# New Investigations in the School of Names[1]

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**Abstract:**

Studies of names and argumentation from the pre-Qin period represent a precious inheritance left behind by ancient Chinese thinkers. As one of the schools from the pre-Qin period, nomenalism made a great contribution to the study of names. Modern research on nomenalism has been greatly affected by the Han Dynasty historians. However, their introduction to the school is vague. In respect to nomenalism, there are some unsolved problems that still need to be clarified and have not been noticed by many scholars. The present thesis analyses the characteristics and functions of nomenalism; it discusses the relations between nomenalists and sophists and epitomises their contributions to the study of names.

**Key Words:** nomenalism; school of names, the sophists, the study of names

In the pre-Qin period, a school that would be called "Nomenalist"(*Ming jia* 名家) did not exist. Originally "nomenalism" was used by the scholars of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C – 220). Sima Tan 司馬談 was the first person to use this phrase to indicate the pre-Qin school, and regarded it equally important to Confucianism, Daoism, Moism, legalism etc. The practice of Sima Tan was adopted by his successors, and is still used today. Nowadays, nomenalism is generally regarded as an independent school of the pre-Qin period in the research of the history of Chinese philosophy and Chinese logic. However, compared with other pre-Qin schools, nomenalism is rather peculiar.

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Firstly, Confucianism, Moism, Daoism and legalism all had their distinctive political or ethic stands. Deng Xi 鄧析, Hui Shi 惠施 and Gongsun Long 公孫龍, are usually taken as the main representatives of the nomenalist school. From the records found on these three men in the pre-Qin books, we learn that they did not have any common political or ethical thought which would differ from that of all other schools.

Secondly, it seems that the nomenalists had no specific research subject. Deng Xi, Hui Shi and Gongsun Long had only one thing in common, and that was that they were all famous for being good in argumentation. However, being good at argumentation is not an adequate reason for confirming a separate school, for there were also many members from other schools that were good at argumentation. Deng Xi compiled the first Chinese legislation, which was called the "bamboo law" (竹刑), while Hui Shi interpreted various natural phenomena (遍爲萬物說). Gongsun Long argued about unusual topics such as "Hardness and Whiteness" (堅白) or "White Horses" (白馬). There are remarkable differences among their interests and thoughts, from which we cannot summarise a single common subject. If a "school" has no particular political or ethical thought, nor a common research subject, it is questionable whether it can be regarded as an independent school.

Is "nomenalism" really one of the schools of the pre-Qin period? If it is, then who are the representatives of the school? And what are its principles? In the continuation I will try to offer an answer to these questions.

## 1   What is Nomenalism

In the pre-Qin period, Confucianism and Moism were famous, and they were already commonly regarded as philosophic schools, while most other schools were labelled as such by later historians of the Han dynasty, who arranged and classified the academic thought of the pre-Qin period. Due to the different methods of classification and due to the various perspectives, the results of their research also differed. For example, Sima Tan divided the pre-Qin thought into 6 schools, while Ban Gu divided them into 10. The term "nomenalism" was firstly

used by the Hans[2], so it is only natural to begin our research by discussing their works. Let us start with a look of Sima Tan's opinion.

名家使人儉而善失真；然其正名實，不可不察也....名家苛察繳繞，使人不得反其意，專決於名而失人情，故曰'使人儉而善失真'. 若夫控名責實，參伍不失，此不可不察也.

Nomenalists made people watch their words but also made it easy for them to stray away from the truth. However, their theories of correct names and actualities should not be neglected. ...... Nomenalists were excessively critical and often beat about the bush (when debating with others); they made others unable to oppose their opinions. They were focused merely upon the names and neglected the human sensibilities. That is why I said they "made people watch their words but also made it easy for them to stray away from the truth". Nomenalism advocated that the process of rectifying names should ascertain actualities (*shi* 實)[3] according to names in order to avoid mistakes in comparing names and actualities with each other. This (contribution) should not be neglected. (Sima 1997: 915)

On the other hand, Ban Gu described them in the following way:

名家者流，蓋出於禮官. 古者名位不同，禮亦異數. 孔子曰：'必也正名乎。名不正則言不順，言不順則事不成.'此其所長也. 及警者爲之，則苟鈎釽析亂而已.

