

Zhu Xi's Analysis on Rhetoric and Technique of Expression in Ancient Chinese Books

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Abstract

Zhu Xi had obtained a deep understanding of the rhetoric and technique of expressions in ancient Chinese books through interpreting them. His analyses and understandings of the rhetoric and technique of expressions, such as intertextuality, omission, hendiadys, self-deprecatory expression, and rhyme, have contributed much to the research of Chinese ancient rhetoric studies.

Key word: Zhu Xi; Exegesis; Ancient books; Rhetoric and technique of expression

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Although there were no books on the topic of rhetoric in ancient China, many studies had focused on this topic. In fact, it was treated as a subtopic of exegetics. In the field of exegetics, one could not truly understand ancient Chinese books without first understand the rhetoric and its functions and characteristics in ancient books. Thus, it had received much attention from scholars. Confucius once said in *Zhou Yi-Qian-Wen Yan*, "Rhetoric establishes one's sincerity". Confucius said in Chapter 15 of *Analects of Confucius*, "The only requirement of language is to convey the meaning clearly and vividly". In Chapter 32 of the *Book of Rites*, the author said, "One's feeling should be sincere, and one's expression should be adapt". These

are ideas based on the theory of rhetoric. The rhetoric and technique of expression of ancient Chinese are quite diverse, and many of them are inherited in modern China.

There are many exegetical notes about rhetoric and technique of expressions in the ancient books, aiming to make it easier to understand. Many researchers of Han and Tang dynasties, including Ma Rong, Xu Shen, Zheng Xuan, Zheng Zhong, Kong Yingda, and Jia Gongyan, had gained much understanding on classical rhetoric and technique of expression. In addition to the previous studies, Zhu Xi had provided more detailed explanations on this topic based on the actual historical and literal background of the ancient books.

1. INTERTEXTUALITY

Jia Gongyan of Tang Dynasty had explained in Chapter 13 of the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, "Intertextuality" means to interchange the positions of characters within two words and omit the repetitive part." This is the definition of intertextuality in ancient time. Intertextuality (互文, hu wen), a.k.a. 互言(hu yan), refers to a rhetorical method in which two things reflect, complement, and explain each other in the context. It was commonly used in ancient books. Zhu Xi had analyzed this expression. For example:

In the Section *Da Ya-Sheng Min* of the *Book of Songs*, it stated, "With seeds from Heaven, he harvests Ju¹ and Pi*, and Men* and Qi*. Amount of Ju and Pi have to be counted in acres. He always carries bags of Men and Qi on his shoulder and back. Then he can offer it to the Gods." In his *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi noted, "After a big harvest, he carries the food home and offers it to the Gods. The amount of Ju and Pi are described using acres of land and the amount of Men and Qi are described by the action of 'carrying them on shoulder and back'. This is

¹ A kind of black millet.

intertextuality.”

In the Section *Wei Feng-Shuo Ren* of the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “This woman (Zhuang Jiang) is such a beauty and dresses in exquisite clothes. She is Marquis Qi’s beloved daughter, she is Marquis Wei’s bride, she is Crown Prince Qi’s young sister, she is Marquis Xing’s sister-in-law, and Marquis Tan is her brother-in-law.” In his *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi noted, “Women who are born late are called *young sister*. Wife’s sister is called Yi, and sister’s husband is called Si. Both Marquis Xing and Marquis Tan are her (Zhuang Jiang) brother-in-law. This is intertextuality.”

2. OMISSION

Omission is one of the common rhetorical and technique of expression used by ancients, and it makes the writing concise. In his book *Chinese Rhetoric*, Yang Shuda has listed three kinds of omission: omission of characters, words, and sentences. Omission (省略, *Sheng lue*) is often referred as *Sheng wen* (省文) in ancient literature. Here are some examples of Zhu Xi’s interpretation of this rhetoric and technique of expression:

In the Section *Zhong Yong* of the *Book of Rites*, it stated, “Memorial ceremony for the Heaven and Earth is a mean to report to the God of Heaven. Memorial ceremony for ancestors is a mean to remember and communicate with ancestors. With a full knowledge of the procedures of the memorial ceremonies for the Heaven, Earth, and ancestors and an understanding the meaning of these memorial ceremonies in summer, governing the country becomes a simple matter in your hand.” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi wrote, “Jiao, memory ceremony for the Heave. She, memory ceremony for the Earth. The latter is omitted in the original text. This is omission.”

