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# Political Rhetoric in the *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子

A structural analysis of Chapter 12 ‘Shuìnán’ 說難

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**Abstract:** Persuasion is one of the main rhetorical techniques employed in debates by early Chinese “wandering persuaders,” as it is attested by several examples preserved in Classical Chinese pre-imperial and early imperial politico-philosophical literature. The present article contributes to the study of persuasion by providing a detailed structural analysis of one of the most famous texts that openly deals with this technique, Chapter 12 ‘Shuìnán’ 說難 (The Difficulties of Persuasion) of the composite “Masters text” *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子. Through such analysis, the article discloses the complex, multi-layered underlying rhetorical structure of the text, and the thick network of conceptual cross-references that are established among its different sections through the ingenious distribution of different kinds of text-structuring elements. As the present case study will show, this type of analysis is an invaluable hermeneutic tool that provides a substantial contribution to a better and fuller understanding of Classical Chinese texts.

## 1 Introduction: text-structural analysis as a hermeneutic tool

“Persuasion” (*shuì* 說) is one of the main techniques employed in early Chinese rhetoric of the Warring States (475–221 B.C.) and Hàn 漢 (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) periods. While no proper manual or handbook of Classical Chinese rhetoric has been handed down, several cases of persuasion have been preserved in pre-imperial and early imperial Classical Chinese politico-philosophical literature, allowing us to reconstruct the main formal and structural characteristics of this technique through a close reading of this rich literary heritage. The present article aims to provide a contribution to the understanding of the formal characteristics of persuasion in Early China through the analysis of a pertinent case study. It disentangles the rhetorical stratagems and complex internal “architecture” of a case of persuasion by relying on a detailed structural analysis of

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Chapter 12 ‘Shuìnán’ 說難 (‘The Difficulties of Persuasion’) of the composite, heterogenous “Masters text” *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子 (*Master Han Fei*). The ‘Shuìnán’ chapter is particularly relevant in this context as it famously discloses and shares “insider’s knowledge” of an experienced court persuader on how to perform a successful act of persuasion and what are the secrets to winning the persuadee’s trust and sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

As recent developments in the field of Early China show, supported by several virtuous examples of successful case studies being carried out on both received and excavated textual materials,<sup>2</sup> in early Chinese *prose* texts structure in itself is a powerful rhetorical tool that is consistently used in two closely-connected ways: (a) to enhance argumentative force;<sup>3</sup> and (b) as a means to evoke meta-textual allusions, and to establish meaningful intertextual and intra-textual cross-references among the different sections of an individual chapter or text, or across chapters within broader collections.<sup>4</sup> These references, drawn from a shared cultural and intellectual lore, create meta-narratives that synergically interacts with the main body of the text. The conceptual connections created thereby are the result of deliberate, pondered choices of the author(s) or compilers that abide by fairly well-established stylistic and rhetorical rules. These connections, carefully woven into the text, are meant to provide an additional interpretive dimension through subtly hidden messages that must have been immediately recognizable to the trained eyes and ears of the erudite scholarly community<sup>5</sup> to which these texts

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See the groundbreaking work of the Russian “structuralist” sinological movement, especially Spirin 1976 and 1991, and, following in his footsteps, Karapet’janc 2015 – on this topic, see Chemla/Volkov/Dorofeeva-Lichtmann 1991 and Rykov 2016. See the most recent contributions in the West, such as Wagner 1980 and 1999; Chemla 1992; Boltz 1999 and 2005; Schaberg 2002; Behr/Gentz 2005; Gentz 2005 and 2007; Schwermann 2005; van Ess 2005–06; Meyer 2005, 2005–06, 2011, and forthc.; Kern 2005 and 2015a – a revised version of the latter is included in Kern/Meyer 2017; McCraw 2006; Schilling 2011; Zádrapa 2011–13, 2014; Richter 2005, 2013, 2014; Krijgsman 2014; Kern/Meyer 2017; Weingarten 2019. On phonorhetorical phenomena, see Debon 1996; McCraw 1995; Behr 2005; Kern 2015b; Schaberg 2015; Tharsen 2015; and Weingarten 2016. On the structure of certain chapters or sections of the *Hán Fēizǐ* in particular, see Reeve 2003; Du 2010, 2017, 2020; Goldin 2013; and Zádrapa 2014. The list is obviously not exhaustive, but it still provides a good overview of the existing scholarship in the field, showing the renewed interest in the study of text-structuring elements and devices and in a “structural” analysis of early Chinese texts.

<sup>3</sup> See Meyer 2011; Kern/Meyer 2017.

<sup>4</sup> See Behr/Indraccolo 2014; Queen/Puett 2014; Gentz/Meyer 2015; Kern/Meyer 2017; Meyer/Indraccolo forthc.; Behr/Indraccolo forthc.

<sup>5</sup> On the intellectual élite of the scholar-officials (*shì* 士), see Pines 2009: 115–184, 2012: 76–103; and 2013. See also Chan 2004; Schaberg 2005; Richter 2005, 2013; Lewis 1999, esp. chapters 2, 3, and 7.

were addressed. Hence, a systematic structural analysis is a fundamental step in the hermeneutic process, as it provides an invaluable interpretive key to understanding all the nuances and facets of an ancient Chinese text. The proposed analysis exposes and disentangles the underlying conceptual connections embedded into the textual structure of the *Hán Fēizǐ* ‘Shuìnán’. The chapter has often been overlooked and considered of somewhat lesser importance or philosophical depth in respect to other chapters that were at a first look apparently more promising.<sup>6</sup> As will be shown, ‘Shuìnán’ is actually a highly sophisticated rhetorical piece, characterized by a complex multi-layered structure which actively contributes to its efficacy and eloquence.

## 2 Persuasion in Early China

In the received literature, persuasion is frequently associated or contrasted with and against “argumentation” (*biàn* 辯) as the two dialectical poles of the same rhetorical phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Persuasion and argumentation constitute a set of two distinct though mutually interconnected, complementary skills<sup>8</sup> that any reputable political advisor of the time had to master and was expected to be able to employ effectively – in public or private debates, in verbal interaction at court, and in diplomacy. Cases of persuasion are usually staged at court and involve two main actors or characters, a persuader and a persuadee. Persuasion is hierarchical: it is characterized by a situation of social disparity existing between the characters involved, and it is almost invariably addressed to a superior in rank, in the majority of cases a ruler. A case of persuasion typically features a morally and/or intellectually superior minister who tries to convince a ruler to listen to his advice, and to pursue an allegedly favourable course of action or assume a certain desirable behaviour, whether in public or in private matters.<sup>9</sup> In order to reach their communicative goal, not only does the persuader have to deploy their eloquence and rhetorical prowess. They also – and

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account of the somewhat surprisingly little appreciation the text has received since the Hàn period, see Hunter 2013: 169–172.