Nomenalists probably originated from officials who administrated ceremonies. In ancient times, there were various titles and ranks, and ceremonies varied accordingly. Confucius said: "It is necessary to rectify names. If the names are not correct, then speeches will not run smoothly. If speeches do not run smoothly, then jobs will not be done successively". This was their important contribution. When fastidious people did it, they only analysed wordy disorders. (Ban 1993: 771)

As we can see, the descriptions of nomenalism given by Sima Tan and Ban Gu differ from each other. Sima Tan thought nomenalist theories were mostly about tactics of governing a country just like those of the other philosophic schools of the pre-Qin period, whereas Ban Gu seems to think that the development of nomenalism should be divided into two stages. In the first stage, its concern was

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[2] Here, this term refers to the people of the Han dynasty.

[3] Here, the Chinese character 實 is not translated with "reality", because I want to make it clear that the character 實 can be used to refer not only to things in the natural world but also to things in human society, such as rank, duty, ceremony, law, etc. These two notions are completely different. The first cannot be adjusted according to names, whereas the second can.

focused on politics and ethics. The names it rectified were those of social ranks. However, in the second stage the school was only a group of fastidious people. They no longer cared about the political or ethical significance of rectifying names and were merely indulged in the analysis process.

The opinion, according to which the representatives of the nomenalist school were only "focused upon names and neglected human sensibilities" (專決於名而失人情) was based upon an abstract discussion of the relationship between names and reality. This discussion already departed from the discussions on political and ethical problems of the time. Most theories of the period were related to political and ethical problems. However, this does not mean that all theories from the pre-Qin era dealt with the tactics of ruling a country. Due to his understanding of the pre-Qin philosophy, which was profoundly influenced by his social and cultural backgrounds, Sima Tan viewed the nomenalist theories as tactics of ruling a country, which is quite understandable. However, we do not need to take Sima Tan's view as a basis and regard the nomenalist theories as a system of ideas that directly served the politics of the time.

Ban Gu's statements can probably be understood as a viewpoint, according to which the nomenalist ideas sprang out from the Confucius' theory of rectifying names in order to rectify politics. But the true nomenalists (in the late period of Warring States) were only a group of fastidious people. According to him, they betrayed the original aim of the school and focused their attention upon the analysis of language. Ban Gu's statement about nomenalists "probably originating from officials administrating ceremonies" should not be taken too seriously. In Ban Gu's opinion, the nine schools (九流) of the pre-Qin period all originated from the officials of special duties in ancient times. Perhaps he reached his conclusion using certain sources that were known to him but are unknown or merely arbitrarily known to us. It is most probable that this is the case. We are not obliged to take Ban Gu's statements as the evidence of the origin of nomenalism.

However, Sima Tan's and Ban Gu's statements about nomenalism also have certain things in common. Firstly, the content of the theory of nomenalism is about rectifying names (i.e. rectifying names and actualities or rectifying names and social ranks). Secondly, the methods used by the school are those of detailed examination and careful analysis. Thirdly, nomenalism focused especially on language. I will take these three points as the main characteristics of nomenalism and base the following analysis of the school upon them.

## 2   Who Were Nomenalists?

Sima Tan regarded nomenalism as one of the six schools in the pre-Qin period, but he did not point out the individuals who belonged to the school. In his encyclopedia *Han Shu's Yi Wen Zhi* 漢書·藝文志, Ban Gu listed seven names from the school: Deng Xi 鄧析, Yin Wen 尹文, Gongsun Long 公孫龍, Cheng Shenggong 成生公, Hui Shi 惠施, Huang Gong 黃公 and Mao Gong 毛公. There are no records on Cheng Shenggong, Huang Gong and Mao Gong in the ancient books, so their writings must have been lost. We have no references and hence no knowledge about them, so we have no way of truly knowing whether they were members of the nomenalist school. The *Yiwen* chapter in the encyclopaedia *Han Shu* stated, that

尹文子一篇. 說齊宣王, 先公孫龍.

