

# Rhetoric as the art of listening : concepts of persuasion in the first eleven chapters of the Guiguizi

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Joachim Gentz

## Rhetoric as the Art of Listening: Concepts of Persuasion in the First Eleven Chapters of the *Guiguzi*

**Abstract:** The first eleven chapters of the book *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子 are ascribed to Master Guigu, the alleged teacher of the two famous rhetoricians Su Qin 蘇秦 and Zhang Yi 張儀. These chapters provide a methodological approach to the art of persuasion which is fundamentally different from European rhetoric. Whereas European rhetoric, originating in Greek rhetoric, is mainly concerned with the persuasion of big audiences in public forums and institutions such as assemblies (the agora as birthplace of democracy) and courtrooms, the persuasive strategies in the *Guiguzi* mainly focus on the involvement with an individual counterpart. In the *Guiguzi* listening to and assessing the particular type of opponent and then taking advantage of his individual preferences is most decisive for the success of persuasion. The *Guiguzi* does not teach how to formulate a perfect piece of rhetorical art which accords to all rules of a commonly shared system of persuasive logic as it is known from European rhetorical traditions. From this different approach also follows a different set of systematic problems in the art of persuasion. The typology of formal figures of speech, so important in European rhetoric, is not as important as the exact typology of human characters which have to be correctly identified to be correlated to the types of speech which have the greatest persuasive effect on them. Each of the eleven chapters discusses a particular method of persuasion in an analysis of different aspects of the communicative process in which persuasion takes place. Together they appear as a handbook on the dynamic process of persuasion, a persuasion that evolves in a dialogic encounter not in a monologic performance as in European rhetoric.

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或問：「儀、秦學乎鬼谷術，而習乎縱橫言，安中國者各有十餘年。是夫？」曰：「詐人也，聖人惡諸。」

– 揚雄《法言》<sup>1</sup>

Someone asked: “[Zhang] Yi and [Su] Qin studied Guigu’s arts and learned diplomatic and strategic (*zongheng*) doctrines; each put the Central States at peace for more than ten years, is this true?” Reply: “They were deceivers. Sages despise them!”

– Yang Xiong, *Fayan*

## 1 Guiguzi, the man and the book

Guiguzi is traditionally known as the founder of the *zonghengjia* 縱橫家 (School of Vertical and Horizontal Alliances), the school of travelling persuaders or diplomats, the most outstanding masters of rhetoric and persuasion in early China. Yet in many books and articles on Chinese rhetoric he is not even mentioned once. That he has generally received so little scholarly attention in Chinese Studies is mainly due to the uncertain dating of the text *Guiguzi* and the little information we have on the (pseudo-)historical person Guiguzi. In the following paper I will therefore first give a short overview on what we know about the man Guiguzi and the text *Guiguzi*. I will then discuss the text and present an interpretation of its concept of persuasion to finally reflect on its contribution to the general discussion of Chinese rhetoric.

The *Shiji* 史記 is the earliest source to mention a person named Guiguzi as the teacher of Su Qin 蘇秦 (?–284 BC) and Zhang Yi 張儀 (?–310 BC) in their respective *liezhuan* 列傳 biographies.<sup>2</sup> As they became famous diplomats and well-known for their art of persuasion, Guiguzi became known as the founder of the political *zongheng* school and as a master of persuasion.<sup>3</sup> A Guigu xiansheng 鬼谷先生 (Master of the Demon’s Glen) or Guiguzi is mentioned in some Han 漢 and early post-Han sources (Chen Chong 陳崇 [fl. AD 3], Yang Xiong 揚雄 [53 BC–18 AD], Guo Pu 郭璞 [276–324 AD]).<sup>4</sup> But none of the dynastic histories provide us with a full-fledged biography of Guiguzi. We have no biographical information of him other than that he lived a secluded life in the Gui 鬼 Glen.<sup>5</sup> In the popular lore of

<sup>1</sup> “Yuanqian” 淵齋 chapter, section 8, Wang 1987: 442, transl. Coyle 1999: 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Shiji* 69:2241 and 70:2279.

<sup>3</sup> Theunissen 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Broschat 1985:1, fn 1.

<sup>5</sup> Later commentaries trying to identify this place either link it to other places with the same name (several Demon’s Glens are mentioned in the dynastic histories) or to the homophonous Glen of Return (歸谷).