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to the main characteristics of “argumentation” and “persuasion” in early Chinese rhetoric, see Kroll 1985–86; Crump 1964, 1979; Levi 1992; Reding 1985; Garrett 1993; Kern 2000; Goldin 2005b, 1993; Lu/Frank 1993; Lu 1998; van Els et al. 2012; Hunter 2013; Indraccolo 2020.

<sup>8</sup> See Kroll 1985–86, esp. 122, 126; Indraccolo forthc.

<sup>9</sup> On the characteristics and the typical settings of a case of persuasion, see Indraccolo forthc.; Graziani 2012, esp. 43–44, and, 2017; Lu 1998: 64–65; Garrett 1993; Levi 1992; Kroll 1985–86.



most importantly – need to develop a refined psychological ability to read the persuadee’s emotions and true intentions, and to interpret the latter’s reactions correctly.<sup>10</sup> Only then the persuader will be able to react appropriately and in a timely manner, so as to tailor their speech to promptly adjust to the persuadee’s mood swings, to appeal to the persuadee’s innermost desires and turn their weaknesses into the persuader’s favour.

## 2.1 The ‘Shuìnán’ chapter as a case study

One of the most famous texts in the history of Classical Chinese literature that treats the topic at length and provides a fully disenchanted (and hence possibly much more commensurate with reality) perspective on the practice of persuasion is the ‘Shuìnán’ chapter of the *Hán Fēizǐ*.<sup>11</sup> The ‘Shuìnán’ chapter stands out in the *Hán Fēizǐ* collection, as it appears to be the only one that is openly addressing an actual persuader or advisor, or a more general intellectual élite of the author(s)’s peers, composed pre-eminently by other scholar-officials holding positions at court, rather than the ruler itself. While this is a largely accepted interpretation, it must also be acknowledged that ‘Shuìnán,’ as other chapters, does not necessarily have a univocal interpretation. Several chapters in this collection lend themselves well to competing readings from both the perspective of the persuader and the ruler.<sup>12</sup> They might have been written with less obvious goals than a first reading might reveal. From this perspective, the Shuìnán’ chapter might have also been written for the ruler’s sake, with the aim of disclosing and revealing to them the subtleties of persuasion and the kind of insidious, deliberate manipulation and trickery they might unconsciously be regularly subjected to, in order to warn them and make them aware of what is

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<sup>10</sup> See Garrett 1993: 112. On the psychological aspects involved in an act of persuasion, see especially Galvany 2012 and Schaberg 2016. On the psychology of the ruler and especially his likes and dislikes as a dangerous soft spot that can be used against them by ill-intentioned persuaders, see Graziani 2012, 2017. See also Goldin 2005b; Lu 1998: 119; Kern 2000: 230; Hunter 2013.

<sup>11</sup> For an updated collection of studies on the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Goldin 2013. See also the still relevant study by Lundahl 1992.

<sup>12</sup> On this internal interpretative tension in the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Goldin 2005a, esp. 4–5; Hunter 2013: 169–172, esp. 172. See also Graziani 2012, esp. 49–50. Graziani further provides a more detailed assessment of the status of the text as a composite collection and addresses in part the problematicity of its authorship in Graziani 2017: 159–161; 167–168; 171–173. I am however somewhat more hesitant to unequivocally identify Hán Fēi as the actual author of certain chapters, at least if we consider the historical figure of Hán Fēi (see the discussion at p. 5 below).

actually going on around them at court behind the curtain, without them even noticing it.<sup>13</sup>

The chapter is written in the first person, thereby creating (the illusion of) an almost intimate, personal relationship with the reader/user<sup>14</sup> of the text by offering an exclusive glimpse into the author(s)'s personal life experience, worldview, successes and failures, and fears. Due to the nature of early Chinese texts, which in origin are most often anepigraphic and typically do not explicitly acknowledge their authors, it is impossible to ascertain whether it was indeed the historical Hán Fēi 韓非 (ca. 280–233 B.C.) who authored this particular chapter – or, for that matter, any other chapter of the received text, and if the thought and ideas presented in the text do indeed correspond to or are representative of the actual point of view of this historical figure.<sup>15</sup> It is however possible to ascribe the chapter to the fictionalized “author figure Han Fei”<sup>16</sup> that is construed through this and other texts in the collection, and in several anecdotes preserved in the received literature. This fictional persona, who might nevertheless have been inspired, at least in part, by the historical Hán Fēi, comes through as an all-round character with a sharp mind and tongue, and endowed with exceptional argumentative prowess and political farsightedness. It is to this authorial figure that I refer to in the present article when talking about Hán Fēi *as author* of the ‘Shuìnán’ chapter or of the *Hán Fēizǐ*. Considering the well-known subtlety and rhetorical ability of Hán Fēi as he is represented in the received sources, the somewhat unusual choice of writing this text in the first person might potentially be yet another skilled rhetorical stratagem. It could be a literary artifice in order to captivate the audience (an example of *captatio benevolentiae*) and make them sympathize with the author and unconsciously side with them, or to be at least more inclined to agree on their potentially problematic and morally questionable opinions – as we shall see in more detail below.

The ‘Shuìnán’ offers a repository of concrete advice to someone who happens to be directly engaged in the delicate and potentially life-threatening activity of persuading or admonishing a superior in rank, and, as it emerges at a closer reading of the text, a ruler in the specific case.<sup>17</sup> The ‘Shuìnán’ seems to be substantially inconsistent as far as its ethical orientation is concerned,

<sup>13</sup> I thank Yuri Pines for bringing this problem to my attention and pointing me to Paul R. Goldin's article, 2005a. See also Graziani 2012, esp. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Richter 2013.

<sup>15</sup> On the authorship of the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Róng 1982 and Lundahl 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Du 2017: 220. See also Goldin 2020, esp. 201–202.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Graziani's contribution in Pines/Goldin/Kern 2017.

especially if compared to the rest of the *Hán Fēizǐ* collection. The chapter has been harshly criticized for its morally ambiguous message.<sup>18</sup> It is the only chapter of the *Hán Fēizǐ* that not only openly encourages the use of rhetoric at large, mentioning on several occasions the two different techniques of “argumentation” (*biàn* 辯) and “persuasion” (*shuì* 說), often in connection with each other. It also justifies the use of a deliberately opaque language, and shamelessly supports the *ad hoc* strategic resort to indirection, and even deception. The author(s) repeatedly invites the blatant and ruthless manipulation of the persuadee’s emotions, fears, and personal inclinations, underlying several times that one’s speech has to be adjusted opportunistically from time to time so as to match the counterpart’s psychology. Thus, it is possible to win the persuadee’s trust, smoothening any possible resistance and exploiting their weaknesses and soft spots to one’s own advantage – and this apparently regardless of what one’s own agenda or true objectives might actually be.

