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

JOHN T. MAKEHAM

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This thesis is wholly my own original work

[Signature]
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INTRODUCTION

I first began research on the late Eastern Han (25-220 AD) philosopher Xu Gan 修幹 (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.\textsuperscript{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 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 荀悦 (148-209) Shen Jian 申鑑, 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

\textsuperscript{1} ANU Masters thesis, 1986.
\textsuperscript{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孔荊子 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

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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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*) or by what is naturally so/so of itself' (*zi ran*). 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
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) polarity. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the Potency (de)-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" in the received Gongsun Long Zi was forged sometime between 300 and 600 AD. And despite Sima Tan’s (d. 110 BC) praise of this school for "correcting the relationship between names and objects", 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. 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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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. 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 , 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. AlthoughConfucius 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 essay, "On the Correct Use of Names" ("Zheng ming" ). 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

8 This is particularly so in Zhuang Zi's (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 premised 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 韩非(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) 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 encouraged men to pursue personal reputation so that they might secure office. The result of this was that the scholar gentry (shi) 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.