

2 THE LITERARY BACKGROUND AND RHETORICAL STYLES

In moving to consider the literary background and rhetorical styles we shall consider texts that can conceivably be classified as being primarily concerned with literary and rhetorical style, or at least have some important things to say about it, even if it is not their primary focus. This chapter also recounts the debate between the competing styles of *guwen* (classical prose) and *pianwen* (flowery prose) and concludes with texts that exemplify typical methods of reasoning.

An early work that was influential to the development of rhetorical and literary style was Dong Zhongshu's *Chun Qiu Fan Lu* (春秋繁露), known in English as *Rich Dew of the Spring and Autumn Classic*. As noted in Chapter 1, Dong, who died in 104 CE, was an advisor to the Emperor Wu and who managed to persuade the Emperor to establish an academy at which Confucian thought be taught at the expense of all other schools of thought. Although his book deals with the theory of government, it is, however, important to style, as it elevated Confucius to the status of a sage. This in turn ensured that Confucian style would become the orthodox style. As has been illustrated earlier, the orthodox Confucian style can be classified as being both plain and clear. Pu Kai and Wei Kun quote a number of Confucian remarks on the use of language, which can be summarised in the phrase “explaining things plainly and simply is good enough” (111–24). It is important to stress, however, that Confucius did not write explicitly about language and rhetoric. Rather, there are references to these topics which are scattered throughout the Analects, which, it needs to be remembered, were written down by his disciples after his death. Despite these caveats, when later scholars call for a return to a Confucian style, they are almost always calling for a return to plain speaking.

The later years of the Han dynasty saw the publication of several works of significance to literary style. These included *The Disquisitions* (*Lun Heng*) of Wang Chong (27-100 CE). Wang Chong's criticism of the historian, Sima Qian, as being unable to produce anything original was cited in Chapter 1.

Although primarily a book about political theory, this is an important book with regard to style because Wang Chong attacked the then current fashion of slavishly imitating the ancients. At the same time, he severely criticises his contemporaries for ignoring their own times.

The story tellers like to extol the past and disparage the present time. They make much of what they see with their own eyes. The disputants will discourse in what is long ago and literati write on what is far away. The curious things near at hand, the speakers do not mention, and the extraordinary events of our own time are not committed to writing. (Kinney)

Wang Chong is significant as his own style is characterised by a penchant for direct or deductive reasoning and, as such, represents an interesting counter example to the usual indirectness of “oblique” style commonly reported by others, including Jullien (*Detour and Access*) and Kirkpatrick (“Traditional Chinese Text Structures”). However, it is perhaps instructive to note that Jullien makes only a single passing reference to Wang Chong throughout *Detour and Access* and that is in the conclusion where he reiterates that the implicit, oblique and indirect—the Chinese notion of *hanxu* (含蓄)—is of fundamental importance in Chinese culture. Here he cites Wang Chong as a writer of “clarity of discourse” but he then adds that Wang Chong’s “prose is unpopular” (374). While his prose may well have been unpopular with those whom he attacked, his style and bravery was much admired. The example below is our translation of the summary of one of Wang Chong’s essays, *Ding Gui* or “Conclusions about Ghosts.” The summary is provided in Wu Yingtian (165).²

General Statement: (*zonglun*)

ghosts and spirits are the illusions of sick minds.

Individual Arguments (*fenlun*)

1 sick people are terrified of death and so they see ghosts.

2 sick people seeing ghosts is just like Bo Le looking over a horse or Pao Ding (a chef) looking over a cow.³

3 when a sick man is in pain, he sees or thinks ghosts are hitting him.

4 sick people seeing ghosts are but dreaming.

This is a deductive arrangement of ideas, in that the main point is made first and then justified with a series of arguments which follow. As such, it is therefore a “marked” sequence in Chinese rhetorical terms. In his discussion of the sequence of this argument, Wu brings in political criteria. He points out that Wang Chong was writing at a time Wu calls a “feudal theocracy” (*fengjian shenquan*) (165). To propose, therefore, a theory that ghosts and spirits were merely the products of sick minds would have been extremely controversial. Wu then argues that the use of this deductive reasoning suited the polemical nature of Wang Chong’s argument. It is direct and establishes the author’s point of view at the beginning. So we must ask why Wang Chong chose to use this style, as he would have known that a more indirect oblique style would have been the norm. It might have been wiser for Wang Chong to have followed Gui Guzi’s advice to speak with “forked tongue.”