Scholars have had a hard time trying to reconcile the shrewd, pragmatic attitude towards rhetoric that exudes from this chapter – which is clearly inspired by and openly supports and promotes the principle that “the end justifies the means” – with the otherwise fairly consistent politico-philosophical agenda that informs the rest of the *Hán Fēizǐ* collection. On several occasions and throughout the *Hán Fēizǐ*, the resort to the rhetorical arts is ferociously attacked and harsh, embittered criticism is directed against sycophants and flatterers who exercise their pernicious influence at court through their mastery of rhetoric and their mischievous eloquence. These are presented as undignified, vicious individuals with a cunning attitude and a sharp-witted tongue, who only have at heart their own private interest and profit, and that are ready to go to any lengths in order to gain the ruler’s attention and favour, only to exploit it to their personal advantage.

Actually, this might be a far too moralizing reading of this chapter. The attitude displayed towards rhetoric by Hán Fēi (or whoever in his stead might have compiled this chapter) is much more complex and multifaceted than it might seem at a first reading. The author(s) seemingly displays a rather ambivalent stance towards certain rhetorical tricks and psychological stratagems they themselves eventually have to make use of. These techniques seem to be just part of the standard rhetorical repertoire of a persuader or advisor of the time, rather than something that the author(s) actually enjoys engaging in. On several

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed and accurate study about the ‘Shuínán’ chapter including its contradictory nature and interpretive difficulties, see Hunter 2013 and Graziani 2012.

occasions, the author(s) voice what might be tentatively interpreted as a certain disgust and a great amount of distress generated by an underlying knot of angst, deriving from their personal experience of political activity and daily life at court. The chapter offers systematic instructions on how to successfully perform an act persuasion, reaching one's communicative goal regardless what the content or the aim of the communication might be – but it further constitutes also a survival manual for anyone who has to deal with and handle the whims and tantrums of the ruler, providing practical advice on how to disengage oneself from sensitive and potentially life-threatening situations, and to effectively defend oneself from insidious attacks and slanders coming from political adversaries at court.<sup>19</sup>

This is definitely not the only instance in Classical Chinese philosophical literature in which a famous “Master” of thought reluctantly admits – or is cornered and forced to admit – that, when the occasion demands it, they are ready to lower themselves to make use of rhetorical techniques, such as “persuasion” (*shuì*), “remonstrance” (*jiàn* 諫),<sup>20</sup> and at times even the allegedly much abhorred “argumentation” (*biàn*). A case in point is Mèngzǐ 孟子's (ca. 372–289 B.C.) notorious, articulate speech in response to the accusation of having being indulging in “argumentation,” preserved in Chapter 3B9 of the eponymous text *Mèngzǐ* 孟子 (*Mencius*). In this exchange, Mèngzǐ<sup>21</sup> tries to explain the reasons why he engages in argumentation, despite the negative connotation it entails and the blame that anyone practicing it seemingly incurs. The persuader claims that it is not the case that he is truly fond of argumentation, it is just that he cannot help using it due to the contingent circumstances. He lives in a time of decadence and corruption that witnesses the decay of traditional moral values, in which his adversaries are openly practicing argumentation. Thus, he has no other choice to effectively counterattack and fight against them and their pernicious eloquence than to make use of the same lowly techniques and confront them on their own ground. A similar justification for instance is provided also by Xúnzǐ 荀子 in Chapter 22 ‘Zhèngmíng’ 正名 (‘The Rectification of Names,’ or ‘On Getting Names Right’) of the eponymous text.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On this see also Graziani 2012: 46–49.

<sup>20</sup> On remonstrance, see Suddath 2005; Schaberg 2005; Olberding 2013; Roetz 2019; Crone/Schwermann forthc.

<sup>21</sup> Once again, I am talking about fictional characters and personas as they are described and brought to life in the received literature rather than the corresponding historical figures.

<sup>22</sup> See also Graziani 2012: 50–52, esp. 52 on Mèngzǐ and Xúnzǐ.

## 2.2 A structural analysis of ‘Shuìnán’

Let us now proceed to the proposed detailed structural analysis of ‘Shuìnán’.<sup>23</sup> The chapter is a paramount example of an ingeniously constructed and highly structured rhetorical speech or harangue, in which almost nothing is left to improvisation. I use the term “speech” here rather loosely, in the sense of a text that might have been composed in writing, orally, or in both ways, and that might have been meant either to be delivered live in front of an audience or conceived as a written text in its own right, addressing a public of readers/users.

The text can be divided in three main parts. The first part is constituted by one rather brief Section (1.1), as is the case for the last part (3.1). The second part, which constitutes the main body of the argument, can be further divided into two main Sections (2.1 and 2.2), having respectively three and two Subsections. The two subsections in Section 2.2 can be further divided into two smaller units.

- 1.
- 1.1
- 2.
- 2.1
  - 2.1.1
  - 2.1.2
  - 2.1.3
- 2.2
  - 2.2.1
    - 2.2.1a
    - 2.2.1b
  - 2.2.2
    - 2.2.2a
    - 2.2.2b
- 3.
- 3.1

The boundaries between sections and among the different subsections can be fairly easily identified, as they are marked by the use of two different kinds of

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<sup>23</sup> The full text with a detailed graphic representation of the structural analysis described here is available at the end of the article in Appendix B.

text-structuring devices:<sup>24</sup> (a) **parallel sentences** and (b) **transition terms (“linkers”)**.<sup>25</sup> These two structural devices can also be combined and appear together in the same section. (a) In the former case, sections and subsections can be introduced by a sentence that is parallel (or partially parallel) and identical (or partially identical) in wording to those that either open or close the three main sections (1.1; 2.1; 2.2). In this way, all the different sections and subsections are linked to each other conceptually across and throughout the text through internal cross-references that constitute a multi-layered web of referential meaning. (b) In the latter case, boundaries between sections and among subsections can also be marked by the use of a transition term (or “linker”) that signals a turning point in the line of reasoning and in the progression of topics being addressed. Such rhetorically charged transition terms are typically followed by a new set of parallel sentences, or a series of juxtaposed pseudo-historical anecdotes.<sup>26</sup> Subsections are further structured and organized through the “strategic” use and distribution of transition terms that build the internal argumentative “architecture” of each individual subsection. Sometimes the different internal “textual building blocks”<sup>27</sup> that constitute the subsections are linked together like a chain through the use of the same transition terms, which appear either between subsections or within the same subsections as internal text structuring devices. Here is a complete list of the transition terms employed in the text with references to their occurrences in the text:

- *fú* 夫: Section 2.1.2 and Section 3.1;
- *gù* 故: Sub-subsection 2.1.3; it breaks Sub-subsection 2.2.2a into two parts; repeated thrice, it functions as an interlocking element that builds a chain of three textual blocks within Sub-subsection 2.2.2b;
- *bǐ* 彼: Sub-subsection 2.2.1, used twice to introduce the consecutive Sub-subsections 2.2.1a and 2.2.1b;
- *xīzhě* 昔者: Sub-subsection 2.2.2, used twice to introduce the consecutive Sub-subsections 2.2.2a and 2.2.2b;
- *yòu* 又: used twice within Section 1.1, where it creates a chain of parallel sentences that add up to each other in a fast-paced rhythm; it also appears

<sup>24</sup> On the use of structural features to organize texts internally, see for instance Behr/Gentz 2005; Gentz 2005; Schwermann 2005; Meyer 2005, 2011; Pohl/Wöhrle 2011; Gentz/Meyer 2015; Meyer/Indraccolo forthc.; Behr/Indraccolo forthc.

