

Argumentation and Persuasion in Ancient Chinese Texts

– Introduction –

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The nine contributions in this section of *Oriens Extremus* were presented at the workshop on “Argument and Persuasion in Ancient Chinese Texts”, held at the K.U. Leuven on June 9–11, 2005 and co-organized by the universities of Leuven and Oxford. With a title as broad as this, we specified the topic of the workshop through a set of research questions sent to the participants one and a half years before the meeting. The questions asked about *how* the ancient authors tried to be persuasive, not what they had to say *about* argument and persuasion. This focus was inspired by two general assumptions: First, that an attempt to be persuasive was characteristic of every text, and certainly in ancient Chinese philosophy; and second, that research in the field had overly favored the philosophical content of texts and neglected the rhetorical forms in which these ideas were presented and by which they are shaped. A focus on the forms of argumentation rather than doctrinal content was thus meant to enrich this standard approach.

During the workshop we realized that, despite the specification of the research questions, the combination of “argument and persuasion” was still intriguingly ambiguous. Not only did both terms appear to be vague and ill-defined, but also their connection – loosely referred to as “and” – turned out to be unclear. When choosing this title, we may have assumed that most texts tried to be persuasive through their use of argumentation. But this did not seem to be the case. To begin with, many of the studied texts did not sustain long and coherent arguments. And those who did, such as *Mozzi*, apparently were not the most persuasive. Secondly, it was not easy to determine which formal characteristics of the text, aside from its argumentative structure, were part of the attempt to persuade and which characteristics (perhaps others) ended up persuading the audience. Some of the papers thus focused on explicit or implicit logic, patterns of inference, parallelism, stories and legends, appeal to precedents, use of citations, linguistic markers, and other formal characteristics, fully aware that these only constituted a possible selection of implicit or explicit persuasion strategies. And thirdly we reflected on the uncertainties concerning authors and audience, both extremely relevant in relation to persuasion, and yet both very elusive in the case of ancient Chinese texts, of which the origin and growth were vague and changing. The later hand of editors, the addition of titles, the new interpretations of cited quotes, the consecutive explanations of commentators, and the censoring pressure of dominant ideologies all contributed to a mixture of authors and audience in a large sense.

All these and similar complexities did not weaken the interest of the participants in the topic. The form of the workshop further ensured a continuous focus: The papers had been distributed two months before the meeting so that all members of the workshop had been able to read them. Moreover, five discussants had been invited to present and discuss them in light of the research questions. In other words: not the authors of the papers but their discussants presented the argument and evaluated it in light of the raised questions. Only then, the authors could respond, and the paper was discussed at length during one hour by the twenty odd members of the workshop. In the same spirit, my brief presentation of each contribution

will try to tease out responses to our research questions concerning various forms of argumentation and persuasion, rather than merely presenting the overall content of each.

Three of the nine contributions constituted a panel dedicated to the *Mozzi*, a very argumentative but seemingly less persuasive text. The latter is suggested by the relentless criticism of Confucian authors such as Mencius and Xunzi as well as by the early disappearance of the Mohist lineage. But perhaps both are misleading: Mohist ideas may have been extremely persuasive and may have lived on in non-Mohist (including Confucian) texts. One of their relatively persuasive and controversial ideas may have been the conviction that one has to use arguments in order to defend a claim. Three other papers predominantly focus on newly excavated manuscripts: unknown texts promoting the ideal of abdication found in Hubei (Guodian and the Shanghai manuscripts), one other Guodian manuscript discussing human behavior in the face of the uncontrollable, and an unearthed *Wenzhi* manuscript found in Hebei (Dingzhou). The advantage of such manuscripts in relation to forms of argumentation and persuasion strategies is that they may present us with a glimpse of the texts before they were edited or censored by later hands. The three final contributions discuss received texts – chronologically: *Lunyu*, *Huainanzhi*, and *Lunheng* – but with a focus on formal aspects, such as, respectively, the interpretation of performative force, particles as structuring elements, and motivation related to argumentation.

1 *Mozzi*: arguments without persuasiveness?

Whether or not Mozi's arguments were as unpersuasive in Chinese history as is usually claimed, it is a fact that relatively few commentators and contemporary scholars have been persuaded to work on them. Therefore, statements on Mohism tend to be general and less sophisticated than in the case of other trends of thought. What the contributors of this panel share is the conviction that an analysis of some formal characteristics of the text, whether argumentative or other, may lead to more differentiated insights into the content of the *Mozzi*.