Ming (1368–1644) times Guiguzi becomes one of the tutelary spirits of divination who is venerated as the patriarch of “physiognomy” (*xiangshu* 相術) and associated with astrological methods of divination.<sup>6</sup> The text *Guiguzi* has two parts. The first twelve chapters form a unit. The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter might be a postface that was added later from some other source as it is identical with chapter 55 (“Jiu Shou” 九守, “Nine things to be preserved”) of the *Guanzi* 管子. It is this first part of the text which deals with methods of persuasion and which is of interest for us. Two further chapters, “Zhuan wan” 轉丸 13 (“Rolling a pill”) and “Qu luan” 祛亂 14 (“Provoke disorder”), which according to Liu Xie’s 劉勰 early 6<sup>th</sup> century *Wenxin diaolong* 文心彫龍 deal with “skilful words” (*qiao ci* 巧辭) and “refined methods” (*jing shu* 精術), have been lost. The second part consists of three chapters which have a strong Daoist and cosmological tinge. The first part of the *Guiguzi* is regarded by most Chinese scholars<sup>7</sup> as a pre-Qin work.<sup>8</sup> Western scholars are more sceptical. Michael Loewe, for example, decided not to include the *Guiguzi* in his *Early Chinese Texts*. Broschat in his detailed discussion of the textual history of the text remains sceptical and leaves the dating issue open. The earliest source referring to the text *Guiguzi* is Pei Yin’s 裴駟 (fl. 438) *Jijie* 集解 commentary in the *Shiji* 史記. He states that the *Guiguzi* (also called *Baihe ce* 捭闔策 or *Benjing yinfu qishu* 本經陰符七術) has the chapters “Chuai” 揣 and “Mo” 摩.<sup>9</sup> The title *Guiguzi* is first mentioned in the early seventh century book catalogue (“Jingji zhi” 經籍志) of the *Suishu* 隋書. As this catalogue was largely based on Ruan Xiaoxu’s 阮孝緒 (479–536) *Qilu* 七錄<sup>10</sup> (*Seven Records*) this bibliographical record might go back to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. From the early titles we might infer that the text was a compilation of at least two parts: *Baihe ce* 捭闔策 and *Benjing yinfu qishu* 本經陰符七術 and was probably written and/or compiled by several authors. From Liu Zongyuan’s 柳宗元 (773–819) refutation of the book in his essay “Bian *Guiguzi*” 辯鬼谷子 we know that the book he saw bears strong resemblance to our current version.

The *Suishu* “Jingji zhi” lists a *Guiguzi* with a commentary by Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215–282). The Japanese bibliography *Nihonkoku genzai shomokuroku* 日本國見在書目錄 (Catalogue of Chinese books present in Japan) compiled in 891 by Fujiwara Sukeyo 藤原佐世 (847–897) who modelled his catalogue after the

<sup>6</sup> Durand-Dastès 2010: 7–9.

<sup>7</sup> Yu Yan 1937, Zhao Tiehan 1957, Xu Fuhong 2012, etc.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed introduction into the textual history of the *Guiguzi* see Broschat 1985: 19–55.

<sup>9</sup> *Shiji* 69:2242.

<sup>10</sup> *Suishu* 34:1005.



*Suishu* “Jingjizhi”,<sup>11</sup> also gives Huangfu Mi as commentator. Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (ca. 1105–ca. 1180) is the first who mentions a commentary by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (431–536) in his *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 (*Records of Reading the Books in the Jun Studio*, preface of 1151). Tao’s commentary is the earliest commentary on the *Guiguzi* extant today. These early commentaries might be taken as *ante quem* indicators for dating the text. Yet, both Huang and Tao are often used as pseudo authors or commentators for mysterious books. Their authorship is therefore not reliable. There is another hypothesis that the *Guiguzi* is a blending of the two (lost) works *Suzi* 蘇子 and *Zhangzi* 張子 ascribed to his students Su Qin and Zhang Yi and listed in the *Hanshu* 漢書 “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志. But no reliable evidence supports this claim. Fragments of the lost *Suzi* do not bear any resemblance to the *Guiguzi*.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Interpretation of the text

Many scholars have claimed that the first part of the text is about persuasion and rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> Yet, most of the topics discussed in the text deal with forms of interaction that are not connected to linguistic communication but rather to different forms of observation and assessment of an interlocutor, and calculation as well as epistemological reflections. Even those chapters that relate to persuasive techniques do not focus on these as central topics but mention rhetoric as one of several possible fields of interaction. This can be illustrated by a short overview of the chapters. The chapter titles mostly consist of analytical key terms which are introduced and defined in the chapter and used as central analytical tools.

### 1. “Bai He” 捭闔: Opening Up and Closing Down

This chapter introduces and defines a number of basic principles of interaction presented in the correlative mode. The main principles are *bai* and *he*, to open and to close, prodding and ceasing. These are correlated with Yin 陰 and Yang 陽,

<sup>11</sup> Shively et al. 1999: 345.

<sup>12</sup> Broschat 1985:26.

<sup>13</sup> Broschat 1985: 2: “The overall concerns are clearly with the subject of persuasion.” 3: “Rhetoric is clearly the subject matter of GGZ.” Metcalf 2001: 42: “With the exception of the *Guiguzi*’s last chapter which presents a relatively superficial philosophy, the entire text is devoted to practical aspects of persuasion.” Coyle 1999: 147: “The ‘primary text’ (1–11) is at once a manual of persuasion and a strategical treatise on the processional order of things.”

beginning and end, moving and staying still etc., i.e. concepts that are used throughout the book.

## 2. “Fan Ying” 反應: Retreating and Responding

This chapter basically deals with an epistemological problem: how can we know something about others? How can we find out the character of someone else to know how to best deal with him? It introduces a number of techniques of going back and forth between oneself and the other to gain insight into the individual dispositions and discover strengths and weaknesses by provoking reactions, by means of active listening and techniques of “fishing” (*diao* 釣, also “hooking” *gou* 鉤 in chapter 5).

## 3. “Nei Jian” 內撻: Internal Bonds

This chapter talks about creating internal bonds as basic conditions for successful interaction. It is in my view the most difficult chapter of the first part, first of all because it has a complicated structure of basic statements and commentarial layers, and secondly, because it is particularly difficult to relate it to the other chapters and to understand its peculiar function within the overall composition of the first part.

## 4. “Di Xi” 抵巇: Repelling Fissures

This chapter discusses fissures or cracks in the social, political or moral order. The occurrence of these fissures has to be carefully observed as they lead to vulnerability and demise. How to discover and close these fissures by using different methods to nip problems in the bud is the main theme of the chapter.