<sup>25</sup> On transition terms, see Gentz 2005, esp. 33, 39, 44; van Ess 2005–06; Nylan 2014; Wagner 2015; Indraccolo forthc.; Behr/Indraccolo forthc.

<sup>26</sup> On the use of anecdotes in the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Reeve 2003; Du 2010, 2017, 2020; and Graziani 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “Textual building blocks” are the most basic constituent elements of early Chinese texts, see Boltz 1999, 2005. See also Meyer/Indraccolo forthc.



in Sub-subsection 2.2.2b where it links two partially parallel sentences uttered by the Lord of Wèi 衛 at the end of an anecdote;

- *jīn* 今: breaks Sub-subsection 2.2.1b into two parts.

The first Section (1.1) is a brief and terse programmatic statement characterized by three parallel and partially identical sentences, among which a close conceptual connection is built through the use of cross-referential repetitions and grammatical and structural parallelism, in particular between the opening and the middle line on one side, and the middle and second line on the other side. The whole block of three sentences at the core of this first brief and deceptively simple section are all cast in a rather defensive tone: “It is not (the case) that I [in doing/having acquired X] I have difficulties in [doing Y].” The first section opens with one of the key formulas that introduces and draws attention to the main topic treated in each section of the chapter, embedding the whole argument within a parallel structural frame, the sentence [凡說之難, “In general, the difficulty of persuasion is/relies in the fact that”] that is then repeated:

- (a) at the beginning of Sub-subsection 2.1.1, quoted verbatim, while the second half of the sentence varies;
- (b) at the end of Sub-subsection 2.1.3, quoted verbatim;
- (c) at the beginning of Subsection 2.2, with the introduction of a new element (*wù* 務 instead of *nán* 難) in the formula that shifts the focus of attention to this apparently closely connected though different topic. The continuity with the other sections is underlined through the grammatically and semantically parallel structure, thereby hinting at the fact that this is indeed a closely-related and equally relevant topic [凡說之務, “In general, the task of persuasion is (...)”]

Thus, the two core issues at the heart of the whole chapter are set: what the difficulties of persuasion actually are (*nán* 難), and what the main tasks or objectives of persuasion should be (*wù* 務). These two terms provide the interpretive key through which to read all the detailed illustrative examples given in the subsections into which each section of part 2 is articulated.

The first Section (1.1) also introduces some of the core concepts that will be addressed in the main body of the chapter: the skill of “being knowledgeable (about things)” (*zhī* 知), especially in regard to the opportunity, timeliness, and appropriateness or not of speaking out and talking about things (*shuō* 說); the ability to “argue” (*biàn* 辯) and make one’s point as a complementary skill to the ability to “persuade others” (*shuì* 說); and the capacity to “acknowledge someone’s limits and to assess and exploit to the fullest one’s personal capabilities” (*néng* 能).



Subsection 2.1 is introduced at the very beginning by a key sentence with a decidedly didactic tone that indirectly provides a fundamental piece of advice on how to perform a successful persuasion:

凡說之難，在知所說之心，可以吾<sup>28</sup>說當之。

In general, the difficulties of persuasion lie in knowing the persuadee's innermost intentions, so that I<sup>29</sup> can attune my speech to match them.

Thus, the main difficulty of persuasion lies in the psychological ability to read the mind of the person one wants to persuade. Such ability is singled out already at the very beginning of the chapter as a fundamental issue, and the ability to acquire and develop such skill is a necessary and sufficient condition to successfully perform an act of persuasion. Knowledge of and familiarity with the persuadee's mindset is crucial in order to formulate one's speech in a way that the persuadee might find the most appealing, or that best resonates with them, matches their inclinations and stirs their innermost desires. The attitude that emerges from this first piece of advice seems to be drastically in contrast with what the *Hán Fēizǐ* supports as a general rule, as it seemingly invites to indirection, and to the strategic, opportunistic “attunement” of one's speech in

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**28** As Yuri Pines pointed out to me, according to Christoph Harbsmeier's analysis of *wú* 吾 – though his reading is based on examples taken from the *Lúnyǔ* 論語 (*The Analects*) and the *Mèngzǐ* – might possibly be interpreted as “you” (Harbsmeier 1997: 196–197). If we assumed that this was the case here, “you” could refer either to the ruler, thus supporting the hypothesis that the chapter might have been written with the aim to instruct the ruler on how to neutralize and counterattack attempts at persuasion and any manipulative behaviour in general (see p. 5 above); or it could refer to the reader/user or the audience of the text, most likely an advisor or a persuader, which would be in line with the traditional interpretation of the chapter. Either way, both readings would be coherent with the rest of the chapter and the kind of advice that is provided later on. However, on the basis of reliable linguistic studies on the use of this pronoun, it seems legitimate to claim with a certain degree of certainty that *wú* 吾 was indeed used consistently as a singular or plural first-person pronoun. Paul R. Goldin and Wolfgang Behr also agree on this point (private communications, resp. on 29/10/2019 and 11/12/2019). On the use of personal pronouns and especially first-person pronouns, and in particular on the use of *wú* 吾 in the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Xú Shiduān 徐适端 1990, esp. 102–105; see also Shèngzhāng 黃盛璋 1963; Heirman/Dessein 1998, esp. 727–743; Zhōu Shēngyà 周生亞 1980; and Zōu Qiūzhēn 邹秋珍/Zhāng Yùjīn 张玉金/Hú Wěi 胡伟 2010: 21–23; and the most recent Zhào Púsōng 赵璞嵩 2018. I thank Wolfgang Behr for the useful and updated reference recommendations.

**29** The “I” here has to be meant not as specifically or exclusively referring to this one-time author(s) referring to their own personal experience and *modus operandi*. It is rather a piece of advice that, though being based on the personal experience of the persuader who is talking, is meant to be universally valid and address and include any potential persuader in the moment in which they are engaging in the act of persuasion.

order to please one's target audience. The dialectical counterpart of the "I" who is talking to us as readers/users (or as members of a potential audience) at this point in the text is still qualified just as a generic and not better specified "persuadee" (*suǒshuì* 所說).

