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Author(s): Mary M. Garrett

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MARY M. GARRETT

“What Need is There of Words?” The Rhetoric of *Lǚ’s Annals* (*Lǚshi chunqiu*)

Abstract: This essay introduces *Lǚ’s Annals* (*Lǚshi chunqiu*), a classical Chinese text with a wealth of material on rhetoric. Not only does the text evaluate numerous examples of persuasion and sophistry, it also lays out a system of rhetorical precepts grounded in a distinctive ontology, that of correlative cosmology. After outlining the cosmology, epistemology, and theory of language of *Lǚ’s Annals*, I trace how these shape its rhetorical theory and practices. I then consider how the text itself works as a persuasive artifact in the light of its own strictures. The essay closes with some reflections on why this valuable resource for Classical Chinese rhetoric has been neglected.

Keywords: Lǚ Buwei, *Lǚshi chunqiu*, Classical Chinese rhetoric, correlative cosmology

INTRODUCTION

In 239 BCE the Prime Minister of Qin, the state which was soon to conquer and unite all of China, sponsored the compilation of a lengthy treatise on statecraft. The resulting book, *Lǚ’s Annals* (*Lǚshi chunqiu* [*Lǚ -shih ch’un-ch’iu*]; hereafter LSCQ),¹ has much to offer those interested in Classical Chinese rhetoric. As it expounds on the art of ruling, it also weaves in discus-

¹For the first citation I give the *pinyin* romanization, followed by the Wade-Giles romanization in brackets; Wade-Giles is older but still widely used and may be more familiar to some readers.

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sions of language, communication, and rhetoric (rhetoric in the sense of persuasive discourse).² In these discussions it presents and evaluates examples of successful and unsuccessful attempts at persuasion, of sophistry, and of unethical rhetoric, and it also lays out a system of rhetorical precepts that are motivated, in large part, by its ontology. In addition, because the book is itself a persuasive document addressed to a specific person, its own rhetorical practices can be held up to the theory it proclaims.

The LSCQ offers the further advantage of being datable to a fairly narrow time period, in contrast to many more well studied Classical Chinese works.³ The composition of the LSCQ can be dated to c. 239–c. 209 BCE, the work is attested in the bibliographies of the dynastic histories continuously up to the last dynasty, and the text itself has suffered relatively little corruption, especially compared to other pre-Han texts (pre-209 BCE). Last but not least, about a decade ago there appeared the first complete English translation, making the work available to those who read English but not Classical Chinese.⁴

For all these reasons, the LSCQ would seem to be a promising choice for those wishing to explore Chinese rhetoric. Why, then, has it been so understudied in works on Chinese rhetoric in Western languages? So far as I am aware, there are no studies devoted to the rhetoric of the LSCQ. On the contrary; it is either ignored completely or, as in Xing Lu's *Rhetoric in Ancient China*, categorized as a "secondary" source on Classical Chinese rhetoric because it was not associated with a named school of thought of the

²Some works on Chinese rhetoric consider rhetoric to be entirely arrangement and style (especially tropes and figures). Representative examples are Karl S. Y. Kao, "Rhetoric," in Wm. H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 121–137, and Ulrich Unger, *Rhetorik des klassischen Chinesisch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994).

³The transmitted manuscripts of such works as Confucius's *Analects*, *Dao de jing* [*Tao te ching*], *Zhuangzi* [*Chuang-tzu*], and *Sunzi bingfa* [*Sun-tzu ping-fa*] were written by different hands at different times, sometimes over a span of centuries, sometimes incorporating deliberate forgeries, and sometimes existed in competing versions. An essential starting-point for serious study of Classical Chinese rhetoric is Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993).

⁴John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, trans., *The Annals of Lǚ Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). This translation has the advantage of including the Chinese text. The only other translation into a European language is now quite dated; Richard Wilhelm, trans., *Frühling und Herbst des Lǚ Bu We: aus dem Chinesischen verdeutscht und erläutert* (1928; rpt. Dusseldorf: Eugen Diederichs, 1971).

fifth to third centuries BCE (it was categorized as a “mixed” (za) or syncretic text).⁵

In devaluing the LSCQ Lu Xing is echoing what had been a prejudice against multi-authored works in sinological studies as well. In addition, sinologists of a previous generation had dismissed the LSCQ as muddled and inconsistent. However, more recent and careful scholarship has rejected this negative assessment of the work’s organization and thematic unity.⁶ In addition, the LSCQ is increasingly regarded as an innovative, influential, and even central text of the Chinese tradition, providing “a guide and a lasting ideology for a centralized, bureaucratized empire *before* the first one came into being.”⁷

My goals here are, first and primarily, to remedy the slighting of the LSCQ as a source for classical Chinese rhetoric and, second and secondarily, to account for this neglect. After introducing the work’s cosmology, epistemology, and view of language, I will turn to its statements on rhetorical theory and practice. After explicating these, I will then consider how the text itself works as a persuasive artifact in the light of its own strictures. With this background established I will return to the question of why this valuable resource has been so easily overlooked or quickly set aside, and I will argue that a combination of modernist impulses and cultural protectiveness from within and from without are most likely responsible.