The first paper, “The Growth of Compounds in the Core Chapters of the *Mozzi*”, was written by Karen Desmet, a doctoral student at the K.U. Leuven preparing a dissertation on the three-fold nature of the core chapters (chapters 8–37), those containing the ten dogma's of early Mohism. The dominant tendency is to interpret each set of three chapters (triplets or triads) about e.g. “Exalting the Worthy”, “Inclusive Caring” or “the Will of Heaven” as if they each concern one topic, respectively meritocracy, universal care and the will of heaven. In Chinese academia, both in the People's Republic as in Taiwan, there hardly seems to be any exception to this generalizing approach. With this research Desmet joins those very few Western and Japanese scholars who have tried to distinguish between the different chapters of each triplet and to explain their puzzling emergence in sets of three.

After summarizing the main arguments of Angus Graham's reconstruction of three contemporaneous rivaling sects versus the evolution theory proposed by Bruce & Taeko Brooks and Watanabe Takashi, she focuses on the presence of compounds such as e.g. *tianxia* 天下, *wanggong* 王公 and *wanwu* 萬物, in the completely preserved triplets of the core chapters: namely “Shang xian” (chapters 8–9–10), “Shang tong” (chapters 11–12–13), “Jian'ai” (chapters 14–15–6), “Fei gong” (chapters 17–18–19), and “Tianzhi” (chapters 26–27–28), excluding “Fei ming” (chapters 35–36–37) because of its textual corruption. The intention of this research is to

temporarily hold back on content related arguments such as sophistication of ideas or views on politics and warfare, and to exclusively focus on a formal characteristic of the texts, namely the presence of compounds, in order to determine their mutual relationship and evaluate the current theories.

Having traced the increase of compounds throughout the complete triplets of the core chapters, Desmet tentatively concludes in favor of the evolution theory, but not for all triplets in the order of “shang” 上, “zhong” 中 and “xia” 下, as the Brookses see it. Her findings support Watanabe Takashi’s idea that the evolution in some triplets follows the order “shang”, “zhong” and “xia”, while in others the order “shang”, “xia” and “zhong”. On the basis of the distribution of compounds in the core chapters of the *Mozǐ* and in other Warring States texts, Desmet is able to confirm Watanabe Takashi’s view on the evolution of the *Mozǐ* triplets, without however supporting his actual dating of the specific chapters, which is remarkably late (into the Han). This type of research focusing on some formal characteristic of the evolving Mohist discourse is useful for Mozi research in general. Desmet’s conclusions not only sustain a differentiated reading of the three chapters in each triplet, but they also support a certain sequence of the different chapters.

Her conclusions agree with those of Carine Defoort focusing on the “Jian’ai” triplet. Here again, the overwhelmingly dominant approach, especially in the Chinese academia, is to read all three chapters as variations on the same theme, namely the one summarized by the title, “Inclusive Caring”. Interpretations therefore select passages of either one of the three chapters to undifferentiatingly characterize all three or, more specifically, the sole topic of universal love. The second *Mozǐ* paper of the workshop, “The Growing Scope of *Jian* 兼: Differences Between Chapters 14, 15 and 16 of the *Mozǐ*,” objects to this approach because it obfuscates the most typical aspect of Mohism, namely its increasing use of argumentation in the face of an unpersuaded audience. According to Defoort, one major impediment to an independent and differentiated reading of the three chapters separately lies in their common title, “Jian’ai”. Taking into account that this slogan may postdate Mencius’ hostile characterization of Mohist thought, and that titles were added later to the *Mozǐ* chapters, she suggests a rereading of the three “Jian’ai” chapters by temporarily doing away with these potentially misleading titles. Without their titles, the three chapters make a different point, neither of which is exactly “Inclusive Caring”. First, the views become increasingly demanding and radical. While chapter 14 asks people to “care for each other”, chapter 15 wants them to “inclusively care for each other, mutually benefit each other” and chapter 16 is an “encouragement to be inclusive”. The idea of “inclusive caring” only gets fleshed out in the later core chapters titled “Will of Heaven”. And second, throughout the three chapters, the argumentation becomes richer, the cited objections more varied and specific, and the answers better supported by narratives, quotations, explicit views on persuasion, and analysis of technical concepts. We end up with increasing argumentation for a radicalizing view. The real center of the debate is not the idea of caring (*ai*) but its scope and, more specifically, the changing nature and value of reciprocity. The Mohist demands throughout the “Jian’ai” triplet are not softened because of critical objections, nor do they compromise to political demands, as argued by Taeko Brooks and Yoshinaga Shinjirō. The Mohists might have been more persuasive if they had nuanced their views in the face of criticism. But in the “Jian’ai” triplet this does not yet happen.