Yin Wenzi is composed of one piece of writing. Yin Wen once gave advice to Qi Xuan Wang and was prior to Gongsun Long. (Ban 1993: 771)

The above-mentioned composition in *Yin Wenzi* has been lost. In today's edition of *Yin Wenzi* there are two compositions, i.e. *Da dao shang* 大道上 and *Da dao xia* 大道下. The content of the two compositions is miscellaneous and the language they use is simple to understand. It is very unlikely that they are from the pre-Qin period, thus today's edition of *Yin Wenzi* is generally considered to be a fake. It is thus not qualified to be the basis of researching the thought of Yin Wen. In the chapter *Zheng Ming* 正名 in Lü Buwei's work *Lü shi chun qiu* 呂氏春秋, there is a record of Yin Wen discussing scholars (*shi* 士) with the king Qi Min Wang 齊湣王. From the record we learn that Yin Wen was eloquent and good at detailed analysis. In addition, according to *Gongsun Longzi's* 公孫龍子 essay *Ji Fu* 迹府, when debating with Kong Chuan 孔穿, Gongsun Long cited the event of Yin Wen discussing Shi with Qi Wang 齊王. This is probably why Yin Wen was regarded as being "prior to Gongsun Long" and was listed as a member of the nomenalist school in the *Han Shu* encyclopedia. However, Song Xing 宋鈃 listed him under the *School of Tiny Proverbs* (*Xiao shuo jia* 小說家).

According to him, Yin Wen 尹文, Song Xing 宋鈃, Peng Meng 彭蒙, Tian Pian 田駢 and Shen Dao 慎道 all studied together in the academic palace of Ji Xia 稷下學宮, which was located in the State of Qi 齊國. In the chapter *Tian Xia* 天

下 of the book *Zhuangzi* 莊子, we can find a passage, in which Yin Wen and Song Xing are mentioned simultaneously. Nowadays, most researchers think that Song Xing and Yin Wen represent members of one of the three sub-schools of Huang Lao at Ji Xia (稷下黃老三派) and that the sub-school represented by Song Xing and Yin Wen mingled the thoughts of Daoism, Moism and legalism. In this event, Yin Wen cannot be noted as a member of nomenalism.

Most contemporary researchers of the pre-Qin studies of names and arguments (名辯學) are of the opinion that nomenalism is represented by Deng Xi, Hui Shi and Gongsun Long. The basis for such a viewpoint can also be found in the *Yi Wen zhi* chapter of the *Han Shu* encyclopedia. Here, these three philosophers were defined as representatives of the nomenalist school. From the analysis of other texts that mention Yin Wen, it can be concluded that if someone is regarded as a member of a certain school by the *Han Shu* encyclopedia, this is not a reliable evidence that a certain person is indeed a member of the school. Which one of them – Deng Xi, Hui Shi or Gongsun Long – was truly a member of the nomenalist school? In order to answer this question, we need to make a broader analysis.

Deng Xi, who was a contemporary of Confucius and lived in the late period of Spring and Autumn (770–476 B.C.), originated from the state Zheng 鄭. Today's edition of *Deng Xizi* 鄧析子 includes two pieces of writing, *Wu Hou* 無厚 and *Zhuan Ci* 轉辭. Most researchers regard it to be a fake, thus it cannot be used as a basis for our study. There are two reasons why Deng Xi is regarded to be a member of the nomenalist school. Firstly, Deng Xi established the *Theory of two possibilities* 操兩可之說 and secondly, he liked making strange arguments and playing with unusual statements (好治怪說，玩琦辭). I will try to analyse whether these two points can be used as evidence that Deng Xi belonged to the nomenalist school. In Lü Buwei's book *Lü shi Chunqiu* we can find the following statement:

> 洧水甚大. 鄭之富人有溺者. 人得其死者. 富人請贖之. 其人求金甚多. 以告鄧析. 鄧析曰：'安之，人必莫之賣矣.'得死者患之，以告鄧析. 鄧析又答之曰：'安之, 此必無所買矣.

