

## **Persuasion in Chinese Culture: A Glimpse of the Ancient Practice in Contrast to the West\***

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### **Documented Study and Practice in Chinese History**

Throughout Chinese history, there are ample records on persuasive communication practices at different times, especially those in the Pre-Chin Autumn-Spring and Warring States period (770-250BCD). According to the history, this was a time where persuaders (*shuikē meishi*) traveled from state to state, recommending themselves to the ruler or the lord of the land. Aided by eloquent talks and persuasive speeches, they presented to the rulers their ideas on political strategization. *Youshui* (traveling around to persuade) and *jinjian* (offering opinions to the ruler to do the right) have since become part of the long tradition in Chinese politics. In spite of the prevalence of such practice, there is no available documentation on the study of this practice as a scholarly subject. It defies the common sense that in the over two thousand years of Chinese civilization, no scholars had paid attention to this most basic of all communication practice. In fact, ancient scholars (up to 280AD) had devoted extensive and intensive study to the practice of persuasion, although it was not a direct subject of inquiry, but exclusively studied as part of some other subjects, such as politics and government, or philosophy.

Indeed, one of the ancient schools of Chinese philosophy, known as *mingbian* (name argument) scholars, stands to testimony of the academic interest in persuasion by ancient scholars (Hou, et. al. 1957). *Mingbian* scholars specialized in various pure philosophical topics and were interested in the logic of various arguments. Thus, persuasion and argumentation were indispensable tools for their inquiries. Similarly, in studies of government and politics, persuasion skills were regarded as essential tools to present and argue for a political positioning. Studies of persuasion served the purpose of these other, main subjects. Persuasion, thus, was regarded as a means to understanding of humanities, people, and politics. For all schools of thought, approach to persuasion started from and was inseparable from their approach to politics and government.

Traditional study of persuasion or rhetoric was carried out as an auxiliary part of other scholarly pursuits, as a way to understand human nature, government of people and corresponding cosmic order. Persuasion or rhetoric was a product of philosophical and political studies. Although never the main focus of those studies, it remained an integral part, as all scholarly exchange of ideas involved clear presentation of ideas and arguments for a particular point of view. In academic discussions, one must communicate and persuade fellow scholars to see things one's own way. In politics, one must persuade a ruler or a people to accept a certain political proposition before moving them to action. The close attention ancient people had paid to persuasion is seen in a rich vocabulary related to persuasive activities.

### Related vocabulary

Chinese language has a rich vocabulary to describe persuasion of various types. According to Lu (1998), classical Chinese had at least 6 terms used for reference to persuasion in practice or in conceptualizing persuasion, in addition to other meanings.

*yan* (言) referred to use of sleek languages to deceive a ruler or arguments about politics that would have certain effects, or language that reflect political ambition or cultural training, or particularly evocative languages that stirred up discontent of the authority. All these verbal communication involved direct or indirect attempt at persuasion.

*ci* (辭) similar in meaning to *yan* , but specifically referred to written or oral language use that was elegant and refined to have certain artistic effect. The art and beauty of such language added to the credibility of language user so they became more persuasive with more success in persuasion. On the other hand, *ci* might also refer to people using fine language to cover their lacking in substance. Thus the term might bring to the individual fame or bad names accordingly.

*jian* (諫) was a particular kind of persuasion done by hired or appointed officials toward a ruler. The purpose was to persuade the latter to retract or reconsider a previous order/policy or to correct a wrong or to mend behavior, for the good of the state and people. The practice of *jian* was by nature directed upward between individuals of unequal status. Its success to a large extent hinged upon the openness of the ruler to advice from councilors. In practice, *jian* might be carried out by an individual or a group of individuals. The latter was sometimes considered to be more effective, being reflective of a common viewpoint.

*shui* (說) was persuasion between peers or to a ruler, usually on political and military matters in policy or action. It was done by individuals of wisdom or of great learning.

*ming* (名) meant to name as a verb or name as a noun. This word did not directly referring to persuasion but stipulated the moral rules for persuasion activities to be proper and acceptable.

*bian* (辯) meant to distinguish and to tease out differences with description. The ability to do this was essential in debate of the vice and virtue of something and making an argument for or against. It involved separating ideas by listing of pros and cons of each and comparing the advantages and disadvantages in political matters. In scholarship, where definition was a necessity, it was to be done by clear a distinction between related or similar concepts and ideas. The term means to debate in modern Chinese.

