

On Xunzi's Three Types of Cognitive Delusion (*Sanhuo*, 三惑)

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I. Problematic of *Sanhuo*

The aim of this presentation is to provide a systematic and coherent interpretation of Xunzi's Three Types of Cognitive Delusion in *Zhengming Pian* of the *Xunzi* (荀子, 正名篇): 1) Being deluded in the use of names to bring confusion to names. (*huo yu yong ming yi luan ming zhe*, 惑於用名以乱名者) 2) Being deluded in the use of objects to bring confusion to names. (*huo yu yong shi yi luan ming zhe*, 惑於用实以乱名者) 3) Being deluded in the use of names to bring confusion to objects. (*huo yu yong ming yi luan shi zhe*, 惑於用名以乱实者). Each of the above delusions was provided with the way of avoiding its delusion and instantiated by several claims. The ways of avoiding delusions are to examine them in the light of the three requirements for proper use of names and objects: the purpose for having names, the evidence for assimilation and differentiation and the pivotal requirements for instituting names respectively. Among the instances showing the delusions, the followings are mentioned as the representative of each delusion in this paper:ⁱ 1) "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" (Neo-Moists, 后期墨家). 2) "Mountains and chasms are on the same level" (Hui Shi, 惠施). 3) "A white horse is not a horse" (Gongsun Long, 公孙龙)ⁱⁱ

Among the threefold delusion, the second delusion has been interpreted as an obvious one. Using the framework of names and objects, Xunzi expresses this fallacy as "being deluded in the use of objects to bring confusion to names". The expression "being deluded in the use of objects" seems to suggest that it is a fallacy arising from the misdescription of the world. For instance, the claim "Mountains and chasms are on the same level" is said to be a fallacy because it fails to grasp the actual differences between mountains and chasms in the world: Mountains are high and chasms are low.ⁱⁱⁱ What, then, does Xunzi mean by the expression "to bring confusion to names" here? The expression "To bring confusion to names" may refer to the situation where language (or names) does not function well. Since the function of language, in general, is to deliver the speaker's intentions and do some businesses by referring to objects, Xunzi's second delusion can be understood as saying that such a misdescription as "Mountains and chasms are on the same level" makes our system of language malfunction because it does not describe the world correctly.

We, however, have some difficulty in interpreting the first and the third delusion. On the surface, the claim "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" and the claim "A white horse is not a horse" could be seen as making the same fallacy in that they deny the conceptual inclusion of a thief as a man (in the former) and of a white horse as a horse (in the latter). However, it should be remembered that the first delusion does not deny the relation between a thief and a man. What is denied by Neo-Moists is the relation

between 'to kill a thief' and 'to kill a man'. Neo-Moists paid denied the relation between 'to kill a thief' and 'to kill a man' while admitting the relation between a thief and a man. What, then, is the difference between the mere denial of the relation between a white horse and a horse (or between a thief and a man) and the denial of the relation between 'to kill a thief' and 'to kill a man' with the admission of thief-man relationship? If both "to kill a thief" and "to kill a man" mean mere compound names, why did Xunzi classify the first and the third delusion into different categories of delusions? While the first, to borrow Xunzi's expression, is a delusion in the use of names to bring confusion to names, the third is a delusion in the use of names to bring confusion to objects. Since this contrast of using the framework of names and objects is not easy to understand, we need to pay attention to the other explanations that followed. The first delusion is said to be due to the disregarding of the purpose of having names while the third to the disregarding of the nature of names as a social convention. Provided by this information, we can infer that those misuses of names refer to two situations: disregarding of the purpose of having names and disregarding of the nature of names as a social convention.

A General problem of understanding the differences among the threefold delusion is that all of the three requirements for proper use of names and objects seem to be interrelated. To have the purpose for having names (the first requirement) is possible only through our experience and current linguistic conventions (the second and the third