Not surprisingly, Wang Chong was renowned for his revolutionary and outspoken ideas. Feng Youlan, the famous Chinese philosopher, called him “the great atheist and materialist philosopher” (238), which, in the context of Chinese communist society, are terms of great approbation. By using a marked sequence represented by deductive and direct reasoning, Wang Chong is deliberately being provocative and outspoken.

We have argued, however, that the use of indirect language is the default or “unmarked” style in much Chinese rhetoric and persuasion. There are many ways of describing this indirectness. Gui Guzi recommended speaking in “forked tongue.” Chinese terms include the notion mentioned earlier of *hanxu* (含蓄), which has the sense of implicitness and concealment. Li Xilan has suggested that, when the weak are dealing with the strong, they should use indirect and diplomatic language. “Use indirect and tactful (*weiwan* 委婉) language to broach the crucial point and thus preserve yourself and obtain a diplomatic victory” (14–24). The following letter, written some one hundred and fifty years after Wang Chong’s death is a prime example of the use of such language.

The author, Li Mi (225–290 CE) is writing to the Jin emperor Sima Yan. In this letter Li Mi turns down an appointment at court that the emperor has offered him on the grounds that he has to look after his ailing grandmother. However, as the Jin emperor has just defeated Li Mi’s native state of Shu, he has other reasons for not wanting to become a servant of the “enemy.” It hardly needs to be said that such a letter would need extremely tactful language in order to avoid offending the emperor. It will also be noted that the main point—the request themselves or the *petitio*—come at the end of the letter

after an extended background or *narratio*. I have italicised the requests. The translation is by David Knechtges (75–7).

Li Mi: Memorial Expressing My Feelings

Your servant Mi states: Because of a parlous fate, I early encountered grief and misfortune. When I was an infant of only six months my loving father passed away. When I was four my mother's brother forced my mother to remarry against her will. Grandmother Liu took pity on this weak orphan and personally cared for me. When young, I was often sick, and at nine I could not walk. Solitary and alone I suffered until I reached adulthood. I not only had no uncles, I also had no brothers. Our family was in decline, our blessings were few, and thus only late in life have I had offspring. Outside the household, I have no close relatives whom I can mourn; inside, I have not even a boy servant to watch the gate. All alone I stand, my body and shadow console each other. Grandmother Liu long has been ill and is constantly bedridden. I serve her medicinal brews, and I have never abandoned her or left her side.

When I came into the service of this Sage Dynasty, I bathed in your pure transforming influence. First Governor Kui sponsored me as Filial and Pure. Later Inspector Rong recommended me as a Flourishing Talent. But because there was no one to care for grandmother, I declined and did not take up the appointment. An edict was especially issued appointing me Palace gentleman. Not long thereafter I received imperial favour and was newly appointed Aide to the Crown Prince. I humbly believe that for a man as lowly and insignificant as I to be deemed worthy of serving in the Eastern Palace is an honour I could never repay you for, even with my life. I informed you of all the circumstances in a memorial, and I again declined and did not go to my post. Your edict was insistent and stern, accusing me of being dilatory and disrespectful. The commandery and prefectural authorities tried to pressure me and urged me to take the road up to the capital. The local officials approached my door with the speed of shooting stars and fiery sparks. I wanted to comply

with your edict and dash off to my post, but Grandmother Liu's illness daily became more grave. I wished temporarily to follow my personal desires, but my plea was not granted. Whether to serve or retire truly was a great dilemma!