The 6 terms represent ancient Chinese understanding of verbal persuasion with nuances for situational differences. Each term expresses one or more aspect of persuasion with some overlapping but never interchangeable. The full meaning of each term is revealed only when it is put in a context and in contrast to other terms. All combine to present a relative comprehensive picture of traditional Chinese conception of verbal persuasion.

### Persuasion practice

In ancient China, formal persuasion mostly took place in three types of situations: government, moral education, and scholarship, where persuasion was carried out by professional persuaders, such as *ceshi*, *shushi* and *xueshi*. *shi* is a generic term for well-educated individual. *shi* invariably gained social status of a nobility because of their learning. *shi* usually went on to be an appointed government official and, thus, became part of the social elite. Three main categories existed to distinguish *shi* of different expertise and

specialties. There were those known as *ceshi* (策士) who specialized in government including diplomacy and wars for external affairs and public policy for internal affairs. Some had knowledge on divinity and related matters such as climate pattern for agricultural, magic medicine for longevity, etc. These are called *shushi* (術士). Last category of *shi* referred to those that devoted themselves to studies of cosmology, philosophy, ethics, governments and social order. These were scholars and were called *xueshi* (學士). There were many subcategories with finer distinction of specialties. E.g., *bianshi* 辯士 specialized in argumentation; *moushi* 謀士 in strategizing; *cashi* 察士 in investigation; *wenshi* 文士 in good writing; *shuishi* 說士 in general persuasion; *jianshi* 諫士 in righteous persuasion; *youshi* 游士 in traveling-persuasion、言談之士 in talks on various topics, etc. (Lu, 1998, pp.64).

Persuaders were of three types in ancient China, so were persuadees in terms of status between the communicators. From the discussion on terms earlier, we can see that, most often the target of persuasion was the ruler, which was the case for *jian* (諫), *shui* (說), *yan* (言) and *ci* (辭) types of situation. Besides, the target of persuasion might also be peers when it was *shui* (說), *ci* (辭), *yan* (言) and *bian* (辯). In a few situations when *shui* (說) and *yan* (言) were used, the target of persuasion might also be an individual of lower status. *ming* (名) was applicable to all persuasion situations as it dealt with general principle of form and content. Regardless of the status differences, in most situations, all parties in the persuasion communication were individuals of social status with good education. Rhetoric in ancient China was a game for the social elite. The terms for various types of persuasion indicate that Chinese of ancient times had noted factors such as social status and background of the audience that must be taken into account for persuasion to occur in proper manner and for it to be effective.

### Rhetorical method

Many rhetorical methods or strategies used in ancient times are still very common today. First, classical Chinese rhetoric put great emphasis on the force of morality, which was considered of paramount importance in making appeals to others. An important component of morality was maintenance of social order in compliance to the role expectations of the society. Thus, an effective rhetorical method was to point out the extent to which a conduct was consistent to social role expectation. This may be illustrated in a story about *yanzi* (see *yanzi chunqiu*), a Confucian scholar of Pre-Chin period. A king of the kingdom of Qi was once very angry with a commoner that had committed some petty crimes. The king wanted to execute him with a cruel punishment of severing his limbs. When the criminal was brought before the Court, *yanzi* stepped forward with a knife in hand. He grabbed the arm of the person and asked, "At which part of a person's body would one begin severance according to the sage kings of the past?" On hearing this, the King changed his mind and said, "Release him." Here, *yanzi* managed to dissuade the King from cruelty. He skillfully used the indirect tactic to point out that the punishment did not fit the crime and was not consistent to the moral standards set up by sage kings in the past. Moral appeals were the strongest when applied to the persuader's character. This is seen in the case of Zhang Yi, a prime minister of the kingdom of Qin who had made great contribution to Qin's eventual integration of China. No sooner than the Qin King whom Zhang had served died, many officials long jealous of Zhang's achievement and status approached the new king and started slandering Zhang. They accused that he was a person of no loyalty, for he was from the kingdom of Wei and yet had served Qin for his own

gain. In other words, he was not a person of good moral character that could be trusted and should not be given a position of importance; whatever he said about government could not be believed either.

