

UNFREEZING AND UNTANGLING THE MODERN NOTION OF ZHENGMING: FROM KANG YOUWEI TO HU SHI

CARINE DEFOORT

These frozen thoughts [...] come so handily that you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now stir in you, has shaken you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then you will see that you have nothing in your grasp but perplexities, and the best we can do with them is share them with each other.
Hannah Arendt, *Thinking*¹

In her last book, Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) describes the activity of “thinking” as a wind that “unfreezes” frozen entities such as established notions and theories. It is a mental activity that pauses one’s train of thought and interrupts one’s activities. It may even temporarily cause a dazing effect like after a deep sleep.² The notion of “correction of names” or “correct naming” (*zhengming* 正名) is, I believe, one such frozen entity that needs unfreezing. Allegedly, the first reference to the term is in a dialogue from the *Lunyu* (Book 13, passage 3) in which Confucius insists on the correction of *ming* 名, a term that has variously been translated as “names,” “naming,” “words,” “terminology,” “titles,” “reputation,” “roles,” and so forth. In the academic study of Chinese philosophy, *zhengming* is commonly described as a very important and long-standing topic of Confucian or Chinese interest.³ It is understood not only to be a “significant aspect of the *Lunyu*” but also “a preoccupation that marked the entire

-
- 1 Arendt [1971] 1978, 175, paraphrasing Socrates. Many thanks to Lee Ting-mien, Chang Yao-cheng, Wang Xin, Wang Xiaowei, Liu Haicheng, for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. This research was supported by the FWO project G048321N “The philosophical relevance of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) as a twofold ‘in-between’ figure: preceding the introduction of the Western paradigm in China and announcing its demise.”
 - 2 Arendt [1971] 1978, 174–175.
 - 3 Thus far lacking an encompassing view of the current academic field in China, my focus is predominantly on Western research. Nevertheless, many Chinese scholars

subsequent development of pre-Qin Chinese thought,”⁴ a doctrine underlying “all the features of Confucian political theory that make it unique”⁵ and an ongoing topic of controversy “unending for more than 2,000 years.”⁶

This notion of the centrality of *zhengming* and its accompanying academic discourse constitute a modern view.⁷ By “modern” I mean nothing more than roughly “twentieth century,” based on my own acquaintance with the research field. It coincides roughly with the switch from imperial to republican China, embedded in a host of educational, social, political, and intellectual changes such as novel reconstructions of the Chinese tradition, the installation of Western-style universities, competing visions of the nation’s future, and so forth. At the beginning of the twentieth century, interpreting the history of Chinese thought in terms of *zhengming* was new and exciting. Today it has frozen into a credo that recurs in textbooks on Chinese philosophy, and is largely characterized by repetition: the same quotes, the same masters, similar claims. Over the course of a century the topic has steadily grown: several monographs have been dedicated to it, as well as innumerable articles and book chapters.⁸ The increasingly wide variety of academic views on *zhengming* might suggest that it is an extremely volatile and flexible topic rather than a frozen block. But I would argue that this boom in interpretations, on the contrary, testifies to its high status and shared core, which is a modern reconfiguration of earlier textual material. Putting its modern characteristics in the spotlight allows us to highlight discontinuities within the claims of continuity. This article’s aim is therefore to unravel a crucial moment in the history of this idea, namely when the modern default

are also representative of this modern discourse. Feng Youlan, for example, not only insisted on this idea but was also very influential spreading it to the West. For Feng’s influence, see Van Norden 2007, 93.

4 Schwartz 1985, 91.

5 Hansen 1992, 66.

6 Gou 2016, 26.

7 See e.g. Yao Xinzong 2003, 814. Yao distinguishes two modern interpretations from the traditional, historical one.

8 For a longer list of references, see Defoort, forthcoming. Some monographs, in chronological order, are Gassmann 1988; Makeham 1994; Hansen 1992; Ding 2008; Gou 2016; Cao 2017; Geaney 2018.

view came into being. It is not within the scope of this article to contribute to the debate about what the historical Confucius may have had in mind when proposing *zhengming*.

Reconsidering a familiar philosophical topic from a historical viewpoint is a type of “thinking” that yields more positive results than the mere perplexities mentioned by Arendt in the epigraph at the beginning of this article. The act of unfreezing can indeed be disturbing, since a familiar narrative dissolves into a historically situated hypothesis. But aside from mere fluidity, the melting block also exposes a knot of connections to be untangled. The perplexities that Arendt mentions can therefore lead to a host of new lines of inquiry; for example, by switching from often quoted passages toward seldom studied texts, highlighting the contingencies of each vision, drawing connections to historical contexts, tracing entanglements with other topics and trends, identifying breaches where continuities are emphasized, and calling attention to possible anachronisms. Focusing on the historical contingency of the idea brings up such questions as: When precisely did *zhengming* become an independent topic of scholarly interest? How was it discussed? How did this differ from the past? And what were the earliest lines of modern interpretation? This is how “unfreezing” a familiar notion leads to “untangling” some of its constituents at a specific moment in time, leaving other possible connections for later research.

In constructing the modern discursive framework of *zhengming*, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) played a pivotal role. Even though Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) was the first scholar to elevate *zhengming* to the core of early Chinese philosophy,⁹ his reading may have been influenced by Kang. Kang focused on *zhengming* in his presentation of Confucius as a reformer. Here lies a germ, I believe, of the modern *zhengming* discourse.

1 Family Resemblances of the Modern *Zhengming* Discourse

Before turning to Kang and Hu, let me suggest some characteristics to identify much of the current *zhengming* research, albeit in a loose fashion, like family

9 See Defoort, forthcoming.

members sharing some traits of resemblance.¹⁰ This is complicated by the fact that the emergence of *zhengming* as an independent academic topic is intricately connected with a multitude of other topics. On the one hand, it relies upon an enormous textual corpus of more than two thousand years; on the other, it feeds into a booming academic production of one century. Without having studied every statement on *zhengming* from the past up till today, I have nevertheless identified six characteristics of the modern discourse by disentangling them from the larger textual context, from each other, and from Kang's and Hu's other insights.¹¹

The six modern characteristics can be seen as closely interconnected fibers of an ever expanding tissue: (1) interest in the complete *Lunyu* dialogue that promotes *zhengming*; (2) insistence on its importance; (3) evidence from other sayings attributed to Confucius; (4) textual support from a larger set of sources; (5) construction of a coherent vision; and (6) an intense but ruptured relation with tradition. These six characteristics, in a variety of combinations, can be seen as the “family resemblances” of the modern *zhengming* discourse. On the one hand, they constitute a breach with the past; on the other, they have enjoyed a remarkable degree of continuity throughout the twentieth century.

(1) Since the beginning of the twentieth century, *Lunyu* 13.3 has often been fully quoted in studies of Confucius's thought. This dialogue contains the Master's only explicit reference to *zhengming*. When asked by his disciple Zilu “what he would give priority if the ruler of Wei would rely on him for governing” (衛君待子而為政，子將奚先)，Confucius answers: “Surely, correcting names” (子曰必也正名乎)。Zilu expresses his skepticism by questioning his Master's “detour” (子之迂也) in governmental matters, which immediately leads to a

10 On family resemblances, see Wittgenstein [1958] 1984, 66–67. He uses the term “game” as an example of how it is impossible to explicate the essence that all games share, though one can point to elements that are characteristic of different games, so that they belong together like a group of family members.

11 I have relied on contemporary *zhengming* research (e.g. Ding 2008; Gou 2016; Cao 2017) as well as databases such as the Chinese Text Project (<https://ctext.org/>) and the Diaolong Full-Text Database of Chinese & Japanese Ancient Books 雕龍中日古籍全文檢索數據庫 (<http://huntenq.com/ancientc/ancientkm?@@0.7714226769917774>).

firm rebuke. Then the Master offers some sort of chain reasoning: “If names are incorrect” (名不正), then “instructions remain unfollowed” (言不順), which causes “affairs to remain uncompleted” (事不成), so that “rites and music fail to prosper” (禮樂不興), with the result that “punishments fail to hit the mark” (刑罰不中), so that, ultimately, “people have no place to put hands or feet” (民無所錯手足). The Master concludes, “Thus when a noble person names something, it must be usable in instructions; when he instructs something, it must be feasible. Regarding his instructions [use of language], a noble person is simply never sloppy” (故君子名之必可言也, 言之必可行也。君子於其言, 無所苟而已矣).¹²

In contrast with modern scholarship, premodern studies, except *Lunyu* commentaries, seldom quoted the full dialogue.¹³ The oldest text fully citing it, aside from the *Lunyu* itself, is Confucius’s biography in the *Shiji*, “Kongzi shijia.”¹⁴ From the Han onward, references to the passage tend to be restricted to the expression *zhengming* or a portion of the dialogue. Most recurrent are the initial and closing lines that frame the chain reasoning, either stressing that “surely, one has to correct names” or describing how “a noble person” would “never be sloppy” in his use of language. Much less prevalent are the chain argument’s initial lines about “incorrect names” obstructing the “follow-up of instructions” leading to “uncompleted affairs.”¹⁵ Even less often mentioned are “punishments

12 子路曰：「衛君待子而為政，子將奚先？」子曰：「必也正名乎！」子路曰：「有是哉，子之迂也！奚其正？」子曰：「野哉由也！君子於其所不知，蓋闕如也。名不正，則言不順；言不順，則事不成；事不成，則禮樂不興；禮樂不興，則刑罰不中；刑罰不中，則民無所錯手足。故君子名之必可言也，言之必可行也。君子於其言，無所苟而已矣。」 Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own. The translation of this dialogue is itself a topic of controversy. Translations can be found in many books on Confucius’s thought. See e.g. Hu Shi [1922], in *Hu Shi quanji* (2003), quoted below in section 3 (see footnote 95); Schwartz 1985, 92; Hall and Ames 1987, 269–270; Hansen 1992, 66; Loy 2014, 148.

13 For commentaries, see Makeham 1994, 35–44.

14 *Shiji* 47 may postdate the *Lunyu*, depending on the latter’s date. Other parts of the *Shiji* also testify to the beginning of *zhengming* as a trope in matters of administration, bureaucracy, etc. See Defoort, forthcoming.

15 See e.g. *Hanshu* 30: on “The lineage of name specialists” (名家者流); *Chunqiu*

not hitting the mark” so that “people do not know where to put hand or feet” occurs rarely,¹⁶ and the step about “rites and music not prospering” is hardly ever quoted. While a detailed study of premodern quotation habits of this dialogue lies beyond the limits of this article, the full quote is not one of its characteristics. Interest in the whole dialogue and especially its chain reasoning is part of the modern discourse.

