

Diversifying the Teaching of the History of Rhetoric Series:

Chinese Rhetoric in Classical and Contemporary Times

Xing Lu, Professor Emeritus, DePaul University



Themes and Context of Chinese Rhetoric

The Chinese rhetorical tradition can be traced to ancient times as early as 3000 years ago, but a distinctive Chinese conceptualization of rhetoric emerged in about 500 B.C.E. There are different perspectives on language art and persuasive tactics as related to morality, dialectics, rational thinking, and utilitarianism in the classical period of 5th-3rd century B.C.E. The rhetorical concepts and expressions formulated during this time by different schools of thought have influenced China and Chinese thinking for the remaining centuries. Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China in 1949, for example, has appropriated many Confucian concepts in his writing while simultaneously promoting a radical version of Marxism in transforming China and the Chinese people. In the following, I will provide themes and sources for Confucian rhetoric, Daoist rhetoric, and the rhetoric of Mao Zedong for those of you who would like to incorporate Chinese rhetoric in your rhetoric courses.

Confucian Rhetoric

Confucian rhetoric is largely based on the works of three major classical Confucianists: Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.), Mengzi (390-305 B.C.E.), and Xunzi (298-238 B.C.E.). Their rhetoric is characterized by a humanistic view of language, persuasion, and argumentation. The tenets of their rhetoric include moral/benevolent/virtuous characteristics in the speaker, the rectification of names (proper use of language according to one's social position), and the ability to distinguish between good and harmful speeches. In their writing, these Confucianists used ample metaphors, analogies, juxtapositions, and dialogues. There are even some similarities between Confucian rhetoric and the rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle.

Primary Sources:

Knoblock, John (trans). *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Lau, D.C. (Trans) *Confucius: The Analects*. New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

Lau, D. C. (Trans) *Mencius*. New York: Penguin Books, 1970.

Secondary Sources:

Chang, Hui-Ching. Language and words: Communication in the Analects of Confucius. In Asante, Molefi Kete, Miike, Yoshitake & Yin Jing (Eds.). *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader* (pp. 95-112). Routledge, 2008.

Cheng, Chung-ying. Dialectic of Confucian Morality and Metaphysics of Man. *Philosophy East and West*. 21, 111-23, 1971.

Fingarette, Herbert. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972.

Garrett, Mary. Asian Challenge. In Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp (Eds.). *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (pp. 295-306). Waveland, 1991.

Hall, David L. & Roger T. Ames. *Thinking through Confucius*. Albany: N.Y.: University of New York Press, 1987.

Jensen, Vernon. Values and Practices in Asian Argumentation. *Argumentation and Advocacy* 28, 155-66, 1992.

Lin, Yu-tang. *The Wisdom of Confucius*. New York: Modern Library, 1938.

Lu, Xing. *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

Lu, Xing & David Frank. On the Study of Ancient Chinese Rhetoric/Bian. *Western Journal of Communication* 57, 445-63, 1993.

Oliver, Robert. *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1971.

Resnik, Michael David. Logic and Scientific Methodology in the Writing of Mencius. *International Philosophy Quarterly* 8, 212-30, 1968.

Richards, I. A. Mencius through the Looking-Glass. In Ann Berthoff (Ed.). *Richards on Rhetoric: I. A. Richards' Selected Essays 1929-1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

You, Xiaoye. The Way, Multimodality of Ritual Symbols, and Social Change: Reading Confucius's Analects as a Rhetoric. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. 36, 425-448, 2006.

Daoist Rhetoric

Daoist rhetoric is represented by Laozi (500 B.C.E.-?) and Zhuangzi (369-286 B.C.E.). While Daoism presents a worldview of metaphysics, dialectics, and mysticism, its rhetorical conceptualization is unique and distinctive. Dao, literally translated as “way” or “path”

actually is a moral concept that refers to the way of natural law and the way of human development. Its core concept is “wuwei” (non-action) which means allowing things to take their own course rather than overexerting intervention or interference. In other words, Daoist rhetoric aims to achieve balance or equilibrium in one’s personal life and in governing a state. Accordingly, Daoist rhetoric is skeptical of the use of language, its limitations, and its effect; it emphasizes non-contention and deemphasizes on the power of language. Its rhetorical style is characterized by paradoxical and oxymoronic sayings to allow the reader to see the opposing view. Zhuangzi’s writing is filled with fables, parables, ironies, anecdotes, pseudo-dialogues, and humor to make his points and to inspire his readers to move away from binary thinking.

Primary Sources:

Lau, D.C. (Trans) *Tao Te Ching*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982.

Palmer, Martin (Trans), *The Book of Chuang Tzu*. Penguin Books, 1996.

Secondary Sources:

Chung, Rueling. An examination of Taoist and Buddhist perspectives on interpersonal conflicts, emotions, and adversities. In Fred, Jandt (Ed.) *Intercultural communication: A global reader*. (pp. 38-50), Sage.

Graham, Angus Charles. *Dispute of the Tao*. LaSalle, IL.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1989.

Jensen, Vernon. Rhetorical Emphasis of Taoism. *Rhetorica* 5, 219-32, 1987.

LaFargue, Michael. *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao De Jing*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Lu Xing. *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

Ma, Hing Keung. The Chinese Taoist Perspective on Human Development. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 14, 235-49, 1990.