Another common persuasion tactic is quoting real-life examples from history or present time, to make a case or prove a point. China was a society of precedence where history was important and so were the historical lessons. Events from the past could not be changed, neither could they be erased, and had thus gained strength as an effective persuasive tool. A story from “*zhanguo* (A history of warring states)” serves as an example. A gentleman by the name of *Lu Jun* (魯君) once made a toast and presented a persuasive talk at a celebration banquet held by a king of the kingdom of Liang. Lu recounted four events some from the past and some were contemporary. He said, in the past, the daughter of Emperor *Shun*, one of the first Chinese emperors, had a master made some very fine wine and presented to a later emperor, *Dayu*, who found the wine extremely good. Since then *Dayu* kept a distance from that maser and stopped drinking. He said, one day someone in later generations would lose the kingdom because of drinking. A King of Qi, one night had stomach discomfort, and an official, named *Yiya*, cooked meat with delicious spices for him. The King ate the meat and slept well until day broke. Since then, the King refused meat and said, someday in later generations, someone would lose a kingdom because of fine foods. A king of Jing was once presented a beautiful woman, *Nan*, and did not attend to his kingly duties for three days. Since then, the king kept away from *Nan* and said, someday in later generations, someone would lose a kingdom for being fond of beautiful women. A king of Chu once climbed up to a pavilion on a mountaintop. There was a river on the left, a lake on the right, and another river right below, all surrounded by green ridges of mountains stretching far. The scenery was so breathtaking and beautify that one could forget about even death there. Since then the Chu king vowed to never climb again, saying, someday in later generations, someone would lose a kingdom for being attracted by the beauty of sceneries. Now, your majesty the king had the drink of the master, fine food of *yiya*, accompanied by beautiful women like *Nan*, while standing in front of beautiful sceneries. Any one of these fine things was enough to corrupt a king and cause him to lose a kingdom. Now you had all four, wasn't it time for you to become alarmed and forego the enjoyment? The Liang king was persuaded by the four historical examples given by *Lu Jun* and adopted his suggestions.

Using historical stories as analogy for today is one particular way of comparison. Ancient Chinese persuasion also used fabricated stories or things that happen in nature as another way of comparison to the case in question. In modern Chinese, there are a lot of set phrases or sayings that have originated from such stories. A common one such as “a mantis going after cicada unaware of the bird behind him” (螳螂捕蟬，黃雀在後) came from persuasive remarks by *Zhuanxin* to a king of the kingdom of *Chu*. *Zhuan* used the case of mantis to compare the situation of the *Chu* king, admonishing him from being enjoying a good life while totally unaware of the grave danger lurking nearby. The point was to get the king be diligent and be always on an alert for the possible disasters and foreign invasion. The saying of “a snipe fighting a clam to the benefit of the fisherman” (鷸蚌相爭，漁翁得利) came from *Sudai* in persuasion of *the Zhao* king who was contemplating attacks on the kingdom of *Yan*. The situation was compared to when a snipe trying to pick into a clam and was pinched by the shells. As neither would give up, both were stuck on the spot only to be picked up by a passing fisherman who was pleased at this windfall. Thus, if the kingdoms of *Zhao* and *Yan* fought each other, neither was strong enough to win but would hurt each other,

while the stronger *Qin* was certain to take advantage of the situation and take both without any effort. One more set phrase, “heading toward north to go south” (南轅北轍) came from *Jiliang* dissuading a king of *Wei* not to attack *Zhao*. At the news of *Wei* king’s intent, *Ji* went to see the king and told him the following story. *Ji* said he ran into a person driving a carriage toward north who wanted to go to the kingdom of *Chu* in the south. When told he was heading in the wrong direction and would never make it, the person claimed to have strong horses, ample funds and skillful driver. All these advantages would only accelerate his mistake and take him further away from where he wanted to go. *Ji* was likening *Wei* king’s wish to be the leader of all lords as the gentleman’s goal to visit *Chu* in the south. Attacking *Zhao* by *Wei* was wrong as was the direction of north was to the traveling gentleman, because such would be an act of bullying the weak and would reflect badly on *Wei* and its trustworthiness. Thus, the stronger *Wei* might be the more severe its attacks on *Zhao* would be, the more other states would distrust *Wei*, and the further away *Wei* would be from being recognized as the leader by other lords. This kind of comparison put things of different type together and allows people to see the similarity in an unexpected way, who are thus more willing to accept the argument and be convinced.

