

‘White horse not horse’  
An Analysis of Modern Interpretative Approaches to  
Kung-sun Lung’s *White Horse Discourse*

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written by

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## Abstract

This thesis provides an analysis of the assumptions and methods of modern, English interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*, an ancient text attributed to the Chinese philosopher Kung-sun Lung (ca. 320-250 B.C.E.), in which he argues for the paradoxical claim that a white horse is not a horse. It places these in the context of cross-cultural philosophy and examines them from the angles of comparison, hermeneutics, post-colonialism and methodology. Doing so, it can be shown that the majority of these interpretations are based on a Western perspective, indicate little reflection on hermeneutic issues, and have some attention for post-colonial perspectives but offer no satisfactory way of moving beyond the Western perspective. Moreover, they can be roughly divided into two groups, namely those whose aim it is to recover Kung-sun Lung's original thought, and those who focus on understanding the text in a way that makes sense for a modern reader. While the former aim may seem to be more fair, it relies on problematic assumptions regarding the existence and accessibility of the original thought of Kung-sun Lung. The second aim appears to be more in line with a hermeneutic view of interpretation, which may be compatible with the demand to remedy Western thought's undue prominence in cross-cultural philosophy. A hermeneutic, post-colonial view would require that prejudice in interpretation be brought to light rather than entirely banished, since that would not be possible. Finally, this thesis shows that covert assumptions about the nature of rationality underlie interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*.

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# Introduction

The *White Horse Discourse* is an ancient text attributed to the Chinese philosopher Kung-sun Lung (ca. 320-250 B.C.E.), in which he argues for the paradoxical claim that a white horse is not a horse<sup>1</sup>. This text is of considerable importance to the research on classical Chinese logic. It has been widely studied by both Chinese and Western scholars. The last sixty years in particular have seen a surge in research, during which many interpretations in English have been given. While there is an ongoing discussion regarding the content of these interpretations, the study and comparison of their methodology has not received as much attention. Similarly, the impact of the language in which these interpretation are written, English, has largely not been thematised. In this thesis, we analyse the methodological approaches and assumptions of these contemporary<sup>2</sup>, English interpretations, which we regard as pieces of cross-cultural philosophy.

In **Chapter 1**, we consider some relevant questions about interpretation in cross-cultural philosophy from a general point of view. We do so along four axes. The first of these is the comparative element of cross-cultural philosophy: we discuss how comparison and its aims are defined in the context of cross-cultural philosophy. The second axis is philosophical hermeneutics: we present the concepts of prejudice, tradition and the hermeneutic circle, as well as a reflection on the role of language and, in particular, translation in cross-cultural interpretation. We then consider a post-colonial perspective, which questions the underlying cultural assumptions in modern Western interpretations of Chinese philosophy. Finally, we look at the methods and goals of cross-cultural interpretation.

Then, in **Chapter 2**, we give a comprehensive overview of the existing modern interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* written in English. After briefly outlining the Discourse in its historical context, we present different interpretations. The first group relies on the opposition between realism and nominalism, and attribute one of these two doctrines to Kung-sun Lung. An-

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<sup>1</sup>The full English translation of the text can be found in Section 2.2 in Chapter 2 and the Chinese original is given in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup>By ‘contemporary’, we mean, roughly, produced in the past century. Indeed, the oldest interpretation mentioned here, [Hu, 1922], dates back to 1922. However, the majority of the texts considered in this thesis were written after 1990. We use the word ‘modern’ in a similar way.

other interpretation discussed is mereological: ‘white’ and ‘horse’ are then seen as parts of the whole ‘white horse’. Some other interpretations studied can be more closely connected to issues in the modern philosophy of language, such as Frege’s distinction between sense and reference. Lastly, we discuss some more formal, mathematics- or logic-based interpretations.

Following this, in **Chapter 3** we offer a comparison of the different interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* based on their assumptions regarding cross-cultural interpretation. In **Chapter 4**, we investigate in which ways the interpretative methods and assumptions the ‘interpreters’ make use of impact their proposed readings of the text. In both of these chapters, we follow the same structure as in Chapter 1, i.e. we first discuss elements of comparison between Kung-sun Lung and Western philosophy, then insights from hermeneutics and the ways in which authors do or do not reflect on these, then the view of the interpreters on Western influence on their work, and finally their methodology.

In **Chapter 5**, we connect this discussion to broader questions related to cross-cultural interpretation. We begin by discussing the tension between the hermeneutic tradition and post-colonialism in their respective treatment of prejudice and ask whether they can be reconciled. Then, we examine the idea of an original object, or the original thought of a writer, and the possibility of its recovery by the interpreter. Finally, we ask whether a continuity can be established between Kung-sun Lung’s rationality and a contemporary reader’s, and what this might entail. In **Chapter 6**, we give our opinion on these three questions, and we then reflect on the shortcomings and merits they reveal for the interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* studied here.

Before starting, four short remarks are in order. The first one concerns our choice of literature. In this thesis, we mention several interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*, and focus on ten of these, which, together, span the space of interpretations on the text. We have tried to include texts by both Western and non-Western scholars, while keeping in mind that we only consider English texts, and by writers of different genders. However, the latter has proved difficult. Indeed, it is perplexing that, while numerous interpretations of the Discourse have been produced, virtually none has been given by women, although they have mentioned the Discourse in works on related topics<sup>3</sup>. Curiously, to our knowledge, analyses devoted entirely to the Discourse have been published only by men. It must also be noted that none of the interpretations we study here mentions a possible gendered dimension in the process of understanding.

The second remark concerns the frequent use of words such as ‘Western’ or ‘Chinese’ to refer to philosophical traditions in this thesis. While using these terms is useful and necessary to the discussion provided here, it is important to keep an awareness of their limitations and problematic aspects. Indeed, there can be no clear, unequivocal distinction between Western and Chinese philosophy, nor is each of these a completely uniform, homogeneous tradition. Following Edward Said’s analysis, we understand the idea of the ‘West’ as some-

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<sup>3</sup>See for instance [Garrett, 1993] and [Geaney, 2010].

thing that does not have any “ontological stability” but, rather, is “an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence” [Said, 2003, p.5]. Similarly, Chinese philosophy is understood here as a tradition of thought.

Thirdly, in the process of writing this thesis, it has come to our attention that there exists an article from 2006, *The White Horse Dialogue – the methodological problems of the comparative research of Chinese and Western logic*, which appears to have similar aims as our project [Sikora, 2006]. Unfortunately, while a translation of the title and some extracts is provided, the article itself is written in Polish and has not been translated in English. However, as the article only treats the interpretations of Janusz Chmielewski, Chad Hansen and Christoph Harbsmeier, whereas this thesis analyses these in addition to several other interpretations, we trust that this thesis contributes something new to the discussion.

As a final remark, we realise that, in its attempt to analyse interpretations, this thesis itself is an interpretation as well. The same comments that we make regarding the interpretations discussed can be applied to the thesis as a whole. Among other things, this thesis is, like any interpretation, situated and determined by our background, which is roughly in Western philosophy and mathematics. Relatedly, the word ‘we’ is often used in this thesis, sometimes to refer to its author, and sometimes to refer to both its author and intended audience. Although we recognise the limitations and problems of this assumption, the ‘we’ that addresses both author and audience here supposes them to be situated in, or familiar with the Western philosophical tradition.

# Chapter 1

## Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Philosophy

In this thesis, we are interested in interpretation taking place in the context of cross-cultural philosophy, sometimes also called comparative philosophy<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, as we will discuss shortly, insofar as the interpretations studied here are English-written, contemporary analyses of an ancient Chinese text, they can be viewed as pieces of cross-cultural philosophy. The aim of this first chapter is to introduce some general approaches and issues related to interpretation in this field in order to set the ground for our study of interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*.

One might think that the study of ancient Chinese texts, and interpretations thereof, is about ancient Chinese philosophy only and that, as such, it does not necessarily entail any cross-cultural comparison. However, it is important to take the situatedness of philosophical enquiry into account. In [MacIntyre, 1988], Alasdair MacIntyre explains that philosophical traditions are closely tied to languages, which themselves are related to a social community with a culture and common beliefs. In the case of ancient Chinese philosophy, this culture is foreign to modern philosophers, both Western and Chinese, although to varying degrees, because it is spatially or temporally very remote. Interpretation of ancient Chinese texts is always done from a certain perspective, within a certain context, which today is indisputably different from that of the origin of the interpreted text. In order to understand these texts, modern philosophers have no choice but to start from what they already are familiar with, which is inherently tied to modern philosophical traditions. It is in this sense that, when interpreting ancient Chinese texts today, we do necessarily engage in comparative philosophy. The present chapter elucidates this idea further.

This chapter provides a general theoretical background with which the vari-

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<sup>1</sup>In this thesis we will use both terms interchangeably. We note that they do not represent one strictly delineated field; in our understanding, any work involving at least two different traditions, regardless of its asserted aim, falls under the scope of cross-cultural philosophy.

ous interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* can be analysed. Our focus is on issues in cross-cultural philosophy that are particularly pertinent to Western readings of ancient Chinese philosophy. For this, we draw on the elaborations of a Western-Chinese comparative philosophy, notably proposed by Deng, Jenco, and Ma. In order to understand the complex influence history, and more particularly historic power dynamics, may have on these readings, we draw particular inspiration from Gadamer's hermeneutics and its inflection in post-colonial approaches, such as Berger's. We discuss the notion of comparison, its connection with interpretation, and some general questions and issues applying to cross-cultural philosophy that this raises. That being said, many points discussed here concern in particular the comparison of Western and Chinese philosophy, and may not be as relevant to the comparison of other traditions.

We begin by elaborating on the definition of the comparative element of cross-cultural philosophy and its aims. In Section 1.2, we discuss more precisely how comparison and interpretation are connected. For this purpose, we introduce the field of philosophical hermeneutics and give an overview of the concept of the hermeneutic circle and the role of the notions of prejudice and tradition in interpretation. Since we will study an example of Western-Chinese cross-cultural philosophy, we believe it is relevant to consider the status of Western philosophy and its relation to other traditions. Given that the history of Western-Chinese relations, especially since the 19th century, is mired in and shaped by colonial dynamics, it seems necessary to render explicit their influence on Western interpretative traditions. Hence, the next section asks what a more critical, post-colonial perspective may tell us about issues in comparative philosophy. The last section investigates which particular methods are used in cross-cultural philosophy.

Before starting, a short note on the notion of tradition is in order. In this chapter and later on in the thesis, we often use the idea of philosophical traditions, such as the ancient Chinese or the Western one. As with the idea of Chinese or Western philosophy, which we discussed in the introduction, we acknowledge that there can be no clear delimitation between different traditions and that the Western as well as the Chinese tradition can be thought of as containing many different traditions (e.g. British empiricism, German idealism, Confucianism, Mohism, etc.). While the notion of tradition as used in this broad sense may strike one as somewhat superficial, it still is a helpful tool for the purpose of presenting several issues concerning this topic. Hence, we use it while also keeping in mind that these traditions are neither absolute or essential nor uniform.

## 1.1 Comparison

Many scholars have proposed comparisons of different traditions, texts and philosophers. In contrast, there is relatively little reflection on the methodology and the characterisation of comparison within cross-cultural philosophy. In recent years, however, more attention has been paid to underlying issues in

methodology, possibly due to, among other things, a general interest in post-colonialism and gender. In this section, we present different authors' views on what comparison is, as well as what it should be and aim towards.

### 1.1.1 Defining Comparative Philosophy

Authors who attempt to define the process of comparison in comparative philosophy seem to agree that it involves at least two objects, which must have some similar, if not common, qualities that may be compared. In [Weber, 2014], Ralph Weber calls these objects the 'comparata' and the respect in which they are compared the 'tertium comparationis'. He further presents comparison as a four components process:

“(1) a comparison is always done by someone, (2) at least two relata (comparata) are compared, (3) the comparata are compared in some respect (tertium comparationis), and (4) the result of a comparison is a relation between the comparata on the basis of the chosen respect.”  
[Weber, 2014, p.152]

The first point, namely the attention to *who* is performing the comparison, and additionally *when* this person does so, will be relevant to the next sections of this chapter.

In [Deng, 2010], Xize Deng presents an approach to defining comparative philosophy that at first sight looks very scientific and analytic : he writes about the “results” of interpretation being “measured” [Deng, 2010, p.579] against each other, for instance. Like Weber, he maintains that comparison must be between two objects, more precisely, with a restricted *domain*. However, he adds to these a third necessary element, namely a clearly established standard. Interestingly, this standard is not only a standard of measurement, such as meters or kilograms, but also a standard of evaluation. For instance, the objects may be a tortoise and a hare, the common domain may be speed of movement, and the standard may be ‘the faster the better’.

### 1.1.2 Aims of Comparative Philosophy

While the definition of comparison in comparative philosophy is relatively uncontroversial, the aims of the discipline are subject to disagreement. Should comparative philosophy attempt to prove the superiority of one tradition over another? Should it help us understand each tradition, separately, better? Should it suggest ways in which each tradition may grow? Or should we hope to ultimately arrive at one all-encompassing philosophy?

Deng's idea of a standard of evaluation suggests that, according to his definition of comparison, one of the two compared objects is to be judged to be superior to the other. This is apparent in the choice of connoted terminology in his examples of what may constitute the standard for comparison: “Which is more delicious (...) or more beautiful, more suitable (...)?” [Deng, 2010,

p.577]. This is noteworthy, particularly so when one thinks of comparing aspects of Western and Chinese philosophy for instance – is it really desirable to suppose and establish that one is superior to the other? Must comparison always involve evaluation, be it explicit or implicit? The idea that comparative philosophy should establish the superiority of some traditions over others may have had some prominence in the past, but in the present, post-colonial era it is often viewed critically and hence at least not expressed explicitly. Deng appears to be aware of this problem, and later writes that we may view objects of comparison as complementary while preferring one over the other for some respects and vice-versa for some others.

An alternative objective would be the creation of one global philosophy. This has recently been discussed under the term ‘fusion philosophy’. The idea behind it is that comparative philosophy is drifting towards a global philosophy encompassing aspects of the different traditions studied and putting them in dialogue. This is defended by Mark Siderits, Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber, among others [Levine, 2016] [Chakrabarti and Weber, 2015]. Chakrabarti and Weber write that fusion philosophy avoids running into evaluative claims of superiority of certain traditions over others. It is up to the reader, or comparer, to determine not which traditions come closer to truth, but, rather, which traditions best fit a given problem to be solved: “Fusion philosophy makes use of different traditions (or rather different philosophical standpoints) in a consciously methodological or instrumental fashion”, they write; “The comparer appropriates the variety of philosophical standpoints and eventually transcends the borders between them” [Chakrabarti and Weber, 2015, p.19]. This entails, among other things, that it is then justified, and even desirable in case this proves most useful, to use modern philosophical methods and concepts to interpret ancient texts. Indeed, insofar as traditions are used instrumentally in order to answer philosophical questions, what matters is that we ask which tradition is most suitable to a given question; if it happens that using modern set theory is the best way to understand ancient Chinese texts, then modern set theory is indeed what we should use, even though it is foreign to those texts.

In a globalising world, one may wonder if all philosophical traditions will, or should, merge into one ‘fusion philosophy’ at some point in the future. Whether or not fusion philosophy should eventually replace comparative philosophy is subject to disagreement. Michael Levine, for instance, is quite critical of the idea:

“fusionists are really fis-sion-ists. Fission involves a breaking down of the larger into the smaller to give off energy (or in this case philosophical insight), while fusion involves bonding the smaller into something larger for the same end. Fusionists are not bonding various views and positions together, but are instead mining those traditions on behalf of positions they already hold or are developing.”  
[Levine, 2016, p.237]

One could indeed argue that, although fusion philosophy presents itself as collecting aspects of different traditions, what it really does is splitting up these

traditions in different parts –thus assuming that these parts can be understood without any reference to other aspects of the tradition, an assumption that is questionable –and selecting which parts are relevant. In this sense, fusion philosophy does involve evaluation of which (parts of) traditions are best – the evaluation is merely relocated: its objects being now aspects of traditions rather than traditions as wholes. Hence, fusion philosophy may in fact have the covert aim of determining superiority of certain traditions, or aspects thereof. Furthermore, Levine denounces issues of appropriation and piracy in fusion philosophy. As we will see in the section on post-colonial aspects of cross-cultural philosophy, these issues suggest that the enterprise of fusion philosophy is indeed not without risks.

Now that we have a clearer picture of the process of comparison and its aims in comparative philosophy, we examine its connection with interpretation. To do this, we turn to the field of philosophical hermeneutics, which provides a helpful framework for understanding interpretation in terms of comparison.

## 1.2 Hermeneutics

While hermeneutics is not traditionally part of cross-cultural philosophy, there have been attempts to bridge the two disciplines. In [Berger et al., 2017], Donald Berger uses hermeneutic concepts to suggest ways in which cross-cultural philosophy could be improved. Here we introduce some notions of hermeneutics that are useful for understanding interpretation and its connection with comparison.

Comparative philosophy, just like any kind of philosophy, involves interpretation of texts, authors, etc. Conversely, interpretation involves a form of comparison, as it requires the interpreter, in a way, to *compare* a new text with their<sup>2</sup> initial knowledge and conceptions. For instance, when reading the sentence ‘a white horse is not a horse’, we compare it to our knowledge that a white horse is normally considered to be a horse, and this contrast between our initial knowledge and the sentence will orient our understanding of the text. To make this idea more precise, we introduce philosophical hermeneutics. We do not aim to give a comprehensive presentation of the field but, rather, present the aspects that are relevant to this thesis.

We note, before starting, that the term ‘hermeneutics’<sup>3</sup> can be understood in roughly two different ways: referring to either aspects broadly connected to interpretation, or to a particular academic field, namely Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, presented in [Gadamer, 2013] among other texts. It is the latter that we discuss here<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>In this thesis, we use ‘they’ (and correspondingly ‘their’) as a gender-neutral singular pronoun.

<sup>3</sup>The term originates from the title of Aristotle’s work on propositions *Peri hermeneias*, which was translated as *De Interpretatione* in Latin. Propositions, which are the form of expression or utterances, can be seen as the translations of inner thought into words and, in this sense, reflect an interpretative process [Grondin, 1994, p.21].

<sup>4</sup>For the rest of this thesis, we will use the term ‘hermeneutics’ only in the latter sense.

### 1.2.1 Prejudice and Tradition

The field of hermeneutics, as it is known today, is mostly attributable to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002 C.E.), who proposed a theory of interpretation, viewed as understanding. Prejudice and tradition were two important concepts he used for this. The idea of prejudice, as it is commonly used, often has a negative connotation: it is often assumed that prejudice impairs understanding and that it should be avoided. In Gadamer's approach, however, prejudice ('Vorurteil') is seen in a more positive light. It can be understood as a 'pre-judgement' or a background of conceptions that one has prior to interpretation:

“Actually “prejudice” means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined.”  
[Gadamer, 2013, p.283]

For instance, before interpreting the *White Horse Discourse*, we may have certain ideas about philosophy, ancient texts or Chinese thought, and these will determine our initial judgement of the text, prior to reading it. Prejudice is shaped by such ideas, which need not be conscious. While it may be limiting in some cases, it is also necessary to interpretation: without any prior ideas about how one should read a text, or how a text may be connected to other concepts we are familiar with, understanding it would be very difficult, if not impossible. Thus, prejudice makes understanding possible and, in this sense, is to be seen positively. Prejudice is also inevitable: one always reads a texts with initial prejudice. It is also in this sense that it is necessary. However, while we may not be able to rid ourselves of prejudice entirely, there is still room to negotiate which prejudice should shape our interpretation. Indeed, prejudice is not fixed, as it changes over time and is questioned in new interpretations. In order to make this negotiation possible, the prejudice has to be rendered explicit: “There can be no question of merely setting aside one's prejudices; the object is, rather, to recognize and work them out interpretively” [Grondin, 1994, p.111].

Interpretation is influenced by individual prejudice but also by historicity and tradition. That is, interpretation takes place at a certain time in a certain context; it is influenced by tradition, which can be understood here, more broadly than involving just philosophical tradition, as what we are historically situated within.

“Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.” [Gadamer, 2013, p.302]

Making the influence of tradition visible is a constant process which can never be complete because understanding itself can be seen as the 'occurrence of tradition' [Grondin, 1994, p.116]. In the process of interpretation, tradition influences the reader but the reader also shapes tradition:

“Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the

evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves.”  
[Gadamer, 2013, p.305]

Hence, tradition is changing and determines understanding without permanently constraining it.

### 1.2.2 The Hermeneutic Circle

The issue of the hermeneutic circle has been articulated in various ways by different philosophers, but is it often taken to refer to the apparent circularity of the process of understanding. Indeed, the process of interpretation can seem circular: we cannot understand a text without placing it in the broader body of concepts we are familiar with, but the text itself may influence our future background and conceptions [Van Norden, 2011, p.231]<sup>5</sup>. Tradition and prejudice determine our initial conception – which corresponds to Heidegger’s notion of ‘Vorgriff’ – of a text, and, through the process of understanding, the text will, in turn, influence our prejudice and tradition. Gadamer describes the hermeneutic circle in the following way:

“The circle (...) describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition.” [Gadamer, 2013, p.305]

The idea of the hermeneutic circle thus illuminates the role of tradition in interpretation. As mentioned earlier, not only does tradition shape understanding, but understanding shapes tradition too. The ‘anticipation of meaning’ is thus not only a matter of individual prejudice, but also of common tradition. In this sense, hermeneutic interpretation does not endorse subjectivism: it is not only the reader, individually, but also tradition that determines the way in which a text is interpreted. Since hermeneutics considers interpretation as strongly influenced by prejudice and tradition, the role of authorial intention is usually downplayed, or at least not considered as important as it may be in the common view of interpretation.

It is also interesting to note that the hermeneutic circle is never complete or finished: it is an ongoing process. Understanding is influenced by tradition but also changes tradition: as we read and understand a text, we change our conceptions and thus take part in the shaping of traditions. If we read the same text a second time, we will interpret it in a different way, since tradition will have changed in the meantime, partly due to our first interpretation. This does not presuppose that there will ever be a final, best interpretation. Rather, it highlights the fact that interpretation and tradition are changing and influence each other, which is captured by the image of the circle.

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<sup>5</sup>Circularity can also be observed in the fact that, in order to understand the whole (text), one must understand its parts, but each part separately cannot be understood without reference to the whole. This is reminiscent of the connection between Frege’s principles of contextuality and compositionality.

In [Berger et al., 2017], Douglas Berger defines the hermeneutic circle as a problem:

“if we are bound, as the historical beings we are, to encounter other traditions at first through our own tradition’s language, conceptual framework and civilizational prejudices, then the likelihood of completely abandoning these in the attempt to “understand” another cultural tradition has but dim prospects.” [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]

To solve this ‘problem’, Berger argues for what he calls a hermeneutic expansion, that is, an expansion of our background so as to include more different traditions in it. We will come back to this idea later in the thesis.

We see that, while Gadamer saw prejudices as positive, Berger considers them as dangerous. While it is contentious that a completely neutral and prejudice-free perspective can be obtained at all, many interpreters (of the *White Horse Discourse* in particular, as we will see later) seem to suppose that their approach is neutral. Hermeneutics invites us to have a close look at our prejudice so as to make the interpretation more clear and transparent. This is, to a large extent, in line with the broad aim of this thesis.

The idea of the hermeneutic circle can be used directly to understand critical, post-colonial views on interpretation, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section. Leigh Jenco<sup>6</sup>, for instance, starts her article [Jenco, 2007] with the following quote:

“Dipesh Chakrabarty once concluded that it is “impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe” ”. [Jenco, 2007, p.741]

This may be seen as alluding to the hermeneutic circle, in connection with the hegemony of Western culture, which will be discussed in the next section. Jenco further writes about the possibility of a “conversion” [Jenco, 2007, p.753] of the interpreter, which may be understood as illustrating the inclusion of the text in the interpreter’s conceptions after interpretation has taken place.