(2) Modern scholarship on Chinese philosophy in general tends to single out Confucius’s interest in *ming* as very important and representative of his thought. It is sometimes explicitly stated that the rectification or correction of names was the Master’s most crucial contribution to Chinese thought or society. Cheng Chung-ying 成中英, for instance, believes that it “occupies an important, if not central position in the political philosophy of Confucius.”¹⁷ Hsiao Kung-chuan 蕭公權 points out that the overwhelming number of relevant statements in the *Lunyu* shows “that the rectification of names was no incidental concern of Confucius.”¹⁸ The same message is sometimes conveyed implicitly by the dedication of much space or a separate section to the topic.

Because of this second characteristic, the large majority of academic writings on the topic contain attempts to interpret the dialogue and its core message.¹⁹ Even scholars who have questioned this dialogue’s authenticity, date, and relation to the historical Confucius are not necessarily insensitive to this topic’s alleged importance. Hui Chieh Loy, for instance, expresses doubts about the early date of the “so-called doctrine of ‘correcting names,’” but his own search of “precursors to the ideas that are found in *Lunyu* 13.3” is undeniably guided by it.²⁰ Also those scholars who set the dialogue aside as unrepresentative of the real

fanlu 36 實性; *Yantielun* 11: “About Ru” (論儒); *Baihutong* 33: “Family names” (姓名); *Fengsu tongyi* 2: “Correcting mistakes” (正失); *Yinwenzi* 1A (大道上).

16 See e.g. *Hanshu* 53: “Biographies of Xue Xuan and Zhu Bo” (薛宣朱博傳); *Hanshu* 69C: “Biography of Wang Mang” (王莽傳).

17 Cheng 1977, 67. For other examples, see Defoort, forthcoming.

18 Hsiao 1980, 99.

19 For some examples, see Defoort, forthcoming, and some scholars mentioned in this paper: e.g. Cheng Chung-ying, David Hall and Roger Ames, Chad Hansen, David Nivison, and Carine Defoort.

20 Loy 2014, 138, 151.

Confucius somehow confirm its potential importance if only the dialogue were an authentic record of the Master's words.²¹ In the field of Chinese philosophy, the importance of the topic therefore is hard to avoid.

This is not to say that no one ever stressed the importance of *zhengming* before the modern period. From the Han dynasty onward, it received increasing attention. Acknowledgment of its importance can even be traced to the dialogue itself conveying Confucius's insistence that it "surely" deserves priority and that "a noble person" is "simply never sloppy" in these matters.²² Early scholars, including *Lunyu* commentators, often insisted on its importance when using or discussing this dialogue.²³ But even though modern scholars may have been inspired by the wealth of such statements, their promotion of the topic is distinct in not depending on commentarial or other contexts. Following their academic conviction, they elevate *zhengming* as an important independent item, a core notion in Confucius's thought. The acknowledgment of the importance of this notion has since then thrived in monographs, articles, chapters, and chapter sections—often with a separate title—dedicated to *zhengming* or *ming*.²⁴

(3) Also since the twentieth century, a growing set of other Confucius quotes, predominantly from the *Lunyu*, has been advanced as illustrations of the Master's vision. Traditional scholarship also occasionally made connections between statements attributed to Confucius about names, affairs, roles, punishment, or government. When *zhengming* was mentioned, some recurrent references were to Confucius's explicit objection "to granting ritual objects and names" (惟器

21 For a list of doubters and their arguments, see Van Norden 2007, 82–96; Loy 2014, 149.

22 This stress is less in the alternative translation and interpretation of 必也正名乎 as "If it is really necessary, then correct names."

23 Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), for instance, concludes his praise for the Sage's political insight here, saying: "With one grasp one can then administer the whole world. Confucius's *zhengming* is probably like that" 一舉而可為政於天下矣。孔子正名或是如此。 See Wang 1992, 1:16–17.

24 For monographs, see footnote 8 above. For separate (chapter) sections and titles, see e.g. Fung [1952] 1973, 59–66; Hsiao 1980, 93–101; Hansen 1992, 65–71; Hall and Ames 1987, 268–275; Defoort 1997, 168–174; Nivison 1999, 757–758; Loy 2014, 146–152.

與名不可以假) expressed in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Mr. Zuo on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*),²⁵ his insistence that a lord does not “borrow” (*jia* 假) but “takes” (*qu* 取) a horse in the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Outer commentary on the *Book of Songs* by Master Han),²⁶ or his supposed endeavors to “distinguish the pattern of things to correct their names” (辨物之理以正其名) in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and autumn annals).²⁷ Again, a reconstruction of all previous textual references would be an enormous project,²⁸ but a substantial cluster of sayings accompanying the interpretation of *Lunyu* 13.3 is a modern creation. Among *Lunyu* quotes, its most stable precedent seems to have been *Lunyu* 11.12: “the ruler being ruler, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son” (君君臣臣父父子子).²⁹ The modern cluster of quotes is larger, more consistent, and solidified by repetition.

(4) The same holds for the growing network of other texts that are construed as part of the presumably agelong scholarly dialogue about “names.” Here again, premodern sources occasionally connected *Lunyu* 13.3 with other early passages, which have consequently been prioritized in recent scholarship. The modern vision on *ming* as a broadly shared interest has thus led to an increasing incorporation of texts of masters all supposedly commenting on this very topic. The selected passages sometimes refer to *zhengming* or one of its variations—*ming bu zheng* 名不正 (names are not correct), *zheng qi ming* 正其名 (correct their names), and the like. But very often they do not. These expressions are less prevalent than the modern reconstructions suggest. Frequently used selection criteria for inclusion in the current narratives are then expressions such as “fulfilling one’s name/reputation/title” (*chengming* 成名), “shape/performance ver-

25 *Zuozhuan*, Duke Cheng, second year.

26 *Hanshi waizhuan* 5. This book is attributed to Han Ying 韓嬰 (fl.150 BCE). See also *Xinxu* 新序 5.

27 See e.g. *Chunqiu fanlu* 35, quoted below in section 2.

28 For a wide variety of relevant *Lunyu* quotes, see Makeham 1994, 39–44; Loy 2014, 146–152.

29 This connection begins in the Han dynasty (e.g. *Shiji* 130) and gains some stability in the Song. *Guanzi* 31 “Jun chen xia” 君臣下 is possibly one of the earliest recorded awareness of the *Lunyu* 13.3 dialogue in combination with *Lunyu* 12.11. See Defoort, forthcoming.

sus name/title” (*xingming* 刑/形名), “debates on names” (*mingbian* 名辯/辨), “teaching of names/roles/reputation” (*mingjiao* 名教), the matching of “names” with “the solid/reality” (*shi* 實), the *Chunqiu*’s concern with “names and roles” (*mingfen* 名分), the records on “regicide” (*shi* 弑), or sentences in the form of “let the ruler be ruler, the minister minister...” (*jun jun chen chen* 君君臣臣). This growing cluster of supposedly relevant material is a characteristic of the modern discourse’s retrospective creation of an agelong *zhengming* history.

(5) Along with the scholarly attention given to the whole dialogue and related passages in and beyond the *Lunyu*, we see an increase in the attempts to attribute a coherent view on *zhengming* to Confucius, to other masters, and to distinct lineages. It is a view that goes beyond the succession issue in the state of Wei 衛 where Zilu had a position.³⁰ Lines of interpretation of Confucius’s *zhengming* dialogue have existed since the Han dynasty.³¹ But the modern academic narratives contain an enhanced concern with coherence. From premodern to modern academic work, the expression of ideas evolved roughly from being contained in commentarial remarks, via the collection of relevant quotes and comments, to the growing production of independent essays, chapters, and monographs highlighting an individual scholar’s original insight. In terms of their substance, modern discussions of *zhengming* included reinterpretations of the past textual heritage, concern with Chinese culture’s identity, insistence on theoretical coherence, construction of a multitude of intellectual genealogies, projections of clear evolutions, and adaptation to the norms of academic institutions and their philosophy departments.³²

(6) Finally, the modern discourse as characterized above was a rupture, not in the sense that the past was fully rejected or replaced, but that it appeared as a chosen, reconstructed, defended option, a valuable tradition and particular heritage. The received tradition that used to contain scholarly debate now had to

30 In 489 BCE, Confucius was in Wei, where the ruler was Duke Chu, Zilu’s employer. This duke had refused to offer the throne to his own father Kuai Kui who had fled the state after his failed assassination of his father’s adulterous wife, Nanzi. See also Makeham 1994, 35–38; Yao 2003, 813.

31 See e.g. Makeham 1994; Ding 2008; Gou 2016.

32 For this evolution, see Moloughney 2002, 138–139.

be shaped and defended in terms of the nation's survival and cultural identity.³³ In the past, increasing references to *zhengming* had often been stereotypical and short, mostly in administrative, social, juridical, or ethical contexts, and with a tenuous connection to the *Lunyu* dialogue's content. Even when some lines of the dialogue were quoted, the item seems to have led its own life in a variety of related contexts: checking names against reality, behavior against roles, tasks against titles, deeds against a reputation, and so forth.

The invisibility of the rupture of the modern discourse can be explained in two ways. First, since every new reading came with a specific selection and interpretation of past testimony, novelty did not exclude past views, but put them in a new light. Hence, rather than being actively rejected, the premodern tradition was reinterpreted and selectively incorporated into the novel narratives. Second, the modern discourse tends to insist on the continuity of an indigenous tradition. In his detailed overview of the history of *zhengming*, Gou Dongfeng 苟東峰 chides Hu Shi for being too Westernized and not enough in line with the Chinese tradition.³⁴ Such criticism is legitimate, but it risks disregarding Hu's most enduring influence, namely his appreciation of China's indigenous tradition. By reducing Hu to a set of excessively Westernized views, contemporary scholars implicitly deny his profound and ongoing influence as the creator of a treasured philosophical tradition, one that contemporaries are profoundly indebted to, even if they seek to reject foreign influence.

This last, somewhat veiled characteristic closes the line of *zhengming*'s modern family resemblances. Separately and in a weak form, each of them can be retrieved from the enormous corpus of premodern Chinese texts. Such textual passages have actually come to dominate in the retrospective portrayals of the *zhengming* tradition. Their strong and clustered appearance, however, is itself a modern phenomenon largely constructed by Hu Shi. While his influence on later scholarship deserves more attention,³⁵ we must first highlight the missing link between Hu and the immediately preceding textual heritage, namely Kang Youwei.

33 See e.g. Levenson 1968, 1:xxi, 2:ii.

34 Gou 2016, 279–280, 364–66. See also Ding 2008, 22–23.

35 For an initial step, see Defoort, forthcoming.

2 Kang Youwei: Political Reform and *Zhengming*

Kang Youwei's use of the expression *zhengming* was flexible and diversified. Throughout his œuvre, it occurs in a variety of senses and contexts; for example, related to unifying the Chinese language and standardizing its script, the importance of reputation and posthumous names, and political arguments based on his claims to "correctly name."³⁶ Much of this is beyond the scope of this article, but there is one context in which Kang presents a pristine form of what I consider the modern *zhengming* discourse, namely when he portrays Confucius as a reformer.

