On Kung Sun Lung's View Of Ontology

The surviving documents of Kung Sun Lung who belongs to the Logician School in the pre-Ch'in Period consist of several paradoxes (among the Twenty-one Paradoxes found in the last chapter of 'Chuang Tze', works of a Taoist philosopher) and the six essays, namely, 1. essay on the 'Store House of Traces', 2. essay on the 'White Horse', 3. essay on the 'Universals and Things', 4. essay on the 'Understanding of Change', 5. essay on the 'Hardness and Whiteness', 6. essay on the 'Names and Actuality'. However, of the six essays, only five are considered genuine works of Kung Sun Lung.

Kung Sun Lung is famous for his argument that 'Hardness and Whiteness are separate'. This argument is, in fact, about the ontological being of universals, though the word 'universal' is not mentioned explicitly. The purpose of this paper is to delve into these essays, find out the ontological insight of Kung Sun Lung and present it in a more explicit and logical form.

Kung Sun Lung understands that universals are pervasive. He says:

"There are so many objects that are white and whiteness is not necessarily limited to any one of them." (essay on the 'Hardness and Whiteness')

He also believes that there are such things as 'Whiteness by itself'. "If whiteness cannot be whiteness by itself", he says, "how
can it whiten stones and other things." (essay on the 'Hardness and Whiteness')

Therefore, all universals for Kung Sun Lung are independent of objects. This is comparable to Plato's 'Universalia anterem' (Universals anterior to or independent of things). Moreover, as universals are independent of objects, they are beyond the reach of human experience. To account for this, Kung Sun Lung says:

"Such hardness which is hardness without hardening stones and other things does not exist. It subsists." (essay on the 'Hardness and Whiteness')

Based on this, Kung Sun Lung argues further that each and every universal is a subsisting reality in isolation.

However, what is really important is not Kung Sun Lung's ontological thinking per se, but his abstract reasoning and his purely intellectual interest that lead to such thinking. The greatest concern of traditional Chinese philosophy has been with 'man' and 'society'—how to live a good life, and how to build an ideal society. Kung Sun Lung's ontological insight shows that he has freed himself from the entanglement of socio-politico-ethics on which Chinese philosophers have focussed their attention. This tendency towards intellectualism for its own sake is just what is lacking in the Chinese philosophical tradition, and thus, if properly developed, can lead to the complement of the Chinese philosophy.