### 1.2.3 A note on language and translation

A presentation of the issues at the intersection of hermeneutics and cross-cultural philosophy would be incomplete without a note on language and translation. Not only can the temporal and spatial distance to the culture of a text’s original context make it difficult to interpret, but also, importantly, the fact that it may be written in a language other than one’s mother tongue. In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, languages bear a history, a tradition and concepts, and they are related to other languages in diverse ways. For instance,

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<sup>6</sup>Jenco is a scholar in political science and presents her article as connected to political theory but, as the following paragraph should make clear, most of her points are applicable to philosophy as well.

English today has become the Lingua Franca of scientific research. On the other hand, only relatively few people can read Ancient Chinese. This impacts the relation between Ancient Chinese and English, the relevance of translations between the two languages and the interpretations thereof.

[Harbsmeier, 2019] and [Gobbo and Russo, 2019], for instance, take a critical stance towards the generalised use of English in philosophy. The former points out that English has been used as the default language in analytic philosophy, and that the impact this has on the content of analytic philosophy is not sufficiently recognised. The latter deplors the lack of epistemic diversity induced by the monopoly of English on academia. If the use of English has indeed had an impact on the content of analytic philosophy and this content forms the tradition which shapes interpretation, it seems reasonable to suggest that the use of English and a lack of epistemic diversity would equally have an impact on interpretation. In general, it is good to keep this in mind and to question *why* certain texts have been translated and how the language they were originally written in impacts their reception in other languages.

The idea of a conceptual scheme, discussed by Donald Davidson in [Davidson, 1973], is relevant to this issue. In his article, Davidson explores the idea that languages may be connected to conceptual schemes, implying that there may exist different conceptual schemes between which communication would be impossible. He refutes this idea, claiming that it would imply that some languages would be untranslatable. This refutation may be seen as going against relativism, namely the idea that concepts, truth, values or similar entities may be relative to one's personal conceptual scheme. It may also be viewed as an argument against the incommensurability of philosophical traditions. While this discussion suggests that there is a strong argument against untranslatability, it is important to remain critical of the process of translation, which in itself constitutes an act of interpretation. We will discuss this in more depth in Chapters 3 and 4.

Another relevant idea discussed by Davidson is the principle of charity. It can be defined in different ways, one of which being that this principle requires that we

“optimise agreement between ourselves and those we interpret, that is, it counsels us to interpret speakers as holding true beliefs (true by our lights at least) wherever it is plausible to do”. [Malpas, 2019]

This requires that the focus of interpretation be on how the reader can make sense of the text. Another principle sometimes used in interpretation is the principle of humanity. This principle requires that we conceive of the authors' beliefs and the meaning they confer to the text as similar to our own [Grandy, 1973, p.443]. Chad Hansen, whom we will come back to later, writes that

a “hallmark of the principle of charity is its focus on human similarity in psychology, desires, capacities, etc., the so-called “like us” explanation.” [Hansen, 2014, p.72]

We will see in later chapters how these principles are used in the interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* and how a hermeneutic perspective can help us understand these. We now turn to another perspective, namely the post-colonial one.

## 1.3 Post-Colonial Perspective

A consideration of political and cultural aspects is, arguably, not only informative but also necessary and inseparable from a discussion of cross-cultural philosophy involving the Western philosophical tradition. Cross-cultural philosophy sometimes involves direct comparison, as discussed in the first section, but also sometimes interpretation of texts from a tradition other than our own, for which we use concepts of a tradition we are familiar with. For the latter, comparison as such may not be the objective, but it is used as a tool, more or less explicitly. Insofar as comparison is used, we believe that the observations on comparison made in Section 1.1 are relevant in these cases too, although perhaps to a lesser extent.

### 1.3.1 The West as ‘Common Standard’

Deng shows a critical view towards the project of comparing Western and Chinese philosophy [Deng, 2010]. His demand for a strictly established common domain and standard in comparisons may appear too restrictive at first. He himself condemns questions of comparison that are open-ended. A question that would be open-ended according to Deng, might be ‘between Plato and Kung-sun Lung, who was more influential?’ and a question that would not be open-ended could be ‘between Plato and Kung-sun Lung, who produced more texts?’ One might think that it may very well be interesting to compare two texts in an open-ended way. However, Deng writes that often, philosophers compare Chinese and Western philosophy, taking these as the two objects, but doing so they – more or less implicitly – assume Western philosophy to be the common standard. Thus Chinese philosophy is understood with respect to how well it fits Western standards rather than on its own terms. Now, one may wonder how precisely one could take a completely external point of view: as discussed in the previous section, one always interprets from a certain standpoint. However, it seems possible to, at the very least, make oneself aware of Deng’s criticism and examine how our standpoint influences our interpretation. Deng also writes that understanding must precede comparison and that this is often a problem in comparative philosophy. According to him, Chinese philosophy is not understood well enough. Interestingly, he writes that Chinese philosophy *is* comparative philosophy. This claim is not explained in depth, but the reason for it appears to be that Chinese philosophy has, at least since the May Fourth Movement<sup>7</sup>, been defined in comparison with Western philosophy. If this is the

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<sup>7</sup>The May Fourth Movement was started by protests that took place in 1919 in China, where people demanded modernisation and an end to imperialism. It has been widely influential,

case, it renders difficult the idea of a comparison of, for instance, Confucius and Socrates, without taking the latter as the common standard. However, Chakrabarti and Weber argue that, while early comparative philosophy was indeed Western-centred, modern philosophers have tried to use other traditions as standards of comparison [Chakrabarti and Weber, 2015, p.20], although unfortunately they do not provide clear examples of such efforts. It is likely that, if such examples exist, they could be found in non-English literature.

### 1.3.2 Western Bias

Deng's view appears to be shared by Leigh Jenco in [Jenco, 2007], although she presents it in a different way. She writes that interpretation and comparison require an attention towards methods in order to do justice to the analysed texts. Indeed, like Deng, she writes that often cross-cultural engagement is biased towards the West. The reason for this is most likely traceable to historical power relations put in place by Western imperialism, which has positioned Western thought as the centre and basis of globalisation and defined other traditions in terms of it. In [Berger et al., 2017], Berger invites philosophers in cross-cultural interpretation to become aware of the bias inherited from colonialism and to move beyond it.

However, Jenco argues, even post-colonial approaches seem to walk into the trap of Western influence; although they are aware of hierarchical East-West power structures, they 'resolve' this issue using Western theories such as Marxism and Post-structuralism. Thus, their emancipatory effort remains within a Western framework. In Deng's words, the 'common standard' remains the Western one. This causes a failure to appreciate other traditions from within.

### 1.3.3 Western Influence on Chinese Philosophers

In [Ma, 2016], Lin Ma appears to agree with some of the points made by Deng and Jenco. Her focus is on the connection between Heidegger and Chinese philosophy, although many of her points seem applicable to Western-Chinese comparative philosophy generally. Interestingly, she notes that this connection has been studied more by scholars whose primary field of research is Chinese philosophy rather than Heideggerian philosophy. Relatedly, we note that many Japanese philosophers such as Nishitani Keiji have also studied Heidegger's philosophy extensively [Davis, 2019]. Ma's observation sets the tone for the broader direction of her article, i.e. to deplore the unilateralism of comparative philosophy. Indeed, she writes, while philosophers gladly borrow ideas from Heidegger to explain classical Chinese texts, very few, if any, start from Chinese concepts to interpret Heidegger. One interesting point she makes is that Western influence affects the very development of the Chinese philosophy, not only the Western view of it. That is, she writes, scholars in China can hardly escape the influence of the West:

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both politically and culturally [Van Norden, 2011, p.215-216].

“scholars of Chinese philosophy [should] become aware of both the explicit and implicit restrictions caused by the domination of Western ways of thinking, and cast off the practice of resorting to Western categories as the standard against which corresponding terms are to be elicited from Chinese sources.” [Ma, 2016, p.86]

This resonates with Deng’s claim that Chinese philosophy is comparative philosophy, as well as with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s quote<sup>8</sup>. One might argue against this that, while modern Chinese philosophy has been influenced by Western thought, this influence is not necessarily to be seen as a problem or as something that hides the ‘true’ Chinese thought. Indeed, in modern times, most traditions are, to lesser or greater extents, influenced by foreign traditions due to globalisation. Sometimes the influence is not obscuring a tradition but is, rather, actively re-appropriated by that tradition, as is the case with Marxism in China for instance. Ma does not seem to take this into account, and writes that pre-modern Chinese thought has been made inaccessible both to Western and Chinese scholars. According to Heidegger, she claims, it is not colonialism but globalisation that has caused this influence. In this sense, and also taking into account the differences in culture and language between ancient and modern China, it seems reasonable to speak of comparative philosophy when describing the enterprise of modern Chinese scholars interpreting ancient Chinese texts.

### 1.3.4 More Moderate Views

This line of thought on East-West comparative philosophy appears to be shared by many scholars, but it is far from being generally accepted. [Liu and Seligman, 2011], for instance, presents a more balanced view on the question of unilaterality. When pondering whether Chinese and Western logic might be better conceived as two different kinds of logic, the authors write the following:

“is this categorization of subject matter an essentially moribund imposition of Western concepts on a foreign culture? This latter view is resisted even by prominent Chinese thinkers.” [Liu and Seligman, 2011, p.11]

While, similarly to Deng and Ma, they recognise that “the intellectual frontiers in China today are drawn by individuals well versed in Western intellectual tradition” [Liu and Seligman, 2011, p.11], thus suggesting that they acknowledge the prominence of Western methods, the authors do not take this as an indication that Western methods should be left aside. Rather, they claim, “methods developed largely in the West can be used in a culturally neutral way, to reveal the operation of genuinely non-Western modes of thought” [Liu and Seligman, 2011, p.11]. In fact, this is not necessarily to be opposed to post-colonial efforts to address the Western bias often found in comparative philosophy. It is perhaps better understood as fitting Gadamer’s project to expose our prejudice

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<sup>8</sup>See Section 1.2.2.

and the methods we are familiar with, and to consciously use them, in a then more transparent way.

## 1.4 Methods and Goals

In this last section, we take a closer look at the specific methods and approaches different scholars advocate for cross-cultural philosophy.

### 1.4.1 A Focus on Methods

In [Jenco, 2007], Leigh Jenco argues that, in the enterprise of cross-cultural engagements, one should pay specific attention not only to the content but also, importantly, to the methods of the tradition of the text one is reading. Indeed, she claims, methods are often overlooked but in fact they shape, and are shaped by, content. Trying to understand content without looking at the methods therefore makes one's analysis prone to flaws and misunderstandings. This thesis stems from similar concerns: just like the methods of a given philosophical tradition shape its content (insofar as method and content can be separated), the interpretative methods of modern philosophy shape its content and essence, determining what is and is not philosophy, philosophical logic, etc.

### 1.4.2 A Focus on Practice

Jenco advocates an appreciation of texts in their own terms, without imposing concepts on them. However, one is then left with the difficult question of how precisely we are to appreciate texts 'from within'. Such appreciation appears inherently inaccessible; it is always from a certain perspective that we appreciate texts. Jenco proposes to look precisely at methods of other traditions. She gives the example of Wang Yangming and Kang Youwei, two scholars who studied classical Chinese texts by paying attention to methods. Wang Yangming (1472-1529 C.E.) proposes an interpretation of the Confucian canon embedded in practice. That is, not only does he read the classic texts, but in his daily life he also puts into practice the values presented in it:

“The Classics transcend mere texts. So too does their interpretation transcend the merely linguistic and formal, and extend to the knowledge gained through the actual daily practice of humanity (...), sincerity (...), and reciprocity (...), among other virtues.” [Jenco, 2007, p.748]

In this way, Wang gains a better understanding of the matters at hand. Wang's effort has been seen by certain scholars – although not by Jenco – as an interpretation that disregards the 'original meaning' of the text and instead focuses on how the reader can make the ideas of the text their own [Jenco, 2007, p.747]. Whether or not this is what Wang meant is questionable, but we will see in Chapter 3 that such a 'reader-centred' approach is often used in modern interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*.

### 1.4.3 Need for a Paradigm Shift

Ma argues for a paradigm shift in comparative philosophy rather than merely paying attention to methods. In order to move beyond the obscuring effect of Western influence, she recommends paying attention to the historical context of the studied text. The paradigm shift she recommends is concerned primarily with methods, but also connected to theory and interpretation. Other relevant aspects of her article [Ma, 2016] include the idea of using fields other than philosophy to understand texts in Classical Chinese. Indeed, the very concept of philosophy is laden with Western values and references, and perhaps other fields such as literature or history may be better suited to the texts and their associated culture and context. In a later chapter of this thesis, we will present Thierry Lucas' interpretation of ancient Chinese texts through modern mathematics. Another interesting point of Ma's article is the idea that there are three approaches to the study of ('other') traditions: a "faithful" interpretation of philosophers "along the lines of their own thinking" [Ma, 2016, p.93], a critical analysis of their ideas, and lastly an expansion of these ideas.

## 1.5 Summary

Before moving on to the next chapter, we briefly summarise what has been discussed so far. We argued that to interpret texts from time periods and philosophical traditions other than one's own is to engage in the project of cross-cultural philosophy. Often, this entails a form of comparison, usually between one's own philosophical tradition and that which one is interpreting. Deng's analysis suggested that, although comparison's elements and standards should be clearly identified, this is not always the case. As a result, Western philosophy is often taken as the covert standard of comparative philosophy. We also saw that comparison can be taken to have different aims. We elaborated the example of the aim of fusion philosophy, but also pointed to other possible objectives such as establishing superiority and understanding traditions, separately, better. Additionally, the hermeneutic concepts of prejudice, tradition and the hermeneutic circle can shed light on the ways in which interpretation functions and is connected to comparison. Moreover, the notion of tradition in particular is useful to understand cross-cultural interpretation. The discussion of post-colonial perspectives highlighted that the influence of Western thought on Chinese philosophy is generally recognised, although there is disagreement regarding the adequate position to adopt in consequence. Finally, the discussion on methodology and goals showed that some authors take the focus of interpretation to be a 'faithful' understanding of the text, while some others aim to make the ideas of the text their own.

In Chapter 3, we will see how these observations may help us understand the assumptions behind modern interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. Before that, we must first introduce these interpretations. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

# Modern Interpretations of the White Horse Discourse: an Overview

In this chapter, we present an overview of English-written interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. Another common way of referring to this text is by its main claim, ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’<sup>1</sup>:

白 馬 非 馬  
bái mǎ fēi mǎ  
white horse not horse

‘A white horse is not a horse.’

While there was a revival of interest for the Discourse in the eighteenth century, mostly thanks to the Qian-Jia school [Liu and Yang, 2010], most of the English literature on the topic was only produced in the last century. Here we start by briefly outlining the Discourse in its historical context, in a section about Kung-sun Lung and the School of Names. We then present different interpretations based on the question of realism against nominalism, namely those of Chad Hansen, Chung-Ying Cheng and Zhitie Dong. The following section is about A.C. Graham’s mereological interpretation. We then present less well known interpretations such as those of Whalen Lai and Kirill Ole Thompson, both of which can be connected to issues in modern philosophy of language. Lastly, we

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<sup>1</sup>An alternative transcription of the Chinese characters would be ‘báimǎfēimǎ’, emphasising the propositional aspect of the string of characters. ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’, contrastingly, indicates a view of the text as made up of different characters, of which each has its own meaning, as is the case for Classical Chinese as opposed to modern Chinese. While we do not aim to argue here that one transcription is better than the other, we choose the second option and will use it for the transcription of Chinese compound terms in this thesis, for the sake of clarity and convenience.

discuss more formal, mathematics or logic based interpretations such as those of Janusz Chmielewski, Thierry Lucas and Yiu Ming Fung.

This chapter aims to give a comprehensive overview of issues in the modern, English discussion on the *White Horse Discourse*. The texts presented here were chosen accordingly. It should also be noted that providing an evaluation of the different interpretations presented is not the aim of this chapter (nor is it the main aim of this thesis as a whole). Rather, we present an overview of different available interpretations and of the way these are connected to each other.

## 2.1 Kung-sun Lung and the School of Names

Kung-sun Lung<sup>2</sup> (公孫龍), (ca. 320-250 B.C.E.) lived in the state of Zhao during the Warring States Period<sup>3</sup>. He served as a strategic and political advisor to the powerful Lord of Pingyuan and often engaged in intellectual debates with other thinkers. The practice of debates, or ‘disputation’, was common to members of the School of Names (‘míng jiā’, 名家), of which Kung-sun Lung is generally considered to have been a member. Other influential thinkers of this school of thought include Hui Shi, Deng Xi and Yin Wen. While these thinkers engaged in common practices of argumentation and were interested in similar kinds of questions, they may not have considered themselves as being part of a common school of thought. The term ‘School of Names’ or ‘míng jiā’ was indeed not used before the Qin period (221-206 B.C.E.), well after Kung-sun Lung’s death. A more common way of referring to these thinkers at the time was ‘biàn zhě’, meaning ‘disputers’ or ‘debaters’ [Dong, nd]. Among the general themes and questions that were of interest to them were the relation between names (‘míng’, 名) and the objects they refer to in reality (‘shí’, 實)<sup>4</sup>, the ‘separation of hard and white’, and the issue of ‘deeming so the not-so’ or admissible the inadmissible. The ‘separation of hard and white’ problem refers to the idea, widely held at the time, that when two attributes, such as ‘hard’ and ‘white’, pervade each other, in a stone for instance, they cannot be separated. Separating them was considered a fallacy, or at least an uncommon way of reasoning. As we will see, Kung-sun Lung did distinguish them and, doing so, he acquired a dubious reputation. In the problem of ‘deeming so the not-so’, ‘so’ relates to things that are acceptable, whether logically or morally, and ‘not so’ to things that are not. Disputers were famous for making so the not-so through clever argumentation and use of language. For instance, Deng Xi would demonstrate that both sides

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<sup>2</sup>There is no generally agreed upon way to spell this name in English. The Wade-Giles transcription ‘Kung-sun Lung’ is frequently used in modern literature on the *White Horse Discourse*, but the Pinyin spelling ‘Gongsun Long’, as well as some alternative spellings, can be found too. For this thesis we will use the Wade-Giles transcription but we may also quote some authors who spell the name as Kungsun Lung or Gongsun Long.

<sup>3</sup>(479-221 B.C.E.)

<sup>4</sup>The term ‘School of Names’ stems from this interest for names. The word ‘names’ (‘míng’, 名) in ‘School of Names’ may be confusing. We note that ‘míng’ can be translated either as ‘name’ or as ‘noun’ [“Míng”, 2020]. The members of ‘míng jiā’ studied not only the relation between names and reality but also, more broadly, the relation between nouns (such as ‘horse’) and reality.

of an argument can be correct, and Hui Shi defended the thesis “I left for Yue today but arrived yesterday” [Van Norden, 2011, p.103]. In a way, Kung-sun Lung’s claim that ‘a white horse is not a horse’ (‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’) may also be seen as an attempt to make acceptable a statement that is apparently false.

The statements defended by the disputers, and in particular Kung-sun Lung’s ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’, may appear as mere flippant assertions that are trivially false. While we will see that scholars tend to consider the *White Horse Discourse* as an important, non-trivial philosophical work, there is some disagreement regarding how seriously Kung-sun Lung should be taken. For instance, Thierry Lucas, one of the authors we will discuss, writes that it “is not sure that we have to consider Gongsun Long’s “argumentation” more seriously than Lewis Carroll’s puzzles” [Lucas, 2012, p.186]. This does not imply that his work is worthless, as Lucas further notes: “those texts reveal much about their epoch and that their logical and sophistical structure is really worth being investigated” [Lucas, 2012, p.186]. Some scholars are more assertive than Lucas. Among these is Christoph Harbsmeier, who does “not find it historically plausible that Kung-sun Lung was (...) a brilliant and always coherent theoretician of logic advancing one consecutive logical demonstration” [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998, p.300]. Again, Harbsmeier does not think that Kung-sun Lung’s work is trivial. However, he emphasises that the disputers served not only as strategic advisers but also as intellectual entertainers. Some other authors argue that Kung-sun Lung should be taken entirely seriously. Among these is Whalen Lai, whom we will discuss later in this chapter.

Unfortunately, only a few writings of the thinkers of the School of Names remain to this day, and most of them are believed to be corrupted to a greater or lesser extent, either posteriorly altered in order to suit certain interpretations better or attributed to the wrong authors. Additionally, disagreements often arise regarding the order of the sentences of the texts. Indeed, texts were often written on bamboo strips held together by strings, which disintegrated over time, thus leaving unordered bamboo strips. The *White Horse Discourse*, found in the *Kung-sun Lung Tzi*<sup>5</sup>, a collection of texts presumably by Kung-sun Lung, is one of the few exceptions. Although there is still some disagreement among modern interpreters regarding the order of the paragraphs and which parts of the Discourse are to be attributed to which of the two characters of the dialogue, the Discourse as a whole is at least almost unanimously attributed to Kung-sun Lung. As a consequence, it has been widely studied and is considered a key source in the study of ancient Chinese thought and argumentation.

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<sup>5</sup>Again, there are different ways of transcribing this, among which *Gongsunlonzi*.

## 2.2 The White Horse Discourse

In this section, we give a translation of the *White Horse Discourse*<sup>6</sup>. A transcription of the text in Classical Chinese can be found in Appendix A. It is generally thought that it is to be seen as a dialogue between two opponents, presenting a number of arguments. One of them, here [A], defends that a white horse is a horse and thus represents commonly held beliefs. The other, [B], defends that it may be the case that a white horse is not a horse, and may be taken to represent Kung-sun Lung's own thought.

[A]: Can it be that a white horse is not a horse?

[B]: It can.

[A]: How so?

[B]: “Horse” is how the shape is named; “white” is how the color is named. That which names color does not name shape. Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse”.

[A]: Having a white horse cannot be said to be having no horses. Is not that which cannot be said to be having no horses a horse? Having a white horse is having a horse; how can a white one not be a horse?

[B]: Requesting a horse, a brown or a black horse may arrive; requesting a white horse, a brown or a black horse will not arrive. By making a white horse the same as a horse, what is requested [in these two cases] is the same. If what is requested is the same, then a white horse is no different to a horse; if what is requested is no different, then how is it that in one case brown and black horses are acceptable, and in the other they are not? Acceptable and unacceptable are clearly in opposition to each other. Thus brown and black horses are also one in that one can reply that there is a horse, yet one cannot reply that there is a white horse. It is clear indeed that a white horse is not a horse.

[A]: If a horse with color is not a horse, then since there are no colorless horses in the world, can it be that there are no horses in the world?

[B]: A horse necessarily has color; thus there are white horses. If one makes horses have no color, then there are merely horses – how can one pick out a white horse? Thus that which is white is not a horse. A white horse is horse and white, horse and white horse. Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse”.

[A]: A horse not yet with white is a horse, and white not yet with a horse is white. Combining horse with white, it is together named a

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<sup>6</sup>This translation is slightly adapted from the one provided by Donald Sturgeon, a modern scholar in Chinese philosophy, on the ‘Chinese text Project’, an online library of ancient Chinese texts [Sturgeon, ndb].

“white horse”. This is to use an uncombined name for a combined thing, and is inadmissible. Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse” is inadmissible.

[B]: Taking “having white horses is having horses”, is it admissible to say that having white horses is having brown horses?

[A]: No.