Kang's conceptualization of Confucius as a reformer was presented predominantly but not exclusively in his *Kongzi gaizhi kao* 孔子改制考 (Study of Confucius as reformer) of 1897.³⁷ In this book Kang's own claims alternate with long lists of supporting quotes from early sources, some of which are followed by his comments. The book came into being when Kang started teaching about this topic in the 1890s to a growing group of enthusiastic students. They skimmed through all the extant texts to collect relevant quotes for him to use.³⁸ Published lecture notes from these students also provide useful information.³⁹ Simultane-

36 Citations are to *Kang Youwei quanji* (Complete works of Kang Youwei), 12 vols., edited by Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2007 (hereafter *KYQJ*). On a national language and against dialects, see *KYQJ*, 1:54 [1885]. On the use of posthumous titles, see *KYQJ*, 6:139 [1901]. On the beginnings of the Chinese script, see *KYQJ*, 1:415. For Kang's own political arguments in terms of *zhengming*, see in this section below under (5).

37 *KYQJ*, 3:1–260. *KYQJ*, 3:5–6 indicates that he started writing *Kongzi gaizhi kao* in 1892 and finished the preface in 1898.

38 Among these students were Liang Qichao 梁啟超, Chen Qianqiu 陳千秋, and Cao Tai 曹泰. See Ma 1994, 68–69, 80, 92–93.

39 See Ma 1994, 79–80, 116–117. For lecture notes from 1896–1897, see *Wanmu caotang koushuo* 萬木草堂口說 (Oral instructions from the cottage of the myriad trees), which consists of the notes of a student of 1896 (especially sec. 2: "Confucius as reformer"), in *KYQJ*, 2:131–207; and two versions of the lecture notes of his student Zhang Bozhen 張伯楨 (1877–1949): *Kang Nanhai xiansheng jiangxueji* 康南海先生講學記 (Records of Mr. Kang Nanhai's lectures), in *KYQJ*, 2:103–124; and *Nanhai shi chengji* 南海師承記 (Transmitted records of Master

ously with his own growing ambitions to reform China's political system into a constitutional monarchy, Kang describes the Sage (i.e., Confucius) as a visionary "Uncrowned King" (*suwang* 素王) who profoundly changed China's system. Confucius's remedy was *zhengming*: "When the Sage ordered the world, he first corrected *ming*" (聖人之治天下，先正名).⁴⁰ More than any other preceding text, Kang's portrayal of Confucius as reformer prefigures the modern discourse by clustering some of its aspects as described above. But it also differs from the modern discourse. What follows is a picture of Kang's vision in terms of the six characteristics cited above.

(1) As pointed out, premodern texts tend to partially quote the *Lunyu* dialogue between Zilu and Confucius. Kang's quotes of the dialogue from these sources are therefore also partial.⁴¹ But in *Kongzi gaizhi kao*, he twice quotes the dialogue in full.⁴² The first full quote occurs in section 9, titled: "Study of Confucius creating the Ru religion/teaching and reforming the system" (孔子創儒教改制考), more specifically in its second subsection on "Confucius fixing the core idea of his reforms in conversation with his disciples" (孔子與弟子商定改制大義).⁴³ The second full quote is in section 13, titled "Disciples and contemporaries questioning Confucius's reforms with references to the old system" (孔子改制弟子時人據舊制問難考). Zilu's criticism of Confucius's "detour" at the outset of the dialogue is presented here as an instance of "critical comments by disciples."⁴⁴ Kang's comments on these passages are short and mostly consist of references to what he considers the most representative early sources to illustrate Confucius's vision on *zhengming*.

(2) In his comments, Kang makes a point that sounds familiar in the modern discourse: he insists on the importance of *zhengming*. Kang envisions a "study

Nanghai), in *KYQJ*, 2:208–263.

40 See e.g. *KYQJ*, 2:188.

41 For example, *KYQJ*, 3:19, quoting *Hanshu* 30: "Treatise on art and literature"; *KYQJ*, 2:385, quoting *Chunqiu fanlu* 35: "Deeply examine names and designations." See below.

42 Though not in any of his other writings, except of course his *Lunyu zhu* 論語注 (Commentary on the *Lunyu*) of 1902.

43 *KYQJ*, 3:116. It is the third quoted *Lunyu* dialogue.

44 *KYQJ*, 3:160. It is the fifth dialogue in the section of critical disciples.

of the late Zhou masters all competing side by side to create a religion, breaking up language and destroying rules, so that names and reality were mixed up. Since Confucius hated the harm they caused to the Way, he gave absolute priority to *zhengming* when reforming the system” (考周末諸子並起創教，析言破律，名實混淆。孔子惡其害道，改制亟以正名為先).⁴⁵ Under the heading “Confucius as sagely king” (孔子為聖王), he states that “Confucius’s reforms began by correcting names” (孔子改制首先正名).⁴⁶ In this respect, Kang did not differ from previous scholars who referred to Confucius’s insistence on *zhengming* to support their own views on a political, juridical, or moral issue. In Kang’s case, the topic’s importance is used to underline his vision of Confucius as a reformer, and indirectly of China’s future as a reformed nation. His approach differs from the modern default in his failure to single out *zhengming* as an independent item, distinct from the themes of “teaching/religion of names” (*mingjiao* 名教), “correcting names and roles” (*zheng mingfen* 正名分), the “study of names” (*mingxue* 名學) “reputation” (*minghao* 名號), or “names versus reality” (*mingshi* 名實). Kang’s references moreover lack formal or paratextual hints supporting the special status of *zhengming* or *ming* such as titles or sections explicitly dedicated to it.

(3) Another way in which Kang does not quite accord with the modern discourse lies in the absence of a cluster of *zhengming*-related statements attributed to Confucius. Like many scholars before him, Kang occasionally cites the Sage from a variety of sources, including the *Lunyu*. This also happens when he discusses Confucius’s role as a reformer.⁴⁷ But Kang does not explicitly single out any set of sayings to support his appreciation of *zhengming* and his interpretation of *Lunyu* 13.3. He is far removed from the modern default portraying the “concept of rectifying names [as] a familiar one in the Confucian *Lunyu*.”⁴⁸ It is

45 *KYQJ*, 3:160.

46 *KYQJ*, 3:105.

47 See e.g. *Lunyu* 2.23 (*KYQJ*, 3:110); *Lunyu* 6.12 (*KYQJ*, 3:87); *Lunyu* 7.23 (*KYQJ*, 3:102); *Lunyu* 8.19 (*KYQJ*, 3:152); *Lunyu* 9.5 (*KYQJ*, 3:105); *Lunyu* 17.21 (*KYQJ*, 3:121); *Lunyu* 11.1 (*KYQJ*, 3:125).

48 Cheng 1977, 67. In another context, Kang once explicitly identifies the *Lunyu* with the notion of *zhengming*: “*Lunyu* talks about *zhengming*” (论语言正名). See *Xinxue weijing kao* 新學偽經考 [1891], in *KYQJ*, 1:415.

perhaps misguided to ask why Kang fails to do what later became common practice. But the elements in Kang's work that amount to a proto-version of what became this solid research topic invite speculation on possible reasons why he does not provide such a cluster of Confucius sayings.

First, neither the expression *zhengming* nor any of its variations explicitly occur in any other early saying explicitly attributed to Confucius. A strong interpretation of Confucius's words in terms of *zhengming* probably needs some leverage to attract sayings into its sphere of influence. At this point, Kang's vision of *zhengming* is not potent enough to exert this influence. Even the familiar companion *Lunyu* 12.11 about "the ruler being ruler, the minister a minister, etc." is not brought up in this context.⁴⁹ A second potential reason might be that Kang is not particularly enthusiastic about the *Lunyu*, which in his eyes was collected by "the dimmest lights among Confucius's disciples."⁵⁰ He considers other sources better mouthpieces of Confucius. Since Kang believes that the five authentic classics—*Shi* 詩 (Odes), *Shu* 書 (Documents), *Yi* 易 (Changes), *Li* 禮 (Rites), and most of all the *Chunqiu*—were written by the Sage himself in support of his reform plans, he may have considered quotes from all these sources as "Confucius sayings."⁵¹ But that would not accord with the third characteris-

49 This is all the more surprising since we know that Kang sees a connection with people dutifully fulfilling their roles. See e.g. the "Mingli" 名例 (Precedents with names) at the bottom of a collection of lecture notes. Kang connects Confucius's installation of the "learning of names" with the construction of order (孔子立名学以治天下。夫名不正，则天下乱)。He explains that this is a matter of defining familial and political roles (夫名者，所以正名分、别善恶也。名分者何？其一夫妇、父子、君臣、兄弟、朋友是也)。See *KYQJ*, 2:263, 2.124.

50 Wagner 2002, 154, 156, speaking of Zengzi 曾子. Kang's *Lunyu* commentary (mostly finalized in 1902 in Darjeeling) is not particularly focused on Confucius's idea of *zhengming*. In the preface, Kang associates *zhengming* exclusively with Gongsun Long (*KYQJ*, 6.377). The commentary on *Lunyu* 11.4 mentions Zilu as one of the students disagreeing with the Master about *zhengming* (*KYQJ*, 6:464). His comments on *Lunyu* 13.3 are partly about the situation in Wei and partly in line with his reform vision discussed below (*KYQJ*, 6:497–481).

51 See e.g. *KYQJ*, 2:186; Ma 1994, 118–119.

tic of the modern *zhengming* discourse, namely, to identify a specific cluster of statements explicitly attributed to Confucius.

(4) Kang mentions a set of other texts that, according to him, explicitly express a view on *zhengming*. This is an aspect that adumbrates the modern discourse. He considers some views wrongheaded and others insightful. This latter group provides him with a cluster of supporting evidence that he does not find in the *Lunyu*. Beyond this specific cluster of explicitly connected texts, *Kongzi gaizhi kao* contains a large number of quotes, from the classics and other sources, that do not mention *zhengming* but that Kang considers more or less related to the topic. That is why they were collected by his students and incorporated into the book. Many of them discuss or mention *ming* in a wide variety of senses—reputation, role, language, script, and so forth. Since their connection with *zhengming* is neither very clear nor explicit, they do not belong to the fourth characteristic.

