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Blending style and theme: grammar and rhetoric in Han Yu's “Miscellaneous Discourses”

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Abstract

This paper analyses the intricate and extraordinary style of the influential prose writer Han Yu (768–824). It uncovers his innovative use of grammar and rhetoric and explores how this works to emphasize his theme through an in-depth analysis of his “Miscellaneous Discourses” series. The series, named for what was a budding literary genre in Tang times, later became a popular anthology selection. It showcases the linguistic intricacy of Han’s renowned “long sentences” and “reverse writing”, while also demonstrating the use of various rhetorical devices, all employed to create visual effects befitting the themes. The seamless match of style and theme strengthens the persuasive power of each essay and realizes the great potential of ancient-style prose. The findings speak broadly to linguistic and rhetorical development in ways that are relevant to literary studies in general.

Keywords: Han Yu; Miscellaneous Discourses; Ancient-style prose; Grammar; Rhetoric

Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) was one of the most influential prose writers in Chinese history. By the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), there were 378 or more scholars who had commented on his works.¹ His status as a monumental figure was then consolidated, and in subsequent eras his works became regular anthology sections. He earned his place in Chinese literary history for his literary experiments, most notably his testing of the boundaries of established genres² and his humorous and playful style.³ His

¹ Wei Zhongju 魏仲舉 (fl. 1195) (comp.), *Wubaijia zhuyin bian Han Changli xiansheng quanji* 五百家註音辯韓昌黎先生全集. Although the title says 500 scholars, the actual number is 378. See Hao Runhua 郝潤華, “Wubaijia zhu Han Changli ji zhengli xinde” 《五百家注韓昌黎集》整理心得, *Guji zhengli yanjiu xuekan* 古籍整理研究學刊 (January 2020), no. 1: 1–4. For Han’s reception in the Song dynasty, see Zha Jinping 查金萍, *Songdai Han Yu wenxue jieshou yanjiu* 宋代韓愈文學接受研究 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2010).

² For example, “Mao Ying zhuan” 毛穎傳 (Biography of Fur Point) narrates the life of a dutiful writing brush using the serious genre of historical biography. For its allegorical meanings, see William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “An allegorical reading of Han Yu’s ‘Mao-Ying Chuan’ (Biography of Fur Point)”, *Oriens Extremus* 23/2, 1976, 153–74. In composing epitaphs, Han magnified specific, sometimes controversial, episodes to highlight the personality of the deceased. Sun Changwu 孫昌武, *Han Yu sanwen yishulun* 韓愈散文藝術論 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1986), 104–6, 48–57. For his experiment with poetry to achieve an extraordinary style, see Kawai Kōzō 川合康三, “Kan Yu no ki” 韓愈の奇, in Kawai Kōzō, *Shūnanzan no henyō: Chūtō bungaku ronshū* 終南山の変容: 中唐文学論集 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1999), 146–61.

³ For a study of how Han used a playful style to convey Confucian ideas, see Fang Chieh 方介, “Tan Han Yu yiwenweixi de wenti” 談韓愈以文為戲的問題, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊, 16, March 2000, 65–93. For the humorous nature of Han’s works, see James R. Hightower, “Han Yu as humorist”, *Harvard Journal of*

renowned series “Za shuo” 雜說 (Miscellaneous Discourses) is a perfect illustration of these experiments. It is particularly interesting because he played with grammar and rhetoric to propose a three-tier government composed of the ruler and his ministers, the feudal lords, and the myriad officials.⁴ This series is ideal for in-depth linguistic and stylistic analysis because its short length facilitates a comprehensive comparison.

Within this series, the first piece “Long shuo” 龍說 (Discourse on the dragon) and the third “Ma shuo” 馬說 (Discourse on horses) are both popular anthological selections and have been the subject of frequent commentary since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).⁵ They have also attracted the attention of modern scholarship: Hartman elaborates on the Confucian ideas in “Ma shuo” and their relation to Han’s search for cultural unity;⁶ Spring focuses on stylistic features, using the series as examples of “argument by indirection”, a form of indirect criticism.⁷ The second piece, “Yi shuo” 醫說 (Discourse on physicians), in contrast, has barely been studied.

