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# Commentary on: Jiaming Li & Jidong Li's "Wang Chong's thoughts on argumentation"

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According to Becker (1986), there existed some ideas on speech communication in Confucius' teachings *Analects* (《论语》), but no argumentation, dialogue, and debate involved. His reason was, according to Confucius (2008, p. 281), "to fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefiting is to let a man go to waste, but to speak to a man who is incapable of benefiting is to let one's words to go waste. The wise man lets neither men nor words go to waste." The key point is that the title of his paper is *Reasons for the lack of argumentation and debate in the Far East* by examining the leading East Asian philosophies such as Confucianism. The crucial point is that his conclusions point not just to the *analects*, but to the whole of far eastern philosophy. Of course, Xiong (2013) not only resolved the discussion, whether there are logic in ancient China, between Leung and Wang with the help of the "two logics" – formal symbolic logic and argumentation theory - proposed by Giovanni Sartor (Sartor, 1994), but also successfully refuted Becker's standpoint by examining Confucian philosophical argumentation skills. In addition, Xiong and Yan (2019) discussed Mencius's strategies of political argumentation from the perspectives of informal and formal logic. Meanwhile, Yan and Xiong (2019) explored refutational strategies in Mencius's argumentative discourse on human nature by means of pragma-dialectics. These contributions have strongly refuted Becker's argumentation.

In my opinion, there is no doubt that Li & Li's paper is another powerful refutation of Becker's argumentation. Li and Li systematically explores the argumentation theory put forward by Wang Chong in his *magnum opus* - *Lunheng* or *The Treatise on Balance* (《论衡》) (Wang 2017; see 黄晖, 2018). In the last volume, *Ziji* or *Autobiography* Wang thinks his own book is about the theory for evaluating argumentation, whether it is oral or written. He said, "《论衡》者, 论之平也" (《论衡·自纪篇》, *the Ziji of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.1043), which indicates that Wang wanted to weigh all the thoughts and theories in the past and at that time, evaluate the truth and falsity of them, determine the importance of them, and attack the false theories. The purpose of argumentation is to distinguish right or true from wrong or false. Wang insisted on the correspondence theory of truth based on realism. In other words, the truth or falsity of a statement is determined only by how it relates to the world or facts, and whether it accurately describes (i.e., corresponds with) that world or facts. Li & Li summed it up as: "if someone's claim about something is contrary to the facts and cannot produce evidence to prove it, no one will believe it, no matter how many nice words s/he said repeatedly." This paragraph comes from the *Zhishi* (《论衡·知实篇》, *the Zhishi of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.945). This principle is equivalent to the Burden-of-Proof rule of critical discussion in pragma-dialectics developed by Frans H. van Eemeren *et al* (2017, p.99). Obviously, Wang's viewpoint is that there is no need to justify a factual claim, but claims contrary to the facts must be justified, otherwise no one can be convinced. Wang clearly does not distinguish between a factual claim and a value claim. In fact, only factual claims can be verified

by evidence while a value claim need to be justified by reasons.

Otherwise, Wang discussed the issue of legal argumentation. According to Wang, there must be an argumentative person in a main room and litigator in a village; there must be right or wrong in everyday argumentation and litigation. How to judge a lawsuit or argumentation? One of the fundamental criteria is that the wrong party loses and the right party wins. Some may win by being eloquent, excelling in argument, clear and fluent in speech; Others fail because their words are weak and slow, and their stuttering is incoherent. To argue and to litigate is like fighting with a sword. A sharp sword, a halberd with a long hilt, and a strong and agile hand and foot, are sure to win; Blunt knives, short spears and slow hands and feet are sure to fail. (《论衡·物势篇》, *the Wushi of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.133)

Li and Li systematically refined Wang's three requirements for argumentation. First, *Yin Xiaoyan* (引效验) & *Li Zhengyan* (立证验). Their interpretation is to test and verify with factual effects or to prove by valid arguments. According to Wang, *Yin Xiaoyan* means on the one hand, there is no greater proof of the truth than vindication, no greater assurance of the correctness of an argument than evidence. Empty and false language, even if it conforms to the fundamental *logos*, will not be believed (《论衡·薄藏篇》, *Bozang of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.840); *Li Zhengyan* means, on the other hand, we should think carefully about the problem and prove it with facts when discussing because exaggerated and false things will be falsified immediately(《论衡·对作篇》, *the Duizuo of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.1033). Second, *Lun Guishi* (论贵是) & *Shi Shangran* (事尚然). Li and Li's interpretation are that the thesis or topic must be correct and the arguments must be true. However, I think, it would be better to translated it that the argument should be correct rather than flashy, and the narrative should be true and not sensationalism(《论衡·物势篇》, *the Wushi of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.133). In Wang Chong's argumentation theory, there are at least two approaches: the argument approach and the narrative approach. The former is logically oriented, while the latter is rhetorically oriented. Third, *Yan Kexiao* (言可晓) & *Zhi Kedu* (指可睹). Their interpretation is that the topic and its main purpose should be understandable. In fact, however, Wang's exact words were *Yan Wubu Kexiao* (言无不可晓) & *Zhi Wubu Kedu* (指无不可睹). Li and Li's interpretation seems to have lost Wang's original meaning of "无不", i.e., *Wubu*, which means "ought" or "must". Maybe their best interpretation should or must be what the arguers or discussers says cannot be incomprehensible, and the objects referred to by the discourse cannot be invisible(《论衡·自纪篇》, *the Ziji of the Lunheng*; see 黄晖, 2018, p.1043). This shows that Wang holds a realistic view of truth.

Here are some other issues that deserve further discussion. In the section 2, for example, Li and Li summarize Wang's two approaches of argumentation. One is "Citing specific matters to prove the content of the argumentation" and the other is "other approaches". The division here is very incongruous and the discussion about them is weak. Maybe it would be better to call it argument scheme than the approaches of argumentation. For example, the former can be called *argument by example*, and the latter can be divided into two schemata: *reductio ad absurdum* and *dilemma*. Again, the third part is the author's creative part, but perhaps should not be called research expansion, but reconstruction based on pragma-dialectics and informal logic. At the same time, this section takes up a lot of space, about 10 pages, and it might seem more harmonious to break it down into two parts, such as reconstruction of pragma-dialectics and of informal logic. In addition, the Toulmin Model may also be used as another useful and helpful method to reconstruct Wang's argument theory. In Toulmin's argumentation theory, his argumentation concept is a one-agent concept, which does not involve multi-agent interaction, but it considers possible rebuttals. This kind of thinking is like Wang's thinking.

To sum up, although there are a lot of points worthy of discussion in Li and Li's article, one thing is certain, that is, they give an overview of Wang's argumentation theory, which falsifies Becker's assertion that there is no argumentation in ancient China. I hope that Li and Li will have more systematic and theoretical research results about Wang's argumentation theory soon.

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