In his explicit references to *zhengming*, Kang mentions wrongheaded responses that Confucius's ideal of *zhengming* provoked.⁵² He associates a number of misguided masters with Mozi. "As Confucius corrected names, Mozi consciously reversed them. Thus the chapters 'Major Selection' and 'Minor Selection' opened up the talk about hard and white; and Gongsun Long, Hui Shi, and Deng Xi played even more with the idea, working hard at opposing it with their oral arguments" (孔子正名，墨子有意翻之，故《大取》、《小取》篇，開堅白之談，公孫龍、惠施、鄧析更暢其旨，務以口辨反之).⁵³ According to Kang, these sources and masters contributed to the increasing resistance to Confucius's reform plans. "It is clear that there was a great boom of related theories in those days, all from the opposition between Kong and Mo" (當時引說，皆以孔、墨對舉，其大盛可見).⁵⁴ The fact that texts which never

52 The testimony of opponents is, in general, an important argument in this book. See e.g. *KYQJ*, 3:21 about the foundation of a religion. As Lee Ting-mien has argued, this may partly have compensated for a lack of evidence in Confucian sources. See Lee 2020, 465–468.

53 *KYQJ*, 2:176.

54 *KYQJ*, 2:176. See also *KYQJ*, 2:188, partly quoted above.

mention *zhengming* are nevertheless included in the alleged discourse attests to the leverage of this notion in Kang's eyes.

Another set of supportive statements inspires Kang more than the *Lunyu*. Following the second full quote of *Lunyu* 13.3, Kang mentions two sources that represent the Sage's own *zhengming* activities: "The *Chunqiu* corrects names and roles, the 'Kingly system' [a chapter in the *Liji*] punishes instigators of disorder. They all clarify this purpose" (《春秋》正名分,《王制》誅亂作。咸著斯旨). Then follow two masters who had understood, defended, and elaborated upon the Sage's subtle insight: Xunzi 荀子 and, above all, the Former Han scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104), the alleged author of the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露. They provide Kang with two chapters that explicitly discuss *zhengming*: "Thereupon Xunzi's 'Correct names' and Dongzi's 'Deeply examine names and designations' all expound Confucius's great meaning" (於是荀子《正名》、董子《深察名號》,皆發明孔子大義).⁵⁵ Elaborating on the "great meaning" that was hidden in the Sage's "subtle speech" (*weiyán* 微言), chapter 22 of *Xunzi* and chapter 35 of *Chunqiu fanlu* constitute a fixed pair in Kang's vision of Confucius's policy of names.⁵⁶

From Xunzi's "zhengming" chapter, Kang's favorite quote is the opening line on the later kings' creation of various names for the sake of social order: "This is how the later kings made names: for names of punishments they followed the Shang dynasty; for ranks, the Zhou dynasty; for culture, the rites; and for diverse items, they followed established customs and minor agreements" (後王之成名: 刑名從商, 爵名從周, 文名從禮, 散名之加於萬物者, 則從諸夏之成俗曲期).⁵⁷ Kang cites this line in his comment following the first full quote of *Lunyu* 13.3, adding: "This line is a clear indication of the subtle speech of the *Lunyu* and of Confucius's reforms. To reform, one has to change the names/terms, so that the system gets settled" (此條為《論語》微言孔子改制明義也。蓋改制必改名, 而制乃定). Kang also quotes this line in his

55 *KYQJ*, 3:160, following the second full quote.

56 See also *KYQJ*, 3:116, following the first full quote. See also *KYQJ*, 2:150, 2:398.

57 The translation of *quqi* 曲期 is tentative. The *Xunzi* chapter never refers to Confucius nor to the *Lunyu* dialogue. Kang also quotes other lines from this chapter. See e.g. *KYQJ*, 3:105.

Lunyu commentary when briefly discussing the chain argument in the dialogue between Zilu and Confucius.⁵⁸ This line from *Xunzi* 22 occurs so often when Kang discusses the Sage's *zhengming* idea that we can consider it part of a textual cluster.⁵⁹

Textual references to the *Chunqiu fanlu* are less straightforward but more important, since Kang values this source more than the *Xunzi*.⁶⁰ He does not directly quote any specific passage from it to illustrate Confucius's *zhengming* policy, but in other contexts he quotes long passages from it. Chapter 35 of *Chunqiu fanlu* actually constitutes one long essay together with chapter 36.⁶¹ This essay uses cosmological and epistemological elaborations on the notion of *zhengming* that are in line with *Xunzi* and oppose Mencius's view on human nature.⁶² The substance of this debate is not directly related to Kang's vision of political reform, which may be the reason why he does not cite it in his *Kongzi gaizhi kao*. But chapter 35 has some assets that Kang values highly. For one, it brings in the *Chunqiu* and its (in Dong's and Kang's eyes) two reliable commentaries: *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 and *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳.⁶³ Of these two

58 *KYQJ*, 6:480. His commentary on *Lunyu* 13.3 is for the most part focused on the historical background in Wei.

59 See e.g. *KYQJ*, 3:107, 3:116; also *Jiaoxue tongyi* 教學通義 (General meaning of learning) [1885], in *KYQJ*, 1:45; *Wanmu caotang koushuo*, in *KYQJ*, 2:150, 2:185.

60 Kang believes that “in transmitting the oral explanations of the First Teacher, [*Chunqiu*] *fanlu* was more respected than Mencius and *Xunzi*” (《繁露》傳先師口說，尊於荀、孟), *KYQJ*, 2:186; and “that Dongzi surpassed them both in grasping the great meaning of his subtle speech” (董子微言大義，過於孟、荀), *KYQJ*, 2:188.

61 According to Sarah Queen and John Major—following the textual reconstructions of Su Yu 蘇輿 (1874–1914)—this treatise consists of chap. 36, “Substantiating human nature” (實性) followed by chap. 35. See Queen and Major 2016, 295. The extant edition of the *Chunqiu fanlu* also mentions *zhengming* in chaps. 4, 67, 81, and 82, some of which appear to be textually dislocated. See Queen and Major 2016, 108n2, 561.

62 Kang was convinced that “Dong followed *Xunzi* and not Mencius.” See *KYQJ*, 2:188.

63 The *Zuozhuan* 左傳 was considered a forgery by Liu Xin. See *KYQJ*, 3:101; Ma 1994, 118–119. Kang believes that these two commentaries were different records

commentaries, Dong and Kang appreciate *Gongyang zhuan* best.⁶⁴ But only *Guliang zhuan* happens to mention *zhengming*,⁶⁵ once even with an echo of the *Lunyu* 13.3 dialogue. The occasion is the Sage’s judicious choice of words recording five falling stones and six backward flying herons in the sixteenth year of Duke Xi (644 BCE).⁶⁶ Dong’s essay repeatedly refers to this peculiar record, praising the Sage’s use of correct names.⁶⁷ So does Kang in following Dong’s discussion of *zhengming*.⁶⁸ Even though its connection with Confucius’s reform plans is far from clear, Kang may have had this case in mind when mentioning—not quoting—Dong Zhongshu’s “Deeply examine names and designations” as an important illustration for Confucius’s vision of reform. Dong’s and Kang’s use of this specific record to praise the Sage’s sublime use of *zhengming* seems to illustrate the importance they give the concept despite a striking dearth of illustrations in the textual corpus related to the *Chunqiu*.

(5) Kang highly values education that goes beyond memorizing orthodox texts. As a teacher as well as the author of *Kongzi gaizhi kao*, he primarily constructs an argument that connects a specific portrayal of Confucius with the urgent needs of his endangered nation.⁶⁹ Formally, Kang’s work on Confucius

of Confucius’s oral teachings and that He Xiu’s commentary on the *Chunqiu fanlu* even contained original records that they had missed. See e.g. *KYQJ*, 2:186.

64 For Kang, see e.g. Ma 1994, 119; Brusadelli 2020, 16–17, 26–29. For Dong, see e.g. Queen and Major 2016, 9–13.

65 *Guliang zhuan*, Duke Yin, nineteenth year, is without explicit connection with *Lunyu* 13.3. See also Cheng 1999, 264.

66 Duke Xi, sixteenth year (644 BCE). “In the [duke’s] sixteenth year, in spring, in the king’s first month, on day *wushen*, new moon, falling stones in Song, five in number. This same month six fish-hawks flew backward past the Song capital” (十有六年春，王正月，戊申朔，隕石于宋五。是月，六鵠退飞过宋都)。See also Cheng 1999, 254.

67 See Queen and Major 2016, 348, 355.

68 See e.g. *KYQJ*, 2:385–386, 2:397, in *Chunqiu Dong shi xue* 春秋董氏学 (Study of Mr. Dong’s *Spring and Autumn Annals*) [1893]; *KYQJ*, 5:427–428, in *Mengzi wei* 孟子微 (Subtleties of Mengzi) [1901]; *KYQJ*, 6:117, in *Chunqiu bixue dayi weiyen kao* 春秋笔削大义微言考 (Study of the subtle speech with great meaning in the *Spring and Autumn* writings) [1901].

69 Ma 1994, 68–77.

as a reformer represents one step in the emancipation from the commentarial voice to the individual theory presented in an independent essay. While the many quotes are remnants of a past scholarly format, Kang's own statements, comments, and—most of all—his sections and titles show that he is in charge of the argument. This book primarily expresses his view; the many quotes are illustrative. The selection of quotes, even with Kang's reflections, are all part of a larger picture that is still far removed from the supposedly independent, detailed analysis expected in contemporary academia. But the book overall does constitute a coherent narrative in support of Kang's political vision. Without repeating Kang's theory about Confucius as a reformer, I highlight three layers that we can see in Kang's coherent reflections concerning *zhengming*: first in regard to the late Zhou dynasty, then from the Han until the late Qing, and finally in Kang's own time.⁷⁰

As for the earliest period, Kang's understanding of the wide variety of responses to Confucius's view on "names" is one example of how he reconstructs a complex network of lineages and sub-lineages of masters. The fact that the followers and opponents of Confucius are portrayed as rivals makes Confucius one among many masters.⁷¹ As a general background to his narrative, Kang makes use of the familiar trope—based on *Mencius* 3B9—of "Confucius creating the *Chunqiu* so that the age was at once ordered" (孔子作《春秋》而世一治). But "after Confucius's death, Yang and Mo arose" (孔子没而杨墨起) and threatened the Confucian Way.⁷² Even the hostile responses of these two heretics' followers constitute valuable testimony about the Confucian "Religion/teaching of names" or "Religion of Confucius" (孔教) for Kang.⁷³ Of these two types of rivals, Kang most explicitly associates Mozi and his followers with *zhengming*: Gongsun Long, Hui Shi, Deng Xi, and the "school of names" (名家).⁷⁴ More than once he singles out Gongsun Long as the main figure responding to Confucius's "correcting names."⁷⁵ While no Daoist source is explicitly associated with

70 See Hsiao 1975, 97–136.

71 See also Zhao 2000, 86.

72 *KYQJ*, 3:105.