respectively). Experiential meaning (the second requirement) also cannot be acquired without the prior understanding speaker's intentions and pre-established linguistic convention (the first and the third respectively). Linguistic convention (the third requirement) can also be made on the basis of speakers' intentions and our experience of the world (the first and the second respectively). In this sense, we need all of the threefold criteria or requirements in order to have a proper use of names and objects. So, each claim of three delusions, if it is a real sophistry, should be understood as arising from violating not just the criterion Xunzi suggested, but all of the criteria in Xunzi's discussion to some extent. The claim "To kill a thief is not to kill a man", for example, would become a delusion which is related not just to the purpose of having names, but also to the experiential evidence as well as linguistic convention. Since the purpose of having names is to deliver a speaker's intentions, the first delusion which violates this criterion naturally leads to violating not just a misuse of names, but also a misdescription of objects. The same point can be made in the other delusions because names and objects are interrelated. Why can't the claim "Mountains and chasms are on the same level" become the delusion of the misuse or abuse of names rather than the delusion of the misdescription of objects? Why can't the claims "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" and "A white horse is not a horse" become the misdescription of objects instead of the misuse or abuse of names? In this sense, it might be said that even though it is true that Xunzi's discussion of threefold delusion shows a general requirement for proper use of names and objects, his allocation of the sophistries of that time to each of three

requirements would not be correctly made. It can be said that since Xunzi's classification was conducted on the basis neither of the rule of excluded middle, nor of adequate procedures, Xunzi's classification of three delusions might not be informative enough to show Dialecticians's ideas as we would expect from it.

However, even though the three delusions or the corresponding three requirements for proper use of names and objects are interrelated, it does not mean we cannot distinguish the three delusions according to certain principle. There might be certain adequate way to deal with the three delusions. With regard to the relation between the first and the third delusion, A. C. Graham seems to provide the most persuasive interpretation to show the difference between the first and the third delusion.^{iv} In what follows, I critically examine Graham's interpretation of Xunzi's threefold delusion and then suggest my own alternative one.

II. Graham's Interpretation

Since A. C. Graham believes that Xunzi's theory "may be seen as largely a digest of Later Mohist disputation for Confucian use", He interprets the threefold delusion on the basis of the Moist disciplines as follows:

	Fallacies	Mohist Disciplines
The purpose of having	Disordering names by	Knowing how to connect

names	confusion in operating with names	names with objects (discourse)
The evidence for assimilating and differentiating	Disordering names by confusion in operating with objects	Knowing objects (the sciences)
The pivotal requirements for instituting names	Disordering objects by confusion in operating with names	Knowing names (argumentation)

According to Graham, the first delusion is due to the mistake of connecting names with objects while the third to the mistake of knowing names. In other words, the first delusion concerns the art of description while the third the art of argumentation. In this reading, Xunzi condemns Gongsun Long's claim "A white horse is not a horse" because it denies the necessary relation between the concept of white horse and the concept of horse while condemns Neo-Moists' claim "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" because it fails to describe coherently the situation of killing a thief.

Graham's interpretation seems to say that Xunzi's classification of threefold delusion was firm and sound. However, the fourfold Moist discipline which Graham uses for classifying Xunzi's threefold delusion is not unanimously agreed on. Before Graham, it was Fung Yu Lan who identified the fourfold divisions of knowledge in addition to three

sources of knowledge in the *Mojing* (墨经), but he did not explain much about them. Many experts on the *Mojing*, on the other hand, have suggested different readings of that specific phrase dealing with kinds of knowledge in the *Mojing*. This means that the question of whether the *Mojing* suggests knowledge of how to connect names with objects as a separate kind of knowledge is still controversial. I, in interpreting the *Mojing*, have doubted Fung and Graham's distinction between knowledge of how to connect names with objects and knowledge of names on the basis of the fact that the searching for reason in the process of disputation in the *Mojing* is nothing but the searching for the standard in the process of description of reality.^v For example, Neo-Moists are applying the art of description not only in the process of refuting the claim "To kill a thief is to kill a man", but also in the process of refuting the claim "A white horse is not a horse". As they criticize the former claim on the basis that we sometimes can say "not to kill a man" to refer to the situation of killing a thief, they can criticize the latter claim on the basis that we cannot avoid calling "ma" (there is a horse) to refer to a white horse.^{vi} If both claims can be regarded as misdescription of reality, why, then, did Xunzi criticize Neo-Moists using different criteria? Why did Xunzi classify Gongsun Long and Neo-Moists differently?

III. An alternative Interpretation

My alternative interpretation says that even though both the first and the third claims commonly belong to art of description, they are different because they are based on

different logic and semantics. The neo-Moists, the representative of the first delusion, use the logic and semantics in the intensional contexts while Gongsun Long the logic and semantics in the extensional contexts.^{vii} The difference of intensional and extensional contexts lies in whether the law of substitution of identities^{viii} is observed or not. The law of substitution means that any substitution among co-extensive terms does not result in any change of truth value or meaning. The intensional contexts refer to situation which resists the law of substitution.

