

3 THE RULES OF WRITING⁹ IN MEDIEVAL CHINA AND EUROPE

The Rules of Writing (*Wen Ze*, 文则) has been called the first systematic account of Chinese rhetoric (Yancheng Liu).¹⁰ Its author, Chen Kui (陈騏) (1128-1203), was born at the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). He lived at a time of great change, being born one year after the beginning of the Southern Song period. The Northern Song emperors had ruled from 960, but had been forced to flee south in 1127 in face of invasion from the north.

Chen Kui was a member of the intellectual elite and passed the extremely prestigious and competitive metropolitan exam to become a *jinsbi* (进士) at the comparatively early age of 24. This was no mean feat. John Chaffee has eloquently recorded the trials and tribulations of being a scholar in Song China. During the Song dynasty, the number of people taking the series of exams that culminated in the *jinsbi* exam increased dramatically. There were two major reasons for this. First, the Song emperors desired to create a meritocracy by increasing the number of able men in the civil service. Exams replaced privilege as the main gateway into the civil service. Second, the advent of printing opened up education to more people: “The spread of printing transformed Chinese book culture” (Cherniack 5). *The Rules of Writing* may thus well have been stimulated to provide a writing and rhetorical guide for the many thousands of men who were now preparing for one of the imperial civil service exams.

Chen Kui himself held a number of senior official positions. In 1190, during the reign of the Emperor Guang Zong, he was appointed secretary of the Imperial Library and was the author of *The Record of the Library of the Southern Song*.

Here, we first briefly summarise how Chinese scholars have evaluated *The Rules of Writing* and then focus on three topics that we hope will be of particular

relevance to those interested in rhetoric and the teaching of writing; the first topic concerns Chen Kui's advice on the use of simple and contemporary language; the second concerns his advice on the sequence of argument when writing discursive texts; and the third concerns the correct use of citations.

THE RULES OF WRITING

The Rules of Writing (hereafter *ROW*) is primarily concerned with the study of “essays” (*wenzhang* 文章), which, in another context, Bol has translated as “literary composition” (16). The *ROW* is concerned with literary composition of a particular type—the writing of compositions suitable for the examination system as it was during the Southern Song. These compositions were based on the *guwen* (古文) style of the classics and which presented the messages of the classics in contemporary language. The type of composition that Chen Kui is concerned with is *lun* (论), discourse or discussion. In summary the *ROW* is concerned with the composition of *lun* for use in the Song civil service exams.

The *ROW* is accepted by contemporary Chinese scholars as **the** study of Chinese classical rhetoric. Indeed it has been described as the benchmark for the study of Chinese rhetoric as a whole (e.g., Wang; Zhou Z.).¹¹ Chen Kui's major aim in writing the *ROW* was to identify and summarise the rules of writing literary composition, using classical texts as his source material. The *ROW* thus discusses and exemplifies principles of composition and rhetoric, including aspects of genres, styles and methods of composition at the levels of word, sentence and text (Liu Yancheng). The book comprises five main topics: genre, “negative” rhetoric, “positive” rhetoric, syntax and style.¹²

Chen Kui's research method is also praised. Tan discusses this in detail and classifies Chen's use of the comparative method into seven categories. We list them in the order Tan does (Tan Quanji):

1. comparing the beginnings and endings of texts;
2. comparing different genres;
3. comparing one book with another;
4. comparing works written at the same time;
5. comparing contemporary texts with classical texts;
6. comparing different ways of expressing the same or similar meanings; and
7. comparing the use of the same method to convey different meanings.

Tan also praises Chen for his use of what he calls the inductive method, *guinafa* (归纳法) and gives as an example Chen's classification of metaphor into ten categories based on countless examples. As a further example of Chen's use of induction, Tan gives his elucidation of the rhetorical pattern of balanced parallelism based on the study of forty-four separate words, each supported by numerous examples.

The *ROW* is made up of ten chapters which themselves each comprise a number of sections, ranging from one (Chapter 10) to ten (Chapter 5). As Chapter 10 is actually the longest chapter, it follows that the number of sections per chapter has little to do with the overall length of each chapter. There are sixty-three sections in all. The numerical references used below refer to the chapter of the *ROW* and section within it. So (1/3) refers to Chapter 1, Section 3.¹³ In the selections below, we have chosen parts of the book which are of particular relevance to rhetoric and persuasion.

ADVICE ON LANGUAGE USE

The first topic we shall consider is Chen Kui's advice on language use. As a fervent advocate of the *guwen* style, Chen Kui identifies the general overriding principle that language should be simple, clear, succinct and contemporary. "To be good, things need to be simple and easy; to be appropriate, language needs to be simple and clear" (1/4).

Good texts need to be succinct and concise. However, being succinct, texts must also be complete and logical. If the reader feels that a text has gaps and omissions, then it cannot be considered succinct, but rather one that has been constructed carelessly. Chen Kui praises the brevity and clarity of the example below from the Spring and Autumn Annals and criticises the Gong Yong commentary of the same event. The criticised Gong Yong version reads: "*Hearing the sound of falling meteorites, as soon as I realised these were stones that were falling, I examined them carefully and found that they were five meteorites.*"

The praised version in the Spring and Autumn annals reads: "*Five meteorites fell on Song territory.*" Chen Kui exalts, "This is a succinctness that is hard to achieve" (1/4).

