient China—another debate
on these hardly productive issues seem as remote as they have remained in the debate about Chinese philosophy, the many valid points raised in the course of the discussion have exposed the paucity of the most ill-conceived claims sustaining the Maoist vision and helped to throw many of the remaining problems into sharper relief.

Although it is difficult not to sympathize with the critics’ revisionist thrust, it seems to me that they have not yet radically enough questioned the way in which the history of Chinese logic has come to be written. One reason for their reluctance to raise even more fundamental objections may be that they share with their opponents certain basic assumptions about the nature of logic, the forms in which it is expressed, and the purpose of writing its history. Following Sally Humphreys, who has argued a similar point with regard to European interpretations of Greek and Roman classics since the nineteenth century, it is tempting to characterize these assumptions as modernist and Eurocentric. One key tenet of modernist historicism that is mirrored in accounts tracing the history of Chinese logic is the belief that the past must be made relevant for the present by revealing its genetic links to current concerns. In other words, for the past to matter, it must be shown to have anticipated or prepared the ground for insights that are still regarded as valuable when a history is published. Combined with a second assumption whose roots can be traced back to nineteenth-century Europe—a narrow understanding of logic as consisting necessarily in a set of rules codified in theoretical texts equivalent in form, function, and status to the Aristotelian *Organon*—this belief has led historians of Chinese logic to exert almost all their energies in a protracted hunt for evidence of explicit theories of reasoning in ancient and more recent Chinese texts. The results of this chase that began, as we have seen, with the discovery of Chinese logic

---

with Professor Cheng Zhongtang), *Zhongzhou xuekan*, no. 6 (2008): 156–159; and idem, “Zai bo Zhongguo gudai (xian Qin) wu luojixue lun—dui Cheng Zhongtang jiaoshou ‘Da Ma Pei jiaoshou’ de huifu” (Another refutation of the theory that there was no logic in ancient (pre-Qin) China—a reply to Professor Cheng Zhongtang’s ‘Response to Professor Ma Pei’), *Zhongzhou xuekan*, no 1 (2010): 146–150. Cheng’s contributions to the controversy are now conveniently available in his “Zhongguo gudai luojixue” jiegou, 110–171. For a summary of other strands in this ongoing debate, see Jin Rongdong, *Luoji hecui*, 177–184.

in the first years of the twentieth century and has come to dominate the historiography of Chinese logic ever more strongly since 1949, are at best ambivalent. To be sure, the sheer mass of fragments that have been identified as possible building blocks of a forgotten Chinese Organon is quite impressive. Yet, no one has been able to show that more than a handful of these scattered pieces served a concrete purpose in argumentative practice. Nor has anyone built a conclusive case that their explicit theoretical content goes much beyond insights that have to be deemed rudimentary by the measure of the milestones marking the history of logic in Greece or India.

This sobering outcome has led many logicians, in China and abroad, to disregard the case of China altogether in their studies of the discipline and its history. Yet, such a drastic conclusion can only be justified if one subscribes to the modernist assumptions outlined above. But these are deeply flawed. Not only are they derived exclusively from Europe’s peculiar history; they are also far too limited in scope. For no history of logic or truth can possibly claim to be “global” in reach when it can provide no answers about the ways in which arguments were made and weighed in contexts and cultures where no, or no obvious and complete, Organon or close equivalent existed. For this more than any other reason, research in Chinese logic is and will remain indispensable to advances in the global history of the field.

But how could we imagine “de-modernized” studies of Chinese logic? Rather than continue the forced chase for theoretical fragments, it seems to me, an alternative approach to Chinese logic could scrutinize argumentative practices and try to recover the implicit and explicit standards of validity embodied in them. Even in the absence of an explicit logical canon, as no one familiar with China’s uniquely rich intellectual history will deny, argumentation, persuasion, and contention were key elements in a wide array of activities central to the concerns of state and society throughout Chinese history. As such, it is inconceivable that decisions about which arguments were more powerful than others, what kinds of knowledge claims were more credible, and which uses of evidence were seen as more convincing, were made on an arbitrary or ad hoc basis, even if we cannot point to theoretical treatises codifying the standards on which such judgments were, or were claimed to be, based.

To recover these standards, it will be necessary to reverse the conventional perspective and try to reconstitute concrete modes of knowledge production and their underlying rules “from the ground up.”
To do so, one would have to analyze practices in discursive fields where argumentation, contention, demonstration, and verification played particularly prominent roles. Areas promising to offer valuable evidence in this regard, at least in the late imperial period, with which I am most familiar,\(^80\) include education, law, canonical studies, and historiography in addition to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and other domains of scientific inquiry. To understand the implicit and explicit standards of validity at work in each of these fields, one would have to identify the specific conventions of description and habits of inference and analogy, as well as ways of using and disputing evidence, and capture in each case the implicit and explicit criteria of validity, veracity, credibility, coherence, relevance, applicability, and so forth, on which the actors seem to have agreed. In a second step, one would need to record and define the terms, or metalanguages, in which arguments and knowledge claims were evaluated in each of these realms; trace the sources from which such metalanguages were built; and examine to what extent their vocabulary and criteria of evaluation were shared among discrete discursive fields.

Translated into the topical areas mentioned above, these *leitmotifs* would call for painstaking studies of a set of related issues. In the area of education, it appears that analyses of examination essays would be most pertinent, with special attention paid to formal requirements and rhetorical devices, the standards and terminology of evaluation, and genre definitions as exemplified in model essays. Studies in the realm of law could begin with reconstructions of the language of legal codes, focusing not only on their technical terminology but also on stylistic requirements, such as the criteria of clarity, coherence, and exhaustiveness outlined in administrative manuals. Also of interest here would be conventions for the evaluation of factual evidence, the assessment and presentation of oral testimony, the arrangement of facts, and the consideration of mitigating circumstances. In the realm of canonical exegesis one would have to clarify the criteria by which commentaries

---

and interpretations were judged to be more convincing than others, starting perhaps with a look into the technical vocabulary of interlinear commentaries; justifications for emendations, elisions, and glosses; and indirect editorial strategies such as the art of quotation. Relevant aspects in historiography could include the uses of historical analogism, about whose origins, development, and functions we still know far too little, and the definition and defense of epistemic virtues such as “impartiality,” including the narrative and editorial strategies by which these were upheld. In the sciences, the focus could be on strategies of verification and proof, such as the discursive efficacy of numbers and calculations in the fields of mathematics and astronomy, or, in the realm of medicine, the grounds given for diagnoses and prescriptions, the evaluation of patient claims, and techniques for the verification of the success or failure of treatments.

Supplementing existing studies on the theoretical aspects of Chinese logic, investigations of the kind I have very tentatively envisioned here could enhance our understanding of the ways in which arguments were made and evaluated, and truth claims assessed and defended, not only in China. If conducted with sufficient attention to detail, they could be used to paint a more nuanced and empirically saturated picture of the varieties of logically relevant knowledge to be discovered in Chinese intellectual history. At the same time, they could provide fresh material for efforts aimed at reassessing the role of explicit theories of reasoning in actual argumentative practice. Such investigations may ultimately earn Chinese experiences a more prominent place in the global history of the field than even the most assertive versions of the current master narrative will be able to secure. While it would be presumptuous to hope that de-modernized studies of Chinese logic may usher in a new age of discovery comparable in scope to the one reconstructed in the preceding chapters, I surmise that they could contribute in new and productive ways toward the overdue creation of a more credibly global history of truth and rationality in which China eventually comes to claim its rightful place.