⁵Xing Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 9. As Lu notes, the “schools” (*jia* [chial]) were an invention of the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), and much recent sinological work sees this notion of pre-Han schools as applicable at most only to the Confucians (Ruist [Juist]) and Mohists, with the other schools being projections back in time by later bibliographers. See, for example, Kidder Smith, “Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, ‘Legalism,’ *et cetera*,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62.1 (Feb. 2003): 129–156.

⁶For a detailed and insightful explication of how the LSCQ selected and harmonized contemporaneous doctrines, see Scott Cook, “The *Lǚshi chunqiu* and the Resolution of Philosophical Dissonance,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62.2 (Dec. 2002): 307–345. James Sellman argues for the thematic unity of the work on somewhat different grounds in his *Timing and Rulership in Master Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals (Lǚshi chunqiu)* (Albany: SUNY, 2002).

⁷Nathan Sivin, review of *The Annals of Lǚ Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study*, trans. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *China Review International* 8.2 (Fall 2001): 407–413 (p. 408).

THE TEXT

The LSCQ was compiled at the very end of the Warring States period (453–221), a period when a number of independent city-states battled for political and cultural hegemony or, at the least, for survival. According to the historian Sima Qian [Ssu-ma Ch'ien] (c.145–c. 90), who wrote the first dynastic history, the *Shiji* [*Shih-chi*], the LSCQ was deliberately conceived as a way to aggrandize the reputation of one of these city-states, the state of Qin. Lǚ Buwei (c. 290–235 BCE), the prime minister of Qin, saw the creation of the work as a way to compete with the other city-states for prestige. He

set about attracting gentlemen to his service with offers of generous rewards and treatment, and in time gathered as many as 3,000 men who lived and ate at his expense. This was also the period when there were many skilled debaters in the various feudal states, men such as Xun Qīng [Xunzi/Hsūn-tzu] who wrote books and circulated them throughout the world. Lǚ Buwei accordingly ordered each of his retainers to write down what he himself had learned, and then collected and edited the results into a work comprising eight *lan* or "surveys," six *lun* or "discussions," and twelve *ji* or "records," totaling over 20,000 characters. It was intended to embrace all the affairs of heaven, earth, the ten thousand things, yesterday, and today, and was entitled "The Spring and Autumn [the Annals] of Mr. Lǚ."⁸

Each of the three sections is further divided into chapters, and each chapter into essays, for a total of 159 essays (one is lost) of roughly the same length each. An essay typically consists of a very brief introductory discussion of a principle followed by several illustrative examples, rounded off with a reiteration of the principle. The entire work is long for the period—some 120,000 characters, roughly twice as long as *Xunzi*. Though it is conventionally dated to c. 239 BCE, most scholars agree that the "Records" was almost certainly written first, and the other two sections completed later, perhaps even after Lǚ's death.⁹ Despite the hyperbolic reference to 3,000 con-

⁸Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 2510; Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 163. This description of collecting and editing materials as the basis for this book, rather than original composition, is repeated in brief elsewhere in the *Shiji* (p. 510).

⁹For an overview of the debate on this point, see Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lǚ Buwei*, cited in n. 4 above, pp. 27–32.

tributors, the style and language of the work is relatively uniform throughout.¹⁰

The *Shiji* description is somewhat misleading, since the LSCQ is not truly encyclopedic (does not encompass “all the affairs” of the universe). Most of the essays concern themselves with political, social, and ethical topics, concentrating on aspects most relevant to a ruler. Many scholars have argued that the primary audience for the LSCQ is King Zheng of Qin, who became the First Emperor in 221 BCE, and in fact Lǚ Buwei had been his tutor and then his regent. Knoblock and Riegel classify the work as a “mirror for princes,” noting that in the LSCQ’s postface (the Chinese functional equivalent of a preface) Lǚ Buwei represents himself as instructing a “good man,” that is, the Emperor-to-be, just as the Yellow Emperor Sovereign instructed the Zhuanxu Emperor. Indeed, there are detailed calendrical instructions in the “Records” that prescribe ritual and policy actions that only an emperor could perform.

However, the contributors to the LSCQ were not simply offering up their knowledge to Lǚ Buwei to transmit to the emperor-to-be. Rather, as Yuri Pines has perceptively noted, the book should be seen as a “negotiation” between, on the one hand, Lǚ Buwei’s desire for a manual on statecraft to present to the ruler, and, on the other hand, the goals of the *shi*, “who seized an opportunity to bolster their social standing and to convince the patron of their importance and indispensability.”¹¹ The *shi*, the “scholar-knights,” was a group comprised of disenfranchised nobility and socially mobile commoners; more importantly, they were men who made their own way in the world through offering their education and their rhetorical skills to those in power. Throughout the LSCQ the essayists emphasize the indispensability of good scholar-knights as advisors and functionaries for the successful ruler. They also argue for a philosophy of statecraft that would have the ruler conserve his energies through a minimalist approach to administration, while his advisors wear themselves out toiling on his behalf—a philosophy of statecraft that would, in reality, turn over the governance of the state to the *shi*. Far from being a purely informative manual, the LSCQ is in large part an extended plea to the ruler to respect and employ the

¹⁰Michael Carson, “The Language of the *Lǚ-shih ch’ün-ch’iu*: Some Characteristic Features of Grammar and Style in a Third Century B.C. Text” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1980).

