Introduction

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Literary Forms of Argument in Early China

Edited by

Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer
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INTRODUCTION

LITERARY FORMS OF ARGUMENT IN EARLY CHINA

Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer

Methods largely shaped by Western philosophical and philological concepts have had an enormous impact on reading strategies applied to early Chinese argumentative texts. What are commonly termed philosophical texts in the Chinese context have been analysed in terms of their so-called logical capacity. Since analytical precision has been connected to Western logical techniques alone, argumentation in Chinese philosophical texts is commonly described as ambiguous and poetic rather than systematic. As a result of this, the written texts from pre-modern China available to us now have long been treated as mere repositories of ideas. This tendency in research was furthered by the fact that many early Chinese texts are made up of distinct components, building blocks or collected episodes. Fragmentation is therefore still conceived of as a common characteristic of early Chinese written philosophy. As a result, the misconception has arisen that pre-modern Chinese texts fail to generate homogenous disquisitions of thought in treatises with a coherent outlook in which consistent literary patterns establish argumentative force.

Convinced of an identical implicit logic underlying Western and Chinese arguments, Angus Graham addressed this Western-centric misconception by differentiating two stages by which to approach Chinese argumentation. First, a stage where all argumentation appears muddled, “the few pitiful examples of Chinese ‘logic’ vitiated by childish fallacies, so that there seems no hope of arriving anywhere by this path unless it leads out of the mist into a world so alien that even the laws of logic reveal themselves as Western and culturebound;” a second stage is where in Chinese argumentation, as in its Western counterpart, “the gaps fill in when the questions and assumptions are rightly identified.” 1 Looking at further developments in Western studies of Chinese philosophical argumentation (including Graham’s own “Reflections and Replies” responding to the essays dedicated to him by students and colleagues five years later), 2 the gaps still do not seem to have “filled in,” and it appears that the relevant questions and assumptions have not been rightly identified. Christoph Harbsmeier notes that “the ancient Chinese have many current forms of argument in common with their contemporary Greeks […] but unlike in Greece, even the argumentative philosophers in ancient China did not systematically deploy the insights of the logicians and their techniques in other areas than those of formal logic.” 3

From the viewpoint of formal logic, arguments in early Chinese texts have been classified as analogical reasoning or correlative thinking, as well as arguments based on associative logic or a metaphorical method of insight. Roger Ames and David Hall explain that “Chinese thinking depends upon a species of analogy which may be called ‘correlative thinking.’” 4 They hold that “The priority of logical reasoning in the West is paralleled in China by the prominence of less formal uses of analogical, parabolic and literary discourse.” 5 Yet, correlative thinking, analogical reasoning, and metaphor are commonly identified with poetry 6 and semantic ambiguity. 7 Argumentation in Chinese early texts is therefore often

described as ambiguous and poetic rather than systematic and philosophical. Earlier authors have often linked Chinese thinking to the Chinese language or the Chinese writing system, which they deemed to be media that is better suited to poetic expression than logical analysis. This sentiment still prevails in recent publications. Michael Broschat stresses the “poetic quality” of Classical Chinese prose. Hall and Ames see an “aesthetic order” prevailing in Chinese philosophical thinking in contrast to a “rational order” dominating in Western philosophy. Jinmei Yuan refers to a “poetic logic” of Chinese thinking.

The distinction between philosophy and poetry has its firm roots in the Platonic dialogues. Although Plato in the Republic refers to this contradiction as “an ancient quarrel,” Plato’s work is nonetheless the first where we see it become conceptualised. Plato’s definition of philosophy is in stark contrast to what he depreciates as rhetoric, art, myth, drama, and poetry, thus formulating the main criteria for philosophy basically in the sense in which we still understand it today. This gives Plato a very peculiar position in the history of Western philosophy. It seems all the more surprising that from the very first generation of his followers the question has been raised whether Plato’s own works are actually philosophical or poetical. Starting with Aristotle who classifies the dialogues as a new type “midway between poetry and prose,” the poetic quality of Plato’s work has been pointed out by apologists of poetry and commentators. The discussion of Plato’s poetical philosophy therefore provides an excellent example for the discussion of Chinese thinking. Attempts to explain the literary form of Plato’s dialogues—that thought of as replete with “myth, metaphor, and colourful image”—consider it as “extra logical means” to draw the readers to

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15 Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), one of the most influential humanist philosophers of the early Italian Renaissance and the first translator of Plato’s work into Latin, referred to Plato as “sacro padre de’ filosopi” in 1468 (Michael Stausberg, Faszination Zarathustra: Zoroaster und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998, 106; Simon A. Gilson, Dante and Renaissance Florence, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 143–144); in a widely quoted passage, what he characterises as the general characterisation of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (Process and Reality, Free Press, 1979, 39).
16 Aristotle as quoted by Diogenes Laertius who quite probably refers to a similar passage in Aristotle’s Poetics: “But the art which employs words either in bare prose or in meters, either in one kind of meter or combining several, happens up to the present day to have no name. For we can find no common term to apply to the mimes of Sophon and Xenarchus and to the Socratic dialogues.” Poetics 1.7 (1447b) quoted in Jill Gordon, Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato’s Dialogues (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 65.
18 Plato presents several views in the voices of several characters who most often disagree with one another; the philosophical conversations in which the disagreement takes place rarely, if ever, reach any single conclusion and leave those philosophical problems largely unresolved; Plato creates a central character who is himself not consistent in his views, and who distances himself from many of the ideas he presents; Plato constructs texts with ambiguous meaning and a vast array of possible interpretations; and finally, Plato fills the dialogues with the seemingly superfluous trappings of myth,
the ‘real’ content of the philosophical arguments. These arguments presumably follow an entirely different rational logic and have to be regarded as separate from the autonomous literary form.19 For this reason, some scholars explain such arguments as self-referential “implicit poetics” in the tradition of Hellenistic poetry.20 Others hold that even after centuries of commentarial debate the inherent problem—and paradox—of relating the disparate elements of drama, philosophy and rhetoric in Plato remain due to the fact that philosophy is fundamentally an “activity of embodied individuals, constrained by both space and time, having to deal with other human beings while having a private life of the mind, with some kind of access to an enduring truth.”21 Some even argue that in Plato “[p]hilosophical rhetoric seems only preliminary: it is presented as the necessary part of a mystery initiation, which culminates in something unphilosophical and unrhetorical.”22 Common to these explanations is the idea that the dramatic, poetic and rhetorical literary forms in the dialogues have to be understood as something exterior to and separate from the arguments. The distinction between poetry and philosophy is further consolidated by the fact that lately philosophers do not show a keen interest in poetry – the attempt to develop a “philosophy of poetry” is therefore still missing.23