[B]: Taking their being horses as different to there being brown horses, is to take brown horses as different to horses. Taking brown horses to be different to horses, is to take it that brown horses are not horses. To take brown horses as not horses, and yet take white horses as being horses, is to have the flying in a pond and the inner and outer coffins in different places: a contradictory claim and misuse of statements as there is under heaven!

[A]: Having white horses cannot be called having no horses, this is what is meant by the separation of white. Not separating it, having white horses cannot be said to be having horses. Thus the reason why it is taken as having horses, is merely that “horses” are taken as “having horses”, and “having white horses” is not “having horses”. Thus on your taking it as having horses, one cannot call a horse a horse.

[B]: White does not fix what is white, this can be put aside. “White horse” speaks of white fixing what is white. That which fixes what is white is not white. “Horse” does not pick or exclude color, thus a brown or black horse can be brought. “White horse” does pick or exclude color; brown and black horses are excluded by color, thus only a white horse can be brought. That which does not exclude is not that which does exclude. Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse”.

It should be pointed out that, to a certain extent, interpretation already takes place in translation. For a simple example, we can look at the third sentence of the dialogue. It was translated as ‘how so?’ in the text just provided, but some other interpreters have a different translation. In [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998], for instance, Harbsmeier writes that the clever argumentation in the *White Horse Discourse* was not only an exercise in philosophical thought but also a entertaining act in which rhetoric played an important part. Hence, he writes, the *White Horse Discourse* is not to be interpreted as a purely mathematical demonstration; some parts are better explained as rhetorical elements. Consequently, he claims the third sentence in the dialogue (‘ho tsai’, 何哉?) can be translated as ‘how on earth?’ thus expressing not only questioning but also surprise.

The relation between translation and interpretation was problematised in the previous chapter and will be treated in more depth in the next chapters. With regards to this particular translation, it should be noted that not all sinologists agree on who of [A] and [B] says which portion of the last two arguments.

Not all interpreters use this specific translation. For this thesis, we take into account that translations vary and that this will naturally influence subsequent interpretations. We provide here a table of the translations used by the different authors discussed. It is notable that several authors do not state clearly which translation they use; we will come back to this issue in the next chapter.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Chad Hansen	Not clearly stated, presumably using his own translation
Zhitie Dong	Not clearly stated, presumably using his own translation into modern Chinese
Chung-Ying Cheng	Not clearly stated, presumably using his own translation
A.C. Graham ([Graham, 1986])	Gives his own translation
A.C. Graham ([Graham, 1989])	Gives his own, new translation
Whalen Lai	Graham's translation in [Graham, 1986, p.185-192]
Kirill Ole Thompson	Gives his own translation
Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz	Not clearly stated
Chmielewski	Not clearly stated, presumably using his own translation
Thierry Lucas ([Lucas, nd])	Translation given in [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998, p.298-326]
Thierry Lucas ([Lucas, 2012])	Fraser's translation in [Fraser, 2017]
Yiu Ming Fung	Translation "based on that of Graham [in [Graham, 1986] ] with minor revision"

As we will see in the next sections, different interpretations have different techniques. Some start from specific arguments directly. Some others are focused on the main claim 'bái mǎ fēi mǎ', asking first how this claim may be interpreted and then testing their hypothesis more or less rigorously against some of the arguments of the Discourse, asking how these arguments can make sense based on the interpretation of 'bái mǎ fēi mǎ'. When this is the case, interpreters may have some 'pre-interpretative' idea of what the text is about. To some extent, this must in fact always be the case, as the discussion on prejudice in the previous chapter has suggested.

## 2.3 Nominalistic against Realist Interpretations

A recurring theme among interpretations of the Discourse is the question of realism and nominalism. Did Kung-sun Lung see 'white horse' as an abstract universal?<sup>7</sup> Or did he understand 'white horse' as a concrete object?

<sup>7</sup>This is defended by Yu-Lan Fung, among others, in [Fung, 1966].

### 2.3.1 Hansen: Mass Nouns and Nominalism

In this regard, one of the most well-known interpretations of the Discourse is Chad Hansen's. In [Hansen, 1976], he argues for a nominalistic understanding of the text. That is, he rejects the idea that terms such as 'horse' and 'white horse' are to be understood as universals. He further claims that the concept of abstract universals was not part of ancient Chinese thought but is, rather, a Western concept that modern philosophers impose on their reading of the text. To support this claim, he looks at aspects of Classical Chinese and notes that most words semantically resemble English mass nouns more than universals. Mass nouns refer to objects that are uncountable such as water, sand and power. Under this interpretation, the word 'mǎ' (horse) is to be understood as the concrete mass of 'horse-stuff' spread over space and time rather than as the abstract universal 'horse'.

It seems it would naturally follow that 'white horse' is then to be understood as the concrete mass of 'white horse-stuff', but what this is exactly is less clear. One may think this is the mass of white horses. This is what Hansen would call a mass product: 'white horse' then refers to the intersection of the 'white-stuff' mass and 'horse-stuff' mass. However, there is another way to understand this, namely as a mass sum: 'white horse' then refers to the combination of the entire 'white-stuff' mass and 'horse-stuff' mass. The concept of mass sum may appear strange at first, for this is certainly not how compound terms would usually be understood in English. However, the following example may be helpful: in Kung-sun Lung's time, a word sometimes used was 'niú mǎ' (牛馬, draft animals) [Hansen, 1976, p.194]. If directly translated, 'niú mǎ' is equivalent to 'ox-horse', since 'niú' (牛) means 'ox' and 'mǎ' (馬) means 'horse', and draft animals indeed consisted of both oxen and horses. It was a common adage in Mohism, a school of thought that influenced the disputers, that 'ox-horse is not horse' [Fraser, 2018]. This resonates with 'white horse is not horse' and probably inspired Kung-sun Lung.

Hansen understands 'fēi' in 'bái mǎ fēi mǎ' as 'is not identical with' [Hansen, 1976, p.200]. He further writes that 'bái mǎ' can be understood either as a mass sum or as a mass product. On the one hand, if we understand it as a mass sum, then it makes sense that 'white horse is not horse', just like 'ox-horse is not a horse'. That is, the combination of the masses of horse-stuff and white-stuff is not identical to the mass of horse-stuff, just like the mass of draft animals is not strictly identical to the mass of horses. In [Fraser, 2017], Fraser points out that the words 'bái mǎ' (white horse) and 'niú mǎ' (ox-horse) seem to have the same syntax, which supports this hypothesis. On the other hand, if we understand 'bái mǎ' as a mass product, then we also must acknowledge that the product is not strictly identical to any of its components<sup>8</sup> and hence 'white horse is not horse'.

While this interpretation is very well-known, it is highly disputed and endorsed by virtually no other philosopher today. Indeed, the strong claims it

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<sup>8</sup>This was indeed a common thought at the time, connected to the doctrine of 'èr wú yī', which we will discuss shortly.

relies on have made it quite contentious. Chris Fraser, for instance, has argued that Hansen’s mass noun hypothesis is ill-founded because the ‘mass’ character of words is not absolute but depends on context: coffee, for instance, may function as a mass noun in some sentences and as a count noun in others [Fraser, 2007]. Besides the mass noun hypothesis, Hansen’s idea that thought is limited by language is also contested, by Chung-Ying Cheng among others [Cheng, 1983]. Some philosophers reject Hansen’s mass noun hypothesis but agree with him that a realist interpretation is not best. We will present one of them in the next section. Some other philosophers argue for a realist interpretation of the Discourse and disagree with Hansen’s view on the Classical Chinese language and mass nouns. Among these are Chung-Ying Cheng and Zhitie Dong, to whom we now turn.

### 2.3.2 Cheng’s Realist Interpretation

Chung-Ying Cheng is a scholar in Chinese philosophy working in the United States. In [Cheng, 1983], he argues that ancient Chinese thought was not nominalistic and hence that a realist interpretation of the Discourse is possible. He writes that people in Kung-sun Lung’s time did have the concept of class (‘lèi’, 類) and that we could take ‘fēi’ in ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’ as denying class equivalence. He also points out that Kung-sun Lung’s aim is to show that the statement ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’ is acceptable, not that it is necessary. This becomes apparent if one looks at the first two sentences of the dialogue: “[A] *Can it be*<sup>9</sup> that a white horse is not a horse? [B] It can” [Sturgeon, ndb]. Thus, Cheng argues that the *White Horse Discourse* is about showing that, if one understands ‘horse’ and ‘white horse’ as classes, it makes sense to claim that a white horse is not a horse.

Hansen would probably argue against this that such an understanding was not possible given the absence of the concept of abstract classes in ancient Chinese thought. This argument relies on the structure of the Classical Chinese language and thus presupposes that ontology is determined by language: if a language mostly contains nouns that do not grammatically function like abstract nouns, then the people using that language must not have had an abstract ontology. This is refuted by Cheng on two levels. Indeed, he does not only claim that there was in fact a concept of class, as is indicated by the word ‘lèi’, but he also argues against the view that language determines ontology:

“In fact, Kung-sun Lung’s philosophy shows that language is capable of receiving different logical and ontological interpretations and that there is no necessity for following one interpretation rather than another.” [Cheng, 1983, p.341]

The possibility of an abstract interpretation is supported by, among other things, the first argument of the discourse, where Kung-sun Lung talks about shape and colour. Cheng argues that:

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<sup>9</sup>Emphasis mine.

“insofar as white color and horse shape are not particulars, they can be alternatively construed as concretized universals (attributes or concepts), or classes (abstract universals).” [Cheng, 1983, p.341]

### 2.3.3 Dong: Realism and Connection to Other Works

More recently, Zhitie Dong has also defended a realist approach to the *White Horse Discourse* in [Dong, nd]<sup>10</sup>. Dong’s text is particularly valuable because it gives interesting insights about the text by placing it within Kung-sun Lung’s global thought as expressed in the *Kung-sun Lung Tzi*. Indeed, Dong connects the *White Horse Discourse* with other texts from Kung-sun Lung such as the *Discourse on names and reality* (*Míng shí lùn*, 名實論), the *Discourse on the explanation of change* (*Tōng biàn lùn*, 通變論) and the *Discourse on pointing and things* (*Zhǐ wù lùn*, 指物論).

The *Discourse on names and reality* is about the connection between míng (name/noun, 名) and shí (reality/object, 實). Dong explains that what may be called the law of non-contradiction, an idea that was common to ancient Chinese thought, is central in this text. Contrarily to what one may suppose, this does not refer to the law that two contradictory sentences cannot both be true, but is rather a law concerning nouns’ relation with reality. It states that, for a proper use of language, a noun should not have two different meanings or referents, but only one. In cases where a noun would have more than one referent, it then becomes necessary to ‘correct’ names, so as to attain the ideal of the law of non-contradiction.

In the *Discourse on the explanation of change*, Kung-sun Lung discusses the idea of ‘èr wú yī’,

二	無	—
èr	wú	yī
two not to have one		

‘two has no one’,

in which it is explained how two names can be combined together to create a new name, which names an object different from each of its compounds. For instance, cǐ yī (‘this one’, 此一) and bǐ yī (‘that one’, 彼一) can be conjuncted to form èr (‘two’, 二), which is not the same as either cǐ yī or bǐ yī.

In the *Discourse on pointing and things*, Kung-sun Lung discusses the connection between zhǐ (‘finger/pointing’, 指) and wù (‘thing’, 物). The meaning of zhǐ is unclear and open to debate among modern sinologists. Its original sense of ‘finger’ or ‘pointing’ is often extended to ‘concept’, presumably because concepts may be thought of as ‘pointing to’ objects. The word ‘wù’ stands for concrete, material objects. Dong distinguishes zhǐ from wù: “Things [wù] have objective

<sup>10</sup>Dong’s text, as well as Thierry Lucas’ ([Lucas, nd]), which we will discuss later, is a chapter in a book that is not published yet. Both may undergo slight changes before the final publication. We are grateful to the authors and the editors for allowing us to use these texts nevertheless.

existence in the world, so they are not identical to concepts [zhī]” [Dong, nd]. The main claim of the *Zhī wù lùn*, following the translation in [Dong, nd], is that

“there is no thing (wù) in the world that is without zhī, but this zhī is not zhi”.

This may be understood in the following way: there is no object that cannot be described or ‘pointed to’ by concepts, but concepts are not, themselves, the objects they point to. Here we see that, at least according to Dong, Kung-sun Lung observes a difference between concepts and concrete objects<sup>11</sup>.

Dong writes that we should understand the Discourse essentially as an outcome of the law of non-contradiction, the concept of ‘èr wú yī’ and the ideas expressed in the *Zhī wù lùn*. Regarding the law of non-contradiction, if a name can only name one thing, then ‘horse’ can only really name horses and not white horses. Regarding the èr wú yī, the combination of ‘white’ and ‘horse’ is neither equivalent to ‘white’ nor to ‘horse’. Finally, regarding the *Zhī wù lùn*, the concept of ‘horse’ is not equivalent to the concept of ‘white horse’ because the former ‘points’ to more things and thus has a larger scope than the latter. By relying on the idea of concepts and the distinction between these and concrete objects, Dong makes explicit that his interpretation of the Discourse relies on a conceptual view of ‘horse’, thus coming closer to realism than nominalism.

Additionally, an interesting point made in [Dong, nd] is that the claim that a white horse is not a horse was defended not only by Kung-sun Lung but also by other thinkers of the time, although it was him who gave the formal argumentation for it.

## 2.4 A.C. Graham’s Mereological Interpretation

A.C. Graham is an influential, Western scholar in Chinese philosophy. He is described by Harbsmeier as “the leading scholar of Kungsun Lung” [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998, p.299]. When it comes to the *White Horse Discourse*, Graham somewhat agrees with Hansen that it is not adequate to resort to the concept of abstract universals to describe Kung-sun Lung’s thoughts. His interpretation, however, is quite different from that of Hansen, although not necessarily incompatible with it. In [Graham, 1989], he proposes to interpret the paradox in terms of mereology, i.e. the study of how wholes relate to their parts and vice-versa. Indeed, the term ‘white horse’ may be understood as a whole, of which ‘white’ and ‘horse’ are two parts. This may not be the most intuitive interpretation for modern readers, who would presumably be more

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<sup>11</sup>The idea that ‘this zhī is not zhi’ may be compared to Gottlob Frege’s claim that the concept horse is not a concept [Frege, 1951]. It appears this connection is not explored in Dong’s text or in the rest of the literature studied here. Perhaps we can understand ‘this zhī’ as an (abstract) object, like ‘the concept horse’, and ‘is zhī’ as a concept, like ‘is a horse’. Since an object cannot be a concept, we then have ‘this zhī is not zhi’, just like ‘the concept horse is not a concept’.

inclined to see ‘horse’ as an object and ‘white’ as its attribute, rather than seeing both ‘horse’ and ‘white’ as equivalent kinds of words (in the term ‘white horse’, that is). However, it is possible that this intuition was not common in ancient China or, otherwise, that Kung-sun Lung aimed to present a new way of understanding compound terms such as ‘white horse’.

Graham supports his view with an analogy to swords. Swords are made of two components: a blade and a hilt. Just like a sword is not a blade, which seems intuitive enough, a white horse is not a horse. Arguably, this example is slightly misleading because the blade and the hilt components are spatially distinct. They do not pervade each other in a sword in the same way that whiteness and ‘horseness’ do in a white horse. Yet, perhaps this is precisely what Kung-sun Lung had in mind: in a sword the blade component and the hilt component can be distinguished, and so the ‘white’ and ‘horse’ components of ‘white horse’ should be distinguishable as well. This is plausible because Kung-sun Lung was famous for ‘separating hard and white’, the paradigmatic example of qualities pervading each other (usually in a stone).

Graham’s interpretation has the advantage that it would be directly in line with one of the first sentences of the Discourse:

“ ‘Horse’ is how the shape is named; ‘white’ is how the color is named. That which names color does not name shape. Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse”. ” [Sturgeon, ndb]

Indeed, one sees here that ‘horse’ is thought of as a shape rather than an object. Note that the idea of seeing ‘horse’ as an attribute rather than an object is not new<sup>12</sup>. According to Yiu Ming Fung, this idea was already present in Hu Shi’s interpretation of the *Kung-sun Lung Tzi*<sup>13</sup>.

Graham’s interpretation, along with Hansen’s, has been very influential in the contemporary English discussion on the Discourse. Most subsequent analyses mention at least one of these two, whether they agree with them or find them inadequate.

## 2.5 Borrowing Ideas from Philosophy of Language

In this section we present interpretations which may not have been as influential as those of Hansen, or Graham, but are nevertheless noteworthy. While the previously presented interpretations are based on metaphysical claims in realism, nominalism, and mereology, the present texts draw inspiration from contemporary, Western philosophy of language.

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<sup>12</sup>Relatedly, in Aristotelian metaphysics form is considered to be a constituent part of objects [Shields, 2016].

<sup>13</sup>See [Hu, 1922].

### 2.5.1 Lai: Sense, Reference and Negative Logic

Whalen Lai was born in China and has worked at the University of California. In [Lai, 1995], he connects the Discourse with the concepts of sense and reference well-known in modern, Western philosophy of language. He claims that we should not think that Kung-sun Lung was talking about the reference of the words ‘horse’, ‘white horse’ etc. but rather that he was alluding to their sense. If one thinks of the sense of ‘white horse’ and that of ‘horse’ in a Fregean way<sup>14</sup>, it does indeed appear to make sense that a white horse is not equivalent to a horse. Lai points out that it is sensible to think that Kung-sun Lung would have been concerned with such questions, to which philosophers before him paved the way. Indeed, Yang Chu and Mo-tzu (fl. 479-438 B.C.E) inquired about the relation between names and reality, and Kung-sun Lung continued this enquiry. While previous thinkers had seen a moral aspect to these questions – for instance, if one is called a ruler, one should act like one – Kung-sun Lung focused on the logical side of the question – if logic tells us a white horse is not a horse, then indeed a white horse should not be called a horse. Lai stresses that, therefore, the Discourse has nothing of a sophistic, ‘for the sake of argument’ nature, but is rather meant to be taken entirely seriously. This contrasts with Harbsmeier’s view, which was mentioned earlier.

Lai proposes to use what he calls a ‘negative logic’ in order to understand what Kung-sun Lung had in mind. Like Dong, he connects the *White Horse Discourse* with the *Zhǐ wu lùn*. In the latter, he writes, Kung-sun Lung explains what it means to select an object. When talking about horses, for instance, and asking which objects the word designates, we proceed by removing everything that is not a horse, in a “scanning” or “reducing to a remainder” process [Lai, 1995, p.70]. The resulting remainder is then what ‘horse’ denotes. When talking about white horses, this scanning process has one more step, as it requires us to further eliminate all those objects which are indeed horses but not white. This type of reasoning fits the second argument of the Discourse very well.

Thus, in contrast to Graham’s part-whole interpretation regarding how wholes are built from several parts, Lai’s interpretation focuses on how objects are singled out from the rest of the world.

### 2.5.2 Thompson on Word-Use Against Word-Mention

Kirill Ole Thompson is a Western scholar working on Chinese philosophy. In [Thompson, 1995], he writes that neither the distinction between sense and reference nor the difference between class inclusion and strict equality are what the *White Horse Discourse* is about. Instead, he proposes to interpret the Discourse as a conflict between someone talking about the words ‘horse’, ‘white

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<sup>14</sup>Lai describes such conceptions of sense and reference in the following way: “Reference may be defined as when a sign points to an object. (...) Sense results from signs pointing to other signs. (...) A simple example should suffice. In looking up what ‘horse’ means in a lexicon, the word is not pointing to an animal; it is networking with other words to give us a dictionary definition. Definitions give us not the reference, but the sense of words” [Lai, 1995, p.64].

horse’, etc. and someone talking about the real objects these words refer to. The *Zhǐ wù lùn* indeed indicates that Kung-sun Lung was concerned with the idea of signs (‘pointing’), such as nouns, and their relations with the objects they signify. Thompson writes that this is connected to the ‘use-mention’ distinction in the usage of words: ‘use’ refers to when words are used directly to signify some real object (e.g. horse), ‘mention’ refers to when words are mentioned indirectly so as to signify the words themselves (e.g. ‘horse’). It is plausible that, if indeed the text is about words mention, this would have caused confusion and made understanding difficult, since Classical Chinese does not have clear punctuation to indicate that a word is mentioned rather than used directly [Thompson, 1995, p.484].

Thompson’s interpretation nicely fits the first argument of the Discourse. He translates the fourth line of the dialogue in the following way: “The term ‘horse’ is that by which we name the form [of the natural kind], the term ‘white’ is that by which we name the color” [Thompson, 1995, p.482]. We note here that this translation is different from the one presented earlier because it adds the word ‘term’. Even without this addition, it seems plausible that this argument is indeed about word mention as opposed to word use. This view of the Discourse can also inform the other arguments. The second one, for instance, is, according to Thompson,

“based on the communicative functions of the two terms, that is how and what they discriminate: one uses the term “horse” to select or pick out horses, regardless of color; but, one uses the term “white horse” to select or pick out only horses that are white.” [Thompson, 1995, p.482]

## 2.6 Formal Interpretations

In this section, we present attempts at more formal interpretations of the Discourse. They are considered formal, in the sense that they use the language and tools of modern mathematics and logic to analyse the claims of the Discourse.

### 2.6.1 Early attempts: Greniewski, Wojtasiewicz and Chmielewski on Sets and Classes

While most literature on formal interpretation is relatively recent, attempts were made already more than fifty years ago. A very well known example, often cited in more modern texts, is [Chmielewski, 1962], which builds on an earlier attempt: [Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, 1956].

In the latter, the authors – Henryk Greniewski, a mathematician, and Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, a linguist – present an analysis of the Discourse through the notion of mathematical sets. In their interpretation, the Discourse is presented almost like a proof of a statement. They ‘translate’ the clauses in the language of sets and thus obtain a formal argument, proving the claim that ‘a

white horse is not a horse’, here understood as ‘the intersection of the set of white individuals with the set of horses is not equal to the set of horses’. We see here that their interpretation resembles that of Cheng: both are realist, as are all the interpretations relying on abstract mathematical concepts<sup>15</sup>, and take ‘fēi’ to deny equivalence.

In his *Notes on Early Chinese Logic*, Janusz Chmielewski, a philosopher and sinologist [Mejor, 1999], starts by acknowledging Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz’s work as the only worthwhile paper on Chinese logic published until then [Chmielewski, 1962]. He then argues against an interpretation of the Discourse relying on syllogisms<sup>16</sup>. According to this view, Kung-sun Lung’s arguments are seen as a form of syllogism. For instance, we can look at the last argument:

“Horse” does not pick or exclude color, (...) “White horse” does pick or exclude color (...) Thus I say: “a white horse is not a horse”.  
[Sturgeon, ndb]

This is identified by Kou as a “strictly Aristotelian syllogism” [Chmielewski, 1962, p.9]. Chmielewski believes it is better understood as a statement about mathematical classes. He writes that the Discourse gets its paradoxical nature from the fact that ‘fēi’, in ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’, may be understood as denying class inclusion – a common understanding – or as denying strict equality of classes – like in Cheng’s interpretation. Since Kung-sun Lung did not have the concept of class inclusion, Chmielewski writes, his theory of class was incomplete, leading to his paradoxical conclusion.

### 2.6.2 Later Mathematical Interpretation by Lucas

The interpretation through classes has not been abandoned but rather built upon. Thierry Lucas, a Western mathematician, has used mathematical tools in more recent interpretations presented in [Lucas, 2012] and [Lucas, nd]. In the latter, he presents a valuable examination of different interpretations. Among other things, he points out that there are two broad ways of understanding the statements of the Discourse, and in particular ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’: one could see it as an ontological statement – a white horse is not the same kind of thing as a horse – or as a linguistic statement – from the point of view of language, ‘white horse’ and ‘horse’ are different entities. Naturally, both types of enquiry are closely related. However, most interpreters tend to give more weight to one view or the other.