> When the Wei river flooded, a rich person from the state of Zheng drowned. Someone found the remains. The rich person's relative wanted to buy the remains from him, but he demanded too much money. The relative told this to

Deng Xi and Deng Xi said: "Take it easy. He cannot sell the remains to others." The person who got the remains was anxious and told the story to Deng Xi. Deng Xi said: "Take it easy. He cannot buy the remains elsewhere." (Lü 1989: 157)

This is an example of Deng Xi's *Theory of two possibilities*, based upon double fitting expositions. This method consists of taking different standpoints that result in different conclusions. As a technique of argumentation, Deng Xi's double fitting expositions exerted great influence on the sophists of the late Warring States period. However, this is not necessarily related to linguistic analysis and it cannot be considered as evidence that Deng Xi belonged to the nomenalist school. Su Qin 蘇秦 and Zhang Yi 張儀 were also both skilled at making double fitting expositions, yet no one considers them to be members of the nomenalist school.

Xun Kuang 荀況 always mentioned Deng Xi and Hui Shi in the same breath, and criticised them for making strange arguments and playing with unusual statements. But Xun Kuang's simultaneous mentioning of Deng Xi and Hui Shi cannot prove that Deng Xi belonged to the nomenalist school, for whether Hui Shi belonged to it or not is still questionable. Neither can Xun Kuang's statements prove that Hui Shi's thought was inherited from Deng Xi, because all the books by Deng Xi and Hui Shi have been lost and the ancient books that remain available do not provide enough material for us to know their thought in detail. Qian Mu 錢穆 analysed Xu Kuang's statements on Deng Xi and Hui Shi and wrote:

雲惠施鄧析，猶雲陳仲史鰌，大禹墨翟，神農許行，黃帝老子. 其一人爲並世所實有，別一人則托古以爲影射.

To say Hui Shi and Deng Xi is like saying Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu, Da Yu and Mo Di, Shen Nong and Xu Xing or Huang Di and Lao Zi. In every single one of these parallelisms, one person lived in the respective period, while the other person, mentioned together with the first one, was taken from the ancient times and was mentioned as a model. (Qian 1985: 19)

Deng Xi lived about two hundred years before Hui Shi. I think Qin Mu's analysis is convincing. According to him, Xun Kuang's mentioning of Deng Xi only serves as a model. Living in the late Spring-Autumn period, when travelling in order to study and find arguments was not yet popular, Deng Xi perhaps never heard of the topics that the sophists argued about. However, we have no evidence to prove this. Deng Xi liked creating strange arguments and playing with unusual statements. Even though this was the case, we can at most say that he was a sophist, rather

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than a member of the nomenalist school. I will discuss the relationship between the sophists and the nomenalists later. So far we have no real reason to connect Deng Xi with nomenalism.

According to the records of the classical books from the pre-Qin period, Deng Xi once compiled a law, which was called "Bamboo Law". The Zheng rulers adopted the law, but killed Deng Xi later. Deng Xi also helped other people with their lawsuits in return for rewards. Qian Mu wrote:

> 今鄧析，其爲人賢否不可知，其竹刑之詳亦不可考. 要之與鞅起異行同趣，亦當時貴族平民勢力消長中一才士也.

> Whether Deng Xi was an able and virtuous person is not known, nor are the details of his Bamboo Law. In principle, his behaviour was different from that of Yang and Qi, but their interests were the same. Deng Xi was also a talent in the power vicissitude of the aristocracy and common people. (Qian 1985: 19)

*Yang* and *Qi* refer to Shang Yang 商鞅 and Wu Qi 吳起, who changed the laws of the *Qin* 秦國 and *Chu* states 楚國 respectively. I think Qian Mu's comment on Deng Xi is accurate. In the late Spring-Autumn period, i.e. on the threshold of the 5th century BC, the society was unstable. Deng Xi wanted to change the political system with the use of law, and should thus be regarded as a pioneer of legalism rather than a member of nomenalism.

Hui Shi, a man from the Song state, who lived in the period of Warring States (475–221 BC), was a close friend of Zhuang Zhou. At a certain stage he also served as the Prime Minister of the Wei state 魏國 and was known for being good at argumentation. According to *Han Shu's Yi Wen Zhi*, *Hui Zi* consisted of one composition, which had been lost. We can only obtain a spot of knowledge about him from the classical books of the pre-Qin period.

