

CHINESE WHISPERS

On the hideous spectacle of the pair spending their evenings in shorthand schools and polytechnic classes, learning bookkeeping and typewriting with incipient junior clerks, male and female, from the elementary schools, let me not dwell. There were even classes at the London School of Economics, and a humble personal appeal to the director of that institution to recommend a course bearing on the flower business. He, being a humourist, explained to them the method of the celebrated Dickensian essay on Chinese Metaphysics by the gentleman who read an article on China and an article on Metaphysics and combined the information.

George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

According to a certain Chinese encyclopædia, animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. This celebrated passage from Borges achieves its startling and charming effect by skilfully reflecting the tension at the heart of western responses to China, a combination of opposing reactions which were elicited quite soon after the initial European contacts and persist in one form or another to the present day.

The question of China, most prominently in the form of the Chinese Rites Controversy, made no small contribution to the epic feud which raged over the years between Jesuits and Jansenists.¹ In the eighteenth century, the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères* edited first by P. Charles Le Gobien and then by P. Jean-Baptiste Du Halde² disseminated an enormous amount of influential pro-Jesuit propaganda designed at least in part to counteract the vicious attacks launched against the Jesuit mission by their Jansenist rivals in the Société des Missions Étrangères. In particular, P. Du Halde freely modified and then published reports he received from the Jesuits in China to glorify their missionary efforts in that exotic empire.³ Given the central Jesuit strategy of delicate accommodation to Chinese culture, at least the culture of the literati,⁴ the *Lettres édifiantes* depict a Chinese society of magnificent resources, enjoying a beneficent and well-run administration unparalleled in Europe.

P. Du Halde's propaganda generates a historical irony. Since the keystone of his Chinese bureaucratic paradise is its superb rationality, his portrait was enthusiastically exploited by the rationalists, for example Voltaire, as a source for anti-Jesuit polemics.⁵ Here is our first western reaction to China: admiration for

its rationality, typically exemplified by the supposed efficacy of its administrative arrangements, and usually interpreted as a consequence of irreligious reason:

Il ne faut pas être fanatique du mérite chinois: la constitution de leur empire est à la vérité la meilleure qui soit au monde, la seule qui soit toute fondée sur le pouvoir paternel (ce qui n'empêche pas que les mandarins ne donnent force coups de bâton à leurs enfants); la seule dans laquelle un gouverneur de province soit puni, quand, en sortant de charge, il n'a pas eu les acclamations du peuple; la seule qui ait institué des prix pour la vertu, tandis que partout ailleurs les lois se bornent à punir le crime; la seule qui ait fait adopter ses lois à ses vainqueurs, tandis que nous sommes encore sujets aux coutumes des Burgundiens, des Francs et des Goths, qui nous ont domptés. Mais on doit avouer que le petit peuple, gouverné par des bonzes, est aussi fripon que le nôtre; qu'on y vend tout fort cher aux étrangers, ainsi que chez nous; que, dans les sciences, les Chinois sont encore au terme où nous étions il y a deux cents ans; qu'ils ont comme nous mille préjugés ridicules; qu'ils croient aux talismans, à l'astrologie judiciaire, comme nous y avons cru longtemps.⁶

The first part of this passage bears out the claim that one western reaction to China was admiration, above all for its civil administration, but the sequel reveals that attributing this success to positively irreligious reason would be something of a simplification. It ignores the pertinence of an Enlightenment formulation from the deist perspective of the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*: religious sages rightly worship the Supreme Being, but their inferiors, especially women and children, are prey to superstitious nonsense. This complication is exemplified in Voltaire's 'Catéchisme Chinois': 'KOU: On nous a donc bien trompés quand on nous a dit que Fo était descendu chez nous du quatrième ciel, et avait paru en éléphant blanc. CU-SU: Ce son des contes que les bonzes font aux enfants et aux vieilles: nous ne devons adorer que l'auteur éternel de tous les êtres.'⁷

One should also add that, although a conviction that China enjoyed social and intellectual stability survived in the west well beyond the eighteenth century, (relative) changelessness came to be no longer regarded as a virtue, and 'oriental' stasis was transformed into a ground for condemning the Chinese, or at least for showing up their manifest inferiority to the west. The nineteenth-century ideology of evolution depicts China as a minatory example of arrested development. Examination of this negative tendency lies well beyond the scope of this paper, but its most eminent proponents include Mill, Marx, and even Tennyson.⁸

But the *Lettres édifiantes* are also *curieuses*. In the Herodotean tradition, as it were, they also include marvellous reports of bizarre Chinese flora and fauna, combining the novel but factual with the purely fantastical. Description of wonderful animals is entrenched in the native Chinese tradition.⁹ But production of such bestiaries does not simply counteract admiration for Chinese rationality.

Such texts are not straightforwardly irrational, but encyclopædias, large learned tomes whose organisation is ostensibly based on a learned rationality which mirrors the splendid bureaucratic arrangements – indeed, such books are often the fruits of projects undertaken with imperial sponsorship. One of Aristotle's legacies to western learning is the taxonomic paradigm, pre-eminent in the study of animals, but historically influential far beyond the confines of biological science. Hence the Chinese bestiary is not just an instance of superstition to be set against triumphs of reason in other spheres: much more problematically, it houses inherently irrational matter within the supremely rationalistic forms of principled classification. Here is our second western reaction to, or perhaps against, China: bewilderment at its unreason, an irrationality confoundingly integrated within rational models.

The Borges fantasy provokes an amused and confused response because it conveys information ranging from the merely arbitrary to the flatly impossible with the serious tone of the encyclopædic entry, putting sucking pigs next to sirens and solemnly indicating pigeonholes that are, shall we say, rather oddly shaped. Foucault cites the Borges passage in the introduction to his study of the emergence of what he claims is a new European taxonomic mentality.¹⁰ What he fails to see is that Borges gets his effect precisely because, for the French *encyclopédistes*, the idea of China functions as an ideal of rational order. Foucault's claim that 'à chacune de ces singulières rubriques, on peut donner sens précis et contenu assignable . . .'¹¹ is just plain false, at the very least of 'included in the present classification', '*et cetera*' and 'that from a long way off look like flies'. Foucault proceeds as though what is startling is that the categories are heterogeneous and bizarre, and takes the Chinese encyclopædia to fulfil a sort of anthropological function by demarcating 'les pouvoirs de contagion'.¹² But that is not its primary impact. What makes the encyclopædia a fiction is that it is only a *soi-disant* classification, given '*et cetera*' and 'included in the present classification'.¹³

Perhaps the Borges passage does indeed suggest divisions familiar from comparative anthropology: the joke is that here there are no stable, determinate *principia divisionis*. Nothing is excluded, and there are so many possibilities for cross-classification. Now Foucault rightly refers to the western vision of the Chinese, as opposed to Borges' Chinese, as supreme classifiers¹⁴ (the first component in what I have designated the contradictory western reaction to China), and Borges is introduced to illustrate a vertiginous affront to '*notre pensée*', where it is essential to Foucault's brief that '*notre*' takes in far less than 'all real human thought'. But this works only if the Borgesian Chinese represent a genuine, if fictional, alternative to 'our' ways of dividing the world.

Foucault's conclusion, that their (imaginary) culture '... distribuerait la prolifération des êtres dans aucun des espaces où il nous est possible de nommer, de parler, de penser',¹⁵ cannot rescue him from his dilemma: he concedes that the

Chinese of whom we 'dream', that is, the 'real' Chinese, think as we do, only are much better at it, and so they cannot provide a contrast to '*notre pensée*'; yet as the Borgesian Chinese are, on his own admission, close to unimaginable, they too establish no radical but authentic alternative to our taxonomies. For Foucault, either '*notre pensée*', despite the apparently restrictive possessive, implausibly includes everybody; or, even more implausibly, we are all permanently trapped within the taxonomic mentality which he insists was sloughed off after Darwin.