Lucas claims that each of the arguments in the Discourse can be classified as either a sophism, for instance confusing class inclusion and equality, or as a proper argument about ‘sorts’. Sorts are things such as colour and shape. Since Kung-sun Lung was famous for separating hard and white, that is, form and colour, it is unsurprising that his Discourse would revolve around issues related

<sup>15</sup>However, while they are committed to abstract entities, these are not necessarily very closely related to Plato’s ideas.

<sup>16</sup>This interpretation is presented by Pao-koh Kou in [Kou, 1953].

to sorts. Sorts, or categories, help us understand how ‘white horse’ could not be ‘horse’:

“ ‘white horse’ and ‘horse’ are predicates of different categories, exactly as ‘Roman emperor’ and ‘prime number’ are predicates of different categories: white horse is no more horse than roman emperor is prime number.” [Lucas, 2012, p.188]

Indeed, Lucas writes, ‘white horse’ is a predicate of the category ‘colour-form’, while ‘horse’ is a predicate of the category ‘form’. A further category defined by Lucas is that of ‘colour’. Lucas defines a model  $\mathcal{M}$ , of which the domain  $D^{\mathcal{M}}$  is “our usual objects” [Lucas, 2012, p.189], but tripled because it contains also the angle from which we see the object, and this angle may be colour, form, or both colour and form. This defines three disjoint sets: the set  $D_c^{\mathcal{M}}$  of objects viewed from the angle of colour, the set  $D_f^{\mathcal{M}}$  of objects viewed from the angle of form and the set  $D_s^{\mathcal{M}}$  of objects viewed from the angle of colour and form. In particular,  $D_s^{\mathcal{M}}$  and  $D_f^{\mathcal{M}}$  are disjoint. Since ‘white horses’ is a subset of  $D_s^{\mathcal{M}}$  and ‘horses’ is a subset of  $D_f^{\mathcal{M}}$ , we get that the sets ‘white horses’ and ‘horses’ are disjoint. Thus, we conclude that ‘white horse not horse’. The important point is that ‘colour-form’ is treated as a different sort than ‘form’, which illustrates how a white horse is not a horse. Lucas develops his idea further in terms of mathematical category theory, so that it can also account for issues in other philosophical texts of Kung-sun Lung’s time, but this lays beyond the scope of this thesis.

### 2.6.3 Yiu Ming Fung’s Interpretation through Modern Logic

Not only Western philosophers but also Chinese ones have used modern mathematical tools to interpret the Discourse. Yiu Ming Fung, an analytic philosopher, is one of them. In [Fung, 2007], he proposes to use predicate first-order logic to interpret the Discourse. To begin, he states that he partially agrees with Yu-Lan Fung’s interpretation of the Discourse as related to abstract universals. Cheng, who also proposes a realist interpretation of the Discourse, thinks as well that Yiu Ming Fung’s reading is a realist one: “Fung shares the basic idea with me in being basically a concrete realist or in offering a concrete realist interpretation of [Kung-sun Lung]” [Cheng, 2007, p.558]. Fung agrees that simple terms such as ‘horse’ are to be understood as universals, similar, although not equivalent, to Platonic universals. Indeed, they are different from Platonic universals because they have the potential to “emerge into phenomenal things” while Plato’s universals can only be exemplified into concrete objects “without any meaning of emergence” [Fung, 2007, p.532]. One way single term universals can emerge into concrete objects is by being combined with other universals. Hence, Yiu Ming Fung maintains, while ‘horse’ should be understood as a universal, compound terms such as ‘white horse’ are not to be understood as universals but rather represent concrete objects.

He then suggests that the Discourse could be understood as a disagreement between someone using a direct theory of reference and someone using a descriptonal theory of reference. The latter would be the proponent of the Discourse defending that “a white horse is a horse”, and their argument would be the following:

$$(\forall x)[(Wx \cdot Hx) \rightarrow Hx].$$

The defender of the thesis that a white horse is not a horse would be the one using direct theory of reference, with the following, simple idea:  $\sim (a = b)$ , where  $a$  and  $b$  presumably represent concrete horses.

## 2.7 Some Additional Interpretations

The interpretations discussed in this chapter provide an overview spanning the space of English interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. In this section, we briefly present some additional interpretations. We do not discuss them in as much depth as the others since they rely on similar ideas, but we still think it is important to mention them.

In [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998], Harbsmeier takes an approach similar to Hansen’s in that he starts his interpretation from an analysis of Classical Chinese. He agrees with Hansen’s mass noun hypothesis, but rejects the idea that the prominence of mass nouns in language implies a nominalistic ontology. He then interprets the arguments of the *White Horse Discourse* with the vocabulary and tools of modern logic such as ‘modus tollens’ or ‘reductio ad absurdum’.

In [Chan, 1969], Wing Tsit-Chan provides a translation and contextualisation of numerous texts of ancient Chinese philosophy. Among these is the *White Horse Discourse*. He does not elaborate an interpretation as such, but he places the text in the context of ancient Chinese philosophy. He mentions the debate between nominalist and realist interpreters of the *Zhǐ wù lùn* – and, by extension, of Kung-sun Lung’s work as a whole – and writes that “the text is simply too corrupt to enable anyone to be absolutely sure” [Chan, 1969, p.238].

In [Manyul, 2007], Im Manyul argues against Hansen’s understanding of Chinese compound terms such as ‘white horse’. He writes that such terms can be understood neither as mass products nor as mass sums. Rather, “atomic terms that are joined to make a compound term must continue to refer atomically to their respective parts in a composite group or individual” [Manyul, 2007, p.168]. Thus, his analysis appears to be drawn against the assumption of the ‘separating hard and white’ problem<sup>17</sup> and Hansen’s understanding through mass sums and mass products.

In [Yi, 2018], Byeong-Uk Yi also starts his analysis from a study of the features of Classical Chinese and discusses a ‘part-whole’, mereological interpretation reminiscent of Graham’s. His interpretation also points out the ambiguity

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<sup>17</sup>See Section 2.1.

of the ‘white horse not horse’ claim and suggests, although in different words, that it leads to a confusion between class inclusion and equality.

Finally, in [Mou, 2007], Bo Mou offers an interpretation that blends many of the themes presented in other interpretations: he connects the Discourse to the relation between language and ontology, as well as the Fregean concepts of sense and reference, but also to mereology, aspects of Classical Chinese, nominalism and member-class structures.

## 2.8 Summary

In this chapter, we introduced the School of Names, Kung-sun Lung, and the *White Horse Discourse*. We then described several modern interpretations written in English. We saw that a recurring question is whether the Discourse should be understood through realism or nominalism. Additionally, the status of Chinese compound terms, the relation between language and ontology, the *Zhī wù lùn*, Fregean sense and reference, ‘negative logic’, word use against word mention, mathematical classes and logic and the confusion between inclusion and equality are themes that are used to understand the text. For the rest of this thesis, we will focus on the ten interpretations that were discussed in most depth in this chapter, namely those of Hansen, Cheng, Dong, Graham, Lai, Thompson, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski, Lucas and Yiu Ming Fung. As we explained in the previous section, most other interpretations use themes and ideas that are found in one of the ten just described, which we therefore consider as representative of the modern, English discussion on the Discourse.

We focused here on the content of these interpretations. In the following chapter, we turn to questions regarding their assumptions and methodology.

## Chapter 3

# Approaches and Issues in Interpretations of the White Horse Discourse

The aim of this chapter is to examine whether authors appear to have specific ideas or approaches regarding interpretation and comparison, whether implicitly or explicitly, and to identify what these ideas are. While in the next chapter, we will look more precisely at how these ideas influence – or can be connected to – their interpretations, the focus of the present chapter is simply on identifying them. We focus on the interpretations presented in the previous chapter, that is, those of Hansen, Cheng, Dong, Graham, Thompson, Lai, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski, Lucas and Yiu Ming Fung. We follow a structure similar to that of the first chapter: we discuss interpretative issues first from a comparative perspective, then from a hermeneutic point of view, then from a post-colonial angle, and finally we examine more specifically the authors' methods and objectives. The most relevant results of this chapter and the next one are summarised in a table, which can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.1 Comparison

While the authors' aim, in the texts studied here, is primarily to interpret the Discourse rather than to compare it with texts from other traditions, we can find many elements of comparison in their interpretations. This supports the claim made in Chapter 1 that interpretation is intricately connected to comparison.

We find, however, at least one exception: Dong's analysis is among those that present less, if any, traces of comparative elements. This may be related to the fact that Dong's background is mostly Chinese, as opposed to some other authors who, while they may have studied in China, worked in Western countries. Dong's text is particularly valuable to this thesis because it is one

of the few works on Kung-sun Lung that have been translated from Chinese to English. Thus, it fits the present study of English-written texts while also giving us a glimpse of the state of the discussion in Chinese-written scholarship on the topic.

### 3.1.1 Comparing to Foster Understanding

In Chapter 1, we discussed some of the possible aims of comparison. One of these was to help us understand a particular tradition better. This appears to be Hansen's aim. In his analysis, he uses several comparisons between ancient Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy.

For example, he writes that Kung-sun Lung may be regarded as the “the Hume of one-name-one-thing-ism” [Hansen, 1976, p.194]. The doctrine of ‘one-name-one-thing’, important in Kung-sun Lung's time, was based on the idea that “all names refer at the same level of generality” [Fraser, 2017]. For instance, the extension of the word ‘stone’ cannot be reduced, even when it is combined with other words, for example in ‘white stone’. Just like some of Hume's claims were highly counter-intuitive, and yet philosophically interesting, perhaps Kung-sun Lung's ‘bái mǎ fēi mǎ’ is to be seen in a similar way, according to Hansen. More interestingly, Hansen writes that

“The modern interest (contrasted with traditional “benign neglect”) in the “White Horse Dialogue” arises from the justified hope that the School of Names will be one of the most “fruitful” schools for parallels and comparisons with the language-analysis orientation of Western philosophy. My own interest is less the possibility of finding ontological commitments similar to some historically important Western philosophical theories than it is that this school, being more direct in discussion of names, is a better “handle” for getting at the basis of Chinese semantic theories.” [Hansen, 1976, p.189-190]

This passage suggests that comparison as such between Chinese and Western philosophy is not Hansen's primary aim, but rather it seems to be a better understanding of Chinese philosophy ‘in its own terms’, to echo Deng's idea presented in Chapter 1. Hansen's passage about Hume, as well as other allusions to Western concepts, shows that he does rely on comparison as a means to understand Chinese philosophy better.

When Hansen uses comparison, it is mostly comparison with Western philosophy. However, it is of course possible to draw comparisons with other fields. We now turn to this possibility.

### 3.1.2 Comparison and Hermeneutic Expansion

Lai mentions Western concepts or thinkers quite openly in his analysis: “as the Greeks would consider...”, “the Kantian *Is*”, “In England too, ...” etc. [Lai, 1995]. Interestingly, Lai draws comparisons not only with Western philosophy but also with Western theology: when discussing the connection between names

and reality and asking which of these is to be adjusted to the other, a question central to the thought of Kung-sun Lung, Lai mentions a passage of the Bible: “When God created the light by simply saying ‘Let there be light’, he too concluded by noting how the reality so created by the name was good” [Lai, 1995, p.61]. This is unsurprising, given that Lai has worked substantively in religious studies. It may be expected that this has given him a particular point of view towards the Discourse, different from that of the other authors discussed here. Another aspect that is unique to Lai’s analysis is that he draws connections not only to Western philosophy, but also to Buddhism:

“the principle of ‘reducing to a [remainder]’ spelled out in ‘Pointing and thing’<sup>1</sup> is a principle well known to Buddhist logicians. To avoid any suggestion of there being a self (atman), Dignaga too would not call a horse a horse or a chair a chair. A chair is a quality like ‘seatable’.” [Lai, 1995, p.71]

Lai then writes that we have difficulties understanding Kung-sun Lung’s thought because “most of us are more like the Hindus who always have trouble with the Buddhist talk about ‘no-self’” [Lai, 1995, p.71]. Lai’s use of the word ‘us’ in this quote indicates that he seems to have a specific audience – presumably one that is culturally closer to the Hindus than the Buddhists – in mind when writing his article. Lai’s reference to the Hindus in this quote is interesting because the difficulty with non-substantialist theories is not specific to the Hindus but applies to many Western philosophical theories, too<sup>2</sup>. Maybe Lai’s choice to mention Hindus here rather than Western people can be interpreted as an attempt to broaden his analysis, which already contains comparisons with Western philosophy.

This takes us to the following point. Lai’s use of varied elements of comparison would probably be seen positively in the light of Berger’s appeal for hermeneutic expansion of cross-cultural philosophy. Indeed, comparison here does not only help the reader understand the text better, but it also puts them in contact with several traditions and thus helps expand their familiarity with these different traditions. Doing so, Lai does not seem to consider some traditions as better than others. This contrasts with approaches that seem to use comparison mostly as a way to establish a tradition’s superiority over another. We now discuss this kind of approach.

### 3.1.3 Unfavourable View of Kung-sun Lung: Comparing to Establish Superiority?

In their short analysis, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz present elements of comparison between Kung-sun Lung, or pre-Qin Chinese thinkers more generally,

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<sup>1</sup>‘Pointing and thing’ is the *Zhǐ wù lùn*, mentioned in the previous chapter. The ‘reducing to a remainder’ process was described as the eliminating process through which the referent of a noun is established, according to Lai’s interpretation. See Section 2.5.1.

<sup>2</sup>With the notable exception of Wittgenstein and Hume, among others. See [Richards, 1978].

and ancient Greece: “Unlike in Greece, the main trends of the Chinese philosophy...” [Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, 1956, p.241], etc. Pejorative terms, such as “failed”, “hampered” and “lacked”, used to describe Kung-sun Lung’s thought, are scattered throughout the text. These indicate that the authors view Kung-sun Lung’s work critically. Indeed, they describe it as “an *attempt* at formal reasoning”<sup>3</sup>, a type of reasoning which they claim was difficult in ancient China due to “the peculiarities of the old Chinese language” [Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, 1956, p.241] such as its lack of morphology. Thus, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz appear to rely on the idea that some philosophical traditions may be superior to others. However, this seems to be more of an implicit assumption than an explicit statement they aim to prove – they start from it, using this kind of terms already at the beginning of the article rather than arriving at it after a proper argumentation.

This can be contrasted with Yiu Ming Fung’s interpretation. His analysis is centred around the aim of showing that it is possible to understand the Discourse through platonic realism. In this sense, there is a comparison with Plato. Yiu Ming Fung makes it explicit in a few passages: “similar to Plato’s two-world theory, he also...”, “Gongsun Long’s idea of “zhi” [(‘finger/pointing’, 指)] is similar to but not exactly the same as Platonic “Idea””, etc. [Fung, 2007]. When defending the idea that Kung-sun Lung might have had an abstract, realist view, Yiu Ming Fung also makes the following claim:

“The one-many relationship [between an abstract universal and its concrete exemplifications] is not Plato’s prestige; it is embedded in ancient Chinese language as in other languages”. [Fung, 2007, p.531]

This quote suggests that, in his comparison between Kung-sun Lung’s and Plato’s thoughts, Yiu Ming Fung does not view the latter as superior to the former. He puts the two on the same level, suggesting that they bear a strong similarity.

In contemporary scholarship, implying that some traditions are better than others may be considered a hazardous course of action, and rightfully so, given the legacy of post-colonial studies. However, there seems to be less hesitation when it comes to suggesting that modern, new philosophy is superior to any older, more ancient philosophy. Since, presumably, our knowledge today is at least as great as it was yesterday, there seems to be a sense of progress in philosophy, as in many other fields. Progress is thus not devoid of ideas of superiority. The notion presupposes a comparison between traditions foreign to each other not necessarily spatially, but temporally. We now examine how this idea is at play in the discussion on the *White Horse Discourse*.

### 3.1.4 Progress in Philosophy: Comparison across Time

Similarly to Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, although already more critically, Chmielewski compares Kung-sun Lung’s thought with that of Thomas Aquinas

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<sup>3</sup>Italics mine.

and Aristotle. He further writes that “We cannot expect too much from so early a thinker” [Chmielewski, 1962, p.20]. This seems to presuppose an idea of progress or development in philosophy: the earlier, the more ‘primitive’; the later, the more advanced. While it is true that modern philosophy benefits from the insights of past thinkers, asserting that we cannot expect much from old texts, and this without questioning the historicity of present philosophy as well, seems problematic. In his conclusion, Chmielewski writes that Kung-sun Lung is to be seen as an anticipator of the theory of classes. This suggests that the interpretation is based in the present and asks how the past may be understood in terms of it, rather than on its own terms.

A similar assumption regarding the progress of philosophy through time is found in [Lucas, nd]. Indeed, there Lucas describes Kung-sun Lung’s work as, “from the point of view of logic, (...) a giant step forward”. Thus, he indicates that he also views philosophy as a progressive enterprise, but he is careful to present Kung-sun Lung’s work in a more positive light in this respect. This may be explained by the fact that he wrote later than Chmielewski, at a time at which there was a greater sensitivity to post-colonial issues in comparative philosophy, which we will come back to in Section 3.3.

## 3.2 Hermeneutics

In Chapter 1, we discussed issues in hermeneutics such as the role of tradition and prejudice in interpretation, as well as the hermeneutic circle and the importance of language in understanding. Since all authors discussed here engage in the process of interpretation, it is interesting to examine their studies from the point of view of hermeneutics. We may ask, for instance, how prejudice is at play in their interpretations, to what extent the authors appear to be aware of their prejudice and how they act on this. On a related point, how can their interpretations be seen in light of the hermeneutic circle? And, regarding issues of language, do the authors see translation as a part of the interpretative process? These are some of the questions we address in this section.

### 3.2.1 Prejudice and the Hermeneutic Circle

As we saw earlier, a strong argument can be made for the case that prejudice in interpretation is inevitable. However, this is not necessarily to be seen in a negative way. Rather, prejudice can be understood as what makes interpretation possible; any text must be seen in a certain light in order to be seen at all. It is thus beyond question that all the authors discussed here have certain prejudices. These prejudices are shaped by, among other things, the traditions that the authors come from – Western, Chinese, etc. – as well as the languages they speak and read, and their main fields of expertise. The interests of most of the authors studied here are varied but focused on some fields more than others, be it formal logic (e.g. Lucas), comparative philosophy (e.g. Yiu Ming Fung),

theology (e.g. Lai) or sinology (e.g. Chmielewski)<sup>4</sup>, for instance.

Perhaps a more interesting question to ask, beyond what the authors' prejudice as such are, would be whether the authors are aware of how their prejudice is at play and how this transpires in their texts. Few authors appear to extensively reflect on the influence of their background and on the context in which they interpret, or on the process described by the hermeneutic circle.

For instance, the interpretations proposed by Chmielewski, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz do not appear to contain any elements that would suggest such a reflection, even implicitly. There are, however, a few exceptions. Lucas shows some awareness of the issue, as he writes that, in his interpretation, he

“has tried to maintain a balance between (...) different aspects, but is clearly conscious that his former professional training gives a bias in favor of the formal methods”. [Lucas, nd]

Cheng is himself well versed in hermeneutics so we would expect him to be aware of these issues too; although he does not mention them explicitly. Some other interpretations do not contain explicit references to these issues but their authors implicitly show a limited awareness of the issue. Among these are Hansen, Graham, Yiu Ming Fung, Dong and Lai. Hansen seems to be at least slightly aware of his own stance given that he reflects on the influence of the West on the study of Chinese philosophy. Furthermore, Graham believes there exist different conceptual schemes<sup>5</sup>, while Yiu Ming Fung does not [Fung, 2006]. Based on the fact that these two authors discuss conceptual schemes, we may assume that they must be at least a bit familiar with hermeneutics and the ambiguity of the process of interpretation.

### 3.2.2 Issues of Language and Translation

As discussed in Chapter 1, interpretation already takes place at the stage of translation. For instance, Graham translates the first two sentences of the Discourse as “Is it admissible that a white horse is not a horse?” [Graham, 1986, p.187]. Under this translation, a tighter connection can be drawn between the Discourse and the broad theme of ‘deeming so the not-so’, ‘admissible the inadmissible’, which we mentioned in Chapter 2. This connection is not as clear under Sturgeon’s translation: “Can it be that a white horse is not a horse?” [Sturgeon, ndb]. Here we investigate whether the authors show an awareness of the role of translation in interpretation.

Several authors do not show much awareness of the issues of translation, as they do not explain their motivation for using a certain translation rather than another, or do not even state clearly which translation they use<sup>6</sup>, even though

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<sup>4</sup>Interestingly enough, just like individual interpretations, research fields themselves are historically and culturally situated. Sinology, for instance, takes a different meaning as a field in Western and in Chinese academia.

<sup>5</sup>However, it seems Graham is reluctant to see truth as relative: “The idea that *truth* might be relative to a conceptual scheme, however, was as abhorrent to Graham as it was incoherent to Davidson” [Rosemont Jr., 2019].

<sup>6</sup>See table in Section 2.2.

they do quote translated passages. Among these, we find Dong as well as Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz. Regarding Dong's text, it is important to point out that he originally wrote the text in modern Chinese and that it was subsequently translated into English. This, however, does not render the question of translation irrelevant: Dong must have translated the text from Classical Chinese into modern Chinese, so translation did take place, but in a way that does not seem to be accounted for. Chmielewski does not state which translation he uses either but writes that his "translation deliberately deviates from the normal English usage" [Chmielewski, 1962, p.10], which suggests that he has thought about this at least to some extent. Others, such as Lai, do state which translation they use, but they do not have a concrete reflection on issues of translation. Cheng does not mention clearly which translation he uses, but he writes that it is important for understanding to have a "genuine reflection of the problems of reference, translation, analysis, and method in general" [Cheng, 1983, p.347].

Hansen appears to be aware of issues surrounding translation as he writes that "(...) alternative "translations" are really alternative explanatory theories..." [Hansen, 1976, p.190]. In line with this, his interpretation is based on the idea that language determines thought, at least partly. Indeed, he claims that since there are no traces of abstract universals in Classical Chinese, we should assume that these were not part of the ontology of Kung-sun Lung. It is then interesting to ask what this may suggest about his views on translation: if language is indeed essential in determining thought, and thus understanding, what may be our hopes of understanding the Discourse, originally in Classical Chinese, through an interpretation in English? This, however, is not necessarily a problem if Hansen's aim is limited to offering an interesting view of what the text may teach us, today, without special attention to the original thought of the author. As we will argue in Section 3.4, this does indeed seem to be the case to some extent.

Yiu Ming Fung states which translation he uses and also shows awareness of the importance of translation when he notes that Chmielewski does not use "the common translation" [Fung, 2007, p.523] – Graham's translation, according to Yiu Ming Fung – and has a different interpretation. Graham's translation is indeed often used, but Yiu Ming Fung seems to be the only author identifying a translation as the common one.