Andreas Kabititz has argued that the concept of a self-referential autonomy of poetry and rhetoric as propagated most prominently by members of the Prague Linguistic Circle,24 and still claimed in post-structuralist theories, is deeply rooted in the philosophical notion of an autonomy of the aesthetic realm, as has been developed in the European tradition of philosophical aesthetics since Kant.25 Against the assumption of a strict division between the poetical-rhetorical and the argumentative function of language, he points out that it is one of the most basic functions of rhetorical devices (which according to Jakobson belong to the poetic self-referential functions of language) to enhance the linguistic effect of referential speech in pragmatic contexts.26

Many modern interpreters of Plato have come to a similar conclusion that the so called ‘dramatic’ or ‘poetic’ elements in Plato’s dialogues have to be interpreted more holistically as part of the philosophical arguments laid out in the dialogues and that they provide more sharpness, depth and unambiguousness to the philosophical arguments and are absolutely essential to the construction of Plato’s philosophical discourse.27

20 Erler, “To Hear the Right Thing and to Miss the Point: Plato’s Implicit Poetics.”
24 Kabititz cites the two most prominent members Jakobson and Mukafotov, however, the “hypothesis of the distinctiveness of poetic language is the basis upon which the entire Russian Formalist method is built,” see Pavel N. Medvedev (1928) quoted in Peter Steiner, Russian Formalism – A Metapoetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 139.
This book takes a similar point of view. We believe that the method of doing philosophy by poetically blending the content of an argument and its literary form is also a typical feature of many early Chinese texts. Many of the ‘extra-logical’ elements in Chinese texts are very similar to those in Plato. Such elements include narrative prologues, setting of the scene with certain historical protagonists including indications of specific times and places of the philosophical stage, dialogical form, the extensive use of metaphors and analogies and manifold forms of parallelisms including cosmological micro-macro correlations. And yet, there are obviously fundamental differences in the function of these elements in Plato and in early Chinese texts.

Evidently, Plato’s work is anything but unified, and even the dialogues are full of contradictory ideas and discursive strands with constantly changing themes and interlocutors. That may well be seen as an intentional part of the artistic arrangement by Plato who “avoided rather than sought a rigid technical terminology, and prodigally varied the language and imagery in which he clothed his most familiar thoughts.” In contrast, most early Chinese argumentative texts use a great part of their literary artistry, attempting to secure the unity of the text and unveil the internal relationship and coherence of its many seemingly disparate parts.

In this volume we consider the literary forms of the analogical, correlative, associative, metaphorical and poetical as devices that serve specific argumentative functions. These literary forms are not “whatever is left over when the paraphrasable ‘something to say,’ message, content, subject matter, is taken away.” They are not regarded as disconnected ‘exterior’ forms into which ‘pure’ arguments are shaped linguistically to make them more attractive to their readers, be it for embellishment, or to make them didactically more easily accessible or memorable. Instead, we understand them as indispensable parts of the arguments themselves. One meritorious aspect of the functional approaches of the Prague School in this respect is the discovery of the multifunctional dimension of language. Following this idea we propose that in many pre-modern Chinese argumentative texts the literary form serves an argumentative function. It is our contention that arguments in early Chinese texts cannot be understood fully if the crucial function of their literary form is not taken into consideration and analysed accordingly. The ‘poetic’ form of these texts should therefore be

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28 For the latter in Plato see Carone, *Plato's Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions*, 153ff.

29 Evidently we do think that Plato and early Chinese argumentative texts have much in common in that the literary forms of their arguments are part of the arguments themselves and should be analysed accordingly so as to grasp more fully the complexity of those arguments. We do not think, however, that Plato uses these literary devices in his dialogues in the same way as the Chinese texts do. Both traditions face entirely different constraints to posit their philosophical ideas. Yet, the comparison with Plato proves fruitful in three ways. First, it helps to contextualise the debate on Chinese philosophy within the Western critical discourse on philosophy; second, it allows us to look at how modern Plato scholars deal with a quite similar problem in a somewhat ‘holistic’ approach; third, the comparison enables us to take the “extra-logical” elements of Chinese texts, such as poetical literary forms, analogies, metaphors, parallelisms and correlations, more seriously and consider them part of the logic of the textual argument. (Given the discussion on Plato’s work, there is also less pressure on us to defend the application of the term ‘philosophical’ for these texts).


seen as a device used to avoid one-sided reductionism, reduce ambiguity, as well as enhance argumentative complexity.

The reason why arguments were enhanced by means of literary forms can be found in the basic structural problem of language itself. On the one hand language signifies meaning. On the other it embodies meaning by using visual or phonetic forms of expressions.

The relation of and mutual dependency between the content and the body, as well as between the meaning and the form of language, have been much discussed by early philosophers. Be it in Plato’s Cratylus or in Gongsun Long’s 公孫龍 “Mingshi lun” 名實論, the question as to whether words are simply conventional arbitrary signs or have a natural intrinsic relation to the things they signify has been posed early on in both Chinese and Western traditions. Due to the split between signifier and signified, language has been declared a deficient mode of expressing reality in many early cultures.

Various techniques of textual enhancement have been developed to bridge the gap between content and form, thus provoking the efficacy of words for enriching the textual meaning with greater density and complexity. Literary techniques of textual enhancement appear in manifold forms in different cultures. They comprise the phonetic and semantic aspects of language but also include the aspects of its visual representation in writing. In addition to the text enhancing linguistic patterns that can exist independently of writing, either as phonetic patterns (e.g., rhyme, assonance) or as semantic tropes (e.g., metaphor), features that are based on writing, typography, and layout are equally important as literary forms in argumentation. Technopaignia in all its variants of acrostics (telesticha, mesosticha), anagrams, pangrams, abcdaria, palindromes, lipograms, isosephic lines, and various other kinds of play with letters or graphical components, such as the plinthides or the practice of dissecting characters, have precursors in Ancient Greece, Egypt, China and Babylon. Concrete or visual poetry including calligrammes, carmina figurata and micrography, pattern poems, ambigrams, palindromes, word squares and many other literary figures playing with language can also be traced back to early literatures. Because for the most part the aspects of visual representation of arguments in writing are of a much later date than the techniques discussed in this volume, we decided not to include them in this book.


36 We are indebted to our most excellent anonymous reviewer for alerting us to that analytical difference. Susanne K. Langer similarly distinguishes “discursive symbolism” or “language proper” from “presentational symbolism,” see id., Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, orig. 1941), chap. 4, 97.


38 For examples of play on words in Greek poetry see Christine Luz, Technopaignia, Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung (Leiden: Brill, 2010). For an overview on the punning hermeneutics used in Mesopotamian omens and commentaries which plays with the polysysem built in to the cuneiform writing system because of the polyvalence of many of its signs, see Marian Brodia, “Textualizing Divination: The Writing on the Wall in Daniel 5:25;” Vetus Testamentum 62 (2012): 1–13, 9–11. For palindromes in China see Christoph Harbsmeier, Language and Logic, 143. For the practice of dissecting written characters in China see J. J. M. De Groot, “On Chinese Divination by Dissecting Written Characters” (Amsterdam, 1987).