73 *KYQJ*, 2:92.

74 *KYQJ*, 3:168.

75 *KYQJ*, 3:105. See also *KYQJ*, 3:160, 3:174. In the preface to his *Lunyu* commen-

zhengming, the broader discussion does list Daoist quotes relating to *ming* in a variety of meanings, mostly “reputation.”⁷⁶ Moreover, the practice of “checking performances against names (words/titles/promises)” is said to “have been derived from Laozi” (刑名本于老子).⁷⁷ Even though Kang believes that eventually the real opposition was between Confucianism and Daoism,⁷⁸ when discussing *zhengming* he focuses on the conflicts between Mo and Ru.⁷⁹ Together, all these opposing voices confirm the fact that “names were what Confucius especially installed” (名为孔子所特立).⁸⁰ They basically all attest to the Sage’s success, which they were not able to destroy.

This changed in the Han dynasty, in Kang’s view. The person who eclipsed Confucius’s plans was the court bibliographer Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 BCE–CE 23). In the service of the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–CE 23) and his short-lived Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 CE), Liu had a devastating impact on the scholarly community. Kang makes this point in his *Xinxue weijing kao* 新學偽經考 (Study of the fake classics of the learning of the Xin dynasty) of 1891. This critical study opened up the field for the construction of an alternative vision of Confucius as a reformer.⁸¹ For Kang, the fact that Confucius had acted as a king and installed correct names had been a generally known truth “from the Warring States to the Later Han dynasty, in those 800 years, for the scholars in the realm.” In that period, “there was no other explanation” (自戰國至後漢八百年間，天下學者，無不以孔子為王者，靡有異論也).⁸² Fortunately, Confucius’s impact was so subtle and powerful that despite this long eclipse on the scholarly level, in reality “the order of 2,000 years is probably all the result

tary, Kang exclusively associates *zhengming* with Gongsun Long. See *KYQJ*, 6:377.

76 E.g. *KYQJ*, 3:77, 3:78, 3:168, 3:170.

77 *KYQJ*, 3:75.

78 See e.g. *KYQJ*, 3:206. He believed that from the Han onward, Kong and Mo both defended a politically positive attitude, while the followers of Lao were more destructive and immoral.

79 E.g. by Xunzi. See *KYQJ*, 3:105.

80 *KYQJ*, 3:170.

81 See also *KYQJ*, 3:101; Ma 1994, 101. For these views, Kang has been accused of plagiarizing Liao Ping 廖平 (1952–1932).

82 *KYQJ*, 3:101.

of Confucius's learning of names" (蓋二千年之治，皆孔子名學治之也).⁸³ Hence, Kang concluded, in the social and political realm, "the names and designations in China today have probably all been corrected by Confucius" (蓋今中國一切名號，皆孔子所正也).⁸⁴ Through this second stage, the impact of Confucius's names had been invisible and unrecognized, but nevertheless very strong and positive—until the turbulent times of the late Qing.

At this third stage of Kang's lifetime, he advocated that the truth about Confucius as preserved in the New Text classics of the Former Han dynasty be restored. "The theory of Confucius reforming the system was doubted by many people after the demise of the New Text learning and the flourishing of the Old Texts causing confusion in people's minds" (孔子改制之說，自今學廢沒，古學盛行後，迷惑人心，人多疑之).⁸⁵ By promoting Old Texts allegedly discovered in the wall of the Kong family, such as the *Zuozhuan*, Liu Xin almost succeeded in exterminating the New Text transmission of the reform-oriented political vision of Confucius as Sage and Uncrowned King. Kang insisted that the major insights of Confucius's subtle statements were predominantly hidden in the *Chunqiu*. Their interpretation had been orally transmitted and written down in some Han texts, such as the *Guliang* and *Gongyang* commentaries and in the *Chunqiu fanlu*. The Eastern Han commentator He Xiu 何休 (129–182) had further elucidated them.⁸⁶ After a dark period of almost total neglect due to Liu Xin's influence, the Gongyang tradition had been revived by late Qing scholars. Kang sees himself as the next in line: using the pen name Chang Su 長素 ("Surpassing the Uncrowned [King]") he follows a sagely mission to take up the defense of the "real" Confucius and further his political reforms.⁸⁷ He does this by teaching, writing, and giving political advice. Kang not only attributes his own views to Confucius, but also tries to influence others by "naming correctly." He insists, for example, that the Empress Dowager cannot be correctly called the

83 *KYQJ*, 3:160.

84 *KYQJ*, 6:480, commenting on *Lunyu* 13.3. See also *KYQJ*, 10:38.

85 *KYQJ*, 3:21.

86 See his *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan jiegou* 春秋公羊傳解詁 (Commentaries of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as interpreted by Gongyang), in *KYQJ*, 2:186.

87 Wagner 2002, 149; Ma 1994, 106–108. Even as a child, Kang Youwei was sometimes called "Sage Wei" 聖人為. See Ma 1994, 18.

emperor's "mother," that she "usurped" the throne, and that her actions ought to be named "regicide."⁸⁸ On this third level, the intellectual debates and political reforms meet in the person who since his early adolescence has been convinced of his task to "become a sage" and "remake the world."⁸⁹

(6) Needless to say that Kang's portrayal of Confucius as a reformer constituted a break with the past. Some contemporaries found it exciting and politically powerful; others considered it disrespectful, far-fetched, and even threatening.⁹⁰ But however extreme and however creative, Kang's elaboration upon one specific tradition, namely Gongyang with its preference for the New Text School,⁹¹ shows that Confucianism still constituted a virtually uncontested framework for political discourse. Moreover, the particular heritage that Kang promoted is more opposed to other indigenous options than to foreign alternatives. In Kang's mix of novelty and ancient legitimation, both extremes enhance each other: the more novel and creative his ideas are, the more he insists on textual support in the allegedly most authentic and reliable sources. Therefore, his explicit statements on Confucius's *zhengming* stance do not predominantly claim originality or inventiveness. On the contrary, for the sake of this daunting task and urgent mission, Kang insists on his adherence to the correct line of transmission before the textual corruptions that misled Confucianism.

Retrospectively analyzing Kang Youwei's writings and trying to retrieve germs of what later became a default portrayal of *zhengming* in the Confucian tradi-

88 On Ci Xi not being the emperor's "mother" (母), see *KYQJ*, 5:167 [1900]. On Ci Xi being an "usurper" (篡位), see *KYQJ*, 5:31 [1898], 5:36 [1898]. On "punishing the thieves" (討賊) in defense of the young emperor, see *KYQJ*, 4:244–245 [1900]. On the "regicide" (弑) about to be committed on the emperor, see *KYQJ*, 9:84 [1909]. Kang also describes acts of other political thinkers in terms of *zhengming*; e.g., on Europeans having something that they *zhengming* "market" (市), see *KYQJ*, 7:242 [1903]. On European and American scholars making mistakes in terms of *zhengming* such notions as "republic" (共和) and "autocracy" (專制), see *KYQJ*, 10:40 [1913].

89 Brusadelli 2020, 1.

90 Some demanded the destruction of the book and the execution of its author. See Ma 1994, 83, 101, 116; Zhao 2000, 86.

91 See Elman, 1990; Brusadelli 2020, 23–24.

tion, illuminates his vision of *zhengming* in his portrayal of Confucius as a reformer. Even though he hardly presents it as a novel insight, a new discursive framework is born there amid a wealth of quotes from ancient sources and hidden in a veil of antiquity. Several aspects of Kang's view represent a break with previous usages of *zhengming*, especially when they are combined: fully quoting *Lunyu* 13.3, providing supporting evidence in privileged textual clusters, identifying a network of competing pre-Qin masters and lineages, reconstructing intellectual debates on *ming*, and so forth. Portions of this emerging *zhengming* narrative are a bit strained by the relative dearth of supporting textual evidence: hence Kang's reliance on many sources that do not mention *zhengming* or any of its variations, or his use of the *Xunzi* rather than the *Mencius*, even though in his eyes the latter transmitted the *Gongyang* commentary and the former the *Guliang* commentary.⁹² He also follows Dong Zhongshu in making much of a *Guliang* record on falling stones and flying hawks, in spite of their meager relevance to institutional reform. Some particularities of this emerging *zhengming* narrative survive Kang's attempts to portray Confucius as a reformer. In order to identify possible indications of this survival, we turn to Hu Shi.⁹³

3 Hu Shi on *Zhengming* and His Relation to Kang

It is only with Hu Shi that *zhengming* emerges as an independent and important topic of research, but some of Hu's approaches can perhaps be traced back to Kang. Concluding his philosophy studies at Columbia University, Hu Shi wrote a dissertation under the supervision of John Dewey (1859–1952) titled *A Study of the Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*. When in 1917 the president of Peking University, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), invited Hu to teach the history of Chinese philosophy class, the young doctoral student was still finalizing his dissertation. Back in China, Hu immediately started consulting colleagues and friends for the Chinese revision of his work. This en-

92 See *KYQJ*, 2:142.

93 For another inheritor of Kang's view on *zhengming*, see e.g. Liang Qichao: Liang [1920] 1999, 3133. Even though he explicitly acknowledges Hu Shi's influence, like Kang, Liang immediately quotes *Xunzi* 22 and *Chunqiu fanlu* 35.

hanced edition was published in 1919 as *Zhongguo zhhexueshi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱 (Outline of the history of Chinese philosophy).⁹⁴ The book caused an uproar.⁹⁵ Urged by colleagues, Hu also published his English-language dissertation in 1922 with hardly any changes, under a slightly revised title, *The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*.⁹⁶ Being the first history of Chinese philosophy in English, this work has had a considerable impact on Western scholars.

For the young Hu Shi, the “rectification of names” (as he renders *zhengming*) lies at the very core of Confucius’s thought. His vision is the first paradigmatic case of what I have identified as the modern default, even though it did not survive in all its details. Did Kang Youwei inspire him? Kang’s influence on Hu has thus far not been studied in detail, but Zhao Lidong has pointed out that Hu’s *Zhongguo zhhexueshi dagang* shows striking signs of similarity with Kang’s *Kongzi gaizhi kao*.⁹⁷ Hu hardly acknowledges Kang, and never in respect to the core of his own interpretation, namely *zhengming*.⁹⁸ Zhang Taiyan 章太炎

94 Citations are to *Hu Shi quanji* 胡適全集 (Complete works of Hu Shi), 41 vols., edited by Zheng Dahua, Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003 (hereafter *HSQJ*). For the text mentioned above: Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:190–534. This book was later called *Zhongguo gudai zhhexueshi* 中國古代哲學史 (History of Chinese ancient philosophy).

95 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:298–606. For the complex and overwhelming reception of his work, see Sang 2003, 35–42; Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:301; Hu [1958], in *HSQJ*, 5:538–539.