In the chapter *Jie Bi* 解 of his book, *Xunzi* 荀子 described him in the following way:

> 惠子蔽於辭而不知實.

> Huizi was blinded by words and did not know reality. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 198)

From the comment of Xun Kuang, we know that Hui Shi emphasised language analysis, which is one of the characteristics of the school of nomenalism. But to

make sure that Hui Shi is a representative of nomenalism, we need to know whether he took the rectification of names or the relationship between names and reality as his main subject of research.

Xun Zi's *Bu Gou* 不苟 said that Hui Shi and Deng Xi can argue about strange and difficult statements. In the chapter *Tian Xia* of the book *Zhuangzi* we can find Hui Shi's ten statements on nature (厤物十事) and twenty-one sophist statements, and Zhuangzi says that

辯者以此與惠施相應，終身無窮.

the sophists argued about them with Hui Shi all their lives. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 372)

Because the writings of Hui Shi are lost, we have no clue of how Hui Shi proved and expounded the statements recorded in *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi*. We also have no clue as to the relationship between the discussion of these statements and the one of rectifying names. Thus, we do not have the evidence to say that Hui Shi was a member of the nomenalist school.

The criticism of Hui Shi recorded in *Xunzi* is written in rather stern terms, sometimes even in abusive language. Comparatively, because of the friendship between Hui Shi and Zhuang Zhou, perhaps Zhuangzi's comment on Hui Shi is more suggestive. In the chapter *Tian xia* of his book we can read the following:

南方有倚人焉，曰黃繚. 問天地所以不墜不陷，風雨雷霆之故. 惠施不辭而應，不慮而對.

A man from the south, named Huang Liao, asked about why the sky does not fall and the earth does not sink, about the causes of wind, rain, thunder and lightning. Hui Shi answered with no hesitation and did not need to ponder on his own words and thoughts. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 372)

He also comments, that Hui Shi has:

遍爲萬物說，說而不休，猶以爲寡，益之以怪，以反人爲實，而欲以勝人爲名, 弱于德，強於物，其塗隩矣.

made theories about all things on earth, argued endlessly, still felt that this was not enough, added something to make his theory strange, took opinions opposing each other as truth, wanted to win reputation by defeating his

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opponent, his theories were weak at virtue, strong at natural things. These were where he muddled. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 372)

From *Zhuangzi*, we can conclude that Hui Shi was keen to study and discuss various natural phenomena. He might not have studied the problem of rectifying names. Even though he had studied the problem, it did not have much importance in his theory. Due to the above-mentioned reason, we should not view Hui Shi as a member of the nomenalist school.

Gongsun Long, a man who came from the Zhao state 趙國, also lived in the late period of the Warring States and was once a retainer (門客) of Ping Yuanjun 平原君. According to the chapter *Yi Wen Zhi*, in the encyclopedia *Han Shu*, his main work, *Gongsun Longzi*, is composed of 14 volumes. Today's edition of *Gongsun Longzi* consists of only 6 pieces, which are *Ji Fu* 迹府*, Bai ma lun* 白馬論*, Zhi wu lun* 指物論*, Tong bian lun* 通變論*, Jian bai lun* 堅白論 and *Ming shi lun* 名實論. Among them, *Ji Fu* was written by his successors while the remaining 5 essays can be considered as the writings of Gongsun Long.[4] We use these 5 essays as a basis for studying Gongsun Long's thought.

The chapter *Min shi lun* was arranged at the end of *Gongsun Longzi*. Pang Pu 龐樸 thinks that:

> Ming Shi Lun is the preface to the book. It offers definitions to some basic categories, suggests the principle of rectifying names, and constitutes a theoretical system with other essays. People in the Qin and Han periods preferred to put prefaces at the ends of books, therefore Ming Shi Lun is also arranged in such a manner. (Pang 1979: 47)

I agree with Pang Pu's analysis. *Ming shi lun*, mainly discussing the relationship between names and reality and the problem of rectifying names, is the kernel of the whole book. The discussions in the remaining four essays are all closely related to the theory of rectifying names. These five essays of *Gongsun Longzi* constitute a complete theory of names. From the viewpoint of the philosophy of language, the theory of Gongsun Long is a theory of meaning. Since this is not the topic of the essay, I will not discuss it here. Gongsun Long put rectifying names at the centre of his theory and, during his study, paid great attention to the analysis of language. His theory is not directly related to the social or ethical problems of his

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[4] Today's edition of *Gong Sun Long Zi* was probably re-edited during the period of the Jin dynasty (晋代) (317–420).

time. We can conclude that Gongsun Long deserves to be a representative of nomenalism.