I humbly believe that this Sage Dynasty governs the empire by means of filial piety, and all among the aged and elderly still receive compassion and care. How much more needful am I whose solitary suffering has been especially severe! Moreover, when young I served the false dynasty, and I have moved through the various gentleman posts. I originally planned to become illustrious as an official, but I never cared about my reputation and character. Now I am a humble captive of an alien state. I am utterly insignificant and unimportant, but I have received more promotions than I deserve, and your gracious charge is both liberal and generous. How would I dare demur, with the hope of receiving something better? However, I believe that Grandmother Liu, like the sun going down, is breathing her last breaths. Her life has reached a precarious, delicate stage, and one cannot predict in the morning what will happen in the evening. Without grandmother I would not be alive today. Without me grandmother will not be able to live out her remaining years. Grandmother and grandson have depended upon one another for life. Thus, simply because of my own small, selfish desires I cannot abandon or leave her. I am now in my forty-fourth year, and Grandmother Liu is now ninety-six. Thus, I have a long time in which to fulfil my duty to Your Majesty and only a short time in which to repay Grandmother Liu for raising me. *With all my filial devotion, I beg to be allowed to care for her to her final days.* My suffering and misery are not only clearly known by the men of Shu and the governors of the two provinces, they have been perceived by August Heaven and Sovereign Earth. I hope Your Majesty will take pity on my naive sincerity and will grant my humble wish, so that Grandmother Liu will have the good fortune to preserve the remaining years of her life. While I am alive, I shall offer my life in your service. When dead, I shall “knot a clump of grass” for you.⁴ With unbearable apprehension, like a loyal dog or horse, I respectfully present this memorial to inform you of my feelings.

We have chosen to include this long memorial, not only because it represents a nice example of “bottom-up” persuasion, but also because it is a request with an unmarked “frame-main” schema. This is remarkably similar to a “Ciceronian” schema, which we shall consider in Chapter 3. Li Mi’s request starts with an introduction to himself and his situation. He then describes his association with the present “Sage Dynasty” and these two sections of his letter provide the *captatio benivolentiae* (or the facework). Towards the end of the third paragraph, he gives a series of reasons why it is important for him to stay and look after his grandmother. These reasons are also acting as reasons for the request, or *narratio*. The requests, the *petitio*, are made at the end of the letter.

This then is a further example of the common-sense strategy of using an indirect approach to persuasion when there is an unequal balance of power between persuader and listener. Kao has called this the art of “criticism by indirection” (121).

This art becomes important in circumstances where persuasion is “bottom-up” and is manifested in the persuasions of the political counselors as they advise or criticise their rulers’ policies throughout Chinese dynastic history.

However, not all requests of this type necessarily followed this arrangement. Here is Bao Shuya of Qi also politely declining the position of prime minister.

I am a commonplace minister of the king. The King is benevolent and kind towards me and ensures I suffer from neither cold nor hunger. This is the King’s benevolent gift to me. *If you definitely want me to govern the country, I’m afraid that that is something I may be unable to do.* If we are talking about governing the country, then Guan Zhong is probably the man with the talent for the job. I measure up badly against him in five areas: his policies are magnanimous and have the advantage of pacifying and stabilising the people and I am not as good as he is here; in governing and not violating basic principles, I am not as good as he is; in establishing sincere relationships with the people, I am not as good as he is; in establishing the correct standards of etiquette and ensuring that the models are followed everywhere, I am not as good as he is; and in standing outside the city gate, holding the drumsticks and the battle drum to inspire great bravery in the people, I am not as good as he is.⁵

While this request starts with a *captatio benivolentiae*, the *petitio* (italicised) comes immediately after it and is followed by what might be called the *narratio*,

where the author offers justifications for his request. Just then as the component parts of the medieval European letters were not absolutely fixed in terms of their order, so is the arrangement flexible in Chinese texts.

As we have argued, the hierarchical nature of Chinese society meant that persuaders normally needed to employ methods of indirect criticism. Kroll (125–7) has pointed out that many of the rhetorical devices employed in chain reasoning and reasoning by analogy were ideal for indirect criticism. For example, the devices of joining objects of the same kind (*lien lei*) and comparing things create possibilities for the indirect communication of ideas.

An important work on rhetoric and literary criticism in the immediate post Han period is a descriptive poem on literature, the *Wen Fu* (文赋, On Literature), written by Lu Ji (261–303 CE). This has been called by one Chinese scholar “a radiant triumph in early Chinese literary criticism” (Wang D. 50). The work is important as Lu Ji developed an analysis of genres that identified ten genres: the lyric; the exhibitory essay; monumental inscriptions; the elegy; the mnemonic; the epigram; the eulogy; the expository; the memorial and finally the argument. (Cao Pi’s third-century “Discourse of Wen” had identified four pairs of genres: the memorial and deliberation; the letter and the treatise; the lyric poem and rhapsody; and the inscription and the dirge.) Lu Ji has this to say about the process of composition:

A composition comes into being as the incarnation of many living gestures. It is the embodiment of endless change. To attain meaning, it depends on the grasp of the subtle, while such words are employed as best serves beauty’s sake. (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* xxviii)

However, it is the *Wen Xin Diao Long*, (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*), written by Liu Xie (465–520 CE) which is considered by many to be China’s earliest account of rhetoric, although it is probably more correct to call it a book of literary criticism. Liu Xie is certainly unusual in being known first and foremost as a critic. Not all scholars are convinced by Liu’s scholarship. S. K. Wong (121), while enthusing over the language and organisation of the book, says “we had better not think him original, or suppose he exerted any influence on Chinese literature before the Qing period” (121). Cai Zongqi describes him “as a scholar of no great distinction in his own day” (1).