In both [Lucas, 2012] and [Lucas, nd], Lucas states which translation he uses. Interestingly, it is a different one for each text<sup>7</sup>. Lucas admits that translation as such can be subject to disagreement. However, while regarding the *Zhǐ wù lùn*, he writes that "Even for the translation of the title itself there is much room for disagreement" [Lucas, nd], when it comes to the *White Horse Discourse* he claims that:

"the Baimalun does not present major philological difficulties and the translations given by different authors are largely compatible; in

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<sup>7</sup>For [Lucas, 2012] he uses the translation provided in [Fraser, 2017] and for [Lucas, nd] he uses the translation given in [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998, p.298-326], "which sticks to the traditional order of the text and is very accurate" [Lucas, nd].

fact, the real difficulties lie in the interpretation of the arguments and on the willful ambiguities of the text.” [Lucas, nd]

Lucas’ observation here is interesting because, while we can agree with him that some texts may be easier to translate than others, it may be hard to identify what precisely makes a text easier or harder to translate and to what extent the level of difficulty varies between texts. This could be connected to languages, genres or authors, for instance. In the present case, what makes the *Zhǐ wù lùn* particularly hard to translate is, among other things, the lack of agreement on how to translate zhǐ, one of its principal terms. It can be translated as a noun – ‘finger’, ‘pointing’, ‘indication’, ... – or as a verb – ‘to point’ – which may be either active or passive. Indeed, Lucas writes, in Classical Chinese “there is no syntactic clear difference between verb and noun, between active and passive” [Lucas, nd]. Furthermore, some words with ambiguous meaning, such as zhǐ, are repeated very often in the text, and this can create some confusion. The *White Horse Discourse* does not exhibit these issues as strongly, but they are present as well. Indeed, ‘mǎ’, clearly an important term in the text, can be translated as ‘horse’, ‘a horse’, ‘horse-stuff’, etc. So the translation is not completely unequivocal here either, pace Lucas.

### 3.2.3 Principle of Charity and Principle of Humanity

As discussed in Chapter 1, the principles of charity and humanity are important concepts in hermeneutics. Lucas clearly demonstrates he knows about these principles, as he explicitly mentions them and describes them as follows, although he does not state explicitly how these apply to his own interpretation:

“What are we doing when we interpret a text like Gongsun Long’s *Baimalun*? Recent research (...) has extensively used Davidson’s principles of Charity and of Humanity. Briefly stated, the principle of Charity asserts that one should maximize the coherence of the speaker, maximize the extent to which we see the speaker as right; in that sense, we should say that *bai ma fei ma* is TRUE. On the other hand, the principle of Humanity asserts that we have to take into account the position of the speaker, maximize the extent to which we see the speaker as humanly reasonable, rather than the extent to which we see it as right; in that sense, *bai ma fei ma* should be declared FALSE, because the speaker does not appear to be reasonable in saying that.” [Lucas, nd]

According to Lucas’ definition, the principle of charity seems to be centred around the idea of ‘making sense’ while the principle of humanity seems to be about ‘understanding the speaker and their rationality’. As we will see in Section 3.4, the use of the principles of charity and humanity may be related to distinct methodological approaches: either trying to make sense of the text in a reader-centred way, or trying to recover the authorial intention, respectively. This may sound contradictory to Lucas’ quote, but it need not be: under the

principle of charity, coherence is emphasised, and this aspect is defined by the reader. This also applies to some extent to the principle of humanity, since that principle focuses on reasonability, which is inevitably also defined by the reader. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, there is something about reasonability that is more author-centred than coherence: the latter does not require that the reader picture themselves as the author, or in fact that they picture anything beyond the text itself. In contrast, the former focuses on “human similarity in psychology, desires, capacities, etc., the so-called “like us” explanation” [Hansen, 2014, p.72]. For instance, coherence is often used as a criterion to judge scientific texts, where the identity of the author is usually not regarded as particularly relevant. Contrastingly, it is more difficult to judge reasonability without enquiring about the author and their work beyond the text at hand. In other words, under both principles, the standards – coherence or reasonability – are defined by the reader, but with the humanity principle the idea that we should ‘step into the shoes’ of the author is more important. In this sense, that principle can be considered more author-centred. This is of course relative. And naturally, these two principles are not mutually exclusive. Yiu Ming Fung, for instance, seems to be in favour of using both principles since he blames Hansen for using neither: “Hansen’s interpretation not only violates the principle of humanity, but also violates Davidson’s principle of charity” [Fung, 2007, p.531]. Additionally, Fung writes that his own interpretation is based on the principle of charity.

### **3.3 Post-Colonial Perspective**

In the third section of Chapter 1, we discussed some post-colonial, critical approaches to interpretation and comparison. In the present section, we examine the interpretations of the Discourse presented in Chapter 2 in the light of these aspects. As can be expected, this is closely related to the discussion of comparison presented in Section 3.1 in particular.

#### **3.3.1 Unintentionally setting the West as Standard**

As we saw in Section 3.1, elements of comparisons between Western and Chinese philosophy abound in the interpretations studied. However, most of these interpretations do not present themselves as comparative texts but, rather, as texts focused on the study of Kung-sun Lung’s thought. Their numerous appeals to Western concepts suggest that, unconsciously, the authors may be taking the West as the common standard, to echo Deng’s term, not only of comparison but also of interpretation. In connection with Section 3.2, one might say that the prejudice and tradition, from which the interpretation takes place, is taken to be shaped by Western philosophy.

For instance, Lai writes that “Confucius would insist on that unity of ‘speech and deed’ in China. In England too, a gentleman is only as good as his word” [Lai, 1995, p.62]. This is peculiar because Lai is not even from England or

writing in England. This focus on the West is further exemplified by the use of terms which do not have an unequivocal meaning outside of Western philosophy. Thus Lai writes that “trusting logic, Kung-sun Lung would remake natural language into a rational language” [Lai, 1995, p.63], but he does not make explicit what kind of logic he is talking about. Given that the mere existence of an ancient Chinese logic is subject to disagreement, this is indeed not a neutral statement. On a related point, in [Fung, 2007] Yiu Ming Fung discusses, among others, Hu Shi’s interpretation of the Discourse and argues that it is implicitly an application of Bertrand Russell’s theory of definite descriptions, “or, more accurately, is an interpretation which is unconsciously based on the theory” [Fung, 2007, p.515]. These observations indicate that, as Deng defends, Western philosophy is, sometimes unconsciously, taken as the ‘common standard’ against which other theories are measured.

### 3.3.2 Post-Colonial Perspective: Attempts to Move Past the Western Standard

The emergence of post-colonial studies has brought to attention that non-Western traditions should be studied on their own terms rather than against the Western standard. Some authors appear to be very aware of the issue.

As we have discussed earlier, one of the most controversial problems in the interpretation of the Discourse is the question of nominalism against realism, which it may be argued was initiated by Hansen. Indeed he notoriously claimed that, even though platonic realism was important in Western philosophy, we should not deduce that it was at all present in ancient Chinese thought. While he claims that his argument stems from a concern for coherence, adding: “The usual observation that [the abstract interpretation] is “over-Westernizing” does not seem to me to be a cogent objection by itself” [Hansen, 1976, p.207], his interpretation has often been seen in light of the post-colonial debate. On the one hand, one could argue that Hansen’s interpretation is laudable because it aims to start from the Chinese tradition itself and is worried not to impose Western concepts on it. On the other hand, the interpretation is problematic because it denies ancient Chinese society the capacity to think abstractly – arguably this is pretty demeaning. Most philosophers, and most notably Chinese ones, do in fact strongly disagree with Hansen.

Cheng, for instance, considers Hansen’s approach as

“not only a form of linguistic dogmatism but a form of linguistic imperialism, to use Tsu-lin Mei’s terminology, to legislate how abstractions must be expressed” [Cheng, 1983, p.349].

This objection seems to be contingent on Hansen’s view that language shapes thought. If we agree with this claim, we must still account for how language shapes thought. Hansen appears to presuppose that the relation between English language and thought is essentially the same as the relation between Chinese language and thought, and hence uses observations about the former relation, as well as observations about Chinese language, to draw conclusions about

ancient Chinese thought. However, we cannot just assume that these two relations are the same. Cheng’s use of the word ‘legislate’ in the quote suggests that, in his view, Hansen does indeed not start from how Chinese language and thought, or ‘expression’ and ‘abstractions’ are related *in reality*, or pre-legislation. Relatedly, Yiu Ming Fung writes that “nominalism is an antithesis which is normally occurred after realism in the history of Western philosophy” [Fung, 2007, p.525]: nominalism was proposed in Western intellectual history only after realism, so it is odd to assume it would have been the contrary in Chinese philosophy. We will come back to this critique later.

### 3.3.3 Western Influence on Chinese Philosophy

In Chapter 1, we discussed not only the influence of Western concepts on contemporary interpretations of specific texts but also on Chinese philosophy as a field. Hansen appears to share Deng’s view that modern Chinese philosophy, including the modern Chinese conception of its own classical tradition, is comparative philosophy when he writes the following:

“In the defensive cultural reaction to confrontation and humiliation by the Western powers, Chinese philosophy became comparative philosophy. Influential modern historians of Chinese philosophy, for example, Feng Yu-lan and Hu Shih<sup>8</sup>, used Kung-sun Lung’s dialogues as the vehicles for rehabilitating intellectual self-esteem by imparting to him philosophical theories roughly parallel to those of the most awe-inspiring and seminal Western thinkers – Plato or Aristotle.” [Hansen, 1976, p.190]

### 3.3.4 More moderate views

Cheng appears to be less critical of the influence of Western philosophy. He writes that under some interpretation,

we “need not worry about extraneous extrapolation or imposition from Western philosophy. Problems of semantics and ontology can be varied, but the structure of these problems remains universal, given the human mind and reality as they are”. [Cheng, 1983, p.347]

This may be connected to the argument in favour of the use of Western tools in [Liu and Seligman, 2011] presented in Chapter 1. Cheng further argues, again against Hansen, that he sees no reason why Western concepts would be less likely to shed light on the White Horse paradox than others. Indeed, in a way, any concept we use today is most likely ‘foreign’ to the ancient Chinese texts, so it would seem odd to only refrain from using Western concepts. In connection with our discussion on hermeneutics, we may say that, when interpreting the text, we are bound to use concepts we are familiar with, so it may be best to

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<sup>8</sup>‘Hu Shih’ is an alternative spelling of ‘Hu Shi’. His name was mentioned in Section 2.4 among others.

work on making that use explicit rather than trying to avoid it. This line of thought seems to be shared by Lucas and Yiu Ming Fung.

## 3.4 Methods and Goals

When it comes to methods of interpretation, the authors have different strategies which generally revolve around two aims, often intertwined: one is to try to ‘recover’ Kung-sun Lung’s original thought, and the other is more focused on how we, today, can make sense of the text, if necessary with modern tools. By ‘making sense’ we do not mean here understanding which sense the text had for its author but, rather, making sense for ourselves, where sense is defined in the readers’ terms.

### 3.4.1 ‘Recovering’ Kung-sun Lung’s Original Thought

We can connect to the first aim the methods that try to ‘do justice’ to the text, to understand it ‘in its own terms’. Among these are Jenco’s view, which we discussed in Chapter 1, that interpretation should be focused not only on the content but also on the methods and related practice of the interpreted text, insofar as content and methods can indeed be distinguished. Most authors do say at least a few words on the methods and practice of Kung-sun Lung: he was a ‘disputer’, took part in argumentative debates, advised rulers with his strategic reasoning, etc. Dong further writes that the scholars of the School of Names “discussed all the things in the world by means of metaphors, examples or analogies” [Dong, nd]. However, most authors do not push this line of reasoning further; their analysis of the content of the Discourse seems somewhat disjoint from their notes on the practice and methods of the School of Names. For instance, they do not take into account the performative character of the work of the disputers<sup>9</sup>.

Another method which seems to fall under the aim of recovering Kung-sun Lung’s thought is that of Lai. His methodology is particular because it is reminiscent of historical enquiry. Indeed, he argues for a “historical or a deconstructionist critique” [Lai, 1995, p.60] of standards in the theory of language – that is, we must try to understand how and why language standards, such as Dong’s law of non-contradiction for instance, arose and were supported by philosophers – and he seems to see his work as that of a “historian of ideas” [Lai, 1995, p.59]. Lai’s appeal to study the historical development of language standards set by philosophers suggests he may consider language to be shaped by historically developed philosophical thought. This would put him in opposition to Hansen, who seems to view philosophical thought as a product of – or at least as limited by – language. Although Lai appears to view his work as that of a historian, presumably aiming to recover ancient thoughts, he does

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<sup>9</sup>That is, with the exception of Harbsmeier, but his interpretation is not discussed in depth here. See Section 2.7.

not hesitate to use modern concepts in philosophy to understand the Discourse. Indeed, he uses Frege's distinction between sense and reference, for instance.

Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz also belong in this category. While they use modern methods, they appear to believe this is what Kung-sun Lung has in mind. This is suggested by Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, for instance when they write the following:

“the problem under discussion, (...) *for its author*<sup>10</sup> was not just a “paradox” in the colloquial sense of the word” [Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, 1956, p.241]

“if the above interpretation explains more or less what Kung-sun Lung wanted to express (...) he tackled the algebra of sets (...)” [Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, 1956, p.243].

Recovering Kung-sun Lung's thought seems to be their objective.

Another approach falling under the second aim is Chmielewski's. While he appears to be in favour of using modern methods, he also sees Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz's interpretation as an “exaggeration in applying modern methods (mathematical, rather than logical) to the problems of early Chinese logic” and blames them for using Reichenbach's “rational reconstruction” too much [Chmielewski, 1962, p.175-176]. Hans Reichenbach worked on philosophy of science and distinguished the context of discovery from the context of justification. The former concerns the psychological process through which the scientist makes their initial discovery, while the latter concerns an epistemologically idealised version of this process, or the way they will justify and explain the discovery to others after it has happened [Aufrecht, 2017]. The relation between rational reconstruction and interpretation may not be directly clear. The context of discovery could be connected to the initial reading of a text, or to its initial meaning for the writer, and the context of justification could be connected to the text's worked-out interpretation. However, rational reconstruction was devised to describe the process of sciences, and it is not given that it can be ‘transferred’ to interpretation without changes, as is done by Chmielewski. We will come back to this issue in Chapter 5. If we disregard it, then, in the context of the *White Horse Discourse*, Chmielewski's critique can be understood as being against too great a focus on the context of justification of the Discourse, and too little a focus on its context of discovery, which would be tied to its original meaning. He writes that both logic and philology must be taken into account in interpretation; perhaps logic can be connected to context of justification and philology to context of discovery.

### 3.4.2 Making Sense and Understanding the Discourse Today

Some interpretations are less focused on recovering Kung-sun Lung's thought and ask instead how we can make sense of the Discourse today – thus, in a way,

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<sup>10</sup>Emphasis mine.

sense is ‘made’ rather than ‘recovered’. This approach lends itself well to the use of modern tools. These tools may be chosen as a function of the interpreter’s affinities but also as a function of the text itself and the issues it presents<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, since theories in general are developed to solve certain problems, it may be useful to consider which problems a modern theory or tool was created to solve, and ask how close these problems are to the issues discussed in the ancient text to be interpreted.

Hansen’s interpretation appears to take this ‘making-sense’ centred approach. He seems to use an ‘inference to the best explanation’ type of methodology, as he writes that the “use of a concept like “mass” (...), rather than “universal” or “class” is a better explanation (more simple, more elegant, coherent, etc.) than any of the abstract alternatives” [Hansen, 1976, p.190-191]. Coherence, in particular, is central in his reasoning:

“My basic argument must necessarily be a coherence argument. I have no direct access to Kung-sun Lung’s mind. I have found no dusty volume in an underground tomb which explains what the Chinese sophist really meant (indeed such a volume would raise the same problems of interpretation as the original dialogue)” [Hansen, 1976, p.190].

Relatedly, Chmielewski aims to make interpretation “smooth”, “less sophisticated” and “more convincing” [Chmielewski, 1962], which may be seen as an attempt to provide a better explanation. While we placed Chmielewski’s interpretation in the previous category, we acknowledge that this shows that the two categories are not absolute or entirely disjoint.

Lucas writes that he takes “the vocabulary of contemporary logic, more specifically the language of classes, to explain the difficulties [of the Discourse], but it should be clear that our explanations may be adapted to any other preferred ontology” [Lucas, nd]. This does not commit him to statements about Kung-sun Lung’s ontology as such, but focuses on finding a language in which we can understand the text today.

Yiu Ming Fung also clearly uses methods foreign to the text, such as Kripke’s direct theory of reference and first order predicate logic. He advises “applying” concepts and methods potentially foreign to Kung-sun Lung’s philosophy, such as the platonic ‘idea’ or Bertrand Russell’s theory of definite descriptions, “to the interpretation of the text” [Fung, 2007]. He is concerned with coherence, like Hansen, and stresses the importance of consistency and avoidance of contradictions in interpretation. Yiu Ming Fung further writes that an interpretation should not be awkward or odd with regards to Kung-sun Lung’s thought, and that we should focus on understanding what his thought was, so he falls between the two categories described here.

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<sup>11</sup>See [Liu et al., 2011] for an example of how different theories can be used to shed light on different topics in ancient Chinese thought.

### 3.5 Summary

In this chapter, we investigated the approaches of the *White Horse Discourse* interpreters towards the questions and themes discussed in Chapter 1. We saw that, with the exception of Dong, all authors use comparisons in their analyses. However, the use of comparison appears to have different aims: for some, it helps us understand the Discourse better, for others, less explicitly perhaps, it serves to expand the range of traditions used to understand the text. For some other interpreters, the use of comparison suggests that they consider modern theories as superior to Kung-sun Lung's. Regarding hermeneutics, we saw that different authors have different levels of awareness of their own situatedness and the ambiguity of the interpretative process, although there is overall relatively little discussion on these issues. The section on post-colonial perspectives indicated that the West is often taken as the covert standard of comparison and that, while some authors such as Hansen attempt to remove this standard, others such as Cheng appear to accept it. Finally, in the fourth section, we distinguished between those authors who attempt to recover Kung-sun Lung's thought, and those who focus on making sense of the text for modern readers. A table summarising these observations can be found in Appendix B. In the next chapter, we study these results in more depth.

## Chapter 4

# Connecting Interpretative Assumptions with Understanding of the Discourse

The aim of this chapter is to connect Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. That is, here we want to analyse how the assumptions and approaches of the authors, discussed in Chapter 3, can be connected to the content of their interpretations, presented in Chapter 2. We will follow the same structure as in the previous chapter: we first discuss elements of comparison, then insights from hermeneutics, then the view of the authors on Western influence on their work, and finally the methods and goals of their interpretations.

Before starting, a note on the methodology of this chapter may be useful. Establishing a connection between two aspects of an author's interpretation is not necessarily straightforward: how do we determine that it is some aspect *A* (e.g. a post-colonial assumption) that influences another aspect *B* (e.g. that the interpretation is nominalistic)? To provide an answer, we first ask what content is shared by interpretations relying on a given assumption. Then, we try to explain how this assumption may be connected to these common aspects. Establishing a causative connection, rather than a correlative and explanatory one, would be very difficult and probably require a more exhaustive analysis of the authors' work and background. Such an analysis lies beyond the scope of the present thesis, which is focused on a specific set of texts only.

Additionally, we make a short remark about the organisation of the different sections. The reader will see that the authors are divided in each section based on their dealing with different questions. For instance, in Section 4.2, we note that Lucas and Hansen reflect on their choice of translation while Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, as well as Dong, do not, and Chmielewski, Lai, Cheng and

Yiu Ming Fung lie somewhere in between. Classifying the authors in this way is useful for the purpose of this chapter. However, any such division is also somewhat artificial, since the delineation of the different categories is bound to be blurry. We believe, however, that we can still learn something from this classification. Hence, we use it while keeping in mind that it is not absolute or beyond question. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, a table summarising these classifications can be found in Appendix A.

## 4.1 Comparison

The texts studied here are primarily interpretations. They may have been written with different purposes, such as providing an exposition of the School of Names (e.g. [Lucas, nd]) or directly arguing for a certain view of Kung-sun Lung's thought (e.g. [Lai, 1995]), but they all seem more or less clearly to aim to explain the Discourse and as far as this is the case, we may understand them primarily as interpretations. As we saw in Chapter 1, there is a strong argument for the idea that interpretation always involves implicit, automatic comparison; in order to understand, we proceed to some form of comparison between the text and our 'initial conception', which is determined by the concepts familiar to us before interpretation takes place<sup>1</sup>. This implicit and automatic kind of comparison can be distinguished from an explicit and more conscious way of using comparison. While the former is necessary to interpretation, the latter is not. For instance, it seems possible to give an interpretation of Plato's *Republic* without *explicitly* comparing his thought to that of some other philosophers. In the case of the interpretations we study here, however, it is remarkable that most of the authors do explicitly use multiple elements of comparison. In this section, we investigate how the authors' use of explicit comparisons and assumptions about these affect their interpretation.

### 4.1.1 Explicit Use of Comparison

Recalling from the previous chapter, only Dong does not appear to use explicit comparisons with other traditions. This makes not using comparisons more of an exception to the norm than using them. So perhaps it is more interesting to ask first how not using comparisons impacts interpretation, rather than how using comparisons would affect it.

One thing we quickly note about Dong's text<sup>2</sup> is that he does not mention any of the other interpretations discussed here. He certainly uses texts by other authors, principally Chinese ones, but it seems to be more in order to justify some of his own claims, rather than to compare his interpretation with others previously offered. This contrasts especially with Lucas' chapter in the same

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<sup>1</sup>This 'initial conception' is similar to the hermeneutic notion of 'Vorgriff'. See Section 1.2 in Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of this notion.

<sup>2</sup>We recall here that Dong wrote his interpretation in Chinese and that it was translated by someone else.

book, which has more or less the same aim, i.e. introducing the School of Names, but does start with a global overview of existing interpretations of the Discourse. Dong's analysis appears to be quite detached from the global English discussion on the *White Horse Discourse*. This may be seen as a disadvantage, as his interpretation does not draw insights from some of the previous research on the topic, but also as an advantage, as it offers a relatively fresh perspective to the English debate about the Discourse.

We now turn to the impact of the explicit use of comparison with Western philosophy, which can be observed in all other texts studied here. To analyse this impact, we must ask what their use of comparisons reveals about their approach. At the very least, it shows that the authors are aware of Western thought on issues they judge sufficiently similar. As a consequence, there are at least two possible attitudes to adopt. The first one is to look for similarities, and possibly differences, between the text studied, here the Discourse, and the Western tradition. Lai, Yiu Ming Fung and Cheng fall into this category. The second one is to be wary of precisely drawing too many similarities, in places where this would not be justified, and to, instead, try to move past these Western insights and thus not use them as that against which the interpretation is drawn, like Hansen and Graham do.

The observed use of comparison, primarily with the Western tradition, rather than other traditions, suggests that the authors assume their audience is familiar with Western philosophy. Indeed, many such comparisons are not explained in depth, even though they seem to have the role of facilitating understanding rather than obscuring it, which they would do if the reader was not initially already familiar with, for instance, platonic realism or class theory.

#### 4.1.2 Assumptions about the Aim of Comparison

While most authors do make frequent comparisons between Chinese and other philosophical traditions, they do so with different aims. Hansen, for instance, uses comparisons with the aim of understanding Chinese theories of language better. In contrast, Cheng's approach appears to come closer to fusion philosophy, since he argues that the study of Chinese thought should be done with the objective of contributing to global knowledge:

“an inquiry into universal elements and peculiarities of classical Chinese logical and methodological ideas should reveal what special contribution Chinese logic and methodology can make to the development of logic and scientific methodology in general.” [Cheng, 1965, p.204]

For Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz as well as Chmielewski, the aim of comparison is not mentioned explicitly but comparison seems to be instrumental in placing their analyses in context, justifying why their respective analysis is interesting by showing that Kung-sun Lung's Discourse on the White Horse is connected to, but perhaps not as good as, Western mathematical theories. We will come back to this conjecture in Section 4.4.

## 4.2 Hermeneutics

In this section, we return to the author's hermeneutic assumptions, which we discussed in Section 3.2. We treat first the authors' attitudes towards prejudice and the hermeneutic circle, then their presumed assumptions about language and translation, and finally their use of the principles of charity and humanity.