Oliver, Robert. *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1971.

Sun, Siao-fang. Chuang-tzu’s Theory of Truth. *Philosophy East and West* 3, 137-46, 1953.

Wu, Kang-Ming. *Chuang Tzu: World Philosopher at Play*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982.

Zhong, Longxi. The Tao and the Logos: Notes on Derrida’s Critique of Logo-centrism. *Critical Inquiry* 11, 385-98, 1985.

The Rhetoric of Mao Zedong

As the founder of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong has been regarded as a cultural icon and national hero by many Chinese people to this day. Mao's rhetoric has had the most impact and influence on the transformation of China and Chinese people through his writing and speeches in the modern era. His writing and speeches stretch from 1913 to 1975, addressing rhetorical exigencies in different time periods throughout China's modern history. Mao's rhetoric is characterized by his strategic appropriation of both symbolic resources of Confucian tradition and the radical tenets of class struggle drawn from Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. Always presenting himself as a patriot and moral leader, Mao's projections of China transformation – to that of a utopian state -- gave Chinese people hope for the future. His rhetoric is filled with ethical, emotional, and rational appeals. He was adept at using simple language, concrete examples, narratives, metaphors, historical references, proverbs and adages from classical Chinese literature to make abstract theories understandable. The current President of China, Xi Jinping, has followed Mao's rhetorical legacy in his own political speeches.

Primary Sources:

Mao, Zedong. "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (pp. 23-55). "On Practice" (pp. 295-310). "On Contradiction" (pp. 311-345). In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. I. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967.

Mao, Zedong. "Combat Liberalism" (pp. 31-34). "Introducing the Communist" (pp. 285-296). "In Memory of Norman Bethune" (pp. 337-338). In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. II. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967.

Mao, Zedong. "Oppose stereotyped Party Writing" (pp.53-68). "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art" (pp. 69-98). "Serve the People" (pp. 177-178). "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains" (pp. 271-274). In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. III. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967.

Mao, Zedong. "Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong" (pp. 97-100). "Cast away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle" (pp. 425-432). "Farewell, Leighton Stuart!" (pp. 433-440). "Friendship or Aggression?" (pp. 447-450). In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. IV. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967.

Mao, Zedong. "Always Keep to the Style of Plain Living and Hard Struggle" (pp. 23-24). "Be a True Revolutionary" (pp. 37-40). "U. S. Imperialism is a Paper Tiger" (pp.308-311). "Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work" (pp. 422-435). In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. V. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1977.

Secondary Sources:

Apter, David E. & Tony Saich. *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Cheek, Timothy. Mao: Revolution and Memory. In *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, edited by Timothy Cheek, 3-30. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Cheek, Timothy & Eugene Wu. *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Cheek, Timothy. The Multiple Maos of Contemporary China. *Harvard Asia Quarterly* II: 2-3, (Spring-Summer, 2008): 14-25.

Chu, Godwin C. *Radical Change through Communication in Mao's China*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977.

Cook, C. Alexander. Third World Maoism. In *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, edited by Timothy Cheek, 288-312. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Friedman, Edward. Democracy and 'Mao' Fever. *Journal of Contemporary China* 3(1994): 84-95.

Ip, Hung-Yok. Mao, Mao Zedong Thought, and Communist Intellectuals. In *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, edited by Timothy Cheek, 169-195. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Ji, Fengyuan. *Linguistic Engineering: Language and Politics in Mao's China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

Karl, Rebecca. *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Karnow, Stanley. *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution*. New York: The Viking Press, 1972.

Kau, Michael Y.M. & John Leung. (eds.). *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1986.

Leese, Daniel. *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Lu, Xing. *The Rhetoric of Mao Zedong: Transforming China and Its People*. The University of South Carolina Press. 2017

Michael, Franz. *Mao Tse-Tung & the Perpetual Revolution: An Illuminating Study of Mao Tse-Tung's Role in China and World Communism*. Hauppauge, New York: Barrons Educational Series Inc., 1977.



Schram, Stuart. *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters: 1956-1971*. Translated by John Chinnery & Tieyun. Pantheon Books, 1975.

Schram, Stuart. *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*. Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Schram, Stuart. *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992.

Schram, Stuart. Mao Studies Retrospect and Prospect. *China Quarterly* 97 (1984): 95-125.

Schrift, Melissa. *Biography of a Chairman Mao Badge: The Creation and Mass Consumption of a Personality Cult*. NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Schoenhals, Michael. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*. Berkeley, CA: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1992.

Schwartz, Benjamin. *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951.

Tang, Zongli & Bing Zuo. *Maoism and Chinese Culture*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 1996.

Walder, Andrew G. *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Wang, Minmin. Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art. In *Chinese Perspectives in Rhetoric and Communication*, edited by D. Ray Heisey, 179-195. Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2000.

Wasserstrom, N. Jeffrey. Mao Matters: A Review Essay. *China Review International* 3 (Spring 1996): 1-21.

Womack, Brantly. *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought 1917-1935*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1982.

Xiao, Yanzhong. Recent Mao Zedong Scholarship in China. In *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, edited by Timothy Cheek, 273-287. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.