Efficacious Persuasion in the *Guiguzi*
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Harsh invective against the professors of the art of speech has been central to

intellectual culture for as long as there has been an awareness of speech's persuasive

powers. Socrates and Plato remain the most eloquent and thoughtful critics of this

delinquent art, but numerous other classical thinkers, including Isocrates, himself a

teacher of speech, railed bitterly against the teachers of discourse, berating them for their

unscrupulousness and duplicity: "Indeed, who can fail to abhor, yes to contemn, those

teachers, in the first place, who devote themselves to disputation, since they pretend to

search for truth, but straightway at the beginning of their professions attempt to deceive

us with lies?"[1] More recently, Kant, the philosophical architect of the now frequently

impugned era of modernity, disappointedly proclaims in his Critique of Judgment,

> I must confess that…reading the best speech of a Roman public
> orator, or of a contemporary parliamentary speaker or preacher, has
> always been mingled with the disagreeable feeling of disapproval of
> an insidious art, an art that knows how, in important matters, to
> move people like machines to a judgment that must lose all its
> weight with them when they meditate about it calmly.[2]

This antipathy towards the art of "word-twisting" finds fertile soil not only in European

culture but in China as well. The canonical thinkers of classical China, ranging from

Confucius to Zhuangzi to Mozi, warned about the perplexities of speech and, more

insidious, those who teach the shaping of speech for the attainment of political ends.[3]

Invective was most frequently directed against those of the "School of the Horizontal and

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[1] "Against the Sophists," in Isocrates, v. 2, George Norlin trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 163.

[2] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), §53, n. 63, p. 198.

[3] For example, Confucius is recorded in The Analects as disparaging "cunning," manipulative dispositions: 子曰：「巧言，令色，足恭，左丘明恥之，丘亦恥之。」 See 《論語，公冶長》.

Vertical Alliances," roving political salesmen who earned their keep as mercenary

diplomats, crafting and deploying political intrigues for the purpose of creating and

destroying political alliances between the various states. Like their Greek contemporaries,

their loyalties were seen by their critics as driven by avarice and power-mongering, their

influence corrosive and bellicose. In spite of their critics' admonitions, the most talented

of these diplomats were frequently employed by one or another state and, sometimes,

more than one.

In contrast to the considerable range of their influence,[4] those associated with the

School of the Horizontal and Vertical Alliances have been given little attention in past

studies on early Chinese political thought. There may, however, be genuine intellectual

grounds for the paucity of analysis and evaluation. For we might legitimately ask, can

such diplomats, can such persuaders really be considered to have had a coherent,

consistent program, or were they simply sycophants who catered to the whims of their

hegemon of the moment? One possible resolution, the most thorough-going, could be

obtained through an analysis of the recorded persuasions or speeches in classical works

such as the Zhanguoce, the Yanzichunqiu, or the Zuozhuan. Another, and the resolution

that I will propose here, can be had by the analysis of the small cache of theoretical

writings attributed to the members of the school. Of the few remaining texts, one of the

most renowned is that attributed to Guiguzi, the putative teacher of two of the most

legendary of the Warring States persuaders, Su Qin and Zhang Yi. Little is recorded

about him save his pedagogical reputation and hermitic lifestyle, but in itself this lack of

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[4] I consider the very influence that Su Qin and Zhang Yi are reputed in the Shi Ji to have had, assuming
their reputations had any basis in fact whatsoever, as substantial evidence for the above more general
assertion. One might, of course, say that there was, in fact, no "school," per se. I would then simply
respond that the putative influence of the school is just that of those who were considered as belonging to
such a "school," which would include the two mentioned.

information is insufficient ground to dismiss him as a fiction. Whether or not the text is genuinely his, it is a trenchant analysis of the principles behind the art of persuasion, and very likely, if not from the Warring States period, is at least derived from texts of that time.[5] The task of this essay will not be to analyze the entirety of the text. What I will assay is how the text speaks to a fundamental issue of political persuasion: the engendering of trust about the veracity of one's assertions in situations in which full, comprehensive certainty cannot be obtained.