It is interesting to compare Chen Kui's treatment with the ways other scholars have analysed this passage. For example, Jullien (*Detour and Access* 105–6) cites the same excerpts in his discussion on the *Wen Xin Diao Long* as an example of how a commentator "scrutinises every notation, for nothing in the mention of an event is seen as either fortuitous or innocuous."

Why does it say “fell” before “stones”? The falling of stones repeats the way it is heard: one hears the noise of something falling, and in looking at the thing that has fallen, one sees that it is stones; in looking at them closer, one can count that there are five.

Rather than the commentator scrutinising every notation, however, we suggest that the *Wen Xin Diao Long* commentary stresses the logical, chronological and natural order of the events. This notion of “logical” order is an accepted principle of sequencing in Chinese and we discuss this in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7. Here, however, Chen Kui’s focus is on the importance of clarity and succinctness. He further illustrates this in the example below, in which he compares the relative economy in the use of characters in three different texts all expressing the same idea.

Xie Ye (洩冶) is recorded as saying: “The guidance and help a ruler gives to his subjects is like wind blowing among grass; when the wind blows from the east, the grass bends to the west, and when the wind blows from the west, the grass bends to the east; when the wind blows the grass bends.”

This excerpt needs thirty-two characters to make its meaning clear.

The Analects say: “The behaviour of people of position can be compared to the wind, while the behaviour of normal people can be compared to the grass; when the wind blows through the grass, the grass bends accordingly.”

This uses half the number of characters that Xie Ye used, but its meaning is clear.

The Shang Histories say: “Your behaviour can be compared to the wind, and the behaviour of the people can be compared to the grass”.

This uses nine fewer characters than The Analects but its meaning remains very clear (1/4).

Chen Kui also calls for writing that is both natural and coherent. “If a musical performance is not harmonious, then music is unpleasant; if a text is

not coherent, then it cannot be read... classical texts were natural and coherent and were without adornment and embellishment” (1/3).

To help ensure this, writers should use the language of the people and the time. “The use of language that was the common speech of one period will be found abstruse and difficult by people of later periods” (1/8).

He continues:

Although classical texts used classical language, classical language cannot be fully understood by later generations, unless there are explanatory notes. Reading classical books without notes is like scaling a tricky peak, after each step you need to take several deep breaths. If, after arduous study, one picks up some classical language and uses it to record contemporary events, one can be compared with maidservants who tried to act like their mistresses, but whose attitudes and postures were very unnatural and did not look right. (1/8)

As an example of the use of the language of the time, Chen Kui cites excerpts from *The Book of Rites*. As he points out, this often used plain and simple language. It is also completely straightforward and to the point. There is no indirection or obliquity here. For example:

“Use your hand to cover your mouth when speaking to avoid breathing over people”;

“When dining as a guest in someone’s house don’t toss your leftover bones to the dog, so showing that you do not give a fig for the things of your host”;

“Even when eating the leftover sauce from the vegetables still use chopsticks”;

“When men and women meet they should observe the proprieties”;

“If you have an itch do not scratch it in front of your relatives”.

Chen Kui explains:

Although the meaning of these extracts is complex and is concerned with preventing people violating the rites, there is

very little literary embellishment. The language used is plain and simple. Writers who study historical literary forms and who adopt classical language to write texts frequently produce muddled gibberish. (5/1)

Chen Kui concludes this section with a striking metaphor. The old saying says:

“Dimples on the face are very attractive, but on the forehead, they are very ugly.” This saying is absolutely right. Ever since the Jin Dynasty (265-420 CEAD), there have been far too many people who have longed to imitate the classics when they pick up their pens to write. (5/10)

Chen’s main concern here is with the language of the classics and its influence on contemporary (Song) writing. He realised that, as language changed with the times, writers should not slavishly mimic classical texts. They should not use classical language to write about contemporary events. He pointed out that the language used in the classics was, at the time, contemporary language, and was language that could be easily understood by the people. Simply put, he opposed the misuse of classical language and promoted the use of common and contemporary language. He cites many examples from different texts to show how the simply expressed text is more effective than the more complex or embellished one. He championed the use of the vernacular and spoken language.

These principles are stressed throughout the *ROW*. He fully understood the phenomena of language change and language variety. “The language used in the *Pan Geng* section of *The Shang Histories* was contemporary and vernacular. It was the common language of the people and language, therefore, that everyone could understand” (5/2).

He also advocates the use of regional varieties and low-brow genres. He quotes, with approval, this builder’s ballad:

“Within the city’s Southern gate, the people’s skin is white,

Urging us to work hard

Within the city, the people’s skin is black,

Consoling us” (9/5).¹⁴

Coupled with these principles of language use is Chen Kui's belief that form should serve meaning. As discussed above, throughout the Chinese rhetorical and literary tradition there has been a constant debate about the relative importance of *dao* (道) (meaning) and *wen* (文), language and/or literature, or form. This is obviously closely linked with the debate over the relative merits of the flowery literary form known as *pianwen* (骈文) and the simpler classical form known as *guwen* (古文). In the *ROW*, *dao* (content) is primary and *wen* (form) is subordinate to *dao*. Words must serve meaning. This notion held true, whether Chen Kui was discussing the use of words, syntax and sentence construction, or rhetoric itself.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF IDEAS

A second topic that Chen Kui discusses in the *ROW* that is of direct relevance to rhetoric concerns the sequence or arrangement of argument. There are, says Chen Kui, three ways in which texts can enumerate the conduct and deeds of people:

They can first state the summary or overall point, and then list the individual details. For example, when judging Zi Chan, Confucius said: "*Zi Chan had four aspects of behaviour fitting for the way of a ruler: his own moral conduct was dignified and respectful; he waited upon the ruler in a dignified way; he nurtured the people kindly; and he made sure that the people followed the truth*" (4/4).