## 5. “Fei Qian” 飛箝: Making (someone) Fly and Manacling

This chapter describes a strategy of hooking people by first assessing them, then exciting and attracting them with something they like (“making them fly”) and then hooking them (“manacling”) to manipulate them in the way one wants.

## 6. “Wu He” 忤合: Disagreeing and Agreeing

This chapter discusses the problem that any position one takes stands against the position of someone else. It analyses ways of deciding which side should be taken (and with what to agree and to disagree accordingly).

## 7. “Chuai” 揣: Figuring Out

This chapter explains the ways in which the two most important aspects of an adversary should be “figured out”: the military power of the state and the personal circumstances of the leader(s) in regard to how they can be persuaded.



8. “Mo” 摩: Touching<sup>14</sup>

This chapter talks about techniques of touching others psychologically to check out how their feelings can be met and what they easily respond to.

## 9. “Quan” 權: Weighing

This chapter is not about weighing (which is an important topic in other chapters) but about different kinds of talking to different people according to their social roles and individual preferences.

## 10. “Mou” 謀: Planning

This chapter talks about conditions of co-operations, how to discover weak points of the counterpart and how to draw consequences.

## 11. “Jue” 決: Deciding

This chapter is a short reflection on what a decision is, how a decision is made and why.

## 12. “Fu Yan” 符言: Matching Speech

This chapter consists of nine paragraphs which explain how certain actions should be conducted in the best way. These nine actions do not play any role in the preceding chapters and appear as new topics. It is virtually identical with chapter 55 “Jiu shou” 九守 of the *Guanzi* and is probably not part of the original textual unit of the *Guiguzi*.

Tsao Ding-ren sees a progressive sequence in the arrangement of the chapters:

From the most basic functions of speech/silence, action/non-action (*pai-ho* – opening up and closing down), knowing oneself and the past events (*fan-ying* – reflection and responses), one proceeds to figure out (*chuai*) things beyond oneself and the past, to know other people and other relevant information. Once the information is at hand, one uses stroking (*mo*) to make sure. Then, one can weigh and evaluate (*chuan* – weighing) this information to use it in the planning (*mou*) of a strategy of persuasion. Then, four specific methods are provided for more specific purposes: *nei-chien* – the internal bonds through which persuasion works, *ti-hsi* – dealing with fissures, i.e., the less than perfect situations, *fei-chien* – making fly and manacled, which deals with attracting talent, and *wu-ho* – disagreeing and agreeing, which helps deciding whom to turn to and whom to turn against. Finally, there is a brief instruction on decision making.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> If palpating could be conceptualised on a psychological level (such as “abtasten” in German) this would be a good translation for the Chinese concept of *mo* 摩.

<sup>15</sup> Tsao 1985: 1 (abstract). Note that the four chapters with the “specific methods” come between the chapters “Mo” and “Quan”.



Metcalf equally sees a development in the chapters “which are arranged in an order that sequentially describes how to establish, cultivate, and control a relationship.”<sup>16</sup> I don’t see such a clear line in the book. Chapter two, “Fan ying”, for example, is not just about oneself but deals with the interaction between oneself and an interlocutor which includes figuring out things, touching, weighing and planning. Chapters 1–11 all appear to deal with one theme, but highlighting different aspects of it. The main theme running through all of the chapters is the process of winning somebody’s affections in order to manipulate him or her. Although each of the first eleven chapters focuses on certain aspects of this theme they all contain several elements of the entire process. The chapters use an identical core of analytical terms, many of which are unique to this text and are not used in other early texts. They allude to the main themes and chapter-specific analytical terms of the other chapters and thus form a coherent discourse which indicates that the process they are describing is one and the same. Chapter-specific themes are condensed in most of the chapter titles (chapter 9 “Quan” 權 is an exception). Chapter 1 uses and defines a number of terms which are taken up in the later chapters. It introduces most systematically the notion of Yin and Yang for the context of persuasion and it uses the terms *zhoumi* 周密 (“disseminating and concealing”), *fanfu* 反覆 (“returning”), and *fanwu* 反忤 (“counteracting”) which play a central role in chapters 2, 6 and 8. Chapter 2 builds on the correlations that were defined in chapter 1: “The speech of others is movement, the silence of oneself is tranquillity” (人言者，動也。己默者，靜也。). Chapter 3 uses the central term (and title) *chuai* 揣 (“figuring out”) from chapter 7. Chapter 4 makes use of the central concept (and title) of chapter one: *bai he* 捭闔 (“opening and closing”). Chapter 5 uses the central concept (and title) *di xi* 抵巇 (“dealing with fissures”) of the preceding chapter 4. Chapter 6 uses the central concept (and title) *fei qian* 飛箝 (“making fly and manacled”) of the preceding chapter 5. Chapter 8 uses the term *zhoumi* 周密 (“disseminating and concealing”) from chapter 1 and the central term (and title) *chuai* 揣 (“figuring out”) from chapter 7. Chapter 9 uses (in some editions) the concept *kai bi* 開閉 (“opening and closing”) from the first chapter. Chapter 10 applies the term *chuai qing* 揣情 (“figuring out the situation”) that is also used in chapter seven and uses the term *mo* 摩 (“touching”) which is also the title of chapter eight.