¹¹Yuri Pines, review of James Sellman, *Timing and Rulership in Master Lǚ’s Spring and Autumn Annals (Lǚshi chunqiu)*, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 24 (2002): 199–204 (p. 203).

scholar-knights, and to govern in a way that would make them the de facto power behind the throne.

In the LSCQ the *shi* argued for themselves, but they also argued against their rivals, at the cosmological level. Michael Pruett has demonstrated that the intellectual landscape of the late Warring States period was a battleground for power at court between specialists in divination to the ancestors, specialists in ritual sacrifice to various spirits, and those promoting a conception of the universe as orderly and impersonal, as governed by *li*, "patterns, principles of reason."¹² The first two groups fought to maintain their positions as sole intermediaries for capricious and potent forces that only they could contact or placate. In opposition to this world-view, the LSCQ promotes correlative cosmology, a system that is regular and predictable, and by advancing such a cosmology the *shi* sought to remove their opponents' putative sources of spiritual and, thus, political influence. Although the debate continued for several centuries more, it was correlative cosmology that was eventually proclaimed the official state ideology.

CORRELATIVE COSMOLOGY

Correlative cosmology is a mode of thinking that came to be employed widely in traditional China and has persisted up to the present day in some areas, such as traditional medicine.¹³ Although correlative cosmology has been traditionally linked with the name of Zuo Yan (305–240) and, later, with the *Chunqiu fanlu* (c. 104 BCE) of Dong Zhongshu [Tung Chung-Shu], the scholarly consensus is gradually shifting to John Henderson's earlier assessment that the LSCQ "seems to be the earliest extant text in which relatively studied, complex correlative systems appear."¹⁴ Correlative cosmology sorts all entities, processes, and materials into categories, with cau-

¹²Michael Pruett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2002).

¹³For a philosophical approach to correlative thinking, see A.C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*, Occasional Paper and Monograph Series, no. 6 (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986). For a historical overview, see John. B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

¹⁴(John. B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1991), p. 32.

sation operating according to resonance (*ganying*, literally, stimulus-response) within and between categories.. The categories themselves are admixtures of *qi*; *qi*, variously translated as “energy,” “breath,” or “vapor,” constitutes all states, entities, and beings of the universe. It ranges from the most gross and material to the most fine and subtle, the “quintessence” (*jing*), which penetrates everywhere. What appears to the human senses as a solid object is in reality a balance of various kinds of *qi*, which influence and are influenced by larger cycles of energy.

When a phase of *qi* gained ascendancy so too did all the things associated with it. As the essay “Resonating with the Identical” put it, “Things belonging to the same category [*lei*] naturally attract each other; things that share the same ethers [*qi*] naturally join together; and notes that are comparable naturally resonate to one another.”¹⁵ The most fundamental phases of *qi* are the *yin* and the *yang*, the former associated with darkness, night, quiescence, and the female, and the latter with light, day, motion, and the male. The *yin* and *yang* phases alternate in a relation of inverse proportionality; when one reaches its zenith, it “summons” (*zhao*) the other, which then “responds” (*ying*).

Belief in more elaborate cycles of *qi* also developed, the most widespread being the “five phases” (*wu xing*) system, which the LSCQ espouses. The five phases of *qi* are symbolized by wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, and each phase is associated with such phenomena as colors, sounds, tastes, and so on. For instance, the category of “wood” *qi* includes green, spring, east, sour, Jupiter, wheat, the spleen, the eye, anger, the wind, and the number eight.

The word for categories, *lei*, when used as a verb means “to resemble,” and the categories themselves are based on resemblance. This resemblance can be in appearance, and thus many *lei* correspond to the categories of natural language. However, the resemblance can also be behavioral, as in the above quote: “things of the same *lei* attract each other.” For example, as the moon (*yin*) waxes, such *yin* creatures as oysters and mussels flourish and plump up. The resemblance can also be analogical, a resemblance of relationship. The most important analogical resemblance is microcosm and macrocosm, and especially humans as microcosm of the universe.

Humans and the human world are an integral part of the cosmos because they are formed by these same patterns of energy; thus, successful action depends on recognizing and responding appro-

¹⁵Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, cited in n. 4 above, p. 283.

priately to their phases. However, although these cycles operated impersonally, they did not operate amorally. On the contrary; the cosmos was posited as inherently ethical. Humans were meant to behave properly (*yi*), and when a government or a people did not, when it behaved "irregularly," nature responded (resonated) with irregularities, such as natural disasters and anomalous phenomena. The same applied to the individual person, the microcosm, who must behave correctly so as to match up to the principles of the universe, the macrocosm. Unethical actions might prevail in the short run, but because the universe instantiates *yi*, "correct behavior," as well as *li*, "principles of reason, patterns," in the long run they will fail.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