The second method of sequencing information is to list individual details first and then summarise and explain. For example, when enumerating the charges against Gong Sun Hei of Zheng, Zi Chan said:

"*Your turbulent heart cannot be satisfied, and the State cannot condone this. Usurping power and attacking Bo You, this is your first charge; coveting your brother's wife and resorting to violence, this is your second charge; setting up local factions on the pretext of being ruler, this is your third charge. With these three charges, how can your behaviour be condoned?*" (4/4).

The third way is to provide the overall or main point at the beginning, then list the individual details and then conclude with the overall point again. For example, Confucius said:

“Zang Wenzhong did three cruel-hearted and stupid things: he gave a low official position to Hui ‘beneath the willow,’ he set up a toll-gate and collected taxes; and he allowed his concubines to sell their woven mats on the open market. These were the three cruel-hearted things. Zang exceeded the bounds of his duty. He kept a giant turtle; he failed to stop Xia Fuji when Xia violated the rituals of sacrifice; and he ordered the entire country to make sacrifices to some seabird. These were the three stupid things.” (4/4)

In the next section of the same chapter (4/5) Chen Kui continues this theme of sequencing by saying that when writing about events, one can first introduce the argument or judgement and then write about the events, or one can write about the events and then make some judgement about them. As an example of first introducing the argument, Chen Kui cites the excerpt in the *Zuo Zhuan* where it records Jin Linggong’s imposition of tax revenues, using money obtained through usury to paint and decorate the palace walls. “It firmly states at the beginning: *‘Jin Linggong had no principles and did not have the moral conduct of ruler.’*” (4/5).

An example of drawing a conclusion after describing the events also comes from the *Zuo Zhuan*.

First, the noble deeds of Duke Wen are recorded, including how he trained the people and then put this training to use. The passage concludes: *“one battle caused the Jin State to become a hegemony, this was the result of Wen’s training!”* (4/5)

The striking aspect of this advice about sequencing is that it is not dissimilar to the advice given by “Anglo” teachers of rhetoric today. In providing three ways of arranging argument, Chen gives cause to doubt that the commonly expressed view that the rhetorical structure of Chinese argument and writing is somehow uniquely Chinese. In fact, the three methods of sequencing information identified by Chen Kui will appear familiar to many. The first was to summarise the main point(s) and then provide the details, and this looks very much like a deductive pattern; the second was to provide the details first and then summarise, and this looks very much like an inductive pattern; and the third was to use a three-part structure whereby the main points were stated

at the beginning and recapped at the end, with the details being provided in the middle. This looks very much like the three-part structure of introduction-body-conclusion. This is of particular interest as it would appear that Chen Kui is promoting a “marked” “main-frame” rhetorical structure, rather than the unmarked “frame-main” sequence which might be expected and which we have ourselves argued to be the preferred default rhetorical structure. The advice to adopt this main-frame sequence is, however, linked to the type of text *The Rules of Writing* is aimed at producing. It needs to be remembered that Chen Kui was adamant that a return to the plain and simple *guwen* style was needed, and that this style should not encumber itself with obscure classical language, but be written in a way which would be clear to contemporaries. We should also remember that the Song empire of the time was keen to establish a meritocracy and therefore to employ only deserving people in the civil service. This was a relatively open time in which people felt they could express their ideas “up” without too much fear of retribution if they displeased the emperor. Nevertheless, Chen Kui himself appears to have overstepped the mark on a number of occasions in his own memorials to the emperor, of which he penned thirty or so. On one occasion, for example, he wrote to criticise the extravagance of the imperial court, and for this he was demoted and sent to cool his heels for a time in an official position in the provinces (*Nan Song Guan Lu* 465).

There is evidence that Chen Kui’s influence was felt throughout later periods of Chinese history and can be traced through later handbooks. For example, his influence upon Gui Youguang’s (1506-1571) *Guide to Composition Writing* (文章指南) is clear. Gui’s handbook advises the writer that three arrangements for an essay are possible.

Present the main idea at the beginning, then break the idea into several points/aspects devoting one paragraph to the elaboration of each; discuss the component points first one by one, then present the main idea in the end; or, best of all, on the basis of the first layout, add a summary of the main idea at the end. (Liu Yameng, “Three Issues” 327)

A much more recent text which shows apparent influence from Chen Kui—although we have been unable to identify a direct link—is the twentieth-century reformer Hu Shi’s promotion of the vernacular as the medium of educated discourse. Hu Shi formulated eight famous rules for writers, which bear a striking similarity to Chen Kui’s advice:

- (i) Language must have content.

- (ii) Do not (slavishly) imitate classical writers.
- (iii) Make sure you pay attention to grammar and structure.
- (iv) Do not complain if you are not ill—in other words, don't overdo the emotion.
- (v) Cut out the use of hackneyed clichés.
- (vi) Don't cite or rely on the classics.
- (vii) Don't use parallelism.
- (viii) Embrace popular and vernacular language. (Hu S., "Literary Innovation" 5–16)

It is commonly assumed that Hu Shi was influenced by his time in the United States—he studied at Cornell and did his PhD at Columbia where he studied under John Dewey, with whom he maintained a lifelong professional relationship—and that it was his experience in the United States that led him to promote the use of the vernacular and *bai hua* Chinese in place of the traditional literary *wenyan* style. But we argue that he was also influenced by the Chinese rhetorical tradition, including by scholars such as Chen Kui.

