Introduction

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In his influential study, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, originally published in 1976, Raymond Williams defined keywords as "significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation" and "significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought." Keywords are the "words in which both continuity and discontinuity, and also deep conflicts of value and belief, are ... engaged."[1] Responding to cultural changes in the postwar period, Williams was intent on raising awareness of how specific social and historical conditions determined our vocabulary. To show how keywords shape us and are being reshaped by us is to demystify their "natural" authority and to heighten our agency.

This book departs from Williams' agenda of contemporary social and political intervention and his focus on modernity, although we do follow his cue on how keywords offer precious clues about "conflicts of value and belief." Like every major culture, Chinese has its set of "keywords": pivotal

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[1]   Williams 1985: 15, 23. See also a brief analysis in Rodgers 1988. Among the many works inspired by Williams' *Keywords* is *Keywords Re-Oriented* (Gentz et al., 2009), which explores the implications of using Western theoretical keywords as analytic tools in Chinese contexts. At the other end of the temporal spectrum, Bergeton attempts to examine the emergence of civilizational consciousness in early China by focusing on "how words are used in pre-Qin texts to construct identities and negotiate relationships between a 'civilized self' and 'uncivilized others'" (2019, front matter).

terms of political, ethical, literary and philosophical discourse. Tracing the origins, development, polysemy, and usages of keywords is one of the best ways to chart cultural and historical changes. What elevates a mere word to the status of "keyword"? The answer seems both self-evident and elusive. There is general consensus on how certain words recur and play a central role in discussions of reality, morality, society, knowledge, human experience and so on.[2] Yet a hard and fast definition would be difficult to nail down. Indeed, the challenges of defining what constitutes a keyword may be itself a window into the multi-dimensionality of keywords. One can focus on keywords in a text, a textual tradition, or a school of thought, but the rewards of thinking through keywords are most apparent when one takes a more sweeping overview. Temporal continuities and transformations, as well as the connections between different intellectual traditions and supposedly disparate categories of knowledge and experience, can only emerge when we examine how the semantic range of a keyword explains the different kinds of arguments it generates.

Questions of "how to do things with words" and "what words do" align with the "linguistic turn" in various intellectual trends, including lexicometry, discourse analysis, historical semantics focused on "intentional speech acts" and rhetorical contexts,[3] and conceptual history that seeks to integrate the emergence and development of concepts with their socio-political contexts and treats the linguistic transformation of concepts as both the agent unleashing historical forces and their inevitable product.[4] In such directions of enquiry, "concept" and "word" sometimes overlap.

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2   See, e.g., Zhang Dainian's 張岱年 (2005: 8–11) list of keywords—what he calls "philosophical categories" (*zhexue fanchou* 哲學範疇)—in different periods in Chinese thought.

3   See Skinner 1969.

4   For an introduction to conceptual history, see Koselleck 1989; Lehmann and Richter 1996. On conceptual history in the East Asian context, see Lackner et al. 2001; Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng 2008; Vogelsang 2012; Harbsmeier 2013; *Dongya guannian shi jikan*; Harbsemeier, *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae*, an attempt to create a taxonomic grid for understanding Chinese concepts (http://tls.uni-hd.de/home_en.lasso), and the "Afterword" in this volume by Harbsemeier.

Vogelsang helpfully defines a concept as "a generic mental image abstracted from precepts or directly intuited from thought," and also laments that the strong philological tradition in China might have obscured the difference between concepts and words.[5] I submit that this apparent "confusion" is precisely why the study of words holds such promise in the Chinese case. For example, Vogelsang is certainly correct in noting that "the appearance of the character 史 (or its precursor) in oracle bone inscriptions does not mean that the Shang had a concept of history,"[6] but the ways that character is embedded in the social, political, and ritual contexts of Shang history, plus all its shifting frames of reference in subsequent periods, are precisely what allow us to reconstruct the modes of reasoning that may or may not justify the character's connection with "a concept of history."[7] The very proposition of "a concept of history" in turn implies a level of abstraction and generalization that alerts us to how changes in word use negotiate the divide between modern times and antecedent eras. (*Gainian* 概念, the term usually used to translate "concept," came to China via Japan and was coined by Nishi Amane 西周 [1829–1897].[8] Another common translation, *guannian* 觀念, arose first in Buddhist discourse and meant "the observation and contemplation of one's thoughts or of Buddhist teachings" from Tang to late Qing.[9])

One brief and well-known example suffices to demonstrate the importance of a keyword-oriented approach. Three decades ago, Angus C. Graham called his major study of early Chinese thought *Disputers of the Tao*.[10] Graham, of course, did not confine his study of intellectual

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5   Vogelsang 2012: 14. Vogelsang is trying to explain "why East Asian scholarship has been reluctant to embrace conceptual history."