Sub-subsection 2.1.1 is rather brief but presents an intricate internal structure, cast in grammatically parallel sentences with partial repetitions. The whole section revolves around two main pairs of opposite polar terms, arranged in regular patterns and distributed chiasmatically: (1) "high reputation" (*mínggāo* 名高) versus "fat profit" (*hòulì* 厚利) as the two main interests that the persuadee typically has at heart, of which the persuader needs to be aware of in order to push the right buttons so as not to disappoint the persuadee and be quickly dismissed, ignored or looked down upon; (2) "what is hidden, secret or kept in the dark" (*yīn* 陰) versus "what is evident, in the open and exhibited" (*yáng* 陽), with a clear reference to the hidden motives the persuadee might actually have, and that might match or, on the contrary, clash with what they claim or pretend these to be in public. The incongruity between what the persuadee really thinks or has in mind and their behaviour, countenance or words is especially underlined by the use of the verb *xiǎn* 顯, "to seem, to appear, to show," which apparently assumes here a decidedly negative connotation, characterizing a duplicitous or at least ambiguous attitude and double-mindedness, if not sheer insincerity, on the persuadee's side.

Once again, the author(s) stresses that knowing what the persuadee has in mind and in their heart is crucial, as we are told that "this is something you cannot help to investigate." This formula closes the subsection, but it appears again as a closing statement of Sub-subsection 2.2.2a and, in a somewhat more articulated manner, of Sub-subsection 2.2.2b. In this Sub-subsection (2.1.1), another fundamental key term is introduced that becomes pivotal in the following Sub-subsection (2.1.2) and establishes a conceptual bridge between the two sub-subsections, *shēn* 身, meant here in the sense of "physical persona."

In Sub-subsection 2.1.2, the author seems to be obsessed with physical safety. The section lists several examples of critical situations in which the persuader might find themselves involved, nolens volens, and that would seriously endanger their physical safety and put them to risk. Such cases are mostly caused (1) by the intentional, deceitful scheming of the persuadee, who claims that their intentions are completely different from the goal they actually want to achieve in reality; or (2) by secret plans that end up being leaked out (*xiè yú wài* 泄於外) or exposed, whether accidentally or intentionally, either by the persuader (in that case involuntarily), or by someone else who is plotting against the persuader to pursue a different political agenda or is trying to gain personal profit from the ruler. Another way of endangering oneself is being incapable of

recognizing people's limits or correctly assessing their potential, which typically results in the attempt to push them to accomplish goals that are far from their reach, or, on the contrary, to make them refrain from doing something that they cannot help doing – the concept that was introduced already in the very first section, the capacity to acknowledge someone's limits and personal capabilities (*néng* 能), is discussed here at length.

Each of the examples of critical or dangerous situations that are raised is marked by the same final sentence, obsessively repeated throughout the whole subsection: “in this way, you will be in (physical) danger.” [如此者身危]. Once again, stress is put on the fact that reality is almost always not as it seems, and that it is fundamental for the persuader to acquire knowledge of what the persuadee actually means with their words and has in mind. Still, somewhat paradoxically, even being knowledgeable about this might eventually put the persuader in danger, once the persuadee or someone in their entourage realizes that their true intentions and hidden plans are now exposed. Despite the relatively higher length of certain sentences and the less pervasive use of parallel structures, the whole subsection has an almost frantic, climactic rhythm that seems to express the author's frustration and restlessness. It conveys the uneasy feeling of being trapped between two (or more) evils and the daunting impression that there is no way to effectively counter the situation, or to protect oneself from the apparently inevitable life-threatening traps with which life at court is constellated.

Two new key elements are introduced here that will be reprised and expounded upon in more detail in the following subsections. The first element is another pair of opposite terms, “victory or successfulness of an enterprise” (*gōng* 功) versus “loss or defeat” (*bài* 敗), ensuing specifically as consequences or results of a course of action pursued in response to an act of persuasion performed by the persuader.<sup>30</sup> The second key term is the infelicitous condition of “being met with [the persuadee's] suspicion” (*jiànyí* 見疑), which appears again later on, associated with “being condemned, incur in blame” *zuì* 罪 or “being found guilty (of some crime)” (*jiànzùì* 見罪), in Sub-subsection 2.2.1b and in the final teaching that comments upon the anecdotal narratives used as illustrative examples in Sub-subsection 2.2.2a.

For the first time, in this section the persuadee is explicitly characterized as someone “eminent” or “high-ranking” (*guìrén* 貴人). This attribute, without necessarily nor univocally identifying the persuadee as the ruler, is nevertheless

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<sup>30</sup> On the use of military language and concepts in the *Hán Fēizǐ* and the contribution that early military literature can provide to better understanding of the text, see Galvany 2017.

consistent with the substantially hierarchical nature of a case of persuasion, which, as mentioned above, is almost invariably addressed to a superior in rank.

Sub-subsection 2.1.3, the final subsection of Section 2, is characterized by a pervasive use of parallelism. The whole section is constituted by a set of eight couplets of parallel sentences. Each couplet is grammatically and semantically parallel and introduces a pair of binary opposite terms. Two of these pairs are especially worth attention, (1) “persuasion” (*shuì* 說) versus “argumentation” (*biàn* 辯), which was introduced already in the first section; and (2) “to love” or “likes” (*ài* 愛) versus “to hate” or “dislikes” (*zēng* 憎), which, once again, is anticipated here but will be treated in more detailed below in the final commentary to the illustrative anecdote included in Subsection 2.2.2b. More or less along the lines of the paradoxical situation described in the previous subsection, where engaging in diametrically opposite behaviours would equally lead to disgrace despite one’s good intentions, in this subsection the author warns about the fact that one can equally easily incur in or involuntarily provoke the persuadee’s wrath or despise, no matter the topic the persuader chooses to talk about: opposite topics might still be interpreted in the wrong way and be perceived as being offensive by the persuadee.

A final concluding remark underlines once again the risks of persuasion, stressing that all the issues that have been exposed up to this point cannot by all means be ignored by the persuader, if they want to be successful in their attempt at persuasion (or, one might say, manipulation) and, what is most important, if they want to preserve their lives. If, despite the countless potential risks exposed so far, the persuader still believes that it is their duty to try to persuade their superior, they need to be fully aware of all the multifaceted aspects of human psychology that they have to take into account when engaging in an act of persuasion. This final piece of advice – “these are the difficulties of persuasion, you cannot help but be knowledgeable about them/ you cannot be unaware of them” [此說之難，不可不知也。] – reprises both the first line in the first section at the very beginning of the text [凡說之難], and at the same time echoes the closing line of the previous Sub-subsection 2.1.1 [此不可不察也。], creating a sort of circular framing structure.