As opposed to the first two members of the *Mozzi* panel, Hui-chieh Loy, who by now has defended his doctoral dissertation on the *Mozzi* at the University of California (Berkeley), does not see any major difference or evolution throughout the three chapters of the “Shang tong” triplet on meritocracy (chapters 11, 12 and 13). His paper, “On a *Gedankenexperiment* in the *Mozzi* Core Chapters,” focuses on their common form of argumentation beyond the content of their beliefs about the world and its past. Loy shows how the authors take the reader from relatively uncontroversial premises to the conclusions, namely propositions or practical-political proposals. More specifically he argues that to interpret the “Shang tong” triplet as a “thought experiment” (*Gedankenexperiment*) helps to make sense of it. The three chapters start with a hypothetical scenario in which people are without any form of social and political authority and its attendant coercive apparatus. On the basis of certain assumptions about human motivation and action, they infer that people would hold to a variety of conflicting moralities, and consequently, be in a state of universal anarchy if the scenario were to be actual. Everyone has a different *yi* 義, which, although private, causes mutual condemnation and disapproval, and is therefore also public: people apparently expect their own *yi* to be regulative for others too. Under some conditions this may lead to war and chaos, which calls for a hierarchy of leaders to implement a unified order. Leaders, rulers, laws and criminal punishment establishing a consistently unified morality are thus a necessary condition for socio-political order. By stressing the hypothetical nature of this argument, Loy illuminates the various premises and conclusions, thus focusing on the soundness of the argument without relying on the actual content or claims made about the world. He thereby shows how an apparently simple doctrine in fact hides a fairly sophisticated if also elusive argument.

2 Unearthed manuscripts: hints of new insights on forms of argumentation?

An increasing number of ancient Chinese manuscripts – on wood, bamboo or silk – have been discovered in the last five decades. Could they, aside from the ideas that they convey, teach us something about forms of argumentation of ancient Chinese texts? The following three papers contain hints into that direction.

In “Subversion Unearthed: Criticism of Hereditary Succession in the Newly Discovered Manuscripts,” Yuri Pines analyses hitherto unknown pro-abdication views on the basis of three manuscripts: “Tang Yu zhi Dao” (Guodian), “Zi Gao” and “Rong Cheng shi” (Shanghai manuscripts), all probably predating 300 B.C. The manuscripts are interesting for their content, form and the combination of both: As for the ideas they convey, it is important to notice that these were absent from the Chinese tradition. Were it not for these recent excavations, we only could guess about the pro-abdication views that may have been inspired by nascent suggestions in early Mohism (the triplet discussed by Loy) and that later aroused critical reactions in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*. Their disappearance above the soil suggests that some pre-imperial ideas may have been censured during the imperial and dominantly Confucian tradition. As for their modes of argumentation, Pines remarks that they are not very developed, despite important differences between the three manuscripts. One consistently used argumentative strategy in all of them is that of historical justification as a legitimation of their political ideal. The abundant use of this type of argumentation in early Chinese texts seems to attest to its persuasive force. Pines speculates that perhaps therefore promoters of unorthodox views readily appealed to it. Respectable

pedigree may have been considered a means to make something legitimate, in this case abdication, and preferable to hereditary rule. It is maybe because this “use of the past to serve the present” had become a favored strategy of proponents of “heretical” doctrines that debates among Warring States thinkers arose about the reference to historical precedents in argumentation.

Dirk Meyer, doctoral student at IIAS (Leiden), also analyzes an unknown text before its discovery at Guodian, namely “Qiong da yi shi” (Failure and success appear at their respective time), but more for reasons of structure than for its content. In fact he is convinced that the meaning of a text also resides in its form, since formal structure in argumentative texts reflects the logical structure of the text and thereby contributes significantly to its content. “Structure as a Means of Persuasion as Seen in the Manuscript ‘Qiong da yi shi’ 窮達以時 from Tomb One, Guodian” is inspired by Rudolf Wagner’s “interlocking parallel style”, Joachim Gentz’ “double-directed parallelism” and Wolfgang Behr’s analysis of sound-correlated figures. By arranging the text on the basis of those insights, Meyer is able to show that “Qiong da yi shi” presents an extremely well structured “closed argument” about the relation between man and “heaven” – or whatever lies beyond man’s control. The argument of the short text is neatly introduced, then illustrated by legendary material, and concluded with advice to the gentleman about the acceptance of, and hence emancipation from, the uncontrollable. This clear structure strongly suggests that the “Qiong da yi shi” is indeed a complete text with an intentional composition, and does not consist of some loose fragments of a longer, orally transmitted lore. To the extent that Meyer’s arrangement and analysis are convincing, they also support a particular reconstruction of the bamboo slips into a coherent text. The advantage of texts such as the “Qiong da yi shi” is that they provide us with pieces of writing unedited by Han and later hands, so that we can try to approach them *via* their original structure.