As a text, the Guiguzi has long been considered of questionable provenance. It does not make an appearance in the imperial bibliographic lists until the Sui dynasty, under the rubric of the "School of the Horizontal and Vertical Alliances." The Ming-dynasty scholar Hu Ying Lin (胡應麟) raises a further charge—that the language of the text does not appear to be pre-Qin—but fails to provide the detailed linguistic analysis that would be necessary to support his claim.[6] Largely because the text does not appear in the bibliographic lists of the Han dynasty, a number of Chinese scholars have considered it to be a later forgery or the work of Guiguzi's two infamous students, and thus, would not have appeared as an independent citation in the Han catalogue. Xiao Deng Fu (蕭登福) convincingly dismisses the significance attributed to its absence from the Han bibliography, retorting that omission does not imply nonexistence, and insists that there is manifold textual evidence elsewhere, notably in the early Han texts of the Shiji, the Shuoyuan, and the Fayan, that speaks to the existence of a Guiguzi. Indeed, the latter two works cite passages that are found in the present edition of the Guiguzi.[7] While

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[5] See 蕭登福，《鬼谷子研究》（臺北：文津出版社，1984），pp. 33-37, for a discussion of why the Guiguzi is likely from the Warring States period. Hereafter cited as "Xiao."
[6] See Xiao, pp. 31.
[7] See Xiao, pp. 33-37.

none of Xiao's arguments are conclusive for a positive identification of either the man or the text, there is sufficient evidence to treat as credible the possibility of such an identification.

The text is broken into three sections, an upper, a middle, and a lower. The upper section contains the first four essays, the middle section contains essays five through fourteen (the last two being lost), and the lower section contains nine essays. The upper and middle appear to be of a piece, for the essays borrow terminology from each other. For example, the term "飛鉗" ("Flying and Pinching"), which is a central theme in the fifth essay (indeed, it is the title of the essay), also appears in essay six. "抵巇" ("Preventing Fractures") appears in its titular essay, essay four, and in essay five. The lower section appears to be a later emendation. Certain philosophical language appears here that does not appear in the previous sections, language that, Xiao Dengfu asserts, reveals Daoist and Buddhist influences.[8] Irrespective of the origins of final section, because of the intratextual references in the upper and middle sections, I will treat them and analyze them as a piece, apart from the lower section.

A prominent difficulty in analyzing the text is the almost impenetrable opacity of certain of its passages, a feature not terribly uncharacteristic of classical Chinese texts. Fortunately, we have the commentary of Tao Hong Jing (陶宏景), the 5th century Daoist thinker, who provided excellent elucidatory expositions without the regular intrusion of a dogmatic agenda. Of course, in its opacity, the text allows for a variety of readings. Furthermore, Tao's expositions are sometimes either awkward or, perhaps because his edition of the text contained textual infelicities, somewhat misguided. Thus, while this

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[8] See Xiao, pp. 48-54.

study is informed by Tao's expositions, I do not depend on them exclusively. My

interpretation of the text will instead make ample use of the text's inherent hermeneutic

openness. Its fundamentally irresolvable ambiguities open a space for consideration of

various shades of meaning and possibilities of the direction of its arguments. Thus my

conclusions will have to remain somewhat speculative.

Although any number of ethical concepts could relate to the issue of

trustworthiness, two terms that speak directly to such a concern, zhong (忠,

"conscientiousness" or "loyalty"), which relates to the trustworthiness of one's conative

commitments (particularly towards non-family), and xin (信, "trustworthiness" or "trust"),

which concerns the trustworthiness of one's doxastic commitments. Evidence for such a

correlation is widely available. The Shuowen defines zhong as "respect; exerting one's

heart-mind to the utmost,"[9] thus to place a priority on following through with what one

has set upon doing. Xin is defined as "integrity,"[10] that is, standing by what one

professes as one's position on a certain matter. Furthermore, a catalog of their usage,

especially among classical Confucian texts, clearly demonstrates their pairing and likely

integral interrelatedness. In the Analects and the Mencius, zhong and xin are frequently

paired. Confucius is cited several times as urging that zhong and xin be made one's

guiding principles.[11] In the Mencius, zhong is paired with xin in half of its appearances;

in the Xunzi, while the ratio of this pairing decreases to only approximately thirty-seven

percent, it is still noteworthy. Outside the Confucian corpus, explicit textual pairing, in

general, drops precipitously, save in the Mozi. R. T. Ames and David Hall, observing the

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[9] 《說文解字注》，(上海：上海古籍出版社，2000)，第 502 頁，下部："忠敬也。盡心曰忠。"
[10] Ibid., p. 92："信，誠也。"
[11] See Lunyu, I.8, IX.25, XII.13.

incidence of the pairing of <u>zhong</u> and <u>xin</u> in the <u>Analects</u>, forward an interesting suggestion: they propound that both involve "plighting one's troth,"[12] thus requiring active, reliable commitment. While their emphasis lies on the ability to carry out one's "troth," their assertion speaks to the importance of commitment, and more importantly a *trustworthy* commitment, for both terms.