Subsection 2.2 opens with a statement that is partially parallel to and expands on the opening sentence of Section 1. This introductory statement represents one of the interpretive keys to the whole chapter, and introduces the second cardinal topic to be treated. This second fundamental topic to be addressed is the actual tasks or objectives of persuasion, which apparently consist in “knowing how to embellish or to maximize what the persuadee is proud of and to dismiss what he is ashamed of” [凡說之務，在知飾所說之所矜而滅其所恥。]. This is the part of the text that has been considered most problematic. Hān Fēi here explicitly

encourages the reader/user of the text (or the audience) to openly manipulate the persuadee, and to adjust their words to please them, regardless of what their actual merits or accomplishments might be, in a opportunistic way that seems hardly distinguishable from blatant flattery and that is rather hard to justify within and against a “legalist”<sup>31</sup> worldview. Subsection 2.2 mostly elaborates upon and provides illustrative examples of the issues exposed at length in Subsection 2.1. Consequently, Subsection 2.2 makes less use of parallelism, as it introduces several references to the contextual behaviour of pseudo-historical exemplary figures of the past and quotes fairly extensive narrative anecdotes. Such anecdotes are used as examples illustrative of the completely opposite outcomes that the same kind of behaviour or action might have under different circumstances, or of the whimsical and at times completely unpredictable changes of mind of a ruler.<sup>32</sup> The persuader, no matter how smart and intuitive, is invariably subjected to the tantrums of the ruler, a precarious situation which will ultimately determine the fall from grace of the persuader and, eventually, their ruin and untimely death.

According to the structural analysis I proposed above, Sub-subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 have both been further divided into two units, a and b, that is respectively 2.2.1a and 2.2.1b, and 2.2.2a and 2.2.2b.

The two units 2.2.1a and 2.2.1b are both introduced by the transition term *bǐ* 彼 “thus”. Sub-subsection 2.2.1a is still characterized by a fairly regular internal structure, in which several sentences are partially identical and arranged in grammatically parallel couplets. One of the central concerns of legalist thought

<sup>31</sup> “Legalist” here and in the following occurrences has to be interpreted rather loosely. The term does not refer to a proper organized “school” of thinkers, but rather to a trend of thought. More precisely, it identifies a group of received politico-philosophical texts or collections of writings – as well as the corresponding thinkers and strategists after which they are named, whether historical, pseudo-historical or fictional figures – among which the *Hán Fēizǐ* is an example par excellence. This grouping of texts has traditionally been classified as belonging to the so-called *fǎjiā* 法家 (“Legalism” or “experts in laws and standards”), an artificial bibliographical category that was conveniently established, among others, during the re-organisation of the holdings of the Imperial Library that took place during the Hàn Dynasty. As such, these texts can be considered as the expression of or as promoting ideas and theories linked to the “Legalist” trend of thought. It is now almost unanimously acknowledged in the scholarly community that the term *jiā* 家 should not be interpreted as identifying a proper organized and structured entity such as a “school” or an “academy”, but should rather indicate broader, permeable and fluid trends of thought. On the interpretation of *jiā* and the debate about the existence of “schools” in the Warring States period, see Petersen 1995; Ryden 1996; Nylan 2000; Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003; Smith 2003.

<sup>32</sup> On the instrumental and didactic use of anecdotes in the *Hán Fēizǐ*, see Reeve 2003; Chén 2004; Du 2010, 2017 and 2020; Graziani 2012.



is introduced here as a pair of binary opposite terms, which is the contrast between the public versus the private dimensions of life, and especially the overarching “common good of society” (*gōng* 公), meant in the sense of the collectivity or community of individuals that constitute the living body of a state, versus the “personal, private interest of a single individual” (*sī* 私).<sup>33</sup> It must be remarked here that in legalist thought private interest is not necessarily considered to be selfish (hence evil) in itself. Rather, it is impractical and detrimental as it distracts from the pursuit and the accomplishments of higher, more stringent goals – the need to secure the benefits and the stability of the state, which has priority and pre-eminence over the interests of the single individual.

In this passage, Hān Fēi seems to suggest that the persuader should assume a demure and almost servile attitude without contradicting the persuadee under any circumstances. The persuader should rather encourage them in the pursuit of their goals regardless the actual validity or ethical acceptability thereof, always highlighting and “maximizing” (*shì* 飾, lit. “embellishing”) any potential positive aspects or outcomes there might be, and “minimizing” (*shǎo* 少) the downsides or shortcomings of their planning. This however is just a preliminary and necessary step, a concession that must be made in order to gain influence and win the trust of the persuadee. In the midst of this, the persuader can still subtly though firmly influence and impose a direction on the persuadee’s decisions, guiding them towards what is actually the best course of action, without them even realizing it – for instance, persuading them to refrain from pursuing unrealistic goals that are evidently beyond their capabilities, but also, and most importantly, pursuing a sensible political agenda by showing that rational goals that benefit the state or society at large also match and benefit the persuadee’s personal interest (*sīlì* 私利), and vice-versa, situations that might be endangering the state are also damaging the persuadee’s private interest (*sīhuàn* 私患).

Sub-subsection 2.2.1b is also introduced by the same transition term as Sub-subsection 2.2.1a, *bǐ* 彼. It can be divided internally in three different parts that match the subsequent steps in the line of reasoning and in the development of the argument. It opens with a set of two blocks of parallel and partially identical sentences, a triplet and a couplet respectively. In this first part, the author once again provides somewhat questionable advice, inviting whoever has to engage

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33 On the binary opposition between the two concepts of *gōng* versus *sī* in the *Hān Fēizǐ*, see Paul R. Goldin’s sharp analysis, 2005c. My interpretation differs slightly, insofar as I interpret *gōng* as meaning the superior interest of the state at large rather than the interest of the ruler. However, if we consider the ruler as the embodiment of the state and the state as an extension or an emanation of the ruler’s persona, then the two interpretations overlap substantially.

in persuasion not to rub the persuadee in the wrong way, and once again, to gloss over their faults or failures and to laud their successes, reinforcing their positive assumptions about themselves. It is here that the author(s) finally explains themselves: the only reason why they have been advocating such morally ambiguous and apparently weak, submissive position is that this is the only safe way to make sure to progressively win the persuadee's (i. e. the ruler) trust. The somewhat sheepish and compliant attitude assumed so far – in respect especially to the faults and failures of the persuadee, the evident shortcomings and inadequacy to perform up to the standards that are expected of them and the negative behavioural traits they show, turns out to be a sophisticated psychological strategy to loosen the persuadee's defences and make them let their guard down, so that the persuader can finally exert a positive influence on them. But in order to be able to do so, the persuader first and foremost has to make sure that their person and especially their suggestions are not met with “suspicion” (yí 疑), as mentioned above.

The second and central part of this sub-subsection is rather brief but of great importance, as it introduces the first illustrative pseudo-historical example employed in the chapter to make the author's point, further reinforcing the authoritativeness of their position. It is characterized by the mention of two famous historical characters, Yī Yǐn 伊尹 and Bǎilǐ Xī 百里奚, who were ready to willingly lower and humble themselves and accepted to degrade themselves to pursue their own interest, which eventually also happened to benefit the state.<sup>34</sup> This illustrates the point just expressed above in Sub-subsection 2.2.1a that personal interests might (and ideally should) eventually also benefit the state or society at large.