Most of the chapters (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11) explain the method of “investigating” (*shen* 審), “exploring” (*cha* 察) and of “measuring” or “gauging” things (*du* 度, *liang* 量, *quan* 權, *chuai* 揣, *jiao* 校, *liao* 料) to get to know the political, social or psychological “situation” (*qing* 情) and to get it under control. Other

<sup>16</sup> Metcalf 2001: 42.



central concepts are *yin* 因 (“adapting/complying”), *cong* 從 (“following”), *qiu* 求 (“seeking”), *fu* 符 (“according”), *ying* 應 (“responding”), *yin* 隱 (“hiding”), *shu* 數 (“calculating”), and *bian* 變 (“changing”).

The composition of these eleven chapters thus resembles a fractal structure in which each part represents a constitutive aspect of the whole and yet at the same time also reflects the whole in its entirety. The analytical keywords of the titles gain weight as leading concepts which form the main analytical categories of the overall discourse. The chapters are written as essays that follow and further explore these conceptual terms. This is reminiscent of dictionary or commentary genres. The chapters appear much weaker if they are read separately and not in an inter-related way. If we put the general theme of the textual mosaic into a larger picture we recognise the main theme as a complex process of manipulating and controlling people which can be described in the following stages:<sup>17</sup>

The basic premise mentioned in several of the chapters (especially chap. 6) is that nothing is constant and everything is subject to change. To preserve order in a changing world, humans therefore have to follow the changes according to their times. One way to know how to change according to the times is to study the patterns of change in the past. The future can thereby be known. The present age can also be better comprehended. The first stage in the process of manipulation is to find out whose position is identical with your own position and whose is different, who is right and who is wrong, who is acceptable and who is not, who is “in” (*nei* 內) and who is “out” (*wai* 外) etc.<sup>18</sup> (beginning of chap. 5). One thus defines one’s own position vis-à-vis others to become aware of the mutual relationship and to decide to whom one should turn and against whom one should position oneself (chap. 6). In order to then develop an efficient strategy of manipulating the counterpart (mostly the ruler) and persuade him to follow one’s own course (and not that of others), one first has to measure and assess the situation and personality of the interlocutor (the ruler) in great detail. This can be done by gathering objective formal data on the one hand, and by figuring out the individual disposition of one’s interlocutor by provoking his feelings, by active listening and other techniques that animate or even force him to reveal himself on the other (chap. 2, 7). Once one has ascertained all the necessary empirical data, one can

<sup>17</sup> I am not sure whether the following sequence given in chap. 10 refers to this overall process that is laid out in the first eleven chapters: 變生事。事生謀。謀生計。計生議。議生。生進。進生退。退生制。 “Change gives rise to matters, matters give rise to plans, plans give rise to strategies, strategies give rise to discussions, discussions give rise to persuasions, persuasions give rise to initiatives, initiatives give rise to withdrawal, withdrawal gives rise to control” (cf. Xu 2012: 150).

<sup>18</sup> 必先察同異，別是非之語，見內外之辭。Xu 2012: 76.



start to develop a strategy and plan how one will proceed to make and keep him compliant through all the constant changes. By observing the principles of opening and closing (chap. 1), one can control fissures in the socio-political and moral order caused by the tensions of changing circumstances, and one can ensure that these fissures which might lead to a personal alienation or a deviating position are always closed (chap. 4).<sup>19</sup> An important technique to draw the ruler to one's side is to entice him by offering him something he can identify with. This is compared to baiting a fish and hooking it by making a sudden move. One can hook one's interlocutor by arousing his feelings through offering him exactly the kind of things he likes (chap. 2, 8). This is when the art of persuasion finally appears on the scene. One needs to actuate exactly the kind of talk which is appropriate to the individual character of the person who is to be persuaded (chap. 9). As a consequence different kinds of decisions will be made according to changing conditions (chap. 11).

The chapters in the *Guiguzi* are essayistic reflections which expand in great detail on the different stages and aspects of this process of manipulation at the end of which comes the art of persuasion which leads to a certain decision. In the two parts of his *Either-Or* (*Enten-Eller* 1843)<sup>20</sup> Søren Kierkegaard contrasts and explores an aesthetic and an ethical mode as two alternative ways of leading a life. The last section of the first part ("Diary of a Seducer") describes in great detail the subtle art of manipulation. The main protagonist uses all his skills to manipulate a relationship with a female by using irony, artifice, caprice, imagination and arbitrariness to engineer poetically satisfying possibilities for himself. He is not so much interested in the act of seduction as in wilfully creating its interesting possibilities. What makes this work so interesting for our reading of the *Guiguzi* is that it illustrates a number of its principles in practice and clearly shows the subordinate role that rhetoric plays in this game. Language is used as an important tool but it remains just one among many others. The art of manipulation is to a great extent *beyond* language as the *Guiguzi* demonstrates in his chapters on measuring and subtle observation. Yet, persuasion is not just one of the continuous themes in the *Guiguzi*, it is the outstanding and final technique to achieve the desired decision. All other techniques are merely supplementary and

<sup>19</sup> Using the term *xi* 隙 (crack, fissure, also: personal divides) which is also used in the *Guiguzi* here, the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 expounds a similar idea in chapter 27 "yong ren" 用人 ("Employing Others"): 如此，則人臣為隙穴，而人主獨立。以隙穴之臣而事獨立之主，此之謂危殆。 "In such a situation the ministers are thus estranged and the ruler is isolated. If estranged ministers serve an isolated ruler, this is what is called a dangerous situation." Chen Qiyou 1974: 500.

<sup>20</sup> University bookshop Reitzel, Copenhagen.



serve as supports to prepare the scene for the final act of persuasion. It therefore makes sense to regard this book as a manual of persuasion.