Gongsun Long accepts the law of substitution and makes such paradoxical claims as "A white horse is not a horse" and "We can separate the white from the hard in a white hard stone". One-name-one-thingism, which is the essence of Confucian theory of rectification of names, underlies in the Gongsun Long's extensional logic and semantics. In this sense, "A white horse is not a horse" should be understood as saying that "white horse" and "horse" do not refer to the same thing because they believe that different names always refer to different objects. For Gongsun Long, there is no distinction between extensional meaning and intensional meaning in an expression.

On the other hand, Neo-Moists, though they follow the one-name-one-thingism, allow that more than two names refer to the same thing. For Neo-Moists, the essence of proper use of names we should keep in mind is the functional relationship between names and objects. By the functional relationship, I mean the way names and objects are

related in which for any given name, the corresponding object is singularly determined. In the sentence "A thief is a man, but to kill a thief is not to kill a man", the expression "a thief is a man" means not that a thief is included in a man, but that "a thief" and "a man" can refer to the same thing. In this regard, Neo-Moists, unlike Gongsun Long, admits the extensional identity by two intensionally different names, that is, the sameness of identity (*chongtong*, 重同). But, in the latter part, "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" in the above sentence, Neo-Mohists take the inference with intensional context in which the identity relationship does not hold any more. On the whole, even though both Gongsun Long and Neo-Moists may deny the sentence "To kill a thief is not to kill a man", their reasons for denial surely would be different: Gongsun Long with the reason of the extensional non-identity while Neo-Moists with the reason of the intensional non-identity. Neo-Moists' intensional inferences in the *Mojing* has the following form which is exactly the same as the form of intensional logics: "a=b, but F(a) is not F(b).

Xunzi basically is following Neo-Moist intensional logic and semantics. His reason against Neo-Moists' claim seems to be that he was worried over the ambiguity of meaning in Neo-Moist intensional logic and semantics. The prevalence of shifts of meaning in Neo-Moists inferences would surely be a threat to Confucian system of names which Xunzi wanted to secure so eagerly. At this point, we should be reminded of the fact that the first and the second delusion are led to the same consequences, that is, to bring

confusion to names. Since Hui Shi's paradoxes usually refer to conflicting claims, we might guess that 'to bring confusion to name' means to have conflicting claims. The reason why Neo-Moists' use of name results in conflicting claims might be that what they wanted to secure is the intentions of individuals rather than of society. Since Neo-Moists pay attention to the deliverance of individual's intention, they emphasize the context of concrete situation and enjoy the shifts of meaning which sometimes result in conflicting claims. That's why that even though Xunzi and Neo-Moists agree in saying that the purpose of having names is to deliver one's intention and thereby succeed in affairs, Xunzi criticizes Neo-Moist. In this regard, what Xunzi denies in Neo-Moist logic is not just the claim "To kill a thief is not to kill a man", but the possibility of claiming the conflicting claims "To kill a thief is to kill a man" and "To kill a thief is not to kill a man" simultaneously. This point is testified by the fact that many conflicting claims are found in the *Mojing*.^{ix}

Reflecting on the above interpretation about the first and the third delusion, we are in need of interpreting the second delusion. This is not only because 'to bring confusion to names' refers to 'to have conflicting claims' instead of just the malfunction of language, but also because 'deluded in the use of objects' cannot mean any more 'misdescription of reality' which is shown to be applied to the first and the third delusion. If 'the use of names' suggests 'the art of description', then 'the use of objects' cannot mean it. My suggestion is that 'the use of objects' concerns 'the art of knowing objects

before description'. According to Xunzi, our knowledge is completed through the order of knowing objects first and then describing it. Since knowing objects by our capacities of senses and mind and describing our knowledge by names are two components of our experiential knowledge, one without the other amounts to 'no knowing'.^x

IV. Concluding Remarks

So far, I have shown that Graham's interpretation of Xunzi's three delusions, though it is the most persuasive, is not well grounded. We have no sufficient evidences for believing that Neo-Moists conceived knowledge of name in addition to knowledge of how to connect names with objects and that Xunzi also used the same division of knowledge in his critique against Dialecticians. Using the distinction between intensional and extensional contexts according to the law of substitution of identities, I, instead, suggest an alternative interpretation which shows the differences among the three delusions.