Here I adopt a different approach. Besides analysing each individual discourse, I focus on the series as a whole and suggest that seeing it as a unified experiment is essential to appreciate Han’s meaning and accomplishment. I examine hitherto-neglected linguistic and literary aspects of Han’s innovations in writing Miscellaneous Discourses and how he creatively applied them to strengthen the persuasive power of his writing.⁸ I argue that there is a striking combination of style and theme for each discourse. The consistency of this feature supports the contention that they form an organic whole. At the same

Asiatic Studies 44/1, June 1984, 5–27. For the playful nature of Han’s prose, see Kawai, “Gire no bungaku – Kan Yu no gi wo megutte” 戯れの文学—韓愈の戯をめぐって, in Kawai, *Shūnanzan no henyō*, 254–78. Han even plays with rhyme. See Wong Yiu Kwan 黃耀堃, “Shilun Han Yu ‘Song qiong wen’ de shenglü” 試論韓愈〈送窮文〉的聲律, *Nankai yuyan xuekan* 南開語言學刊 13/1, 2009, 27–34.

⁴ For an analysis of the three-tier government and the reason for omitting “Ti Cui Shanjun zhuan” 題崔山君傳 (Foreword to the biography of Cui Shanjun) from the series, see Mei Ah Tan, “Han Yu’s ‘Za shuo’ 雜說 (Miscellaneous Discourses): a three-tier system of government”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140/4, October–December 2020, 859–74, especially 870–72. In brief, it does not adhere to the genre characteristics and was also omitted from a Song edition of the series.

⁵ For a collection of these commentaries, see Ye Baifeng 葉百豐, *Han Changli wen huiping* 韓昌黎文集評 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1990), 22–7. “Long shuo” and “Ma shuo” were included in the seventeenth-century textbook *Guwen guanzhi* 古文觀止 (The finest of ancient prose), which remains influential even today. Wu Chucai 吳楚材 (Wu Chengqian 吳乘權, fl. 1694) and Wu Diaohou 吳調侯 (fl. 1694), *Zuben Guwen guanzhi* 足本古文觀止, rendered into modern Chinese by Wu Jinghui 吳敬暉 and collated by Wu Liucun 吳留村 (fl. 1648) (Shanghai: Guanghua shuguan, n.d.), j. 7, 72–4.

⁶ According to Hartman, “Ma shuo” condemns the political inertia and stagnation that characterized the last decade of Dezhong’s reign (779–805). Since the ability to locate and foster “talent” was an essential quality of Confucian sage-kings, the return of this quality was high on Han’s programme for political reform. He argues that Han had already worked out many of the major philosophical premises that underpinned the Neo-Confucian synthesis. Charles Hartman, “The oneness of the sage”, in Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the Tang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 171–210. Chen argues that Han’s aim to construct a Confucian moral and metaphysical philosophy differentiated him from Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), who simply treated the Confucian Way as the guiding principle of public life. Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yüan and Intellectual Change in Tang China, 773–819* (1992; rpt. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188–93, 119–26. McMullen, however, questions the scope and nature of the interior philosophy contained in Han’s extant corpus. David McMullen, “Han Yü: an alternative picture”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49/2, December 1989, 603–57.

⁷ Madeline K. Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’: the rhetoric of Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan” (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1983), 133–58.

