XU GAN'S CONCEPT OF THE NAME AND ACTUALITY RELATIONSHIP AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

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This thesis is wholly my own original work

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INTRODUCTION

I first began research on the late Eastern Han (25-220 AD) philosopher Xu Gan 徐幹 (170-217) in 1983. The initial result of this work was an annotated translation of his *Zhong lun* 中論, *Discourse That Hits the Mark.*[1] *Zhong lun* is a collection of essays that are predominantly concerned with philosophical questions. As a whole, the text can be best described as an enquiry into the causes of political and social breakdown and the presentation of various ethical and political remedies. Much of Xu Gan's argumentation appeals to the authority of traditional Confucian ethics; indeed the work is classified under *ru jia* 儒家 in all bibliographical lists of the standard histories, except for that of *Song shi* 宋史, where it is listed among miscellaneous writers. Even though in some of the twenty-two *pian*[2] 篇 that comprise *Zhong lun* a range of influences may be discerned that derive from non-Confucian sources, for a Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) writing it is remarkably free of the overt eclecticism that characterizes many writings of that period. And, like Xun Yue's 荀悅 (148-209) *Shen Jian* 申鑒 , which also dates from the end of the Eastern Han period, Xu Gan's *Zhong lun* evidences a creative and polemical Confucian spirit that was continued in such

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[1] ANU Masters thesis, 1986.
[2] For bibliographical details and history of the *Zhong lun* text, see Appendix A.

post-Han writings as Wang Su's 王肅 (195-256) *Kong Cong Zi* 孔叢子 and Fu Xuan's 傅玄 (217-278) *Fu Zi* 傅子 .[3]

The most important concept employed in *Zhong lun* is the 'name and actuality' (*ming shi* 名實) dichotomy and my purpose in this thesis is to elucidate Xu Gan's concept of the name and actuality relationship and its philosophical and social background. Xu Gan saw the name and actuality relationship to be of fundamental importance because he believed that the correspondence between name and actuality ultimately affected the harmonious integration of the realm of man with the rest of the cosmos of which man was a part. For Xu Gan the bond between name and actuality was not something to be prescribed by convention or artificially determined by man because, just like the flowering of plants in spring or the regular cycle of the four seasons, it is part of the cosmic order. And if that bond is broken or artificially prescribed, the repercussions were seen to affect not only socio-political order, but even the moral order, leading Xu Gan to address questions such as whether the practice of moral conduct was of any practical worth, and what bearing humane behaviour had on a man's longevity.

My purpose in presenting the philosophical and social background is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Xu Gan's concept of the name and

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[3] For studies of these three works, see Chen Chi-yun, *Hsün Yüeh and the Mind of Late Han China*, Yoav Ariel, *K'ung-Ts'ung-Tzu: The K'ung Family Masters' Anthology*, and Jordan D. Paper, *The Fu Tzu: A Post-Han Confucian Text*.

actuality relationship, by seeing it in relief against the backdrop of a tradition of *ming shi* discourse, and also to determine what were the more immediate influences that prompted Xu Gan to discuss the name and actuality relationship. As Maurice Mandlebaum writes:

> It is only when we view philosophic thought both in terms of its own tradition, and in terms of influences focussed upon it because of the circumstances of the philosopher's life and times, that we can see a particular philosopher's work in proper perspective: as a distinctive philosophic achievement which also belongs within the general intellectual history of the period.[4]

The thesis is comprised of eight chapters divided into four parts:

Part I: Chapter 1.

Part II: Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Part III: Chapters 6 and 7.

Part IV: Chapter 8.

Each part broadly addresses a particular question: 'What was Xu Gan's concept of the *ming shi* relationship?', 'How does it relate to earlier views of *ming shi*?', 'What background social and intellectual factors prompted Xu Gan to discuss the *ming shi* relationship?' and 'What bearing did his concept of the *ming shi* relationship have on other thinking in *Zhong lun*?'

Part I - In this first part, comprising only one but the longest chapter of the thesis, I develop my interpretation of Xu Gan's concept of the proper relationship that should obtain between name and

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[4] Maurice Mandlebaum, "The History of Ideas, Intellectual History, and the History of Philosophy", *History and Theory*, 4.3 (1965), Beiheft 5, 62.

actuality. I stress that it is my interpretation because in writing *Zhong lun* it was certainly not Xu Gan's intention to set forth a systematic account of the body of beliefs and premisses that informed his concept of the name and actuality relationship. Thus, insofar as my interpretation is a reconstruction of beliefs and premisses which all too often lie only partially revealed in the various essays that comprise *Zhong lun*, of necessity it is hypothetical. (It is, of course, this very reconstruction that makes the whole enterprise a challenge.)