In the upper and middle sections of the <u>Guiguzi</u>, these terms appear irregularly. <u>Zhong</u> appears only four times: twice in essay six, once in essay nine, and once in essay ten. <u>Xin</u> appears a total seven times, twice in essay eight, once in essays nine, ten, and eleven, and twice in essay twelve. Their usage is fully commensurate with that in the above referenced Confucian and Mohist texts. Several example passages from the <u>Guiguzi</u> can suffice to demonstrate this: "[In] joining with that and departing from this, [in] planning intrigues, [one] cannot be conscientious to two sides—there will certainly be conflicts"[13]; "[If] conscientiousness [and] actuality have no truth [to them], [one] cannot comprehend people"[14]; "[When attempting to] fathom him, [one can] use 'equanimity,' 'uprightness,' 'joy,' 'rage,' 'naming,' 'performing,' 'honesty,' 'trust,' 'profit,' and 'humility'…to 'trust' is to anticipate"[15]; "In the case of 'worrysome' language, deliberate and effect trust."[16]   While the contents of the text frequently seem to verge on tacit support of amoral political intrigue (a tendency which will be of utmost concern in my evaluation of the text), nothing in the text appears to be in conflict with the aim of establishing long-term trusting relationships. Indeed, as I shall claim, trust in the

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[12] David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, <u>Thinking Through Confucius</u> (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 60.
[13] See 忤合篇: "合于彼而離于此，計謀不兩忠，必有反忤。"
[14] <u>Ibid.</u>: "忠實無真，不能知人。"
[15] 摩篇: "其摩者，有以平，有以正，有以喜，有以怒，有以名，有以行，有以廉，有以信，有以利，有以卑…信者，期也。"
[16] 權篇: "戚言者，權而幹信。"

<u>Guiguzi</u> is given an articulation that renders it all the more politically viable. The <u>Guiguzi</u> clearly lays out all that must, in any politically autocratic setting, be overcome for trust to be engendered.

From the perspective of modern commentators, what the text merely seems to advocate, at least when it advises how inferiors should interact with their superiors, is base psychological manipulation—how to respond to their various moods, how to read and understand the behavioural signs of their moods. It repeatedly admonishes that, if possible, nothing be left to chance, no information ignored, no opportunity overlooked. Utilizing various artifices, the agent attempts to divine his audience's psychological predispositions and crafts his speech to appeal to such predispositions. The closer the "fit," the <u>Guiguzi</u> affirms, the greater the likelihood that the agent will be able to bring his intrigue to fruition. In brief, suggested tactics from the twelve essays of the upper and middle sections are (which simultaneously serve as the titles of each essay): "Dividing Apart and Closing Together" (捭闔), or segregating character types into active and passive; "Reacting" (反應), or observing his manner and action and countering with the corresponding counterpart; "Internal Doorbar" (內揵), or finding an accord between one's audience's preferences and one's own; "Flying and Pinching" (飛箝), or praising one's audience in order to "pinch" him, i.e., to "nab" him; "Preventing Fractures" (抵巇), or preventing minor setbacks from becoming major ones; "Opposing and Converging" (忤合), or adapting one's plans to accord with changes in the situation; "Fathoming" (揣), or determining the essential nature of the situation and the people involved; "Approaching" (摩), or insinuating oneself in such a way as to provoke an unnoticed but very consequential effect; "Weighing" (權), or carefully judging the situation and the

public reaction one ought to have regarding it; "Plotting" (謀), or observing weaknesses and capitalizing on them without being noticed; "Deciding" (決), or determining what issues and what demeanor will attract a favorable decision; and "Tally Speech" (符言), or paying attention to the empirical. Commentators such as Xiao see in these techniques rather straightforward, and indeed even self-explanatory, evidence of the text's advocacy of what is "merely" psychological manipulation of a listening audience. Unfortunately, while there is indubitably a psychologically informed sensibility to the Guiguzi, modern analyses often do not linger with subtleties or with the philosophical problems with regard to the effectiveness of such a sensibility when employed in the highly volatile political arena. In the few texts that offer more than a passing reference to the Guiguzi, more often than not, after an introduction of the perceived basic conceptual structure of the text, the techniques within the text are given cursory description, with a simple psychologically formulated translation appended.[17] Frequently, modern Chinese commentators quote without discussion, as if the quotes call for little or no analysis.[18]