⁸ Fang Li-Na’s 方麗娜 linguistic analysis of “Huo lin jie” 獲麟解 (On capturing the unicorn) has provided a new approach to the study of Han’s prose, but her research specifically looks at the correlations between sentences: her aim is to shed light on the relationships among syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Fang Li-Na, “Pianzhang de yuyi xianjie he yufa shouduan tanxi – Yi Han Yu ‘Huo lin jie’ wei li” 篇章的語義銜接和語法手段探析——以韓愈〈獲麟解〉為例, *Gaoxiong shida xuebao* 高雄師大學報 14, 2003, 127–49.

time, it demonstrates the nature of Han Yu's revival of ancient-style prose: a "revival" approached not through reversion but through innovation.

The central theme uniting the three discourses is a three-tier government: "Long shuo" emphasizes the crucial role of ministers in assisting the emperor within the court, "Yi shuo" the imperial agnates in safeguarding regional areas, and "Ma shuo" the myriad literati from all classes in implementing policies. Moreover, in the establishment of this three-tier government, the emperor has to rely on his ministers.

The three discourses also form a composite unit in terms of style. They all demonstrate a matching of linguistic and rhetorical style to an individual theme, through which they create a visual effect that appeals to the senses. Both "Long shuo" and "Ma shuo" involve repetition with intricacy, with "Long shuo" focusing more on intricacy to stress the paradox of the ruler having to depend on his ministers, and "Ma shuo" concentrating more on repetition to stress the plethora of fine horses, refuting the belief that such horses are rare. Occupying the middle place, "Yi shuo" presents repetition with structure, strengthening its proposal that the enfeoffment system is key to the balance of power and ultimately to dynastic duration.

"Long shuo": myriad transformations for a great era

"Long shuo" follows the traditional Chinese convention of the dragon as a metaphor for the ruler. The clouds that accompany it constitute a metaphor for the ministers. This discourse argues that the emperorship is actually determined by the ministers: only with their assistance can the ruler become a true Son of Heaven with the transformative ability that announces the beginning of a new era. This is intriguing because the ruler appoints his ministers, yet he must depend on them to demonstrate his awesome power. This is just like the dragon that creates the clouds and depends on them to display its numen. Both cases present a paradox: the creator must be superior to that which he has created, but the creator must also rely on the created to make himself the real creator of wonder. The central point of argument thus lies in whether the clouds are numinous. At different points, Han argues that the clouds are not as numinous as the dragon; that they are as numinous as the dragon; and finally that they can be used to define the dragon.

"Long shuo" constitutes the top tier of the series and is the most intriguing in its theme: the de facto interdependent relations between the ruler and his ministers and the multiple changes they could bring to the state when they work together seamlessly. The rhetorical devices used to emphasize this interdependent relation are *dingzhen* 頂真 (anadiplosis) and *huihuan* 迴環 (chiasmus), with the aid of *fanfu* 反復 (repetition). The grammatical pattern used to underscore the miraculous changes is the multilayered compound sentence.

In the full text below, *long* 龍 (dragon), *yun* 雲 (clouds), and *ling* 靈 (numinous/numen) are in bold type to facilitate the discussion of rhetorical device. The principal clause that carries the central idea in a multilayered compound sentence is underlined:

The **dragon** breathes out, and [its breath] turns into **clouds**. The **clouds** indeed cannot be more **numinous** than the **dragon**; but the **dragon** rides on this breath, travels far and wide in mysterious space, approaches the sun and the moon, crouches in their light and glow, induces thunder and lightning, makes its [own] transformations divine, spreads rain on the land, and drenches mountains and valleys: how **numinous** and **marvellous** are the **clouds**!

The **clouds** are what the **dragon** can make **numinous**; yet the **numen** of this **dragon** is not something the **clouds** can make **numinous**; but if the **dragon** does not have the **clouds**, it has nothing to rely upon to divinize its **numen**. Losing what it relies upon – isn't this indeed unfeasible?