Note: Zhu Xi’s comment on “omission” is based on Zheng Xuan’s note, which stated “She, memory ceremony for the Earth. The god of earth is omitted in the text. This is omission.” She is the memory ceremony for the Earth. Without omission, the original text should read as follow: “Memorial ceremony for the Heaven and Earth is a mean to report to the God of Heaven and the God of Earth.”

In *Teng Wen Gong I* of *Mencius*, it stated, “An area of one square li² equals to one jing³ of land, every jing of land is nine hundreds mu⁴ of land, and the middle section is the shared land. Eight families together own one jing of land, and each of them owns one hundred mu of land. All of them should plant and farm the shared land before working on their private lands. This behavior sets apart farmers.” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi wrote,

“This specific land system helped with the development of Zhou. Educated men relies on the food from the shared land, and private land is for farmers. Educated men are set apart from farmers by stating the order that shared land comes before private one. The original text omits educated men and only mentions farmers. This is omission.”

Note: according to this land system, shared land is for educated men and private land is for farmers. “Educated men are set apart from farmers by stating the order that shared land comes before private one.” The original text omitted “educated men” and only mentioned “set apart farmers”. Without omission, the original text should read as follow: “All of them should plant and farm the shared land before working on their private lands. This behavior sets educated men apart from farmers.”

3. HENDIADYS

Hendiadys (重言, Chongyan) or Zaiyan (再言) refers to a rhetoric in which words are repeated continuously or at intervals. When writing poems or articles, the ancients often used words or sentences repeatedly to express emotions or to achieve certain effects. Zhu Xi had analyzed this technique in ancient books. His analyses and comments can be divided into the following types:

3.1 Repetition of Words or Sentences

In the Section *Bei Feng-Yan Yan* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “The swallows go flying about, with their wings widely open. The lady (my sister) is returning (to her native state), and I escorted her far into the field. I looked till I could no longer see her, and my tears fell down like rain.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi commented, “Yan (swallow) is also called Yi. ‘Yan Yan’ in the original text is hendiadys.”

In *Jin Xin II* of *Mencius*, it stated, “Why are they said to be profligate and unrestrained?” Mencius answered, “Because they are ambitious and complacent. They always say ‘the ancients did this and the ancients did that’. But their behaviors are not consistent with their words.” In *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “‘the ancient’ is repeated twice in the original text. This is hendiadys.”

3.2 To Deepen the Degree Through Hendiadys

In the Section *Bei Feng-Shi Wei* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “It’s dark, it’s dark! Why not go home? It is for the lords, we are wet with dew.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi commented, “Wei means it is dark. The degree of darkness is increased by this hendiadys expression.”

In *Gongsun Chou I* of *Mencius*, it stated, “Mencius said, ‘No! How can you say that? Zi Gong once asked Confucius, ‘Master, are you a Sage?’ Confucius answered, ‘No, I am not. I only learn without satiety and teach without being tired.’ Zi Gong said, ‘You learn without satiety, that shows your wisdom. You teach without being tired, that shows our benevolence. Be benevolent and wise, Master, you are a Sage!’ Even Confucius did

² An ancient unit of length in China. It is approximately 300 steps long.

³ An ancient unit of area in China. It has a square shape and looks like the # symbol.

⁴ A common unit of area in modern China. It is 1/6 of an acre.

not dare to claim to be Sage, how can you say that (I am a Sage)?” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “The repetition of ‘How can you say that’ deepens Mencius’ rejection of this idea.”

3.3 To Deepen Emotion Through Hendiadys

3.3.1 Complimentary

In Chapter 6 of *Analects of Confucius*, it stated, “What a great Sage Yan Hui is! A bamboo basket for food, a ladle for water, and a simple room for living. Others cannot bear the sorrow of poverty, but he can still be happy. Yan Hui is such a great Sage!” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “Yan Hui is so poor yet happy and not bothered by it. Confucius deepens his complimentary on Yan Hui by repeating the sentence.”