ⁱ This is because I take Xunzi's discussion of the threefold delusion as a critique against the so-called Dialectician (*Bianzhe*, 辯者) using the framework of names and objects even though the threefold delusion includes Song Xing's (宋鉞) claims. By Dialectician, I refer to Neo-Moists and the School of Names in ancient China.

ⁱⁱ Some scholars including Fung Yu Lan read this claim as "Ox-and-horse are not horse" (*youniuma feimaye*, 有牛马非马也) rather than "A white horse is not a horse" (*baima feima*, 白马非马) because it does not contain any interpolation into the text and is a wide-spread sophistry in ancient China. My preference of the latter to the former has the following advantages: 1. It makes the number of instances of the third delusion three which is consistent with the numbers of instances of other delusions. 2. It makes the first and the third delusion as different one because "Ox-and-horse are not horse" is Neo-Moists'.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some scholars such as both Li Disheng (李焯生) and Li Zhexian(李哲贤) say that this delusion is a fallacy to confuse general concept on the basis of particular situation where some mountains and chasms are actually on the same sea-level. However, this interpretation cannot explain why objects refer to particular situation while names refer to general concepts. Cf. Li Disheng, *Xunzi Jishi* (荀子集释), Taiwan: Xuesheng Shuju, 1994. Li Zhexian, *Xunzi zhi mingxue*, (荀子之名学), Taiwan: Wenjin chupan, 2005.

^{iv} A. S. Cua, on the other hand, is holding the position of deemphasizing their differences by saying the third can be subsumed into the first. A. S. Cua attributed Xunzi's first delusion to the lack of rationality and the third to the inobservance of social convention. Cua goes on to say that the third can be subsumed into the first because the third can be understood as suggesting 'coherence to pre-established social conventions'. Cf. A. S. Cua, *Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsun Tzu's Moral Epistemology*, Honolulu, Hawaii University Press, 1985. By relating rationality with the respect for current linguistic practices, Cua, here, seems to say that the Chinese concept of rationality is not abstractly thought, but concretely conceived. Through this kind of interpretation, he, in fact, takes reason and experience as the main requirements for the proper use of names and objects. Cua, therefore, allows the distinction between knowledge of objects and knowledge of names while he, unlike Graham, does not accept knowledge of how to connect names with objects.

^v Chaehyun Chong, The Conception of *Bian* (Disputation), *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 26, issue 1, March 1999. 1-19.

^{vi} In this regard, I do not believe that there was a clear conception of conceptual knowledge which was distinguished from experiential knowledge in ancient China. It is true that we can see the clear case of knowledge of names in the *Mozi* (墨子), that is, the blind man's knowledge of color. According to Mozi, the blind man knows that black is not white, but he can't take black out of white. Mozi, at first, seems to suggest the blind man has conceptual knowledge. As far as I know, however, the blind man's knowledge of color does not have any independent

significance in the *Mozi*. In other words, it is taken as insufficient knowledge, not as a separate kind of knowledge.

^{vii} Anthony C. Yu contrasts Confucian emphasis of pragmatics with dialecticians' semantics in his book. cf. Anthony C. Yu, "Cratylus and Xunzi on Names", in *Early China/Ancient Greece*, ed. by Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, pp. 235-250. I, however, believe that Neo-Moists, compared to Gongsun Long, are more pragmatics-oriented than semantics-oriented.

^{viii} It refers to the law that from $a=b$ and $P(a)$, it follows that $P(b)$. cf. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. By Edward Craig, New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 807. Zong Desheng claims that Neo-Moists clearly distinguished intensional expressions which resist the law of substitution from extensional expressions which do not. However, "to kill" which Zong mentioned as an extensional term was used in intensional context when Neo-Moists say "A thief is a man, but to kill a thief is not to kill a man. So the distinction between extensional and intensional context is made not in expressions, but in contexts. Cf. Desheng Zong, Studies of Intensional Contexts in Mohist Writings, *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 50, no. 2, April 2000.

^{ix} Two examples suffice to show my point. Regarding the issue of separation of hard and white in a white hard stone and the issue of whether killing a puppy is killing a dog, Neo-Moists take both affirmative and negative position.

^x Xunzi, Zhengming Pian.