When *Dialectica* and *Logica* Travelled East: An Early Modern Chinese Translation of ‘Logic’ in *Mingli tan*

*XU Zhemeng*

**Abstract**

*Mingli tan* 名理探 (*Investigation of Name-Patterns*) is the first Chinese work dedicated to introducing Aristotelian logic. It was largely forgotten after being published in the 1630s, only rediscovered more than two centuries later, and then considered by modern academia more or less a failed project. However, through the lens of *mingli*, the key term to translate ‘logic’ in the book, this paper argues that despite the scarce readership and influence of *Mingli tan*, its translation practice should not be deemed as a failure. Instead, it is a work that reveals how translators can intervene with conceptual paradigms creatively and meaningfully. This paper provides a thorough examination of *mingli*, a culturally loaded term, by contextualizing it in the late Ming (1582–1644), a time of significant Sino-European cultural contacts. In doing so, it sheds light on the neglected philosophical value carried by the term through translation, and highlights the translator—Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630)—and his pioneering effort in infusing it with a novel Aristotelian and Christian sense. *Mingli* is also examined in the broader intellectual history. Through an investigation into its traces in later Chinese translations of ‘logic’ starting from the 19th century until the 1980s, this study reveals a line of changes in the Chinese reception of logic suggested by the shift from the use of *mingli* to the phonetic translation *luoji* 逻辑 to denote logic, indicating that *mingli* can serve as a meaningful clue to track the transition of Chinese thought from traditional to modern paradigms.

**Keywords:** *mingli*, Aristotelian logic, Chinese philosophy, intercultural, translation history, history of concepts

**Ko sta Dialectica in Logica odpotovali na vzhod: zgodnjemoderni prevod ‘logike’ v delu Mingli tan**

**Izvleček**

*Mingli tan* 名理探 (*Raziskava o vzorcih imen*) je prvo kitaško delo, ki se posveča uvodu v aristotsko logiko. Kmalu po objavi v tridesetih letih 17. stoletja je potonilo v pozabo, ponovno pa je bilo odkrito šele več kot dve stoletji pozneje, vendar je moderni akademski

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Ključne besede: mingli, aristotelska logika, kitajska filozofija, medkulturno, prevodna zgodovina, zgodovina konceptov

Introduction

Mingli tan 名理探 (Investigation of Name-Patterns<sup>1</sup>) is a translation that marks the first detailed introduction of Aristotelian logic into China. It is based on a commentary on Aristotle's Organon, titled Comentarii Collegii Comimbricensis e Societate Iesu: In universam dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritae (Commentaries of the Coimbra College of the Society of Jesus: on the Whole Logic of Aristotle from Stagira) published in Cologne in 1611,<sup>2</sup> a textbook used by Jesuits when they studied at the College of Liberal Arts in Coimbra. Mingli tan was collaboratively written by Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630), a Chinese scholar-official and prominent convert to Christianity, and by the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Furtado (Fu Fanji 傅泛际) (1587–1653). It was published around 1636–1639 and contains two

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the translation of mingli in Mingli tan, the previous scholarship has adopted the phrase "the pattern(s) of names", where the choice of “pattern” to render li dates back to Needham who understood it in terms of its literal meaning “the order and pattern in nature”. Similarly, “the principles of names” has also been used, where “principle” is a commonly used yet extended meaning of li. Another translation is “names and principles/patterns” where ming and li are in parallel. In this paper, I would like to use “name-pattern(s)” to translate mingli, an imitation of “heart-mind” used to translate xin 心. This approach keeps the relationship between the two words open to interpretation and draws on the literal meanings of both words.

<sup>2</sup> This edition is a reprint found in the library of the Beitang (North Church) in Beijing. The initial edition is Coimbra: D. G. Loureyro (1606).
volumes (册): “Five Universals” (wugong 五公) and “Ten Categories” (shilun 十伦). Each volume is comprised of five chapters (卷). Compared to the scope of *In universam dialecticam*, Mingli tan is not a full translation. The Latin commentary includes eight chapters: *In Prœmio* (Introduction), *In Isagogem Porphyrii* (Porphyry’s Introduction to Categories), *In Libros Categoriarum* (Categories), *In Libros de Interpretatione* (On Interpretation), *In Libros de Priori Resolvente* (Prior Analytics), *In Libros de Posteriores. Resolutione.* (Posterior Analytics), *In Librum Primum Toporum* (Topics), and *In Duos Libros Elenchorum* (on Sophistical Refutations). However, Mingli tan only covers the first three of them.

As for its reception, in contrast to the tangible influence of other translations on subjects such as mathematics, astronomy and mechanics in the late Ming and early Qing periods (c. 1582–c. 1724), the first introduction of European logic seems to be “a more or less complete failure. It did little, if anything, to enlarge or transform the conceptual repertoire of late Ming and early Qing discourses” (Kurtz 2011, 21‒22). Modern scholars have proposed different reasons for this. Kurtz emphasizes that the text is rather abstruse due to the abundance of neologisms, indicating that comprehending the finer ideas without the guidance of an instructor is nearly impossible (ibid., 58). Similarly, Fukazawa Sukeo believes that the intricate style and structure of the Latin source text is partly responsible for the difficulty in reading the Chinese target text. He stresses that in the beginning of the book, *In universam dialecticam* delivers a lengthy discussion on the intractable issue of universals (universalis) in its commentary on the Noe-Platonic philosopher Porphyry’s (c. 234–c. 305) *Isagoge* (*In Isagogem Porphyrii*). At first, Porphyry largely set aside this issue in his *Isagoge* due to its challenging nature. Later, however, it stood out as one of the prominent controversies in the Scholastic philosophical debates. The rigorous approach in the Latin original with regard to treating this problem is faithfully maintained in *Mingli tan*, thereby complicating the task of comprehending the text (Fukazawa 2006, 174). Zhang Yijing also attributes the difficulties in understanding it to textual, linguistic challenges. By discussing the Chinese translation of *categoria* (category) in *Mingli tan*, she underscores the difficulty of associating new meanings with existing Chinese words. This challenge complicates readers’ comprehension of the Chinese translation in its specific Aristotelian sense, which grows out of a distinct linguistic and cultural milieu compared to the Chinese context (Zhang 2020, 109‒11). Zhang’s point implies the idea of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that is, grammatical categories and concepts in a language shape how we perceive the world by directing our attention to certain ideas rather than others. This is challenged by Robert Wardy, who conducted a case study on *Mingli tan* to examine the relationship between language and thought. He argues that even in two instances concerning

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3 1582 marks the year when Jesuit missionaries first entered the Chinese mainland.
relativa (relative) and denominativa (denominative) where linguistic relativity might be more at play, the relevant features of the Chinese language were not distorting or lacking Aristotle’s intent, but were instead found to be better suited for reproducing certain logical properties of the concepts in question. The two terms were successfully explicated through what the Chinese philosophical tradition refers to as 

geyi (analogical interpretation/dynamic equivalence) (Wardy 2004, 151). Meynard does not regard Mingli tan’s inherent linguistic difficulty as the essential factor that hinders its reception. He emphasizes that the Coimbra commentary and Mingli tan are both textbooks of logical exercises in their nature and require a pedagogical method of reading. Thus, the main reason for the limited influence of Mingli tan lies in the lack of institutional support to use it. He also puts forward two additional factors to explain the book’s failure: its claim to be the foundation for any human knowledge, and its complex relationship with theology (Meynard 2019, 248–63).