The objects of knowledge, in the most general sense, are these same *li* and *yi*. For *li*, the primary epistemological task is recognition, especially pattern recognition: the capacity to discern which categories (*lei*) an object or event belongs to and which phase of the cycles one is in. The visual metaphor looms large here: one "sees" (*jian*) the transformations beforehand, especially if one is "far-sighted" (*chang jian*). It is especially crucial to discern the *wei*, the minute signs, and the *biao*, the outward indications, both of these being subtle indicators of the present condition of a being or of the impending shifts of a situation. "Hence, by examining the shadows at the foot of the hall one knows the movements of the sun and the moon and the metamorphoses of the Yin and Yang principles."¹⁶

At the same time, there are limits to what can be known, at least when it comes to the physical world:

Lacquer and water are both liquids; but if you mix the two liquids together, they solidify, and if you steam the lacquer, it will dry out. Copper and tin are both soft, but combine the two soft substances, and they become hard; and if you heat the combination, it liquefies. In one instance, you dry out the material by making it damp; in the other, you liquefy the material by heating it. When the class to which a thing belongs is decidedly uncertain, what can be ascertained about it?¹⁷

¹⁶Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 369.

¹⁷Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 627. The interpretation of the last sentence is the subject of ongoing and unresolved debate.

What is the reason for such exceptions to expectations? Simply put, this is not an important question for this text:

There definitely are things the eyes cannot see, the intellect cannot grasp, and techniques cannot deal with. We may not understand the explanation of what makes a thing as it is, yet we know it is that way. The sages founded their institutions on the basis of what they knew to be so and did not exercise their minds over the explanation.¹⁸

Consistent with the emphasis on recognition, the main source of error in this epistemology is apparent resemblance (*si*).¹⁹ This may be a misleading similarity between objects, between qualities, or between situations that seem to signify one reality, but in fact are the opposite. Such essays as “Confusing Similar Things” (*Yi si*) and “Apparent Accord” (*Si shun*) tackle this problem, though their advice seems not quite up to the challenge; ponder, investigate, and inquire of people who are more familiar with the details.

How does one improve one’s ability to know? The LSCQ is quite emphatic on this point; the only way is through prolonged study under a teacher. Even the legendary sages and cultural heroes had to have masters; how much more so does this apply to ordinary humans. But “study” here demands much more than passively listening to a master explain a text. Rather, it is a lengthy apprentice-like process, including not just chanting texts, questioning the teacher about them, and mediating on their import, but also total devoted personal service to the teacher in every aspect of his life, down to ritual offerings after the teacher’s death. A teacher is essential because study ideally leads to transformation; the teacher is the model, and through long personal association and submission the student internalizes not just the teacher’s knowledge, but also his teacher’s modes of perception, evaluations, ethical disposition, and habits.

Because of this model of inculcation, in which ethical habits are formed in a process akin to the Aristotelian cultivation of virtue, there is much less discussion of *yi*, correct behavior, as an object of knowledge. Although there were ongoing philosophical debates on ethical issues in the larger intellectual community on core issues such as whether human nature is inherently good, neutral, or bad, or whether one’s primary loyalty is to one’s family or to one’s

¹⁸Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 629.

¹⁹For a discussion of the concerns about deceptive resemblance in this and other texts, see Martin S. Ekstroem, “Illusion, Lie, and Metaphor: The Paradox of Divergence in Early Chinese Poetics,” *Poetics Today* 23.2 (2002): 251–289.

community, when it comes to the question of knowing the right thing to do this is assumed to come about "naturally" as a consequence of having studied.

The more thorough-going the transformation attained through prolonged study, the more a person is capable of an ultimate self-cultivation in which one "completes his nature." This refers to a process of moderating and then quieting the desires and dislikes and stilling one's thoughts, to reach a state of absolute tranquility. For such a person the injunction repeated throughout the LSCQ that one know by "seeking it in yourself" takes on new depths of meaning:

What does it mean to "seek it in yourself"? It means to moderate the ears and eyes, restrict appetites and desires, reject "wisdom" and "plans," and abjure the "clever" and "established," so that you can let your thoughts roam through the abode of the limitless and allow your heart to follow the path of spontaneity. If you become like this, then nothing can harm your natural endowment. If nothing can harm your natural endowment, you know the vital essence [*jing*]. If you understand the vital essence, you know the spirit. To "know the spirit" means to "attain the one."²⁰

In this way, like the sage of *Laozi* [*Lao-tzu*], one knows about the world without going outside, and one knows about nature without looking over the wall. This is not a claim of omniscience; rather, it is a claim to understand not the details of matters, but their underlying principles of order. The person who has completely "attained the one" is paradoxical to lesser humans: he "is trusted without speaking, acts exactly as needed without devising schemes, and succeeds without planning ahead. His vital essence [*jing*] circulates though Heaven and Earth, and his spirit covers the cosmos."²¹ As Pruett notes, this kind of cosmological framework "was used to argue that a sage can, through variously defined processes of self-cultivation, achieve the power to understand the workings of the cosmos and thereby act correctly and gain control over them."²²

Within this cosmology an ultimate kind of communication or, perhaps, influence can occur when "the quintessence penetrates" (*jing tong*). This occurs when a type of *qi* is intense, concentrated, or refined. The *qi* transmits across distances, but the communication is non-linguistic, and mainly affects the emotional state. It operates

²⁰Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 106.

²¹Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 66.

²²Pruett, *To Become a God*, cited in n. 12 above, p. 145.

as a natural force; it is not willed by the sender, and those who are influenced by it are not necessarily aware of the cause.

