

CONCLUSION

In this book we have described a selection of rhetorical and persuasive styles in China, drawing a particular distinction between “top-down” and “bottom-up” persuasion. We have illustrated these and also exemplified a number of traditional Chinese text structures which were used as clothing in which to dress “persuasions.” In so doing, we have also argued that similar styles have been adopted at different times in other cultures, including Ciceronian Rome and Medieval Europe, thus suggesting that, while there are clearly distinctive aspects of Chinese rhetoric, it is not the absolute other. We have elucidated a number of linguistic principles of argument and rhetoric in Chinese, showing how these principles work together to help construct the unmarked, default “frame-to-main” sequence and rhetorical structure of Chinese argument and persuasion, while showing that a marked sequence and structure is also commonly used when there is a specific motivation for such a marked form. We here recap the principles we presented in the conclusion to Chapter 7:

1. The “because-therefore” operates at levels of discourse as well as at sentence level. It represents an important sequencing principle in MSC. For example, when MSC speakers are justifying a claim, they commonly posit the reasons for the claim before making it, following a “frame-main” sequence.
2. These “because-therefore” and “frame-main” sequences can be recursive. This rhetorical structure is more likely to occur in planned speech than in spontaneous speech. Although, in more planned speech, the use of the because and therefore connectors is comparatively uncommon, a therefore connector, either *suoyi* or *yinci* is common, but not obligatory, when its communicative purpose is to signal a summary statement.

This rhetorical structure is represented in the diagram.

BECAUSE x_n + THEREFORE x_n

THEREFORE.

3. In more spontaneous speech, enveloping is likely. When this occurs a “because-therefore” unit can act as a “pregnant” unit and contain a number of lower level units within it. These lower level units can themselves be lower level ‘because-therefore’ units. In more spontaneous speech, where there is enveloping, connectors are more common. This structure is represented in the diagram.

BECAUSE [LOWER LEVEL UNITS] THEREFORE

4. The structures in (ii) and (iii) can be used in combination.
5. In addition to acting as sentence level connectors, both the ‘because’ and the ‘therefore’ connectors can act as discourse markers. They can introduce and control a series so that “because x_n ” and “therefore x_n ” are possible sequences.
6. The presence of explicit “because” and “therefore” discourse markers is less likely in formal planned speech than in informal and more unplanned discourse.

In addition, we have also illustrated related principles of sequencing and these include a preference for big-small sequencing or whole-part sequencing, often realised as topic-comment constructions, and James Tai’s Principle of Temporal Sequence (PTS) defined as “the relative word order between two syntactic units is determined by the temporal order of the states they represent in the conceptual world” (50).

A further related principle we identified and illustrated was that Chinese follows logical or natural order so that the sequence in which the following two clauses are presented, “he fell over, he hurt his ankle”, *must* mean that “because he fell over he hurt his ankle”. The cause always precedes the effect. This, in turn means, that the use of explicit connectors which demonstrate the relationship between the clauses is not required. However, as we have also shown, influence from Western languages, particularly through the translations of Western texts into Chinese at the turn on the twentieth century, has meant that the use of explicit subordinating conjunctions in hypotactic clauses are now frequent in Chinese so that the sentence sequence, “He fell over because he hurt his ankle” are now possible (and common) in Chinese.

In the early chapters, we showed that an inductive method of argument represented the unmarked arrangement of ideas, not least because the official or ‘persuader’ was almost always persuading “up.” It will be remembered that this ‘bottom-up’ persuasion was termed *yin* by the philosopher Gui Guzi and required speaking “in forked tongue”, while persuading from above to below encouraged “straightforward speaking” (Tsao 103). Thus many methods of reasoning in Chinese adopted an inductive sequence, as this was safer when persuading “up.” The key textual patterns of *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* and the *ba gu wen* both lend themselves to inductive and “indirect” argument. But, as we also pointed out, this did not mean that Chinese were not able to use deductive or mixed methods of argument. We provided examples of texts where writers adopted a deductive arrangement of ideas. We argue, therefore, that the socio-political context, in particular the relative relationship between speaker/writer and listener/hearer, is at least as important as culture in determining the ways in which people arrange argument and persuade. This is as true of Chinese rhetoric as of any other rhetoric.

We also showed that the Chinese rhetorical tradition was diverse and dynamic. On occasion the flowery *pianwen* style was promoted, while at others, the *guwen* classical style of plain speaking was required, as exemplified in Chen Kui’s *Rules of Writing*. The debate between content and form has a long history in China.

We also argued that some of the rhetorical features which have been ascribed to Western influence since the turn of the twentieth century and since the development of rhetoric as a discrete discipline in China can, in fact, be found in traditional Chinese rhetoric. Contemporary evidence for this can be found in the advice given in contemporary texts on Chinese writing and composition which we analysed in Chapter 10. It is important to note, however, the irony that the majority of Chinese university students are now given more instruction on how to write in English than in how to write in Chinese. Only Chinese majors currently obtain in-depth knowledge of the Chinese rhetorical tradition.

This is one reason why we suggested in Chapter 9 that contemporary Chinese, whether they represent the government or its critics, have failed to create a new rhetorical style suitable for twenty-first-century public and political discourse in which citizens and the government can engage in critical debate. Instead, both sides have adopted a style that combines the imperious “top-down” style along with an agonistic “cultural-revolution” approach. We provided the examples of *Charter 08* and the Tiananmen mothers’ *Open Letter* as examples of this aggressive accusatory style. These documents follow a “top-down” or *yang* style, and thus more likely to inflame than persuade the Chinese authorities. The

current lack of an accepted rhetorical style of public discourse means that it is currently impossible for civic-minded Chinese to engage in constructive public debate. As we write (March 2011) several more “dissidents” have been arrested for “subversion.” The practical writing taught to Chinese majors aims to serve the State and bureaucracy rather than constructively challenge it. As well as being an introduction to Chinese rhetoric and writing, this book also represents a plea that the extraordinarily rich and diverse rhetorical tradition of traditional China be re-instated into school and university curricula. A knowledge of the precepts of traditional Chinese rhetoric, an understanding of the principles of information and argument sequencing, along with a study of textual and rhetorical styles could lead to the development of new rhetorical styles “with Chinese characteristics” which would be appropriate for constructive and critical public discourse.

In conclusion, we hope that this book has offered insights into and an understanding of the Chinese rhetorical tradition. We hope that we have demonstrated that, as well as differences, there are many similarities between the Chinese rhetorical tradition and the Western rhetorical tradition.

In the Introduction to the book, we expressed the hope that it would encourage debate about what we referred to as the “primacy” of Anglo-American rhetoric. As the world becomes increasingly pluricentric, we argue that it is crucial that we learn about the rhetorical traditions of other cultures and that we consider ways in which the dissemination of knowledge can become increasingly multilateral. In the specific case of China, as China becomes increasingly powerful and important, it would seem no more than wise, to repeat Shi-Xu’s admonition we quoted in the Introduction, to stress that we cannot understand China “without also understanding what it says, how it says things, how its current discourses are connected with its past and those of other cultures” (224–45). This has been the aim of this book.