Mingli tan is not the first work in Chinese that touches upon Aristotle’s logic. The earliest trace can be found in Tianzhu shiyi 天主实义 (The True Meaning of Lord of Heaven 1603), where Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利玛窦) (1552–1610) employed common words found in Chinese classical texts to translate major terms in Aristotle’s Categories. For example, he translated “substance” as zili zhe 自立者 (who/what supports oneself/itself) and “quantity” as jihe 几何 (how much) (Hsu 2005, 249, 255–57). Subsequently, Jihe yuanben 几何原本 (Elements of Mathematics (1607)) includes a translation of “category”. Giulio Aleni’s (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略) (1582–1649) Wanwu zhenyuan 万物真原 (The True Origin of Everything (1628)) contains several terms from Categories, adhering to Ricci’s translations (Hsu 2005, 263). Xixue fan 西学凡 (An Outline of Western Learning (1623)) includes both translations of important terms in Categories and a brief introduction to logic as a discipline, where four translations of “logic” are given. Alfonso Vagnone’s (Gao Yizhi 高一志) (1568–1640) Qijia xixue 齐家西学 (Western Learning on Family Regulation (1625–1630)) and Tongyou jiaoyu 童幼教育 (Education of Children (c. 1628)) also contain two translations of “logic” each. Compared to them, Mingli tan stands out for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as a dedicated, in-depth introduction to Aristotle’s logic. Moreover, it holds significance as the first Chinese book to present a significant number of Chinese translations of the concept itself—more than twenty, as per my count.

This paper first lists all the translations of “logic” in Mingli tan and explain why mingli deserves special attention. Following this, the second section is dedicated to analysing this term. It serves as the main body of the paper because there is a lack of in-depth investigations into this term in the current scholarship when discussing Mingli tan, hence an insufficient awareness of its significance concerning the introduction of logic into China and the broader picture of cultural contacts between
China and the West. This section is comprised of three sub-sections corresponding
to three cultural implications carried by the term. It examines the use of mingli not
only by Li Zhizao, but also by other Chinese literati and by European missionaries
in their intercultural texts. This is because the term is mostly considered in isolation,
rather than in a cluster of neighbouring texts, when researchers discuss the early
introduction of Aristotelian logic into China represented by Mingli tan. After each
sub-section, a comparison is drawn between Li and others in their use of this term,
highlighting the novelty of the former’s work. The last section discusses the enduring
influence and traces of mingli in later Chinese translations of “logic” from the late
Qing period onward. It reveals that the Chinese understanding of logic was limited
to the scope delineated by mingli for a long time. However, this transformed as the
phonetic translation luoji (逻辑) eventually became the official and most commonly
used equivalent to “logic”. In general, this paper offers a comprehensive analysis of
the introduction and influence of Aristotelian logic in China through the lens of the
term mingli. It reveals a significant dialogue between China and European intellectual
traditions, as initiated by Li Zhizao. More broadly, it underscores the complexities
in cross-cultural translation and the evolution of conceptual paradigms, contributing
insights to the historical exchanges of ideas between China and the West.

A Summary of Chinese Translations of “Logic” in Mingli tan

This section presents a list of 21 Chinese translations of “logic” which I identified
in Mingli tan, and explains why mingli stands out among them.

Table 1: Chinese translations of logic in Mingli tan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese translations</th>
<th>Retranslations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 mingli 名理</td>
<td>name-patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 mingli tan 名理探</td>
<td>the investigation into name-patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 mingli tui 名理推</td>
<td>the search for name-patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Tui 指 literally means “to push”. In the context of Mencius, it can mean “to extend”, such as in his
important idea of “extending affection” (tui en推恩). Le Grand Ricci dictionary defines it as inferer
(to infer). It can also mean “to search for” or “to investigate” in some instances. For example, “The
Biography of Prince Yuan of Chu 楚元王” (?–178 BC) (Chu yuan wang zhuan 楚元王传) in Ban
Gu’s 景固 (32 AD–92 AD) The Book of Han (Hanshu 汉书) wrote that: “He was inclined to search
for their roots” (you yi qi tui ben zhi ye 有意其推本之也). According to the commentary of Yan
Shigu 颜师古 (581–645), tui means “a thorough search for/investigation into the roots” (jiuji gen-
ben 究极根本). See the entry for tui in https://www.zdic.net/hans/. I opt for “to search for” here
because it does not look as modern as “to infer”, and it also corresponds to the notion of zêtêsis
(search) central to Aristotle. See Corcilius (2008, 166 n.11).
A total of 21 Chinese translations of “logic” are found in Mingli tan (see Table 1). The sheer number of them reveals the difficulty of translating a foreign concept, and also reflects the translators’ persistence in attempting to reconstruct the nuances of a term embedded in a distinct linguistic, cultural context in new linguistic and extralinguistic circumstances. A major challenge inherent in translation is that there are “no fixed ‘source texts’ capable of objective reinstatement in another language” (Sturje 2007, 2). This challenge is evident when translating “logic”, as the Latin

In universam dialecticam describes the notion of logic as “tota ars disserendi” (the entire art of debating/discussing), which largely corresponds to this Chinese translation. According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary (Glare 1968, 556), “dissero means “to set in order; to discuss”. Its definition can be found in more detail in A Latin Dictionary (Lewis, Short, and Freund 1958, 594), where it is described as “to set forth in order, arrange distinctly; hence to examine, argue, discuss; or to speak, discourse”. Therefore, it explicitly means to discuss, argue/debate, yet it also implicitly involves the act of distinguishing one thing from another before going on to discuss things. Similarly, the character bian 辨 has both the meanings of “to debate” and “to distinguish”. It was used interchangeably with another bian 辨 (to debate) in the Ming dynasty.
words used to denote this concept in the original Latin commentary, *dialectica* and *logica*, do not bear any single stable meaning ready for transmission. Rather, their meanings changed over time and were perceived differently by various philosophers. For example, and as stated in the *In universam dialecticam*, Aristotle, Plato, and other earlier ancient Greek philosophers never used *logica* to denote the demonstrative art (*ars demonstrativa*). For Aristotle, the entire discipline of syllogisms belongs to the whole or part of *dialectica*, and he never used the term *logica* in this sense. Nevertheless, later Peripatetics attributed the term to the art. As for Cicero, he stated that “logic” can be signified by both *dialectica* and *logica*. He also mentioned that Epicurus referred to the same concept as *dialectica*.8

In the table it is notable that—the two phonetic loans at the end excluded—half of the other examples contain *mingli* or at least one character of the compound term, such as *tuijiu yili* and *bianlun lixue*, suggesting the importance attached to it in the initial reception of logic in China. Additionally, given the heavy philosophical implications suggested by the term in various Chinese schools of thought, *mingli* serves a counterexample to Kurtz’s claim that the technical terminology worked out by both Li and Furtado displays “no attempt on Li’s part to link logical terms with established Chinese notions” (Kurtz 2011, 51). The central importance of the term is further evident due to its remarkably high frequency in the book, particularly noticeable in the first chapter of the initial volume (see Table 2). This chapter corresponds to the introductory chapter of *In universam dialecticam*, delving into the definition and the place of logic among all disciplines, hence the frequent occurrence of the term “logic”. As a culturally loaded term and the core to all translations of “logic” at the same time, *mingli* warrants a closer examination, which will be conducted in the following section.

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6 Couto (1611, 25): “Quod spectat ad vocabulum (Logica) non tam facile probant eo significari artem demonstrativam; quia hoc nomen apud Aristotelem, Platonem, & antiquiores non reperitur in substantivo, quo tantummodo artem significare potebat; posteriores autem Peripatetici, qui auctore Boetio in Top. Cicer. Ad initium, illud inuenierunt, toti arti attribuunt. (‘As for the term ‘logic’, it is not so easily to prove that it specifically signifies the demonstrative art, since this term is not found as a substantive which could exclusively denote the art in Aristotle, Plato, and the earlier philosophers. However, the later Peripatetics, who, according to Boethius, discovered it at the beginning of Cicero’s Topics, attribute it to the entire art.’)