Chinese commentators, of course, are certainly not the only ones who overlook possible complexities; Western commentators do so as well. François Jullien, for one, sees the issue of Chinese political thought as largely taking for granted the "fact" of manipulation, in clear distinction to persuasion. "Manipulation, not persuasion, was the Chinese way."[19] According to Jullien, classical Chinese social theory emphasizes the

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[17] For example, see 趙傳棟，《論辯史話》(上海：復旦大學出版社，1999)，pp. 149-155. See also 陳光磊 and 王俊衡，《中國修辭學通史》（吉林教育出版社，2001），pp. 134-147. Of course, as surveys, their discussions are unavoidably brief. This brevity, however, does not excuse the lightness of the analysis.

[18] For a particularly egregious example, see 顧念先，《縱橫家研究》，（臺北，臺灣：正中書局，1969），pp. 86-101.

[19] François Jullien, The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China, Janet Lloyd trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 69.

indirect potential of the power relation (its 勢) and concomitantly deemphasizes direct confrontation. Thus, he claims, there appears to be a "profound distrust of the power of words," which led to the rejection of "all efforts at persuasion."[20] Jullien acknowledges that rhetoric, and by extension persuasion, can also be regarded as a technique of manipulation; however, "it involves at least turning towards others, addressing them, and seeking to convince them; which gives them a chance to reply, defend themselves, and argue the opposite case…And, as we realize from the contrast provided by Chinese civilization, from that face-to-face *agon* in the agora…Greek democracy was born."[21] Manipulation, for Jullien, stands in antithesis to persuasion, just as Chinese autocracy stands in antithesis to the Greek democracy.

This, clearly, is a starkly hyperbolic contrast. Were one to define persuasion as simply the verbal art of transforming the doxastic commitments of another, surely no one could insist that persuasion could only flourish in an arena resembling the Greek agora, or would even simply be more frequently present within such. I have further difficulties with Jullien's categorical statements about the Chinese disregard for language. While one may debate the relative "mistrust" of language by classical Chinese thinkers, there are any number of texts that speak directly to, and indeed focus on, how language should be used. These seem gross evidence for a serious concern with discourse, and thus language, among Chinese thinkers. Chinese thinkers were not merely concerned with the articulation of action and psychological "positioning." If such texts are any evidence, they were also very concerned with the difficulties of arbitrating between conflicting doxastic assertions and the winning of the transformation of commitments, both doxastic

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[20] Ibid., p. 69.
[21] Ibid., p. 69.

and conative. In the case of the <u>Guiguzi</u>, while the text does not focus solely on persuasion, one can easily identify any number of passages and terms that relate directly to the employment of language. A brief analysis of the employment of the character <u>shuo</u>/<u>shui</u> (說) in the <u>Guiguzi</u> readily demonstrates that its usage is most often clearly meant to denote persuasion (<u>shui</u>) rather than clarification, or explanation (<u>shuo</u>). Among the 30-odd times 說 appears in the text, it appears five times in a verb-object compound in which the object is "person" (人). In several more instances, it appears in a verb compound in which the object is the pronoun <u>zhi</u> (之). In such cases <u>zhi</u> clearly is meant to serve as a substitute for "a person" or "group of people." While there are two instances in which 說 verbally modifies an objective subject matter rather than a person (or group of people), and thus perhaps lends itself to be interpreted as meaning "explanation" or "clarification," these two instances in no way poses any difficulty for its more frequent employment of "to persuade."[22]

If we are to grant, as we clearly must, that the text assigns certain import to questions of persuasion, we must enter into resolving any number of questions of doxastic commitment, and the relation between doxastic commitment, conative commitment, and action. Because these topics are immense, each deserving of long and intensive discussion, this essay can serve only as a prefatory analysis. This analysis briefly considers two principal issues and anticipates a third. First, we must attempt to determine what the <u>Guiguzi</u> proposes as the process by which doxastic commitment is produced and thus, perhaps, transformed. Second, we might ask whether "reason" has

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[22] The two instances in which 說 appears to brought in relation to an objective subject matter are found in 內楗 and 抵巇.

any place in the text and if so, how its efficacy in relation to unreasoned discourse is measured. Finally, to assess persuasion's impact on action, we would need to ask whether there is any perceived necessary relation between transformed doxastic commitment and the intention to act on such a doxastic commitment. My larger objective in posing these questions, is to assess the degree to which trust is involved in the course of the transformation of doxastic commitment and, consequently, the intent to act.