42 Literary enhancements grounded in layout as seen in a number of ancient traditions also have counterparts in the Chinese literary tradition. A very entertaining and useful collection of examples of ‘ludic script use’ is Zhou Yuanlong 周燁 and Zhou Wei 周為, eds., Wenzì yòuxì 文字遊戲, 2 vols. (Beijing: Tuanjie, 1999). A brief glance suggests that most
All these literary forms can take manifold functions, and in most cases they serve several functions at the same time. They can be used for pleasure as literary forms of entertainment, as riddles or for their aesthetic value of literary embellishment, or as folkloristic ornament or for poetic effect. They can serve magical purposes in the form of formulas and spells, as they purport an additional hidden meaning which mirrors the invisible body of numinous powers, and so they enhance the mysterious efficacy of the text. Moreover, such figures can be used to hide certain meanings either because of theological assumptions as reflected in early theories of manifold senses of Scripture, or for purposes of safety in times of persecution. Literary forms can support and further illustrate the contents they purport, like the Horatian couplets used by Alexander Pope to express his point in his “Essay on Criticism,” or Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics, which is an introduction to the comic genre written as a comic book. In both cases, literary forms are used to reinforce the content by enactment. In this sense they can be understood as “cognitive facilitators.”

Finally, such figures can also have argumentative functions when they provide patterns which illuminate the structure and the meaning of an argumentative text and thus reduce their ambiguity. These are the kinds of literary figures used in argumentative discourse. Starting from the above mentioned prime assumption that language is an insufficient and unreliable tool to express the complexity of epiphany, many Chinese thinkers chose to do philosophy with words and shape their arguments in particular literary forms. Scholars of Chinese philosophy have assessed this rather differently. While Hall and Ames (and other defenders of what Van Norden calls “The Radical View”) present Chinese thinking as an alternative model of philosophical enquiry, Graham, Hansen, McCurdy, Van Norden and others largely explain these modes of reasoning as belonging to the same system of philosophical logic as the Western philosophies. This volume attempts to probe more deeply into the examples in these volumes are from the early medieval period or later. We are grateful to our anonymous reviewer for pointing this publication out to us.

43 Famous examples of visual text enhancement in early China include the bronze water basin that carries a text by Scribe Qiang, the “Shi Qiang” pan 史牆盤. The text was probably composed shortly before 900 BC. The flat surface of the vessel carries a text of 284 graphs, cast into eighteen well-balanced lines neatly divided into two halves, where the first half commemorates the achievements of the Zhou kings and the second one the service carried out for those kings by Scribe Qiang and his ancestors. As an “epitome of order and regularity,” the visual representation of the text embodies “the ideal political order of the Zhou royal lineage” where “the balance of the two columns … corresponds with the balance of the eulogistic narrative.” (See Martin Kern, “The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China,” in The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign, eds. Sergio La Porta and David Shulman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 109–174, 170.) Another example is the “Chu Silk Manuscript,” dated circa 300 BC, that contains three texts, two of which deal with the creation of cosmic order and the events causing cosmic collapse respectively. Those two texts are written in reverse directions (rotated 180 degrees) to express order and chaos visually. The third text surrounding the other two presents twelve monthly guardian gods of the four cardinal directions. See Li Ling, “Discussion of the Chu Silk Manuscript,” transl. by Jenny F. So, in New Perspectives on Chu Culture during the Eastern Zhou Period, ed. Thomas Lawton (Princeton University Press, 1991), 178–183.

44 See the work by Klaus Peter Dencker, especially his edited collections Deutsche Unsinnpoesie (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1978) and id., Poetische Sprachspiele. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), as well as his work on (international) visual poetry.


48 In his introduction—“The Design”—to An Essay on Man, Pope writes: “This I might have done in prose; but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or precepts, so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: the other may seem odd, but it is true: I found I could express them more shortly this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain than that much of the force as well as grace of arguments or instructions depends on their conciseness.” Alexander Pope, An Essay on Man. Moral Essays and Satires (London, Paris & Melbourne: Cassell, 1891), 1.

49 Ribeiro, “Toward a Philosophy of Poetry,” 74.


52 Hall and Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, 40.

presuppositions of this debate by trying to elucidate a broader range of varieties of early Chinese modes of reasoning. Like in research on Plato, a proper understanding of the literary modes of reasoning is essential for understanding more fully any possible philosophical nuances of the argument. The approach taken here therefore does not aim at replacing philosophical analysis; rather we wish to complement it by providing further evidence for philosophical, as well as linguistic, literary, and historical analyses of early Chinese argumentative texts.

Arguments are devices of persuasion. Literary forms of arguments too serve this one goal. Whether these arguments should count as “philosophical arguments” is not our concern here. Yet, we would like to distinguish argumentative texts, which we deal with in this publication, from texts that reflect early rhetorical traditions of persuasion in diplomatic contexts as in the dialogues of the Zhanguoce 戰國策, or formulate rhetorical principles for persuasive strategies as in the early chapters of the Guiguzi 鬼谷子. The aim of this volume is not to look at rhetorical figures in early Chinese texts, but to identify the literary forms that serve as argumentative tools and that need to be recognised fully to understand the philosophical discussion in more precise terms. ‘Argument’ is therefore not understood as a tool to ascertain truth, as is commonly seen in Western philosophical discourse. Instead, ‘argument,’ as applying to the kind of texts discussed in this volume, should be described as a “pattern that, in its use, generates argumentative force.” By drawing attention to the philosophical relevance of form and thought in early Chinese writings, our aim is to examine the formal characteristics of a written argument in early Chinese texts that were developed not as strategic tools but as devices to convey ideas about how to regulate the self, the family, the society, the state and the world to achieve long life, prosperity, peace, harmony and perfect order. This has to be understood in the historical context of the development of written versus oral argumentation.