Borges' Chinese order transcends mere oddity and laughable diaeresis by brushing against logical paradox: thus, 'included in the present classification'. As so often in his writing, a delightful conceit carries philosophical and anthropological implications of the most profound significance, and it is a tribute to Foucault's characteristic astuteness that he lighted on it (and a token of his characteristic perversity that he misinterpreted it so wildly). This is also why it is important for us to appreciate Borges' hint and avoid Foucault's errors. Are the Chinese – sometimes – irrational in the deep sense of downright illogical? The imposition of order, classification, is a primary instance of the exercise of logical thought. Aristotle gave us not only biological classification, but also logic. Furthermore, the connection between these twin legacies is hardly adventitious: taxonomy is categorisation, and Aristotle's taxonomy is largely based on the structure provided by his categories in the technical sense of the word. So how, if at all, is Chinese thought shaped by the categories of logic? If these categories are universally normative, do the Chinese operate within their strictures, or do they flout them? If these categories are instead culture-relative, are the Chinese categories different from ours? And are they then intelligible from 'our' perspective?

One or another version of this question, which is, of course, an expression in philosophical guise of the ambiguity in reactions to the vision of alien China, has dominated western speculation about the impact of Chinese language on Chinese thought from von Humboldt through Whorf to the present day. The debate about Chinese follows the twisting contours established for the general debate about Chinese culture: it has been argued, for example, that Chinese, especially in its written form, manifests an illogical or even anti-logical fluidity; or displays an alternative logic; or, despite its fundamental differences from Indo-European languages, preserves the deep features which are linguistic universals, Chomskian or otherwise.

Yet another turn in the language debate has its origin in the seventeenth-century dream of an ideal language, whether through recovery of the original *lingua Adamica*, or by means of a newly-constructed *characteristica universalis*. Chinese plays an important part in these speculations. Some argued that, because Noah's son Shem, the ancestor of the Chinese, settled so far east after the flood, the Chinese never made it west to Babel, and consequently they retain the primitive language more or less uncorrupted.¹⁶ On the other hand, those inspired

by Ramon Lull and keen on an exemplary logical system of real characters (that is, characters referring unambiguously to determinate and objective features of the world) were excited by their impression that Chinese graphs achieve (near-) perfect reference, and are accessible to a population speaking diverse, mutually incomprehensible dialects. Leibniz and the Royal Society are chief players in this language game.¹⁷

Proponents both of the *lingua Adamica* and of the *characteristica universalis* schemes attribute great importance to Chinese as a source of information about the true nature of linguistic communication, but it was the latter group in particular, especially Leibniz, which placed special emphasis on the connection they saw between the character of written Chinese and perceived traits of mathematical logic. Such a visionary tendency persists to this day in the form of arguments for connections between the Chinese ability to recognise thousands of graphs and certain software structures in artificial intelligence programs.¹⁸ Then and now, the debate revolves around the issue of language and logic.

All too often this controversy proceeds at a level of stratospheric speculation and generalisation, not only unsupported by credible, specific examples, but even by real competence in the languages at issue, usually Chinese pitted against Greek and Latin. Does any linguistic and logical reality lie beyond the Borgesian dreamland? Is 'Chinese' merely a philosopher's potentially disastrous alternative to Quine's 'gavagai'? 'Gavagai' is a fictitious coinage, expressly invented to illustrate a theory of conceptual schemes and how they can (and crucially cannot) manifest themselves in linguistic reference and categories.¹⁹ Perhaps 'philosophical Chinese' is no more than a bogus language, consisting largely of 'gavagai' equivalents, and suffering from the signal disadvantage of positively inviting disputants to assume that they are grappling with facts of momentous historical and contemporary significance: in brief, a confusion of the real world with just another thought-experiment. This is a grave suspicion; if it can be settled definitively one way or the other, it will only be at the conclusion of much arduous research.

There is nevertheless a rare opportunity to make a start on a comparative study which focuses not on *the* languages and logic, whatever they are supposed to be, but rather on a set of perhaps uniquely apposite texts: the Chinese Aristotle. The *名理探* (*Ming Li T'an, Investigation into the theory of names*) is a translation of Aristotle's *Categories*. It is the first translation into Chinese of Aristotle, and indeed the first Chinese translation of a major western philosophical work. The Jesuit missionary Francisco Furtado brought the book to China, where he dictated it in its entirety to the literatus Li Chih-tsao, who then worked it up into acceptable Chinese and eventually had it published (c. 1631). Despite its obvious historical and philosophical importance, no scholar has ever paid it any attention. Indeed, it is scarcely read, either in China or the west, and no translation of the translation back into a European language exists.

I have glibly drawn together classification, categories, Aristotle, the *Categories*, and logic as if they all somehow come down to more or less the same thing. Of course they do not, and I do not pretend otherwise. But everyone knows that for a very extensive period in the west modified Aristotelian logic, conceived of as universally binding rules regulating acceptable processes of thought and argument, did indeed reign supreme; here is our point of entry.²⁰ Long-standing western dissatisfaction with the serious limitations of syllogistic is matched by a Chinese philosophical challenge to the contemporary neo-Aristotelian logical thesis most famously championed by Peter Strawson.²¹ To simplify greatly, Strawson mounts a transcendental argument to the effect that subject–predicate logical form is essential to what he considers the conceptual categories within which human thought necessarily operates.²²

Strawsonian categories are supposed to be inescapable and universal. The argument in question turns on *logical* form, but a prominent feature of his strategy is his reliance on purported facts about how English sentences work. Does Strawson implicitly identify English sentences and their subjects and predicates with logical propositions and their subjects and predicates, or at least assume they are isomorphic? How Strawson gets from linguistic data to logical theory is highly problematic, far more so than Strawson himself appears to acknowledge. In a series of articles Mei Tsu-lin has argued that any uncontentious survey of modern spoken Mandarin shows that Strawson should be condemned on the charge of the worst sort of linguistic and philosophical parochialism or imperialism: Strawsonian generalisations quite simply fail to obtain for the many linguistic families characterised by a topic–comment rather than subject–predicate structure.

It is not that Mei Tsu-lin rejects Strawson's thesis as a *logical* postulate; quite the contrary.²³ Rather his contention is that such logical theses cannot derive support from linguistic findings, at least from those limited to some single language or set of languages. In my view he is absolutely correct to distinguish sharply between grammatical and logical subjects and predicates and to refuse to permit unthinking inferences from the one to the other. Strawson's ultimate inspiration for both his view of subject–predicate logical form and his category theory is Aristotle. Angus Graham has lambasted what are basically Strawsonian notions under the description 'the Aristotelian principle'.²⁴

Is this blatantly unfair? No. Strawson is ironically working very much in the spirit of Aristotle when he provocatively mixes and matches a privileged language, thought, and logic, English in Strawson's case, Greek in Aristotle's. The focus of Aristotle's dialectical method is the collection, analysis and reconciliation of *φαινόμενα* and *ἔνδοξα* taking in not only the settled views of the many and the wise, but also observational phenomena and features of 'what we say' in the sense of Greek grammar and morphology. The issues of whether and how Aristotle can get from this dialectical material to true rather than merely

consistent results has acted as a powerful magnet on Aristotelian scholarship in recent decades.²⁵ The particular problem of his use or abuse of language makes itself most acutely felt in the *Categories*: even if the facts (if they are facts) about Greek morphology, syntax and usage which Aristotle musters for the construction of his scheme can ground a category theory, can it be a category theory which transcends parochial linguistics? Does Aristotle even recognise this difficulty for what it is, or is it rather the product of a post-Kantian problematic?