There is another type of comparison that does not involve stories but lay out all related facts for a comparison of strengths and weaknesses of different scenarios, leading to a decision for the most advantageous option. This is demonstrated in a large-scale persuasive venture by a disciple of Confucius, *Zigong*, known for his oral skills. He once at the request of his mentor went traveling from state to state persuading the respective lords and advocating for certain actions. *Zigong* managed to thwart the plan of a powerful official of the kingdom of *Qi*, *Tianchang*, who was going to attack *Lu*, the native land of Confucius and many of his students. *Zigong* first went to see *Tianchang* and told him that attacking *Lu* was a wrong move, because *Lu* was smaller and weaker than *Qi* that had a people who did not like war and a king with generals who were incompetent. Attacking *Lu* would bring difficulties and problems. In comparison, he should turn to attack *Wu* instead, which was large, rich and well equipped, with good generals. When *Tian* was angered by this absurd counterintuitive argument, *Zigong* continued to point out that *Tian* did not have a very strong position in his own state and was vulnerable. *Lu* might be easy to win, which would strengthen the king of *Qi* and the generals who fought the battles, leaving *Tian* without awards being merely the strategist with no substantial contribution. Thus a victory over *Lu* would bring difficulties and problems for *Tian* in his quest for power. In contrast, attacking *Wu* was difficult and defeat was more likely, which would root out generals who fought in the war, or at least weaken their powers. Then there would be fewer competitors in the court, so the king would have to rely more on him as a main counsel. This way, *Tian* could easily control the king and virtually rule the state. *Zigong*’s presentation and comparison brought the point home to *Tian*, who was persuaded to attack *Wu* in stead. *Zigong* then moved on to the kingdoms of *Wu*, *Yue* and *Jing*, talking to each king in the similar fashion. *Zigong*’s persuasive expedition spared people of *Wu* the misery of a war, and much changed the inter-state situation of that time.

Lastly, Ancient Chinese routinely used emotional appeal as an effective persuasion method. As mentioned before, the moral appeal most important to Chinese culture is ultimately an emotional appeal. The traditional beliefs in such virtues as “*ren* - kindness, *yi* - righteousness, *zhong* - loyalty, *xin* - faith, *cheng* - sincerity” were the source of moral appeals, which were all built on the foundation of emotions and were reflected in conducts and actions. A belief in these virtues and morality is a belief in feelings and emotions. Good persuasion is

such because it is able to stir up feelings that people trust, which induces conviction. Two cases serve as illustrations of this common method. In *Tan* dynasty, a General *Xin* serving the emperor then was a good soldier and a good general. He once killed someone for private vengeance and was put on a death roll for capital punishment. One official, *Li*, spoke to the Emperor that *Xin* was due to die for a long time. The Emperor was curious and asked the reason for this remark. *Li* said, *Xin's* father and brothers all fought for the country and died in battles. *Xin* was the only one that had survived and should have joined his family in death; his death was long overdue. At this, the Emperor felt sympathy and gratitude for *Xin* and his family, then ordered *Xin's* sentence be reduced to demotion. *Li* was begging for clemency on behalf of *Xin*, by appealing to the positive emotions of the Emperor toward the accused and persuaded the latter to spare his life. (Cited in Dong, 1994, p. 34)

Emotions the persuasion may appeal to also include other types, e.g., the well-known scare tactics. Here is the second case, a story that created another set phrase for the Chinese, *weiruleinuan* (more dangerous than stacking eggs). In Spring-Autumn period, a king of the kingdom of *Jin* intended to build a pavilion of 9 stories, which would demand huge labor and other resources and would deplete the treasury. Against opposing voices from below, the king declared to kill anyone who dared to dissuade him of this plan. Then an official, *Sunjin* asked to see the king, claiming he could perform a very difficult trick of stacking up 9 chess pieces with 9 eggs on top of them. The king was intrigued and ordered to have all materials ready for *Sun* to perform. *Sun* carefully put chess pieces one on top of another to stack them up, and then, very gingerly put one egg on top, then another and another ... Sweats ran out of *Sun's* face as he went on with utmost care. The stack grew higher and higher, and became less and less stable, and the atmosphere in the house more and more tense. Every official watching was holding the breath in case air vibration would shake the stack. The king was very nervous and murmured, "so dangerous, so scary." *Sun* immediately put in, "This is not dangerous. There are things more dangerous than this." The king was surprised and asked for an explanation. Holding a last egg in one hand, *Sun* said, "Building the 9-story pavilion is more dangerous, which would take at least 3 years. In the 3 years, many strong labors are needed to do this, so is a huge sum of money. By the time it is done, people would be exhausted and disgruntled. The treasury would be empty and the state very weak. Neighboring states would take advantage of the situation to attack us, when we are at our weakest. Then we would not be able to defend ourselves. The kingdom of *Jin* would be conquered. And your majesty would be no more. Is that not more dangerous than stacking eggs?" The *Jin* king was so shaken by the scenario and ordered the immediate halt to the building plan. Here, *Sun* in his persuasion appealed to the worse fear of every ruler, the loss of his throne and his kingdom, which had proved to be very effective.