When a sage assumes his position facing south, he keeps in mind the goal of loving and benefiting the people. Before his commands and proclamations are issued everyone in the world expectantly cranes his neck and stands on tiptoes. This because the sage's refined essence [*jing*] has circulated among the people. The people respond similarly to those who prey upon and injure them.

Now, an attacker sharpens the five types of weapons, dresses in fine clothing, and eats delicious food when intending to set out the next day. But those about to be attacked take no pleasure in such things, not because they have heard about it, but because a spirit has forewarned them. If you reside in Qin but the one you love lives in Qi, and that person dies, your mental ethers will be unsettled. This is because the refined essences [*jing*] will not longer travel back and forth between you.²³

Such contact also operates between close relatives, who share the same *qi*. "Though they are in different places, they remain in communication with each other. ... The spirit that comes forth from such loyal devotion is echoed in the heart of the other. When the refined essence [*jing*] of each of them can reach one another, what need is there of words?"²⁴

The same implicit devaluation of spoken communication occurs earlier in this essay. In describing how a musical performance saddened a listener, the writer commented that "what the gentleman genuinely feels here is understood there. When emotions rise up within him, others feel them. What need does he have for forcible persuasion?"²⁵ The word *cheng* is often translated as "being sincere, true, genuine, honest." Within the LSCQ it denotes a state of focused concentration or intense emotion that focuses one's energy (*qi*) and brings one into contact with the true nature of reality.

Therefore, when sincerity [*cheng*] is made more sincere [*cheng*], one is conjoined with the true nature of things. Only when the vital essences [*jing*] are made more subtle [*jing*] does one commune with Heaven. When one communes with Heaven, the basic natures of water, fire, wood, and stone can be moved; how much more so can those who possess blood and breath? Therefore, as a general principle, in the tasks of those who persuade and govern, nothing equals sincerity [*cheng*].

²³Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, pp. 218–219.

²⁴Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 221.

²⁵Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 220.

Hearing grief in a person's words does not equal seeing him cry, nor does hearing anger in his words equal seeing him fight. If persuaders and rulers are not sincere [*cheng*], their "moving" of others will not have the magical effect of a spirit.²⁶

A very few people can deliberately communicate quintessentially to a selected audience. The essay "On Subtle Communication" (*jing yu*) opens by saying that "Sages can understand one another without relying on language, for there are things that precede language in communicating meaning." The essayist goes on to give an example of what he calls communicating by means of *jing*.

Sheng Shu said to Dan, Duke of Zhou, "Where the courtyard is small and people are many, if you speak in a low voice, you will not be heard, but if you speak in a high-pitched voice, then people will understand what you say. Which do you choose, a low voice or a high-pitched voice?"

"A low voice," answered the Duke.

"There is something to be done. If you explain it in subtle [*jing*] words, people will not understand, and if you say nothing at all, the task will not be completed. Which do you choose, subtle words or saying nothing at all?"

"I would say nothing at all," answered the Duke.

Hence, Sheng Shu was able to persuade without words, and the Duke of Zhou was able to comprehend without words. This is called "comprehending what is not spoken."

As Confucius is made to say immediately following, in explaining his own silence during a visit, "Sages understand one another directly; why should they rely upon language?"²⁷ Sages are capable of such communication because "the more refined one's awareness, the more refined what one can share."²⁸

However, most people are not sages and they must use speech to communicate, so that language is perforce a key topic in the LSCQ. Language is described as a means to an end; it was the vehicle for the "import," and "phrases are signposts of ideas." Despite the potential richness of these definitions, in fact the authors of the LSCQ conceptualized language in terms of a naming model; language consists of names and phrases, which label and describe reality. However, this naming function is very powerful, because when things (in the broadest sense) are identified or described correctly, people will know how to behave. This view of language may have

²⁶Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 472.

²⁷Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, pp. 448–449.

²⁸Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 285.

been encouraged by the grammatical structure of Classical Chinese, in which a noun may function as a verb, enabling a sentence such as *fu fu*, "the father behaves as a father," with the implication of "as a father should." On this view, when the superior person is correctly referred to as superior, inferior people will know to behave with respect and obedience. When, on the other hand, the labeling system is confused, and thus confusing, the consequences can be disastrous, beginning in mere disorder and ending in absolute chaos.

Language is thus an extremely powerful force in human affairs—hence the "rectification of terms" or "right use of names" (*zheng ming*) doctrine attributed to Confucius, that to put a state in good order the most important thing is to correct the terms. This doctrine is alluded to throughout the LSCQ, usually in a context where name and form fail to correspond. "Name" and "form" must be taken in the widest sense here; "name" can range from a one word term to an entire doctrine, and "form" can refer to a thing, event, quality, behavior, or social structure. "Name and form" not corresponding covers a variety of disparities, from a simple mistake to hypocrisy to intentional duplicity. The incompetent may be considered competent; a wicked person may feign interest in good deeds, or a person may deliberately break a promise.

Much of what would be considered sophistry fell under this rubric. A certain Deng Xi, for instance, argued both sides of disputes, reinterpreted the meaning of laws, and hired himself out as a litigator. He was so successful that the courts were clogged, right and wrong were reversed, and the state verged on anarchy. Only with his execution was order restored. His exploits were described in an essay titled "Deviating from the Import [of phrases]."