This is not exclusively a modern response to Aristotle. Rather it is the new form of the paramount problem addressed by the vast commentarial tradition on the *Categories*: are the categories categories of things, of words, or of both at once? How, if at all, do the lineaments of language map onto those of the world? If his predecessors only lisp and stutter Aristotle's philosophical language, by the same token is it the case that other people only speak barbarous approximations to Greek?²⁶

To gain a novel perspective on this major puzzle in Aristotle, and in philosophy itself, we can do no better than to examine Li Chih-tsao's translation through Furtado of the *Categories* section of the *Conimbricenses* volume, *In universam dialecticam*. Here we have, not the western reaction to Chinese illogical logic, but rather the antidote: a Chinese literatus striving to cope with *the* canonical logical treatise of our tradition. And this is a uniquely promising test case: given that so many of the linguistic features essential to Aristotle's argument quite literally cannot be reproduced in Chinese, what happens to the argument? That is, what happens, for example, when one tries to express the Aristotelian doctrine of paronymy, of ἐκείνινον or 'thaten' terms such as 'wooden' or 'golden', which does so much work in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*,²⁷ in a language more or less bereft of morphology? What of the vital Aristotelian distinction, that employed in the course of giving pride of place to the category of οὐσία, between being said 'of' something as opposed to being 'in' something, when the topic-comment structure of Chinese blurs the edges of the grammatical category, 'the subject'? What of Aristotle's reliance on a hard-and-fast distinction between ὀνόματα and ῥήματα in discussing complex units, when Chinese word-classes, if they exist, are functional rather than fixed, in Harbsmeier's terms?²⁸ Last, does Li Chih-tsao's rendering really betray the pressures detected, not to say championed, by advocates of 'the guidance and constraint hypothesis'?²⁹

Almost needless to say, an exploratory introduction can at best just barely begin to broach this budget of major questions. It would not be entirely churlish of a reader to dismiss this topic as the ultimate *recherché* curio, the ultimate game of Chinese whispers, with the message passing from Aristotle's lips to Porphyry to Boethius to Aquinas to the *recentiores dialectici* to Argyropoulos to Furtado to Li Chih-tsao to Wardy to the reader, from Greek to Latin to Chinese to English, inexorably developing a worse and worse signal-to-noise ratio along the line, until one ends up with pure philosophical white noise. How to get the reader to

strain after the faint signal? The pressing questions assembled might provisionally convince him not to think we are just playing at Chinese whispers.

Since in this game context is everything, some pertinent facts about what is being translated, and what translation is must be assimilated before one can finally address the texts themselves. First, facts about the original, which is emphatically not Aristotle's *Categories* as such. Between 1592 and 1598 the Jesuits of the Portuguese University of Coimbra, under the leadership of Pedro da Fonseca, issued a major series of commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus. In the words of *The Cambridge history of renaissance philosophy*, the volume *In universam dialecticam*, which followed in 1606, '... is not of the same exhaustive and rigorous quality as the volumes devoted to the central works of natural philosophy'.³⁰ This is just an unsupported *obiter dictum*, and highly questionable so far as the rigorous and exhaustive quality of the actual commentary is concerned, but the *Cambridge history* has at least one solid point: unlike other volumes in the series, *In universam dialecticam* has no Greek, and merely reproduces the Latin translation of the Byzantine philosopher Johannes Argyropulos.³¹

This absence of Greek is curious and hard to understand, since by this time, after the humanist impact, display of Greek learning was essential for establishing one's scholarly credentials. Even odder, *In universam dialecticam* is clearly intended for readers aware of, perhaps in possession of, at least some Greek, for the explications preceding the *quaestiones* often give the Greek equivalent of the translation's Latin, and make useful and reassuring remarks about Aristotle's usage. Most striking of all, the commentary at one juncture tells us that Argyropulos' version suits an interpretation which it rejects as 'opposed to all the Peripatetics and Aristotle' (p. 336). The correct explanation is very hard to square with Argyropulos, but matches Boethius' version beautifully, which here gets the Greek dead right ('... quæ cum Graeco contextu hoc loco plane consentit, et sic habet', p. 336).

I can only offer two, perhaps complementary, explanations. First, Coimbra was so low on funds it had to sacrifice printing the Greek, a situation all too familiar to us now. Second, it remained standard practice for a surprisingly long time to continue to consult well-established Latin translations such as the Moerbeke or indeed the Argyropulos versions, and thus it suited the purpose of *In universam dialecticam* to stick to the Latin, despite the new learning.³² In any case, what gets put into Chinese is Latin, not Greek.

But simply to attempt to extract the Latin and Chinese versions from their surrounding commentaries would be to commit a profound error. Scholars living in the Iberian peninsula about 1600 were also living in two philosophical worlds: their inevitable humanism was tempered by an unusual, perhaps unique allegiance to scholasticism, most obvious in Suarez, but actually permeating much of the neglected work emanating from Spain and Portugal.³³ *In universam*

dialecticam comes replete with overwhelmingly compendious citation of the commentarial tradition stretching from Porphyry to Cajetan. Even the look of the book makes this clear, an archipelago of tiny islands of Latinised Aristotle separated by great seas of explication governed by the terms set by all the *auctoritates*. We assume very much at our peril that what Furtado said to Li Chih-tsao separated off what we regard as authentic, if translated, Aristotle from the immense armature of the commentary: Furtado gave Li Chih-tsao a version of the tradition, with all that entails.

The distinctive character of Iberian work has its advantages. An endemic fault of *chic* humanist translations and commentaries is their irritating penchant for using only what they regard as correct, neo-Ciceronian vocabulary and constructions, disdaining what were thought of as the barbarous neologisms laboriously assembled over several mediaeval centuries in the philosophical jargon of scholasticism. The result was that the wording of many renaissance versions is fatally indeterminate in comparison with the scrupulous distinctions permitted by scholastic usage. Luckily *In universam dialecticam* permits itself to indulge in old-fashioned exactitude. For example, λόγος τῆς οὐσίας in the actual translation of the *Categories* is ‘ratio substantiæ’,³⁴ where the polyvalence of ‘ratio’, so far from being a disadvantage, appropriately reflects the polyvalence of λόγος. In the commentary, moreover, we are given a useful distinction between ‘ratio’ and ‘finitio’, and carefully informed not only that ‘ratio’ is the Latin for λόγος, but are also helped with what λόγος might signify.³⁵ We shall be inspecting the Chinese rendering of λόγος τῆς οὐσίας, for, whether or not the *Conimbricenses* or Furtado couples ‘ratio’ with ‘finitio’, how Li Chih-tsao will react, working as he was within a distinct and highly elaborate commentarial tradition, remains an open question.

There is another respect in which the relatively antiquated character of *In universam dialecticam* is from our point of view a potential asset. For considerable stretches of the text one might well be reading an antique work, those where the great authority is above all Porphyry rather than, say, Aquinas, let alone someone more recent; hence, much of the message transmitted to the Chinese is not scholastic, but reassuringly Greek (albeit neo-Platonic and not classical).

We shall also need to equip ourselves with some information about the receiver of the message and the translating relationship. Quixotic as it may seem to us, Jesuit missionary policy as formulated by Matteo Ricci and carried forward by his immediate successors on the whole dictated that the key to converting the Chinese to Christianity lay in gaining the allegiance of the literati, and that the key to gaining the allegiance of the literati lay in intellectual collaboration.³⁶ At its crudest but perhaps most effective, this policy could result in Ricci’s attempt to impress the Emperor with the marvel of a western chiming clock, a device beyond the ingenuity of indigenous Chinese technology. The policy achieved its greatest triumph in astronomy, when Adam Schall climbed to the apex of the imperial

bureaucracy on the basis of the crushing defeats suffered at his hands by scientists from both native Chinese and imported Arabic traditions within the Bureau of Astronomy in competitive prediction of the celestial phenomena critical for setting the ritual calendar.³⁷ Even here there is a debate over what intellectual compromises the Jesuits might have made in communicating their science to the Chinese, since their handling of Copernican theory was, to put it mildly, somewhat jesuitical.³⁸ Finally, there was our project, the collaborative translation into Chinese of western intellectual masterworks.