### Views and talks on persuasion

Chinese cultural tradition, especially from the Confucius school, had held morality as a key element for human conduct including communication. Early thinkers, such as Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, had all discussed the relationship between verbal activity and morality in this way. Such that "Persons of virtue would speak," "Virtue expressed in words are to be expressed in deeds" (Confucius); "One with no virtue would not be listened to by others;" and being persons of virtue, "Gentleman would speak of virtue;" "The gentleman has virtues, practices virtues, and enjoys speaking virtues."(*Xunzi*) Regarding talk and virtues, there were

many discussions from the opposite aspect: “Quick talk disrupts virtue” and “sharp tongues confuse morality;”(Confucius) “ineptitude in talk rather than speech of no virtues”(Mencius). Talks and remarks that were against moral criteria must be sanctioned and not allowed to spread. Thus one’s duty was to retort such speech, which was different than just idle arguing. As Mencius remarked “one did not enjoy arguing but could not help it when provoked by talk of no virtue”. Or as *Xunzi* put it, “with virtue one would not give way but to argue one’s best”. Even practitioners of Zongheng School (vertical and horizontal coalition strategies), who were known for their utilitarianism in approach, recognized the importance of virtue and morality. Zongheng practitioners regularly cited virtue to support their points and used morality as criteria of assessment of persuasion by others (e.g., Peng 1996).

In association with virtue was the emphasis on names and naming. Naming was a verbal activity that concretized the notion of morality and was closely related to persuasion. Name as opposed to content, represented a relationship with many implications. Name as label was external form, as opposed to substance that was internal quality. Where morality was concerned was the consistency between name and content. A name inappropriate to the content was a rhetorical problem but a form inconsistent to substance was an ethical issue. Then what does name appropriateness have to do with morality? Listen to Confucius, “when names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable; when what is said does not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success; when affairs do not culminate in success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, punishments will not fit the crime; when punishments do not fit the crime, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot. Thus when the gentleman names something, the name is sure to be usable in speech, and when he says something, this is sure to be practicable. The thing about the gentleman is that he is anything but casual where speech is concerned”. Thus was established the connection between the rhetorical practice of naming and morality. On this, *Xunzi* held a similar view: “Name is not such by nature but by convention. When a name fits the convention, it is appropriate; when it does not fit the convention, it is not appropriate.” Not being appropriate was not (socially) reasonable and thus went against morality. The moral connection of naming is presented here from a different angle.

Naming is one of the few areas where ancient scholars made inquiries that involved pure logic, all at the same time of its practical implications for law enforcement and government. More in character is ancient scholars’ view and many discussions on talks and deeds in relation to naming. Confucius contributed much to this discussion. One finds many related references in *Analects*, “The gentleman should be reluctant to talk but ready to act;” “The gentleman would be ashamed to speak but not to do;” “apt at action and cautious at talk”. In comparison to talk, action was infinitely preferable and worthier of trust. Deeds were yardstick that speech must measure up to, thus action was primary and talk secondary. This principle of action over word applied to persuasive communication as well. When something could be said and done, then doing comes first, although talk must be done if necessary. A natural question then is what to say, or what is worthy of speaking or necessary to talk about? One criterion was relevance to virtue. *Xunzi* said, “Speak no virtue, then keep silent rather than speak, then speak badly rather than argue well”. In other words, when speaking, what was said must be consistent with the moral standard. Otherwise, one should not speak—because it was not worthy. Only what was consistent to morality was worthy of speaking. He also pointed out, “Argue and not avail is wasteful and useless”; “argument that cannot be applied is fruitless effort and must not be done in government and moral cultivation.” In other

words, only things that could be done or carried out in practice should be said. Specifically, “knowledge of the past must be of use to today; knowledge of divinity must be of use to earthly matters. Talks of value can stand the test of reality and practice.” Similar remarks are found from other scholars. For example, “Speaking often without the ability to act or do is empty talk” (*Mozi*). “Talk can be broad and deep but useless” (*Hanfeizi*). This kind of contrast rendered talk completely inadequate and useless unless it served some practical purpose of doing something or helped in moral cultivation. Following this thinking, communication or rhetoric was nothing until it accomplished some moral or practical deeds. This view on speaking and talk applied to other means of persuasion as well.