By Liu Xie’s time, the plain and simple Confucian style had given way to a florid and verbose literary style called *pianwen* (骈文), often translated as “parallel prose” and which is described and illustrated further below. An early meaning of *pian* (骈) is of a carriage being drawn by six horses and it thus

provides an image of ornateness. Liu, who traces all literary genres back to the Confucian Classics, argues that the writer who used the Classics as models would develop a style free from verbosity. The following excerpts from the *Wen Xin Diao Long* come from Vincent Shih's translation.

The five classics are masters moulding human nature and spirit and the great treasure house of literature, unfathomable and illustrious, the source of all literary forms. (21)

The obligation Liu Xie feels to praise the Classics and Confucius reflects the importance the Chinese ascribe to traditional models.

Jiao, or to teach, literally means *xiao*, or to imitate. Words once spoken form models for people to imitate... therefore the words of kings and lords have come to be grouped under the general term of *jiao* or teaching. (114)

Liu, however, is not prescriptive. His advice to the author on composition and organisation stresses flexibility and sensitivity to context. For example:

The division into paragraphs and the construction of sentences conform to different tempos at different times. For these differences there is no fixed rule, and one must adapt... to varying circumstances. (186)

Paradoxically, then, although it appears that Liu was clearly proposing a return to Confucian style, he also believed that literary style should change with the times and that, to endure, literature needed to be adaptable. These two apparently contradictory strands are encapsulated by Shih: "We must conclude that his conservatism is a matter of habit, while his progressive ideas arise from convictions" (xliv).

This tension is reflected in Liu Xie's style itself. "In comparison to contemporary masters of parallel prose, Liu Xie's chapters have an unmistakable awkwardness," and this is because "there are two writers competing for control of the text" (Owen, "Liu Xie" 191).

The balance between respect of the classics and their use as literary models, and the needs of the writer to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the time and the genre is one that has occupied the minds of Chinese scholars since time immemorial. This tension is nicely expressed in the verse that concludes the

chapter in the *Wen Xin Diao Long* on literary development, and highlights how the needs of a particular time condition the preferred rhetorical style:

Against the background of the ten dynasties, literary trends have changed nine times.

Once initiated at the central pivot, the process of transformation circles endlessly.

Literary subject matter and the form in which it is treated are conditioned by the needs of the times,

But whether a certain subject matter or a certain form is emphasised or overlooked depends on the choice made by the writers.

Antiquity, however remote, can be made to display itself before us like a human face. (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* 224)

Liu Xie was writing when the parallel prose style, *pianwen*, was at its most popular. The style was itself a reaction to the plain and simple Confucian style (Hightower). *Pianwen* is characterised by the use of four and six word parallel phrases, with four words in the first phrase, six words in the second and so on. This syllabic correspondence can be heightened by the use of similar or deliberately contrasting tone patterns across the phrases. *Pianwen* continued to be popular—even dominant—until the Song dynasty (960-1278 CE), when the *guwen* (古文) (see below) movement succeeded in replacing parallel prose with a more conservative style. We consider developments in the Song in the next chapter when we introduce the Song dynasty scholar, Chen Kui's, *Rules of Writing*.