To move to the third topic of Chen Kui's ROW to be considered here, his advice on the use of citation is also relevant to rhetoric and writing, as citation gives authority or support for an argument or claim. He starts by pointing out that *The Book of Poetry*, *The Shang Histories*, and the many books that explain the classics and histories all contain many citations. There were definite rules for citing and, generally speaking, there were two methods: "The first was to use citation as evidence about an event or action that had taken place, or to exemplify appropriate behaviour; the second was to use citation to prove one's argument" (3/2).

At the same time, copying without acknowledgment, plagiarism, was not condoned (5/5).

Chen Kui illustrates ways of using citation to provide evidence that an event has taken place and gives examples. One such reads.

The Zuo Zhuan records: "The Book of Poetry says: 'A person who sought for himself worry and sadness,' this was really talking about Zi Zang!" (3/2).

Among the many examples provided by Chen Kui of using citation to explain or promote actions and behaviour are these two.

The Zuo Zhuan records: "The Book of Poetry says: 'Where does one go to pick wormwood? By the banks of a pond or on a small sand

bar. Where can you use it? At the funeral ceremony of a duke.' Tai Mu Gong did this" (3/2).

"Work hard and do not let up at dawn or dusk to pay respect to someone. Meng Ming did this" (3/2).

Chen Kui also gave three ways of using citation to prove one's argument. It could be done by citing widely from the Classics, or by presenting one's argument and then using citations to support it, or by analysing the cited excerpts and showing that they supported one's argument. As an example of citing from the Classics, Chen Kui provides this excerpt:

Shang Tang says: "If one day you can get rid of the old customs and renew yourself, with this new foundation, by renewing daily and constantly, you can arrive at a brand new realm." Kang Gao says: "Education stimulates the masses, makes them get rid of old customs, and become new people." The Book of Poetry says: "Although Zhou was an ancient state (by the time of King Wen), it received the mandate of heaven in a further renewal of virtue, and replaced Shang. Therefore we say that a ruler, in order to build a good state, must try all methods and must explore all paths" (3/2).

Finally, the method of analysing cited text to support one's argument is illustrated with this passage from *The Zuo Zhuan*:

The Zuo Zhuan says: "Appoint people you can use, and respect men worthy of respect." This extract is discussing the Duke of Jin's rewarding of those who render outstanding service. It also says: "Although the last ruler of the Shang dynasty had millions of subjects, dissension and discord was in them all; The Zhou dynasty had ten great officials who helped in ruling and they were all united and in accord." "The point of this passage is that virtue can serve the people. If the emperor has virtue, the masses must come together and turn to him" (3/2).

Chen Kui's discussion of the use of citation suggests that the claim that Chinese do not acknowledge sources as frequently or as comprehensively as Western scholars (Bloch and Chi) does not have a historical origin. Chen Kui shows that citation was an important part of scholarly writing at the time and gives a detailed explanation of the ways in which this could be done and for what

purposes. He also explicitly states that copying another person's work without acknowledgement cannot be condoned. We should make it clear that we are not claiming that this means that Chinese scholars used citation in the same way as Western scholars do today. On the contrary, certain styles of Classical Chinese writing required the listing, one after the other, of many citations from the Classics, with the author providing little of his own voice, or, at least, providing his voice in characters of smaller size than those of the citations themselves (Moloughney 23). Chen Kui's comments do show however, that Chinese scholarship has been familiar with the practice of citation for centuries and that plagiarism is understood and condemned. Moloughney provides further evidence of this when he translates a witty aphorism of Zhang Xuecheng, a Chinese scholar of the late eighteenth century: "The plagiarist fears only that people would know of his source; the creative user that they would be ignorant of it" (136). It is also worth noting that the importance we currently attach to citation and acknowledgement has at least as much to do with copyright law as with a genuinely altruistic wish to acknowledge the work of others (Scollon). Writers in medieval Europe were notorious for not acknowledging the work of others. For example, St. Jerome "borrowed" complete excerpts from Quintilian (Lanham 83).

There is much more to the *ROW* than we can summarise here. Chen Kui made an extraordinary contribution to the study of Chinese rhetoric. In addition to his advice on clarity, the arrangement of ideas and the importance and use of citation, he categorised metaphor for the first time, and many of his categories are still used today. He showed how a whole range of function words were used. He illustrated the rhetorical effect of tropes such as inversion, repetition and balance. He discussed the relative merits of sentence length. He identified and discussed a number of genres and took genre theory forward. Yet, it was also the manner in which he did this that made him stand out as an original thinker and groundbreaking rhetorician. For the first time, rules of writing and principles of rhetoric were identified from a close study of real texts. Chen Kui compared texts and deduced rules from a close study of numerous examples. The *ROW* is peppered with examples that illustrate the points Chen Kui is making. In this way, he provides hard linguistic and rhetorical evidence for all of his claims. Finally, this is all presented in a non-prescriptive way, in that the final determiner of use has to be the context and the rhetorical effect the writer wishes to make.

In the next section of this chapter we compare and contrast the *ROW* and a selection of the *Ars Dictaminis* of Medieval Europe, as these were written at around the same time.