7 Couto (1611, 26): “Aristoteles etiam primo libro Rhetoricae Dialecticam accipit pro tota arte, cum ait, omnem Syllogismorum doctrinam ad totam Dialecticam, aut ad aliquam eius partem spectare. Logiam vero nonquam eo sensu usurpavit; sed nec proedula artis portione accipit; ut post alios obseruauit Bernardus Mirandulanus lib. 8. suae apologiae sect. 10.” (“Aristotle, in the first book of Rhetoric, also takes dialectics for the whole art when he says that the entire doctrine of syllogisms belongs to the whole of dialectics or to some part of it. However, Aristotle never used the term logic in that sense, nor did he take it for any portion of this art, as Bernardus of Mirandola observed later in his Book 8, Section 10 of his Apology.”)

8 Couto (1611, 26): “Tota ars disserendi utroque vocabulo, Logica scilicet, vel Dialectica significatur. Cicero… Epicurus plane inermis, ac nudus est paulo post eandem arte portione accipit; ut post alios obseruauit Bernardus Mirandulanus lib. 8. suae apologiae sect. 10.” (“The entire art of debating/discussing is signified by two terms, namely dialectics and logic. Cicero… Epicurus, indeed defenceless and exposed, refers to the same art as dialectics shortly afterwards.”)
Table 2: Frequency of *mingli* in the whole *Mingli tan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The first <em>juan</em>: “The Five Universals”</td>
<td>The first <em>juan</em></td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The second <em>juan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The third <em>juan</em></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fourth <em>juan</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fifth <em>juan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total</td>
<td>The first five <em>juan</em></td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The second <em>juan</em>: “The Ten Categories”</td>
<td>The first <em>juan</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The second <em>juan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The third <em>juan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fourth <em>juan</em></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fifth <em>juan</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total</td>
<td>The second five <em>juan</em></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Investigation of *Mingli* as the Chinese Equivalent of “Logic”

This section explores the most important translation of “logic” that appeared in *Mingli tan*, the culturally loaded word *mingli*. My interest is not to evaluate whether Li Zhizao, as a translator, made the right or wrong choice when rendering a foreign concept. Rather, by putting this term back in the historical context, my focus is twofold: firstly, I investigate what attributes implied by *mingli* might have driven him to create correspondence between “logic” and his own intellectual world when he selected and reshaped *mingli* to accommodate the new idea. Secondly, I explore how this new association contributes to enriching the meaning of the existing Chinese term and to interacting with intellectual trends at the time. I approach these two questions by situating this translation within configurations of varying scopes which range from narrow to broad, including Li’s own intellectual dispositions, the context of intercultural contacts represented by Chinese Christian Texts (CCT), and the overall intellectual picture during the late Ming period.10

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9 Chinese Christian Texts is a term referring to the intercultural texts relevant to “Western Learning” (*xixue* 西学) introduced by European missionaries from the late Ming period on, written either independently by missionaries or Chinese scholars, or out of their collaborative efforts. For more information about CCT in the late Ming and early Qing periods, see the CCT Database created by Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink: https://libis.be/pa_cct/index.php/Search/advanced/ccts.

10 The theoretical guidance of this section is drawn from Theo Hermans’ book *Translation and History: A Textbook* (2022, see especially 85–90).
In order to gain an idea about Li’s understanding and use of *mingli*, I went through all 54 of Li’s texts (not including books) that have been collected so far. They are categorized into essays in response to practical questions in imperial exams (*ce* 策), reports to the throne (*shu* 疏), discussions (*yi* 议), prefaces and postscripts (*xu ba* 序跋), letters (*qi* 启), and miscellaneous compositions (*zazhu* 杂著) (Zheng 2018). It turns out that *mingli* occurs three times in these texts, as shown in the table below. Moreover, what seems to be an interesting finding is that all the three texts fall into the domain of CCT.

Table 3: Instances of Li Zhizao's writings (CCT) that contain *mingli*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time of printing</th>
<th>Original Chinese</th>
<th>Retranslation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Daiyi pian xu</em> 《代疑篇》序 (Preface to Essay in Place of Doubt)</td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>唯拘守旧闻，自矜极致，妄谓世无域外之境界，人无超性之名理。</td>
<td>Only those who cling to old knowledge and are excessively conceited would presumptuously assert there are no places beyond the boundaries [of Ming Dynasty] and deny the existence of name-patterns transcending human nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ke Tianxue chuhan tici</em> 刻《天学初函》题辞 (Foreword to the Printed First Collection of Writings on Heavenly Learning)</td>
<td>1628</td>
<td>时则有利玛窦者，九万里抱道来宾，重演斯义，迄今又五十年，多贤似续，翻译渐广，显自法象名理，微及性命根宗。</td>
<td>At the time, someone called Li Madou [Matteo Ricci], who travelled ninety thousand li carrying the righteous way to pay his tribute, presented the teaching once again. It was fifty years ago. Since then, many noblemen seemed to have followed suit, resulting in an increasing number of translations [on Western Learning] in a wider scope. They reveal the apparent name-patterns of natural phenomena and reach as deep and subtle as the root of nature and life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Time of printing</td>
<td>Original Chinese</td>
<td>Retranslation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Huanyou quan xu</em> 《寰有诠》序 (Preface to Explanation on the Great Being)</td>
<td>1628</td>
<td>是编竣，而修士于中土文言理会者，多从此亦能渐畅其所欲言矣。于是乃取推论名理之书而嗣译之。</td>
<td>When this work [<em>Huanyou quan</em>] was completed, the Father [Furtado] was better at understanding and expressing himself in Chinese. Therefore, we took the book which quests for and discusses name-patterns for subsequent translation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these three occurrences of *mingli*, only the preface to *Huanyou quan*, the first Chinese translation of the Coimbra commentary on Aristotle’s *On the Heavens*, uses the term as an equivalent to “logic”. This is also the earliest occurrence in Li’s writings of the word used in that sense. According to Li Cibin’s preface to and the start of the first section “The Beginning of Philosophy” (*ai zhi xue yuanshi* 爱知学原始) in *Mingli tan*, Li Zhizao and Furtado started the project of *Mingli tan* in 1627. His preface to *Huanyou quan* was written in 1628, when Li was still committed to working on *Mingli tan* before being summoned to reform the calendar in Beijing in 1629. Therefore, his use of *mingli* in this preface aligns consistently with his prior association of the term with logic dating back to 1627. As for the other two texts that include the term, it should be noted that although the foreword to *Tianxue chuhan* was also written in 1628, the use of *mingli* seems to have nothing to do with logic. That text draws a distinction between the apparent (*xian* 显) and the subtle (*wei* 微) through the phrase “name-patterns of natural phenomena” (*faxiang mingli* 法象名理). In this sense, *mingli* can be related to what is apparent, such as natural phenomena (*faxiang* 法象), as opposed to what is subtle, such as nature and life (*xingming* 性命). *Faxiang* and *mingli* are not a common collocation in ancient Chinese writings, since after searching in the Scripta Sinica and Diaolong databases the only example I could find is in this foreword. Regarding his preface to *Daiyi pian* completed in 1621, here too the use of *mingli* bears little relation to logic. In this case, the term connects to the abstract concept of human nature, which contrasts with its earlier association in the 1628 foreword mentioned above. From those instances, we derive an impression that for Li Zhizao *mingli*, which only appeared in his CCT writings, was mostly used in reference to Western Learning and did not have a single, strict meaning. It may specifically denote the Aristotelian logic, yet it also has the capacity to encompass a wide array of elements, whether they are tangible or abstract, superficial or foundational.
Nevertheless, Li Zhizao is neither the first nor the only author to have employed the term in CCT in the late Ming and early Qing. It also appears in writings by both Chinese scholars and European missionaries of the time, including other pillars of Chinese Christianity in the late Ming such as Yang Tingyun 杨廷筠 (1562 [1557]–1627; jinshi degree 1592), Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633; jinshi degree 1604), and Wang Zheng 王徵 (1571–1644; jinshi degree 1622). Other Chinese authors who make use of the term include a scholar known for his study of European knowledge, Xiong Mingyu 熊明遇 (1579–1649), and Christian converts such as Qu Rukui 瞿汝夔 (1549–1611), Li Tianjing 李天经 (1579–1660, jinshi degree 1613) and Wang Shiqi 王世其 (?–?).