96 See Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:301–302. When quoting from this version, I have changed all transcriptions to Hanyu pinyin. This book was translated into Chinese in 1982 under the title *Xin Qin minxueshi* 先秦名學史 (History of pre-Qin study of names). See *HSQJ*, 5:3–189.

97 Zhao 2000 also includes Kang’s earlier work *Xinxue weijing kao* but not the English publication of Hu’s work.

98 Hu explicitly agrees with Kang’s claim that the masters all attributed their own views to antiquity (e.g., *HSQJ*, 5:210), but not with his doubts about the burning of the six classics in the Qin dynasty (see *HSQJ*, 5:524). Hu implicitly rejects the “recent” suggestion of a Confucian religion. See *HSQJ*, 5:308, 35:406. His vision of Mozi as religious thinker is also remarkably similar to Kang’s. See *HSQJ*, 5:322. More specifically, in the English book, Hu repetitively describes Confucius as a

(1869–1936), the Old Text scholar and Kang’s opponent, figures predominantly among the scholars to whom Hu explicitly expresses his indebtedness.⁹⁹ Yet following Zhao, this article emphasizes the possible connections between Hu and Kang on the theme of *zhengming*, including in Hu’s English monograph.¹⁰⁰

If Kang’s portrayal of *zhengming* inspired Hu and if—as I argued earlier¹⁰¹—Hu had a major influence on the current discourse, then Kang’s contribution has to be acknowledged too. But intellectual influence is typically difficult to determine. Shared backgrounds, spheres of influence, and individual connections are complex matters to reconstruct. Following the six characteristics of the modern default, I only highlight instances of a shared interest and possible connections such as remarkable similarities in wording and content, implicit agreement or opposition, clusters of textual support, and so forth.

(1) Like many modern scholars, Hu Shi quotes the whole *zhengming* dialogue between Zilu and Confucius. This is his own translation:

Confucius was asked by a disciple what he would first undertake were he to govern a state. The Master answered: “It must needs be the rectification of names.” “Indeed,” said the bewildered disciple, “that is far-fetched, sir! Why rectify them?” “You,” said Confucius, addressing the disciple by name, “thou art uncultivated. A gentleman should show a cautious reserve in regard to what he does not know. If names be incorrect, speech will not follow its natural sequence. If speech does not follow its natural sequence, nothing can be established. If nothing can be established, no rules of conduct or music will prevail. Where rules of conduct and music do not prevail, law and punishment will not be just. When law and punishment are not just, the people will not know where to place their hands and feet. Therefore, a superior man requires that

reformer. See *HSQJ*, 35:350, 35:352, 35:355, 35:371, 35:380, 35:391, 35:416ff.

99 Zhao 2000, 85. Hu also acknowledges Dai Zhen 戴震, Wang Niansun 王念孫, Wang Yinzhi 王引之, Yu Yue 俞樾, Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, etc. For the opposition between Zhang and Kang, see e.g. Wong 2010.

100 There are more explicit references to Kang in the Chinese version than in the English one. This could be because it made more sense to mention Kang to a Chinese audience or because of the consultations held between 1917 and 1919 when Hu was revising the work.

101 Defoort 2020, 15–19.

names must be capable of being spoken, and that what is spoken must be capable of being put into practice. A superior man is never careless of words.”

Unlike Kang, Hu goes on to carefully explain this passage line by line.¹⁰²

(2) Like Kang and many earlier scholars, Hu reiterates his appreciation for *zhengming*. But he goes further: his first and strongest claim concerns its overall importance. His explicit statements are also supported by formal hints. This dialogue is, for instance, the first long *Lunyu* passage in Hu’s monograph. He introduces it as “the best statement of the problem of Confucianism.”¹⁰³ The translation is immediately followed by the claim that Confucius was “thus conceiving ‘rectification of names’ as the heart of the problem of social and political reformation.”¹⁰⁴ The Chinese edition, moreover, is an overview of the ancient Chinese masters’ “study of names”, which Hu identifies as China’s indigenous version of logic.¹⁰⁵ Almost every early master is given a separate section carrying *ming* in its title: for Laozi 老子 it is “Names and no-names” (名與無名), for Kongzi “Correct-name-ism” (正名主義), for Yang Zhu 楊朱 “No-name-ism” (無名主義), for Zhuangzi 莊子 “Study of names versus philosophy of life” (名學與人生哲學), and for Xunzi the “Study of mind and pattern versus study of names” (心理學與名學). Since “study of names” is Hu’s term for Chinese logic, all the titles in the English version referring to somebody’s logic implicitly strengthen the importance of “names.”¹⁰⁶ According to Hu, each lineage had

102 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:354–355.

103 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:354.

104 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:355.

105 Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:355, refers to *luoji* 邏輯. Kang Youwei also once associated *zhengming* in the *Xunzi* and *Chunqiu fanlu* with “what Europeans call ‘logic.’” See *Chunqiu Dongshi xue*, in *KYQJ*, 2:398. The fact that Kang uses the term *lunlixue* 論理學 suggests the influence of Liang Qichao. For Liang and logic, see Kurtz 2011, 149, 196, 260, 313–315, 318.

106 Aside from one title explicitly referring to “names”—“The Confucian logic” is titled “The rectification of names and judgment” (chap. 5 of part 2)—many titles refer to “logic”: Confucian (part 2), of Mo Di and his school (part 3), of Mo Di (book 2 in part 3), of “Neo-Mohism” (book 3 in part 3), “Evolution and logic” (part 4), of Zhuangzi (chap. 3 in part 4), of Xunzi (chap. 4 in part 4), and the “Logic of law” (chap. 5 in part 4).

its study of *ming*. Unlike Kang, he rejects the dominant view that there was a *mingjia* (school/lineage of names).¹⁰⁷ The “study of names” is simply too important and ubiquitous in Hu’s reconstruction of pre-Qin philosophy to have been associated with just one school. And finally, the term that Hu invents, “*zhengming*-ism” 正名主義, occurs more frequently than any of the other fifty-four “-isms” (*zhuyi*) found in his Chinese monograph.¹⁰⁸ All this attests to the importance of the reflection on *ming* that Confucius is said to have initiated.

(3) It is not surprising that a work that prioritizes Confucius’s “rectification of names” interprets many other sayings of the Master in terms of this topic.¹⁰⁹ Following the translation of *Lunyu* 13.3, Hu continues: “This somewhat brief summary cannot be fully understood without collateral illustrations which I now propose to supply.”¹¹⁰ Then come three extra sayings to supplement the dearth of textual illustration. First are *Lunyu* 6.23 (sometimes numbered 6.25) and 12.17. In the former, Confucius laments about a “*gu* [vessel] not acting as *gu* [vessel]” (觚不觚); the latter states that “governing is correcting” (政者正也). Hu uses them to illustrate the beginning of the dialogue’s chain reasoning, when “incorrect names” result in the fact that “speech will not follow its natural sequence”—Hu’s translation of 言不順—so that “nothing can be established.” The third quote is the familiar line in *Lunyu* 12.11 about “the ruler being ruler, the minister being minister, etc.”¹¹¹ which highlights the further consequences

107 Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:355. He explicitly reconfirms this view in 1958 in a new edition of his work. See *HSQJ*, 5:537.

108 It occurs twenty-four times; *zhengming* 112 times and *zhengming lun* 正名論 six times.

109 This is even more so in the enhanced Chinese revision than the English original. For the English edition (Hu [1922]), see chap. 1: “The problem of Confucius,” in *HSQJ*, 35:352–361. This section coincides in the Chinese book with sec. 4: “*zhengming*-ism” of chap. 4: “Kongzi.” This chapter is seriously reshuffled and contains more *Lunyu* quotes, e.g. *Lunyu* 6.2, 3.2, 3.7, 3.17. See Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:273–284.

110 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:355.

111 Hu’s discussion of *Lunyu* 13.3 ends with a saying attributed to Confucius in the *Yi-jing* “Family hexagram” 家人卦 about “father being father, son son, elder brother elder brother, younger brother younger brother, husband husband, and wife wife.”

in the chain: “no rules of conduct or music (which was considered an integral part of moral and religious life) can prevail,” leading to “the breakdown of rights and duties.”¹¹² Separately, these *Lunyu* lines had occasionally been interpreted in terms of *zhengming*, but together they now form a cluster of “collateral illustrations” that has found its way into the current discourse. Even the cryptic lament about “the *gu* not being a *gu*” has, since Hu Shi, been abundantly used as an illuminating illustration of incorrect naming.¹¹³

(4) Since the body of Hu’s monograph includes the many other masters’ interest in *ming*, quotes to illustrate this point are pervasive and go beyond Kang’s list: Hui Shi, Gonggun Long, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, Yinwenzi 尹文子, and the like. The three most important sources for Hu are the *Yijing* as foundation of the *zhengming* theory, the *Chunqiu* as illustration, and the *Mozi* as an improvement on Confucius’ vision. As for the *Yijing*, Hu dedicates no less than three out of the five chapters of “The Confucian logic” (part 2) to its “Ten wings” (*shi yi* 十翼) or Appendices.¹¹⁴ In his eyes, the *Lunyu* sayings merely provide illustrations, but the *Yijing* derives its “great importance in that it furnishes the basis for the Confucian doctrine of names.”¹¹⁵ Then comes the *Chunqiu*, the source in which “Confucius sought to embody” this idea. Hu therefore dedicates the last chapter of part 2 to these annals of the state of Lu to illustrate the means by which Confucius as a scribe implemented *zhengming* by using evaluative terms such as “regicide” (*shi* 弑) when recording events. Hu’s third source is discussed in part 2, “The logic of Mo Di and his school,” dedicated to “perhaps one the greatest souls China has ever produced”¹¹⁶ and his followers. Much attention

See Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:361.

112 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:355–358.

113 See e.g. Fung [1952] 1973, 60; Hsiao 1980, 99n45; Graham 1989, 24; Hansen 1992, 67; Hall and Ames 1987, 270; Cao 2017, 99n1; Kim 2019, 179n1.

114 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:326–399. Following the tradition, he attributes them to Confucius.

115 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:379; for the attribution of the “The ten wings” to Confucius, see *HSQJ*, 35:364–365. For details, see characteristic 6 below.