6   Ibid.

7   See Durrant, Chapter 3 in this volume.

8   Zhong Shaohua 2012: 27. In the writings of 17th-century Jesuits and their Chinese collaborators, the Latin word *concetpum* was translated as *yi* 臆 and *yixiang* 意想; see Zhong Shaohua 2012: 25–32.

9   See, e.g., Song Zhiwen 宋之問, "You Fahua si" 遊法華寺, in *Quan Tang shi*, 51.622.

10   Graham 1989.

developments in pre-imperial (pre-221 BCE) and early imperial China to the changing definitions of the word Dao (道, "Way"), but he implies that debates built on that keyword yield a road map to the world of thought in early China. Dao can mean governing principles of political and ethical relations—as in *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo tradition), *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects), or the early layers of *Mozi* 墨子. It is linked to the ineffable "Way of Heaven" in *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子.[11] Xunzi's 荀子 reorientation of the word addresses competing arguments in texts like *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*:

> 道者，非天之道，非地之道，人之所以道也，君子之所道也。
>
> The Way is neither the Way of Heaven nor the Way of Earth. It is that which humans try to follow as their way, and what the noble man realizes as his way.[12]

Tracing shades of meanings and range of reference for *Dao* can thus help us navigate the relationship between different positions, investigate the connection between intra- and inter-textual components, and reimagine textual transmission and the dissemination of ideas. The variants of the graph in excavated texts enrich our understanding of its early formative associations. Forays further afield take us to subsequent attempts by thinkers and religious leaders who sought to imbue this word with new meanings, allowing fresh departures in politics, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, religion, and so on. Indeed, throughout Chinese history,

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11 See *Laozi* paragraphs 9, 47, 73, 77, 81. The phrase "Way of Heaven" (*tiandao* 天道, *tian zhi dao* 天之道) also appears several times in *Zuozhuan*. Sometimes it refers to the movements of asterisms and their possible effect on human affairs (*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 9.1: 963; Xiang 18.4: 1043; Zhao 9.4: 1310; Zhao 11.2: 1322; Zhao 18.3: 1395); on other occasions it designates the ethical or politically acceptable course (*Zuozhuan*, Zhuang 4.1: 163; Wen 15.11: 614; Xuan 15.2: 759; Xiang 22.3: 1068; Ai 11.4: 1665) or even predestination (Zhao 27.4: 1486). As something Confucius is said to have been reluctant to talk about in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 5. 13: 46), *tiandao* 天道 implies something lofty and mysterious.

12 *Xunzi* 8:122 ("Ru xiao" 儒效). All translations are my own.

new ideas and new approaches often mean reinterpreting important words; rupture, continuities, and inflection points are inseparable from the linguistic history of specific terms. It behooves us, therefore, to take stock of significant moments in the word-centered intellectual endeavors in the Chinese tradition before proceeding to our attempts to investigate keywords in this volume.

1. Discourse on Keywords in the Chinese Tradition

1.1 Lexicography and Philology

Early Chinese lexicographical works are not merely dictionaries; they reflect and embody the persistent concern with naming in Chinese thought.[13] Acts of naming are ways of articulating worldviews; categorization and definition of names are often implicit arguments on how the world should be ordered. A brief look at *Erya* 爾雅 (Approaching correct meanings; ca. 3rd–2nd century BCE), the earliest of such works, makes this clear. Its 2,091 entries are grouped as categories of synonymous or analogous words. Many commentators have emphasized *Erya*'s exegetical function. Wang Chong 王充 (27–100) characterizes it as "glosses on the Five Classics" 五經之訓詁.[14] Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324) declares in his preface to *Erya*: "For it is through *Erya* that one understands the purpose of glosses, sets forth the poet's expressive chanting, collects variant words from distant generations, and distinguishes different names for a shared reality" 所以通詁訓之指歸，敘詩人之興詠，摠絕代之離詞，辯同實而殊號者也.[15] Shao Jinhan 邵晉涵 (1743–1796) lauds *Erya* for "rectifying names and matching meanings,

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13   On this issue, see Defoort, Chapter 1 in this volume.

14   *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 52.765.