In Chapter 1, I argue that Xu Gan understood *shi* to mean 'a state of development in an entity or state of affairs by virtue of which that entity or state of affairs is what it is'. To distinguish this sense of *shi* from its other sense as 'particular object', I translate it as 'actuality'. I also argue that, as a corollary to this view, Xu Gan subscribed to a correlative theory of naming. By a correlative theory of naming I mean the view that there is a proper or correct correlation between a given name and a given actuality, determined, variously, by what has been ordained by 'Heaven' (*tian* 天) or by what is naturally so/so of itself' (*zi ran* 自然). A correlative theory of naming is to be distinguished from a nominalist theory of naming, the latter being the view that it is man who arbitrarily or conventionally determines which *ming* should be applied to which *shi*; there is no proper or correct correlation between a given *ming* and a given *shi* other than what has been

artificially determined by man. I then proceed to show that for Xu Gan, the proper relationship between names and actualities is one where there is accord between them such that names faithfully represent actualities and actualities give names their meaning and significance. When name and actuality are in accord they form a whole where each partner relies on the other such that without names, actualities would not be manifest and without actualities, there would be nothing to be manifest as names. I argue that the conceptual model which best represents this relationship is the substance-function (*ti yong* 體用) polarity. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the Potency (*de* 德)-reputation relationship, the single most important name and actuality relationship discussed by Xu Gan in *Zhong lun*.

Part II - This is a group of background studies of the *ming shi* dichotomy in the classical period of Chinese philosophy - approximately 500 BC to 150 BC. During the classical period, discussion of *ming* and *shi* was common to all the major schools of thought: the Confucians, the Legalists, the School of Names, the Daoists, and the Mohists. Nevertheless, given that my purpose is not to write a proper history of the *ming shi* dichotomy - a huge topic warranting a study in its own right - of necessity I have had to be selective in choosing which thinkers and which writings are most germane to my twofold purpose of: i. providing a philosophical backdrop against which my interpretation of Xu Gan's concept of name and actuality is given depth and perspective, thereby enhancing its

definition; ii. determining the extent to which Xu Gan's concept of the name and actuality relationship is original or derivative. To some extent, the task of selection has been made easier because the only School of Names writing dealing specifically with the subject of *ming* and *shi* is no longer extant - the essay entitled "*Ming shi*" 名實 in the received *Gongsun Long Zi* 公孫龍子 was forged sometime between 300 and 600 AD.[5] And despite Sima Tan's 司馬談 (d. 110 BC) praise of this school for "correcting the relationship between names and objects",[6] School of Names writings are characterized by an extreme nominalism where *ad hoc* and circumscribed senses of words (*ming*), paradoxes and specious logic are used for the purposes of entertainment and winning in disputation.[7] For School of Names philosophers, it is *ming*, not *shi*, that are important; whether or not a name does in fact correspond with some object or state of affairs was not a primary consideration. Daoist writings present an even more extremist nominalism: the distinctions represented by *ming* are held to be determined on the basis of nothing more than arbitrary, subjective, relative and conventional standards

Worse than this, *ming*

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[5] See A.C. Graham, "The Composition of the Gongsuen Long Tzyy", *Asia Major*, n.s. 5.2 (1956).

[6] *Shi ji*, 130.3289. Presumably he means that the subtle semantic distinctions employed by School of Names thinkers in disputation forced their opponents to take more care in defining their terms. It is also possible that in making these comments, Sima Tan specifically had in mind Gongsun Long's "Ming shi" essay.

[7] See, for example, my discussion of the 'hard and white' sophism in, "The *Chien-pai* Sophism - Alive and Well", *Philosophy East and West*, 39.1 (January, 1989), 75-81.

actually perpetuate false dichotomies by creating the illusion that distinctions exist.[8] Because the focus of these views on *ming* is extremist, in Part II I have chosen to examine the writings of thinkers, both nominalist and *correlative* whose views provide more insight into the notion of a name and actuality *relationship*.