A pivotal turning point in the discussion is marked by the transition term *jīn* 今, which introduces the third part of this sub-subsection and juxtaposes these pseudo-historical illustrative examples drawn from the shared cultural tradition to the contemporary political situation in which persuaders find themselves to act. If a persuader manages to serve a ruler for several years, pushing their own political agenda without being met with suspicion or blame, and advises the ruler for the best, promoting what is profitable for them but, first and foremost, for the state,

<sup>34</sup> I thank Yuri Pines for his useful comments on the interpretation of this reference. See also Graziani 2017: 165–166, esp. n. 21. An interesting point raised by Graziani is the kind of “reverse criticism” that *Hán Fēi* – or the author(s) – brings forward in Chapter 19 ‘Shì Xié’ 飾邪 (“On Setting Evil Straight”) and Chapter 51 ‘Zhōngxiào’ 忠孝 (“Loyalty and Filiality”) against the instrumental use made by others officials and ministers of historical examples and anecdotes to exert influence upon the ruler's judgement (170, esp. note 34).



then persuader and ruler rely on and support each other. This – as we are told in the final concluding sentence which recalls in its latter part the “difficulties of persuasion” [以此相持，此說之成也。] – is an example of persuasion at its finest, reaching its most accomplished state.

As was the case with the previous two sub-subsections, Sub-subsections 2.2.2a and 2.2.2b are also both introduced by the same transition term, *xīzhě* 昔者 “in the past, in ancient times.” Both sub-subsections are characterized by the citation of narrational and dialogic anecdotes drawn from the shared cultural lore that are used as illustrative examples to reinforce the point that the author(s) wants to make. Sub-subsection 2.2.2a features a set of two anecdotes, quoted at the very beginning one right after the other: a first, more articulated anecdote that includes a dialogic exchange, followed by a brief, mostly narrative short story. Both examples aim to show that timeliness is crucial when trying to persuade or advice others, and that being knowledgeable about things might put someone in danger if they are not aware of the right moment and the appropriate way in which they should formulate their comments or deliver a speech.<sup>35</sup> This idea was anticipated and addressed already in Section 1 at the very beginning, and it further reconnects us conceptually with Sub-subsection 2.1.2, in which knowing things might pose a great threat to one’s safety. This fundamental teaching is openly expressed in the final commentary that concludes the Sub-subsection by relating the narrated events to the contemporary situation. Here we find several of the conceptual terms that have already been introduced and discussed in the previous sections. While the words of the protagonists of the two anecdotes cited above are in both cases described as being “appropriate” and “fitting into the context” (*dāng* 當), they are nevertheless “met with suspicion” (*jiànyí* 見疑) and end up putting the two characters in danger. This is because “it is not that it is difficult to be knowledgeable about things, it is making use of that knowledge that is difficult.” [則非知之難也，處知則難也。]. Finally, the transition term *gù* 故 “therefore, for this reason” introduces the final comment – a one liner in which one further exemplary historical character, Rào Zhāo 繞朝, is cited whose infelicitous fate was determined by the opposite opinions people of two different states had of him and of his words. Hence, he was revered as a sage in Jìn 晉, but was eventually

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35 See Goldin 2005a, esp. 6–7.

executed in Qín 秦. This final example is followed by the concluding formula that was employed already at the end of Section 2.1.1 “this is something you cannot help but investigate.” [此不可不察也。].

Sub-Subsection 2.2.2b, as mentioned above, is also introduced by the transition term *xīzhě* 昔者, “in the past, in former times,” and presents a very similar structure to the previous Sub-subsection 2.2.2a. It opens with the quotation of a dialogic anecdote used as illustrative example featuring the advisor Mí Zǐxiá 彌子瑕. The anecdote narrates his sudden fall from grace, determined by futile motives that affected and drastically changed the attitude of the ruler towards him. Once again, the author of the ‘Shuǐnán’ warns us against the whimsicality of superiors in general, and of rulers in particular, and draws attention to the ensuing risks that the ruler’s sudden mood swings or change of attitude might represent for a persuader’s safety.

The final concluding commentary on the anecdote has a tripartite structure. It is constituted by three brief internal sections, linked in a progressive argumentative chain of reasoning by the transition term *gù* 故, which functions as a connective element. These sections are characterized by partially identical parallel sentences that correlate the pair of binary opposites “love” or “likes” (of a superior or ruler) (*ài* 愛) versus “hate” or “dislikes” (of a superior or ruler) (*zēng* 憎), previously addresses in Section 2.1.3, with respectively “closeness, familiarity” (*qīn* 親) versus “distance, alienation” (*shū* 疏). It is only here in this sub-subsection that the dialectic counterpart of the persuader is finally identified explicitly as the lord or ruler (*zhǔ* 主). As we are told, as long as the ruler loves the persuader, the latter’s wisdom will be considered adequate and the ruler will keep them close, but once the ruler hates the persuader, there is no turning back: the latter’s wisdom will be dismissed and blamed, and they will eventually be cast aside. The final maxim concluding this sub-subsection and the whole Subsection 2.2. is of particular interest, as it openly identifies the persuader as a scholar-official (*shì* 士) who engages in rhetorical practice, and in particular in the two well-established rhetorical techniques of “remonstrance” (*jiàn* 諫) and “persuasion” (*shuì* 說).

The last section of the ‘Shuǐnán’ chapter, Section 3, is rather brief and does not add much to the detailed treatment of the topic provided in the previous sections. It can rather be appreciated for its literary qualities, as it revolves around a colourful metaphor expressed in a refined language that compares the ruler to a dragon, and warns against the sharp scales hidden under its neck that the persuader needs to avoid to be successful, but quite obviously also to protect their personal safety.

### 3 Conclusions

Finally, as it has been shown, a structural analysis of the ‘Shuínán’ chapter not only effectively reveals its intricate underlying rhetorical structure, but also substantially improves and broadens our understanding of the text by disclosing otherwise overlooked conceptual connections that establish bridges of meaning among different sections of the text. The chapter is a highly structured and ingeniously crafted rhetorical piece that talks about the difficulties of persuasion and the necessary skills that one must develop in order to persuade successfully, that is mainly learning how to read and correctly interpret the persuadee’s heart and mind, and how to make a timely use of one’s knowledge at court and in political life, so as to avoid incurring disgrace. The text might tentatively be considered as a pragmatic rhetorical manual and a survival kit for the persuader. It provides concrete advice with a fair amount of detail, presenting several possible scenarios and weighing favourable and unfavourable situations in which a persuader might find themselves involved at court. It especially urges the need for a persuader to ponder over and choose their words with the utmost caution, and to constantly monitor the ruler’s moods and reactions so that they can attune their speech accordingly. Thus, a persuader can avoid to inadvertently unleash the ruler’s blame and to fall into disgrace or put their safety at risk.

While at a first reading certain pieces of advice the author(s) gives might seem morally questionable and ambiguous to say the least, the text makes clear that these are unavoidable compromises with which a persuader must comply in order to win the ruler’s trust, so that they can finally start guiding him and subtly directing his actions. This might imply acting in apparently counterintuitive ways, such as supporting downright unacceptable behaviours, or even embellishing the truth to please and flatter the ruler’s ego, at least at the beginning. Still, these are necessary steps to be undertaken in order to win the ruler’s favour so as to finally be put in the condition to promote one’s own political agenda. Thus, someone who is animated by the sincere desire to contribute to the higher good of the state must not be afraid of getting their hands dirty and lowering themselves, occasionally playing such undignified role.