Among the "members" of the nomenalist school listed in the *Yi wen zhi* chapter of the *Han Shu* encyclopedia, Gongsun Long is the only undoubted member of the school.

## 3    Nomenalism and the Sophists

The "nomenalist school" (*ming jia* 名家) was often confused with the "sophists" (*bianzhe* 辯者). Many people think that a member of the nomenalist school is a sophist and that every sophist is most certainly also a nomenalist. In fact, the meanings and the referents of these two names are different. In the Warring State period, many people liked to argue about strange statements. These people were sophists, also called *cha shi* (察士) or *bian shi* (辯士), m*ing Jia* (名家), while the nomenalist school refers to a school from the pre-Qin period, or to member(s) of that school. Indeed, all members of the nomenalist school were sophists, but not all the sophists were members of the nomenalist school. At this point, I shall briefly analyse certain social phenomena in order to clarify the relationship between nomenalists and sophists.

In the Warring States period, the kings of different states solicited the able and virtuous men, hoping to make their countries rich and strong and to consolidate their position with the help of these people. The practice of the kings provided opportunities for ordinary people to be promoted. Once appreciated by a king, a common person could get hold of the main power of the state. For example, Shang Yang 商鞅, Su Qin 蘇秦, and Zhang Yi 張儀 were all promoted to a high rank, after getting the appreciation of the kings through lobbying. Under this condition, lobbying became the main means of promotion for learned people. In order to acquire the necessary abilities and knowledge of lobbying, they needed to learn from teachers. Consequently, lobbying and studying with teachers became a kind of fashion. For example, Meng Ke 孟軻 had several hundred students, and even Tian Pian 田駢 had a hundred students. At that time, every slightly famous scholar would have his own students. One of the results of this fashion was that there were a lot of *shi* (士)[5] in the society. These *shi* were knowledgeable, eloquent, but not

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[5] *Shi* refers roughly to educated or especially trained people.

engaged in production. They were lobbying between kings, teaching students or acting as retainers of the aristocrats. Su Qin and Zhang Yi were two outstanding men among them. Their teacher, Gui Guzi 鬼谷子 was also renowned for them. However, people like Su Qin and Zhang Yi were quite rare, for most *Shi* have been forgotten.

In the second half of the Warring States period, it was fashionable for the high-ranking officials and aristocrats to keep retainers. For example, Meng Changjun Tian Wen 孟嘗君田文 from the Qi state 齊國, Ping Yuanjun Zhao Sheng 平原君趙勝 from the Zhao state 趙國, Xin Lingjun Wei Wuji 信陵君魏無忌 from the Wei state 魏國 and Chun Shenjun Huang Xie 春申君黃歇 from the Chu state 楚國 were famous for keeping retainers. Each of them kept about 3000 retainers. Although some of these retainers possessed various kinds of talent and skill, most of them were eloquent and persuasive *shi*s.

In the period of the Warring States, the *shi*s were very active. To them, lobbying was the ladder to promotion; eloquence was the capital for getting the appreciation of kings, senior officials or aristocrats. This is why argumentation came into fashion. It is in such circumstances that the sophists came into existence.