European missionaries who use the term include Matteo Ricci and Alfonso Vagnone, two prominent figures during the early Sino-European contacts. I will first make a table showing how mingli was utilized by other individuals, something which has not been explored or summarized in previous scholarship. After that, I will analyse the instances and compare them with Li's usage, further shedding light on how the term was understood within the context of Sino-European interaction in three regards, and on Li's ingenious contribution in adding a new layer to its meaning.

Table 4: Instances of other authors’ writings (CCT) that contain mingli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time of printing</th>
<th>Original Chinese</th>
<th>Retranslation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yang Tingyun</td>
<td><em>Qike xu</em> 《七克》序 (Preface to Seven Victories)</td>
<td>1610–1615</td>
<td>名理妙趣</td>
<td>exquisite wittiness in name-patterns [points]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Xixue fan xu</em> 《西學凡》序 (Preface to An Outline of Western Learning)</td>
<td>1623</td>
<td>而貌取者第敬其操诣之纯笃，与其名理之该洽。</td>
<td>Those who are superficial respect them only for their honesty in conduct and their extensiveness in name-patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 Wang Shiqi probably knew the Chinese Christian convert Zhang Xingyao 张星曜 (1633–c. 1715) in person. Therefore we have a basic idea of Wang’s appropriate period of existence. Please see Xiao (2013, 52).

12 The data presented in this table is based on the search results of the keyword “mingli” obtained from the Diaolong and Scripta Sinica databases.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time of printing</th>
<th>Original Chinese</th>
<th>Retranslation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xu Guangqi, Li Tianjing, etc.</td>
<td>Xinfa Suanshu 《新法算书》 (Treatises on Calendrical Astronomy according to New Methods from the West)</td>
<td>c. 1770 [originally 1635]</td>
<td>能依名理; 专求法数，罕言名理.</td>
<td>able to follow name-patterns [close to logic]; dedicated to pursuing numbers and techniques while hardly discussed name-patterns [general principles]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ke Tongwen suanzhi xu 刻《同文算指》序 (Preface to the printed Instructions for Calculation in Common Script)</td>
<td>1614 [draft 1608]</td>
<td>其一为名理之儒士直天下之实事</td>
<td>One of the reasons is that Confucian scholars of name-patterns disregard practical matter in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tongwen suanzhi zhongbian xu 《同文算指通编》序 (Preface to Instructions for Calculation in Common Script)</td>
<td>1614 [draft 1608]</td>
<td>往予晤西泰利公京邸，与谭名理累日。</td>
<td>Previously I visited Mr Ricci from the West at his household in Peking. We discussed name-patterns [philosophical and religious theories] for days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tianshi mingbian 《天释明辨》 (Light Emitted by Heaven)</td>
<td>1645 [post-humously]</td>
<td>其稍能修饬，善谈名理者…</td>
<td>Those Buddhist monks who have a relatively decent look and are good at talking about name-patterns [philosophy]…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Time of printing</td>
<td>Original Chinese</td>
<td>Retranslation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiong Mingyu</td>
<td>Qike yin 《七克》引 (Prologue to Seven Victories)</td>
<td>1610‒1615</td>
<td>精天官日历、算数之学，而犹喜言名理，以事天帝为宗。</td>
<td>They are excellent in the studies of calendrical astronomy and mathematics. In particular, they enjoy talking about name-patterns [Christian teachings], taking the service of Emperor of Heaven as their primary mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qu Rukui</td>
<td>Jiaoyou lun xu 《交友论》序 (Preface to On Friendship)</td>
<td>1595/1601</td>
<td>予思楛矢白雉，非关名理…今利公…以我华文，译彼师授…此心此理，若合契符。</td>
<td>To me, wooden arrows and white pheasants have nothing to do with name-patterns [being civilized in a Confucian way] … Mr Ricci now has put into Chinese what he was taught…which is common to us regarding mind and principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Time of printing</td>
<td>Original Chinese</td>
<td>Retranslation</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Zheng</td>
<td><em>Xiru ermu zi shiyi</em> 風儒耳目资释疑 (Explanations of Doubt on <em>An Aid to the Ear and the Eye of Western Scholars</em>)</td>
<td>1626</td>
<td>西儒他所著書，種種名理，悉皆發此中从来所未发；名理如渊，正汇字学之海。学海不澄，名理奚自而流？其中种种名理相逼而出，鲜新可味；但名理所迫，不得不尔。</td>
<td>Various name-patterns [points] in Western scholars' books have never been put forward in our land. Name-patterns are like a deep pool, filled by the sea of words. If words are not clarified, how are name-patterns able to flow? A myriad of name-patterns [points] burst forth from the books ... which are fresh and worth ruminating on. He had to do this due to what is requested of name-patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Shiqi</td>
<td><em>Piwang tiaobo beke</em> 弥妄条驳合刻 (Preface to the combined printed <em>Refutation of Buddhist Errors and Confutation of Buddhist Arguments</em>)</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>盖深恶其剽窃名理，…以惑世也。</td>
<td>This is out of a strong aversion to those Buddhist monks stealing name-patterns [Confucian traditions] ... to delude the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matteo Ricci</td>
<td><em>Bianxue yidu</em> 辩学遗牍 (The Remaining Letters on the Study of Debate)</td>
<td>c. 1624</td>
<td>凡诸异教行久行远者，无不依附名理。</td>
<td>Any foreign teaching that seeks a lasting and prosperous presence in China is bound to attach itself to name-patterns [Confucian teachings].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The instances mentioned above provide a wealth of information regarding the meanings and implications carried by mingli. I will focus on three of them it bears in the following sub-sections. Firstly, it is closely associated with the use of language. Secondly, it implies a hierarchical structure within Western knowledge, where mingli not only can be used to refer to a higher abstract level of knowledge than that on the concrete level, but also to the highest level of Western knowledge. Moreover, it indicates hierarchy within the Three Chinese Teachings, with a particular emphasis on a Confucian perspective. Lastly, the term suggests a potential tension with the intellectual trend of critique against “idle talk” (kongtan 空谈) at the time.