The third contribution, “Persuasion through Definition: Argumentative Features of the Ancient *Wenzhi*,” by Paul van Els, throws yet another light on the relevance of unearthened manuscripts in relation to modes of argumentation. His paper concerns a fragmented *Wenzhi* discovered in a Former Han tomb at Zhongshan, called the Dingzhou *Wenzhi*. It differs from the two previous papers in at least two ways: First, the manuscript has a title recorded on one bamboo slip that happens to correspond with a received text, namely the *Wenzhi*. The continued use of this title suggests that there may have been nothing particularly heterodox or unacceptable about this text, as opposed to the manuscripts promoting abdication. Second, the Dingzhou *Wenzhi* is extremely scattered and incomplete due to early tomb theft as well as the earthquake of Tangshan in 1976. Therefore, the reconstruction methods applied by Meyer would not yield valuable results in this case. But the presence of two different documents carrying the same title, one unearthened manuscript and one received text, is an intriguing source for analysis. Van Els’ recently defended dissertation at Leiden University discusses the larger picture of the various *Wenzhi* texts. This contribution focuses on modes of argumentation or styles of persuasion in the “Ancient *Wenzhi*” (which van Els defines as the “hypothetical Urtext of the *Wenzhi*” of which the Dingzhou strips are the only surviving remnants) on the one hand, and the received *Wenzhi*, which postdates the Han, on the other. He remarks that the two texts differ in discursive structure and rhetorical strategies. As for the former, the Han manuscript consists of very short dialogues in the form of formulaic questions by King Ping followed by catechist type of answers by master Wen; there is also a dominant and exclusive reliance on quotations

from *Laozi*. All this differs remarkably from the received *Wenzi* with its prose and long *Huainanzi* passages. As for the rhetorical strategies, the author respectfully quotes the *Laozi* and refers to its central values – the Way, Sagehood, Wisdom – but unobtrusively invests these quotes and values with other meanings, often milder and less critical than in the received *Laozi*. Both differences seem to suggest that the Ancient *Wenzi* tries to persuade the audience of his own (early Han) views but without explicitly arguing or too visibly making his own point. While suggesting that, as a good student, he merely echoes the Old Master, he nevertheless promotes a much more syncretic view on politics.

3 Received texts and their neglected modes of persuasion

It is not necessary to revert to unearthed manuscripts in order to say something new and relevant concerning modes of argumentation or strategies of persuasion. One basic assumption of this workshop was that research in the field ancient Chinese texts had overly focused on the content of texts and had somewhat neglected their form. It has, for example, been argued repeatedly that all Confucian thinkers advance the idea of *ren* (“humaneness”), but there has been little analysis of how these thinkers differ in defining, illustrating and promoting *ren*. Therefore, even much studied sources, such as the *Lunyu*, it was felt, could be approached in new ways.

This is what Yang Xiao did by reading the *Analecets* in light of the “pragmatic turn” towards communicative practice in contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy. “The Pragmatic Turn: Articulating Communicative Practice in the *Analecets*” tries to tease out the pragmatic force of Confucius’ sayings. Having distinguished between the “mood” of a sentence indicated by grammar and being context-independent, Yang Xiao calls attention to the “force” of an utterance, which is pragmatic, context-dependent, and not consistently indicated by particles or terms. One therefore risks overlooking or unreflectively assuming the force of a saying, namely what it is *doing*: describing, prescribing, asserting or quoting. It is therefore important to interpret specific sayings by explicitly involving the concrete context. In the *Analecets* this context amounts, first of all, to what John Austin has called the “total speech situation” of the sayings. But it also, more broadly, refers to the larger context of scholars making judgments about the interpretation of the Master’s specific utterances. Yang Xiao therefore includes Chinese commentators from Zheng Xuan to Zhu Xi as well as different western translations in his detailed and explicit comparison of different interpretations of inherently ambiguous utterances. Confucius’ utterances show how far persuasion can be separated from argumentation, and how much the former relies on the actual context while the latter is supposed to retain its validity despite any concrete context. This clear distinction in the case of the *Analecets* should make us all the more alert for the “total speech act”.