### 4.2.1 Prejudice and the Hermeneutic Circle

One of the issues discussed in the previous chapters was the role of prejudice in interpretation and its connection to the hermeneutic circle. If we classify the authors in terms of how much awareness they show for this kind of issue, we get roughly this: Chmielewski and Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz show close to no awareness, Lai, Hansen, Graham, Thompson, Dong and Yiu Ming Fung appear to pay limited attention to the issue, and Lucas and Cheng are those who seem to be the most attentive to it.

One might hypothesise that only the authors who pay explicit attention to the hermeneutic circle in their own interpretation would have the peculiarity that they then also consider how it is at work in Kung-sun Lung's text, and hence they would take the historical context of the Discourse more into account. However, all authors do discuss the context of the Discourse at least a bit, so it seems that there is no real correlation between the authors' awareness of the hermeneutic circle and their attention to the context of the Discourse. In fact, Cheng and Lucas, who seem to pay the most attention to hermeneutic issues, have in common that the context of the Discourse plays only a small role in their interpretation. Perhaps, because they are aware of prejudice in their own interpretation, they also appreciate the intricacy of the situatedness of Kung-sun Lung's writing process and realise that the initial stance, or position, from which he wrote is inaccessible and therefore not to be recovered. Hence, they do not start their interpretation from the context in which Kung-sun Lung wrote, like other authors may do. This resonates with the fact that both Cheng and Lucas' analyses are not focused on 'recovering' Kung-sun Lung's original thought, as we saw in the discussion on methodology and goals of interpretation in Section 3.4. The authors' level of attention to context is indeed connected to the aim they seem to have in their interpretation, and we will discuss this in more details in Section 4.4.

### 4.2.2 Issues of Language and Translation

Another issue that we discussed in the previous chapter was that of language and translation. We observed that, while it is common for authors to reflect somewhat on language issues, such as certain grammatical aspects of Classical Chinese or the way our view of the world is or is not determined by language, most authors do not reflect much on issues of translation and they do not even justify their choice of translation. Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, as well as Dong, do not discuss translation at all. Chmielewski and Lai mention it. Yiu Ming

Fung and Cheng do briefly discuss it, and Hansen and Lucas are the authors who appear to show the greatest awareness of the ambiguity of translation.

In the case of Hansen, his attention for issues of translation can be seen as a manifestation of his interest for language and, in particular, his view that language determines ontology. Indeed, if ontology is truly shaped by language, then it is of prime importance to reflect on translation choices. Thus, we see that Hansen's interpretation of the Discourse, which as we saw relies heavily on his idea that language determines thought – and in particular thought concerning ontology – can be connected to his attention to issues of translation.

In the case of Lucas, the role of language in his interpretation may not be as transparent but it is nevertheless quite revealing. As we saw, he uses modern mathematics to interpret the Discourse. In this sense, it may be said that he *translates* the Discourse into the language of classes. This choice of translation is significant; when translating a text from a natural language to a formal one, as is the case here, nuances are necessarily lost. This is something that seems intuitive enough; we can accept that the translation into mathematics is 'imperfect' in the sense that it partly alters the message of the original text. For instance, if we translate 'a white horse is not a horse' into 'the intersection of the set  $S_W$  of white objects with the set  $S_H$  of horse-shaped objects is not equal to the set  $S_H$ ', i.e.  $S_W \cap S_H \neq S_H$ , we 'loose' the potential understanding of 'is' as meaning set inclusion rather than equality. In contrast, it is often believed that translation from a natural language into another natural language can be 'perfect' in that sense, or at least come close to perfection. This seems to be assumed by authors such as Dong and Lai, for instance, who do not problematise at all their use of translation of the Discourse into English. Perhaps, in the case of Lucas, we can understand his choice of translating the Discourse into the language of classes as a recognition that translation is imperfect.

One might argue, in response to this, that both Chmielewski and Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz's interpretations translate the Discourse into a formal language as well, even though they show no clear awareness of issues of translation, which questions the idea that these two things would be connected. However, the stance these authors take towards their translation is different from Lucas'. Indeed, the wording of the texts of Chmielewski and Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz suggests they consider their mathematical translation as precisely what Kung-sun Lung had in mind. In this view, their 'translation' is the only correct one. In opposition, Lucas remarks the arbitrariness of his choice of translation, when he writes the following:

“We take the vocabulary of contemporary logic, more specifically the language of classes, to explain the difficulties, but it should be clear that our explanations may be adapted to any other preferred ontology.” [Lucas, nd]

Here he makes clear that he views his translation as a simple choice of vocabulary rather than a revelation of what Kung-sun Lung precisely had in mind.

### 4.2.3 The Principles of Charity and Humanity

In the previous chapter, we also discussed the principles of charity and humanity. Interestingly, we can observe a correlation between this topic and the two previously discussed. Indeed, those authors who appear to use primarily the principle of humanity, namely Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski, Dong, Thompson and Lai, all show overall relatively little awareness for issues of prejudice and translation. In contrast, those authors who primarily use the principle of charity, namely Lucas, Cheng, Graham and Hansen, appeared to have more awareness for the issues discussed in the two previous subsections. Yiu Ming Fung, who shows a mild awareness of these issues, appears to rely equally on the principle of charity and the principle of humanity. Of course, the two principles are not mutually exclusive and many interpretations contain elements that suggest both principles are used, but often one seems to be prevailing over the other.

This topic will be dealt with in greater detail in Section 4.4, where we connect this issue to that of using modern methods – in a ‘reader-centred’ way – against recovering Kung-sun Lung’s thought – in an ‘author-centred’ way – in interpretation.

## 4.3 Post-Colonial Perspective

In previous chapters, we discussed the influence of Western concepts in cross-cultural interpretation. In this section, we look at how the way the authors deal with the influence of Western philosophy on Chinese philosophy can be connected to the content of their interpretations.

### 4.3.1 No Awareness

Some authors show little to no awareness of the problematic aspects of Western influence on cross-cultural philosophy. Among these, we find Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski and Dong. For the two former interpretations, their lack of awareness can be explained by the time at which they wrote, respectively 1956 and 1965, making them the earliest interpretations considered in this thesis<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, this was a time in which there was not yet much sensibility for this kind of issues, a sensibility that came later with post-colonialism among other things. The reason for Dong’s lack of awareness seems to be different: his interpretation appears somewhat detached from Western philosophy, since he does not discuss any of the Western interpretations presented here and since he does not compare Chinese philosophy with Western philosophy.

Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski and Dong have in common the fact that their interpretations appear to rely on a form of universalism. That is, they seem to assume that there is a form of universal truth against which

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<sup>3</sup>With the exception of a few authors who are not discussed in as much depth here, such as Hu Shi and Yu-Lan Fung’s.

Kung-sun Lung's thesis can be measured. In the case of Chmielewski, there is also clearly the idea that mathematicians of his time are closer to this truth than Kung-sun Lung was, as we discussed in Section 3.1.4. The idea of universalism in Chmielewski and Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz's interpretations is supported by their use of assertive terminology; they talk about statements being "correct", theories being "incomplete", etc. In the case of Dong, this universalism is expressed differently, and not as strongly. The following quote is revealing:

"Currently, books with new interpretations [of the *White Horse Discourse*] and different perspectives come out at an even faster pace, but there is still no definitive account. This is an infinite process of seeking absolute truth through accumulation of relative truth."  
[Dong, nd]

Here we see that the idea of an absolute truth is applied not to the content of the Discourse but, rather, to its interpretations. Even though it is unclear whether Dong believes we can ever attain this truth, he seems to maintain that there is such a truth, or, in other words, that there is one correct way to interpret the text. This idea is not common to all interpretations; some, such as Cheng's and generally those that show greater awareness for hermeneutic matters, focus on describing one possible understanding without claiming that it is the correct one, or that there is one correct interpretation at all.

These observations suggest that absence of post-colonial awareness may be connected to assumptions of universalism. This would make sense since challenges to universalism may often come from the recognition of the legitimacy of plural ways of thinking, and such a recognition is not devoid of political implications.

### 4.3.2 Attempt to Move Past the Western Standard

Some authors show more awareness of the pervasiveness of Western thought and attempt to move past it, by proposing theories that intentionally distance themselves from analyses that would seem more natural but rely on Western concepts. Unsurprisingly, Hansen is one of them. Graham, insofar as his interpretation starts from the same premise as that of Hansen, can be put in this category as well.

Graham's and Hansen's interpretations have in common the fact that they are based on nominalism, as opposed to platonic realism. Indeed, both authors start their interpretation from the premise that Kung-sun Lung, and in fact all the Chinese thinkers of his time, had an ontology devoid of abstract universals such as 'horseness' for instance. With this idea, Hansen and Graham significantly depart from many other interpretations which have Kung-sun Lung thinking precisely about such universals.

This suggests that there is a correlation between the ambition to move past the imposition of Western concepts and the view of Kung-sun Lung as a nominalist. This connection is probably indirect: the rejection of realism, presumably

as a Western doctrine, leads authors to look for an alternative directly opposed to it, and they arrive at nominalism.

We should note, however, that this result has been criticised, for instance in [Fung, 2007, p.525], because, insofar as the idea is to avoid reading Western concepts into the Discourse, resorting to nominalism is not adequate. Indeed, nominalism too can be considered a Western doctrine in as far as it was developed by William of Ockham, Thomas Hobbes and Rudolf Carnap among others.

### 4.3.3 Reactions to these Attempts

Some authors are aware of the influence of the West, as well as of the reaction of Hansen and Graham to the problem. In turn, they propose an interpretation, sometimes directly in reaction to Hansen's analysis and with a return to a realist reading. Among these authors we find Cheng, Yiu Ming Fung and Lucas.

These interpretations have in common the fact that they come closer to platonic realism, whether explicitly or through abstract mathematical classes and logic, than to nominalism. They differ from the other previously mentioned interpretations through classes or sets, i.e. Chmielewski, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, and Dong, in that they do not appear to assume universalism. Cheng, for instance, focuses on showing that a certain reading of the Discourse, namely one through platonic realism, is possible. He does not argue that it is the only right reading. Similarly, Lucas acknowledges the plurality of possible interpretations and ontologies that can be attributed to Kung-sun Lung. Yiu Ming Fung, too, is careful to use terminology less assertive than Chmielewski's, presenting his own interpretation as a possible one among others.

Here, we can see a correlation between the return to realist interpretations and awareness of post-colonial perspective involving an acceptance, rather than a rejection, of Western influence. This makes sense if we consider the fact that the authors in the present category are also in the group of authors who focus on 'making sense' of the text rather than 'recovering' its original meaning and, roughly, have an awareness of hermeneutic issues<sup>4</sup>. These stances suggest that the authors are aware of the situatedness of their own interpretation and, instead of trying to avoid Western prejudice altogether, they recognise it openly as something that influences them. Since the focus of their interpretation is to 'make sense' of the text, their prejudice is not necessarily an issue, but rather something that must be accounted for in the way they explain, or make sense of, the Discourse.

## 4.4 Methods and Goals

In this section we discuss the methods of the authors and their impacts on their interpretations. We follow the structure of the corresponding section in the previous chapter, thus (artificially) dividing the authors into the following two

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<sup>4</sup>See Sections 3.2 and 3.4 or Appendix A.

categories: those who attempt to recover Kung-sun Lung's thought – and, to some extent, appear to use primarily the principle of humanity – and those who use modern or foreign methods and focus on a contemporary understanding of the Discourse – and, to some extent, use more the principle of charity.

#### 4.4.1 Recovering Kung-sun Lung's Original Thought

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the following authors' objective appears to be the 'recovery' of Kung-sun Lung's original thought: Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, Chmielewski, Dong, Thompson and Lai. These are also the authors who seem to rely on the principle of humanity, at least more so than on the principle of charity.

In order to have the objective of going back to Kung-sun Lung's thought, the authors must believe it is possible for us, at least theoretically, to conceive Kung-sun Lung's ideas today and to see them as rational. This in turn presupposes that there is a rationality shared between Kung-sun Lung and the contemporary reader, or at least that it is possible to establish a continuity between our rationality and his.

This can be observed quite clearly in Chmielewski's interpretation. Indeed, he writes that Kung-sun Lung had a theory of classes<sup>5</sup>, but an incomplete one since it lacked, among other things, the concept of class inclusion. In other respects, according to Chmielewski, Kung-sun Lung's theory of classes was seemingly remarkably similar to 20th century mathematics. While Kung-sun Lung missed class inclusion, he did think of class exclusion and intersections, for instance. Thus, Chmielewski establishes a continuity between Kung-sun Lung's original thought and ours, while also maintaining that the former is incomplete, suggesting that modern theory is complete and, perhaps, superior.

Some authors in this category appear to push further the idea of a progressive continuity between ancient Chinese and modern thought. Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, for instance, do not seem to want to study the differences and similarities between Kung-sun Lung's original arguments and modern set theory. Rather, they start from modern set theory, use it to devise a mathematical proof based on the Discourse, and suggest quite bluntly that this may be precisely what Kung-sun Lung had in mind. So here it is not only continuity but almost equality of rationalities that is assumed. That is, not only is Kung-sun Lung's way of reasoning accessible and understandable through our modern rationality, but it is, presumably, the same as ours, at least with respect to his arguments in the Discourse.

Similarly, Lai presupposes a common rationality between us and Kung-sun Lung. Perhaps he does not mean to argue that we share exactly the same one, but rather that we can grasp, and even understand, Kung-sun Lung's. Just like 'us', Lai claims, Kung-sun Lung is rational in that he knows a white horse is in fact a horse, and at the same time it is possible for us to understand why he claimed the contrary:

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<sup>5</sup>Here we take theory of classes to be representative of rationality.

“Any serious historian of ideas must grant [Kung-sun Lung] (...) that he knew what common sense would say (‘A horse is a horse (...) — whatever colour it might have’). He must have good reasons for saying what he said. The present essay will reconstruct that rationality”. [Lai, 1995, p.59-60]

Dong’s view on the question seems to be slightly different. When writing about previous interpretations of the Discourse, he mentions one<sup>6</sup> which, according to him, “does not grasp the essence of the Gongsunlongzi” [Dong, nd]. This suggests that (a) he believes there is an essence to be grasped, which in turn presumably implies (b) that there is an essence which we *can* grasp. It seems reasonable to assume that the idea of grasping this essence is similar to the idea of grasping Kung-sun Lung’s rationality. Dong’s view here is different from the other ones in that he does not claim that he himself grasps that rationality. This resonates with his idea that “there is still no definite account” [Dong, nd] of the Discourse.

#### 4.4.2 Making Sense of the Text with Foreign Methods

Some authors seem to be less focused than those we just mentioned on unveiling what Kung-sun Lung really meant and, rather, focus on how we, today, can make sense of the Discourse. Sometimes this means they use modern methods, such as mathematical class theory, to interpret the Discourse. However, as we saw, not all interpretations based on modern methods are to be counted in this category, since some of them do use modern methods but with the idea that these were in fact close to what Kung-sun Lung had in mind. Hence, we put in the present category only Hansen, Graham, Cheng and Lucas, although, as we have mentioned before, we acknowledge that the boundaries between these categories cannot be strictly enforced.

Regarding the use of the principle of charity, it is interesting to point out that there may be a difference between the principles which the authors explicitly claim they use and the ones they actually seem to be using. In this respect, Hansen’s interpretation is interesting because, while he claims that he uses the principle of charity, Yiu Ming Fung, when commenting on that interpretation, argues that Hansen does not, in fact, use it, since he fails to make sense of the text in a coherent way:

“even though [Hansen] claims to use Davidson’s principle of charity to interpret Gong-Sun-Long-Zi, he has to interpret Gong-Sun Long as committing inconsistency, particularly in the case that he interprets Gong-Sun Long as using the term ‘fei-ma’ (...) in two different senses”. [Fung, 2006, p.128]

Here we see Hansen’s aim to use the principle of charity confronted to the interpretation he wants to give. For this thesis, we classified Hansen as a user of

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<sup>6</sup>Namely, this is Xiè Xīshēn’s *Explanatory notes on the works of Gongsun Long* (*Gōngsūnlóngzǐzhù* “公孫龍子註”), written in Chinese and dating from the Song dynasty.

the principle of charity, but we take Yiu Ming Fung's argument as an indication of the tensions inherent to our classification.

## 4.5 Summary

In this chapter, we explored further the assumptions and approaches of the interpreters of the *White Horse Discourse* that we had identified in Chapter 3 and connected them to the content of the interpretations, described in Chapter 2. We noted that the authors' hermeneutic awareness – or lack thereof – can be linked to their views on the nature of language and the role it plays in their interpretation. We identified three different attitudes that authors take towards the prominence of Western thought – ignorance, rejection and acceptance – which, we observed, are correlated to universalism, nominalism and realism respectively. Finally, we looked further into the distinction between the authors who aim to recover Kung-sun Lung's thought and those who have a more reader-centred approach. The former can be seen as 'recovering sense' and the latter as 'making sense'. We saw that they tend to focus more on the principle of humanity and charity, respectively.

This discussion generates broader questions. In particular, the continuity of rationality assumed by the first group appears to presuppose a universal rationality, but such a concept is questionable. In addition, it relies on the idea that there exists such a thing as the original meaning of the text and that it is accessible to us, which again can be questioned. Moreover, the question may be raised to which extent hermeneutics and post-colonialism are compatible. In the next chapter, we describe and discuss these questions in more depth.

## Chapter 5

# Extension to Broader Issues in Interpretation

The discussion in the previous chapter raises interesting global questions regarding interpretation. The aim of the present chapter is to explore some of these. The idea here is to extend the discussion of interpretative questions regarding the *White Horse Discourse* to more general questions concerning the interpretation of any text. This naturally leads us back to some of the general points and authors discussed in Chapter 1.

As we will try to show, the questions we treat here are all connected to each other. Yet, in order to facilitate the analytic discussion, we distinguish three sections. In the next section, we begin by discussing the tension between the hermeneutic tradition and the post-colonial one in their treatment of prejudice and ask whether they can be reconciled. Then, in Section 5.2, we examine the idea of an original object, or the original thought of a writer, and the possibility of its recovery by the interpreter. In the last section, we ask whether rationality is to be seen as universal or plural and what this might entail.

We note that the questions discussed in this chapter and the next one are very broad. It will, of course, not be possible to provide a comprehensive representation of the work that has been done on these topics. However, by discussing these questions in relation to the interpretations of the Discourse, it is possible to deepen our analysis of the interpretations. The choice of literature is based on the relevance of the texts to this thesis in particular.

### 5.1 Hermeneutics and Post-Colonialism in Tension

As we saw earlier, some authors show some sensibility for issues dealt with in the hermeneutic tradition. These authors appear to be aware that the process of interpretation is situated and that this situatedness is inevitable. Lucas, for

instance, writes that his mathematical background makes him more inclined to use certain interpretation techniques. In the hermeneutic tradition, a common way of dealing with this situatedness is to suggest that we should inspect our own prejudice and present it openly, so as to make our interpretation more transparent, as Lucas does.

We also saw that some authors take into account the post-colonial tension between Eastern and Western philosophy in their interpretation. As discussed in Chapter 1, several scholars in comparative philosophy denounce the prejudices originating in the Western tradition and found in contemporary cross-cultural philosophy. Following the same line of thought, some of the interpreters of the *White Horse Discourse* claim that we should be wary of imposing Western concepts on our reading of the text. They seem to advocate a more genuine, authentic reading – and thus to assume that such a reading exists and is possible. Doing so, they appear to hold both the belief that bias *is* present in interpretation and the conviction that this bias *could be* removed, that is, that theoretically it would be possible not to be biased. If prejudice is necessarily present in interpretation, then this may seem to conflict with the desire to free ourselves from this bias. However, if we understand the first belief as an empirical observation rather than as an analytic, necessary truth, this conflict can be resolved.

Although some authors, such as Cheng, appear to pay attention to both hermeneutic and post-colonial concerns, it is not clear whether such concerns are in fact entirely compatible. Indeed, the desire to rid interpretation of its predominant Western prejudice stands in opposition to – or at least is in tension with – the hermeneutic conception of prejudice as an inevitable, and even positive, component of interpretation. In short, on the one hand we have the hermeneutic idea that prejudice is inevitably an integral part of interpretation. On the other hand, we have the normative demand underlying the post-colonial approach that, even though this may not be the case for now, interpretation should – and hence the hope that it could – become free of Western prejudice. In this section, we want to investigate these tensions and ask whether there might be a way to reconcile this hermeneutic insight and the normative demand underlying post-colonial approaches.

### 5.1.1 Resolving the Tension through Hermeneutic Expansion

In [Berger et al., 2017], which we discussed in Chapter 1, Berger draws a connection between the hermeneutic and post-colonial traditions by presenting prejudice and colonial legacy as two important issues of contemporary comparative philosophy. Initially, he seems to side more with the post-colonial tradition when he writes the following:

“While Gadamer (...) took a positive tack in seeing our prejudices as inescapable conditions of initiating a kind of dialectic interchange between reader and text, (...) the dangers implicit in such prejudices

are still obvious”. [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]

Berger presents prejudice and the lack of attention for post-colonial perspectives as two major areas for improvement in contemporary comparative philosophy. While he views prejudice as dangerous, he recognises that it is not possible to rid oneself of it. In order to address the issue, he proposes to

“expand our hermeneutic boundaries instead, and forge overlappings with other “circles” of thought, creating new relationships between cultures”. [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]

By this he means that, instead of stepping out of the hermeneutic circle, we should attempt to include ‘foreign’ cultures and point of views in our ‘initial conception’ and background. This may be seen as his way of resolving the tension between the hermeneutic necessity of prejudice and the post-colonial judgement against it.

Berger’s solution is intriguing, as it seems to sit somewhat awkwardly with the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The process that is required to include a new point of view in our initial conception, as Berger recommends we do, is precisely the process of the hermeneutic circle: we first see a foreign text, or point of view, through a lens determined by our initial background. Through interpretation, the text or point of view itself will become part of our conceptions and background. To put it in Berger’s own terms:

“we are bound, as the historical beings we are, to encounter other traditions at first through our own tradition’s language, conceptual framework and civilizational prejudices”. [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]

However, as Berger suggests in this quote, the process of the hermeneutic circle is already inevitably at work in comparative philosophy. So Berger’s solution would have us do nothing new. But it seems that what he proposes is something different, namely to somehow bypass the hermeneutic circle. This problem put aside, we must grant to Berger that the ways he proposes to proceed might indeed be of benefit for the diversification of the field of modern philosophy, which, as Deng among others argues, is too often centred around Western concepts. These ways are mostly practical: Berger explains how he himself has chosen to spend more time working on Eastern philosophy, and how he deliberately composes discussion panels in such a way that they include experts from multiple different traditions.

While his efforts seem laudable and his objective legitimate, it seems that this only addresses the problem on a superficial level. It is good to have cross-cultural discussion panels – although not revolutionary for cross-cultural philosophy – but once a Western philosopher will be asked to discuss an Eastern concept in these panels they will still face the problem of prejudice. Perhaps a way forward would be, in addition to Berger’s suggestion, to reflect more deeply on prejudice as such rather than deftly attempt to move past it. This is indeed what some of the commentators of Berger, among which Moeller, suggest [Berger et al., 2017].