15   Guo Pu, "*Erya* xu" 爾雅序, in *Erya zhushu* 爾雅註疏 1.4. "Poets" here refer specifically to the authors of *Shijing* (詩經 *Classic of Odes*). For a full translation of Guo Pu's preface, see O'Neill 2010: 392–394.

fully illuminating the subtle teachings of the sages" 正名協義，究洞聖人之微旨.[16]

Erya was briefly instated as official learning during the reign of Emperor Wen of Han 漢文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE). It came under "Six Arts" in "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 ("Treatise on arts and writings") in *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han dynasty; 1st century) and was included in the category of "Classics" (經 *jing*) in Ruan Xiaoxu's 阮孝緒 (479–536) *Qi lu* 七錄 (Seven lists) and in "Jingji zhi" 經籍志 ("Treatise on bibliography") in *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui dynasty; 7th century). In other words, even before *Erya* became part of the "Twelve Classics" carved on stelae in 837 under imperial auspices, it enjoyed the de facto status of a canonical classic. Notwithstanding oft-repeated claims that it is a "key" or "ladder" for understanding the Classics, academicians compiling and editing *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete library of the four treasuries, 1773–1782) pointed out that only about 30–40% of *Erya* are glosses related to the Five Classics.[17] Perhaps a deeper reason for its elevation is its implicit claim to explain and order the world through words by bringing together entries from different time periods, regions, and sources and categorizing them for mutual illumination.

For example, the first group of entries in the first section of *Erya*, "Explaining glosses" (釋詁 "Shi gu"), approaches the notion of "beginning" (*shi* 始) from different contexts. Paraphrasing Xing Bing's 刑昺 (932–1010) sub-commentary, we have *chu* 初 (the start of tailoring), *zai* 哉 or *cai* 才 (the sprouting of vegetation), *shou* 首 (head, the top of the body), *ji* 基 (the foundation of a wall), *zhao* 肇 (to begin, to open), *zu* 祖 (ancestor, the beginning of the ancestral temple), *yuan* 元 (prime, the excellence or beginning of goodness), *tai* 胎 (fetus, the beginning of a human taking form), *shu* 俶 (the beginning of movement), *luo* 落 (to fall, the beginning of leaves withering), and *quanyu* 權輿 (the beginning of heaven and earth),

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16   Shao wrote *Erya zhengyi* 爾雅正義. Cited in Dou Xiuyan 2004: 238–239.

17   *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目, in *Erya zhushu* 1.

all summed up as "[meaning] the beginning" 始也.[18] In the semantic field implied by this list, what matters is "the practical use of words according to proper linguistic and social order."[19] Perhaps the most surprising word included here is *luo*, glossed elsewhere in *Erya* as "death."[20] Hao Yixing 郝 懿行 (1757–1825) explained:

> 此訓始者，始終代嬗，榮落互根⋯⋯落之訓死，又訓始，名若相 反，而義實相通矣。
>
> This (*luo*) is glossed as "beginning" because beginnings and endings succeed each other, and flourishing and withering have their roots in each other ... Luo is glossed as "death" and also as "beginning": the names appear to be opposite but their meanings are in fact connected.[21]

Through a web of associations with other words, the word "beginning" organizes our thinking about origins, gestation, foundation, time, sequence, and the mutuality of opposites.

Categorical and associative reasoning, the use of an act of naming to explain another, and the ambition to order the world through words in *Erya* are the hallmarks of other early lexicographical works, the most famous being Xu Shen's 許慎 (d. ca. 147) *Shuowen jiezi* 説文解字 (Explanation of simple graphs and analysis of composite characters), "a dictionary of graphic etymology"[22] compiled around 100 CE. Liu Xi 劉熙 (late 2nd– early 3rd century) in *Shiming* 釋名 (Elucidation of names) chose twenty-seven categories of meaning units or names (concepts, linguistic usages, things, rituals, etc.), each encompassing entries that Liu glossed through homophones or close homophones, a mode of phonetic exegesis (*shengxun*

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18   *Erya zhushu* 1.6. As Guo Pu noted, *zai* appears in *Shangshu* (尚書 *Book of Documents*), and *shu*, *luo*, and *quanyu* are found in *Shijing*.

19   O'Neill 2010: 412.

20   *Erya zhushu* 2.29.

21   Hao Yixing, *Erya yishu* 爾雅義疏, cited in Gao Ming 1978: 473.

22   Bottéro and Harbsmeier 2008: 429.

聲訓) that assumes sounds generate meanings.[23] Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) *Fangyan* 方言 (Words from different regions) offers regional variations of clusters of semantically related words. (*Fangyan* contributes to our thinking about keywords by omission—since it is concerned with regional differences, it excludes words that are important enough to have universal application across regions despite, or because of, built-in polysemy.)