### 3 The literary form of the *Guiguizi*

For several reasons, however, it is difficult to represent the process envisioned by the *Guiguizi* in textual form. First, the process itself is so far beyond language that it is difficult to learn persuasion by reading about it. Second, the process has to be learned as an oral practice of communication, not as a practice of composing texts or performing speeches. The efficacy of persuasion is conceptualised in the dynamic process of a dialogical interaction, not in the dynamic of a monological performance.<sup>21</sup> The result is not a static piece of rhetorical art that realises the perfection of aesthetic rules like a Greek statue, but the art of flexible moving and finding a balance in a field of interpersonal power tensions. Most examples of persuasion in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 or the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 are presented in the form of speeches that argue brilliantly according to fixed rules. Like most of the outstanding exempla of persuasion in the West, these speeches can be analysed by focusing on the rhetorical construction of their linguistic form performed by an outstanding individual. In contrast, the art of persuasion in the *Guiguizi* is not about an awesome performance of a great self. It is all about the counterpart and about keeping oneself hidden and silent so that the counterpart cannot see what one is doing and, ideally, is convinced that his decisions were made all by himself. In the *Guiguizi* the art of talking is contingent upon the art of listening. The persuader is not a great stage performer but a *Master of Disguise*. Yet, the literary form and rhetoric of the *Guiguizi* itself is a presentation of general principles, analogies, detailed descriptions and listings of artifices. The technique of providing different perspectives on an identical theme is a method to achieve abstraction. We are nevertheless surprised that the persuasive process is presented by the *Guiguizi* in the form of a monologue without any illustrations. This seems to be a contradiction to the text's own principles. But how could it be presented differently?

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<sup>21</sup> See on this point also Crump 1964: 101.



### 3.1 The queen of Chao and the old commander

The *Zhanguo ce* provides a brilliant illustration of *Guiguzi*'s principles with a striking example of how the philosophy of the *Guiguzi* could be presented in a historical narrative of a dialogue<sup>22</sup>:

觸龍說趙太后

趙太后新用事，秦急攻之。趙氏求救於齊。齊曰：「必以長安君為質，兵乃出。」太后不肯，大臣強諫。太后明謂左右：「有復言令長安君為質者，老婦必唾其面。」

左師觸龍言願見太后。太后盛氣而揖之。入而徐趨，至而自謝，曰：「老臣病足，曾不能疾走。不得見久矣，竊自恕，而恐太后玉體之有所郤也，故願望見太后。」太后曰：「老婦恃輦而行。」曰：「日食飲得無衰乎？」曰：「恃鬻耳。」曰：「老臣今者殊不欲食，乃自強步，日三、四里，少益嗜食，和於身也。」太后曰：「老婦不能。」太后之色少解。

左師公曰：「老臣賤息舒祺，最少，不肖。而臣衰，竊愛憐之，願令得補黑衣之數，以衛王宮。沒死以聞。」太后曰：「敬諾。年幾何矣？」對曰：「十五歲矣。雖少，願及未填溝壑而託之。」太后曰：「丈夫亦愛憐其少子乎？」對曰：「甚於婦人。」太后笑曰：「婦人異甚！」對曰：「老臣竊以為媼之愛燕后，賢於長安君。」曰：「君過矣！不若長安君之甚。」

左師公曰：「父母之愛子，則為之計深遠。媼之送燕后也，持其踵，為之泣，念悲其遠也！亦哀之矣。已行，非弗思也，祭祀必祝之，祝曰：『必勿使反！』豈非計久長，有子孫相繼為王也哉？」太后曰：「然。」左師公曰：「今三世以前，至於趙之為趙，趙主之子孫侯者，其繼有在者乎？」曰：「無有。」曰：「微獨趙，諸侯有在者乎？」曰：「老婦不聞也。」「此其近者禍及身，遠者及其子孫。豈人主之子孫則必不善哉？位尊而無功，奉厚而無勞，而挾重器多也。今媼尊長安君之位，而封之以膏腴之地，多予之重器，而不及今令有功於國。一旦山陵崩，長安君何以自託於趙？老臣以媼為長安君計短也，故以為其愛不若燕后。」太后曰：「諾！恣君之所使之！」於是為長安君約車百乘，質於齊，齊兵乃出。

Chu Long Advises the Dowager Queen.

When the Dowager Queen of Zhao first took charge of state affairs, Qin launched a sudden attack. Zhao sent a request for aid to Qi, but Qi replied, "We will dispatch troops only if you send the Lord of Chang'an to us as a good-faith hostage." The Queen flatly refused. Her ministers strongly remonstrated with her, but she told them in no uncertain terms, "I will spit in the face of the next person who tells me I must send the Lord of Chang'an as a hostage!" The General of the Left, Chu Long, requested an audience with the Dowager Queen. She was sitting in a rage awaiting him as he entered the hall. Though he made an effort to hurry, he shuffled very slowly across to stand before her. "Your aged servant has an injured leg," he apologized. "I cannot walk very quickly. That is why it has been very long since I have been able to come see you. From my own ills I felt a sense of empathy, and concerned that your majesty might also be suffering from some ailment I have looked eagerly for an opportunity to visit your majesty." The Queen replied, "I myself must depend upon a sedan chair to move about." "May I trust that your majesty's appetite remains healthy?" "I live entirely on gruel." "I find that I am frequently without any appetite at all now," said Chu Long, "and so I force myself to walk three or four li each day. It lets me find a little pleasure in my food, and it is good for my body." "I could not manage as much," said the Queen. Her

<sup>22</sup> Translation by Robert Eno 2010. Compare the translation by Crump 1970: 332–333, no. 262: The queen of Chao and the old commander (repr. 1996: 318–319).