### 5.1.2 Authority and Tradition: a Further Point of Contention

A related question is the status and legitimacy of tradition and authority, or appeal to authority as a tool for interpretation. As we saw in Chapter 1, the notion of tradition plays an important role in hermeneutics. Interpretation is seen as taking place from a certain stance, which is determined by traditions. For instance, Dong's background is much more influenced by the Chinese academic tradition than the Western one and this makes his interpretation different from the other ones discussed in this thesis. With tradition comes the notion of authority: some authors will be judged as representatives of these traditions and hence as authoritative figures guiding interpretation. Hansen, for instance, uses Hajime Nakamura's work for his interpretation in what he himself calls an 'appeal to authority'. The hermeneutic view of tradition and authority may be seen as an endorsement of these as legitimate components of interpretation. Since being influenced by traditions and appealing to authority, at least implicitly, is inevitable in interpretation, this then becomes legitimate. Such a view directly opposes the post-colonial one, which not only questions the legitimacy of the use of the Western tradition, but may also challenge the notion of authority more generally. Furthermore, this alleged endorsement of authority has rendered hermeneutics prone to the critique of being related to a politically conservative mindset [Wilson, 1996]. If this is the case then that might further increase the tension between hermeneutics and post-colonialism, the latter being generally considered to problematise conservative notions.

However, this tension might be resolved if we take a close look at the hermeneutic understanding of tradition and authority. In [Wilson, 1996], for instance, Holly Wilson argues against the claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics is tied to conservatism, and writes the following:

“[Gadamer] is arguing that tradition in fact does give us a starting point for reflection, not that it ought to. He is not advocating the superior authority of tradition; he is only claiming that the authority of tradition is based on an act of reason, an act of acknowledgment.”  
[Wilson, 1996, p.147]

If we view the relying on tradition and authority as a starting point rather than a normative criterion, then we may reconcile hermeneutics with post-colonialism. The latter might indeed accept the recognition of tradition and authority as a starting point of interpretation, as long as this recognition can later be turned into a questioning of this authority.

## 5.2 The Original Object

In our discussion of the methodology and goals of the different authors, we drew a distinction between the authors who search for Kung-sun Lung's original thought and those who do not. The idea that, when interpreting, we should

aim to recover exactly what the author had in mind, which may be called the ‘authorial intention’, is peculiar and deserves attention. This idea rests on the assumption that such a recovery is not only desirable but also, to begin with, that it is possible. In this section, we want to discuss not only the (im-)possibility of such a recovery but also the assumption that there is such a thing as ‘the original thought’ of a writer. Here, we refer to this idea as the ‘original object’, but it is not to be confused with the physical, written manuscript. Asking whether the original manuscript can be recovered is probably more of a question for archaeologists than for philosophers, although there may be connections between the manuscript and the authorial intention, for instance related to the problem of text corruption. We will discuss these in more details in the next chapter.

We note that the idea of a recovery of an original object is related to the topic of the previous section. A hermeneutic approach would probably claim that the original object – if there is any – is inaccessible, or at least that the focus of the interpretation process is on the reader rather than on the writer of the text<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, a post-colonial approach would presumably be more focused on doing justice to the writer’s intention than on the reader’s personal understanding of it, since the latter would presumably be too influenced by Western prejudice.

### 5.2.1 A Hybrid, Inaccessible Original Object

Berger appears to claim that there is such a thing as the original thought of thinkers like Kung-sun Lung but that it is not accessible to us. He suggests there is no “transparent access to the past” [Berger et al., 2017, p.123] and writes:

“it is not as if any of us has a crystal ball that would enable us to peer into the ancient “lifeworlds” of philosophers even in one’s own traditions to divine what they were thinking or what the exact meanings and intentions of their ideas and texts were.” [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]

Berger’s claim here is not so much about spatial distance as about historical distance. Arguably, we might add, even with these two types of distance absent, there is still a difficulty of understanding, or arriving at the initial meaning of any text written by someone other than oneself. This passage also suggests that, in Berger’s view, there is such a thing as an original object or “exact meanings and intentions of [the authors’] ideas and texts” [Berger et al., 2017, p.122]. This is further supported by the wording of his article, for instance when he claims we should “bridge the distance” between cross-cultural philosophy and

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<sup>1</sup>The terminology used here might be a little confusing, as in this thesis we often use the term ‘author’ to denote an interpreter (e.g. Dong is an interpreter of Kung-sun Lung but the author of a text we study here). We try to make explicit what we mean in the thesis, but also note that this difficulty illustrates the interpretative recursivity of the project of this thesis. That is, by working on the authors’ interpretations, we ourselves interpret them.

“its objects of study”: the idea of a gap, or a distance, indeed presupposes that there is something, set in time and space, that we are distanced from.

Berger also mentions ‘hybridity’ as something that may render access to the object easier. A text is rarely the product of only one tradition or culture, he writes; rather, and particularly so in the modern, globalised world, texts stem from several traditions and hence may be seen as hybrid. The reason why this hybridity makes interpretation easier, Berger claims, is that the object is less opaque and might even contain some of ‘our’ culture. However, hybridity may also render interpretation more difficult, as it makes it more complex. For instance, we saw in the previous chapters that, according to some interpreters, several philosophers in Kung-sun Lung’s time maintained the claim that a white horse is not a horse, while common people shared our intuition that this claim is false. Viewing the philosophical thought and common thought as two ‘traditions’, we may see the Discourse as a hybrid product of both<sup>2</sup>.

The notion of hybridity applies not only to the ‘original object’ but also to the stance of the interpreter; this is no new idea for hermeneutics but it illustrates the complexity of both the production of a text and its understanding. In this hermeneutic line of thinking, one might ask whether the notion of hybridity does not, in fact, undermine the very idea of an original object. If the object is determined, or ‘created’ by – and understood as – the intersection of the traditions of its author and interpreters, then this renders it not only inaccessible but also inexistent, or at least not existent as an ‘object’ anymore. Indeed, it is then something more abstract, subjective, whose delineation is more blurry and in this sense fails to be an object. Berger does not seem to take this point into account. He is concerned mostly with the hybrid character of the authorial intention and not of the interpretation, but he notes that hybridity may somewhat compromise interpretation:

“The comfort that can be drawn from the creative but, as it were, already-accomplished facts of hybridity may be tempting, since it does not necessarily challenge our prevailing philosophical frameworks and ways of life.” [Berger et al., 2017, p.123]

Although we mentioned some form of hybridity in the Discourse, it is interesting to point out that there might be a lot more hybridity today than there was in Kung-sun Lung’s time, given the restrictions of technology back then, which made the mixture of different cultures difficult.

The notion of hybridity put aside, the claim that there is an original object but that it is inaccessible seems paradoxical: if it is truly inaccessible, how can we assert anything about it? By claiming it is inaccessible, we already access the inaccessible character of the object. This issue hearkens back to the critique against Kant’s ‘Ding an sich’, and may also apply to positions that claim there is no original object: how do we know this? How do we access this?

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<sup>2</sup>And indeed some interpretations explicitly take the confrontation of these two thoughts into account. Thompson, for instance, argues that the Discourse is precisely about this confrontation, which he connects to the use-mention distinction.

## 5.2.2 Letting Go of the Original Object

Moeller, in a reply to Berger, shows a similar stance towards the accessibility of an original object. However, he does not appear to believe as much as Berger that there necessarily is such an object. Rather, following the same line of thought as the hermeneutic tradition, he appears to focus on the interpreter's process of understanding. He writes the following:

“Sense (...) is not made as a cognitive illumination of a presumably given “thing in itself” (such as, e.g. “Chinese Philosophy” or “Chinese Thought”), but rather as an effect of functioning communication which operates in a specific social context and is capable of generating further communication of the same kind. Simply put, cross-cultural philosophy is not contingent upon “cross-culture” but, just like any other philosophy, contingent upon philosophy as a field of communication within the academic system of society.” [Berger et al., 2017, p.127]

Although he does not seem to claim that there is automatically no original object, Moeller provides an analysis that is compatible with the idea that there *may* not be an original object as such. When it comes to the *White Horse Discourse*, for instance, we noted earlier that there is a certain confusion surrounding the order of the bamboo strips on which it was written. Of course, we may suppose that when Kung-sun Lung wrote it, he intended for the strips and the text to be read in a certain order. However, it is also conceivable that this was not the case: perhaps he could not make up his mind about which part of the dialogue should go first and never decided. The point here is that this would not render the whole study of the Discourse irrelevant<sup>3</sup>. What is interesting is the discussion about the Discourse and its influence on philosophy, regardless of whether or not it is based on ‘the real’ text or not. We note, however, that such a view is contentious; it could be argued that this view implies that it does not matter whether a text is corrupted or not. Authors like Graham, who in their analysis of the Discourse reject the use of other, potentially corrupted texts from Kung-sun Lung to understand his thought [Lucas, nd, p.24], would presumably strongly disagree with this view. It may also be in opposition with the project of historiography. Indeed, if one studies a text with the aim of understanding better the social issues of a specific time and place, then it would matter whether the text is authentically from that time and place or not. In particular, this applies to philosophical historiography: we may want, for instance, to know how Kung-sun Lung's thought related to the work of other thinkers of his time, or perhaps how his work could be seen as an improvement on earlier theories<sup>4</sup>. Such an enquiry requires that attention be paid to authenticity and context. We will come back to this point in the next chapter.

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<sup>3</sup>We see here that there is a connection between the importance we grant to the original thought of the author and the physical text, as introduced earlier.

<sup>4</sup>We will see in Section 5.3.1 that some scholars do indeed see this as an important question, in particular regarding the question of whether Kung-sun Lung's work should be seen as rational.

### 5.2.3 Non-existent Original Object

The ‘bamboo strips’ example just provided shows that, in some situations, there may not be one defined original object. It is not inconsistent with the idea that it may exist in other situations. A stronger position might argue that the original object is in fact always non-existent. This seems to be the position of Paul Roth, who, in a reply to Berger, writes the following:

“one would also be mistaken (...) to imagine that some meaning exists in advance of translation” ; “There exist only ongoing, holistic attempts to make the best sense we can of ourselves and others.”  
[Berger et al., 2017, p.137]

The non-existence of the original object may be supported by the hermeneutic idea that both the writing and interpreting process have a historicity: they are shaped by their historical context. This context defines and restricts the range of possible meanings. In this way, context itself becomes part of the meaning and, in this sense, there is no such thing as one original object.

While there may be some disagreement regarding the hermeneutic recognition of the existence of an original object (or lack thereof), it seems sensible to say that hermeneutics generally problematises the idea of a fixed original object. This may be illustrated through a comparison with the idea of rational reconstruction, discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, just like in hermeneutics there is a distinction to be made between a text’s original meaning and its interpretation, in rational reconstruction there is a distinction between the initial ‘discovery’ and the way it is explained and justified later on. However, rational reconstruction does seem to rely on the ideas of a fixed original object and a universal rationality that explains it best. A scientific event is observed and there is one right way of understanding it – we may not be able to ever get this understanding, but there is the idea that it is what we are tending to. In hermeneutic interpretation, however, the initial object is not as clearly defined – and under the understanding presented here it does not even exist – and there is presumably not one universally right way of interpreting the text given that interpretation is situated.

## 5.3 A Universal Rationality

In the previous chapter, we discussed the assumption made by some authors that the same rationality is shared between Kung-sun Lung and modern readers. Important questions regarding rationality underlie this issue: is there such a thing as a universal rationality? If not, can we talk about several rationalities shared by different groups of people? Would that necessarily imply a sort of hierarchy of rationalities? In this section, we turn to some of these questions. In Chapter 1, we mentioned a chapter of Alasdair MacIntyre’s book ‘Whose justice? Which rationality?’ [MacIntyre, 1988] on translation. Here we turn to another chapter of the same book concerning competing rationalities. It is evident that

this thesis cannot provide an exhaustive discussion of the question of rationality. The aim here is rather to address the question as it arose organically from considering the presumptions of interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. To do so, we return to MacIntyre's text, which – with its ability to insightfully bridge different topics discussed in this thesis, such as tradition, translation and rationality – is particularly useful.

### 5.3.1 Connection between Rationality and Tradition

Perhaps a first question to ask is what we mean, precisely, by 'rationality'. MacIntyre notes that this is certainly a disputed topic. In line with the broader theme of his book, he draws a connection between rationality and justice, but for the purpose of this thesis we stick to his views on rationality only. He first considers the suggestion that rationality be defined as that which remains after we have 'rid' ourselves of the influence of the traditions we grew up in. This consideration indicates that he shares the hermeneutic view that, at least before inspection, we interpret from a certain stance determined by tradition. Not unlike the hermeneutic tradition, MacIntyre then argues that the idea of such an abstraction from one's original tradition or context is problematic. Indeed, he argues, the process of determining what is rational – or what is left after one got rid of initial prejudice – is itself bound to be determined by what we judge as rational:

“For already in initially proceeding in one way rather than another to approach the disputed questions, those who so proceed will have had to assume that these particular procedures are the ones which it is rational to follow.” [MacIntyre, 1988, p.4]

Thus MacIntyre rejects a view of rationality as the 'neutral' outlook one arrives at after removing one's own prejudice. This view of rationality rests on a presumed opposition between rationality and tradition, or authority. This opposition, MacIntyre writes, comes from the Enlightenment and its 'impossible' standards for rationality. Instead, he proposes a tradition-embedded conception of rational enquiry:

“What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover is (...) a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.” [MacIntyre, 1988, p.7]

Here we see that rationality is defined in terms of progress of traditions. This suggests that MacIntyre does not view rationality as universal but, rather, as plural and determined by the plurality of traditions. In this sense, he seems to agree with the hermeneutic perspective.

### 5.3.2 Universalism

Naturally, the question of a universal rationality is connected to the broader concept of universalism, which we discussed earlier<sup>5</sup>. This is also connected to the post-colonial aspects discussed previously: universalism is often associated with ‘pre-colonial’ views while post-colonial authors may be more sensitive to the plurality of truths, or at least the plurality of ways to see the truth.

The question of universalism is connected to what Moeller calls the ‘paradox’ of comparative philosophy and its way of treating the ‘other’ in an attempt to “think truly universally”:

“the history of cross-cultural philosophy could well be described as the institutionalized communication effort resulting from the paradoxical distinction between universal rationality and newly discovered alternatives to it, and the subsequent “re-entry” (...) of this distinction into the further unfolding of rationality in the form of a distinction between “our” and “other” ways of thinking. (This re-entry took place on one side of the distinction, namely on “our” side of universal rationality.) This would mean that cross-cultural philosophy not only owes its existence to the making of a paradoxical distinction, but also that its future lies in the persistent need, resulting from the emergence of the paradox, to invisibilize it in one way or another”. [Berger et al., 2017, p.126]

Moeller then connects this to the idea of the hermeneutic circle and writes that, in comparative philosophy, we have a choice to either minimise or maximise the otherness of the other. If we minimize it, we will look for things that are common to both our tradition and the other’s, we will attempt to show that theirs is not so different after all, and in so doing we incorporate the other into our own ‘initial’ conception. As an example, Moeller cites Leibniz’s attempt to unify thought with logic. Arguably, the modern attempts by Lucas and Yiu Ming Fung, among others, to interpret the Discourse through logic also fit in this category. If we maximise the otherness, we have two options: either we present the other as lacking some things that we have, or we present the other as having some things that we lack. In the first category, we might find Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, as well as Chmielewski, for instance. In the second, there could be Lai and his negative logic. Moeller presents this as a paradox about the very nature of comparative philosophy: as soon as the other is no other anymore, there is no more comparison to take place, but if we maintain the other in its otherness, then this alienation makes comparison impossible.

The paradox discussed by Moeller is a recurrent question in comparative philosophy and has been discussed by several philosophers. For instance, in [Chakrabarti and Weber, 2015], which we also discussed earlier, Chakrabarti and Weber begin their book by a quote from Georg Simmel:

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<sup>5</sup>See Section 4.3.1.

“we must first conceive intellectually of the merely indifferent existence of two river-banks as something separated in order to connect them by means of a bridge.” [Chakrabarti and Weber, 2015, p.1]

In other words, the enterprise of comparative philosophy requires that there be something conceived of as ‘other’. In their introduction, Chakrabarti and Weber discuss bridges but also borders and the way cross-cultural philosophy depends on them while also trying to cross them.

## 5.4 Summary

We started this thesis with questions applying to cross-cultural philosophy broadly and then discussed the particular case of the English-written interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. In the present chapter, we returned to a general point of view in order to examine some of the questions generated by the discussion in the previous chapters. We considered three main questions. The first one was the tension between post-colonialism, which, on certain readings, requires that interpretation be rid of Western prejudice, and hermeneutics, which maintains that prejudice is inevitable. We presented Berger’s solution through hermeneutic expansion and a critique of it as insufficient. We also elaborated on this tension through the question of the alleged conservatism of hermeneutics. We then examined the idea that the original thought of the author can, and should, be recovered in interpretation. We presented three ways of looking at this question, which consider the original thought as inaccessible, irrelevant, and non-existent respectively. Finally, we discussed the idea of a universal rationality and exposed how rationality is connected to tradition and the necessity of an ‘other’ for the enterprise of comparative philosophy. In the next chapter, we evaluate these ideas and give our opinion on them.

## Chapter 6

# Evaluation

In this chapter, we provide an evaluation of the questions and issues discussed in the previous chapter. Up to this point, we have tried to present these questions, in as far as this is possible at all, factually and mostly without judgement. Here, the idea is to look at the same questions but from a more evaluative point of view, arguing for certain approaches and against others. We follow the structure of the previous chapter and its three sections, namely the tension between the hermeneutic and post-colonial traditions, the idea of an original object and the universality of rationality. We give our opinion on the three questions discussed and conclude with a short discussion on the shortcomings and merits these questions highlight in the different interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* discussed in this thesis.

### 6.1 Hermeneutics and Post-Colonialism in Tension

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a tension between the hermeneutic appeal to become aware of the role of prejudice and tradition in interpretation on the one hand, and the post-colonial demand to delegitimise the consistent presence of a Western standpoint in interpretation on the other hand. Indeed, the one recognises prejudice as inescapable while the other, at least under certain understandings, demands precisely that prejudice be eliminated. It seems to us that both demands are legitimate. We also believe that neither of these two demands is appropriately taken into account in most of the interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* studied here.

In this section, we first consider a possible way to reconcile the two demands. We then explore the connection between this question and the notion of authority, and finally we look at how the tension discussed and its possible resolution may be at play in Hansen's interpretation of the *White Horse Discourse*.

### 6.1.1 Reconciling Hermeneutics and Post-Colonialism

What we have named the post-colonial demand can take different forms. In one of the strongest formulations, it is argued that scholars should only interpret texts from their own traditions, because interpretation of texts from a tradition other than one's own is considered as illegitimate and as a form of cultural appropriation. However, this view seems not only unfair to philosophers – it would not just be Western scholars who would have to stop interpreting non-Western texts, but also non-Western scholars who would not be allowed to interpret Western texts, and this does not seem warranted – but also too restrictive and damaging to the enterprise of philosophy. Indeed, it would widely limit the range of available perspectives on texts and thus impoverish philosophical discussion. Furthermore, this 'strong' version of the post-colonial demand clearly conflicts with the hermeneutic idea that prejudice is inevitably involved in interpretation, regardless of the background of the interpreter.

There is, however, another, weaker way to see the post-colonial demand that could help reconcile hermeneutics and post-colonialism: instead of claiming that we should interpret without any prejudice, it would demand that we become aware of our prejudice and that we actively attempt to overcome it while also recognising that completely surpassing it is impossible. In this sense, the hermeneutic and post-colonial tradition would become not only compatible but also complementary. Indeed, in this way, the post-colonial tradition could be seen as a radical inflection of the hermeneutic one.

If we understand the post-colonial demand in such a way, then a possible way to address the issue of the predominance of Western-based interpretations would be to ask for more diversity in interpretation. This could mean, for example, that more interpretations based on different Eastern or African philosophies and concepts would be encouraged. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the boundaries between traditions are blurry and, consequently, to avoid essentialising traditions, as was discussed in the introduction. This solution would allow to expand the scope of possible interpretations and make the study of ancient texts richer. If we consider the study of the *White Horse Discourse*, authors could, for instance, try to stop almost systematically starting their interpretations by stating their agreement or disagreement with prominent Western interpretations, such as Hansen's, and instead use Jenco's technique of asking about methods and practices connected to the text, since such methods are likely different from Western ones. In this way, interpretation would become more grounded in non-Western traditions. Of course, it is not possible to completely remove one's own attachment to a particular tradition, but more attention to prejudice can certainly be given.

We note that this applies to both Western and contemporary Chinese researchers (as well as others)<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the inclination to interpret from a Western point of view is also present in Chinese academia, given

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<sup>1</sup>However, we remind the reader that this thesis concerns only those interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* that are written in English. The criticism proposed in this chapter may not be relevant to interpretations written in Chinese.

that, as Deng argues, much of modern Chinese philosophy is in fact comparative philosophy based on Western thought<sup>2</sup>. Of course, today most philosophical traditions have been in contact with other traditions and involve comparison to lesser or greater extent as a natural consequence. However, in the case of Chinese philosophy, Deng, as well as Ma, argues that there is a problematic imbalance that needs to be addressed, as was discussed in Chapter 1<sup>3</sup>.

This proposed way to address Western predominance concerns future interpretations. However, it seems that the post-colonial approach would demand not only that we change our methods for future endeavours but also that we reflect on past efforts and their shortcomings. Hence, along with a greater attention towards prejudice in future interpretations, we might want to also consider existing interpretations and clarify the ways in which these are shaped by Western prejudice. This has been done to some extent in some of the interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*<sup>4</sup> but this line of reasoning could certainly be pushed further.

### 6.1.2 What we judge as Authority

Along with a questioning of our prejudice, it may be useful to question what we deem as an authority and the role it plays in the practice of philosophy. Indeed, a post-colonial approach would probably denounce the excess of authority that has been granted to Western philosophy and ask that we review what, and who, we deem authoritative and why.

The notion of authority is, in a way, always at play in interpretation. This may be explicit, as is the case for Hansen's interpretation of the *White Horse Discourse*, for instance, when he writes the following:

“I shall content myself here by an “appeal to authority.” Almost all attempts to characterize Chinese philosophy in general have stated, in one way or another, that the dominant character of Chinese thought is nominalistic. Perhaps the best-known generalized characterization is Hajime Nakamura's *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*. Nakamura finds emphasis on the concrete and the nondevelopment of abstract thought to be dominant characteristics of Chinese thought.” [Hansen, 1976, p.191]

Cheng seems to be critical of Hansen's use of ‘appeal to authority’ in his interpretation:

“Hansen says that there is no historical background for the discovery of abstract entities. He has no argument for this. His resort to Hajime Nakamura is, as he himself acknowledges, a matter of appeal to authority.” [Cheng, 1983, p.8]

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<sup>2</sup>See Section 1.4.1 in Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup>See Section 1.3 in Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup>See Section 3.3 in Chapter 3.

However, this critique does not seem entirely warranted since any interpretation must to some extent appeal to authority implicitly at many points. For example, this is seen when Thompson mentions a parallel between his idea that the *White Horse Discourse* concerns the use-mention distinction and “Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later insight that the meaning of a word is a function of its use in language and communication, not just a function of its sense and reference” [Thompson, 1995, p.485]. Thompson uses this parallel to support his point and he does not question whether Wittgenstein’s insight was right or not. In this sense, the parallel can be seen as a non-justified, implicit appeal to the authority of Wittgenstein. If the authors who interpret the Discourse had to justify every point they make, their interpretation would be unfeasibly long (if finite at all).