During the second half of the first millennium BC, probably in the fourth and third centuries, there occurred a shift in the “production of philosophy” when the philosophical texts of early China no longer constructed argumentations in predominantly oral ways. The first significant maturing of a manuscript culture that occurred during that period implicated a proliferation of literary texts, and with the increase of written texts in wider circulation, the pollination of various genres and text traditions. In this environment there developed a shift in the written philosophical productivity that smoothed the way for new forms of philosophical enterprise. The new forms of written philosophical communication that advanced in the context of a growing manuscript culture manifest a sophisticated attempt to facilitate direct access to the philosophical experience of what most early Chinese thinkers refer to as “dao” (Way). In these novel forms of written communication, authors developed philosophically sound positions that were increasingly argument-based and so less dependent on contexts of


oral explanation. The philosophical text thus steadily replaced the triangular relationship of meaning conveyance between master, student, and text, which previously determined the successful communication of thought. As a result, the philosophical texts gradually became direct mediators of ideas. In some cases, it may even be argued that the formal structure of the text was thought to express the philosophical insight transported in the text, which thus came to be embodied in the text itself. The result of such forms of written philosophical communication, in which the medium was simultaneously made into the matter, is that the distinction between the cognitive grasp of the philosophical thoughts and their enactment that caused so many “disputers of the dao” considerable headache, ceased to exist. This may have worked on different levels of textual composition and text-performance, and we find a reflection of those different levels in the great variety of literary forms used to formulate and perform arguments at the same time.

It is in this context and in contrast to the “Western” tradition that Chinese thinkers have not attempted to define an organon of valid logical forms. Instead, early Chinese thinkers spent some effort in generating different literary forms of philosophical reasoning, such as interlocking parallel style, overlapping structure, Janus-faced bridges, symmetrical rhyme nets, collage strategies, modular arrangements, phonetic and graphical intensification, or micro-macro structure correspondences which, however, have largely passed unnoticed by sinologists both in China and the West. This is not surprising as the various literary forms in which Western philosophy has found its expressions in epinikion songs of triumph (Bacchylidean gnomes), didactic poems (Parmenides, Empedocles), dialogues (Plato, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume), letters (Epicurus, Seneca), autobiographies (Augustine, Descartes), prayers (Anselm of Canterbury), meditations (Descartes), tractates (Spinoza, Wittgenstein), schoolbooks (Wolff), aphorisms (Lichtenberg, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein), essays (Montaigne), dictionaries (Bayle), verse (Pope, Voltaire) et cetera, have never been regarded as relevant for a philosophical analysis of the argument. Literary and philosophical (argumentative) texts are in the West dealt with by different disciplines and specialists. Literary forms of philosophical arguments as we find them throughout Chinese early literate traditions have therefore been much ignored in the field of Chinese Studies. Attempts in recent scholarship to overcome the neglected place of this philosophically productive level of compelling consent in early Chinese Philosophy by means of the literary form of an argument, are still few and far between – but not entirely absent.

With the development of structural linguistics and the performative turn in the philosophy of language, new approaches to the analysis of early Chinese argumentation have been proposed by Herbert Fingarette, Rudolf Wagner, Michael Broschat and others which focus on the performative and structural features of Chinese arguments. A similar approach had been taken nearly two hundred years earlier already by the first generation of European sinologists who recognised parallelism as a fundamental means of constructing meaning in Chinese texts. John Francis Davis (1795-1890) was probably the first scholar in the West who, in a lecture, given at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1830, pointed out the importance of parallelism in Chinese poetry and its “striking coincidence” with the Hebrew forms that Robert Lowth (1710-1787) had defined into three classes in 1753. Davis is also the first to mention the occurrence of parallelism in Chinese prose texts. In 1878, Georg von der Gabelentz (1840–1893) presented parallelism in a short analysis of an inscription as a valuable tool, which allowed clear demarcations of the non-punctuated
Chinese sentences. In 1892, Gustave Schlegel (1840–1903) in his translation of the Stele of Teghin Giogh also emphasised parallelism as an important tool for a correct understanding and translation of the text. He even took this ‘law’ of parallelism as the philological basis of his critical discussion of two translations of Zhang Yue’s 張說 (667–730) preface to Xuanzang’s 玄奘 (ca. 600-664) travelogue Da Tang xiyou ji 大唐西城記, a text composed in strict parallelisms, and provided his own translation of it. However, the analytical approaches that focus on a literary form of meaning production in these texts have not yet been systematically developed beyond the mere literary form of parallelism. This might be due to the fact that parallelism has mainly been studied as a literary phenomenon in Chinese as well as in Western literary theory. Although Chinese literary theories did not analyse literary forms of arguments in the first place, they have developed a substantial number of analytical concepts and terms (especially after the Song) which are also applicable in some cases to an insightful analysis of literary forms of arguments.

Rudolf G. Wagner was the first to analyse parallelism as an argumentative form. In 1969 he published his first analysis of the argumentative figure of “interlocking parallel style” (IPS), which he further developed in later publications. Further argumentative forms of parallelisms have been identified by Gentz, Meyer and Streif.

One of the first systematic attempts to analyse the meaning of early Chinese texts by “determining the structures that are defining relations for the elements within a text” was proposed by Michael Broschat who applied what he called “constituent analysis” to the Guiguzi in 1985 – to this day a much neglected work. That approach was probably inspired by the linguistic methodology of “immediate constituent analysis” developed by American linguists Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949), Rulon Wells (1918–2008), Noam Chomsky and others since the 1930s. (That tradition was in turn inspired by the Sanskrit grammar of Pāṇinī, who probably flourished in the 5th–4th century BC, as Bloomfield and Wells both studied Indian languages). In contrast to earlier works, Broschat enquired into the constituents of paragraphs and whole texts rather than to the constituents of sentences. He defined his “constituent analysis” as “an analytic process in which significant constituent parts are identified, their relations to other parts are identified and specified, and the general effect of these constituents and their structural inter-relations on the meaning of the whole text is considered.”

Broschat discusses three basic literary techniques, which serve to relate the parts of a text they demarcate to other parts, constitute structure and thereby generate meaning:

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72 Broschat, “Guiguzi,” 88–89.
rhythm, parallelism and rhyme. He differentiates the linear structure of prose texts from poetical texts and argues that many early Chinese prose texts do not follow linear structures:

“When a piece departs from linear structure, as I would argue much of Classical Chinese prose does, it approaches the poetic, where the meaning of a piece depends more and more on the effects generated by its structures. Only when those structures, and thus their effects, are as clear as possible, can the reader presume to have a good understanding of the author’s intentions.”

A reader should therefore

“look first at the value of the structure to avoid being incorrectly influenced by the value of the word (which can change in different contexts).”

In recent years the philosophical study of written arguments has gained in importance in Western and Chinese scholarship, as is further reflected in the broader interest in Chinese hermeneutics, the application of metaphor theory, the increasing awareness of integral structures of textual compositions, as well as the increased number of international conferences on early Chinese argumentation. The volume Literary Forms of Argument in Early China further explores possibilities of the structural-analytical approach by bringing together the ideas developed both by Western and Chinese colleagues, and so construct new methods for the analysis of pre-modern Chinese philosophical texts. It investigates literary patterns and their philosophical function in pre-modern Chinese texts and analyses the correlation of form and content in Chinese philosophy.