In the same way that *pianwen* developed as a reaction against the earlier Confucian style, so the *guwen*, or “ancient prose” movement, was a reaction against the parallel prose style of *pianwen*. Han Yu (768-824 CE), a Confucian conservative of the Tang dynasty, was the major force behind the *guwen* movement, although there had been earlier proponents. Luo Genze has argued that the *guwen* movement began when Su Chuo (498-546) rejected *pianwen* and drafted the edict entitled “The Great Announcement.” But it is Han Yu who is most closely associated with the movement and who promoted the simple straightforward style of pre-Han models of expository prose (hence the

name *guwen* or ancient prose). In Han Yu's day, *guwen* meant "literature of antiquity" or "ancient style prose" (Bol 24). One of Han Yu's own essays, "The origin of Dao," explains his own firm conservative commitment to upholding the ways of the past:

What Dao is this Dao? The answer is, this Dao what I call Dao and not an inquiry into what Lao Tzu and the Buddha meant by Dao. This is what Yao transmitted to Shun, Shun transmitted to Yu, Yu transmitted to T'ang, T'ang transmitted to King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Chou, King Wen, King Wu and the Duke of Chou transmitted to Confucius and Confucius transmitted to Meng K'o (Mencius). When Meng K'o died there was no one to transmit it to.... Now the ways of the barbarians have been elevated above the teachings of the ancient kings. How far are we from degenerating into barbarians ourselves? (Chen Shou-yi 289).

Han Yu's promotion of *guwen* had considerable influence upon the exam system for the selection of civil service candidates. During the eighth century, the style required of candidates for the civil service exams was the popular *pianwen* style and the major canon which candidates had to know was the *Wen Xuan* or "Selection of Literary Writings" which had been compiled by Xiao Tong sometime between 501-503 CE.

The level to which the influence of Confucianism had declined and foreign influences—most importantly Buddhism—had been established during the time of the Six Dynasties (220-589 CE), (and so called because this period saw the successive establishment and collapse of six short-lived dynasties) was that the *Wen Xuan* included none of the Classics. Literature was seen as a civilising influence and was able to transform men into civilised beings. The *pianwen* age of the Six Dynasties saw the "increasing belletrisation of Chinese literary criticism and theory that paralleled the Buddhicisation of Chinese society" (Mair 81). Civil service exam candidates were judged, not on their knowledge of Confucian Classics, but on their ability to manipulate the complex forms of *pianwen*. Han Yu and people of like mind considered such people as being unqualified for employment in the civil service. Ignoring the sages and favouring embellishment meant that "the literary brush became ever more lush and the government ever more chaotic" (Bol 91). The *pianwen* style attracted ridicule from its opponents, characterised by one scholar as being "a boat of magnolia wood propelled by ostrich feather oars" (Chen P. 6). Yet Han Yu's promotion of *guwen* met with harsh opposition, not least because *guwen*

required more time and erudition to master. With the comparative success of Han Yu and the *guwen* movement, however, it now became possible for candidates to write about the Confucian classics in *guwen* style in the exams, although it was not until the later years of the Song dynasty that the *guwen* movement reached its height and Han Yu's goals were realised. Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) took up the *guwen* cause and made it the accepted examination style. Not surprisingly he favoured content at the expense of form. His own style has been described as follows:

The works of Ouyang Xiu are lucid and fluent; his style is easy and unaffected. In his prose writings, he showed his mastery by a continuous flow of thought and argumentation, with a significant content couched in clear and simple language. (Chai 46)

Bol has argued that *guwen* was primarily a search for the *values* associated with the style, rather than a wholehearted endorsement of the style itself. Ouyang Xiu himself announced that he did not agree that *guwen* writing was necessarily right and *pianwen* or ornate writing wrong, although, by the time he became Superintendent of Examinations in 1057, he said he favoured passing those who had comprehended the methods of the Classics and wrote in *guwen*. But the debate was more about values and content rather than style. *Dao* (the way) and *wen* (writing) are, along with *li* (ritual) three key terms in Chinese rhetoric (You, *Writing in the Devil's Tongue* 10). Another way of looking at this debate has been to compare the respective roles of *dao* (道), which we might translate in this context as “meaning” or “content,” and *wen* (文) which we might translate as “language,” “literature” or even “form.” The *pianwen* movement was associated with the development of an ornate *wen*. The *guwen* movement was associated with *dao* or meaning. In the early Tang, intellectuals had the freedom to move among the three competing ideologies of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. This encouraged a freedom of style and the use of ornate writing or *pianwen*. Intellectuals were probably not narrow dogmatists. Rote repetition of authoritative interpretation was still part of the tradition but it was not as highly valued as producing a new interpretation (Owen, *The End of the Chinese “Middle Ages”*). But, as we shall see in the next chapter, by the time of Chen Kui (1128-1203), the Neo-Confucian movement of the Song had become ascendant and the Confucian classics were back as the key objects of study and the *guwen* style was the style in which to write about them. Scholars now had to aim at giving contemporary form to the original models. People needed instruction in ways of doing this. As we shall show

in Chapter 3, this was an important motivation for Chen Kui to write his *Wen Ze* (文则) or *Rules of Writing*.