How exceptional! What it relies upon is what it creates. The *Changes* says, “The clouds follow the dragon”. As it is called “dragon”, the clouds should follow.⁹

龍嘯氣成雲，雲固弗靈於龍也；然龍乘是氣，茫洋窮乎玄間，薄日月，伏光景，感震電，神變化，水下土，汨陵谷：雲亦靈怪矣哉！

雲，龍之所能使為靈也，若龍之靈，則非雲之所能使為靈也；然龍弗得雲，無以神其靈矣：失其所憑依，信不可歟？

異哉！其所憑依，乃其所自為也。《易》曰：「雲從龍。」既曰龍，雲從之矣。¹⁰

The discourse begins its sinuous discussion of the dragon's reliance on its clouds with *dingzhen* and *huihuan*.¹¹ *Dingzhen* is a modern rhetorical term rooted in the traditional Chinese rhetorical form *lian Zhu* 聯珠, also written as 連珠, translated as “linked phrasing” for prose and “linked verse” for poetry.¹² Anadiplosis, an ancient Greek rhetorical device, refers to the repetition of the last word or clause of one line to begin the next; it is often used to translate *dingzhen*.¹³ By using anadiplosis, Han creates a sense of continuity,¹⁴ repeating the same key elements, dragon and clouds, to link his arguments.

Anadiplosis requires only the pattern AB, BC, CD, but Han uses the pattern AB, BA, AB, thus embedding *huihuan*. *Huihuan* creates a mirror image of a word or a phrase by reversing the order.¹⁵ The strictest form of *huihuan* requires a mirror inversion with the same syntactic patterns and words. In Han's essay, the use of *huihuan* is looser: the words are different, and so is the syntactic pattern. This device takes the same approach as “chiasmus”, and is translated so.¹⁶ Through chiasmus, Han reinforces the idea that dragon and clouds are interdependent; they are interlocked in the nature of their existence and their numina.¹⁷ Also employed is “repetition” to reinforce the argument on the relative numen of dragon and clouds: in only 114 words, “dragon” and “clouds” each recur eight times, while “numen/numinous” recurs six times.

The traditional commentaries have pointed out that the essay flips its idea on the relative numen of the dragon and its clouds five times,¹⁸ with “numen” as the linkage.¹⁹

⁹ This translation has taken note of Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 133–4, and the revised translation in Spring, *Animal Allegories in Tang China* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1993), 143.

¹⁰ The punctuation here is modified from the edition of Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (1855–1930) and Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元 (1918–89) (eds), *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (1986; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), j. 1, 32–3.

¹¹ Their combined use is known as *huihuan dingzhen* 迴環頂真 (anadiplosis with chiasmus). Meng Zhaoquan 孟昭泉, “Zailun dingzhen cige de fenlei” 再論頂真辭格的分類, *Zhongzhou daxue xuebao* 中州大學學報 3, March 1994, 30–35.

¹² Its use can be traced to pre-Qin texts and the term first appears in Ren Fang's 任昉 (460–508) *Wenzhang yuanqi* 文章緣起. For its historical development, see Huang Lizhen 黃麗貞, *Shiyong xiucixue* 實用修辭學 (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2007), 447–9.

¹³ For anadiplosis, see Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 10. When *dingzhen* refers to repetition at the beginning and end between paragraphs, it is known as *lianhuanti* 連環體 (the style of interlocked rings). Chen Wangdao 陳望道 (1891–1977), *Xiucixue fayan* 修辭學發凡 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2008), 173–5.

¹⁴ According to Huang Qingxuan 黃慶萱, anadiplosis lines up thoughts and uses a common point to connect a number of complex issues. Huang Qingxuan, *Xiucixue* 修辭學, seventh ed. (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1994), 499–502.

¹⁵ Huang Lizhen, *Shiyong xiucixue*, 334–8.

¹⁶ Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 33.

¹⁷ Huang Lizhen notes that chiasmus helps elaborate the dependent or oppositional relation of two elements. Huang, *Shiyong xiucixue*, 336. For its literary effects, see Zhang Gong 張弓, *Xiandai hanyu xiucixue* 現代漢語修辭學 (Hebei: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1963), 148–9.