Our approach in this volume is manifold: first, it is formalistic in the sense that it focuses on linguistic forms on the levels of words, utterances, paragraphs and entire text compositions. As such, it aims at generating a phenomenology of the formal patterns of arguments in early Chinese texts; second, it is functionalist in that it analyses multiple functional devices of the different formal patterns and enquires into the way in which they are operational in the logic of the argument; third, it is structuralist as the literary devices are regarded as functionalist elements within the literary whole. Textual parts are identified which gain further significance as integral parts of an overall network of structure in which the individual parts are significantly interrelated in a relationship of interdependence.

Central questions asked in this volume are: What are the formal characteristics of an argument in pre-modern China? What kind of literary figures are used to convey arguments? Does the formal pattern of a text itself contribute to the idea transmitted? Are literary patterns reflective of mapping mechanisms between conceptual domains? How do literary form and conceptual mapping shape the way in which concepts are generated?

74 Broschat, “Guiguzi,” 126.
But the focus of this volume is not restricted to the study of texts as consciously composed and philosophically coherent edifices. It also looks at the different kinds of devices of argument and argumentation in early Chinese written thought. These include the use of metaphor and other non-linear semantic utterances, different hermeneutical approaches of philosophising with texts by contemporaneous textual communities, sound correlated devices used to structure text and meaning, as well as the conscious use of paradox in written philosophical prose – but also other expressions of communicative intentions and the implementations of pragmatic effects used to criticise, ridicule, seduce, persuade, employ irony, and achieve an infinite number of other aims. Such elements of persuasion in the philosophical discourse may not only serve a function in the formal development of the argument, but also evoke ritual or abstract principles of order that reflect cosmological conceptions by contemporaneous philosophers and disputers.

The volume Literary Forms of Argument in Early China grew out of a three-day conference held in September 2009 at The Queen’s College, University of Oxford, organised by Joachim Gentz, Dirk Meyer and Wim De Reu. Participants of the meeting came from all over Europe, North America, and Asia. The papers presented at the meeting were consistently excellent, and we decided to choose nine contributions that we thought would best represent our concern with regard to the strategies of argument construction in early Chinese discourse. The Oxford workshop was followed by a long and productive exchange between the authors and the editors where the specific dual focus on the literary form on the one hand and its argumentative function on the other was sharpened. The result is a first, tentative attempt to identify literary patterns and their specific argumentative purpose in early Chinese discourse.

In early Chinese texts, the literary form can relate to the argument of the text in various ways. Sometimes the literary form itself serves as an argument. Parallelisms suggest identity or opposition of parallel clauses; enumerative catalogues suggest completeness of a set of terms covering a certain field; tetrasyllables suggest didactic authority. In other cases, literary forms serve as illustrative bodies that mirror the philosophical argumentation. The ways in which the ambiguous interlocked parallelisms in the Laozi 老子, the playful and floating style in the Zhuangzi 莊子, the simple, economic and clear sentences in the Shangjun shu 商君書, the organic metaphors in the Mengzi 孟子, or the artificial constructions in the Xunzi 荀子 reflect aspects of their respective philosophies may serve as examples. Literary forms can also provide connotations that enrich the meaning of the text. Micro-macro equivalents in the composition of the text or allusive insertions add further dimensions of meaning to a text. Literary forms are often used as means of encoding and thus signifying the structure of an argument. Interlocking parallel style, double directed text units, overlapping structure, technical terms, and referential signifiers are literary devices that define the units of argumentative texts and their respective relationships. Moreover, literary forms reflect basic forms of arguments such as authority-based or context-based arguments, historical precedence, chain arguments, wise judgements in teaching dialogues et cetera. Finally, literary forms can convey meaning through the conspicuous absence of any pattern that could support an argument. This argumentative silence of a literary form can have manifold reasons. It might give expression to the assumption that the
teachings of the sage(s) are beyond our grasp, or it could emphasise the claim of the independence and ahistorical truth of single textual units in a textual composition.

This volume combines three dominant modes of analysis and it is structured accordingly. First is the analysis of the precise function of specific markers in argumentation as structuring devices for Chinese rhetoric and argument; second is the analysis of particular structural patterns and their argumentative function, addressing the specific function of select argumentative patterns, such as parallelism, tetrasyllables, or literary signifiers of argumentative boundaries that apply repeatedly to different texts from the classical era; third is the analysis of macro modes of persuasion in the written philosophical discourse, dealing with the question of how persuasive texts work as argumentative units where the literary form of composition as a whole becomes part of the message – either by means of absence of established argumentative literary forms or by providing meaning through (authorial or editorial) arrangements of textual units.

Rudolf Wagner heads the analysis of the literary form of argument in early Chinese discourse with a study of the initial fu 夫 as a phrase status marker and building block of Chinese argumentation. He notes that analytical discourse in early China is characterised by the use of rhetorical figures to mark the status of a statement as either expressing a general rule, an exception, or a side comment. Such “status markers,” as Wagner likes to call them, may be silent or non-silent—that is, implicit or explicit—in classical Chinese argumentation. This adds to the difficulty in dealing with such markers, which might be part of the reason why they have been much neglected by scholarship, as Wagner laments. The result of such omission in the analysis of Chinese forms of argumentation is a lack of precision when dealing with Chinese ideas, especially since in early discourse such markers are often the only device to structure an argument. With phrase and paragraph separators being widely absent in early texts, a precise understanding of these markers, Wagner insists, is crucial for a precise understanding of “argumentative procedures” in early China. Wagner addresses this hiatus in learning through a detailed analysis of the initial fu as a phrase marker for statements of general rather than particular validity. But Wagner’s analysis is fundamentally not about “mapping the bandwidth of the uses of the character 夫 during the Warring States.” Instead, the study is about the rhetorical functions of fu in structuring texts of a philosophical nature.

Wagner’s choice of analysis is that of a qualitative analysis of random phrases used by Wang Bi (226–249 AD) in his commentaries on the Zhouyi 周易 and the Laozi, from which he develops a series of hypotheses concerning the function of fu. The random phrase search is an important methodological choice that prevents Wagner from falling into the circularity of argument when discussing a select range of examples. In his analysis, he refutes the common perception that thinks of initial fu as a topical marker and concludes that its function is instead that of a marker for “statements and definitions of a general philosophical nature.”