In the final section of this chapter, we exemplify typical Confucian methods of argumentation, illustrating these with a variety of texts.

Confucian thinkers usually employed one of three types of argumentation, “the rhetorical chain argument, argument by appeal to antiquity and argument by analogy” (Wyatt 46). Garrett (128) distinguishes two types of chain-reasoning common in Chinese argument, one which relates propositions and one which relates terms within propositions. Below is an example of the first type, interpropositional chain-reasoning.

If the people are farmers then they are naturally simple. If they are naturally simple then they are easy to use. If they are easy to use then the borders of the state will be secure and the position of the chief will be honoured.

If the people set aside the base (farming) and serve the peripheral then they will be fond of being intelligent. If they are fond of being intelligent then they will be deceptive most of the time. If they are deceptive most of the time then they will cleverly twist the models and commands and take right as wrong and wrong as right.

As an example of the second type of chain-reasoning, the one that relates terms within propositions, Garrett gives:

Before the time of Ch’ih Yu [a mythical rebel] the people did definitely whittle pieces of wood to do battle with, and those who won became the leaders. The leaders still were not sufficient to put the people in order, so (*gu*) they set up rulers. Again, the rulers were not sufficient to put them in order, so (*gu*) they set up the emperor. The setting up of the emperor comes from the rulers, the setting up of the rulers comes from the leaders, and the setting up of the leaders comes from the conflict. (130)

We could set up a rhetorical structure of this passage that would follow the “because-therefore” and “frame-main” patterns, examples of which we have already illustrated and which we shall develop in more detail in later chapters.

Ø BECAUSE (leaders not sufficient)—THEREFORE (set
up rulers)

+

Ø BECAUSE (rulers not sufficient) — THEREFORE (set
up emperor)

+

Ø THEREFORE
(emperor comes from rulers, etc.)

This type of chain-reasoning displays a preference for “because-therefore” and “frame-main” sequences. The following example of chain reasoning displays a similar preference for “frame-main” reasoning. This is translated by Graham (*Yin Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*) and is taken from the *Huai Nanzi*.⁶

The Way of Heaven one calls round, the Way of Earth one calls square. It is primary to the square to retreat to the dark, primary to the round to illuminate. To illuminate is to expel *ch'i*, for which reason fire and sun cast the image outside. To retreat to the dark is to hold *ch'i* in, for which reason water and moon draw the image inside. What expels *ch'i* does *to*, what holds *ch'i* in is transformed *by*. **Therefore** the Yang does *to*, the Yin is transformed *by*. (31)

Reasoning by analogy is also common. Smith suggests that this Chinese preference for argument by analogy can partly be explained by the structure of the language itself, its stylistic requirements and “the penchant for relational thinking” (Smith 92).

In a discussion on ethical argumentation in the works of the Confucian philosopher Xunzi (298-238 BCE), Cua argues that the methods of explanation (*shuo*) and justification (*bian*) involve the comparison of kinds of things and analogical projection. A.S. Cua defines analogical projection as reasoning that:

involves a number of complex considerations that lead to a terminus... the different considerations are not necessarily connected with one another, forming, as it were, a chain of premises leading to a single outcome. Thus, the knowledge of the application of the standards of the past, information concerning the present circumstance, appreciation of the problem at stake, and the variety of archetypes that aid in

selecting the baseline for analogy between past and present circumstance, all together converge on a terminus that constitutes the judgement, which represents the solution to the problem at hand. “(*Ethical Argumentation* 93)

In support, Cua cites Richards where Richards argues that the notion of reasoning in Mencius is not an inference from explicit premises to a definite conclusion according to specific rules, but the placing of a number of observations in an intelligible order. Crump calls this type of reasoning the progressive analogy, and suggests that the information sequence is from subordinate to main as the progression is from the:

far away and inconsequential toward the important and near at hand, until, at the end, the persuader applies the whole set of analogies, which then has the force of a sorites or chain-syllogism, to the case at hand. (Crump 50)

Argument by historical example(s) is also very common. This use of argument by historical examples as opposed to deductive argument is well summed up in the following way. “Philosophy meant a kind of wisdom that is necessary for the conduct of life, particularly the conduct of government” and “it sought to exercise persuasive power on princes, and ... resorted, not to deductive reasoning, but to the exploitation of historical examples” (Cua, *Ethical Uses* 133).