There was little interest in analyzing how such uses of language "deviated from the import," how they went wrong, beyond labeling them incorrect or dangerous. At one point the LSCQ observes that "it is only with propositions that we convey our expectations; but if we trust only in propositions, confusion results." Perhaps the best example of such "confusion" is the socially unacceptable conclusion to the valid syllogism produced by a servant who refused to die along with his master: "One serves another because service produces benefits, but death is not beneficial so I did not die." The essayist observes that the conclusion was an example of the "greatest immorality, but the man's propositions appear to be irrefutable. It is clear, however, that they are inadequate to decide the matter."²⁹

²⁹Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 455.

Along the same lines, the LSCQ records Gongsun Long's defense of his notorious paradox that "Zang [i.e., Smith] has three ears." The essayists of the LSCQ were aware that some of their contemporaries, most notably the Later Mohists, were engaged in serious linguistic analysis of exactly this sort of paradox; at one point they refer to two of the later Mohists' technical terms.³⁰ But they dismiss this kind of investigation on pragmatic grounds—such explorations are "external to what matters."³¹

Thus, the explanations of the gentleman are sufficient to discuss the truth of the worthy and the reality of the unworthy, but stop with that. They are sufficient to illustrate the factors that causes disruption of order and the causes from which disorder arises, but stop with that. They are sufficient to know the essential nature of things and what man must catch in order to live, but stop with that.³²

Instead such improper uses of language were pejoratively described as a blurring or transgression of the appropriate boundaries, as *liu yan*, "flowing speech." The word *liu*, "flowing," usually modified water, and when applied to human affairs had negative connotations of uncontrolled movement, of excess. The word *yin*, "sloppy," also used to describe water, usually flooding rivers or overflowing rainwater, was applied similarly. Short transgressions were called *yin shuo*, sloppy speeches, or *yin ci*, sloppy phrases. The essay "Sloppy Phrases" covered a miscellaneous congeries of offenses; sophisticated reasoning, exploitation of ambiguity, pitting the letter against the spirit of the law, and beautiful but misleading phrasings. Such irregular and indulgent uses of language are both causes and symptoms of chaos. Conversely, "In an age of perfect order, people dislike empty words, vacuous phrases, wayward learning, and heterodox theories."³³

Language used properly, then, mirrors the true and the ethical principles underlying the cosmos, rather than confusing them. It serves the larger social good, rather than individual desires to win debates, to dazzle audiences by twists of logic, or to rationalize self-serving conduct. Likewise, the proper goal of persuasions is to move

³⁰"The hard and the white" and "without thickness." A.C. Graham identifies these as terms for "mutually pervasive but distinct qualities" and "the dimensionless," respectively (*Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978)).

³¹Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 410.

³²Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, pp. 400–401.

³³Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 423.

the audience toward what is right and good, not merely to flaunt one's abilities to sway the audience at will.

RHETORICAL THEORY

Just as the LSCQ is directed to a ruler, so too its discussions of persuasive speech are primarily seen from the ruler's standpoint, and concentrate on his paradigmatic rhetorical situation; facing an advisor or would-be advisor who is attempting to persuade him a particular course of action. Consistent with its philosophy of governing, the LSCQ recommends the ruler remain quiet and let the persuader speak, so that he may match the speaker's claims against *li* and *yi*. Does the speech correspond to the principles of morality and to the principles of reason (reason conceived of not just as valid argument, but also as agreement with commonsense and experience)? The audience should also probe for consistency between the speaker's present claims and his past actions, his character, and his demeanor as he delivers his persuasion.

The position that is illustrated again and again throughout the LSCQ is that speeches that are unethical or wrong may succeed in the short run, may be accepted and acted upon by the audience, but given the nature of the universe such incorrect or immoral recommendations will lead to disaster in the long run. Just as a ruler who accepts advice based on false information or poor reasoning will not last long, so too a ruler who is persuaded to mount an unprovoked invasion of another state will surely come to doom. The question, then, is why persuasions that are unethical or wrong are, nonetheless, accepted by the listener. Conversely, why are speeches that are ethical and correct rejected or not acted on? For the LSCQ there are two answers; the deficiencies of the audience or the inadequacies of the persuader.

The audience may be irremediably stupid, and such a case may be truly hopeless. "Where intelligence does not extend, then a persuasion, however well argued, and acting with the Dao, however refined, cannot make such a man see."³⁴ Similarly, if a person is merely dim-witted, and can only see what is near, then "a persuader, however skilled he might be, will not be able to provide him with appropriate illustrations."³⁵

³⁴Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 385.

³⁵Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 382.