### 6.1.3 Assessing Hansen’s Interpretation

Hansen’s interpretation is a good example of the shortcomings of a ‘strong’ or ‘unreflected’ post-colonial approach: one of its aims is to remove the Western lens through which the Discourse is too often interpreted and which portrays Kung-sun Lung as a platonic idealist. However, Hansen only succeeds in replacing the obvious Western interpretation by another Western interpretation, since nominalism is a Western doctrine, too. One could argue that, since Hansen gets the idea that Chinese thought is nominalistic from Hajime Nakamura, this nominalism is characteristic of Asian thought and not to be seen as an exclusively Western notion. However, Cheng argues that Nakamura is mistaken in reading nominalism into ancient Chinese texts [Cheng, 1983, p.347-348]. Moreover, even though ideas similar to nominalism may be characteristic of Chinese thought, the word still bears with it a Western connotation. In fact, the word ‘nominalism’ is used only twice in Nakamura’s *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* [Nakamura, 1991], the book on which Hansen bases his understanding of Nakamura. This suggests that, while Nakamura may have had something similar to nominalism in mind, nominalism as such does not play a prominent role in his work. Whether or not this is correct, Hansen shows eagerness to use this nominalism without mentioning its Western connotation nor questioning whether Nakamura’s claim is correct or whether nominalism is really part of Nakamura’s analysis. In this sense, the nominalistic interpretation is not very effective in its aim to not let Western standards drive our understanding of the Discourse.

However, we must also take into account that Hansen explicitly states he appeals to authority when resorting to Hajime Nakamura. Making explicit what we take as ‘authority’ is in line with the aim of rendering prejudice in interpretation more transparent. Moreover, taking Hajime Nakamura, a prominent Japanese scholar who worked on Chinese, Indian and Japanese thought among other things, as one’s authority appears to be a good step forward in the objective of changing the stance from which Western philosophers tend to interpret the Discourse. Hence, as may be expected of any interpretation, Hansen’s interpretation has both shortcomings and merits from a post-colonial point of view.

## 6.2 The Original Object

We now turn to another question discussed in the previous chapter, namely the idea of an original object, which may be thought of either as the author's thought or as the expression thereof in an original written text and the meaning of this text. There are several stances that one can take towards this question. If one believes that there is indeed such a thing as a unique original object, then there are still several options: one may see the object as accessible (this seems to be Chmielewski's position), inaccessible (Berger's position), or one may claim that we must strive to recover the original object even though we cannot be sure it is accessible (Dong's position). Other possible stances include the refutation of the existence of an original object (Roth's position) and the idea that it does not matter whether or not such an object exists, that this is not what interpretation is about anyway (Moeller's position). In this section, we explain why we believe that the last position is the most sensible one.

### 6.2.1 Justifying Moeller's Position

We agree with Moeller that it is particularly interesting to look at how a text has been received and understood, how its understanding has influenced and been influenced by various philosophical approaches. Thinking along the lines of the hermeneutic tradition, we should have no pretension of being able to access the author's original thought directly, since it is always through a certain lens, in a certain time and historicity that we encounter it. However, asserting that there is an original object but that it is inaccessible seems problematic, as we discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, as soon as the object becomes inaccessible, it is difficult to see how we could assert anything about it, and in particular how we could assert that it is inaccessible.

In the previous chapter, we showed with an example that the existence of an original object is not a necessary condition to make interpretation possible or interesting. Hence, we reject the claim that there is necessarily an original object, although we recognise that this is a strong claim. In particular, the perspective that there may be no original object at all in some cases may seem counterintuitive to many readers. However, this pretheoretical wariness by itself cannot be enough to reject the argument presented here.

We conclude that, first, in cases where there is such an object, we cannot say much about its accessibility or lack thereof, and, second, that an original object may or may not exist but that this is not the only thing that makes interpretation relevant or meaningful. Hence, we think that the focus of interpretation should not be the recovery of the original meaning of a text but, rather, the way we can best make sense of it for ourselves.

### 6.2.2 Away with History?

An argument against the position we defend here could take the following form: if we do not attempt to recover the original object and, more importantly, if we

accept that it may not have existed, then this questions the point of the study of history as a whole. That is, by favouring the hermeneutic view that we should focus on our modern, situated understanding of the text rather than on the original authorial intention, it may look like we dismiss entirely the question of the text's authenticity and its role as a historical object. Often, researchers may want to ask not only how a text should be interpreted, what we can learn from it today, but have a real 'historical' aim and ask questions such as: what does the text teach us about philosophical thought in a specific place at a specific time? Was the author's thought related to political events of his time? etc. Lai, for instance, does appear to view his interpretation as a historical work<sup>5</sup> and hence we may suspect that he would most likely disagree with the view that the recovery of the original object should not be the focus of interpretation.

Relatedly, if it does not matter whether there is such a thing as an original object, then it is also presumably of no importance to ask whether a text is corrupted. However, this does not seem to be something we would want to say. Regarding the *White Horse Discourse*, most interpreters do appear to care, albeit to different extents, about the authenticity of Kung-sun Lung's different texts. This has been discussed by Lucas, among others:

“Graham (...) gives very rigorous and quite convincing philological arguments to prove that only the Baimalun and the zhiwulun should be attributed to Gongsun Long (...) The authenticity of the texts has subsequently been the subject of much attention and Graham's position is far from being accepted; (...) [Cheng] accepts Zhiwulun, Baimalun and Jianbailun.” [Lucas, nd]

Lucas' discussion is interesting because it asks not only which authors consider which texts as authentic, but also connects with the question of whether authenticity is necessary and how this relates to the objective of interpretation:

“The discussion of authenticity is not exclusively a matter of philology, since it commands two clearly conflicting interpretations. The first one, relying on the authenticity, favors a unified interpretation, seeing all the texts as essential pieces of information, fitting with one another to give a global coherent picture of Gongsun Long's thought”. [Lucas, nd]

This first kind of interpretation is in line with Dong's approach, for instance, since he uses several texts by Kung-sun Lung to understand the Discourse, although he does not explicitly state his agreement with Lucas' idea. Harbsmeier, too, writes that even texts which we know are corrupted are relevant and should be taken into account in the study of Kung-sun Lung [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998, p.298]. Lucas then describes a second kind of interpretation:

“The second interpretation, insisting on the differences of the component texts (...), will not give a unified picture of the whole and tend

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<sup>5</sup>See Section 3.4.1 in Chapter 3.

to describe them analytically, without trying to coordinate them, or even totally neglecting the texts which are considered as being inauthentic. Graham's and Hansen's positions are typical representatives of that interpretation". [Lucas, nd]

Whether or not we agree with this second approach, it must be recognised that, while we may want to be able to disregard authenticity in some cases, it can be profitable to consider it in some other cases, and hence it should not be entirely disregarded.

We think that these are valid objections, and that authenticity does indeed matter in some cases, in particular in the context of historical enquiry and when the identity of the author is an important component of our understanding of the text. Usually it is relevant to consider how the life of the author can help enlighten our interpretation of their work, but sometimes, for instance in sciences or theoretical philosophy, this may not be as important. The idea of authenticity can also be a helpful tool to assess which interpretations are better. We doubt that there is ever one correct, best interpretation. However, we do want to maintain a possibility to assert that some interpretations are more plausible than others. This can be achieved through the principle of charity – asking which interpretation makes more sense, or is most coherent – but also by asking which interpretation appears to come closest to what we imagine was Kung-sun Lung's thought. If we choose the second option, it makes sense to assume authenticity. Hence, while we maintain that authenticity and authorial intention should not be the focus of interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*, we acknowledge that there are cases, in particular in historiography, in which these questions are more important.

However, it may be helpful to point out that history, understood as the study of historical events, is itself situated too. There is probably no such thing as objective history: if we take a conflict or war, the different parties involved will often give different accounts of what happened. It is possible to view history as the attempt to recover and understand what truly happened, but another way to see it is to ask how we can make sense of – and do justice to – the plurality of accounts of what happened and of the fact that it is impossible to recover completely the 'true' way in which events happened. Understanding that we have only accounts to work with<sup>6</sup> and no direct access to the past, we can make sense of history with or without original objects. Hence, a questioning of the relevance of the original object does not imply a rejection of – or an inconsistency with the aims of – the field of history. It also does not mean that we should stop asking whether texts are 'authentic', but perhaps that the first of the two approaches described by Lucas – that is, the idea that we should not dismiss texts whose authenticity is not entirely certain but rather use them to build a coherent whole together with other, presumably authentic texts – is more productive. In short, we do not defend the idea that 'anything goes'

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<sup>6</sup>Arguably, one might say that modern digital tools such as pictures and videos offer a more direct access to past events. However, just like texts, pictures and films are subject to interpretation and rarely provide indisputable answers to historical questions.

regarding authenticity, but rather that it should not always be the primary focus of interpretation.

## 6.3 A Universal Rationality

We now turn to the questions concerning the nature of rationality that were addressed in the previous chapter.

Rationality can be understood in at least two different ways. It may be the ideal, ‘best’ way of thinking and reasoning; in this sense, rationality is normative and can be either universal or plural, although this view fits more naturally with the idea of a universal rationality. In Western society, for instance, rationality understood in this way can be connected to logical or mathematical thought. Alternatively, rationality may be the way in which people of a certain cultural group tend to reason; in this sense, rationality is descriptive and more likely plural than universal. For instance, according to Fung, Graham conceives of Chinese reasoning as through parallelisms or ‘complementary polarities’ such as in ‘yīn yáng’ (陰陽) [Fung, 2006, p.119].

Often, studies of rationality may compare these two conceptions of rationality. There is also often a confusion between the two. In this thesis, we take it for granted that different societies have different ways of thinking and hence that if rationality is seen as descriptive there is not much contention about it being plural rather than universal. We are primarily interested in the idea of normative rationality, but will also use the descriptive one and try to make it explicit when we do so.

We agree with MacIntyre’s view that conceptions of rationality, whether normative or descriptive, are tied to traditions and that establishing ‘what is left’ after tradition has been ‘removed’ is impossible. Hence, we believe that there is no such thing as a universal rationality. In addition, we believe that seeing rationality as plural is not the right answer and that we should, rather, question whether rationality, or at least its normative component, is a good concept to use. In this section, we first explain why both plural and universal understandings of rationality can lead to the problematic idea of a hierarchy of ways of thinking. We then clarify why we think that the concept of rationality itself is problematic, which implies that the question of universal against plural rationality is ill-founded.

### 6.3.1 Hierarchy

Both a view of rationality as universal and as plural can be used to establish a hierarchy of systems of thought. If rationality is plural, then it would seem possible to find standards against which certain rationalities may be judged better than others. Of course, a plural view of rationality does not necessarily imply that there must be a hierarchy. However, it might be difficult to reject hierarchy without having to accept the relativist claim that ‘anything goes’, which is usually not considered a desirable conclusion. If rationality is universal,

a belief often tied to the idea that it is ‘our’ rationality that is the universal one, then systems of thought may be judged based on how close they are to the presumed universal one.

Establishing a hierarchy is not necessarily bad; after all, we may want to avoid having to say that any system of thought is just as good as any other. If a given type of reasoning was, for some reason, connected to oppressive practices, we might want to have the possibility to claim it is not the best system. However, the history of imperialism should make us wary of the idea of a hierarchy of systems of thought. Hence, we must be cautious with both plural and universal views of rationality.

We note that this is connected to the question of the aim of comparative philosophy, which we discussed in Chapter 1. An attempt to establish a hierarchy would presumably be in line with a view of the aim of comparative philosophy as the determination of which tradition is best<sup>7</sup>. However, this aim is far from unanimously accepted today, partly thanks to the insights of post-colonialism.

### 6.3.2 Questioning the Concept of Rationality

In [Rooney, 2010], Phyllis Rooney discusses practices and assumptions about argumentation in philosophy. She writes that the association of men with reason and women with irrationality has been sustained through history. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Augustine but also Kant, Nietzsche, and C.S. Pierce have used them in more or less direct ways. Regarding Aristotle, for instance, Rooney writes the following:

“Aristotle not only thought that women were (in a literal sense) less capable of reason than men, but woman also symbolically represented the irrational element of the soul: “in the soul too there is something contrary to the rational principle, resisting and opposing it...[the relationship between these parts of the soul] metaphorically resembles that between master and servant or that between husband and wife”. [Rooney, 2010, p.224]

Philosophers such as Rooney but also Charles Taylor [Hollis and Lukes, 1982] argue that the Western, modern conception of rationality is rooted in the practice of philosophers in ancient Greece. If this the case, then there are reasons to believe that this conception of rationality carries with it at least some of its initial, oppressive aspects. For instance, Rooney writes, related misogynist aspects can be found in the work of Augustine, Aquinas, Kant and Nietzsche, among others [Rooney, 2010, p.207-224]. This suggests that the definition of a normative rationality is not as neutral as it pretends to be. Since it has been used to exclude members of society from the philosophical debate, it seems the concept of rationality might need to be revisited<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>Recognising here that we would have to ask ‘best in which respect’ and often this is overlooked, as is pointed out by Deng who argues for more clarity regarding the standards of comparison.

<sup>8</sup>This issue has been widely discussed in philosophy. See for instance [Plumwood, 2002].

This also suggests that, when people try to establish a hierarchy of systems of thought, it is not the idea of rationality that comes first, as a standard for comparison, but rather their imagined hierarchy itself. That is, it would not be rationality that is used to determine the hierarchy, but it would be the other way around: the hierarchy forming the basis to determine what is rationality. This may be quite an extreme view, but seeing conceptions of rationality as devised precisely to support specific views of hierarchy might help cast light on why rationality is thought of in the way it is and why it has remained a prominent concept in philosophy.

## 6.4 Summary and Connection to Interpretations of the White Horse Discourse

In this chapter, we gave our opinion on the general issues introduced in Chapter 5. We discussed a possible way to reconcile hermeneutics and post-colonialism, which sees prejudice as necessary and inescapable but also unfixed. A recognition of prejudice can be seen as the first step towards calling into question the predominance of the Western perspective. Regarding the idea of an original object, we argued along the same line as Moeller that, although there are cases in which it cannot be entirely disregarded, such an object should not be the focus of interpretation. Finally, we argued that the idea of a universal rationality presupposed in some interpretations can easily be tied to a hierarchical comparison and that the concept of rationality itself is problematic.

Interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse* can be evaluated against these interpretations. In particular, we saw that Hansen's interpretation has the merit of showing awareness of post-colonial perspectives, although it does not address these in a satisfactory way. This interpretation also shows some limited awareness of hermeneutic issues in its treatment of appeal to authority. Hence it can be seen as an example of an interpretation that reconciles hermeneutics and post-colonialism, although there is still much room for improvement. The discussion on the original objects suggests that those approaches which we identified as 'making sense today' (i.e. Hansen, Cheng, Graham and Lucas) rather than 'recovering' Kung-sun Lung's thought (i.e. Dong, Lai, Thompson, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz, and Chmielewski) might be on a more promising track. The questioning of rationality presented in Section 6.3 induces a questioning of the idea that there is a continuity between Kung-sun Lung's rationality and the modern reader's. This assumption is found in particular in the interpretations of Chmielewski, Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz and can be considered a shortcoming.

# Concluding Remarks and Open Questions

In this thesis, we have studied the interpretative assumptions behind modern, English-written interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*, seen as a work in cross-cultural philosophy. We started from a general point of view, discussing issues in cross-cultural philosophy in Chapter 1, dived into the particular example of the discussion surrounding the *White Horse Discourse* in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, and came back to general issues in Chapters 5 and 6.

We have seen that, with the exception of Dong, the frequent use of explicit comparisons between Chinese and Western philosophy suggests that the authors discussed in this thesis interpret – and hence probably expect their interpretations to be read – from a Western perspective. We also saw that the fact that interpretation is influenced by prejudice, tradition and language is barely mentioned or taken into account, let alone problematised by the authors. Few authors try not to presuppose Western concepts in their reading of the text, but we argued that their attempts are not satisfactory, since all they achieve in that respect is the replacement of an obvious Western reading by another one, less obvious, but still Western. We also saw that the authors can be roughly divided into two groups, namely those whose aim it is to recover Kung-sun Lung's original thought, and those who focus on understanding the text in a way that makes sense for a modern reader. While the former aim may seem to be more fair and doing justice to the text, we showed that it relies on problematic assumptions regarding the existence and accessibility of the original thought of Kung-sun Lung. The second aim appears to be more in line with a hermeneutic view of interpretation. We saw that, although this may seem unlikely at first consideration, such a view may be compatible with the post-colonial demand to remedy Western thought's undue prominence in cross-cultural philosophy. A hermeneutic, post-colonial view would require that prejudice in interpretation be brought to light rather than entirely banished, since that would not be possible. Finally, we have seen that covert assumptions about the nature of rationality underlie interpretations of the *White Horse Discourse*. We believe these questions are important to address and that a proper reflection on these would enrich resulting interpretations and the global English discussion on the *White Horse Discourse*.

We now briefly discuss two broad directions in which the work presented here could be developed further.

First, the approach of this thesis could be used to study scholarship on later Mohism, which is often considered, along the School of Names, as the most promising tradition as a candidate for logic in ancient Chinese thought. However, this approach may also be useful to the study of other Chinese schools of thought usually considered as less closely related to logic. More generally, the kind of analysis given here could be applied to the study of Chinese logic as a whole. In the past century, there have been many efforts to study ancient Chinese texts from a logical point of view and thus to define a Chinese logic<sup>9</sup>. While some of these efforts entertain methodological reflections<sup>10</sup>, it would be productive to have a more detailed and systematic discussion about the assumptions behind this kind of endeavour. Perhaps an awareness of the fact that our view of logic, at least in English scholarship, is rooted in Western philosophy, as well as a questioning of the idea of rationality, may help to orient the search for logic in non-Western traditions. More generally, this kind of approach may help to bring about a questioning of what we consider to be ‘logic’ and recognise the situatedness and hence political relevance of this concept.

Second, it may be interesting to apply the reasoning and questions presented in this thesis to the interpretation of texts of other traditions. As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, we studied mostly those aspects of cross-cultural philosophy that are relevant to ‘Western-Chinese’ discussion in particular. While some of these may be relevant to the comparison of other traditions, too, it is likely that such a comparison would be quite different. Chinese philosophy has enjoyed a prominent place in Western cross-cultural philosophy, and so have Japanese and Indian philosophy, among others. However, the situation may be different for other traditions. For instance, pre-Columbian Latin American philosophy is, according to [Gracia and Vargas, 2018], barely recognised as philosophy, and Africana philosophy is, according to [Outlaw Jr., 2017], naturally much more politicised due to its origins<sup>11</sup>. Asking whether – and, if so, how – the issues discussed in this thesis are at play in the English interpretation of texts of these two traditions might lead to fruitful observations. An elaboration of post-colonial hermeneutics might be helpful in that purpose<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, this thesis did not only focus on Western-Chinese cross-cultural philosophy but, more specifically, on Western-Chinese cross-cultural philosophy from a Western, or at least English, point of view. It would be interesting to ask how the issues presented here are at play when looking at the enterprise of cross-cultural philosophy from the perspective of non-Western traditions and in texts in languages other than English. This would be in line with the idea

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<sup>9</sup>See for instance [Liu and Yang, 2010], [Cheng, 1965] or [Harbsmeier and Needham, 1998].

<sup>10</sup>See for instance [Liu and Seligman, 2011].

<sup>11</sup>This might be a good place to recall that there is no sharp delineation between these traditions, as we discussed in the introduction. Africana philosophy has been developed partly by Western scholars of African descent, and hence it really can be seen as a product of different traditions, as well as as a tradition on its own.

<sup>12</sup>For an example of a work going in this direction, see for instance [Serequeberhan, 1994].

presented in [Harbsmeier, 2019] that English cannot, and should not, be the measure of all things, even though it is often taken to be just that in current analytic philosophy. This may lead to a general reflection on the methods of interpretation in philosophical enquiry, which in recent times has become more and more cross-cultural.

## Appendix A

# The White Horse Discourse: Text in Classical Chinese

Here we give the Classical Chinese version of the *White Horse Discourse*, as it was transcribed by Donald Sturgeon in [Sturgeon, nda].

“「白馬非馬」，可乎？

曰：可。

曰：何哉？

曰：馬者，所以命形也；白者，所以命色也。命色者非命形也。故曰：「白馬非馬」。

曰：有白馬，不可謂無馬也。不可謂無馬者，非馬也？有白馬為有馬，白之，非馬何也？

曰：求馬，黃、黑馬皆可致；求白馬，黃、黑馬不可致。使白馬乃馬也，是所求一也。所求一者，白馬不異馬也；所求不異，如黃、黑馬有可有不可，何也？可與不可，其相非明。故黃、黑馬一也，而可以應有馬，而不可以應有白馬。是白馬之非馬，審矣！

(1. 馬: Originally read: “者”. 從《百子全書》本改。)

曰：以馬之有色為非馬，天下非有無色之馬也。天下無馬可乎？

曰：馬固有色，故有白馬。使馬無色，有馬如已耳，安取白馬？故白者非馬也。白馬者，馬與白也；馬與白馬也，故曰：白馬非馬也。

曰：馬未與白為馬，白未與馬為白。合馬與白，復名白馬。是相與以不相與為名，未可。故曰：白馬非馬未可。

曰：以「有白馬為有馬」，謂有白馬為有黃馬，可乎？

曰：未可。

曰：以有馬為異有黃馬，是異黃馬於馬也；異黃馬於馬，是以黃馬為非馬。以黃馬為非馬，而以白馬為有馬，此飛者入池而棺槨異處，此天下之悖言亂辭也。

曰：有白馬，不可謂無馬者，離白之謂也。不<sup>1</sup>離者有白馬不可謂有馬也。故所以為有馬者，獨以馬為有馬耳，非有白馬為有馬。故其為有馬也，不可以謂馬馬也。

(1. 不: Another version reads: “是”. 《百子全書》本「不」作「是」.)

曰：白者不定所白，忘之而可也。白馬者，言白定所白也。定所白者，非白也。馬者，無去取于色，故黃、黑皆所以應。白馬者，有去取于色，黃、黑馬皆所以色去，故唯白馬獨可以應耳。無去者非有去也；故曰：「白馬非馬」。”

## Appendix B

# Interpretative Assumptions

Here we provide a table summarising our evaluation of the authors' assumptions and methods, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The table is not entirely filled, as in some cases the criteria are not adequate to judge the interpretations. The 'Comparison' column shows the apparent aim of the use of comparison of the authors. The 'Hermeneutics' column gives the degree of awareness (in increasing order: no awareness, very limited awareness, limited awareness, and some awareness) of the author for hermeneutic issues, in particular with respect to prejudice, tradition and translation. This column also states which principle is prevalent in the interpretation: P.C. stands for 'principle of charity' and P.H. stands for 'principle of humanity'. The 'Western Influence' column gives the stances of the authors towards the predominance of Western thought, as we identified them in Section 4.3. The 'Methods and Goals' column shows which authors we identify as aiming to 'recover' the initial meaning or thought of the author, and which authors seem to rather focus on making sense of the text in a reader-centred way.

As we mention in the introduction of Chapter 4, this kind categorisation is inevitably artificial; the format of a table in particular is quite reductive and does by no means do justice to the subtlety and nuances of the interpretations mentioned. However, we hope that this table can be a useful tool to summarise the points made in the thesis and guide its understanding. For a justification of the results in this table, please see Chapters 3 and 4.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Comparison</b>	<b>Hermeneu- tics</b>	<b>Western Influence</b>	<b>Methods and Goals</b>
Hansen	Foster understanding	Limited awareness, P.C.	Rejection	Making sense
Dong	No explicit use	Very limited awareness, P.H.	No awareness	Recovery
Cheng	Fusion	Some awareness, P.C.	Acceptance	Making sense
Graham	Foster understanding	Some awareness, P.C.	Rejection	Making sense
Lai	Hermeneutic expansion	Very limited awareness, P.H.		Recovery
Thompson		Limited awareness, P.H.		Recovery
Greniewski and Wojtasiewicz	Show superiority	No awareness, P.H.	No awareness	Recovery
Chmielewski	Imply progress	No awareness, P.H.	No awareness	Recovery
Lucas	Imply progress	Some awareness, P.C.	Acceptance	Making sense
Yiu Ming Fung	Show similarity	Very limited awareness, P.C. and P.H. equally	Acceptance	Both making sense and recovery

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