Xunzi divided sophists into three types:

有小人之辯者，有士君子之辯者，有聖人之辯者.

the trivial ones, the integer ones and the sages. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 124)

Those who argued about strange topics, such as "thickness" (無厚), "hard and white" (堅白), or "white horse" (白馬), were trivial sophists (小人之辯者). They regarded argumentation as a way to practice their eloquence and show their talent. Thus, they picked out statements, which were in contrast to common sense and debated them. While debating, they made full use of their ability to devise cunning and tricky plots, and tried to defeat their opponents through various methods. Zhuang Zhou criticised sophists by saying that they:

飾任之心，易人之意，能勝人之口，不能服人之心.

confuse the minds of others, change their meanings, are capable of defeating others in words, but cannot win their hearts. (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 372)

Zou Yan 鄒衍 criticised sophists by saying that they:

煩文以相假，巧譬以相移，引人之聲使不得及其意.

used complicated language to make use of the meanings of other words, use ingenious figurative speech to shift the meanings of statements, lead away the speeches of other people to make others not able to contact their meaning. (Du 1962: 82)

These criticisms are not unreasonable. The existence of numerous sophists and the emergence of various strange statements supplied sufficient conditions for the appearance of nomenalism.

Amongst sophists, there was no lack of sagacious and knowledgeable scholars. As retainers (or teachers), these scholars needed not to worry about their living, nor to work hard on political affairs. They had the ability and condition to engage in serious academic studies. Arguments conducted them to think about a series of problems related to argumentation. Some of them focused their attention on the relations between names and put forward their theories on names. These people were nomenalists.

They were all sophists, who took part in debates about strange statements and used sophistry sometimes. But they did not invariably use sophistry. Their research on the relationship between names and reality was serious. Their theories were abstract, profound and hard to understand. Their aim of "rectifying names and reality to guide and transform the world" was only a slogan. In fact, their theories were not related to politics and ethics.

## 4    Nomenalism and the Study of Names

The nomenalists studied names, but they were not the only philosophical direction to do so. In the pre-Qin period, most of the schools were to some extent concerned with the problem of rectifying names. Even the Daoists, who advocated "effortlessness" (無爲), discussed the problem of names, although their attitude was negative. The studies of names of the schools in pre-Qin period involved many problems, such as rectifying names, the formation of names, the kinds of names, the relations between names and reality and the relations between names and arguments, etc. The thoughts of different schools opposed, influenced and permeated each other. Here I will briefly discuss the main developing threads of

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the pre-Qin study of names, and then explain the position of nomenalism in the study of names in the pre-Qin period.

There are three main trends in the development of the study of names in the pre-Qin period. They are: a) rectifying names and status (正名位), b) rectifying legal codes and names (正刑名) and c) rectifying names and reality (正名實).

In the late Spring-Autumn period, the positions of social classes had changed greatly and the duchies fought each other. This lead to a social turbulence in ancient China and the dukes (kings of deferent states) acted arbitrarily. Ceremonies and music were abused (used not complying with the old regulations). Common *shi*s criticised politics recklessly. The patriarchal clan system of the Zhou dynasty, which was based upon blood relationships was destroyed. Confucius, longing for peace and prosperity of the past Western Zhou dynasty (西 周 1066–771 BC) and worshipping its systems, attributed the social instability to the unconformity of names and reality, the instance of which was that kings and courtiers were only titular. Confucius regarded the restoration of *li* 禮 as his major duty and took rectifying names as the first work to rectify politics. The names that Confucius wanted to rectify were those related to social or family positions, such as "king" (君), "courtier" (臣), "father" (父) and "son" (子). Although the scope of Confucius' discussion of names was limited to politics and ethics, he was the first person to put forth the problem of rectifying names and started the pre-Qin study of names. His thought of rectifying names in order to rectify politics went through the entire pre-Qin study of names and argumentation.

The thought of rectifying legal codes and names (正刑名) came into existence very early, and can probably be traced to Deng Xi. The thought was later adopted and developed by the school of legalism. The difference between Deng Xi and legalism is that Deng Xi was hostile to rulers while legalism gave them power. This is why Deng Xi is not regarded as a member of the school of legalism by the present researchers. Han Fei 韓非, living in the late Warring States period, incorporated legalist theories and established a complete theory of politics, which can be called *The tactics of ruling* or *The art of facing south* 南面術. In Han Fei's tactics of ruling, rectifying legal codes and names was very important. In the chapter *Er Bing* 二柄 of his main book *Han Feizi* 韓非子, he wrote:

人主將欲禁奸，則審合刑名；刑名者，言與事也.