Ancient Chinese had long recognized the role of action and conduct as a means for persuasion, and held it as more effective than verbal persuasion. It was said, “No attendance, no doing, no one believing” (*Sijing*). Without being there doing that, no one would trust what you were saying. Also, “Act in righteous manner, others follow without order; act not in righteous manner, others will not follow even ordered” (*Anelects*). The persuasive power of example was self-evident. In comparison to acts, “fine talks do not go deep into heart as do fine deeds” (*Mencius*). Good conducts moved people more than good words and were thus more persuasive. “Talk with acts and no words, tell without saying; tell without saying, not no talking” (*Zhuanzi*). One could talk with acts and not words and talk better that way. Such action-talks “far surpass any actual talk” (*Laozi*). This kind of faith in action as persuasion was extended to talks about action as persuasion. It can be seen in the discussion earlier on rhetorical methods, where persuaders cited other’s action in the past or present as examples for people to follow and to be moved. Besides being a direct example, one’s own action and experience were commonly quoted as analogy in talks to persuade, known as “self-example persuasion” (現身說法). One well-known example is an official, *Zouji*, of a Qi king, who used his own experience to persuade the king as follows. *Zou* said, he had thought of himself as good looking and asked respectively his wife, his concubine, and a visiting guest, how he himself compared to a known handsome man Master *Xu*. All said *Zou* looked better. Then one day, *Zou* had a chance to meet the said Master and realized *Xu* was indeed more handsome than himself. He explained to the king, that the three people that had praised him to be better looking, did so because, his wife favored her own husband and would not tell the truth; his concubine feared him and would not tell the truth; while his guest had asked something of him and would not tell the truth to jeopardize the chance. Thus, he was unable to get the truth from all of them. This might be compared to the situation of the king, who was surrounded by people who either favored him, or feared him, or wanted something from him, therefore, none would tell the truth about his weakness. The king was persuaded and ordered to reward anyone that would point out his shortcomings or mistakes.

Self-example persuasion, just like examples, was also employed in action. Here is a case in point. Han Gaozhu, an emperor of Han Dynasty had a wet nurse when he was an infant. This nurse once committed a crime. The emperor did not have the heart to punish her and just sent her to remote regions away from the capital. The woman did not want to go that far and sought advice from a favorite actor of the emperor. Taken the latter’s advice, she went to say good-bye to the emperor, then turned immediately to walk out of the palace. On her way out, she turned her head around to look at the emperor at every step, appearing difficult to just tear her herself away. The actor standing nearby, shouted to her, “Woman, just go. The majesty is a grown man and does not need you any more.” The emperor on the other hand was

deeply touched by the behavior of the wet nurse and ordered to allow her to stay. With her acts as an example of what she had to say, the woman was successful in her persuasion.

### **Ancient Chinese Persuasion and Western Classical Rhetoric**

Based on the available documents, in both China and the West, there were active persuasive communication activities as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. The study of persuasion followed shortly afterwards. The discussion above has set grounds for some similarities and differences between Ancient China and the West at about the same period. Here we turn to examination of cultural influences on persuasion practices and studies.

**Research approaches.** The classical rhetoric in the West (500BC - 500 AD) had long been a subject of study in its own right, complete with systematic theorization (Ehninger, 1968). While the three main schools of moral philosophy, scientific approach and education philosophy (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 1976) each had different emphasis, their approach to rhetoric and theorization were quite compatible. All main elements were defined and analyzed, whereas all relevant aspects specified and classified. The study was comprehensive to cover most of the elements and aspects that are still applicable today, from topic to form, to different participants, to organization, to style.

Chinese social tradition had always placed function and content before forms, and was suspicious of any emphasis on form, regarding interests in form as placing the cart before the horse. In relation, scholarship of any type held essential the practical relevance of any knowledge, whereas pure knowledge of any kind was deemed useless and irrelevant to the society, hence unacceptable. Knowledge of persuasion and rhetoric were by classification tools and form that served other purposes than mere persuasion. It was not an independent, substantive subject of study, hence of no importance on its own. Ancient Chinese scholars studied persuasion as part of other subjects, such as philosophy and government, and would follow the need for development of these other subjects. Study of persuasion was never systematic nor independent of other subjects. However, in some particular aspects, especially when persuasion was related to government and humanities, the scholar had put forth some unique and rather comprehensive discussion and conceptualization. Their works touched upon such important topic as effectiveness of persuasion (*Xunzi*) (Lin, 1994) and audience adaptation (*Han Feizi*) (Lu, 1998). In terms of approach to persuasion, different schools of thought all had their own conceptualization in service to the social moral view each espoused (Zhao, 1994; Garrett, 1993b; Lu, 1998).