Moving on from the initial fu in Chinese argumentation, Andrew Plaks undertakes a re-evaluation of parallel patterns in the seminal works of classical Chinese philosophy. Plaks proposes nothing less than a revised understanding of the significance of parallelism in Chinese argumentation. ‘Parallelism,’ by his definition, is an overarching mode of textuality where “the paradigmatic use of parallel sequences constitutes the primary feature of a part or the whole of a given piece of prose or verse composition.” Progressing from his earlier work in which he highlighted those aspects of parallelism that were specific to texts from early China in comparison to similar patterns in other literary traditions, Plaks now suggests the tentative division of categories of analysis into, first, “sequences of parallel statements that culminate in the final assertion of a principal point that casts conceptual light or logical direction on a given argument”; second, “equivalent utterances that lead up to the presentation

89 See Harbsmeier in this volume.
90 See, however, Richter’s analysis on punctuation as initiator, section terminator and separator in manuscripts from the Warring States period, especially in his “Punctuation,” in Reading Early Chinese Manuscripts, eds. Wolfgang Behr, Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).
of provocative, unconventional or counter-intuitive assertions”; third, “pairs or strings of clauses in which a given unit serves to delineate the conditions for another unit, thus functioning as a kind of subordinate clause.” While ‘antiphony’ or ‘poliphony’ in matching lines “may be considered the ‘default mode’ of classical Chinese expository prose,” Plaks now suggests that there are “a significant number of examples” where the expected governing principle of “paratactic coordination of parallel assertions” must be nuanced by recognising a certain notion of subordination that generally goes unnoticed. By casting light on an overlooked aspect of Chinese parallelism, Plaks’ work enables the student of Chinese ideas to arrive at a more nuanced assessment of the literary form of Chinese argumentation through parallel patterns and evaluate forms of argumentation in their full breadth.

Following on from parallelism in Chinese argumentation, David Schaberg discusses a subgenre of philosophical discourse from early China, which he terms “Laozi-style tetrasyllables.” As the “single densest concentration of the specific type of gnomic verse that it contains,” Schaberg notes that the Laozi has come to “stand for a whole distinct subgenre of philosophical discourse,” with no other text relying so heavily on this form. However, assuming that to regard this form of verse as unique to the Laozi, or to think that parallels were found only in “Daoist” texts such as the Zhuangzi would be to “ignore an important and broadly influential development in the history of Chinese philosophical argumentation.” Schaberg shows that the Laozi-style tetrasyllables appear to have resulted from a sophistication of existing conventions for didactic verse: a type of verse that was, on the one hand, notably limited both in its lexicon and in its gamut of syntactical patterns and “figures of speech,” while depending greatly upon sets of stock dichotomies and a limited set of themes, on the other.

By way of reconstructing a corpus of tetrasyllabic verse that provides the setting for the Laozi-style form, Schaberg notes that the genre style is typically juxtaposed with unrhymed material, most likely to mark a special aspect of speech. First appearing in texts from the late fourth century BC, rhymed tetrasyllables perform alongside unrhymed prose in passages of instruction or argumentation where they form a “distinct genre of didactic prosimetrum.” Based on studies by Baxter and Wagner, Schaberg holds that the Laozi most likely emerged from a tradition of philosophical verse with strong oral elements and little concept of individual authorship. But while the genre was represented widely in the Warring States period, Schaberg now shows that it was surrounded by verse that had, however, very different didactic aims. Schaberg therefore assumes that “Laozi-style verse and this larger field of verse coexisted for some centuries.”

Laozi-verse is largely concerned with representations of the dao 道 and the sage, including illustrations of how the dao works in the world and how rulers may themselves become sage users of the dao. Evaluating a vast range of early texts, Schaberg assumes that the tetrasyllabic verses were useful predominantly in didactic and curative contexts. While the anecdotes discussed by Schaberg are clearly delivered as fictions, the common elements in their narrative frames nevertheless allow for certain conclusions to be drawn about how Laozi-style tetrasyllables were used originally. Schaberg’s assumption is that such verse was being performed at the courts of Warring States and Han patrons and rulers.

Schaberg’s analysis brings together different aspects of the literary form of an argument in China and its sociological applications. His observations about framing and the interaction of rhymed passages with prose tally in closely with related observations made by Wolfgang Behr, Joachim Gentz, Martin Kern, Dirk Meyer, and Rudolf Wagner with regard to the marking practices of an argument in early Chinese philosophical discourse. 92

92 See Behr’s study “Three Sound-Correlated Text Structuring Devices in Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose,” 15–33; Gentz’ discussion in this volume of the literary signifiers of argumentative boundaries; Kern’s study of quotations the “Zi yi”; (in Kern, “Quotation and the Confucian Canon in Early Chinese Manuscripts: The Case of ‘Zi yi’ [Black Robes],” Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques 59/1, [2006]: 293–332) Meyer’s observations about structural consistency in argument-based texts (in Meyer, Philosophy on Bamboo) that ensure textual stability and recognisability, (id., 31, 202) signal the importance of a unit, (id., 51, 62), and mark the length of an argumentative unit in Chinese texts (id., 53); Wagner’s study in this volume of the marking of an argument by means of the initial fú, to name but a few of the important recent developments in the study of the form of an argument in early China. See also Schaberg’s earlier discussion of literary patterning that is conceived of as an
Next comes Joachim Gentz with a close description of different examples of literary forms to show how they function as signifiers of boundaries and text relations in early Chinese written argumentation. For this, Gentz chooses three types of literary forms, namely that of the ‘double-directed text units’ with its subcategory of ‘double-directed parallelism;’ the ‘enumerative catalogues;’ the ‘referential signifiers’ and their specific function in the formulation and specification of an argument. The figure of the double-directed text units combines two unrelated parts of an argument and indicates an aspectual relationship of these elements. A subcategory to the double-directed text units is formed by the double-directed parallelism. Here, the parallel form of two sentences, which can operate on the phonetic as well as the syntactical level at the same time, expresses different aspects of one and the same topic. As examples of the Laozi and the Shijing 詩經 show, the double-directed parallelism may also formulate the crucial insight of an argument, and so take on a related function to that of the principal insertion discussed by Meyer in this volume. Whether the two forms of argument have a common origin or perhaps express different aspects of a related argumentative form is a question that remains to be explored.

The second form discussed is that of the enumerative catalogue. Such catalogues define groups of key analytical terms and create a particular conceptual field. The field is thereby not only defined but also structured, and a full representation of the matter is claimed. At the same time, the individual constituents mark the length of argument and act as operators within that field.

As a third category, Gentz discusses the construction of oppositional pairs of positions through contrasts, using the example of the Xunzi to show how contrasting positions are being developed progressively through opposite chains of terms. As in the previous examples of argumentative figures, the literary form not only guides the argument, it also indicates the length of an argument within a text. The examples given by Gentz demonstrate the degree to which close analysis of the literary form of an argument is crucial for understanding an argument in full. The Xunzi, for instance, displays its rhetorical tools at the start by developing them in a strictly uniform fashion, just to weaken the rigid patterns as the text moves on and starts to shift more freely beyond those patterns. It seems as though the form of the text was key to the way in which its authors hoped their audiences would understand and use their text. One is tempted to read this in parallel fashion to the claim in the Xunzi about the realisation of ritual by the individual: the habituation of ritual on the part of the individual requires repetition and drill so that the individual develops a habitus of conduct where any deviation from the form would still be such that it conforms to the internalised patterns of ritual propriety.