The LSCQ pays more attention to more remediable faults, most of them involving partiality in judging. Most commonly, the audience does not or cannot set aside its biases or prejudices, its desires or obsessions, and as a result it is unable to accurately perform the tests that evaluating a speech requires. Perhaps even more damagingly, the audience may not want to hear the truth. Competent and honorable scholar-knights have a duty to remonstrate, even to argue with the ruler, but of course they run the risk of angering the listener and endangering themselves. In some cases the ruler literally kills the messenger who bears bad news. As the LSCQ observes of one such case, "However skilled the persuader, what could he have done with the king?"³⁶

Finally, the audience may misjudge because it has not developed its analytic abilities. "As a general principle, a person capable of judging persuasions must be accomplished in discoursing and debating."³⁷ The first step toward attaining this skill is self-examination, to "study your own heart," because the LSCQ assumes a certain uniformity in human nature. "As a general principle, other men too must study their own hearts, for only then will they be able to judge persuasions. What you do not get by studying your own heart, study by learning and questioning. From antiquity to the present there has never been anyone who did not learn yet was able to judge persuasions."³⁸

At this point the LSCQ refers to five examples found elsewhere in the book, using the formula "the explication is found in" (*jie zai*).³⁹ Each example illustrates a different kind of fault: inappropriate yet relentless attempts at persuasion; gaining audience agreement without a real commitment to change; sophistical interpretation of a treaty; defense of a paradox; and inappropriately elegant language that renders a law code unusable. In each case the speech was initially accepted by an untrained audience, and the fatal flaw had to be pointed out by someone else on the scene.

³⁶Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 599.

³⁷Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 328.

³⁸Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 291.

³⁹D. C. Lau observes that variations of this formula of "principle/explanation" are found in several other pre-Han texts, such as *Mozi* [*Mo-tzu*] (*jing/shuo*, canon/explanation) and *Guanzi* [*Kuan-tzu*] (*jie*, explication), but the LSCQ is most like *Hanfeizi* [*Han-fei tzu*] in using "illustrative stories" as its explanations ("A Study of Some Textual Problems in the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and Their Bearing on its Composition," *Bulletin of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy* 1 (March 1991): 45-87 (p. 22).

Turning from the shortcomings of the audience to those of the speaker, the true and good speech may also fail because the persuader is not rhetorically adept. Consistent with its focus on the ruler as audience, the LSCQ devotes much less space to this possibility, but does recommend that persuaders make the persuasion “agreeable, accordant” (*shun*) and “rely on” (*yin*) the persuasive resources the situation offers. It is worth quoting the text at some length on this topic.

“On making persuasions agreeable” (*Shun shui*)

Thus, the skilled persuader sets forth the facts and offers the remedy in such a way that as he observes the agitation of his audience, it is as if he himself were caught in their predicament. What need has he to employ any force? Those who must compel their listeners are demeaned. When persuasions are not heeded, the responsibility lies not only with what is said but also with the persuader himself.

A skillful persuader is like a crafty knight;
He relies on [*yin*] the strength of others for his own strength,
Relies on [*yin*] their coming to help them come,
Relies on [*yin*] their going to help them go.
He does not set forth his own forms or figures,
But creates and develops in accord with those of others,
Relies on [*yin*] them as he speaks,
Like their shadow, like their echo.
He expands or contracts with others;
Through these means he reaches his goal.
However great their strength, prodigious their talents,
He controls their fate.

When you shout with the wind, your voice is no more intense: when you climb up high and gaze out, your vision is no clearer. The advantage comes from what you have relied on [*yin*].⁴⁰

This process of *yin*, of “relying on” or “basing oneself on,” is described as “following the natural course.” The first example in this essay is of Hui Ang’s using a king’s love of physical strength and valor to persuade him that the teachings of Confucius and Mozi were actually the most powerful forces available to him. The essayist notes that “The king of Song was a vulgar ruler and so the way his heart could be tamed by Hui Ang is an instance of the technique of ‘relying.’ By employing the technique of ‘relying,’ the poor and lowly can

⁴⁰Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 356. The middle section is rhymed in the original.

vanquish the rich and noble and the small and weak can control the strong and big."⁴¹

This process of "relying on" or "basing one's self on" (*yin*) may involve temporary resort to behaviors that are contrary to the speaker's beliefs and values. For instance, the LSCQ reports that Mozi, who opposed extravagance and the expensive musical performances of the day, wore decorated clothing and played the flute to gain an audience with the King of Chu. Similarly, Confucius used the notorious Mi Zixia, an icon of sexual depravity, to obtain an introduction to the Lady Li. The LSCQ does not raise any ethical objections to such expedient strategies, simply noting that they are sure to prevail.

EXAMPLE: THE LSCQ

To what extent can the LSCQ be seen as an instantiation of its own tenets on persuasion? As noted above, in its rhetorical precepts the LSCQ assumes face-to-face address to a one person audience; written communication is never mentioned as a medium for persuasion, although the developing bureaucracy certainly relied on such genres. Certain procedures would immediately be ruled out; for instance, the reader cannot scrutinize the author's non-verbals. Along the same lines, whether *cheng* could be transmitted through a written text is an open question.

Nevertheless, the LSCQ does exemplify many of its other recommendations. Were the ruler to test it against the standards of *li* and *yi*, it certainly does match its own standards, always advocating the humane, truthful, and impartial course. Although the *shi* are making a case for themselves, this is entirely consistent with the ethics propounded in the text; indeed, they would have a responsibility to make such an argument, to make themselves known, just as Confucius searched for a ruler who would use him.