What were the ideological principles fuelling this sort of work? Crucial to the Jesuit accommodative policy was the thesis, ingenuously maintained or not, that *ancient* Chinese wisdom, while of course bereft of divine Christian revelation, is nevertheless illuminated by the light of natural reason, and therefore highly receptive to completion by the Gospel truth. The very fact that Confucius so pointedly abstains from metaphysical speculation conveniently gives scope for the ambition of supplementing his sensible naturalistic morality with a Christian spiritual superstructure. But to pull off this trick, the Jesuit missionaries felt obliged to distinguish sharply between the purity of ancient Chinese wisdom and the contaminating alloy of later, degenerate ages, especially Sung neo-Confucianism, which they ignorantly decried as an atheistic, materialistic philosophy,³⁹ much as some Church Fathers condemned certain Presocratics or Epicurus as intellectual evil incarnate. So the Jesuit goal was to gain converts through connecting with the sound heart of Chinese natural reason, by impressing the literati with the treasures of western knowledge – say, the Aristotelian *Categories*.

On the Chinese side, there were literati receptive to this invitation. Li Chih-tsao was a gifted mathematician, and collaborated with Ricci himself on the translation of Clavius' *Arithmetic*. For a time at least he was in bad odour with the other Jesuits, since, while he readily accepted Roman Catholic doctrine, he was loth to give up his numerous concubines, heavy boozing, and inveterate gambling, but eventually – I suppose as the years passed and he had his fill of carnal pleasure – he fell into line, was baptised, and indeed became one of the so-called 'Three Pillars' of the Church in China. Presumably, at least on the surface, he must have concurred in the Jesuit condemnation of neo-Confucianism, if not for quite their reasons, since movements advocating return to the authentic meaning of the classics, claiming to sweep away subsequent encrustations, are a recurrent feature of Chinese intellectual history.⁴⁰

I say 'at least on the surface', not because I question Li Chih-tsao's integrity,⁴¹ but rather because ridding oneself of an all-pervasive, deeply-rooted cast of mind, as opposed to rejecting certain specific doctrines, is easier said than done. To pick on a familiar and rather suitable example from within our tradition, one cannot fail to be struck by the irony – there is much irony in this topic – of Alexander of Aphrodisias roundly berating Stoic teachings on deterministic providence in the conviction that he is thereby defending Aristotle, all the while blithely ignorant of

the fact that the very terms in which he conducts his polemic are almost entirely derived from the Stoic conceptual repertoire.⁴²

The same goes for Li Chih-tsaio. Perhaps he paid no allegiance to neo-Confucian theory, deriving in large measure from Buddhist metaphysics. But again and again in perusing the *Ming Li T'an* one is struck by the systematic ambiguity of the very word 理 (*li*) which occurs in its title. 理 can be rendered 'theory', as it should be in the title, *Investigation of the Theory of Names*. But it is also the paramount term in neo-Confucianism, where what it signifies is as important, and as difficult to grasp, as 道 (*tao*) or, for that matter, λόγος. In fact, in certain contexts 理, while most certainly not equivalent to λόγος, is translated into English by 'reason' or 'principle', although of course the Greek term is also often provided with just the same English equivalents.

Collaborative translation was not a novelty for the Chinese in the late Ming and early Ch'ing. After all, their Buddhism came from just such joint exercises undertaken by missionary monks from Central Asia working with Chinese scholars on the rendering of the Buddhist scriptures, and that experience stimulated considerable recognition of the dangers inherent in pressing established Chinese philosophical or religious vocabulary into use for the representation of foreign ideas, although it would seem that the Christian missionaries and Chinese converts typically employed the relatively unsophisticated procedure of one-on-one dictation followed by literary polishing, a far cry from the large team efforts involving bilingual teams in which the Buddhists engaged.⁴³ The fact remains that the *Ming Li T'an* cannot be read without constant sensitivity to the possibility that the Chinese version of the *Categories* might very well put a neo-Confucian or Buddhist spin on what we initially accept as a fairly neutral translation of Aristotle.

Not that the pioneering Jesuit translations of Chinese into Latin fail to provide abundant opportunities for a *tu quoque* response. The most famous and influential such work, *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive scientia Sinensis Latine exposita* (composed by Philip Couplet and others (Paris, 1687)) yields examples of dubious and potentially disastrous misrenderings on almost every page. 君子 (*chün-tzu*), the Confucian term of art for the accomplished, cultured, upright individual, is now often despairingly translated as 'gentleman', with a note warning the English reader of the difficulty and importance of the term (cf. the shifts employed by translators grappling with Aristotle's φρόνιμος). *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* slides between 'princeps',⁴⁴ 'perfectus vir',⁴⁵ 'probus rex'⁴⁶ and 'perfectus rex'⁴⁷ for *chün-tzu* in its version of the 大學 (*Ta Hsüeh*; in passing one might note that even translating this title as *Magna scientia* is far from unproblematic). Again, the Confucian virtues of 仁 (*ren*) and 義 (*i*), now conventionally represented with much hesitation as 'benevolence' or 'humanity' and 'justice' respectively, are transformed into 'pietas et clementia' for *ren*⁴⁸ and 'fidelitas' for *i*.⁴⁹ The inevitable distortion resulting from the presentation of

Confucian philosophy in the vocabulary used in the west to depict the virtuous prince's relation to his subjects is almost total.

As for psychology, 心 (*hsin*), now sometimes flagged as 'heart-mind' so as to emphasise the dangers inherent in the translation of Chinese mental and emotional terms, not only appears as 'animus',⁵⁰ but is also embedded within phrases which presume the mediaeval version of Aristotelian philosophy of mind.⁵¹ Finally, 道 (*tao*), 'way' or 'method', but now usually left untranslated in recognition of its cultural and philosophical importance and impenetrability, is rendered as 'regula'⁵² in the translation of the 中庸 (*Chung Yung*). If in the great sea separating China from the west there be dragons, both Jesuit and literatus sailed unwarily, each reposing a rash confidence in his own cultural constellations.

My final preparatory facts also concern the receiver of the message and his readership. When the Jesuits and their Chinese collaborators undertook joint mathematical or cartographical work, the literati came to the project with the benefit of a schooling in the impressive native traditions in these fields. But there is no analogue in the case of the translation of the *Categories*. The magnificent but lonely achievement of the Mohist logical canon more or less totally disappeared until interest in it revived in the nineteenth century, largely under the stimulus of exposure to western logic and science,⁵³ so Li Chih-tiao cannot have had anything like an appropriate context in which to place this odd Aristotelian text.⁵⁴ As for his audience and how they received his efforts, we can unfortunately know nothing. The *Ming Li T'an* was discreetly printed at Hangzhou, presumably to avoid the dangers involved in publicly disseminating any Christian work at that time, and all my efforts to discover how many copies were printed, where they were lodged, and who might have read them have come to nothing.

I shall conclude by beginning, by bringing the various considerations I have raised to bear on the very first sentence of the *Categories*. Wardy's version of the Latin version of the Greek original runs as follows: 'Equivocals are said to be those things of which the name alone is common: but actually the definition of the substance accommodated to the name is diverse: as animal is said of man himself and of that which is pictured. For their name alone is common, but actually the definition of substance accommodated to the name is diverse' (*æquivoca dicuntur ea, quorum nomen solum commune est: ratio vero substantiæ nomini accommodata, diversa: ut animal dicitur, et ipse homo, et id, quod est pictum. Horum enim nomen commune tantummodo est, ratio vero substantiæ nomini accommodata diversa*) (δμώνυμα λέγεται ὡν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος, οἷον ζῶιον ὃ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ γεγραμμένον: τούτων γὰρ ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος)).⁵⁵ Wardy's version of the Chinese version of the Latin version is this: 'Matching names diverge in meaning. Concerning the living man and the sculpted man, they are both called "man", but only the names match; as

far as the meanings of the structures are concerned, they differ' (物倫首辯。同名歧義。活人塑人。皆謂之人。厥名雖名。體義則異。).⁵⁶

In Aristotle, and indeed in the Latin version, synonyma, homonyma and paronyma are notoriously the things bearing the *ὀνόματα*, not the *ὀνόματα* themselves: hence the sticky problem, whether Aristotle's theory is correctly designated as a pioneering contribution to semantics as such. But in the Chinese version, 'the things said' disappear; we have only the 同名 (*t'ung ming*, 'matching names'). At least in its Warring States phase, Chinese linguistic philosophy has been described problematically as nominalistic;⁵⁷ is the translation manifesting the same, perennial tendency? Revealingly, the *Ming Li T'an* simply omits the sections in which the *Conimbricenses* grapples with the issue of whether the *prædicamenta* are terms or things.⁵⁸

ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος or 'the definition of substance accommodated to the name is diverse' goes into Chinese in disconcertingly abbreviated form, 歧義 (*ch'i i*). *i* is what we conventionally translate by 'justice', as in the traditional Confucian virtue. It can indeed also mean 'meaning', as it doubtless does here. But, first, it cannot mean 'ratio' or λόγος or definition; and, second, any reference to the *i* being the *i of the substance* is absent, although the Chinese reproduces the examples of the living and the artificial men, so that what is expressed is indeed so far purely about expressions.

When ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος recurs, we do find a reflection in the Chinese, 'as far as the meanings of the structures are concerned, they differ', but it is difficult to decide whether the image is distorted. 體義 (*t'i i*) could just mean 'the meanings of their bodies', where 'bodies' refers to the living frame and its artificial representation.⁵⁹ But then, disappointingly, the Chinese could show that some difference exists between the two men who bear the appellation 'man' and motivates the doctrine of homonymy, but totally fail to convey what is different about the men, namely, the λόγος of their οὐσία. There is conceivably an alternative, however. Perhaps *t'i* means 'structure' in the sense of functional organisation, in which case it could approximate in an interesting way to εἶδος, if not quite to οὐσία in the sense required by Aristotle.

Evaluating this optimistic hypothesis requires a quick look at the Chinese commentary. What emerges is most revealing. 'As for what is called "structure" (*t'i*), it does not exclusively indicate the structure of substance (自立 (*tzu li*)), for it also indicates the principles (*li*) which each and every thing has at the root and originally, what is called "meaning" (*i*). Meaning either indicates and manifests the thought of things, or indicates their original principles.'⁶⁰

One can readily verify that Li Chih-tsoo employs the binome *tzu li* as a term of art equivalent to 'substantia' in the Latin.⁶¹ But the 'principles' in question here are *li*, raising the spectre of at least tacit neo-Confucianism. At this juncture the Latin original assures us that 'substantiæ' in 'ratio substantiæ' does not stand for the category of substance, as opposed to the accidental categories. Rather it refers

to 'a certain nature which can be explained by a definition'.⁶² The point of this distinction is to permit the *Conimbricenses* to assume, on the authority of Sergius Flavius and Boethius, that the Greek word οὐσία designates 'essence'; since essence 'is to be found in accidents no less than in substance', we get equivocation in all the categories, accidental as well as substantial.

The *Ming Li T'an* thus gets the message dead right at the start, when it says that 'as for what is called "structure", it does not exclusively indicate the structure of substance'. But the sequel sinks into obscurity. In 'structure also indicates the principles which each and every thing has at the root and originally, what is called "meaning"', we ought to be getting the idea that 'substance' here is not the category, but rather an 'essence' which ranges across the categories. Just possibly 本元 (*pen yüan*) principles, 'at the root and originally', specifies non-substantial essence. The earlier claim that metaphysics, not the theory of names, attends to 本, 'roots',⁶³ creates no trouble, since it correctly picks up the *Conimbricenses'* explanation that 'the dialectician does not consider the material quality of predicates, but rather what and how many formal modes of predication there are . . . therefore the inquiry into the number of genera of those things which are predicated pertains least of all to him, but rather to the metaphysician'.⁶⁴

In the sentence just preceding, however, the Chinese version has it that metaphysics investigates 'nature and essence', where 'essence' is 情 (*ch'ing*); if *ch'ing* is Li Chih-tsao's 'essence', he unfortunately misses the opportunity to use it for the clarification of the later passage about *t'i*. We can reasonably conclude that the *Ming Li T'an* is trying to render the Latin argument by distinguishing among *li*, rather than among *t'i*, and that all such *li* come under the rubric of *i*, 'meaning'; so again we are confronted by the significant inadequacy of the Chinese whenever it attempts to render 'ratio' or λόγος.

As for 'Indicating and manifesting the thought of things, or indicating their original principles' in the Chinese, this is amply justified, because the corresponding passage in the *Conimbricenses* informs us that "'ratio" is said here for the Greek λόγος, which can signify a concept of the mind, either simple or definite, or even an objective concept of the thing signified';⁶⁵ not quite Aristotle, but a reasonable representation of the distinction between 'conceptual' and 'real' definition which evolved under his influence.

Then there is the worrying fact that at least once the Latin 'naturam substantiæ, corporis, etc.'⁶⁶ is rendered by 本性自立形體,⁶⁷ where *t'i* would indeed seem to mean nothing more interesting than 'body'. Of course, even if that is the case, it hardly establishes that elsewhere Li Chih-tsao does not employ *t'i* in a higher-powered sense. Only an exhaustive study of the texts taken singly and in conjunction could give us a fix on whether he attempts to correlate crucial Latin philosophical terms with Chinese equivalents one-to-one in a fairly definite manner; and even then, of course, we would hardly have banished the challenging

possibility that his terminology must be construed with a neo-Confucian mind-set.

But finally, the manifest distinction between 自立 (*tzu li*), which is substance, on the one hand, and *t'i*, with which we are tussling, on the other, suggests a last rich irony. I initially drew attention to *t'i i* as a rendering of 'ratio substantiæ' because *i* is not nearly good enough for 'ratio', and because *t'i* should signify more than just 'body'. We have found no reason to look more kindly on *i*, but could it ironically (again) be the case that, because Li Chih-tsao has studied his *Conimbricenses* all too carefully, and taken to heart the Latin passage I have cited which insists that 'substantia' in the first sentence of the *Categories* ranges across all the *prædicamenta*, he has deliberately employed *t'i* rather than *tzu li* in his actual translation of Aristotle? That is, he goes one better than the *Conimbricenses*, by importing their interpretation right into the Aristotelian text; in the Chinese, as opposed to the Latin, no one could be misled into thinking that the differing definitions or *i* of equivocals pertain only to substance, because Li Chih-tsao has helpfully tampered with the text itself. The irony is that we have no grounds whatsoever for supposing that Aristotle, as opposed to the western commentarial tradition, conceived of the *antepredicamenta* as so intimately related to the *prædicamenta* proper, or at least that he conceived of them as related in precisely this fashion. This is of course only a single, if highly important, case; but it does indicate that since, as I have said, Furtado communicated not the *Categories*, but rather the tradition, to Li Chih-tsao, the Chinese scholar quite reasonably permitted 解 (*chieh*) or analysis to modify 古 (*ku*) or original in a fashion we would not tolerate.

This single sentence has much more to yield; its complete interpretation would take account of the many pages in both the *Conimbricenses* and the *Ming Li T'an* devoted to exposition of the sentence in terms of an ingenious effort to integrate the *antepredicamenta* with the *prædicamenta* by way of combining Aristotle's opening semantic tripartition with modes of predicating the categories themselves. I have not offered answers to any of the very large philosophical questions about language, logic and translation which I raised. Decent answers can only begin to emerge from a detailed study of the texts in their entirety; what I hope to have demonstrated is that by turning their attention to the Chinese *Categories*, philosophers might lay to rest the suspicion that their perennial excitement over the apparent implications of a very alien syntax and semantics is a paltry delusion.

What would Aristotle have made of it all? Several years ago I whiled away a pleasant afternoon in a magnificent Shanghai ornamental garden by pretending to work at my classical Chinese. It struck me that the crystalline phrasing of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* would go over into Chinese with peculiar elegance – at least if someone better educated were to attempt it. Finally I showed my miserable effort at the famous last sentence to my companion, a Chinese

philosopher, and asked him whether the *Tractatus* was well-known in China.⁶⁸ He assured me that my translation was not so bad, and that Wittgenstein was read all over China. When I asked him how that famous sentence was understood, he replied ‘Oh, politically’. During the student disturbances, demonstrators would chant ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ at politically appointed professors whose lectures warped western philosophical classics to bring them into conformity with so-called Maoist ‘philosophy’. Such are the unanticipated consequences of philosophical translation – if one likes, of truly ‘radical’ translation. I am confident that Wittgenstein would have been delighted, and almost as sure that Aristotle would have found ample food for thought in the *Ming Li T’an*.⁶⁹

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(1) The first sentence of the *Categories*:

(a) δμάνυμα λέγεται ὄν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος, οἶον ζῶιον ὃ τε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ γεγραμμένον· τούτων γὰρ ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοῦνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος.