ARS DICTAMINIS

The *ars dictaminis* became popular in Europe from the eleventh century and flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The major treatises concerning the *ars dictaminis* are thus more or less contemporary with Chen Kui's "Rules of Writing." While the *ars dictaminis* was the art of letter writing, it is important to note that letter writing covered a very wide field and was the most common written genre at the time, and also that *ars dictaminis* could also refer to prose writing in general and had clear ties to classical rhetoric (Camargo). For example, the first major treatise on the *ars dictaminis*, *Flores Rhetorici*, written by Alberic of Monte Cassino and published in 1087, was based on Ciceronian precepts. We discuss the social and political conditions that gave rise to the need for this new medieval genre of *ars dictaminis*, and consider examples from treatises on *ars dictaminis* and draw attention to similarities and differences between the situation in Europe at this time and China, and also between the advice given in the ROW and that given in the treatises on the *ars dictaminis*, based, as they were, on the Roman tradition. As we assume readers will be familiar with the key tenets of classical rhetoric, we shall limit reference to these to where they are directly relevant or comparable, with a particular focus on the Latin tradition as developed by Cicero and Quintilian.

The Greek rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Isocrates and Plato had little influence on medieval rhetoric, while Roman rhetoric did. Indeed, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* only became available in the twelfth century once it was translated into Latin. The Middle Ages were not the direct successors of Greek but of Latin antiquity, and there was virtually no knowledge of Greek in the early Middle Ages. But we must remember that something of the Greek tradition survived in the Roman one. As James Murphy has pointed out (*A Short History*), Roman educators took the loose ideas of the Greeks and moulded them into a coherent system. And, as the Roman education system as developed by Quintilian had the specific purposes of turning out eloquent speakers and political leaders, rhetoric was a fundamental component of each person's education. Quintilian's system was long lasting, surviving for centuries and into the Renaissance.

A major objective of the educational process devised by Quintilian was to enable students to create their own texts. It was designed to produce what Quintilian called *facilitas*, defined as the ability to produce appropriate language on any subject in any situation. It was a painstaking process. It comprised several stages and these are described in Quintilian's work, the *Institutio Oratio*. The importance attached to rhetoric is clear, as it takes up eight of its twelve books. The division of rhetoric into these component parts is derived from Cicero's

De Inventione, published a century earlier in around 90 BCE, where he had also divided rhetoric into invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery, based on concepts first stated by Isocrates (Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*). Invention is the devising of material that will make the case convincing. Arrangement concerns the ordering of the material. Style is the adaptation of words and sentences that are suitable and appropriate for the material and the case. Memory requires remembering the material, the arrangement of it and the style of it. Delivery is the graceful regulation of voice, facial expression and gesture. In the event, however, Cicero only ever wrote about the first. A book published a few years after Cicero's *De Inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, did develop all five divisions and Quintilian also derived much of his work from this.

The techniques associated with imitation did not simply mean the rote memorisation and copying of texts. They included: reading a model text aloud; a very detailed, word by word and line by line, analysis of the text; memorisation of models; paraphrase of models; transliteration of the models, whereby students had to rewrite the model text as a different genre, perhaps turning a piece of prose into a poem; the recitation of the student's paraphrase or transliteration in front of the class; and finally, the correction of the paraphrase or transliteration. This system of teaching rhetoric was longer lasting than might be supposed. The author remembers going through these exercises while a schoolboy struggling with Latin and Greek.

To show something of how students worked in a twelfth-century classroom, Carol Lanham provides an extensive passage that describes how a famous teacher, Bernard of Chartres, taught grammar. We quote from it extensively, as it has echoes of the *Rules of Writing*.

This method was followed by Bernard of Chartres. By citations from the authors he showed what was simple and regular; he brought into relief the grammatical figures, the rhetorical colours, the artifices of sophistry, and pointed out how the text in hand bore upon other studies.... For those boys who had to write exercises in prose or verse, he selected the poets and orators, and showed how they could be imitated in the linking of words and the elegant ending of passages. If anyone sewed another's cloth into his garment, he was reprov'd for the theft, but usually was not punished. Yet Bernard pointed out to awkward borrowers that whoever imitated the ancients should himself become worthy of imitation by posterity. He impressed upon his pupils the virtue of economy and the values of things and words: he explained where a meagerness and tenuity of diction was fitting, and where copiousness or even excess should be allowed, and the advantage of due measure everywhere. He admonished them to go through the histories and poems with diligence, and daily to fix passages in their

memory. He advised them, in reading, to avoid the superfluous, and confine themselves to the works of distinguished authors (94).

By the fourth century, the formal study of prose had increased, as the needs of the time were changing. The practice of addressing a public audience had disappeared. The Roman Empire did not produce conditions conducive to public oratory. Nor, of course, did the Chinese empire. An increasingly bureaucratic imperial government started to favour “technical legal skills, streamlined procedural exactitude and written documents over extended oral presentation” (104). Rhetoric started to become specialised, and written rhetoric took precedence. Out of this developed the *ars dictaminis*, as social, political and religious pressures for change created a huge bureaucratic demand for letter writing of various types. By the twelfth century, Europe had changed dramatically. The increase in economic trade and the rise of towns and cathedral schools, all coupled with the needs of an expanding bureaucracy gave rise to the *ars dictaminis*. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a dramatic increase in letter writing. Problems within the church produced a widespread reform movement and people started to write polemical tracts. These tracts were in the form of letters. The *ars dictaminis* taught the rules of letter writing and other prose, and, with related subjects, became the core of medieval rhetoric.