The *Huainanzi* is a very different text in the sense that it constructs long arguments meant to persuade its audience independently of their concrete context. According to Hans van Ess, it “belongs to the first philosophical texts of Chinese tradition which consist of essays characterized by coherent arguments presented in the form of long causal chains.” We therefore do not expect to find utterances with a context related “force” (in Yang Xiao’s terms), but we search for the context independent “mood” of sentence indicated by grammar. This is exactly what van Ess tries to do in “Argument and Persuasion in the First Chapter of *Huainanzi* and its Use

of Particles.” He shows how important the careful interpretation of particles is in order to understand the elaborate and complicated structure of the argument. His detailed comparative analysis of passages from chapters 9 and 1 of the *Huainanzǐ* in different translations focuses on often neglected or mistranslated particles such as *gu* 故, *shìgu* 是故, *fu* 夫, *jīn fu* 今夫, and *shìyǐ* 是以 as structuring elements. Van Ess argues that, at least in the *Huainanzǐ*, the current particle *fu* 夫 does not, as is often assumed, indicate the starting point of a new argument, but often introduces images or similes from nature or the human world, adding another connotation to the view expressed above. The particles *gufu* 故夫 add more similes, while *shìyǐ* 是以 leads the concrete similes to a general conclusion, and the particle *gu* 故 relates the argument to a suggestion about the behavior of sage. It is clear that in a text such as the *Huainanzǐ* the persuasive force of a passage positively correlates with its argumentative structure. The latter is closely related to the use of particles, although they do not always obey an iron rule, not even within the confines of one particular text.

In relation to the two previous papers, one could say that Michael Puett’s analysis of Wang Chong’s thought again widens the gap between argumentation and persuasion, at least where Wang presents a positive alternative to the views that he attacks. Of all the ancient Chinese masters, one would have expected of this well-known “rationalist” that his attempts to persuade would coincide with sharp and convincing arguments. However, “Listening to Sages: Divination, Omens, and the Rhetoric of Antiquity in Wang Chong’s *Lunbenǐ*” shows that this is not always the case. If we distinguish between Wang Chong as a sharp criticizer of others, on the one hand, and as a politically concerned thinker, on the other, we discover that only in his attacks on the dominant views of his day, Wang Chong was perhaps as persuasive as he was argumentative. He ridiculed other views, made reference to empirical evidence, and indicated contradiction and errors in written sources about sages. Hence his fame as a sharp thinker and the major rationalist of his age. But as far as his own positive alternative is concerned, it is neither very elaborate nor more rational than the views he attacked. Rather than assuming that here too Wang Chong tried but failed to be rational, Puett traces his motivation for criticizing all others and his way of defending an alternative. According to Puett, Wang’s deepest concern was the recognition of contemporary sages for the creation of order in his own days. Although he believed in omens, as did most of his contemporaries, Wang reacted against omenology and divination, namely the *interpretation* of omens by contemporaries *according to a set system*, because that obstructed people’s capacity to recognize living sages. His arguments against specialists claiming authority were meant to pave the way towards something that he found both valuable and vulnerable, and not easily established through sound argument. He wanted to persuade his audience to think independently and to be alert for what living sages have to say.

Like Wang Chong, I hope to have persuaded the reader of the value of the topic “argument and persuasion” in ancient Chinese texts, even though I may not have convincingly argued for it. This short presentation of the nine papers in line with our research question has not only focused on the formal aspects of some texts but also on the differences between argument and persuasion. It is thanks to the workshop that many subtle nuances and a variety of related but still understudied topics began to dawn. We therefore agreed that the discussion would be continued one year later and in a comparative perspective at the University of Oxford (June 22–24, 2006).

To conclude, I want to express my gratitude to all the participants of the workshop: First of all to the five discussants, Nicholas Bunnin, Joachim Gentz, Michael La Fargue, Michael Nylan and Nicolas Standaert for their incisive comments and challenging remarks. Also those who contributed with their research and joined the debates: aside from the nine authors represented in this issue, as there were Jean-Paul Reding, Masayuki Sato and Griet Vankeerberghen, whose papers are being published elsewhere. I also want to thank the other participants, especially the graduate students who presented their current research: Wim De Reu, Mark Metcalf, Brandon Miller, and Siufu Tang. The workshop was made possible through the generous financial support of the Chiang Ching Kuo Foundation for Scholarly Exchange, as well as the Research Foundation-Flanders and the Onderzoeksraad K.U. Leuven. Finally, I want to thank Dorothee Schaab-Hanke and Martin Hanke for their painstaking work on the publication of these articles. The preparation of this issue was one of various inspiring intellectual collaborations with Dorothee, who also attended the workshop and subsequently was a visiting scholar here during the academic year 2005–06. *Oriens Extremus* not only carries the fruits of the workshop on “Argument and Persuasion in Ancient Chinese Texts” but also of our intensive academic collaborative project.