¹⁸ Wu and Wu, *Zuben Guwen guan zhi*, j. 7, 72.

¹⁹ Cai Zhu 蔡鑄 (annot. and comm.), *Caishi guwen pingzhu buzheng* 蔡氏古文評註補正, tenth ed. (1929; rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1934), j. 7, 20a–20b.

However, nothing has been said about the role of grammar in achieving these adversative transitions both within a sentence and beyond. I argue that the flipping of ideas can be analysed from a linguistic perspective: it is accomplished by the different semantic layers within one, long compound sentence and the use of particles between sentences.

To facilitate the grammatical analysis, Ma Maoyuan's 馬茂元 (1918–89) punctuated edition is used with modifications.²⁰ In Ma's version, "Long shuo" is divided into three paragraphs. This paper proposes that the first two paragraphs are both composed of one multilayered compound sentence with the main idea presented in the final clause. Since essays in pre-modern times were not punctuated, it is essential to differentiate a simple sentence from a compound sentence when analysing Han's long sentences. While a simple sentence has only one set of syntactic components, a compound sentence has more than one, with at least two logically related clauses that are relatively independent in syntactic structure.²¹ They are relatively independent because certain syntactic components can be omitted when they also appear in another clause.²² Moreover, there is often a principal clause that carries a central semantic idea towards which all the other clauses are directed.²³

The analysis below follows the regular practice of modern Chinese grammatical studies. All clauses are numbered with their semantic relations specified, and the respective level of importance of each clause is determined by which semantic relation holds the key message. These levels of importance create a hierarchy and can be presented by a linear or by a structural method. In a linear presentation, different numbers of vertical lines are drawn between clauses to indicate different levels; thus the first layer that indicates the primary semantic relation is noted by a single vertical line |, the second by two lines ||, and so on. In a structural presentation, the relations between different clauses are directly shown in the form of layers. The first layer belongs to the highest level, the one that addresses the key semantic relation of the entire sentence. It may be placed either at the top or the bottom of the diagram. If placed at the top, the analysis begins with the largest unit and works through to the smallest; if placed at the bottom, the analysis begins with the smallest unit and works through to the largest. Both placements are equally acceptable, the only difference is presentation. In the structural diagrams presented below, the latter approach is followed, with the highest level at the bottom: this shows more clearly where a semantic relation has changed. In the verbal analysis, however, I shall begin with the largest unit to capture the most essential semantic relation, then work down to the least important. This way the major idea of the sentence can be readily revealed.

As for the determination of semantic layers, there must be at least two clauses to create one layer, because a layer is determined by a relation of one clause to another. When these clauses exhibit no difference in hierarchy, they belong to the same layer and are considered nested; this holds true even when they display different semantic relations. If a difference in hierarchy exists, the clauses belong to different layers even if they have the same semantic relation.

A grammatical analysis of Han Yu's long sentences reveals how they achieve a mesmerizing effect: there are multiple layers with different semantic relations created within one

²⁰ Ma Maoyuan used his grandfather Ma Qichang's edited *Dongyatang* 東雅堂 edition, printed by Xu Shitai 徐世泰 (dates unknown) during the Wanli 萬曆 (1573–1620) era. See the preface in Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, 1–2.

²¹ Wang Weixian 王維賢, Zhang Xuecheng 張學成, Lu Manyun 盧曼雲, and Cheng Huaiyou 程懷友, *Xiandai Hanyu fujin xinjie* 現代漢語複句新解 (Shanghai: Huadong shida chubanshe, 1994), 45–6. In Chinese grammatical studies, complex sentences – sentences in which at least one subordinate clause (e.g. "when Han Yu wrote this essay") is linked to a main independent clause – are now considered a type of simple sentence.