THE ARS DICTAMINIS—THE MANUALS

Over three hundred treatises on the *ars dictaminis* survive. Treatises on *dictamen* concentrated on genres and placed emphasis on the overall structure of the document and the arrangement of its component parts. Like Chen Kui, they championed brevity and simplicity. The manuals devote the majority of their space to the salutation. Correct forms of address were determined by the relative status of writer and receiver and the importance of *captatio benevolentiae*, the securing of goodwill, was emphasised, thus further indicating their Ciceronian heritage. As Cicero had pointed out, the exordium or opening of a speech should make the listener well-disposed, attentive and receptive. Examples and models usually concluded the manuals.

As mentioned above, the first major treatise was Alberic’s *Flores Rhetorici* and this was published sometime between 1075 and 1090. Alberic was, to quote Lanham “a pivotal figure.” He places letter writing in the context of rhetoric as a whole. His book starts with a discussion on the parts of speech, and then gives five model salutations and three model letters. The main part of the book, however, is actually devoted to figures of speech. Here, we quote in part the excerpt concerning the salutation.

The first consideration should be the nature of the sender and that of the person to whom the letter is sent if he is of high rank, it should be written in an elevated style; if humble, in the simple style.... You will represent a prelate in one way, a subordinate in another. (Lanham)

Two treatises which bracket, in chronological terms, the ROW, and that have been translated or made available by contemporary scholars are: the anonymous *Principles of Letter Writing (Rationes Dictandi)*, written in 1135 and translated by Murphy (*Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*); and the *Summa Dictaminis* by Guido Faba, written between 1228-9 and discussed by Faulhaber. Murphy considers the *Principles of Letter Writing* a standard treatise on the subject. And Faba has been described as probably the most outstanding dictator in the history of the genre. (Dictator here means letter writer.) Here we briefly summarise the key points of both treatises, starting with the *Principles of Letter Writing*.

THE PRINCIPLES OF LETTER WRITING

The Principles of Letter Writing (hereafter *Principles*) was written in response to great demand. The opening lines read, “We are urged by the persistent requests of teachers to draw together in a brief space some certain points about the principles of letter writing” (Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts* 5). *Principles* became the standard and set out the five parts for a letter. This again showed Ciceronian influence. The *dictamen* divided the Ciceronian exordium into two parts, giving a separate part to the *captatio benevolentiae* where, as we have seen, the writer sought to place the reader in a receptive frame of mind. Then came the *narratio*, or background and this was followed by the *petitio*. The *petitio* replaced Cicero’s stages of presentation and rebuttal of evidence and was concerned with the real business of the letter, which might have been a request or the urging of some form of action. The *conclusio* ended the letter. This is the normal sequence and schema of a letter, and, as we shall show later, is very similar to the schema of certain types of contemporary Chinese request letters. The author of the *Principles* points out, however, that the stages of this schema were neither obligatory nor fixed in this particular sequence. The author then gives examples of where parts can be omitted, altered in their sequence or even intermixed. “And thus in all similar letters the intermixture can go on quite correctly as desired. Or, after all elements of the Narration have been set forth, all the elements of the Petition can then be paced in unbroken succession, however it pleases the discretion of the letter writer” (24).

Having defined a letter and set out the five parts, the author then discusses the salutation. The importance given to the salutation can be seen here, as, together with the seeking of good will, it takes up about half of the book. The author first defines the salutation as an expression conveying a “friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the persons involved.” The consideration of the respective social rank and status of writer and recipient was of the utmost importance. “Of course, among all people some are outstanding; others are inferior, and still others are just in between. Now people are said to be “outstanding” to whom no superiors are found, like the Pope or the Emperor. Therefore, when a letter-writer (dictator) undertakes to write, and the difference between the ranks of the persons involved is known, he must take into account... whether equal is writing to equal, inferior to superior, or superior to inferior” (7–10). Contemporary Chinese documents also reflect the importance of this tri-partite distinction, as special names are given to documents depending on whether they are written among equals (*pingxing gongwen*), by inferiors to superiors (*shangxing gongwen*) or superiors to inferiors (*xiaxing gongwen*) (Dai 7ff).

The author then turns to the securing of goodwill, the *captatio benivolentiae*, which as he points out is, in the main, secured in the course of the salutation itself and key strategies include humbling oneself and praising the recipient.

The author then provides a mere three paragraphs on the Narration and seven on the Petition. The Narration should be brief and clear and The Petition is where “we endeavour to call for something” (Murphy, “Rhetoric, Western European” 18). The author then lists nine forms of these, from supplicatory, through menacing to direct. Finally, the Conclusion, where it is customary “to point out the usefulness or disadvantage possessed by the subjects treated in this letter.” He gives two examples: “If you do this you will have the entirety of our fullest affection,” and “If you fail to do this you will without doubt lose our friendship” (19).

THE SUMMA DICTAMINIS

Guido Faba, the author of the *Summa Dictaminis* (hereafter *SD*), wrote eight major works, all of them dealing with the *ars dictaminis*. He was from Bologna, which had become virtually synonymous with the *ars dictaminis* and this, together with the quality of his own writing, made him the most influential and imitated “dictator” in the later Middle Ages (Faulhaber). The *SD* is more practical handbook than theoretical treatise and sits alongside his *Dictamina Rhetorica*, written a year or two earlier, in which he gives a total of 220 real

letters of various types, including letters from a wife to her husband pleading for his return home and his letter of refusal, and a bishop writing to the Pope for the absolution of an excommunicative. The following description of the SD is a summary of Faulhaber.