### **Cultural aspects of persuasion**

Ethics and morality is an aspect important to both Ancient Chinese persuasion and classical Western rhetoric. For the latter, ethic and moral standards apply to the persuading communicator, or at least the perception of such, and the method used in persuasion. Thus, untruthful or misleading methods were not acceptable. For Ancient Chinese, morality was the main motivation and purpose for persuasion. Where these were lacking, either in the persuader or in the content of persuasion, there should not be persuasion. Standards of moral conduct overlapped but were not identical to those used in the West.

For the Western classical rhetoric, the speaker and the audience were citizens, who were social equals. A basic assumption of rhetoric was rationality of the audience who would assess and interpret the persuasive messages in rational manner. Thus, the main objective of a speaker was to evoke rational thinking on part of the audience, so they would follow the line

of argument presented to them and made judgment of soundness and validity. The areas of topic cover everything of interest to the public in terms of public policies, legal issues as well as ceremonial occasions. Speech was part of citizen education, an essential skill for every freeman. In comparison, ancient Chinese persuaders were learned scholars of high social status, often addressing a ruler or a king as their sole audience. The communicators were not only in an unequal relationship, but the superior was one that held the power of life and death, and could wield it at whims. A main assumption of persuasion was the listeners' wisdom as human beings that was reasonable and based on their social experience. A main objective of a persuader was to touch the heart of the listener, by encouraging the latter to judge on the basis of social rules and associated social feelings about the matter. That the society had a view that should be complied to was deemed necessary and taken as an effective persuasive point. The view on the relationship between persuasion and morality put great constraints on the topic of persuasion, which was limited to social norms and governments, divinities and humanities. The ability to speak well and to argue was of use only to social elites, who needed it for their own ambition or simply as an accomplishment or a game.

Classical rhetoric of the West developed from public speaking and put a great deal of emphasis on the speaker. The speaker was considered the dominant party who, with skills, could bring out expected reaction from the audience. The speaker, thus, had been the center of scholarly attention, while the role of the audience was passive and to be influenced by the speaker. Audience analysis was needed so that the speaker could adapt the message and make the speech more effective. Human rationality was assumed and the same was assumed of the study of rhetoric in terms of arguments being sound and valid for effectiveness. Emotional appeals were less trusted as they preyed on the irrational side of the audience. It is in this aspect that Ancient Chinese had a different approach. In persuasion as in other aspects of life, Chinese tradition held a holistic view of emotion and reason. Heart and mind were one and the same, while reason referred to a sense of the way things work from experience rather than mental faculty capable of abstraction that stripped away feelings and emotions. Traditional cultural values of “*ren*--kindness, *yi*--righteousness, *zhong*--loyalty, *xin*--faith, *cheng*--sincerity” were each one of them affectively based. The moral appeals of these values also paved the way for emotional appeals as a legitimate means of persuasion. The moral stipulation of persuasion, on the other hand, probably had also diminished the concern over the ethics of persuasive methods as such. As a matter of fact, the ability to provoke emotions was considered a prized skill in persuasion, and a sign of professional maturity.

Considering the fact that most persuasive communication in ancient China were carried out toward a ruler, a king, it was of paramount importance to know and understand the emotional inclinations of this superior audience, so that even if persuasion was not successful, the persuader would not end up bringing harm to himself. In this sense, persuasion in ancient China had its own understanding of audience analysis and adaptation. Many scholars, e.g., Confucius, Mozi, Gost Vally Master (*guiguzi*), Mencius, Zhuanzi, had elaborated on this aspect. According to Gong (Gong, 1994) Chinese audience analysis had generalized two points: weighing of power (*liangquan* 量權—measure power) and assessing the person (*chuaiqing* 揣情—assess feeling). Power weighing involves a complete understanding of some essential external factors that may have affect the survival of the target, including his power status, strength in resources, popularity among people and diplomatic relations. Feeling assesment involves knowing internal factors of the persuasion target, including personality, emotions, moods, likes and dislikes. Both type of audience information could be had, besides

research in advance, through observation of the target and his self-disclosure or self-revelation in interaction. The audience, in this sense, was much more part of the persuasion activity.