**Association with the Use of Language**

Primarily, the term is closely connected with spoken language, although it also pertains to written expression. This can be observed directly from the verbs that usually go with mingli in many instances, such as Yang (1614), Xu (1635), Xiong (1610–1615), and Ricci (1603). These verbs include “to say” (yan 言), “to talk about” (tan 談), and “to debate/distinguish” (bian 辨). Such a feature can also be derived indirectly from three other quotations. In Yang Tingyun’s 1623 preface, he mentions Jesuits’ honesty in conduct (caoyi zhi chundu 操詣之純笃) and their extensiveness in name-patterns (mingli zhi gaiqia 名理之洽治). Here mingli is situated in conjunction with action. Given that Jesuits were known for the
new objects and ideas they introduced to China, the term appears to refer to the all-encompassing European learning. Since Chinese scholars learned about the new knowledge mainly by talking with European missionaries or by reading their works in Chinese, mingli in this case is relevant to both spoken and written words. Wang Zheng’s writing put forward an original metaphor. He compared mingli to a deep pool (mingli zhi yuan 名理如渊) filled by a sea of the study on words (zi xue zhi hai 字学之海), emphasizing that words lay the building blocks for mingli. As for Vagnone, he used mingli when he mentioned the components of writing a composition where the term was put alongside with the organization of paragraphs [structure] (zhangfa 章法), the arrangement of sentences [syntax] (jufa 句法), and the lively spirit of a composition (shencai 神采). It was still utilized within the framework of linguistic application.

That mingli has much to do with the use of language is evocative of how the Coimbra commentary describes the concept of logic. It stated that logic is the entire art of debating/discussing (tota ars disserendi) which is encapsulated by two terms: dialectica and logica. Contemporary philosophers often used them interchangeably when referring to this complete art of discourse, although Aristotle only used dialectica for this sense, never logica.13 Regarding dialectica, four meanings of this term were given, among which the first one is fundamental. The first meaning is to use language (sermone uti), serving as the origin of the designation of logic as “the entire art of debating/discussing”. The other three specify the desirable ways to use language and their aims, such as developing well-reasoned arguments in a discussion.14 In this sense, important common

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13 Couto (1611, 26): “(Tota ars disserendi utroque vocabulo, Logica scilicet, vel Dialectica signifcatur. Cicer.) Quamuis hic vocabulorum usus priscis temporibus magna ex parte observatus fuerit, hodie tamen Philosophorum consuetudo obtinuit, ut utrumque vocabulorum pro tota arte disserendi permixtim usurpetur… Aristoteles etiam primo libro Rhetoricae Dialecticam accipit pro tota arte, cum ait, omnem Syllogismorum doctrinam ad totam Dialecticam, aut ad aliquam eius partem spectare. Logicum vero non quam eo sensu usurpauit; sed nec pro uilla eius artis portione accipit; ut post alios observauit Bernardus Mirandulanus lib. 8. Suae apologiae sect. 10.” (“The entire art of debating/discussing is signified by two terms, namely dialectics and logic. Cicero.) Although in ancient times there was largely a usage of these terms as observed, today the custom among philosophers has prevailed to use both terms interchangeably for the entire art of debating/discussing… Aristotle, in the first book of Rhetoric, also takes Dialectics for the whole art when he says that the entire doctrine of syllogisms belongs to the whole of Dialectics or to some part of it. However, Aristotle never used the term ‘Logic’ in that sense, nor did he take it for any portion of this art, as Bernardus of Mirandola observed later in his Book 8, Section 10 of his Apology.”

14 Couto (1611, 27): “Verum cum Dialectica a disserendo deducatur, necesse est ostendamus verbi (disserere) non esse illa tantum significationem…sed banc etiam, ex qua nomen totius artis derivatur. Igitur disserere aliquando idem est, ac sermone uti…. Ailiquando idem est ac probabiliter disputare… Tertio idem valet etque argumentari… argumentandum & accurate disserendum… Quarto denique summum disserere pro eo, quod est aulidum ignotum ex iis, quae nota sunt, oratione patefacere.” (“However, since Dialectics
ground is visible between mingli and logica/dialectica. On the other hand, given the emphasis on using language and the definition as the art of discussing in logic, it is understandable that bian 辩/辨 (to debate/distinguish) was a favoured word choice to render the new concept of logic among the CCT published before Mingli tan. This translation appeared in three texts before the completion of Mingli tan in 1629. A list of Chinese translations of logic in the texts is presented in the table as below.

Table 5: Chinese translations of logic in CCT published before Mingli tan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Time of printing</th>
<th>Chinese translation of logic</th>
<th>Retranslation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xixue fan 西学凡</td>
<td>1623</td>
<td>luorijia 落日加 logica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mingbian zhi dao 明辨之道</td>
<td>the way of clear debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>luorijia 洛日伽 logica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bian shifei zhi fa 辨是非之法</td>
<td>the method of debating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>truth from falsehood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qijia xixue 齐家西学</td>
<td>1625‒1630</td>
<td>luorejia 落热加 logica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mingbian zhi dao 明辨之道</td>
<td>the way of clear debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongyou jiaoyu 童幼教育</td>
<td>c. 1628</td>
<td>luorejia 落热加 logica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bian also accounts for a noticeable frequency in all of Li’s translations of logic, appearing in six out of the 21 translations, as indicated in Table 1. This demonstrates Li’s continuation of the legacy established by his predecessors in translating this concept. Meanwhile, however, Li made his own intervention by being the first to identify and claim commensurability between mingli and logic.

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is derived from ‘debating/discussing’, let us show that the word ‘debate/discuss’ not only has the meaning that…but also the meaning from which the name of the entire art is derived. Therefore, ‘to discuss’ sometimes means the same as ‘to use language’… Sometimes it means to argue probably…Thirdly, it is taken to mean the same as to argue, as Cicero thinks that…one should argue and discuss accurately… Finally, in the fourth sense, it is used to discuss the act of revealing something unknown from what is known by means of discourse.”
Hierarchy Within Western Knowledge and the Three Chinese Teachings

Other than its association with the use of language, mingli’s utilization suggests a possible hierarchy of knowledge in Western Learning, favouring what is profound and overriding over what is superficial and elemental. For example, in *Xinfā suanshu*, which was adapted from the earlier *Chongzhen lishu* (Treatises on Calendrical Astronomy of the Chongzhen Reign), Xu Guangqi complained that most of the previous calendars were dedicated to pursuing numbers and techniques [divination] (*fashu* 法数) while seldom discussed mingli. By contrasting the two words *fashu* and mingli, Xu implied that the latter was more critical in producing satisfactory calendars. *Fashu* may only concern surface-level aspects, while mingli may go deeper, providing guidance for it. Here we can turn to the prevalent neo-Confucian idea *gewu qiongli* (investigating things to fathom principles) at the time, which was reshaped by European missionaries starting from Ricci and acquired a touch of Western Learning. Xu’s writings show traces of his reception of the new learning through this adapted idea. In his preface to *Jihe yuanben* 几何原本 (Elements of Mathematics), he divided the knowledge introduced by Ricci into three kinds, at the highest level being moral self-cultivation and service to Heaven, and at the foundational level being the investigation of things to fathom their principles (*gewu qiongli*). The third kind is the study of images and numbers (*xiangshu* 象数) as a part of the foundational level of knowledge (Xu Guangqi 1607, quoted in Xu Zongze 2010, 193). Since *fashu* and *xiangshu* overlap in meaning, *fashu* can be considered as belonging to the knowledge of *gewu qiongli* as well. In this way, the mingli in *Xinfā suanshu* refers to a higher level of knowledge than that dealing with concrete things. By the same token, such a hierarchy of knowledge within the structure of Western Learning is observable in Xiong’s prologue to *Qike*, where he wrote that the Jesuits whom he met were excellent in the study of calendrical astronomy (*tian-guan riti* 天官日历) and mathematics (*suanshu* 算数). More importantly, they took pleasure in talking about mingli (*xi yan mingli* 喜言名理) and regarded the service of Emperor of Heaven [God] (*shi tianti* 事天帝) as their primary mission. In this context, mingli was distinguished from astronomy and mathematics. Moreover, the subsequent mention of serving God implies that their discussions

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15 Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

16 For a detailed analysis of how missionaries reinterpreted the concept of *gewu qiongli* and brought European learning under the line of *lixue*, please see two papers: 1) Nicolas Standaert “The Investigation of Things and the Fathoming of Principles (*gewu qiongli*) in the Seventeenth-century Contact between Jesuits and Chinese Scholars” (Standaert 1994, 395‒420), and 2) Kuang-tai Hsu “Jie *gewu qiongli* zhi ming 借‘格物穷理’之名: 明末清初西学的传入 (In the Name of ‘Gewu Qiongli’: The Transmission of Western Learning in Late Ming and Early Qing)” (Hsu 2003, 165‒209).
were oriented towards religion, and specifically Christianity. This is supported by Ricci’s preface to *Jihe yuanben*, where he notes that his conversations with Xu Guangqi primarily revolved around the Great Way of the Lord of Heaven [God] (*tianzhu da dao* 天主大道) (Ricci 1607, quoted in Xu 2010, 196). Therefore, according to the categorization quoted previously, here *mingli* refers to the highest level of Western knowledge.