(b1) *aequivoca dicuntur ea, quorum nomen solum commune est: ratio vero substantiæ nomini accommodata, diversa: ut animal dicitur, et ipse homo, et id, quod est pictum. horum enim nomen commune tantummodo est, ratio vero substantiæ nomini accommodata diversa.*

(b2) Equivocals are said to be those things of which the name alone is common: but actually the definition of the substance accommodated to the name is diverse: as animal is said of man himself and of that which is pictured. For their name alone is common, but actually the definition of substance accommodated to the name is diverse.

(c1) 物倫首辯。同名歧義。活人塑人。皆謂之人。厥名雖名。體義則異。

(c2) Matching names diverge in meaning. Concerning the living man and the sculpted man, they are both called ‘man’, but only the names match; as far as the meanings of the structures are concerned, they differ.

(2) Important Chinese graphs:

- (a) 同名 (*t’ung ming*, ‘matching names’).
- (b) 義 (*i*, ‘meaning’).
- (c) 體 (*t’i*, ‘body’/‘structure’).
- (d) 自立 (*tzu li*, ‘substance’).
- (e) 理 (*li*, ‘principle’).
- (f) 本元 (*pen yüan*, ‘at the root and originally’).
- (g) 情 (*ch’ing*, ‘essence’).

NOTES

1. For a useful point of entry to this protracted and convoluted battle, consult D. E. Mungello, *Curious land, Jesuit accommodation and the origins of Sinology* (Honolulu, 1989) 332–3.
2. *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères*, 34 volumes (Paris 1702–76).
3. Mungello (n. 1) 343.
4. I borrow the concept of ‘Jesuit Accommodation’ from Mungello’s path-breaking book; for a

comprehensive description of what the policy entailed, see the introduction to *Curious land* (13–20). I am indebted to him throughout for information on missionary ideology in China and its implementation.

5. C. R. Boxer, 'Some aspects of Western historical writing on the Far East, 1500–1800', in *Historians of China and Japan*, eds. W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (London, 1961) 312–15: Voltaire actually put Du Halde on his list of illustrious contemporaries.

6. Voltaire, 'De La Chine', *Dictionnaire philosophique* (Paris, 1964) 113.

7. 'Catéchisme Chinois', 1er Entrétien, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, 77.

8. Mill: 'We have a warning example in China – a nation of much talent, and, in some respects, even wisdom, owing to the rare good fortune of having been provided at an early period with a particularly good set of customs, the work, in some measure, of men to whom even the most enlightened European must accord, under certain limitations, the title of sages and philosophers. They are remarkable, too, in the excellence of their apparatus for impressing, as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community, and securing that those who have appropriated most of it shall occupy the posts of honour and power. Surely the people who did this have discovered the secret of human progressiveness, and must have kept themselves steadily at the head of the movement of the world. On the contrary, *they have become stationary – have remained so for thousands of years; and if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by foreigners*' (*On liberty*, ch. 3 (published with *The subjection of women and Chapters on socialism*, ed. S. Collini (Cambridge, 1989)) 71–2, emphasis added). Marx (his curious notion of the 'Asiatic' mode of production): 'the Oriental empires always show an unchanging social infrastructure coupled with unceasing change in the persons and tribes who managed to ascribe to themselves the political superstructure' (from an article in *Die Presse*, 7 July 1862). Tennyson: 'Not in vain the distant beacons. Forward, forward let us range, / Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change. / Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day: / Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay' (*Locksley Hall*, ll. 181–4).

9. See e.g. the *T'ai P'ing Kuang Chi*, completed in 978, published in 981.

10. 'Ce livre a son lieu de naissance dans un texte de Borges. Dans le rire qui secoue à sa lecture toutes les familiarités de la pensée – de la nôtre: de celle qui a notre âge et notre géographie –, ébranlant toutes les surfaces ordonnées et tous les plans qui assagissent pour nous le foisonnement des êtres, faisant vaciller et inquiétant pour longtemps notre pratique millénaire du Même et de l'Autre . . . Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxonomie, ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué comme le charme exotique d'une autre pensée, c'est la limite de la nôtre: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela' (*Les mots et les choses, une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, 1966) 7).

11. Foucault (n. 10) 7.

12. Foucault (n. 10) 7.

13. Foucault nevertheless inconsistently recognises that the latter involves 'l'explicite référence à des paradoxes connus' (Foucault (n. 10) 8).

14. 'La Chine, dans notre rêve, n'est-elle pas justement le lieu privilégié de l'espace?' (Foucault (n. 10) 10).

15. Foucault (n. 10) 11.

16. See John Webb, *An historical essay endeavoring a probability that the language of the Empire of China is the primitive language* (London, 1669) especially 24, 61–2.

17. See *An essay towards a real character and a philosophical language*, by John Wilkins, D.D., Dean of Ripon and Fellow of the Royal Society (London, 1668), and Mungello's chapter 'Proto-Sinology and the seventeenth-century European search for a universal language' (*Curious land*, 174–207).

18. Angus Graham contends – rashly, I believe – that classical Chinese is ‘perhaps nearer to symbolic logic than any other language’ (*Disputers of the Tao, philosophical argument in ancient China* (La Salle, Illinois, 1989) 403); see my strictures in ‘The China syndrome’ (forthcoming). Chinese mathematicians participating in a seminar I conducted at the *Beijing Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, in 1990, argued for connections between graph recognition and artificial intelligence development. ‘The China Syndrome’ formulates and evaluates ‘the guidance and constraint hypothesis’, according to which basic linguistic structure at once encourages and constrains the development of philosophical tendencies and doctrines, both fruitful and disastrous.

19. ‘Translation between unrelated languages, e.g., Hungarian and English, may be aided by traditional equations that have evolved in step with a shared culture. What is relevant rather to our purposes is *radical* translation, i.e., translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people . . . The utterances first and most surely translated in such a case are ones keyed to present events that are conspicuous to the linguist and his informant. A rabbit scurries by, the native says “Gavagai”, and the linguist notes down the sentence “Rabbit” (or “Lo, a rabbit”) as tentative translation, subject to testing in further cases’ (W. V. O. Quine, *Word and object* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960) 28–9). Intense discussion of ‘the indeterminacy of translation’ has raged unabated since the publication of *Word and object*, centring primarily on the problem of whether Quine’s inferences to the inscrutability of reference and the relativity of ontology are undercut by his behaviouristic predilections (for a vigorous polemic see John Searle’s ‘Indeterminacy, empiricism, and the first person’ (*Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987) 123–46)). What is germane to our concerns is not any opinion as to the fortunes of this argument, but rather the recognition that, in striking contrast to discussions of linguistic relativism in Chinese guise, both Quine and his critics are quite clear in agreeing about the purported status of ‘gavagai’ and in disagreeing about the proper description and analysis of the thought-experiment.

20. This claim for the supremacy of Aristotelian logic must be taken with a grain of salt. That is, ‘Aristotelian’ logic certainly did enjoy an unrivalled position; but all the impressive mediæval work on syncategoremata, consequence and supposition theory, and modal logic goes so far beyond what is actually in Aristotle himself that it would perhaps be unjust and misleading even to describe the logic of the middle ages as modified Aristotle. Nevertheless the point I want emerges unscathed, since it concerns the ruling conception of the Philosopher, not how well that conception squares with the actual history of logic.

21. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals, an essay in descriptive metaphysics* (London, 1959), ‘The “Grammatical Criterion”’, 139–66, with Mei Tsu-lin, ‘Subject and predicate, a grammatical preliminary’ (*Philosophical Review* 70 (1961) 153–75) and ‘Chinese grammar and the linguistic movement in philosophy’ (*Review of Metaphysics* 14 (1961), 463–92).