In Chapter 14 of *Analects of Confucius*, it stated, “Qu Boyu sent a messenger to visit Confucius. Confucius asked him to sit down and asked, ‘What is your master doing recently?’ The messenger replied, ‘Master wants to eliminate making mistakes in life but has not yet succeeded.’ After he left, Confucius said, ‘What a messenger! What a messenger!’” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “The messenger’s reply is very modest and it shows his Master’s virtue. He really knows the mind of a scholar and knows the right thing to say. Confucius repeated ‘What a messenger’ to deepen his complementary.”

3.3.2 Hatred

In the Section *Xiao Ya Xiang Bo* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “A huge dirty mouth like the Comet (for bad luck). Those slanderers! Who devised their schemes for them?” Later in the same section, it stated, “Those slanderers! Who devised their schemes for them? Catch them and leave them in mountains as food for wolves. If wolves do not eat them, then bring them to the North as food for savages. If savages do not eat them, then the God of Heaven will punish them.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi commented, “The hatred toward slanderers is deepened through the repetition of the sentence ‘Those slanderers! Who devised their schemes for them’.”

3.4 To Emphasize Through Hendiadys

In the Section *Bin Feng Qi Yue* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “In the seventh month, the Fire Star passes the meridian; in the ninth month, clothes are given out. In the days of (lunar) first month, the wind blows cold; in the days of (lunar) second month, the air turns cold. Without the clothes and garments, how could we survive the year? In the days of (lunar) third month, they take their ploughs in hand; in the days of (lunar) fourth month, they take their way to the fields.” Later in the same section, it stated, “In the seventh month, the Fire Star passes the meridian; in the ninth month, clothes are given out. With the spring days the warmth begins, and the oriole utters its song. The young women take their deep baskets, and go along the small paths. Looking for the tender (leaves of

the) mulberry trees.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi commented, “The article emphasizes the start of sewing by repeating ‘Fire Star and clothes are given out’.”

In the Section *Li Sao* in the *Song of Chu*, it stated, “The day grew dark, and now was nearly spent, idly my orchids into wreaths I bent. The virtuous and the vile in darkness merged, they veiled my virtue, by their envy urged... Before the young king was in marriage bound, the royal sisters twain might still be found. My suit was inauspicious at the best, I knew I had small hope in my request. The world is dark, and envious of my grace, they vile my virtue and the evil praise.” In the *Chu Ci Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “The author was afraid that his position was less desirable than the young lord, and he knows that the matchmaker’s skill is not good. He believes his request of marriage will be rejected before he hears any answers. Thus, he restates that the world is dark and envious of his virtue.”

3.5 To Connect With Previous Paragraphs Through Hendiadys

In *Liang Hui Wang I* of *Mencius*, it stated, “Mencius replied, ‘Why must your Majesty mention benefit? I am here to provide counsels of benevolence and righteousness... There never has been a benevolent man who neglected his parents, and there never has been a righteous man who put his sovereign at second place. Let benevolence and righteousness be your Majesty’s only topic. Why do you have to mention benefit?’” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi commented, “This is hendiadys. It connects the previous two parts together.”

In *Zhou Yi Qian Wen Yan*, it commented, “Isn’t it true that only Sage can do that? Knowing the right thing to do at the right time but still hold his righteous and virtue. Only Sage can do that!” In the *Zhou Yi Ben Yi*, Zhu Xi commented, “The sentence ‘only Sage can do that’ is a hendiadys. The flow of the article is completed by asking the question at the beginning and answering it at the end of the paragraph.”

4. SELF-DEPRECIATORY EXPRESSION

In Chapter 2 of *Analects of Confucius*, it stated, “The Master said, ‘At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I was independent and had my place in society. At forty, I was no longer confused or lost. At fifty, I understood the rule of society and life. At sixty, I could distinguish right from wrong and accept the bitter truth. At seventy, I could follow my heart without breaking the rules.’” Zhu Xi commented, “I think the Master was born like that without the need to learn. He must have realized this and notice things that other scholars are lacking. Therefore, he claims this learning experience to be his. He hopes scholars are not timid by the fact that he is a Sage (and the standard is impossible to meet for a human) and can use it as standards to keep learning. This is also why

the Master uses self-depreciatory expressions.”