116 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:403.

goes to the traditionally neglected and textually corrupt six chapters of “Mo-bian” 墨辯 (chaps. 40–45) attributed to the Neo-Mohists.¹¹⁷

The strongest indication that the specter of Kang (and, indirectly, Dong Zhongshu) is hovering over Hu’s thinking is when he comes up with the “most famous entry” illustrating the “fine, exact, judicious use of the written word which constitutes the first characteristic of the *Chunqiu*.”¹¹⁸ Surprisingly, it does not concern regicide, but the record of stones falling from the sky and backward-flying hawks in the state of Song.¹¹⁹ In the Chinese edition of Hu’s work, this discussion is even enhanced and moved to the section “zhengming-ism.” Hu insists that “he stays out of the New Text versus Old Text controversy” (我不主張“今文”，也不主張“古文”), but “when discussing the real meaning of the *Chunqiu*, one must study the *Gongyangzhuan* and the *Guliangzhuan*, the *Zuo-zhuan* came out later and is utterly useless” (論《春秋》的真意，應該研究《公羊傳》和《穀梁傳》，晚出的《左傳》最沒有用).¹²⁰ Due to the fact that the *Chunqiu* and its relevant commentaries hardly ever mention *zhengming*, and never explicitly in relation to “regicide,” Hu actually seems to be following the textual path created by the *Guliangzhuan*, followed by the *Chunqiu fanlu*, revived by New Text scholars, and highlighted by Kang.

(5) Hu’s extensive range of relevant sources comes with a coherent interpretation of the early masters’ thought. His narrative is, moreover, heavily influenced by Western philosophy. This is most obvious in his focus on logic in his resort to the *Yijing* for illuminating the workings of *zhengming*. He explains that the Master conceived of abstract entities (*xiang* 象) such as Platonic “ideas” or Aristotelian “formal causes.” They represented reality in its most embryonic form and could serve as standards to check concrete phenomena.¹²¹ Names that

117 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:400–518.

118 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:395. He adds that its “linguistic importance is obvious” and that its “logical significance is twofold.” The former amounts to the “careful and exact usage”; the latter is the improvement of an instrument of logic (exact language) and the explicit reference to *Lunyu* 13.3 in the *Guliang* commentary.

119 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:394–395.

120 Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:278. See also Zhao 2000, 88.

121 “The names are regarded as of supreme importance and their rectification is deemed a necessary preliminary to social and political reforms, because they are

correctly convey these “ideas” could then steer behavior and events on the concrete level. For instance, by naming some political acts “regicide,” an authoritative scribe would have been able to blame and thus warn actors on the political scene.¹²²

This dualistic reading of Confucius’s thought is no longer particularly fashionable either in China or in the West.¹²³ The other side of Hu’s narrative, however, concerns the Chinese tradition, which he claims to retrieve from under layers of dusty Confucianism in order to steer the nation into modernity. “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?”¹²⁴ He therefore insists on a return to the long neglected authentic nature of Chinese philosophy. More than Kang’s narrative, Hu’s indigenous story speaks for the whole Chinese heritage confronted with another culture. It no longer opposes types of Confucianism against each other; nor does it exclude erstwhile heretics such as Mohism. Focusing on *zhengming* and following the three-layered narrative of Kang’s reconstruction, I turn to Hu’s portrayal of, first, the pre-Qin intellectual debate, then Confucius’s supposed reforms, and finally Hu’s period.

There are some striking similarities in Kang’s and Hu’s pictures of the pre-Qin debates. The intellectual evolution that they trace basically starts with the “real” Confucius as they respectively picture him. It continues with a large array of other masters portrayed as either followers or opponents in a constellation of lineages. Of course, there are differences: Hu, from his side, does not always follow the Han portrayal of schools (*jia* 家), calls the masters “philosophers,”

the symbols *par excellence* of the ideas, because in them alone are the ideas still traceable and recoverable. And to rectify the names is to make the names mean what they ought to mean in the light of the source-ideas they embody. Names are ‘correct’ when their meaning is in accordance with their original ideas; and when the names are correct, speech will then ‘follow its natural sequence.’ Until then, ‘nothing can be established.’ Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:380; see also p. 375.

122 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:350, 35:355.

123 For Chinese critics, see e.g. Ding 2008, 22; Gou 2016, 42–43, 70–79, 184–186. For Western critics, see e.g. Fingarette 1972, 15; Schwartz 1985, 93–95; Hall and Ames 1987, 268–271; Geaney 2018, 3–22.

124 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:313.

pays more positive attention to the Later Mohists, and so forth. One specific difference is the position of Laozi in their thought. While quotes from the *Laozi* concerning *ming* are included in Kang's *Kongzi gaizhi kao*, Laozi does not play a significant role in his portrayal of *zhengming*. Conversely Hu's view on Laozi evolves. In his dissertation (and hence also in the English book), Laozi is part of the historical background preceding the philosophical debates, "on the eve of the birth of logic in ancient China."¹²⁵ In the Chinese version, however, Laozi is considered a philosopher. His vision on *ming* has expanded into a separate section within a whole chapter dedicated to him, preceding the presentation of Confucius. Such differences between Hu's two books show how he is still thinking through the topic between 1917 and 1919, maybe building further where Kang had stopped.¹²⁶

As for the second period, Hu, like Kang, considers Confucius "essentially a statesman and reformer," an "uncrowned sage" who tried to bring about a social and political reform, "*using the written words and judgments so judiciously and so judicially as to imply moral judgment, to approve and condemn as the laws of a State ought to approve and condemn.*"¹²⁷ But he failed, not due to any counteraction in the Han dynasty,¹²⁸ but rather because of legitimate criticism of other early masters. Confucius encountered "bitter opposition that thwarted his opportunity for constructive reforms."¹²⁹ He had been naive in thinking that order could

125 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:344.

126 Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:245–249, sec. 6 in chap. 3.

127 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:391, italics in the original. What is original in this claim is Hu's stress on how very Chinese this is: "This notion must appear to an Occidental reader to be rather fanciful and untenable. But it is an idea which has had tremendous influence upon Chinese thought, and especially upon the development of historical sciences in China."

128 He does point out that Han scholars such as Sima Tan, Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu did not understand the pre-Han masters well, and thus came up with the wrong ideas, such as a "school of names." See Hu [1919], in *HSQJ*, 5:355.

129 Hu [1922], in *HSQJ*, 35:350. For other explicit references to Confucius as reformer, see also pp. 352, 355, 371, 379, 380, 391, 399ff. In the Chinese volume, he even explicitly refers to Kang in this respect: "Kang Youwei was absolutely right to call this type 'reform the system by attributing it to the past'" (康有为称这一

be restored with the use of evaluative terms only. “The problem of the logic of Confucianism was the problem of *rectifying names by means of names*; that is of correcting the now corrupt and degenerate meaning of names by reestablishing their original and ideal meaning. Any modern student of philosophy can readily see the futility of the attempt.”¹³⁰ Hence, unlike Kang, Hu does not believe that Confucius’s thought effectively contributed to China’s social and political order over 2,000 years.¹³¹

This leads to the third and last step. For Hu, Confucius’s lack of political effectiveness did not make him a failure since “he resolved to consecrate his life to the education of the youth of his time”¹³² and inspired other masters to come up with more elaborate theories.¹³³ As a philosopher Confucius thus started a long intellectual conversation to which Hu Shi contributes now by tracing the development of “Chinese logic.” As for “logic,” Hu highlights the philosophical rigor and coherence of all the early masters’ views, shaping them into “doctrines” or “-isms.”¹³⁴ As for being “Chinese,” his mission is to explain the typically Chinese nature of this “study of names.” He therefore makes use of records that he estimates might seem incomprehensible to Western readers.

(6) In the specific mixture of old and new that Hu proposes, there are many similarities and differences compared to Kang’s views, in general as well as specifically related to *zhengming*. On the general level, one striking similarity is the focus on the age of Confucius. The mere fact that Hu’s philosophy course at Peking University started with the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 771–476 BCE) rather than with Emperors Yao (ca. 2356–2255 BCE) and Shun (ca. 2294–2184 BCE) was considered shocking by his contemporaries, even though Kang preceded him in this respect.¹³⁵ Responses to Hu are also strong and var-

种为“托古改制”极有道理). See Hu [1919], in HSQJ, 5:210.

130 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:423–424; italics in the original.

131 “That he was unsuccessful in realizing this original purpose, history has shown us.” Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:399.

132 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:350.

133 In the case of the Neo-Mohists who insisted on the importance of reality when discussing language. Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:399.

134 Hu later expressed disapproval of such jargon. See Spira 2015, 140–141, 167–172.

135 Hu [1958], in HSQJ, 5:538–539.

ied among young students, scholars, and the wider populace.¹³⁶ General differences are the fact that Hu's thought functions in an academic environment, explicitly emancipated from politics. He is positioned further away from the commentarial voice and toward an individual stance. Compared to Kang's format of comments surrounding long lists of quotes, Hu Shi's book-length treatise speaks with an individual authority, using quotes as pure support for his original argument. However familiar Hu's approach has become in academia, for his contemporaries it was a remarkable feature of his work.¹³⁷

Hu's theory on *zhengming*, more specifically, is likewise a mixture of past and present: a strong claim to novelty on the one hand, and the reconstruction of a Chinese heritage on the other. The introduction concludes with the hope that "this study, which is the first of its kind in any language not excepting the Chinese, [may] serve to introduce to the Western world the great schools of thought in ancient China."¹³⁸ Compared to Kang, Hu's claim to novelty is indeed loud and persistent. It cannot be reduced to the self-confident tone of a doctoral student trained in America. A few years before his death Hu still insisted on the pathbreaking novelty of his basic viewpoint.¹³⁹ He identifies as the two major "departure[s] from traditional scholarship" his reinterpretation of the *Yijing* and of the *Mozzi*.¹⁴⁰ For the latter, Hu positions himself within a scholarly trend reconstituting the texts that were "long ignored by the hostile Confucian scholars, and consequently suffered many textual corruptions."¹⁴¹ As for the former, he claims exceptional originality and responsibility:

In the present essay an effort is made for the first time in history of the interpretation of the *Book of Change*, to break away almost completely from the traditional, occult, and moralistic views, and to interpret the Confucian Appendices either as logical theories or as discussions having a bearing on the

136 See Sang 2003, 43–51.

137 See Moloughney 2002, 138, quoting Feng Youlan's review of Hu's book.

138 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:318–319.

139 Hu [1958], in HSQJ, 5:537, in the preface to the Taiwanese publication of his book.

140 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:300.

141 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:402.

problem of logic. For the correctness or incorrectness of this interpretation, the present writer holds himself entirely responsible.¹⁴²

The past that Hu presents in his reconstruction of the *zhengming* narrative bears several similarities with that of Kang: he wants to liberate China from the oppression of Confucian orthodoxy, he insists on a return to the long neglected authentic figure of Confucius, he finds the plea for “rectifying names” crucial in this respect, and he has an eye for the role of other masters and lineages.¹⁴³ The tradition that he defends, however, is not a particular intellectual genealogy within the Confucian frame such as the Gongyang tradition, but rather the whole frame, enriched with non-Confucian thought. His audience is not from the outset shaped by the Chinese heritage, but has to be convinced of its value. Hu is aware of the fact that the notion of *zhengming* “must appear to an Occidental reader to be rather fanciful and untenable. But it is an idea which has had tremendous influence upon Chinese thought.”¹⁴⁴ Even though Western and modern scholars were indeed not always convinced of his vision, Hu’s defense of the Chinese tradition in terms of *zhengming* became very influential.