As for *li*, the principles of reason, of right and wrong, in the most sweeping sense this text is "right" since it grounds its structure in the principles of correlative cosmology. Although some of the details continue to be debated, there is no doubt that the structure of the LSCQ is intended to replicate, microcosmically, the structure of the cosmos itself. The three main sections of the work echo the divisions of the cosmos into Heaven, earth, and the human realm, a trifurcation that became common in later Chinese encyclopedias.

⁴¹Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals*, p. 358.

Within the three sections, the microcosm/macrocosmic analogies are most worked out in the “Records,” which was most likely written first. The “Records” is subdivided into twelve chapters of five essays each, with the twelve chapters representing the twelve months of the year, and the total of sixty chapters corresponding to the sextenary cycle of the Chinese calendar system for naming days. The first essay of each of the twelve chapters consists of the *Yueling*, the “Monthly Ordinances,” which detail the appropriate actions for the emperor at that point in time.⁴² The remaining essays also accord with the temporal structure: “many chapters grouped under the spring months deal with themes of self-cultivation and the nurturance of life; those of the growth months of summer carry themes of learning, and, especially, musical education; those of the decay months of autumn contain chapters on military matters; and those of the death months of winter deal with themes of death, burial, and mourning.”⁴³

The numerological correspondences continue in the “Surveys” and the “Discussions.” The former consists of eight chapters with eight essays each, paralleling the eight winds and the eight directions. The “Discussions” contains six chapters with six essays each, which may refer to the “six surroundings” (north, south, east, west, above, and below).

Finally, in the postface the compiler dated the completion of the work to the first day of the first month of autumn, which was the first day of the year in the Qin calendar, and to the first year in the Chinese sixty year cycle. In other words, the work is positioned temporally as a new beginning—the beginning of a new age.

Turning to more specific prescriptions, to what extent does the LSCQ “rely on” (*yin*) in addressing a potential emperor? If we trace the progression of argument, it starts by establishing what everyone, including the ruler, surely desires; not simply power, but above all else life, and not a miserable, over-worked life, but a contented, full life. It then suggests a way a ruler can preserve his energies, enjoy life, and also govern perfectly, through its philosophy of statecraft. Since advisors are the key to this system, it then offers instructions on how to select advisors and judge their advice

Furthermore, in the guise of merely informing the ruler on how to judge persuasions, these authors also argue for those criteria most favorable to themselves, although never making this connection

⁴²The *Yueling*, which may have circulated independently at some point, was also incorporated into the *Liji* [Li-chi] and *Huainanzi* [Huai-nan-tzu].

⁴³Scott Cook, “The *Lǐshì chungiu*,” cited in n. 6, p. 315.

explicit. How appropriate that they advise the reader that: successful rulers are not afraid of frank talk; everyone has to study; everyone has to have a teacher; the ruler should judge all recommendations impartially (do not dismiss this book because of who might have contributed to it; do not discount it because the *shi* might benefit if you act on it). To some extent the LSCQ is a self-consuming artifact as Stanley Fish described such works: if the ruler is persuaded by the book, he will set it aside and turn to the *shi* as his mentors and ministers.

CONCLUSION

As befits a work that was touted as a compendium of knowledge, much that is in the LSCQ is drawn from various other works of its era. A partial list would include: its concern with social order; its unquestioning assumption of a hierarchical political structure; its right/wrong binary; its advocacy of quietism for the ruler; the "rectification of names" doctrine and the associated beliefs about language; the emphasis on the importance of teachers; the notion of the sage knowing the principles of the universe through embodying them. Its synthesis of these notions is skilful and purposeful, resulting in a unique theory of statecraft.

What the LSCQ does not share with other pre-Han works that have been widely studied in the West is its correlative cosmology, which it sets out at such length and in such detail and integrates so thoroughly into its structure that it can hardly be overlooked. Along with it come certain remarkable rhetorical concepts, such as "communication through the quintessence" (that is, telepathy) as well as the more diffuse and unintentional "quintessential influence" that can occur at a distance.

Such ideas are certainly not modern. Especially for the twentieth century Chinese Communists, such ideas were tossed into the dustbin of "feudal superstition." Correlative cosmology was also associated with traditional Chinese medicine, which for a long period was also seen as nothing more than superstition, until its recent rehabilitation. Chinese scholars were unlikely to put the LSCQ forward to a scholarly audience as a treasured text.

Going further, the correlative cosmology of the LSCQ raises the specter of "primitive thought." At worst, correlative cosmology has been damned as a non-rational or a magical thought system. At best, it is deemed proto-science, or interpreted as an alternative rationality. Even here, correlative thinking suffers by an invidious comparison

to its supposed opposite, causal or analytic thinking. Either way, correlative cosmology is often brought up as a primary reason that China did not develop science, despite its tremendous technological inventiveness; correlative cosmology was thought to have somehow inhibited, or substituted for, the kind of thinking that is crucial for the scientific enterprise.

Given this context, a sympathetic non-Chinese scholar might well feel hesitant to highlight a text that apparently reflects so poorly on its culture, or that might play into a fascination with the mystic and the exotic. A kind of protective impulse might come into play. Having wrestled with this predicament myself, I take refuge in a cross-cultural chiasmus: we should not ignore it because it is different, but we should not ignore its difference.