The central problem with regarding the Guiguzi as simply a manual for psychological manipulation, specifically in regard to its concerns with persuasion, is that it then must be seen as treating the persuader's audience as unable to enter into full-fledged, robust discussion, and thus, unable to fully discern just what aspect of the persuader's speech is worthy of doxastic commitment and what not, or, in its ethical formulation, what is trustworthy and what is not. To regard it as such without due consideration is to limit prematurely its applicability and to obviate the very real danger of the audience's cognizance of such manipulation. Assuredly, many of its doctrines focus on treating the audience as object. The estimation of a persuasion as worthy of doxastic commitment would require an analysis of the listener's assessment of what would constitute justification for that doxastic commitment, a feature of persuasion on which the author (or authors) of the Guiguzi do not focus. The emphasis in the Guiguzi is not on the giving of warrants or justifications to more forcefully propel the transformation of the listener's doxastic commitments but how the listener's set of doxastic commitments may relate to his goals and value system and thus, why the discovery of such agenda and value system is of the utmost importance. There is little

confidence expressed in the <u>Guiguzi</u> in the listener's ability to extract himself from the grip of subjective preference. Once the speaker has determined the listener's preferences and motivations, the text avers, the success of future persuasions is far more likely. Nevertheless, even with secured insight into the listener's motivations, the <u>Guiguzi</u> does not assure success. There is an acknowledgement that the success of the persuasion is not inevitable, that influences affecting the course of motivation and thus the necessary course for a successful persuasion are too complex to ever be fully accounted for, and even if accounted for, they may frequently lie beyond the control of the persuader. Thus, the <u>Guiguzi</u> warns, the persuader must always be vigilant regarding not only that which affects actual states of affairs but also possible states of affairs. In other words, he must be conscious of insinuation, irony, and indirection: in brief, he must always remain vigilantly suspicious of the inconstancy of doxastic commitment. It is this inconstancy of the listener's system of doxastic commitment that presses for the acknowledgement that the listener is not simply a trainable object, but variable other, with his own decision procedures and evaluative mechanisms. This inconstancy demands that the other be treated as subject (with all the risk that entails) whose mind may have to be reached rather than simply manipulated.

In Humean fashion, doxastic commitment is conceived in the <u>Guiguzi</u> as being formed in the confluence of affair (事) and preference (欲). While this is not explicitly stated, the text recommends that both are of primary import, not in and of themselves, but because they are the primary constituents of the listener's perceptions, and thus, of a possible set of doxastic commitments. Their import is strongly emphasized by their reiteration. The text repeatedly addresses the framing and taking advantage of affairs and

the shaping of preference. "[Upon] regarding how he plots out the affair, [one] will know his conative and doxastic commitments."[23] For the Guiguzi, affairs are the basic parameters, the structure within which preferences can be formulated, and yet, the preferences themselves shape the manner in which affairs can be articulated.[24] There is nothing that permanently, and unalterably, fixes the shape of a state of affairs, because "situations have no constant prioritizations; [and] affairs have no constant guides."[25] Disagreement concerning the central point of the affair, the Guiguzi propounds, frequently arises from the differences in the preferences governing perceptions. Affair and preference are mutually influential, their symbiotic relationship all the stronger because of the politicized environment in which they become manifest.

The shape of preference, nevertheless, is further complicated, the Guiguzi concedes, by the contour of the listener's character—the virtues which he possesses and the ideals which he pursues. The issue of character is broached almost immediately in the text, at the beginning of chapter one: "Worthiness, unworthiness, intelligence, stupidity, courage, cowardice, humaneness, propriety—there are distinctions. [Sometimes] then [they] can be divided apart, [sometimes] then [they] can be brought together, [sometimes] then [they] can be approached, [sometimes] then [they] can be distanced from, [sometimes] then [they] can be made lowly, [sometimes] then [they] can be aggrandized."[26] Both virtues and ideals are seen as inconstant, and unworthy of any

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[23] 内揵篇：" 見其謀事，知其志意。"

[24] 權篇：" 故言多類，事多變。" This sentence expresses, to my mind, a closely interrelated parallel between the "many categories" of assertion and the "many alterations" of affairs. The following sentence reads, "Thus [if] during the entire day [one's] words do not wander astray from systematic arrangement, then affairs will not become chaotic." (故終日言不失其類，而事不亂.)