This is Zhu Xi's understanding of the use of 'self-depreciatory expression' in ancient books. Here are some examples of his comments on this rhetoric technique in exegesis:

In Chapter 11 of *Analects of Confucius*, it stated, “Chi, what about you?” Chi replied, ‘I cannot say that I am good at anything, but I am willing to learn. I am willing to wear the festival clothes and assistant as the host in services of the ancestral temple and foreign affairs.’” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi remarked, “Xiang indicates assistance to the emperor. The character Xiao (small) in front shows his modesty.”

In *Liang Hui Wang I of Mencius*, it stated, “The *Book of Songs* says, ‘First be a good model in virtue and moral for your less-morale wife, then for your brother, and then apply it in governance of the nation.’ This is saying to apply this thought of benevolence and virtue to other things. Thus, if one apply this then the whole nation will be stable; otherwise, one cannot even keep his wife.” In the *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Zhu Xi remarked, “‘less-morale wife’ is a self-depreciatory expression.”

5. RHYME

When writing poems, the ancients often used various rhetoric and technique of expression for rhyming works in order to make it sound better. Zhu Xi had commented on the following rhyme techniques:

5.1 Change of Characters

Change of characters (变文, bianwen) refers to a rhetoric technique that deliberately uses different words to express the same or similar meanings to avoid repetition in the sentence and to achieve a certain effect. Here, change of characters are often used to avoid repetition and make the poem rhyme. For example, the first stanza in the Section *Chen Feng-Ze Bei* in the *Book of Songs* stated, “By the shores of that marsh, there are rushes and lotus plants. There is the beautiful lady, I am tortured for her, but what avails it?” And the third stanza stated, “By the shores of that marsh, there are rushes and lotus flowers. There is that beautiful lady, tall and large, and majestic.” Kong Yida noted, “The first stanza uses He (荷), which is the stem of lotus. The third stanza uses Han Dan (菡萏), which is the flower of lotus. Both use the beauty of lotus as a metaphor for a lady's beauty. The change of characters here is for rhyme.” Here is Zhu Xi's remarks on this kind of rhetoric technique:

The third stanza of Section *Xiao Ya-Huang Huang Zhe Hua* in the *Book of Songs* stated, “My horses are piebald, the six reins are like silk. I gallop them and urge them on, everywhere seeking information and counsel.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi commented, “Ru Si (如丝) means smooth like silk. Mou (谋) means investigation. The change of characters is to rhyme. Same as the rest of the poem.”

Note: The second stanza of the poem reads, “My horses are young, the six reins look as if they were moistened. I gallop them and urge them on, everywhere pushing my inquiries.” Here “馭 (zou)” and “驹 (ju)”, “濡 (ru)” and “驱 (qu)” share a common sound of ‘Hou Bu’ (侯部).

The rest of the poem uses characters that either sound similar or have similar meanings to avoid repetition. For example, the fourth stanza reads, “My horses are white and black-maned, the six reins look glossy. I gallop them and urge them on, everywhere seeking information and advice.” Zhu Xi commented, “Yin (骃) means a mixture of black and white fur. Jun (均) means smooth. Xun (询) means investigation.” These characters also follow the rule of rhyme. Among all the characters in the third, fourth, and fifth stanza, all characters rhyme except “驱 (qu)”. “Qi (骐)”, “Si (丝)” and “Mou (谋)” in the third stanza share a similar sound of ‘Zhi Bu’ (之部) in the ancient time. “Luo (骆)”, “Ruo (若)” and “Du (度)” in the fourth stanza share a similar sound of ‘Duo Bu’ (铎部). “Yin (骃)”, “Jun (均)” and “Xun (询)” in the last stanza share a similar sound of ‘Zhen Bu’ (真部).

5.2 Intertextual Rhyme

Intertextual rhyming refers to a rhetoric technique that often uses words that can reflect, complement, or explain each other to make the poem rhyme. Zhu Xi's analysis on this is as follow:

In the Section *Yong Feng-Ding Zhi Fang Zhong* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “When Ding appeared in the sky (at night-fall), he began to build the palace at Chu. Determining its aspects by means of the sun, he built the mansion at Chu. He planted about it hazel and chestnut trees, the Yi⁵, Tong, Zi, and the varnish-tree, which, when cut down, might afford materials for lutes.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi remarked, “Chu Shi (楚室, mansion at Chu) is the same as Chu Gong (楚宫, palace at Chu). This is intertextual rhyme.”