Lastly, use of nonverbal cues was emphasized in the Western classical rhetoric in delivery. By body languages and facial expressions, the speaker reinforced what he had to say verbally, so as to better influence the audience. In ancient Chinese persuasion, nonverbal elements were taken as an integral part of persuasion, from action as message and model, to nonverbal behaviors as information about the audience. Action in particular occupied a very prominent place, much more so than the Western tradition, which took great stock in the nonverbals associated with speaking.

### **Commonly used persuasive strategies**

Many strategies and devices can be found in both Western rhetorical and Chinese persuasive practices, with differences in preference or frequency of usage.

Traditionally, Chinese culture stressed the importance of societal order represented in social hierarchy, set great stock on morality and virtue, and believed in the emotional appeals. This tradition has influenced the preferred rhetorical approach in persuasion. A most common mode of proof in ancient times and today is argument by authority.

Second, arguments often appear in what is known as Chinese sorites, where a chain of syllogisms are presented in such a way that the conclusion of one is the premise of the other that follows immediately (Garrett, 1993a). The set of arguments are not necessarily deductively linked but rather set out the conditional parallels for the final conclusion (e.g., Confucius on naming).

Another common mode of proof is argument by consequences. In *Shiji*, there is a story about Warring States period, when a person by the name of *Cai* had the idea of himself to become prime minister of the kingdom of *Qin*, and set out to persuade the then *Qin* Prime Minister *Fan* to step down. *Cai* made his point by citing the cases of three other important officials of other states, who had made great contributions to their respective states and were all once very powerful statesmen. Yet, each had met a very tragic fate in the end, being prosecuted or tortured to death. Using these predecessors' miserable ending as proof, *Cai* was making the argument that similar consequences were waiting for *Fan*, if he did not resign at the prime of his career to preserve himself from being prosecuted later by other ambitious new comers. He was making the point that being loyal to the lord and being good for the state was no guarantee for a peaceful old age. Although *Cai* did not succeed in this particular case, the method was a well-tested one.

Yet another mode of proof is argument by comparison, which we have discussed earlier on examples and comparison of strengths and weaknesses. Even in argument by consequences above, comparison was explicit.

Lastly, arguments in Chinese persuasion almost all involve some kind of narrative, which may be one of the unique aspects of Chinese persuasion. It is unique not because it is exclusive to the Chinese but due to its prevalence and its importance to the line of reasoning. All of the examples mentioned above have used one narrative or another to indirectly prove or bring out a moral. In a sense, narratives are an integral part of Chinese persuasion. Given the tradition of upward persuasion, mostly of a ruler that held the power of life and death, the indirectness of a story was crucial to keep a distance between the points made and the person making the point. So when things did not go as planned, at least the persuader had the recourse of arguing for a different interpretation or outcome.

In comparison, the classical rhetoric of the West put much more emphasis on the rational reasoning as a basic mode of argument and had generalized a large set of argument lines. Syllogism often presented in enthymeme was a most common form of argument presentation, including logical and rhetorical. For that aim, efforts were also made to identify fallacious arguments, which were also classified as a category on its own. Of all arguments, the more rigorous in logic the more likely arguments were considered to be sound and effective. Rhetorical arguments being resting often on probability were considered less forceful although acceptable. With regard to evidence, physical or factual evidence, including statistics, held much weight as support in the argument, while hearsay and other secondary evidence were treated with caution or even distrust. Lastly, rhetoric and narrative were two different subjects, although not mutually exclusive.

The brief comparison here shows that, whereas there is much similarity in Chinese and Western persuasion in ancient times, there are also culturally influenced aspects of difference. Most differences, however, are a matter of emphasis or priority rather than a matter of compatibility. Western classical rhetoric developed earlier as a systematic subject of scholarly inquiry, while Chinese of the same period just practiced without treating persuasion as a worthy subject in its own right. The study in the West was also more comprehensive and analytical in nature, while Chinese study was much less systematic with narrower focus. An understanding of where Chinese persuasion stands vis-à-vis the West provides a basis for intercultural understanding for societies following the two traditions.

\* A revision of a speech at University of Texas-Austin, 2002. Part of an earlier version was incorporated into a chapter in a book, Chen, L. (2004), *Persuasive Communication: Process and Practice*, Taipei: Wunan.

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