Finally, Gentz uses the “Zhu yan” 主言 chapter of the Da Dai Liji 大戴禮記 to demonstrate how the different literary forms are combined and interwoven within one single text.

Moving on from coherent patterns to non-patterned literary forms of arguments, Christoph Harbsmeier discusses the literary form of the “Yucong” 語叢 1 and argues that the genre style of the text compounds to the intellectual message of the text. It is by virtue of its particular style of truncated, programmatically enigmatic propositions and theorems that the “Yucong” 1 presents itself as an “analytically pointilistic” text.

The “Yucong” 1 only occasionally organises statements into sequences of theorems. For the most part, the statements remain isolated. “Badly in need of elaborating explanations,” they are obscure dicta. But they cohere. When read in context, according to Harbsmeier, they “add up to an overall vision that is intimately linked to the aphoristic form itself.” A vision is created in the “Yucong” 1 where there is no such thing as a “reasoned system,” but where the vision is enunciated through a succession of “analytical aperçus.” This forms groups of “unorganised sets” where the constituents are such that they are mutually interrelated but, at the same time, “retain their semantic and rhetoric independence.”
But this is not the only way by which the “Yucong” 1 is squarely out of line with tradition. Unlike known philosophical texts, the “Yucong” 1 neither references historical narrative as a point of illustration or source of authority, nor does it provide any moral advice. The rhetorical form of the “Yucong” 1 is just focused on what Harbsmeier understands as “conceptual analysis.” Much in line with Wang Bi’s 王弼 (226–249) understanding of the form of the Laozi,93 Harbsmeier thinks of the non-form of text composition as in itself a formalistic message: that the “Yucong” 1 makes no appeal to any authoritative instance outside the text makes it speak “in its own intellectual right” where the text “is beholden to no authority past or present” the text is fundamentally, and as Harbsmeier claims, provocatively “ahistorical.”

In some respect, this situation bears a resemblance to the “Kongzi shilun” 孔子詩論 (henceforth “Shilun”) discussed by Martin Kern. Just as in the “Yucong” 1, the “Shilun” progresses no linear sequence of events, and there seems to be no such thing as a logical or necessary development of an argument. Although there are now some confirmed clusters to arrange the “Shilun,” the links between those clusters are very loose. Just as is true of the “Yucong” 1, there is also no such thing as an explicit argument in the “Shilun.” The “Shilun” has no single expository style. It is a “patchwork of various rhetorical patterns.” Similar to the “Yucong” 1, the lack of a rigid progression of formalistic sequences, the ‘non-form’ of the “Shilun” might in fact serve as a device that points to the overall message of the text. As Kern assumes, the literary form marks it as a particular type of text, which “is defined by its particular function.” However, unlike the “provocatively ahistorical” nature of the “Yucong” 1, the “Shilun” is fundamentally connected to external sanction, as signalled by the repetitive use of yue 曰, “it is said,” that is interceded with the lines of the “Odes,” and it is closely related to the authority of Kongzi, ‘Confucius.’ The yue marks speech as an accepted voice, “sanctioned and perpetuated by tradition.” It marks the absence of a “specific authorial voice” as a quality, “marking the text as an expression of traditional authority.” The formulaic makeup of the text and its absence of a systematic linear progression of thought therefore gives form to its “catechistic, authoritative nature.” Speaking to the initiated already familiar with the anthology “Odes,” it “issues pronouncements.”

Kern shows that in opposition to a text such as the Mao Odes, the “Shilun” advances no historical or political interpretation of the “Odes.” As is true of the “Yucong” 1, the “Shilun” is not supported by a commentary or any other means to connect it to historical anecdotes or a larger narrative framework that would situate the text.

While the “Shilun” is no guidance to the “Odes” and provides no actual interpretation, it simply confronts the text recipient with Kongzi’s “exemplary judgment.” But, as Kern astutely observes, the master’s personal comments are fundamentally about his reactions “as the person who truly understands” the “Odes.” “His structurally repetitive remarks thus stand as a model of profound insight” which is to be accepted by whoever is confronted with the “Shilun.” As such, the persona Kongzi serves in fact as a chiffre for rhetorical artifice that is given form through decidedly stylised and pithy pronouncements.

The whole situation of the “Shilun” and the absence of strict forms of progression of statements in a purposeful sequence of clusters is reminiscent of the “Unhandlichkeit” (non-graspable nature or unhandiness) of Kongzi as portrayed in the Shiji 史記.94 While the Shiji normally captures by its mastery of materials, the “Kongzi shijia” 孔子世家 chapter of that anthology is surprisingly loose—not to say slack—in organisation, and the lack of coherency in the account of Kongzi and his life is striking. To think of that as a deficiency on the part of the ‘Sima Qian 司馬遷 project’ in their compiling and authoring of the Shiji would seem too easy a suggestion in light of the consistency of the other chapters and their masterful command of handling the different materials and sources and bringing them into compelling form. The lack of consistency and stringency is in itself a masterful strategy of argumentation: you cannot handle Confucius. The sage is beyond our grasp. But while we cannot put Kongzi

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93 See Wagner, Craft, 117ff.
94 Cf. also Wagner, “Die Unhandlichkeit.”
and his profound insight into categories of our own, he fundamentally serves as an example on which to model our conduct.

Much in line with Harbsmeier and Kern and the concept of anti-structure in early Chinese texts as developed at the Oxford meeting, Michael Nylan advances a strategy to interpret Yang Xiong’s 扬雄 (53 BC–AD 18) Fayan 法言 (Exemplary Figures) with its lack of a consistent structure and the dual personae of “Yang-the-Master” that is so strangely at odds with Yang Xiong’s masterwork, the Taixuan 太玄 (Great Mystery), where much effort seems to be placed on the “exposure of an exostructure relying on yin, yang, and the Five Phases qì.” The task that is before the reader of the Fayan, according to Nylan, is to “interpret the multiple voices and registers” that Yang Xiong used while “fashioning this persona as master of all the phenomena worth knowing,” when Yang Xiong himself signals to his readers that his texts should not be read in a literal sense.