Besides the hierarchy within Western knowledge, a hierarchical structure among other elements can be found in *mingli*. For instance, in his preface to *Jiaoyou lun*, Qu remarks that although “wooden arrows and white pheasants” [tribute] (*hushi baizhi* 楣矢白雉) have nothing to do with *mingli*, they were still received with respect by the emperor. Following this, he stressed that what Ricci offered to China through translation was in line with Chinese in terms of heart-mind and principles (*ci xin ci li, ruo he qi fu* 此心此理，若合契符). It was thus much more worthwhile than tributes from peripheral states. Given his complimentary words about Ricci, it can be inferred that what Ricci presented was relevant to *mingli*. In this context, *mingli* points to something better than plain material goods, since it was intangible, sophisticated culture or philosophy. A similar scheme of order can be found in Ricci’s words in *Bianxue yidu*. He asserted that any foreign teaching (*yijiao* 异教) seeking to establish a lasting and flourishing presence in China inevitably attached itself to *mingli* (*yifu mingli* 依附名理), without exception. Considering the dominant status of Confucian teachings in the Chinese intellectual landscape, it is highly probable that here *mingli* refers to such teachings. This connection can be supported by the afore-mentioned preface to *Tongwen suanzhi*, where he mentions “Confucian scholars of *mingli*” (*mingli zhi ru* 名理之儒), implying a possible strong link between the Confucian tradition and *mingli*. Ricci’s manner of expression hints at an asymmetry in power relations between foreign teachings and those represented by *mingli*, suggesting the former are on the periphery while the latter hold a position of orthodoxy or centrality.

Such an underlying structured hierarchy, however, is little visible in Li Zhizao’s use of *mingli* as discussed in the previous segment. For one thing, distinct from other authors quoted above, Li did not display his favour of *mingli* over something

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17 This phrase alludes to a quote by the Chinese philosopher Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 (1139‒1193): “东海有圣人出焉，此心同也，此理同也。西海有圣人出焉，此心同也，此理同也。千百世之上至千百世之下，有圣人出焉，此心此理，亦莫不同也。” (“There are sages who appear in the Eastern Sea; their heart-mind is the same, and their principles are the same. There are sages who appear in the Western Sea; their heart-mind is the same, and their principles are the same. There are sages who appear from the earliest to the latest, across thousands of generations; their heart-mind and principles are the same as well.”) This quote was often referred to by Chinese literati who converted to or sympathized with Christianity in their texts in the late Ming.
else by making a comparison. For another, unlike others who predominantly associated mingli with a sense of depth and excellence, Li associated the term with both surface-level and profound elements by aligning it in parallel with “natural phenomena” (faxiang) and “beyond human nature” (chaoxing). Therefore, compared to others, Li displays a more expansive interpretation of mingli, enabling the incorporation of contrasting elements into this term. This broader perspective allows for a unique selection of terminology during translation. Such an approach is particularly important in translating “logic”, because as noted in the Coimbra commentary, “logic” bears a dual nature of instruction (doctrina) and practice (usus), also exhibiting a coexistence of contradictory aspects. It is instructive as an independent discipline, deciding rules of constructing a mode of discussing. However, it is at the same time practical, constructing the mode itself applicable to all disciplines. 18

Tension with Contemporary Intellectual Trends

Beyond its link to language and to a graded structure, mingli hints at an underlying tension between its use as a rendition of “logic” and its compatibility with the intellectual atmosphere in the late Ming period. The intellectual dynamics at the time can be perceived in Xu’s preface to Tongwen suanzhi, where he criticizes Confucian scholars for disregarding solid (shi 实) matters, one cause of the decline of mathematical studies in China in recent centuries. In particular, he uses mingli to designate the attribute of those Confucian scholars, namely mingli zhi ru (Confucian scholars of mingli). A following question would be: Instead of focusing on what is solid, what did those scholars of mingli divert their intellectual pursuits to? An answer to this question would enlighten us about what mingli stands for in this context. A potential clue can be identified in the preface that Li Zhizao’s son, Li Cibin 李次霦, wrote for Mingli tan (1639). This starts with harsh criticism of Confucian intellectuals who were lost in ornamental language (diaochong xiu-huang 雕虫绣幌) while their ideas became increasingly obscure (zhiqu yi hui 目趣益晦). This was followed by a depiction of the intellectual chaos and disorder observed at the time. Li Cibin laments that pure Confucian teachings were stained

18 Couto (1611, 28): “At prior quidem actus est doctrina actualis, & habitus qui illius causa est, appellatur Dialectica docens; posterior vero est usus, & habitus qui ad illum concurrit, utens dialectica nuncupatur.” (“The prior act is the actual instruction and the condition which causes it called instructive Dialectics. The posterior act is practice and the condition that contributes to it is called applied Dialectics.”); Couto (1611, 31‒32): “nam actus docentis est praeciputum, & regula extruendi aliquem disserendi modum: actus vero utens est ipsa modi extractus.” (“For the act of teaching is to give precepts and rules for constructing a mode of debating/discussing, while the act of employing is the actual construction of the mode itself.”)
by “saliva of Shendu (Sindbuka, India)” [Buddhism] (shendu zhi tuo 身毒之唾) and “ink under the column (Laozi)19” [Daoism] (zhu xia zhi shen 柱下之沈), resulting in literati’s belittlement of the typical political obligations expected of them as empty (xuwu 虚无) and temporary (jiahe 假合).20 Therefore, scholars of mingli have instead turned their minds to enhancing the beauty of their expressions and to learning about Buddhism and Daoism. Considering the two prefaces together, mingli conveys dual connotations of an excessive dedication to flowery language and an undesirable blend of Confucian together with the more inferior Buddhist and Daoist teachings among literati. In contrast, the notion of being solid in the context of late Ming comprises two levels of meaning. On the academic level, it emphasizes studying concrete content rather than refining words. On the political level, it stresses compliance solely with Confucian political ideals in thinking and practice. Overall, it can be perceived that mingli conveys a stress on the Confucian framework.

The problems with literati pointed out by Xu and Li are relevant to a particular phenomenon among intellectuals in the late Ming period, which is “idle talk” (kongtan 空谈). The subject is usually related to heart-mind (xin 心), the result of popularity of Wang Yangming School's development of Neo-Confucianism. The prevalence of such speculative, unproductive talk and its harmful effect invited significant criticism at the time. For example, one of the elite intellectuals Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613–1682) compared the idle talk on lixue 理学 (the study of the neo-Confucian li) in the late Ming to that on Daoist classics in the Wei and Jin Dynasties (224–420), warning about its danger of aggravating the social, moral, political crises (Wang 2011, 220). As stated by Zhang Xiao, intellectuals in the late Ming period were critical about the lixue characterized by “abstract talk on the nature of heart-mind” (kongtan xinxing 空谈心性), and started to divert their attention to knowledge of practical value (Zhang Xiao 1998, 774). It was under

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19 “Ink under the column” (zhu xia 柱下) refers to the official title of zhu xia shi 柱下史 (official standing under the pillar) in the Zhou and Qin dynasties, indicating an official who typically serves by standing under the pillar. This later evolved into the more widely known title of called yushi 御史 (Censor). Laozi served as zhu xia shi historically.