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## APPENDIX A: Table of binary opposites in order of appearance in the text

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<i>shuì</i> 說	<i>biàn</i> 辯
<i>mínggāo</i> 名高	<i>hòulì</i> 厚利
<i>shì</i> 事	<i>yán</i> 言
<i>yīn</i> 陰	<i>yáng</i> 陽
<i>gōng</i> 功	<i>bài</i> 敗
<i>ài</i> 愛	<i>zēng</i> 憎
<i>dà rén</i> 大人	<i>xì rén</i> 細人
<i>sī</i> 私	<i>gōng</i> 公
<i>shì</i> 飾	<i>shǎo</i> 少
<i>yì</i> 意	<i>xīn</i> 心
<i>yì</i> 異	<i>tóng</i> 同
<i>sī lì</i> 私利	<i>sī huàn</i> 私患
<i>xián</i> 賢	<i>zuì</i> 罪
<i>qīn</i> 親	<i>shū</i> 疏

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## APPENDIX B: Structural analysis

1.

1.1 凡說之難:

非吾知之, 有以說之 之難也;  
又 非吾辯之, 能明吾意 之難也;  
又 非吾敢橫失, 而 能盡 之難也。

2.

2.1 凡說之難, 在知所說之心, 可以吾說當之。

2.1.1

所說出於為名高者也, 而說之以厚利, 則見下節而遇卑賤, 必棄遠矣。  
所說出於厚利者也, 而說之以名高, 則見無心而遠事情, 必不收矣。  
所說陰為厚利 而顯為名高者也,  
而說之以名高, 則陽收其身而實疏之  
說之以厚利, 則陰用其言顯棄其身矣。  
此不可不察也。

2.1.2

夫

事以密成,  
語以泄敗,  
未必其身泄之也, 而語及所匿之事,  
彼顯有所出事, 而乃以成他故,  
說者不徒知所出而已矣, 又知其所以為,  
規異事而當, 知者揣之外而得之, 事泄於外, 必以為己也 如此者身危。

周澤未渥也，而語極知，  
 說行而有功則德忘，  
 說不行而有敗則見疑，如此者身危。  
 貴人有過端而  
 說者明言禮義以挑其惡，如此者身危。  
 貴人或得計而欲自以為功，說者與知焉，如此者身危。  
 彊以其所不能為，  
 止以其所不能已，如此者身危。

## 2.1.3

故

與之論大人則以為閒己矣，  
 與之論細人則以為賣重，  
 論其所愛則以為藉資，  
 論其所憎則以為嘗己也。

徑省其說則以為不智而拙之，  
 米鹽博辯則以為多而交之。  
 略事陳意則曰怯懦而不盡，  
 慮事廣肆則曰草野而倨侮。

此說之難，不可不知也。

## 2.2 凡說之務，在知飾所說之所矜而滅其所恥。

## 2.2.1a

彼

有私急也，必以公義示而強之。

其意有下也，然而不能已，說者因為之飾其美而少其不為也。  
 其心有高也，而實不能及，說者為之舉其過而見其惡而多其不行也。

有

欲矜以智能，則為之舉異事之同類者，多為之地，

使之資說於我，而佯不知也以資其智。

欲內相存之言，則必以美名明之而微見其合於私利也。

欲陳危害之事，則顯其毀誹而微見其合於私患也。

譽異人與同行者

規異事與同計者。

有與同汙者則必以大飾其無傷也；

有與同敗者則必以明飾其無失也。

### 2.2.1b

彼

自多其力，則毋以其難概之也；

自勇其斷，則無以其謫怒之；

自智其計，則毋以其敗窮之。

大意無所拂悟，

辭言無所繁縻，

然後極騁智辯焉，此道所得親近不疑而得盡辭也。

伊尹為宰，

百里奚為虜，

皆所以干其上也，

此二人者，

皆聖人也，然猶不能無役身以進，如此其汙也。



今

以吾言為宰虜，而可以聽用而振世，此非能仕之所恥也。

夫曠日離久，而周澤未渥，

深計而不疑，

引爭而不罪，

則明割利害以致其功，直指是非以飾其身，

以此相持，此說之成也。

### 2.2.2a

昔者

1) 鄭武公欲伐胡，故先以其女妻胡君以娛其意。

因問於群臣：「吾欲用兵，誰可伐者？」

大夫關其思對曰：「胡可伐。」

武公怒而戮之曰：「胡，兄弟之國也，子言伐之何也？」

胡君聞之，以鄭為親己，遂不備鄭，鄭人襲胡，取之。

2) 宋有富人，天雨牆壞，其子曰：「不築，必將有盜。」其鄰人之父亦云。暮而果大亡其財，其家甚智其子，而疑鄰人之父。

此二人說者皆當矣，

厚者為戮，

薄者見疑，

則非知之難也，處知則難也。

故

繞朝之言當矣，其為聖人於晉，而為戮於秦也。

此不可不察。

## 2.2.2b

## 昔者

彌子瑕有寵於衛君。衛國之法，竊駕君車者罪<sub>罪</sub>刑。

彌子瑕母病，人閒往夜告彌子，彌子矯駕君車以出，  
君聞而賢<sub>賢</sub>之曰：「孝哉，為母之故，忘其別罪<sub>罪</sub>。」

異日，與君遊於果園，食桃而甘，不盡，以其半啗君  
君曰：「愛<sub>愛</sub>我哉，忘其口味，以啗寡人。」

及彌子色衰愛<sub>愛</sub>弛，得罪<sub>罪</sub>於君，

君曰：「是固 嘗矯駕吾車，  
又 嘗啗我以餘桃。」

## 故

彌子之行未變<sub>變</sub>於初也，  
而以前之所以見賢<sub>賢</sub>，  
而後獲罪<sub>罪</sub>者，愛<sub>愛</sub>憎<sub>憎</sub>之變也。

## 故

有愛<sub>愛</sub>於主則智<sub>智</sub> 當 而加親<sub>親</sub>，  
有憎<sub>憎</sub>於主則智<sub>智</sub>不當 見罪<sub>罪</sub> 而加疏<sub>疏</sub>。

## 故

諫說談論之士，不可不察愛<sub>愛</sub>憎<sub>憎</sub>之主而後說<sub>說</sub>焉。

## 3

## 3.1

## 夫

龍之為蟲也，柔可狎而騎也，

## 然

其喉下有逆鱗<sub>逆鱗</sub>徑尺，

## 若

人有嬰<sub>嬰</sub>之者 則必殺人。

人主亦有逆鱗<sub>逆鱗</sub>，

說<sub>說</sub>者能無嬰<sub>嬰</sub>人主之逆鱗<sub>逆鱗</sub>， 則幾矣。

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