fierce countenance had somewhat relaxed. Chu Long said, "I have an offspring named Shuqi, my youngest son. He is a worthless youth, but in my dotage I love him dearly and wish that he could wear the black robes of the Palace Guard. And so your aged servant makes this request at the risk of his life!" "I am pleased to approve it," said the Queen. "How old is he?" "Only fifteen," replied Chu Long. "Very young indeed. But it has been my hope to see him well taken care of before I fall by the wayside." "So men too dote upon their young sons?" asked the Queen. "More than women," replied Chu Long. "Oh no," laughed the Queen. "With mothers it is an extraordinary thing!" "And yet," continued Chu Long, "if I may be so bold, it seems your majesty loves your daughter, the Queen of Yan, more than your son, the Lord of Chang'an." "You are mistaken," replied the Queen. "I am much fonder of the Lord of Chang'an." "When parents love their children," said Chu Long, "they plan for their futures with great care. When you sent off your daughter off upon her marriage to the king of Yan, you clung to her heels and wept, bereft with grief that she was departing far away. But once she was gone, you prayed at every sacrifice saying, 'Let her not return!' It was not that you did not long for her, but that you were set on her future, and hoped that her sons and grandsons would one day sit upon the throne in Yan." "Yes, that is so" said the Queen. "Now, from the time that Zhao first became a state until three generations ago, was there any younger son of the royal family who held an estate as a marquis whose descendants still hold that title?" "No," said the Queen. "And this is not only so in Zhao. In other states, are there any descendants of such younger sons still in possession of the ranks of their forbears?" "I have not heard of any." "In some of those cases," said Chu Long, "the younger son met disaster in his lifetimes; in other cases it was his sons or grandson who encountered misfortune. How could it be that every such younger son was unworthy? Misfortune came to them because they were granted high honors without having achieved any merit, awarded rich gifts of land without having worked for them, and bestowed great emblems of rank and office. Now your majesty has honored your son with the title Lord of Chang'an and given him an estate of rich and fertile lands, bestowing on him great emblems of rank and office. Yet to this day you have not allowed him to do anything to win merit for the state of Zhao. Should the unthinkable happen and your majesty suddenly pass from the scene, what support could he rely on in the state of Zhao? It is because it seemed to me that you had not planned very carefully for his future that I presumed you did not seem to care as much for him as for your daughter, the Queen of Yan." "All right," replied the Dowager Queen. "I leave it to you to arrange things as you see fit."

Thereupon the Lord of Chang'an was provided an escort of a hundred chariots and sent off as a good-faith hostage, and the troops of Qi were quickly dispatched.

(*Zhanguo ce*, "Zhao ce" 286)

We rarely see the process of applying manipulative principles so nicely presented as in this *Zhanguo ce* anecdote. And again, we see very little rhetoric here. No brilliant speech, no refined literary forms. Just a number of seemingly unrelated themes that are used to educe easy common sense commitments to certain values from the Dowager Queen and a number of very subtle questions following these commitments. Chu Long starts with evoking her sympathy by presenting himself as weak and old, someone whom she does not have to be afraid of, someone whom she can identify with and someone who apparently did not come to discuss



the sensitive matter of the Lord of Chang'an but to share his empathic concerns about her health. She therefore relaxes (*Taihou zhi se shao jie* 太后之色少解 “the Dowager Queen’s [fierce] countenance had somewhat relaxed”), and it is in this very moment when she opens up (“starts to fly”). She comes to trust Chu Long such that he starts to talk about his son and pretends to disclose the real motive for his visit. The Dowager Queen feels so secure in her role as generous and human ruler that she even starts joking with him, such that she seems not to notice that Chu Long all of a sudden directs the conversation into a different direction. The conversation evolves naturally from the harmless theme introduced before although it involves, quite unexpectedly, the Lord of Chang'an, hooking her with this unexpected move. Now that he has “figured out her feelings” (*chuai qing* 揣情) he continues with an argument that still seems to be unrelated to the matter that enrages her so much and seems to talk about her motherly care. Chu Long links her motherly care with the question whether she planned as carefully for the future of her son as she did for the future of her daughter. He is thereby able to suddenly connect this seemingly unrelated question (which concerns the Queen very much) with the actual political situation, providing an entirely new perspective on the case. In the end Chu Long is out of trouble as he did not bring up the topic himself but presents his remonstrance perfectly disguised as if he just responded to the Dowager Queen’s question of why he thought that she cared more about her daughter than about her son, something she wanted to know and had asked him. Eno writes:

It is likely that this account was preserved in the *Intrigues* because it so gracefully exemplifies a cardinal lesson of persuasion: that one’s rhetorical moves much match the mood and character of the ruler addressed. Persuasion was not simply a matter of memorizing a bag of tricks; it was an art, as this anecdote clearly intends to illustrate.<sup>23</sup>

But this anecdote is exceptional in the *Zhanguo ce* which mainly consists of monologues, thereby distinguishing itself from the *Shuiyuan* 說苑, for example, in which Liu Xiang 劉向 mainly collected dialogues. Yet these mostly operate with clever and insightful sayings/responses which are used more like formulas, in the manner *Shi* 詩 or *Shu* 書 quotations are used. We do find similar dialogues like the above also in the *Mengzi* 孟子, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子<sup>24</sup> and the remonstrance literature. It therefore is quite astonishing that we do not find any such anecdote in the text of the *Guiguzi*, although it analyses exactly the kind of persuasive process which finds such masterly literary forms in other texts.