Chapter 2 is an interpretation of Confucius' *zheng ming* or correction of names programme, the seminal statement in early Chinese thought of the socio-political role that *ming* are perceived to play. Confucius' *zheng ming* programme is also the earliest example of a nominal prescriptivist philosophy in classical Chinese thought. I define nominal prescriptivism as the view that *ming* can and should be used to prescribe *shi*. Although Confucius does not employ the word *shi* in those passages that best exemplify his *zheng ming* thinking, it is evident that he did believe that *ming* did (or should) represent what later writers used the word *shi* to refer to: entities and states of affairs. His concern with the normative and prescriptive function of *ming* was to be reiterated and refined in a number of later writings on *ming* and *shi*.

Chapter 3 is a study of *ming* and *shi* in the Neo Mohist summa and the *Xun Zi* 荀子 essay, "On the Correct Use of Names" ("Zheng ming" 正名). I argue that the word *shi* in these writings is to be understood as 'particular object' and to distinguish it from its other meaning of 'actuality' I translate it as 'object'. I also argue that

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[8] This is particularly so in Zhuang Zi's 莊子 (second half fourth-early third century BC) writings. See Appendix B.

these writings advance the view that *ming* could and should be used to prescribe *shi*, and that in each case this view is premissed on a nominalist theory of naming. The nominalist theories of naming that are found in these writings stand out as being the most fully developed in classical Chinese thought.

Chapter 4 is a study of the Legalist administrative formula of 'matching word and deed' (*xing ming* 刑名). I argue that *xing ming* is a unique application, rich in nuance, of the *ming shi* dichotomy to Legalist philosophy of statecraft. While *xing ming* is a further example of nominal prescriptivist thinking, its particular relevance to Xu Gan's thought is Han Fei's 韓非 (d. 233 BC) presentation of *xing* and *ming* in a substance-function relationship. In discussions of *ming shi* before Han Fei there is no evidence to suggest that *ming* and *shi* are amenable to a substance-function interpretation.

Chapter 5 is a study of what I identify to be the earliest examples of essentialist theories of naming in early Chinese thought. The main writings studied are the "Xin shu shang" 心術上 , "Xin shu xia" 心術下 and "Bai xin" 白心 *pian* of *Guan Zi* 管子 , and the "Shen cha ming hao" 深察名號 *pian* of Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (c.179-c. 104) *Chun qiu fan lu* 春秋繁露 . I argue that in these writings, for the first time we find the word *shi* being used to mean 'that by virtue of which an entity is what it is' and that Xu Gan's theory of naming and his concept of *shi* share a great deal in common with the ideas adumbrated in these writings.

Part III – The purpose of Part III is to establish
that, in particular, two aspects of Eastern Han society
can be seen to have influenced Xu Gan's belief that when
the conditions for accord between names and actualities
do not prevail, the bond between names and actualities
becomes dislocated, leaving actualities unable to be
properly expressed and names being used to represent
actualities which did not exist. Xu Gan sees this changed
name-actuality relationship as a fundamental-peripheral
(*ben mo* 本末) relationship.

Chapter 6 is a study of the bearing that the
unbridled pursuit of reputation in Eastern Han society
had on Xu Gan's understanding of what happens to the name
and actuality relationship when name and actuality are
seen to be in disaccord. I show how *ming jiao*
名教 encouraged men to pursue personal reputation so that
they might secure office. The result of this was that
the scholar gentry (*shi* 士) class came to attach undue
importance to *ming* and less and less importance to *shi*.

Chapter 7 is a study of the bearing of Eastern Han
classical scholarship on Xu Gan's understanding of what
happens to the name and actuality relationship when name
and actuality are seen to be in disaccord. I begin by
describing the methodological characteristics of the two
rival schools of classical scholarship in the Eastern
Han: the Old Text School and the New Text School and then
proceed to investigate Xu Gan's objections to that
methodology. I argue that classical scholarship in the
Eastern Han was concerned more with the written word and

glossing than it was with the elucidation of the teachings of the classical texts and, as with *ming jiao*, this development can be seen to have influenced Xu Gan's view that when the conditions for the proper relationship between name and actuality no longer prevail, name and actuality fall into a fundamental-peripheral relationship.

Part IV - In Chapter 8, I examine what for Xu Gan were the cosmological-cum-ethical implications of name and actuality being in accord and disaccord. The rationale for dealing with this topic last of all is that it builds on an understanding of accord and disaccord developed in Parts I and III. Xu Gan's position on two major contemporary philosophical questions are examined: i. the relationship between a man's practice of humaneness and the length of his life; and ii. the relationship between a man's moral nature and his innate ability.