Shuowen, comprising 9,353 entries, is frequently cited in later discussions of keywords. Even though its graphic etymology may now seem inaccurate in light of evidence from oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, it still offers major insights into the reasoning inspired by words. For example, in glossing the word *wu* 武 (martial), *Shuowen* quotes *Zuozhuan*: "In writing, 'stop' and 'dagger axe' form 'martial.'" 夫文，止戈為武.[24] The graph *wu* appears as 𠂤 in oracle bones and is supposed to represent a man walking (or marching) with a weapon. The "rationalization" of the word in *Zuozhuan*, subsequently adopted in *Shuowen*, shows the appeal of the idea of "using a war to end wars" or "stopping violence as true martial power." Xu Shen's gloss of *shi* 史 as having *zhong* 中 (center, correct) and *you* 又 (hand) as its constitutive components (Durrant, Chapter 3) is another suggestive example of etymological reasoning. While his reading may not be borne out by the earliest forms of this character, it points rightly to the association of *shi* with scribal tradition and accurate record keeping.

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23 Phonetic gloss is also sometimes tied to semantic explanations in *Shuowen jiezi*. See Zhu Junsheng 朱駿聲 (1788–1858), *Shuowen tongxun dingsheng* 説文通訓定聲. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) argues that "meanings arise from sounds, and words are created from phonetic meanings" (義從音生也，字從音義造也.) (*Yanjing shi ji*, 1: 18). Cf. Liu Shipei 劉師培 (1884–1919), "Ziyi qiyu ziyin shuo" 字義起於字音説 (2004: 147–151); Chen Xionggen 2005.

24 *Zuozhuan*, Xuan 12.2: 744; *Zuo Tradition* 1: 660–661; *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 12B.633. *Shuowen jiezi zhu* (2B.69) also adopts the reading of *fa* 乏 (lack) in *Zuozhuan* (Xuan 15.3: 763; *Zuo Tradition*, 1: 680–681): "The reverse of 'correct' is 'lack'" 反正為乏. In seal script, the two graphs for *zheng* 正 (correct) and *fa* seem to be mirror images. In bronze inscriptions, where *fa* has a slanted top stroke in place of the horizontal one for *zheng*, the logic does not apply. According to He Leshi (2010: 72–79), about one-fifth (213 out of 1,085) of the references to pre-Han texts in *Shuowen jiezi* come from *Zuozhuan*.

More to the point, *Shuowen* and other lexicographical works train us to think in terms of semantic fields and contextual transformations. The issue is not establishing hard and fast definitions or logical equivalents, but why something can be called by a certain word in a particular context. For example, the word *ren* 仁 (humaneness) is glossed as *qin* 親 (kin and by extension the feelings one has for one's kin), but it is also offered as explanations for *wen* 㿻 (to feed a prisoner), *hui* 惠 (to benefit another), and *shu* 恕 (forgiveness and empathy).[25] The word *luan* 亂 (disorder) is used to explain (among other things) mental states of bewilderment, delusion, stupidity, confusion (*huo* 惑, *nu* 㤄, *chun* 惷, *kui* 憒), muddied water (*hun* 溷), the act of stirring (*jiao* 攪), deception (*wang* 妄), and various states of entanglement for silk threads (*suo* 縮, *wen* 紊, *fu* 紼), but the word *luan* itself is glossed as *zhi* 治 (order).[26] While phonetic borrowing might have explained this apparent example of "glossing a word by its opposite meaning" (*fanxun* 反訓),[27] it has inspired reflections on how a word can encompass opposite meanings. Thus Xu Hao 徐灝 (1810–1879) stated: "Pertaining to the essential situation, it is disorder; pertaining to the functional manifestation (i.e., proper reaction), it is order. That is why 'disorder' is also glossed as 'order.'" 自其體言則為亂，以其用言則為治，故亂亦訓治也.[28]

In that sense, glosses in lexicographical works are not structurally or functionally different from philosophical reasoning by way of defining terms in other texts. *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant dew of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), for example, speaks of the five aspects (*wuke* 五科)