<sup>23</sup> Eno 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., e.g., the analysis of chapter 30 “Shuo jian” 說劍 in Graziani 2009.



## 4 The implied reader of the *Guiguzi*

The *Guiguzi* addresses readers that search for advice about how to effectively persuade their superiors. It does not reflect upon the consequences which these rhetorical skills may entail for techniques of governance and does not offer advice to rulers about how to protect themselves against such intrusive techniques of manipulation. In this respect the *Hanfeizi* appears like a response to the first part of the *Guiguzi* written from the perspective of the ruler (who could likewise be the addressee in the *Guiguzi*). Discussing parallels between the arts of war and rhetoric Albert Galvany eloquently points out the particular consequences which are drawn in the *Hanfeizi* to protect the ruler against exactly those techniques which are elaborated so perspicuously in the *Guiguzi*.

Besieged not only by the suggestive eloquence of wordsmiths, the sovereign is also exposed to their indiscreet gaze which seeks to detect and decipher his deepest emotions as they attempt to arouse his passions, desires and aversions through the power of their words. [...] However, in the exposition of all this in the *Han Feizi*, the ideal ruler must not be content with camouflaging his emotions and preventing them from coming to the surface and being detected by his subordinates but, still more radically, he must also completely suppress all his inclinations, preferences and aversions, which is to say all the elements of his emotional constitution. [...] In this resolute process of divestment, of emptying and even dehumanisation, the sovereign needs to take on all the negative characteristics of the Way that will attest to his superiority and command: he must appear as impassive, serene, immobile, invisible, unknowable, and so on. [...] Concealed in the depths of his palace, the sovereign remains in a perfect state of quiescence and inactivity and, without the least sign of emotion, he neutralises the attempts of his underlings to adjust their oral interventions to his leanings and predispositions, thus obliging them, as I have noted, to present themselves as simple (*su*) and straight (*zheng*). Now divested of any kind of determination, the sovereign becomes indistinguishable from spirits and phantoms. Like them, unseen he sees, unheard he hears, and unknown he knows. Just as, when one turns to the invisible spirits, there is no place for calculation or measurements (*shen zhi ge si, bu ke du si*), before this subtle, ineffable sovereign, subordinates are unable to scheme in advance and are forced to behave exactly as they are. [...] Making the best possible use of the information procured by his networks of surveillance and espionage, the impenetrable opacity in which he is shrouded, and the fact that the ones who must speak (and hence reveal themselves) are his possible adversaries, while he remains silent, the ideal sovereign conceived by the *Han Feizi* engineers a total disarming of the wily-tongued orators.<sup>25</sup>

This kind of entirely detached and undetermined attitude, envisioned as the strongest position within the struggle of persuasions in the *Hanfeizi*, is nowhere visible in the *Guiguzi*. In the first part we rather find a balance of opening up and

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<sup>25</sup> Galvany 2012: 30–34.



showing oneself on the one hand and closing and hiding oneself on the other, as two different strategies to explore the interlocutor:

或開而示之，或闔而閉之。開而示之者，同其情也。闔而閉之者，異其誠也。

[The Sage] either opens up and shows himself or he remains closed and blocks others. Someone who opens up and shows himself when he is in an identical situation with others, remains closed and blocks others when he is in a different disposition.<sup>26</sup>

*Hanfeizi* probably assumes that a ruler is always in a different disposition.

Like the *Hanfeizi* the second part of the *Guiguzi* is full of implicit references to the *Laozi* 老子, and many passages echo the first part of the *Guiguzi* like, for example, the beginning of section five of the *Basic Canon's*<sup>27</sup> *Hidden Correspondences in Seven Sections* 本經陰符七篇 *Benjing Yinfu qipian*:

散勢者，神之使也。用之必循間而動。威肅內盛。推間而行之則勢散。夫散勢者，心虛志溢，意失威勢，精神不專。其言外而多變。故觀其志意為度數，乃以揣說圖事，盡圓方，齊短長。

Dispersing power is something effected by the spirit. When applying it you have to act in pursuit of [your counterpart's] open spaces [of weakness]. If you are solemnly composed full of strength within, and if you exert it onto the open space [of your counterpart], then his power will be dispersed. Now, in case his power is dispersed, his mind is empty and his will is overflowing, his intent deteriorates and his strength is lost, his spirit is not focused and his speech misses the point and is inconsistent. You should therefore observe his will and intent, to measure the severity. You should then on this basis figure out a persuasion strategy and plan matters, fully exhaust adaptive and normative tactics and balance short-term and long-term strategies.<sup>28</sup>

The second part of the *Guiguzi* mainly deals with the strategic role of inner cultivation techniques in securing power positions, relating these to animals' hunting and protection techniques (in the titles of the sections), human inward cultivation (of subtle energies, the soul, the spirit, the mind, the thoughts, the inner organs, the intent, and the will), and outward strategic action, including speech. Yet, these techniques of inner cultivation never aim at the spirit-like, dehumanised ideal of a sovereign as outlined by Galvany above. The *Guiguzi* does not develop theories about the perfect state of rulership, it presents techniques of persuasion and of gaining power for those in deficient positions.

<sup>26</sup> Xu 2012: 9.

<sup>27</sup> As opposed to the following Middle Canon (中經 *Zhongjing*).

<sup>28</sup> Xu 2012: 222.