An excellent example of this argument by analogy and historical precedence was the excerpt from *The Discourses of Salt and Iron* analysed in Chapter 1 as following the “because-therefore:’ and “frame-main” rhetorical sequence. Here we provide a second example and this is taken from Sun Tzu’s, *The Art of War*, which was written sometime between 480 and 221 BCE.⁷

Do not move unless it is advantageous.

Do not execute unless it is effective.

Do not challenge unless it is critical.

An intense View is not a reason to launch an opposition.

An angry leader is not a reason to initiate a challenge.

If engagement brings advantage, move.

If not, stop.

Intensity can cycle back to fondness.

Anger can cycle back to satisfaction.

But an extinct organisation cannot cycle back to survival.

And those who are destroyed cannot cycle back to life.

Thus, (*gu*) a brilliant Ruler is prudent.

A Good leader is on guard.

Such (*ci*) is the Tao of a Stable Organisation and a Complete Force.

There are several points of interest here. The first is that the English translation of the first three lines of this extract follows a main clause-subordinate clause sequence. In the original Chinese, however, the sequence is subordinate clause-main clause which indicates that the unmarked clause orders in MSC and English differ, a point made earlier and to which we return later. The second is that the argument here follows the familiar rhetorical structure of “because-therefore” and “frame-main” sequencing, with the reasons explaining why prudence and being on guard are qualities of a leader preceding the statements to that effect. The third is the use of a final summary statement which is introduced by *ci* (thus). The function of *ci* here is similar to the function of the contemporary conjunction *suoyi* (therefore) in signaling a final summary statement, which we analyse in Chapter 7. The final line could be translated, “Thus the state is kept secure and the army preserved.”

These examples show that argument by analogy and by historical example naturally follow the rhetorical “frame-main” structure. We now describe and illustrate a particularly well-known Chinese text structure and one which is often used for indirection of one sort or another.

THE QI-CHENG-ZHUAN-HE (起承转合) STRUCTURE.

A text type which was frequently used to convey indirect criticism was the four-part *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* pattern. However, the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure has altered in both form and function over several hundred years.

The *Dictionary of Chinese Rhetoric (DCR)* defines this rhetorical structure as follows:

A common logical belle-lettres (诗文) structure and sequence but also the epitome of a common structural pattern for a variety of texts, both ancient and modern. *Qi* is the opening or beginning, *cheng* continues or joins the opening to the next stage. *Zhuan* is the transition or turning point, used either to develop or expound the argument, *he* is the summary or conclusion. (Zhang 314)

As an early example of this form, the *DCR* cites one of Li Po's⁸ most famous poems:

“At the front of my bed moonlight shines (*qi*)
I think there is frost on the ground (*cheng*)
Raising my head, I look at the moon (*zhuan*)
Lowering my head, I think of home.” (*he*)

It is significant that the *DCR* should give a Tang Dynasty (618-907) poem as an early example of this structure. Chen Wangdao (233), possibly the most famous and influential Chinese rhetorician of the twentieth century, quotes Fan Heng (1272-1330) on the stylistic requirements of this structure, but no explicit reference to poetry is mentioned:

“*Qi* needs to be level and straight
Cheng needs to be the shape of a mortar
Zhuan needs change
He needs to be like some deep pond or overflowing river (or needs to leave the reader pondering over the meaning)”.

Wu Yingtian (204), on the other hand, takes the view that the origins of the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* lie in the poems of the Tang Dynasty, and is able to trace the development of the structure from poetry to prose. He argues that, by the

end of the Yuan Dynasty (1368), the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* had been adopted as a structure for prose writing. Wu goes on to argue that this is the forerunner of the contemporary four-part prose structure of *kaiduan* (beginning 端), *fazhan* (development 发展), *gaochao* (climax 高潮) and *jieju* (conclusion 结局). In this, Wu is in disagreement with those contemporary Chinese linguists who claim that the modern four-part structure came into Chinese via translations in the 1950s of *Russian* literary theory. Wu is thus being “patriotic” in claiming the contemporary four-part structure, which is primarily used for narrative texts, is home-grown produce and not some foreign import. Wu attempts to prove this by analysing this contemporary four-part structure against a narrative text written in 100 BCE. He is unsuccessful, however, in this, as the third part of the contemporary narrative structure (the climax or *gaochao*) is not equivalent with the transition stage (*zhuan*) of the traditional structure. We shall not argue this rather arcane case further here. What is beyond dispute is that the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* became commonly used as rhetorical structure to express indirect criticism.