22. Strawson does admit that ‘in relying upon the grammatical phrases, “substantival expression” and “expression containing a verb in the indicative mood”, the distinction [between expressions for objects and expressions for concepts] seems both parochial and unexplained: parochial, because grammatical classifications adapted to one group of languages do not necessarily fit others which may be equally rich; unexplained because grammatical classifications do not unequivocally or clearly declare their own logical rationale’ (Strawson (n. 21) 148). This is a most forthright admission, and would seem to scotch Mei Tsu-lin’s critique, but Strawson nevertheless palpably fails to take his own warning about the limitations of grammar to heart, since he nowhere explains just what the ‘grammatical’ criterion *can* achieve within these limitations.

23. Mei Tsu-lin (n. 21).

24. Angus Graham (n. 18) 394; for discussion, see ‘The China syndrome’. In fact Graham tackles the issue of *Aristotelian categories head-on* (414–28), starting from the over-confident Whorfian assertion that ‘it has long been noticed, and demonstrated in detail by Benveniste, that Aristotle’s categories do largely coincide with Greek grammatical forms, not all of them shared by modern languages’ (414–15). Graham’s essay is substantially identical to an earlier piece, trenchantly criticised by J.-P. Reding (‘Greek and Chinese Categories’, in *Philosophy East and West* vol. 36, no. 4 (1986) 349–74); Graham acknowledges Reding’s critique (*op. cit.* 415–16), but does not recognise its force.

25. See G. E. L. Owen, 'Tithenai ta phainomena', in his *Logic, science and dialectic, collected papers in Greek philosophy*, ed. M. Nussbaum (London, 1986); M. Nussbaum, 'Saving Aristotle's Appearances', in her *The fragility of goodness: luck and ethics in Greek philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986); R. Wardy, *The chain of change, a study of Aristotle's Physics VII* (Cambridge, 1990); J. Lear, *Aristotle: the desire to understand* (Cambridge, 1988); S. Waterlow, *Nature, change and agency in Aristotle's Physics: a philosophical study* (Oxford, 1981); T. Irwin, *Aristotle's first principles* (Oxford, 1988); R. Wardy, 'Transcendental dialectic: a review of Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's first principles*', *Phronesis* 36, no. 1 (1991) 88–106.
26. See *The chain of change*, 159–64. My 'Lucretius on what atoms are not' (*CP* 83 (1988) 112–28) discusses Lucretius' subtle handling of the perceived expressive 'inferiority' of Latin relative to Greek.
27. See *The chain of change*, 180–201.
28. Christoph Harbsmeier, in his monograph on Chinese grammar and logic, to be published in a forthcoming volume of Joseph Needham's *Science and civilisation in China* series.
29. See n. 18. J. Gernet, although he makes no mention of the *Ming Li T'an*, would doubtless answer with an emphatic 'yes'. He asks: 'taking a language such as Chinese as a starting-point, would it have been possible for Greek philosophy or medieval scholasticism to develop? To which the answer would probably be "no"' (*China and the Christian impact, a conflict of cultures*, trans. J. Lloyd (Cambridge, 1985) 239). Uncritically endorsing Benveniste's largely outmoded and heavily criticised work, he expresses his endorsement of extreme 'guidance and constraint' in a form which would doom Li Chih-tso's efforts from the outset: 'Benveniste shows that Aristotle's ten categories encompass nominal and verbal categories that are peculiar to the Greek language' (240).
30. *The Cambridge history of renaissance philosophy*, eds. Charles Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1988) 814.
31. According to the *Cambridge history*, '... Argyropulos translated so loosely that he was often condemned as a paraphraser' (77). Quite apart from the adverse comments of other scholars, Argyropulos' own advice on proper translation is somewhat alarming: 'recte quidem sententias referentes auctoris, latius autem eas explicandas pluribusque verbis' (from E. Garin, 'Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV', *Atti dell' Accademia fiorentina di scienze morali 'La Colombaria'* 16 (1951) 84). Of the translation of the *Categories* itself, perhaps the very first effort after Moerbeke's (c. 1470), Minio-Paluello has this to say: 'Argyropulos latinatam boëthianam per totum librum novavit, præcipue in iis quae sermonem artis logicæ non tangunt sed perspicuitati sententiarum aliquid addunt et varietate verborum nonnihil venustatis opusculo tribuunt; pronomina quoque et coniunctiones minus a Boëthio usitata pro communioribus supposuit. Sine dubio codice graeco usus est, et ex eo lectiones a Boëthii diversas latine reddidit' (*Aristoteles Latinus* 1.6–7, *Categoryarum supplementa*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello (Bruges–Paris, 1966) lxiii–lxiv).
32. I am heavily indebted to Jill Kraye of the Warburg Institute for her generous and expert help on such questions.
33. E.g. 'Because the versions of Bruni and his colleagues threatened a breach of terminological continuity with scholastic philosophy, Alonso de Cartagena and other critics of humanist translation recommended using the Vulgate versions, partially in order to sustain a commentary tradition whose unawareness of the Greek texts or indifference to them appalled the humanists' (the *Cambridge history*, 79). I have benefited from conversations with Anthony Pagden and Desmond Henry on this subject.
34. *In universam dialecticam*, 302.
35. *Ibid.*, 304; this scholasticism harmonises well with Argyropulos's translation, since he was unusually tolerant of mediaevalisms, despite his *de rigueur* espousal of humanist style (cf. the *Cambridge history*, 77, 458, 778).

36. There were at least partial exceptions, notably Fr. Niccolò Longobardo; see Gernet (n. 29) 30–4 and Mungello (n. 1) 293; Étienne, *L'Europe chinoise I: De l'Empire romain à Leibniz* (Paris, 1988) also contains much useful information. Although there is general consensus that after the Manchu conquest missionary efforts were more or less restricted to the imperial court at one extreme and the common people at the other, Mungello and Gernet disagree over the substance, scope and longevity of Ricci's original programme. For Mungello, Jesuit Accommodation was a sincere policy, underpinned by profound doctrine on both western and Chinese sides and sincerely pursued, despite interesting modifications, by missionaries following Ricci's death. For Gernet, even Ricci was little better than a wily Jesuit, and he detects gross deception and duplicity throughout the early phases of missionary work ('... the missionaries did deliberately encourage a certain confusion between the literal meaning of the Classics and the principles of their own religion' (p. 51); 'some people clearly were not duped by Ricci's tactics which consisted in "interpreting, without refuting directly"' (p. 53, citing a letter from Ricci to Francesco Pasio, the Visitor)).

37. There is an ample and vivid description of Schall's career in George H. Dunne, S. J., *Generation of giants, the story of the Jesuits in China in the last decades of the Ming Dynasty* (London, 1962), but it must be used with extreme caution, since the Jesuit author is not above flagrant propagandising on behalf of his order.

38. See Nathan Sivin, 'Copernicus in China', *Studia Copernicana* 6 (1973).

39. See Mungello's *Curious land*, 61.

40. See *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. I, *The Ch'in and Han empires 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, eds. D. Twitchett and M. Loewe (Cambridge, 1986) 191–2 and 747–65, e.g. 'The term *Confucian school* ... indicated from the beginning the twofold function of preserving and handing down the ancient traditions, and of reflecting on the meaning of these traditions in a changing world order' (p. 748).