4 Conclusion

As a case study of an emerging modern discourse in Chinese academia, the topic of *zhengming* illustrates the wealth of possible and implicit connections between Kang and Hu. The least we can say is that they took part in a conversation that profoundly changed due to their contributions. Although not necessarily proof of direct influence, some connections between them are particularly striking, such as Hu’s insistence (in the English edition) on Confucius as a reformer and his reference to a record about falling stones and backward-flying hawks as a perfect illustration of *zhengming*.¹⁴⁵ Opposition to Kang may also

142 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:374–375.

143 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:313–317.

144 Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 35:391–392.

145 Long before Hu Shi, James Legge (1815–1897) in 1872 found the Guliang reflections on the five falling stones and six backward-flying hawks nonsensical. See Legge [1872] 1994, 171. So did Herbert Giles (1845–1935) in 1901. See Giles

indicate acquaintance, as when Hu insists that Confucius failed as reformer and when he adamantly states that Confucius was no religious founder, as “some people recently suggested” (in the Chinese edition).¹⁴⁶ But equally interesting as these isolated indications of connection is the shared background of intellectual change: the evolution of Confucius from reformer to philosopher, from an alternative Confucian orthodoxy toward a wholesale Chinese tradition, the growing appreciation of Mozi, and other trends of the early twentieth century.

Focusing on Hu’s treatment of *zhengming* in relation to Kang, I would suggest three possible lines of influence, even if not necessarily direct. First, the philosophical reading of Confucius and his contemporaries. Kang’s vision of a reformer in the late Qing may have been an important step toward Hu’s philosopher in the early republic. Even though Hu’s specific philosophical portrayal of the early masters, with all his logic and -isms, may have lost much of its appeal today, his portrayal of them as philosophers has since then occupied a substantive space in China’s academic and intellectual sphere. Second, and a corollary to this, is the conviction that Confucius’s and all masters’ or scholars’ views on *ming* are not only important, but crucial. They are even seen as representative of a typically Chinese mindset. Third, the academic tendency to collect a wide variety of textual evidence from the *Lunyu* and other sources in support of one’s *zhengming* view was shared by both Kang and Hu. The specific clusters presented by them have long been overtaken by other and larger sets of textual evidence. But Hu’s *Lunyu* cluster has nevertheless frozen into a relatively stable block. Most striking is the ease with which Confucius’s lament about the changed *gu* vessel (*Lunyu* 6.23/25) is presented as illustration of his *zhengming* theory.

Returning to Hannah Arendt’s notion of frozen ideas, the *zhengming* case shows that one cause of a notion’s frozen state might be the failure of scholars to explicitly acknowledge the influence of others, especially when they propose

1901, 29–30. Few scholars still use it as an illustration of *zhengming*. However, Liang Qichao still referred to it in a talk of 1920. See Liang [1920] 1999, 3146.

146 See Hu [1919], in HSQJ, 5:308; Hu [1922], in HSQJ, 25:406. For Kang’s vision on Mozi as a religious founder and his use of this vision to construe his vision of Confucianism, see Lee 2020, 468–469.

their own important insight. There seems to have been a chain of mostly implicit reliance: as Kang may have used the ideas of Liao Ping (although perhaps not in relation to *zhengming*),¹⁴⁷ Hu may have failed to mention his indebtedness to Kang in what turned out to be the core of his own novel reading, just as Feng Youlan did not mention Hu in his strikingly similar theory of the “Rectification of Names,”¹⁴⁸ which in turn has been repeated over and over again, usually without reference to the initial creators of this discourse. All this may have happened for a variety of reasons that deserve to be further studied. Of course, high sensitivity to the supposed ownership of ideas, plagiarism, and scholarly acknowledgment rather belong to the modern discourse. But due to some degree of selective acknowledgment, the major inventors of the modern *zhengming* narrative—Kang and Hu—have moved to the background while their visions have gained leverage. Their interpretations have thus frozen into supposedly objective facts. Their own success and persuasiveness have caused the historical contingency of their claims to be overshadowed. The notion of *zhengming* has thus become an attractive and convenient credo for academic use, but also cold and hard. Attempts to unfreeze this stronghold in Chinese philosophy may provide new insights into the specific meanderings of what has become an important notion and into the impressive personalities who contributed to it. Two of these figures are Kang Youwei and Hu Shi. But like so many other notions, *zhengming* harbors the promise of many more impressive visions and topics to be unraveled.

References

- Arendt, Hannah [1971] (1978). *Thinking. Vol. 1 of The Life of the Mind*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Brusadelli, Federico (2020). *Confucian Concord: Reform, Utopia and Global Teleology in Kang Youwei's Datong Shu*. Leiden: Brill.

147 I have thus far not searched nor come across evidence of this in the case of *zhengming*. Perhaps we should rather search for Zhuang Cunyu's 莊存與 influence with his focus on wording. See Elman 1990, 179–180.

148 Fung [1952] 1973, 59–62. See Defoort, forthcoming. The tense relationship between Hu and Feng is yet another topic and could enlighten their academic connection in relation to *zhengming*.

- Cao Feng 曹峰 (2017). *Zhongguo gudai "ming" de zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu* 中國古代“名”的政治思想研究. Shanghai: Shanghai guji 上海古籍.
- Cheng, Chung-ying (1977). “Rectifying Names [Cheng-ming] in Classical Confucianism.” In: *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 8.3, pp. 67–81.
- Cheng Zai 承載 (1999). “*Chunqiu Guliangzhuan yizhu*” 春秋穀梁傳譯注. Shanghai: Shanghai guji 上海古籍.
- Defoort, Carine (1997). *The Pheasant Cap Master (Heguanzi): A Rhetorical Reading*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- (2020). “How to Name or not to Name: That is the Question in Early Chinese Philosophy.” In: *Keywords in Chinese Culture*. Ed. by Li Wai-ye and Yuri Pines. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, pp. 3–36. Forthcoming.
- (2021). “Confucius and the ‘Rectification of Names’: Hu Shi and the Modern Discourse on Zhengming 正名.” In: *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 20.4. Forthcoming.
- Ding Liang 丁亮 (2008). “*Wuming*” yu “*zhengming*”: lun Zhongguo shang-zhonggu mingshi wenti wenhua zuoyong yu fazhan “無名”與“正名”—論中國上中古名實問題的文化作用與發展. Taipei: Hua Mulan.
- Elman, Benjamin (1990). *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-Chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Feng Youlan [Fung Yu-lan] 馮友蘭 [1952] (1973). *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Trans. by Derk Bodde. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fingarette, Herbert (1972). *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Gassmann, Robert (1988). *Cheng Ming. Richtigstellung der Bezeichnungen*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Geaney, Jane (2018). *Language as Bodily Practice in Early China: A Chinese Grammarology*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Giles, Herbert G. (1901). *A History of Chinese Literature*. London: William Heinemann.
- Gou Dongfeng 苟東峰 (2016). *Kongzi zhengming sixiang yanjiu* 孔子正名思想研究. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe.

- Graham, Angus C. (1989). *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Hall, David and Roger Ames (1987). *Thinking Through Confucius*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hansen, Chad (1992). *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hsiao, Kung-Chuan (1975). *A Modern China and a New World*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- (1980). *A History of Chinese Political Thought*. Trans. by Frederick Mote. Taipei: Caves Books.
- Hu Shi 胡適 (2003). *Hu Shi quanji 胡適全集*. Ed. by Zheng Dahua 鄭大華. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe.
- Kang Youwei 康有為 (2007). *Kang Youwei quanji 康有為全集*. Ed. by Jiang Yihua 姜義華 and Zhang Ronghua 張榮華. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe.
- Kim, Halla (2019). “Confucianism Before Confucius: The Yijing and the Rectification of Names.” In: *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 46.3-4, pp. 161–81.
- Kurtz, Joachim (2011). *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lee, Ting-mien (2020). “The Role of Mohism in Kang Youwei’s Arguments for His New-Text Theory of Confucianism.” In: *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 19.3, pp. 461–477.
- Legge, James (1872). *The Ch’un T’sew with the Tso Chuen*. Vol. 5. The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes. Taipei: SMC Publishing.
- Levenson, Joseph (1968). *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Liang Qichao 梁啟超 [1920] (1999). “Kongzi.” 孔子. In: *Liang Qichao quanji 梁啟超全集*. Ed. by Zhang Pinxing 張品興. Vol. 11. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe.
- Loy, Hui Chieh (2014). “Language and Ethics in the Lunyu.” In: *Dao Companion to the Lunyu*. Ed. by Amy Olberding. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 137–158.
- Ma Honglin 馬洪林 (1994). *Kang Youwei zhuan, Kongjiao zhi Mading Lude 康有為傳—孔教之馬丁路德*. Taipei: Kening chubanshe.

- Makeham, John (1994). *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Moloughney, Brian (2002). "Derivation, Intertextuality and Authority: Narrative and the Problem of Historical Coherence." In: *East Asian History* 23, pp. 129–148.
- Nivison, David (1999). "The Classical Philosophical Writings." In: *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*. Ed. by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 745–812.
- Norden, Bryan van (2007). *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Queen, Sarah A. and John S. Major, eds. (2016). *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn (Attributed to Dong Zhongshu)*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Sang Bing 桑兵 (2003). "Heng kan cheng ling ce cheng feng: xueshu shicha yu Hu Shi de xueshu diwei" 橫看成嶺側成峰：學術視差與胡適的學術地位。In: *Lishi yanjiu* 5, pp. 25–54.
- Schwartz, Benjamin (1985). *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wagner, Rudolf (2002). "The Philologist as Messiah: Kang Youwei's 1902 Commentary on the Confucian Lunyu." In: *Disciplining Classics – Altertumswissenschaft als Beruf*. Ed. by W. Most Glenn. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 134–168.
- Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1992). *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集. Shanghai: Shanghai guji 上海古籍.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig [1958] (1984). *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. by Gertrude E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Wong, Young-tsu (2010). *Beyond Confucian China: The Rival Discourses of Kang Youwei and Zhang Binglin*. London: Routledge.
- Yao Xinzong, ed. (2003). *Routledge Curzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*. Vol. 2. London: Routledge Curzon.
- Zhao Lidong 趙利棟 (2000). "Hu Shi yu Kang Youwei: Xueshu lianxi de yige chubu tantao" 胡適與康有為：學術聯繫，學術聯繫的一個初步探討。In: *Xueshu yanjiu* 1, pp. 84–92.