Unlike the *Principles of Letter Writing* the SD deals with faults that writers commit when writing *dictamen*. He lists four main ones: first, when one part of the letter does not follow logically on from another; second, when the writing becomes irrelevant; third, when the letter is too short for its purpose to be understood; and fourth, when the writer adopts different styles in the same letter. Faults associated with the particular sections of the letter include not being able to secure goodwill in the opening or writing too general and bland an opening. Recalling Chen Kui, the *narratio* must not be verbose or obscure, but “brief, lucid and plausible” (97). In the petition, the writer must only ask for that which is useful, necessary and honest. The salutation must take into account the person of the sender, the subject of the letter, and, particularly the social status of the recipient. “If one equal writes to another, it is more polite to put the recipient’s name first; if an inferior writes to a superior, or a superior to an inferior, the superior’s name goes first” (95). In addition to securing goodwill, the exordium was also used to lead into the specific facts of the *narratio*, often by quoting some proverb or biblical citation and, as with the Chinese, this was often some appeal to authority or precedent. “The letter thus becomes a sort of enthymemic argument from authority, with the *exordium* serving as the major premise, the *narratio* as the minor premise, and the *petitio* as the conclusion” (97).

The relative status of the writer and the recipient also influenced the choice of style. Faba also gives other guidance about style, which appears to come somewhere between *guwen* and *pianwen* in its allowance of some form for form’s sake. For example, rhymed prose is condemned, but final syllable rhyme is allowed, provided that the penultimate syllables differ. The repetition of the same vowel or consonant at the end of one word and the beginning of the next is also to be avoided, as is alliteration. Metaphors should not be used unless they are very common. Nevertheless, rhetorical tropes are admitted to “empurple” the letter. The proverbs of the wise should also be used to add strength to the letter, and in a further echo of Chen Kui, “ornament yields to authority” (103).

The SD concludes with a list of rhetorical tropes, a list of citations from the Bible that might be suitable for use in the exordium and a series of grammar exercises based on the parts of speech.

These treatises of *ars dictaminis* were successful because they were written in response to a real demand. They were indispensable for those who worked in the bureaucracies of either the church or state, as they had to know how to draw

up formal documents. As writing manuals for the bureaucracy they paralleled the *Rules of Writing* and we draw further comparisons between these in the next section.

THE ROW AND ARS DICAMINIS

The *ROW* and the treatises of the *ars dictaminis* (AD) were written when their respective societies were undergoing great change. Both Song Dynasty China and twelfth-century Europe saw significant increases in prosperity. In turn, the various bureaucracies grew and there was thus an urgent demand for people who could write official and commercial documents. Education expanded dramatically and the AD was written to help students master the art of writing for their respective bureaucracies. It is our contention that the *ROW* was written to meet a similar need in China.

The principles of writing contained in both sets of texts are similar in some cases. The *ROW* stresses the importance of clarity, simplicity, succinctness and the use of contemporary understandable language. The AD treatises also underline the importance of brevity and simplicity. The narration or background section must be short (Lanham 115), and the petition only ask for that which is useful, necessary and honest (Faulhaber 98).

The AD treatises specify the set pattern, or schema for these letters, although, as we have seen, this order of the component parts is not fixed. There is less advice in the treatises on the way to sequence an argument per se. However, Faba has suggested that the normal sequence of *exordium*, *narration*, *petitio* can be seen as an enthymemic argument, with the *exordium* serving as the major premise, the *narratio* as the minor premise and the *petitio* as conclusion. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, writing at almost the same time as Chen Kui, points out that this order follows the sequence of placing the more general before the specific. This order, from general to specific, is also recommended by Gervase of Melkley, an Oxford grammar master writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Camargo). In the *ROW*, Chen Kui gives three possibilities for the sequence of an argument, of which two, the first and the third, encourage the sequence of general to specific. As was illustrated earlier, Chen Kui's three models are: from main topic to supporting details; from supporting details to main topic; or a three part arrangement of main topic-supporting details-restatement of topic. We have earlier argued that Chen Kui's promotion of this "main-frame" pattern suggests that the time at which he was writing was more open to ideas than was normal and that writers had less fear of retribution than normal. This is just one of many instances, therefore, where politics and power relations influence

rhetorical style in China, just as it did in Europe. The default and unmarked “frame-main” sequence comes into its own when the hierarchies are clearly established and the power of the superior instills fear in the person writing and persuading “up.”

The authors also stress the importance of context and content for the choice of style. Meaning takes precedence over form. By the same token, rules are for guidance and should not be followed slavishly. There are also similarities in the appeal to or use of authority. Faba’s *Summa Dictaminis* provides a list of one hundred and four biblical citations that may be useful for supporting the letter writer’s petition, for inclusion in the exordium section of the letter. There are, of course, significant differences in the use of authority as justification. Chen Kui’s examples are all from the Chinese Classics. Faba’s are all from the Bible. Murphy has argued that the eagerness to use the past for the needs of the present is a fundamental aspect of the Middle Ages (Murphy, “Rhetoric, Western European”). He cites Cicero’s influence in the development of the new genre of the *ars dictaminis* in support of this. There are also differences in the ways the Medieval Chinese and Europeans used the past for the needs of the present. In the context of Medieval Europe, Cicero was used as a rhetorical model for a way of speaking and writing, but not as an ideological model. In contrast, the ROW provides both rhetorical and ideological models. The ideologies, the *dao*, of the Chinese Classics were used to inform the present and their message needed to be phrased in a rhetorical style based on *guwen*, but in language which could be readily understood by contemporary audiences. The AD treatises are about ways of using traditional genres for a relatively new purpose.