[25] 忤合篇：" 世無常貴，事無常師。"

[26] 捭闔篇：" 夫賢，不肖；智，愚；勇，怯；仁，義；有差。乃可捭，乃可闔，乃可進，乃可退，乃可賤，乃可貴。"

great measure of respect. Thus there is no admission of any greater constancy than

doxastic commitment itself would have and thus of any more significant impact on the

shape of doxastic commitment than preference. In fact, in the essay entitled "Plotting,"

the virtues are construed as weaknesses that can be adjusted for as easily as preferences:

> The humane person depreciates wealth: [one] cannot tempt [him] with
> profit, but [one] can make [him] cover expenses. The courageous shi-
> officer depreciates adversity: [one] cannot frighten [him] with troubles,
> but [one] can make [him] defend against danger. The intelligent see
> through [one's] techniques and are aware of axiomatic principles: [one]
> cannot deceive with insincerity, but [one] can display the guiding principle
> [of the matter], [and thus] can make [him] render meritorious service.
> These are [the] three talents.[27]

For the Guiguzi, the possession of virtue is not considered as proving any greater

receptivity to ethical reasoning. Thus the presence of virtue in one's audience does not

indicate that the language of justification and warrant would ensure any greater likelihood

of success. On the contrary, virtue, for the persuader, has no inherent ethical content but

rather is simply a factor among many to be weighed when evaluating costs and benefits.

In fact, what the text also seems to be suggesting is that the virtues are an ideological

vocabulary for meaner pragmatic judgments, and thus, alterable as the pragmatic

judgments are, so are the virtues.

These highly unstable factors—preferences , states of affairs, character—are

fused to form what the Guiguzi terms "qing" (情), variously rendered by Western

commentators as "essence," "fact," or "characteristic features." As Graham explains, "In

general usage the *ch'ing* of a situation or a thing is what confronts us as fact, irrespective

of how we name, describe, or try to alter or disguise it. In the technical sense as it first

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[27]謀篇：“夫仁人輕貨，不可誘以利，可使出費；勇士輕難，不可懼以患，可使據危；智者達于
數，明于理，不可欺以不誠，可示以道理，可使立功；是三才也。”

emerges in Sung Hsing, Chuang-tzu, Mencius and the Later Mohists, the *ch'ing* of *x* is that without which the name '*x*' would not fit it."[28] Kwong-loi Shun further notes that, in many early texts, qing "is often linked to [shi (實)], the way things really are…and contrasted with one's reputation…and with false appearances [wei (偽)]."[29] In the Guiguzi, by contrast, to have a grasp of the essence is merely to have a grasp of what is necessary to shape or alter a course of action. While the Guiguzi does not appear to necessarily support a reading of qing as "that which confronts us as fact," it shares with such a reading the central aspect that the qing of a situation demands acknowledgement.[30] Qing is that quality of the situation about which the persuader must have a firm understanding. Without such understanding, the persuader is assured to face "negation." Once the persuader grasps "characteristic features" of the situation, he can employ the appropriate "technique": "[If one] does not obtain its characteristic features and sets about persuading him, [then] negation will occur. [If one] obtins its characteristic features, then [one may] employ its technique. Using this [one] can go out, [one] can enter in, [one] can bind together, [one] can put apart."[31] The Guiguzi makes manifestly clear that an understanding of qing is central to the success of a persuasion. One recognizes these "characteristic features" by determining that upon which the situation "relies."[32] That on which the situation relies cannot be deemed either "fact" or "fiction,"

[28] A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 98.

[29] Shun, Kwong-loi, Mencius and Early Chinese Thought (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 184.

[30] 摩篇： "說者聽，必合于情，故曰：情合者聽。" I take "ting" to mean not only "listening" but "understanding." Thus, a possible translation might be: "[If] the persuasion is to be understood, [it] must be in accord with the characteristic features [of the situation]. Thus it is said, 'That which is in accord with the characteristic features [of a situation] is the understanding.'"