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of the name "ruler" (君 *jun*): prime (元 *yuan*), origins (原 *yuan*), judicious expediency (權 *quan*), moderation (溫 *wen*), and (creating cohesion for) the multitude (群 *qun*).[29] The reasoning is similar to the grouping of terms in *Erya*, *Shiming*, and sometimes *Shuowen*. Their glosses are less "dictionary definitions" than "thinking with words" and participation in ongoing generation of and debates about meanings. For example, *Shuowen* glosses *shi* 詩 (poetry) as "intent" (*zhi*) 志也. *Shiming* glosses it as "to go" (*zhi*) 之也.[30] Both are related to the definition of poetry in the Mao Preface to *Shijing*: "Poetry is where the intent goes" 詩者，志之所之也.[31] The sense of movement here is the opposite of the emphasis on restraint in *Xunzi*, which defines the poems in *Shijing* as "stopping (*zhi*) at concordant sounds" 中聲之所止也.[32] Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–532) in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (Literary mind and carvings of dragons) follows a similar logic with a different phonetic association: "poetry means 'to hold' (*chi*) because it upholds a person's emotions and innate nature" 詩者，持也，持人情性.[33] Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) combines different meanings into a logical sequence:

> 詩有三訓。承也、志也、持也。作者承君政之善惡，述己志而作詩，所以持人之行，故一名而三訓也。

> The word poetry has three glosses: to receive, intent, to hold. The authors receive the good and bad consequences of the ruler's government, tell of their intent and compose poems, with a view to upholding people's conduct. That is why one name has three glosses. [34]

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29   *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 35.290.

30   What is translated as "poetry" refers specifically to poems in *Shijing*. Lexicographical works sometimes gloss the same words differently, and even the same gloss can generate totally different explanations (Gong Pengcheng 1992).

31   *Maoshi zhushu*, 1.13.

32   *Xunzi jijie* 1.11 ("Quanxue" 勸學).

33   *Wenxin diaolong zhu* 6.65.

34   *Maoshi zhushu* 4.

Since early lexicographical works were designed to complement and supplement exegetical scholarship on the canonical classics, they establish the crucial role of words as the venue for understanding the sages' intent. The postface of *Shuowen jiezi* (submitted to the emperor in 121 CE), linking the text to ancient script (*guwen* 古文) learning, elaborates this point:

> 蓋文字者，經藝之本，王政之始。前人所以垂後，後人所以識古。
>
> For graphs and characters are fundamental to the classics and letters; they are the beginnings of royal governance. Through them the ancients leave traces for posterity, by them those born later learn about the ancients.[35]

In addition, later discussions of keywords draw on these early sources, turning etymology and constituent graphemes into endemic meanings. The sense of system in such works also encourages the exploration of the functions of keywords through their graphological, semantic, and phonetic connections with other words. Furthermore, the very notion of system is tied to the claims of words to order reality. The nineteen lexical groups in *Erya* move from human civilization to nature, while the twenty-seven categories in *Shiming* reverse the order and move from nature to human existence, starting with heaven and ending with death and funeral rites. The structure of *Shuowen* has clear ties with Han cosmology, as Xu Shen explains in the postface:

> 其建首也，立一為端。「方以類聚，物以群分」。同條牽屬，共理相貫。「襍而不越」，據形系聯。引而申之，以究萬原。畢終於亥，知化窮冥。
>
> In building the top category, this work establishes "one" as the beginning. "Affairs are brought together as categories, and all things divided according to groups."[36] They are linked together in the same entry; the same principle goes through them. They are "various but do not exceed

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35   *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 15A.763. For a complete translation of the postface, see O'Neill 2013.

36   These lines appear in "Xici" 繫辭 commentary on the *Classic of Changes* (*Zhouyi zhushu*, 143) and "Records of Music" ("Yueji" 樂記) in the *Records of the Rites* (*Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, 271).

proper boundaries,"[37] and are connected according to form. This work draws on all forms and extends their application to investigate myriad causes. It ends with *hai* to let us understand transformations and exhaust the deepest mysteries.[38]

1.2 Lexicography and Power

Lexicographical works are traditionally classified as *xiaoxue* 小學 or "foundational learning," the groundwork for other branches of learning. Han experts of classical texts transmitted in ancient script were de facto masters of lexicography.[39] But while this connection was cemented by the challenge of decipherment during the Han dynasty, later attempts to tie the exegesis of canonical classics with the study of characters are sometimes based on their respective sacralization. *Zishuo* 字説 (Disquisition of characters) by the Song-dynasty reformer, scholar, and poet Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) is a case in point. The text is no longer extant, but fragments have been preserved in other texts.[40] In his preface to *Zishuo* (dated 1080), Wang argues for the analogy between characters and symbols in the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of changes):

字者，始於一，一而生於無窮，[41] 如母之字子，故謂之字……皆有義，皆出於自然……與伏羲八卦，文王六十四，異用而同制，相待而成易。