Comparisons in the use of rhetorical tropes can also be drawn. A sample of thirteenth-century European student work recorded by Woods mirrors the use of repetition of specific words for stylistic effect, in much the same ways as advised by Chen Kui. Although this example does not come directly from an *ars dictaminis* treatise as such, it shows what students were being taught to practise in schools in thirteenth-century Europe. Two examples show the repetition of the words, “how” in the first, and “why” and “this” in the second.

How stupid, how insane, how wicked it is to vex the Gods,

Why do you do this? Why do you affect this? Why do you believe that you can profit in this? (Woods 135).

Compare this with these extracts from the Analects, cited in *The ROW* 4/3. “Confucius also says, How wise and worthy is Yan Hui! He only has a bamboo basket for food and a gourd ladle for water. How wise and worthy is Yan Hui!”

Another example from the Analects of the rhetorical use of repetition is when Confucius praises Da Yu: “Confucius says, I have no complaint to make against Da Yu: his own table is simple, but the sacrificial offerings he prepares are abundant and he demonstrates sincere respect towards the gods. I have no complaint to make against Da Yu.”

Attention to complex stress patterns and rhymes is found in both Chen Kui and the AD treatises. One possible reason for this attention to stress and rhyme may be the lack of punctuation in traditional Chinese and Greek and Latin. This certainly explains the great attention to individual letters and syllables in Quintilian’s education system. For Quintilian, there was no short cut with syllables; they had to be learned thoroughly. The way Latin was read explains this. Before Jerome introduced the arrangement of text by sense units in the fourth century CE, the reader had to deconstruct the text. It is not until the ninth century that word separation and punctuation in manuscripts became widespread. Stress patterns and rhymes were thus vital clues in helping the reader deconstruct the text. In a comment that could apply as well to Classical Chinese, Lanham points out, “The lack of a fixed word order and the absence of word separation and punctuation in written texts made reading a matter of decoding, even for the experienced reader” (96).

We shall conclude this chapter on medieval China and Europe with an example from contemporary China (see also Kirkpatrick, “The Arrangement of Letters”). We have chosen to end this chapter in this way, as the arrangement in the exemplar Chinese letter of request bears a striking similarity to a Ciceronian or medieval European arrangement.

The example comes from a study conducted on letters of request written by Chinese living in the Mainland to the China Service of Radio Australia, based in Melbourne (Kirkpatrick, “Information Sequencing”). The China Service of Radio Australia broadcasts into China in Chinese and it naturally employs many native Chinese speaking staff. These letters were thus written by Chinese to Chinese. They were letters of request, but, as is clear from the example below, the requests were not onerous. However, the Chinese letter writers, almost all of whom were in their late teens or early twenties, would have considered that they were, in Gui Guzi’s terms, writing from below to above.

The great majority of these letters of request followed the same rhetorical structure and, as shall be illustrated below, this structure shows a quite remarkable similarity to the arrangement proposed by Cicero and then taught in the *ars dictaminis* manuals. The letter below was the one chosen by native speakers of Chinese as being the most appropriate model of the genre and this explains why it has been selected as a representative example here. We assign Ciceronian terms to the respective parts of the letter, and also include

in parentheses, the names Kirkpatrick gave to the parts of the schema in the 1991 analysis. It is worth underlining that this example was originally written by Chinese in Chinese and for Chinese in 1990, some nine hundred years after the treatise on letter writing, written for Medieval Europeans writing in Latin (Kirkpatrick “Arrangement” 256).

Salutatio (Salutation)

Respected Radio Australia producers.

Capatio benvolentiae (Facework)

I have been a loyal listener to Radio Australia’s English teaching programmes and to “Songs You Like” for several years. I consider both programmes to be extremely well produced.

Narratio / Background (Reasons for Requests)

Let me describe myself a little: I am a middle school student, I am eighteen and my home is in—, a small border city. The cultural life really isn’t too bad. Because I like studying English, I therefore follow those programmes closely. But because the Central Broadcasting Station’s English programmes are rather abstruse, they are not really suitable for me and therefore I get all my practice in listening comprehension and dialogue from Radio Australia’s English programmes. This practice has been of great benefit. As I progress, step by step through the course, I am keenly aware that not having the teaching materials presents several difficulties.

Petitio (Requests)

Because of this, I have taken time to write this letter to you, in the hope that I can obtain a set of Radio Australia’s English programme’s teaching materials. Please let me know the cost of the materials.

In addition, I hope to obtain a radio Australia calendar. Wishing Radio Australia’s Mandarin programmes even more interest.

(Sign Off)

(Listener's name and date)

As intimated above, what is particularly interesting here is that this Ciceronian / AD arrangement could not have been explicitly taught to these Chinese letter writers. Instead this style appears to develop naturally in contexts where hierarchy is important and the relative status of writer and reader has to be taken into account. As we shall show in the next chapters, this indirect “frame-main” style, in which the main point (i.e. the request itself) comes at the end of the letter and is prefaced by the reasons for it and some form of *captatio benevolentiae*, is the preferred or unmarked style in much Chinese rhetoric, involving as it does, speaking from below to above.

In the next chapter, we turn to a description and a discussion of perhaps the most iconic of all Chinese text structures, the *baguwen*, or the civil service exam essay.