Di Chen provides an excellent example of this with an indirect political polemic which adopts this rhetorical structure (Di). The piece, a famous one, was written by Gong Zizhen in 1839 when he was in his forties. He had just returned south after being dismissed from his post. We indicate each of the respective four parts of the structure so that the structural pattern may become clearer.

A Sanitarium for Sick Plum Trees

(*Qi*)

Longpan Mountain in Jiangning, Dengwei Mountain in Suzhou and the Western banks of West Lake in Hangzhou all have an abundance of plum trees.

(*Cheng*)

It is said: the beauty of the branches of a plum tree lie in their crooked shape, there being no charm in ramrod straightness; their beauty lies in their jagged angles, as being upright and straight is not pleasing to the eye; their beauty lies in their sparseness, as dense abundance has no definition. This has long been so. Scholars and artists believe this in their hearts but do not openly shout aloud these criteria for the judgement of plum trees, nor can they tell those cultivators of the plum tree that, by hacking them into shape, by viciously cutting

back their abundant foliage and by lopping off branches, they can turn prematurely dead or diseased plum trees into a profitable enterprise. The tortured crookedness and bare sparseness of the plum branches is not caused by those who, as soon as they sense profit, can use their skill to obtain it. But, someone has explained in clear terms this unsocial desire of the scholars and artists to the sellers of plum trees. These, then, to obtain a higher price for their trees, cut off the straight branches and tend the crooked ones, cut back dense foliage and destroy delicate buds and uproot and kill off any plum trees that grow straight. And so the plum trees of Jiangsu and Zhejiang have all become ill and deformed. What a serious disaster have these scholars and artists brought about!

(*Zhuan*)

I bought three hundred pots with plum trees in them and they were all sick; not a single pot contained a completely healthy plant. I grieved for them and wept for three days and then vowed that, to cure them, I should indulge them and let them grow freely. I destroyed the pots, planted all the plum trees in the ground and cut free their encompassing and binding twine. I still need five years to restore the plum trees to their original state. I have never been a scholar or an artist and am happy to have scorn heaped upon me, but I want to build a sanitarium for sick plums where I can place these plum trees.

(*He*)

Ai! How I wish I had the free time and the idle land so that I could gather in the sick plum trees of Jiangning, Hangzhou and Suzhou, and within my lifetime, cure them!

Following Di Chen's analysis, the first paragraph is the *qi* of the text. The second paragraph describes the underhand schemes of the scholars and artists and recounts how they have oppressed the growth of the plum trees. This is, of course, an analogy, with the scholars and artists representing the reactionary feudal classes. It lays bare the crimes of the Qing dynasty rulers in destroying men of talent. This is the *cheng* and it continues and explains the topic, elaborating the opening sentence. The third paragraph recounts how the author opposes all this and this is the *zhuan*. This represents a change, a change from one view of the situation to another. The fourth paragraph describes the

author's desire to cure the sick plum trees. This is the *he*, the conclusion of the piece. It demonstrates the author's resolve to fight to change society. The whole piece demonstrates the use of analogy as a weapon of indirect criticism being directed against tyrannical and corrupt dynastic government.

The *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure was often used as a form in which to express unofficial criticism from below to above. In this it differs from the *ba gu wen* (八股文) or eight-legged essay, perhaps the most famous Chinese rhetorical structure with regard to written texts. The *ba gu wen* is the topic of Chapter 4.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have reviewed the literary background and the development of Chinese rhetoric and writing, giving illustrations from a variety of texts. We explained how Confucian texts became officially sanctioned as the state canon and provided a rhetorical analysis of texts which show a Chinese preference for because-therefore or frame-main reasoning. However, we have also shown that the deductive style was also known to and used by Chinese writers. In Chapter 3, we describe the book *Wen Ze* (Rules of Writing), which has been described as China's first systematic account of rhetoric and writing and compare the advice provided there with advice given in medieval European treatises which were written at around the same time.