20 See Li Cibin’s preface in Li and Furtado (1975 [1636/1639], 7): “其或负敏喆、侈赡博者, 搜奇袭艳, 遂事雕虫绣幌, 而旨趣益晦。寕假而承身毒之唾, 拾柱下之沈汁, 以奸吾儒之正。举凡一切修齐克治, 咸轻视为虚无假合, 而理道且愈迷厥向矣。” (“Some literati captivated on their cleverness and extensive knowledge to seek for and follow the novel and flowery [styles], focused their mind solely on literary writings, leading to increasing opacity of their ideas. Gradually accepting the saliva of Buddhism, and using the ink from Daoism, [those literati] have jeopardized the purity of our Confucian teachings. All [political obligations] concerning cultivating one’s moral character, regulating your family, and restraining selfish and wicked thoughts is disregarded as void and ephemeral. Therefore, the [true] path towards principles becomes increasingly hard to navigate.”)
these circumstances that scholars like Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao were keen on advocating for solid learning (shixue 实学) to remedy the pernicious consequences of these impractical discussions. Thanks to this favourable condition, Jesuit missionaries were able to accommodate the prevailing utilitarian mindset and distaste for non-utilitarian pursuits by presenting evidence of their solid studies, such as those which indicate their scientific and technical superiority (Übelhör 1972, 181). Therefore, Li's introduction of the Aristotelian logic was not only for the sake of importing a new discipline and method, but more importantly, he intended to use it as means to counter the negative effect of Chinese scholars' idle talk on the nature of heart-mind (Zhang Xiping 2001, 24).

The allusion made by Gu Yanwu to impractical discussions on the Wei and Jin Dynasties directs us back to mingli 冥理 again, since it is a useful concept to understand the intellectual trends of these dynasties. The term is normally understood as a compound comprised of ming (names) and li (patterns/principles). This compound was at least known during the early Han times, around the third century BC, and became widely used during the third century AD (Harbsmeier and Needham 1998, 354). It became the subject of pure talk (qingtan 清谈) in the Wei-Jin period, a popular practice among literati. As Tang Yongtong noted, at the start of the Wei Dynasty pure talk was mainly about political matters and political figures, emphasizing an examination of the relationship between names and reality (ming shi 名实) or names and shapes/performances (ming xing 名形). Such examination concerns Confucianism, the School of Names (mingjia 名家), and Legalism (fajia 法家), though it was frequently categorized as belonging to the School of Shapes/Performances and Names (xing ming jia 形名家). However, as methods of discussion evolved and the political climate became increasingly constrained, the literati grew reluctant to discuss real-life occurrences and focused instead on abstract, speculative theories (Tang 1962, 13‒25). As Zhang Yijing nicely puts it, mingli “has been retained as a way of describing a mind inclined towards questions that are theoretical, abstract, speculative; in short, contrary to the political ideal of Confucianism” (Zhang Yijing 2019, 29). Since Mingli tan discusses “the names and principles of language and thought”, rather than “the names and principles of things” (ibid.), it complies more or less with the tradition of qingtan. As such, mingli is a term that “carries in itself the idea of a discourse that is vague and general” (ibid.). The latter stage of mingli in Wei and Jin acquired a negative connotation that has persisted ever since, as captured in the frequently used expression kongtan mingli 空谈名理 (idle talk about name-patterns), serving as a critique for such impractical discussions. For example, the well-known historian and philologist of the Qing Dynasty Qian Daxin 钱大昕 (1728–1804) lamented in his preface to the collection of Sun Mingfu’s 孙明复 (992–1057)
texts that since the Yuan and Ming Dynasties scholars had been so absorbed in idle talk about name-patterns (kongtan mingli) that they no longer conducted philological and exegetical studies on ancients books (xungu 训诂). Gu's attack on idle talk in the late Ming drew exactly upon this unfavourable association of the term. From the preceding elaboration, a potential tension emerges regarding mingli. It was critiqued by a relatively general intellectual circle for its impractical and abstract nature, yet simultaneously promoted by a person who created its association with logic, an integral component of practicality-oriented solid learning. In this sense, it appears especially intriguing that Li Zhizao, though living in an age that featured an awareness of resisting idle discourse on mingli, still chose this word to render a concept that seems to be its opposite. A response to this contradiction is made by Jia Qingjun. He contends that this is interlinked with Li's reception of Western Learning and the scope of solid learning at the time. Regarding the former, Li was not only interested in the utilitarian aspect of Western Learning, such as natural sciences and Catholic ethics, but also developed a keen interest in the conceptual aspect, namely the method of logic. This inclination led to his preference for talking in a speculative manner. Furthermore, he noticed that the power of Western Learning was grounded on its impractical theological elements, and Western natural sciences were also built upon the method of abstract logic. Therefore, to him, both practical and impractical parts form an inseparable whole of Western Learning. As for the latter, according to Jia's examination, solid learning in the late Ming period can be either physical or metaphysical, incorporating studies of utility (gongli zhi xue 功利之学) as well of moral philosophy and human nature (daode xingming zhi xue 道德性命之学) (Jia 2009, 136‒39). Jia's explanation not only dissolves the seeming tension between the two, but once again confirms Li's ability to encompass apparently opposing components, an attribute we have already observed in the earlier comparison between his and others' utilization of mingli.

To conclude, and as elaborated in this section, mingli embodies rich layers of meanings, allowing for an extensive space of interpretation. Moreover, it takes on similar features compared to “logic”, such as the focus on the use of language and the possibility to include contrasting elements within itself. Such similarities provide the potential common ground for their association. Thanks to Li Zhizao's all-embracing attitude and creativity, he was the pioneer in unlocking the potential embedded in mingli by bridging it with logic through translation, further

21 “元明以来，学者空谈名理，不复从事训诂.” ("Since the Yuan and Ming dynasties, scholars have indulged themselves in idle talk on name-patterns, neglecting philologial and exegetical studies on ancients books.") As for instances of modern scholarship that uses this phrase, see for example Yang (1996, 162); Wang (2002, 305); Peng and Ma (2004, 45) and Sun (2001, 114).
enriching its meaning. Although his creation largely fell into obscurity almost as soon as it was made public, later it proved influential in the Chinese reception of logic from the late Qing period on, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Enduring Influence and Traces of Mingli from the 19th Century Onward

*Mingli tan* was largely neglected from its first publication till the 1724 imperial edict that prohibited Christianity in China, which also marks the oblivion of Western logic in China during this period. It was in the late Qing period (19th century) that Western logic was again introduced into China. Since then, there has been a surge in translated books on logic, hence a myriad of new translations of this concept. Around 1920, “Chinese Logic Studies” was established as an independent field of study that aimed to explain and supplement Western logic (Gao 2008, 64). Gao Shengbing, who did a thorough study of Chinese translations of “logic” throughout the Chinese history, made a table in that gathered all the major examples before 1919 (ibid., 65–67). According to this, more than half of them contain either *ming* or *li* from the compound *mingli*. Gao listed 43 translations in total, of which eight contain *ming*, 17 include *li*, and one is *mingli*. It is notable that more importance was attached to *li* in interpreting logic at the time. Yan Fu 严复 (1854‒1921) and Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) were two prominent Chinese intellectuals who significantly influenced the transition of Chinese culture from traditional to modern. Their translations of “logic” provide typical examples of the reception of this concept in the early 20th century, and these will be discussed in more detail below.