41. Gernet, however, who displays considerable sympathy with Longobardo's resistance to Ricci's assimilationist policy, goes so far as to suggest that 'even judging solely by the prefaces written by Christian men of letters for works by the missionaries, one is sometimes forced to the conclusion that they were converts in no more than appearance or else that, as the missionaries claimed, they did not dare to declare themselves openly' (*China and the Christian impact*, 37). In fact the star example of a dubiously Christianised literatus is Li Chih-tsao himself. Gernet cites his 1628 preface for a reissue of Ricci's *The true meaning of the Master of Heaven*: 'Having recognised that Ricci's ideas were in agreement with those of the neo-Confucian commentators from Zhou Dunyi to Zhu Xi, despite the fact that the missionaries had always tried to combat neo-Confucian theses, considering them to be atheistic and materialistic, Li Zhizao grants that, in his works, Ricci often expresses opinions that are different from those of "recent Confucians". On the other hand, he goes on, "he is mysteriously in agreement with those books of Antiquity, the *Suwen* [a work of medicine], the *Zhoubei [suanjing]* [a work on mathematics], the *Kaogong [ji]* [a work on technology] and with Qiyuan [Zhuangzi, the Taoist philosopher] [!]"' (*China and the Christian impact*, 37–8). Scholars familiar with neo-Platonic exegesis of earlier Greek philosophy might very well not experience the incredulity apparently expressed by Gernet's exclamation-point, nor share his confidence that the universalism espoused on both the Jesuit and the Chinese sides of the cultural transaction must be the product of either blanket incomprehension or insincerity. Nevertheless, Li Chih-tsao's syncretistic manifesto, even if moulded by the political pressures which inevitably shape Chinese Christian writings of the seventeenth century, provides ample confirmation of the need to approach his construal of Aristotelian writings with every caution.

42. E.g. in his anti-Stoic polemic Alexander adduces the evidence of widespread convictions, as a good Peripatetic should; but he unselfconsciously appeals not to Aristotelian ἐνδοξα, but rather to Hellenistic ἐνάργεια and κοιναὶ ἐννοίαι (ὅτι μὲν γὰρ παρὰ τὰ ἐναργῆ, δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ πεπιστεῖσθαι μὲν σχεδὸν ὑπὸ πάντων ἰδιωτῶν τε καὶ φιλοσόφων τὸ γίνεσθαι τινα καὶ αὐτομάτως καὶ ἀπὸ τύχης ... (*De fato*, p. 172, in *Supplementum Aristotelicum* 2.1–2 (Berlin, 1887), ed. I. Bruns); λέγεται δὴ πρὸς ἀπάντων ἀνθρώπων κοιναῖς τε καὶ φυσικαῖς ἐννοίαις ἐμμενόντων ταῦτα ἀπὸ τύχης τε καὶ αὐτομάτου γίνεσθαι, ἃ αἰτιαὶ ἄλλων τινῶν ποιητικαῖς προηγουμένας ἐπιγίνεται (*ibid.*)). His

conception of the efficient cause, so far from being orthodox original Aristotelianism, is pervasively influenced by Stoic causal theory.

43. This generalisation, omnipresent in the literature, is based on the prefaces appended to Christian works and largely anecdotal evidence. However, my reading of the *Ming Li T'an* already suggests a degree of finely detailed correspondence between Latin original and Chinese translation, as well as quite precise modification in certain passages, which might very well call for a reassessment of how the missionaries worked with the literati.

44. *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*, 10–11, 18, 27.

45. *Ibid.*, 14.

46. *Ibid.*, 20.

47. *Ibid.*, 28.

48. *Ibid.*, 20.

49. *Ibid.*, 35.

50. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

51. E.g. 'nam quia & oculos videre, & aures audire, & os manducare, & c. omnes sunt exterioris hominis seu corporis functiones; id vero, quo organa illa functiones eiusmodi recte vel male præstant, est animus; utique hoc non constante sibi, etiam illa officio suo recte fungi non poterunt' (*ibid.*, 16).

52. *Ibid.*, 40; disturbingly coupled with 'lege naturali', 48.

53. See Angus Graham, 'Textual problems', in *Later Mohist logic, ethics and science* (London, 1978) 73–110.

54. However, even the western heirs of Aristotelianism managed to produce some startling linguistic *exotica* when they set about issuing logical manuals in the vernacular, e.g. this remarkable bit of 'English' from the militant Anglo-Saxon Raphe Lever: 'Gaynsaying shewsayes are two shewsayes, the one a yeasaye and the other a naysaye, changing neither foreset, backset nor verbe' (*The arte of reason, rightly termed witcraft* (1573); reference from W. and M. Kneale, *The development of logic* (Oxford, 1962) 299).

55. *In universam dialecticam*, 302.

56. *Ming Li T'an*, 251.

57. See Angus Graham, *Later Mohist logic, ethics and science*, 29–30, and *Disputers of the Tao*, 140–1.

58. *In universam dialecticam*, 289–90.

59. I am not denying that *t'i* can and does bear some specialised sense(s) in various philosophical contexts. For example, Hui Shih's phrase 天地一體也 ('heaven and earth are one *t'i*' (*Chuang-tzu*, ch. 33)) might very well be translated 'heaven and earth are one unit / count as one' (as by Angus Graham (*Later Mohist logic, ethics and science*, 266)) rather than 'heaven and earth are one body'. Again, the Mohist dialecticians carefully attribute a precise technical meaning to *t'i* in the *Canons and explanations*: A2, 體, 分於兼也 ('A *t'i* (unit/individual/part) is a portion in a *chien* (total/collection/whole)' (*op. cit.*, 265)); *t'i* then recurs in the fascinating series of mathematical definitions which follow, clearly bearing a determinate technical sense (e.g. A61, 'the *tuán* (starting-point) is the unit (*t'i*) without dimension which precedes all others' (*ibid.*, 310)). My point is rather that there are no grounds whatsoever for supposing that *t'i* has a single *fixed* special sense throughout the Chinese philosophical tradition (clearly it does not); and that in the absence of clear contextual indications to the contrary, it is always reasonable to suspect that it does just mean 'body' or 'limbs'. Consider the current witticism about the fate of Hong Kong after reunification: will its decadent publishers issue *Playboy* in 簡體字, 'simplified characters', or 繁體字, 'complex characters'? Hong Kong and Taiwan

have not adopted the simplified graphs introduced on the mainland; the joke turns on the employment of *t'i* = 'shape' in the neologisms for the two types of graph, with the suggestion that the Communist authorities might wish to modify the *t'i* of the pornographic photographs.

60. *Ming Li T'an*, 292.

61. Gernet illustrates his linguistic relativity with a claim of immediate relevance: '... for the Chinese, whose language lacked inflections, the abstract concept of substance could not have the same logical necessity as it did for the European missionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who were accustomed to use languages which regularly made a distinction between the adjective and the noun and who were heirs to a long scholastic tradition. To express the notions of substance and accident which were vital in proving the Christian truths and without which the missionaries considered it to be impossible to think correctly, Matteo Ricci had been obliged to resort to circumlocutions, translating substance as "that which is established of itself" (*tzuli-che*) and accident as "that which depends upon something else" (*ilaiche*). From the Chinese point of view the distinction was gratuitous and artificial since in their language nothing of the kind was suggested' (*China and the Christian impact*, 243). Ricci's 'circumlocution' for substance is precisely the binome 自立 (*tzu li*); but Gernet's claim that the distinction between substance and accident could make little or no sense to the Chinese, as a consequence of purported linguistic structure, is entirely unwarranted. This is an unfortunately influential instance of making the most gross generalisations about 'the Chinese point of view' without any scrap of logical, linguistic or textual evidence.

62. *In universam dialecticam*, 304.

63. *Ming Li T'an*, 289.

64. *In universam dialecticam*, 300.

65. *Ibid.*, 304.

66. *Ibid.*, 300.

67. *Ming Li T'an*, 290.

68. 在你不能言說的詩候，你應當保持沈默。

69. The comparativist scope of this topic far exceeds my meagre scholarly resources, and could only be attempted by drawing on the immense scholarship of kindly and generous colleagues. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the help of my collaborator Christoph Harbsmeier, who initially brought the *Ming Li T'an* to my attention. For help on matters logical, philological, sinological, Aristotelian and scholastic, I am heavily indebted to Catherine Atherton, Charles Aylmer, Nicholas Denyer, Desmond Henry, Jill Kraye, Mark Lewis, David McMullen, David Mungello, and Anthony Pagden. I am also grateful to the British Academy and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for my participation in their exchange scheme; they made possible a research trip to China which provided the initial inspiration for this work.