[31] 內楗篇： "不得其情而說之者，見非。得其情乃制其術，此用可出可入，可楗可開。故聖人立事，以此先知而楗萬物。"

[32] See 謀篇.

but consists in features of the world as framed by what is required by the situation. Thus, what is "relied" upon changes with the frame of the situation and its discursive articulation.[33] Truth is therefore largely a function of pragmatic discourse.

Although for the Guiguzi, the qing of a situation has no absolute connection to what western philosophers might consider as objective reality, neither, however, is the content of qing merely a function of the configurations of language. Qing is configured in discourse in relation to the pragmatic demands of the situation, whether these be concrete, material factors, such as geographic space; sociological, such as the reactions of the common public; or superstitious, as with astrological portents.[34] These configurations are arranged according to the situation, to its ultimate aims, but also to its confusing and irresolvable set of competing particular factors. In any given situation, the set frequently contains competing claims that could structure the parameters of the discourse. Because of this, there can be no one ultimate factor or series of factors that drives the course of the persuasion. As mentioned earlier, it is the unhappy fate of the persuader, and the persuasion, that there can be no certainty for its success. The successful persuader must be part tactician, part scientist, part seer, divining into the permutations of what could possibly influence the shape of the discourse. It is for this reason that the strategies that the Guiguzi recommends, in the end, must fall upon the persuader's ability to "fathom" what is necessary and even then, "[if] there is no possibility that the situation can be prevented [from being fractured], then [the shrewd man] must completely conceal himself and await the [proper] time."[35]

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[33] 反應篇："或因此，或因彼，或以事上，或以牧下。"
[34] 飛箝篇："將用於天下，必度權量能，見天時之盛衰，制地形之廣狹，阻險之難易，人民貨財之多少，諸侯之交孰親孰疏，孰愛孰憎，心意之慮懷。"
[35] 抵巇篇："世無可抵，則深隱而待時。"

Because of the inherent unreliability of the course of the persuasion, the successful persuader himself cannot, if he really cares to be successful, himself be reliable, neither in action nor in speech. He seeks that which is reliable but does not, nor cannot, ask such of himself. But is reliability, doxastic or conative, really commensurate with the ethic of trustworthiness? It is at this point that the reader may feel a certain sense of frustration with the sharply instrumental tack of the Guiguzi, for if reliability is not the constitutive factor for being trustworthy, what is? With no stable formulation of the qing of a situation and thus no stable formulation of any particular doxastic commitment that is not open to immediate and potentially irreversible alteration, why then did not the Guiguzi concentrate more on the possibility of firm entitlement to commitment by way of asserting only that which can be proven, and thus, is irrefutable? Furthermore, why did it not emphasize the shoring up of the reliability of the persuader's assertions with actions clearly intended to be for the benefit of the listener?

Truth, it is clear, cannot be enough to confirm a course of action: within the unstable autocratic Chinese court, with plots followed by counterplots, intrigues upset by random event, "ought" cannot be derived from "is." Even sympathetic action, action performed for the benefit of the listener, is not sufficient to overcome the inherent and unavoidable atmosphere of suspicion: Action does not, cannot speak for itself. In such an environment, the actions of the innocent cannot speak for their innocence, nor, inversely, the actions of the guilty against the guilty. The very fact of power attracts intrigue and denies conviction of all seemingly trustworthy action. In politics, particularly in its highly unstable autocratic form, trusting action to speak incontrovertibly to a person's character is supreme folly.

So where does this leave the persuader? Without reliable action and any firm connection between fact and action, "is" and "ought," upon what can the persuader, so to speak, hang his hat? What will make the persuasion more likely to succeed? The answer is: the inherent ambiguity of the persuasion, a suggestion that there really is no one persuasion, no single course of action being suggested. Just as the text of the Guiguzi remains hermeneutically open, so must the persuasion. A clearly articulated persuasion is one that is certainly open to attack. The "shrewd man" is "hidden," not only in his effects, but, just as importantly, in his presentation of such effects. Not clarity but obfuscation, not firm conclusion but light insinuation. The reason for the peripherality of trustworthiness as a guiding concept in the Guiguzi is just because trustworthiness, qua doxastic or conative reliability, while meritorious perhaps, does not really belong in politics. The only sure way to engender trust is for one's assertions to be hermeneutically open, vague. Paradoxically, by being more reliable, more fixed in his assertions, the persuader, in the situation of Chinese court politics, frequently becomes less trustworthy.

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