In 1895, after China had been defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War, Yan published an article in support of Western Learning in a newspaper in Tianjin, in which he translated “logic” as *mingxue* 名学 (the study of names), marking his first translation of the concept. In 1902, Yan's translation of John Mill’s (1806‒1873) *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* was published, under the title *Mule mingxue* 穆勒名学 (*Mill’s Logic*). In this work, Yan proposed another two alternative renditions, *luoji* 逻辑, and *luoji xue* 逻辑学 (the study of logic), the most commonly used equivalent to “logic” today. In fact, he was the first to propose this translation. In the first footnote to this work he explained why he uses *luoji* and *ming* to render logic. *Luoji*, he wrote, was a phonetic translation of “-logy”, as in “philology”, “sociology”, and “psychology”, implying the importance of logic as the study of all the studies (*yi qie xue zhi xue 一切学之学*). As for *mingxue*, he asserted that in the Chinese linguistic repertoire only *ming* carried the same extent
of profundity and extensiveness as logos (Yan 1902, quoted in Gao 2008, 71). Similar to mingli, ming is also a heavy culturally loaded word. It is immediately evocative of the theories of zhengming 正名 (rectification of names)\(^2\) and mingji-ao 名教 (the teaching of names). It should be noted that names in the Confucian sense do not refer to individuals' own names, but their social positions (mingfen 名分), official titles (mingwei 名位), or reputations (mingmu 名目). Another concept closely associated with ming is shi 实 (realities). The relationship between names and realities is an important theme of philosophical discussions found in various schools of thought in ancient China, with various nuanced meanings of ming and shi in different schools. Regarding Liang Qichao, he translated “logic” as lunli xue 论理学 (science of reasoning) in an article on Mozi that was published in 1904, which attempted to depict Mohist logic from the perspective of Western logic. In this he wrote that Western logic was what Mohism called bian 辩, and what Mozi called bian is lunli xue. This translation was derived from the Japanese translation of “science of reasoning”. Liang stated that he regarded Li Zhizao's translation of “logic” as mingli and Yan Fu's translation as mingxue as originating from the term “School of Names”. They did not seem to have fully conveyed the original meaning of “logic”. He opted instead for the Japanese translation to maintain a strong link and facilitate seamless communication with the Japanese academic community (Liang 1904, quoted in Gao 2008, 72). Like mingli and ming, li is another word with complicated cultural implications. Liang's translation shows a clear correspondence between “reason” (or ratio) and the term, one which has significantly diverged from its original meaning as “pattern”, or in the context of Neo-Confucian philosophy specifically gewu qiongli, which signifies comprehending “principles”. Such an association may begin with Mingli tan because the text mentions in different places that the object of logic lies in the actions of the intellect, such as “logic is a tool through which intellect extends across all fields of study”.\(^2\) However, the connection between li and the scholastic ratio requires further careful examination, which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

\(^2\) As Defoort (2021) has insightfully clarified, zhengming is a successful modern discourse in the current academic scholarship on Confucius, Confucianism, and even Chinese philosophy, which is often taken as a fact instead of a specific interpretation. The consensus nowadays is that the debate on zhengming, initially started by Confucius, had a tremendous influence on the stream of thought that bears his name, and even Chinese thought in general. Nevertheless, this discourse is in fact the invention of Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), one of China's most influential modern scholars. He was the first who constructed a philosophical interpretation of zhengming, offered textual evidence from ancient Chinese classics for his proposal, and attached unprecedented importance to the term. His interpretation had a profound influence on later scholars in China and beyond, despite a striking lack of acknowledgment of his contribution nowadays.

\(^2\) Li and Furtado (1975 [1636/1639], 14): “名理探者，乃明悟所以贯彻诸学之具也” (“Logic is the means through which intellect extends across all fields of study.”)
Based on our earlier discussions regarding the use of *ming* or *li* in translating “logic” during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is evident that those translations have not surpassed the scope of *mingli*. The nuanced layers of meaning encompassed by the former terms are also embedded within *mingli*. This compound term can be regarded as a unified concept, yet it also allows for separate consideration of its two constituent words. Moreover, it is notable that *mingli* was still used as the translation of “logic” as late as in the 1980s. For example, from 1980 to 1986 Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) retranslated the analytic philosopher Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Treatise on Philosophical Logic)* and named it *Mingli lun* (On Name-Patterns), maintaining the same title for the translation of the same work that had been produced by his teacher, Zhang Shenfu (1893–1986), in 1927. This aligns with Christoph Harbsmeier’s view that *mingli* can be anachronistically translated as analytic philosophy (Harbsmeier and Needham 1998, 354). Speaking of today, however, as the phonetic translation *luoji* becomes ever more widely adopted as the official equivalent of Western logic, devoid of cultural connotations, it appears that the reception of logic is focused on accepting Western logic as it is. This marks a transition away from the stage exemplified by *mingli*, which has significant cultural baggage encompassing various schools of thought such as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, the School of Names, and the School of Mystery (*xuanxue*).

**Conclusion**

*Mingli* (名理) is a long-standing term in the Chinese philosophical tradition, and has been utilized in texts relevant to various Chinese schools of thought. However, its utilization exhibits characteristics shared by the Western “logic”, establishing a basis for commensurability. First and foremost, the verbs that normally pair with *mingli* show its fundamental relevance to the use of language. This can also be seen in Aristotelian logic, since *dialectica* and *logica* were together defined as *tota ars disserendi* (the entire art of debating/discussing). Moreover, according to Li’s interpretation, *mingli* incorporates contradictory elements. It can refer to the superficial as well as the profound. “Logic” also features contradictory aspects in itself due to its dual nature of making rules (*doctrina*) and applying the rules it makes (*usus*). Li Zhizao was the pioneer who materialized this commensurability through his translations, contributing a novel dimension to the term. Meanwhile, given *mingli*’s emphasis on the Confucian perspective in the instances shown in Table 4, it is likely that Li Zhizao essentially embraced logic within the framework of Confucian thinking. The same can be seen in the later Chinese reception of the concept since the 19th century, such as in Yan Fu’s translation of “logic”
as mingxue (名学). Given the highly frequent use of ming (名), li (理), and mingli in translating “logic”, those translations are still bound by the connotations embedded in mingli. By the same token, the extent of Chinese understanding of logic deriving from these translations does not transcend the limit set by this term. Such cultural baggage appears to have been finally shed when the phonetic translation luoji (逻辑) became predominant in the last few decades. In this sense, mingli can be taken as a guiding thread to trace the evolution of Chinese thought from traditional to modern perspectives. Placing the term within the broader context of intellectual history reveals its significance.

Moreover, the term itself suggests an attempt to organically encompass elements that seem contradictory—the practical and the impractical, “names” (ming 名) and “reality” (shi 实). This effort indicates Li’s recognition of Western Learning as an integral unity comprising practical and impractical facets, a perspective that is still inspiring and relevant today. The combination of the seemingly conflicting elements in the term through translation creates an appealing tension with the contemporary critique of “idle talk” (kongtan 空谈), characterized by theoretical and speculative discussions. In this way, mingli also appears as both an echo and a challenge to Chinese philosophy exemplified by “pure talk” (qingtan 清谈) and “the examination of the relationship between names and reality” (ming shi zhi bian 名实之辩) in the Wei-Jin period. Li’s effort in reconciling the practical and the impractical, as seen in this translation, might have been overlooked historically, but as this paper has revealed, it holds non-negligible value philosophically.

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