Although the Fayan contains larger themes, they do not unfold easily between the chapters and they are disconnected from the literary form of the text. Syntactical units are scattered over different textual units and they are not guided by any structural principle. Different statements in the text contradict one another, and there seems to be no single consistent train of thought in the entire Fayan. Instead, the “stop-and-start quality” of the text bears close reminiscence with a text such as the Lunyu 論語, and the lack of thematic and syntactic connections gets more and more marked as the text progresses. No line in the text sequence “yields a satisfying semantic sequence with the succeeding text elaborating, expanding, or elucidating the preceding.” The only point of reference in a text without contextually joining references between the different units is the “literary Yang himself,” Nylan asserts. “Yang attacks and retreats from various stances, modifying his assertions until the reader’s head fairly swims.” The lack of structural coherence, as well as obvious principles that would guide the text, is therefore something that compounds the difficulty in determining meaning on the part of the text recipient, making the Fayan much more difficult, and in fact more mysterious, than its predecessor, the Taixuan, and one is tempted to read this as a literary device used purposely by Yang Xiong. This being true, the non-structure seems to be a device to assist the text recipient in grasping “the subtle idea that no small part of learning and living well depends on divine insight and intuition, and cannot be grasped by strict logical forms,” a point repeatedly made especially with regard to the Zhuangzi. At the same time, the non-structure of the Fayan and its constant contradiction requires a devoted reader, just as the study of the dao requires a devote student with a love for learning. Yang Xiong as philosophical persona therefore assumes an author function, where through his status as eminent thinker the text recipient will impute any failure in understanding the Fayan not to deficiencies in the text but to their own limitations. The non-form of the text, Nylan therefore concludes, brings into practice the message that “small men use to perfect themselves in small things, and the great in great.” (Fayan 8/12)

Moving on from Nylan’s discussion of the Fayan, the remaining two chapters of this volume discuss strategies of argumentation in the Zhuangzi. Much in line with Nylan’s findings, the apparent non-form of textual structure is also prominent in chapter 26 of the Zhuangzi, the “Wai wu” 外物 (Things External), analysed by Wim De Reu. The “Wai wu” is one of the so-called za pian 杂篇 (miscellaneous chapters). At first sight, the text, much like the Fayan, seems to be lacking in consistent organisation, and the component sections appear “mutually unrelated and even trivial.” It is for this reason that a common misconception has arisen that thinks of this chapter as a “ragbag of odds and ends”95 – a view much challenged by De Reu.

Noting the lack of systematic research on the later Zhuangzi chapters, De Reu’s analysis goes against the received perception of the “Wai wu” as something that is just “made up of scraps put together at random.” Through his examination of the underlying argumentative structure of the “Wai wu,” De Reu identifies three sets of explicit verbal connections in the “Wai wu” and shows that there is a coherent line of argument that connects the entire chapter

95 See Angus Graham (transl.), Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzŭ (London: Allen & Unwin), 29; id., Disputers of the Tao, 173.
into a coherent organism. For this, he divides the “Wai wu” into twelve units, all of which culminate in the final section of the chapter, which, following De Reu’s analysis, must be seen as the “culmination” of the entire “Wai wu.”

With his analysis De Reu calls into question the common interpretation of the chapter’s well-known final section. It is usually argued that it deals with the dynamics between language and meaning. However, De Reu argues that the final section of the “Wai wu” is in fact better understood by distinguishing between two ways of linguistic engagement within a given social context, and he conjectures that the chapter as a whole possibly formulates a critique of fixed social interactions. The dominant reception of that unit is based on Wang Bi’s reading of the first three lines for his exposition of the *Zhouyi* (Changes of Zhou). Wang Bi’s de-contextualisation of this section in support of the *Zhouyi* informs the reading of this unit to the present day, stressing the relation between language and meaning and obscuring its function within the “Wai wu” as an argumentatively cohesive unit.

By showing the coherence on the chapter level of composition, De Reu invalidates the common ragbag hypothesis and demonstrates the ways in which close form analysis of a text can fundamentally change the interpretation of received wisdom as philosophically sound argumentation.

A similar situation also applies to the “Qiushui” 秋水 (Autumn floods) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, discussed by Dirk Meyer. By analysing the literary form of argument, this study casts light on the strategies through which persuasion is invoked on the level of text composition.

Although much of the *Zhuangzi* dates probably from the time of the Warring States period, the composition of the chapters in their current form is a result of Guo Xiang’s 郭象 (d. 312 AD) editorial activity, through which he established a text much in line with his personal vision of the *Zhuangzi*. Meyer takes this as his starting point of analysis for the “Qiushui” and, as a working hypothesis, looks at the chapter as a whole to investigate its strategies of argumentative persuasion.

It appears that the “Qiushui” as a consistent unit, according to Meyer, formulates a coherent vision that manifests an attempt to bridge the gap between a philosophy of praxis and the attempt to communicate philosophical insight through the literary patterns of text composition. The literary patterns of the text transform the “Qiushui” into a text-performance in the sense that, when read, it makes the text recipient act out philosophical insight simply by virtue of reciting the text. The “Qiushui” therefore manifests an attempt to express the unsayable through form. The text as a whole formulates a claim to truth without ever claiming the truth in explicit terms. With the “Qiushui,” Guo Xiang translates the prominent theme of skill in the *Zhuangzi* into a philosophical essay where the text itself becomes a most skilful praxis of the *dao*.

In his analysis of the “Qiushui,” Meyer carries out a detailed investigation into the literary form of the argument both on the level of the micro and macro structure of composition. One might be tempted to read the “Qiushui” as a collection of mutually unrelated stories, but Meyer’s analysis, like De Reu’s, casts light on the literary strategies by which the different stories in the “Qiushui” are mutually interconnected in a coherent whole where a consistent vision is presented. This is much in line with argument-based texts from the Warring States period where some contain quite an elaborate architecture of text composition. Excavated texts such as the “Zhong xin zhi dao” 忠信之道, “Qiong da yi shi” 穷達以時, or the “Wuxing” 五行 from tomb Guodian One represent this well. However, unlike a text such as the “Zhong xin zhi dao” in which each unit is given a necessary place, the “Qiushui” entertains a much more organic form of text composition. The different units in this text rather float one into the other, much in line with the overall vision of the text. The literary form of text composition therefore reduplicates the initial metaphor of the text, and Meyer feels confident in concluding that the formal composition in fact expresses the argument of the text on the literary level.

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96 The architecture of text composition in these texts was discussed in detail in Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*. 
By bringing together leading scholars in the field of literary philosophical communication in early China to discuss literary forms of arguments, our intention with this volume is to further awareness of the intricacies of argument-construction in early Chinese written prose. We aim to open up the field of literary philosophical communication in pre-modern China to a broader public and to connect the questions relevant to our field to wider discourse about strategies of compelling consent in other disciplines.

The realisation of this volume would have been impossible without the engaged, critical and insightful contributions of the conference participants and the excellent papers that we received for this volume. The editors are grateful for the friendly openness of the authors to yield to a new approach, for their receptive and creative responsiveness, as well as for their support and patience throughout the highly labour intensive, yet productive, editing process. We would also like to thank the American Council of Learned Societies in conjunction with the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for their generous support of the workshop, the British Inter-university China Centre, as well as The Queen’s College, University of Oxford.

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