> When a master of the people wants to prohibit deceit, he needs to examine the consistence between legal codes and names. "Legal codes" and "name" refer to what the legal codes say and do (through the people who bear names of official posts). (*Zhuzi jicheng* I 1999: 305)

And in the chapter *Nan Er* 難二, he pointed out:

> 人主雖使人，必度量准之，以刑名參之；以事遇於法則行，不遇於法則止；功當其言則賞，不當則誅.

> Though a master can employ people, he must measure them with norms, examine them with legal codes and names. When a thing is consistent with the law, it should be allowed; when it is inconsistent with the law, it should be forbidden. If an exploit done by a certain person conforms to the words of the legal codes, the person should be rewarded, otherwise he should be punished. (*Zhuzi jicheng* II 1999: 437)

In Han Fei's opinion, whenever a person has done things that he should not do according to the legal codes, he must be punished, even though he has achieved a certain exploit. Han Fei developed the theory of rectifying legal codes and names to its summit.

The third trend in the development of the pre-Qin study of names is rectifying names and reality. The theories of rectifying names and status and rectifying legal codes and names both directly served the politics. In opposition to them the theory of rectifying names and reality wanted "to examine the account of names and reality" (察名實之理). The names it tried to rectify were not those related to social status or law, but names of material things. Thinkers of the pre-Qin period were all, to a certain extent, concerned with the problems related to language. With the development of the study of names and argument, the theory of rectifying names and reality gradually matured and became an important constituent of the pre-Qin studies of names. Since the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), many Chinese scholars have regarded the pre-Qin studies of names as the theory of logic of ancient China. In fact, the theories of names that have been regarded as Chinese ancient logic are those belonging to the study of rectifying names and reality, which is only one of the branches of the studies of names from the pre-Qin period. In the late period of the Warring states, Xun Kuang, the late Moists and nomenalists made the highest achievements in examining the account of names and reality.

Xun Kuang bitterly hated the strange statements. He thought people of noble character should not take part in debates on such statements, but should stop them. However, he could not shut the mouths of others. So, he took the theory of rectifying names as a means to stop the strange statements. He wrote a thesis named *Zheng ming* 正名 in which he discussed the problems of the origin of names, their kinds and functions, principles of their formation, and the relations between names and the argument. He established a complete theory of the study of names.

The thoughts of names from the late Moism period are concentrated in *Mo Bian* 墨辯.[6] The scope of discussion in *Mo Bian* is broad, involving mechanics, optics, geometry, epistemology, ethics, logic, linguistics, etc. With regard to the study of names, *Mo Bian* discussed the problems of the function of names, the relations between names and reality, the types of names, etc., and explained the meanings and use of a number of concrete names. *Mo Bian*'s discussion of names is integrated with its discussion of argumentation. The authors of *Mo Bian* took "examining the account of names and reality" as one of the functions of argumentation, "showing reality with names" as an important means of argumentation. It is evident that the late Moists' study of names is closely related to its study of argumentation.

Compared with the thoughts on names of Xun Kuang and late Moism, the nomenalist study of names has a number of distinguished characteristics. Take Gongsun Long as an example. Late Moists said that "hardness and whiteness were compatible" (堅白盈), while Gongsun Long said that "hardness and whiteness are separated" (堅白離). Late Moists said that "a white horse was a horse" (白馬，馬也), while Gongsun Long said that a "white horse was not a horse" (白馬非馬). Xun Kuang was concerned as regards the social function of language, while late Moism was concerned as regards the communicating function of language. (See Cui 1997: 210, 322) Unlike Xun Kuang and Late Moism, Gongsun Long studied a series of problems related to the relationship between names and reality and suggested a distinct theory of names. Many people think that Gongsun Long's theory is about logic. If we change the angle and view it from the standpoint of the philosophy of language, the research into the theory of nomenalism will perhaps become more interesting.

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[6] *Mo Bian* refers to six pieces of writing in *Mozi* concerning argument, i.e. *Jing Shang, Jing Xia, Jing Shuo Shang, Jing Shuo Xia, Xiao Qu* and *Da Qu.*

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