Note: “Gong (宫)” rhymes with “Zhong (中)” in “when Ding appeared in the sky”. They share a similar sound of ‘Dong Bu’ (冬部). “Shi (室)” rhymes with “Ri (日)” in “determining its aspects by means of the sun”, and also “Li (栗)”, “Qi (漆)” and “Se (瑟)”. They share a similar sound of ‘Zhi Bu’ (质部). “Gong” and “Shi” are intertextual. In *Gong Bu* of *Shuowen Jiezi*, it stated, “Gong (palace) is Shi (mansion).” Duan Yucai noted, “Gong indicates the outside of the building, and Shi indicates the inner of the building. Unless it is specially mentioned, they are interchangeable.” In *Er Ya-Shi Gong*, it stated, “Gong and Shi are equivalent.” In *Historical Records-Annals of the Five Emperors*, it stated, “Xiang remained in Shun's house (Gong) and played his lute.” Zhang Shoujie commented, “Gong is Shi.” Thus, “Chu Gong” and “Chu Shi” are intertextual rhyme.

⁵ A type of tree, which is used to make lutes.

5.3 Change of Word Order

By reviewing the usage of “Bianwen (变文)” and “Bianwen (便文)”, we think they are two different concepts. “变文” means to use different characters with similar meaning to avoid repetition, and “便文” focuses more on the changing the order of words. In the Section *Xiao Ya-Qiao Yan* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “Very grand is the ancestral temple, a true sovereign made it. Wisely arranged are the great plans, sages determined them.” Kong Yingda wrote, “For the term ‘Qin Miao (寝庙, ancestral temple)’, the *Rites of Zhou* clarified, ‘Miao should come before Qin’. That means ‘Miao’ and ‘Qin’ are the same. It’s just a change of word order.” Here, change of word order is often used in poetry so that poems rhyme better. For example, in the Section *Xiao Ya-Chu Ci* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “With correct and reverent deportment, the oxen and sheep all pure, we proceed to the winter and autumnal sacrifice.” Kong Yingda commented, “In the correct order, “Chang (尝, autumn)” should come before “Zheng (蒸, winter)”. The order of words is switched in order to rhyme.” There is no difference between “Zheng Chang” and “Chang Zheng”. The order is switched only to rhyme. Here, “Chang (尝)”, “Qiang (踰)” and “Yang (羊)” share a similar sound of ‘Yang Bu’ (阳部). Here is Zhu Xi’s understanding of this rhetoric technique in his study of exegesis:

In the Section *Xiao Ya-Fu Tian* in the *Book of Songs*, it stated, “With my vessels full of bright millet, and my pure victim-rams, we sacrificed to (the Spirits of) the land and to (those of) the four quarters. That my fields are in such good condition, is matter of joy to my men.” In *Shi Ji Zhuan*, Zhu Xi remarked, “Zi (齐, millet) is the same as Zi (粢). In the *Book of Rites-Qu Li*, it stated, “Ji (稷) is white (明) millet.” This means the word order is switched in ‘Zi Ming (齐明)’.”

Note: “齐” and “粢” have the same pronunciation. In *Huai Nan Zi-Jing Shen Xun*, it mentioned, “Most people think those rare food are delicious, but Emperor Yao ate rough meals made of zi (粢) and drank soup made from wild vegetables.” Gao You noted, “Zi is millet. It reads as ‘zi’.” In *Ji Yun-Zhi Yun*, it stated, “Zi (粢) is the same as Zi (齐).” According to the *Book of Rites-Qu Li*, the correct word order should have been “Ming Zi (明粢)” or “Ming Zi (明齐)”. It is written as “Zi Ming (齐明)” for the poem to rhyme. “Ming (明)” rhymes with “Yang (羊)”, “Fang (方)”, “Zang (臧)” and “Qing (庆)”.

In short, Zhu Xi’s understanding of rhetoric and technique of expression used in ancient books, including intertextuality, omission, hendiadys, self-depreciatory expression, and rhyme in exegesis has a profound influence in the field of study. It also has an important position in the history of Chinese literature. Because the study of rhetoric technique was part of exegetics in ancient China, studies on Zhu Xi’s research on this topic will help enrich the rhetoric theory in ancient China.

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