## 5 Conclusion

If rhetoric according to Aristotle is tentatively defined as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion”,<sup>29</sup> then the *Guiguzi* is certainly a book that teaches rhetoric. In the late 1960s Kenneth Burke defined rhetoric as *identification*. According to him rhetoric was used as a means to resolve conflicts through identification.<sup>30</sup> The *Guiguzi* frequently uses the notion of *tong* 同/通 (accordance) to express a very similar idea. Identification is one of the crucial strategies to win an interlocutor’s favour as a condition to manipulate him. The method of checking and exploring other people’s characters aims at constructing a common ground of “identical kinds” (*tonglei* 同類) to affect their feelings and exert control over them. In this very basic sense the *Guiguzi* does not differ from Western rhetoric. An important difference lies in the way people who should be persuaded are encountered. The main technique of the *Guiguzi* is empathy not imposition, negotiation not confrontation, “responsiveness” (*ying* 應) and “adaption” (*yin* 因), not normative rules and defined figures of speech, flexibility, not constant values.<sup>31</sup> In this it resembles classical Chinese military lore,<sup>32</sup> a fact of which the authors of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* were clearly aware:

善說者若巧士，因人之力以自為力；因其來而與來，因其往而與往；不設形象，與生與長；而言之與響；與盛與衰，以之所歸；力雖多，材雖勁，以制其命。順風而呼，聲不加疾也；際高而望，目不加明也；所因便也。

Someone who is adept in the art of speaking resembles a skilful wrestler who, on adapting to the adversary’s strength makes it his own by fully pulling him over when he moves towards him and by pushing him when he turns away. He does not set up his own shapes or figures but lives and grows in accordance with others, while his voice is an echo of theirs. With others he blossoms and withers whichever they turn to. However powerful or talented the other may be, he eventually takes control of his destiny. If one shouts with the wind the tone does not get louder. If one looks into the distance from an elevation the eye does not get more acute. This is just adapting to conveniences.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ἔστω δὴ ἡ ῥητορικὴ δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρησαί τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν. Cf. Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, Book 1, first sentence of chapter 2 (1355b26f.). Transl. Kennedy 2007: 37.

<sup>30</sup> Burke 1969.

<sup>31</sup> Raphals 1992 calls this “metic intelligence”. For further comparative reflections see Lloyd 1996: 74–92.

<sup>32</sup> Coyle 1999: 246, 345–347, Galvany 2012: 23. Raphals 1992: 17 speaks of “verbal warfare”.

<sup>33</sup> Chen Qiyu 2002: chap. 15.5 (“Shunshuo” 順說, opening phrase), 913. Translation partly based on Wilhelm 1971: 220–221, partly on Galvany 2012: 23 who adds in the footnote: “Su Qin 蘇秦 himself establishes an explicit relationship between the techniques of persuasion and diplomatic dexterity as a form of combat or war: Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 2008: chap. XII.5, 670–676; Sima Qian 1959: chap. LXIX, 2242–2261. See also Raphals 1992: 117–123.”



In contrast, classical Confucian positions are corrective rather than manipulative.<sup>34</sup> In the *Mengzi* or Yang Xiong's *Fayan* as cited above they denounce this approach and oppose it to the normativity of ritual correctness or uprightness.

景春曰：「公孫衍、張儀，豈不誠大丈夫哉！一怒而諸侯懼，安居而天下熄。」  
孟子曰：「是焉得為大丈夫乎！子未學禮乎？丈夫之冠也，父命之；  
女子之嫁也，母命之。往送之門，戒之曰：『往之女家，必敬必戒，無違夫子。』  
以順為正者，妾婦之道也。[...] 富貴不能淫，貧賤不能移，威武不能屈：此之謂大丈夫。」

Jing Chun said: "Gongsun Heng and Zhang Yi, these are really great men! Once angry and all the Regional Lords were frightened but when they were peaceful All under Heaven calmed down."

Mengzi said: "How can these be said to be great men? Have you not properly studied the rites? The father is responsible for the capping ceremony of a young man. The mother is responsible for the wedding ceremony of a daughter. When she accompanies her to the main door on her leaving she admonishes her and says: 'when you go to your husband's family you must be respectful and careful and do not disobey your husband.' Thus to take compliance as the correct course is the way of subordinate women. [...] When wealth and status cannot make him unbridled, poverty and mean condition cannot make him swerve from principle, and authority and power cannot make him bend: this can be called a great man."<sup>35</sup>

The difference between *Guiguzi's* art of persuasion and both the orthodox Confucian and the Western approaches to persuasion might be explained by the two fundamentally different ethical modes which provide the background for these approaches. Whereas orthodox Confucian and early Greek ethics are commonly classified as virtue ethics, the ethics of the *Guiguzi*, the *zongheng* diplomats, many of the early Chinese travelling persuaders and strategists belong to the side of consequentialism. It is probably for this reason that the *Guiguzi* has been criticised by scholars like Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元, 773–819) as "dangerous, cruel, harsh, and mean" (*xian li qiao bo* 險整峭薄). Liu further states that "fearing its deceptive words might disorder his times, and because it was so difficult to trust, scholars rightly did not speak about it."<sup>36</sup> Apart from the uncertain date of this text this might be another reason why it has been neglected for so long in our discussions on Chinese rhetoric.

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<sup>34</sup> Coyle 1999: 20, referring to Haun Saussy 1993.

<sup>35</sup> *Mengzi* 3B2. My translation.

<sup>36</sup> Liu Zongyuan 1965: 「鬼谷子後出，而險整峭薄，恐其妄言亂世，難信，學者宜其不道。」 See also Coyle 1999: 158.



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