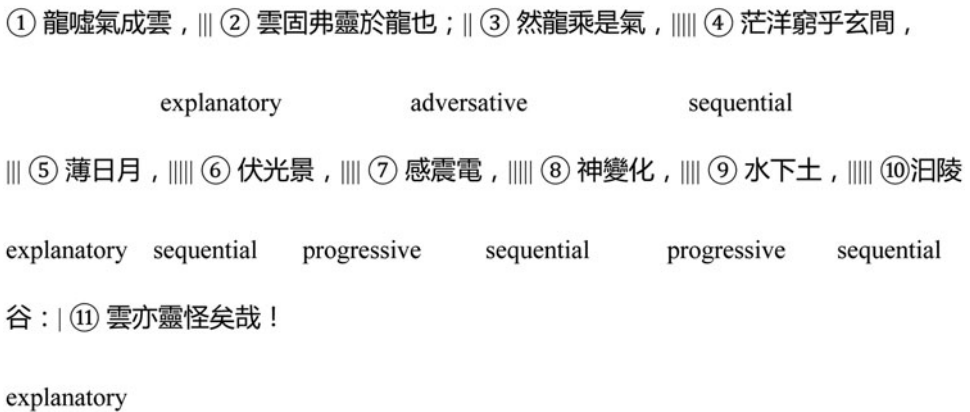
²² Xing Fuyi 邢福義, *Hanyu fujin yanjiu* 漢語複句研究 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2001), 5–6.

²³ Wang et al., *Xiandai Hanyu fujin xinjie*, 294–8; 305. Xing Fuyi and Wang Weixian are the two most influential scholars in the study of compound sentences. Shao Jingmin 邵敬敏, *Xinshiqi Hanyu yufaxueshi* 新時期漢語語法學史 (1978–2008) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011), 442–50.

sentence. “Explanatory” indicates explanation of a certain phenomenon; “adversative” indicates a situation that goes against the natural course of development or logical deduction; “sequential” indicates occurrences in a time sequence; “progressive” indicates an increase in intensity or degree; “supposition” indicates the result of a presumed situation; “coordinative” indicates the parallel presentation of two or more things whose order can be changed; “conditional” indicates the condition needed for a situation to occur; “causative” indicates cause and effect, of either explicative or inferential nature.²⁴

The first paragraph of “Long shuo” has only 47 characters, but a total of 11 clauses, creating up to five layers with four types of relations included (see Figure 1).

Linear presentation



Structural diagram

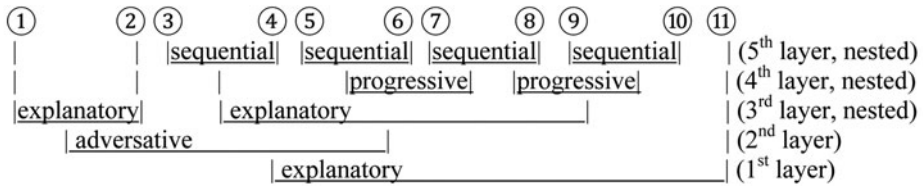


Figure 1. The first paragraph of “Long shuo”

This paragraph argues that the clouds, despite having the role of assistants, are as numinous as the dragon. The principal clause, which carries the central idea, is ⑩, where the author exclaims, “How numinous and marvellous are the clouds!” All the previous clauses serve to prove this exclamation; their relation to the principal clause is explanatory, and thus a colon is placed before it, indicating the major pause, marked with one vertical line. This fundamental semantic relation governs the entire sentence and is considered the first layer.

The sentence flips its meaning once: from the clouds not being as numinous as the dragon, the creator, to the clouds being as numinous as the dragon, the assisted. The second layer is where this adversative transition occurs. It comes after the first two clauses, ① and ②, which confirm that the clouds indeed cannot be more numinous than the dragon, and before clauses

²⁴ There is no causative relation in the diagrammatic presentation, but it comes up in the analysis.

① 雲，龍之所能使為靈也，|| ② 若龍之靈，則非雲之所能使為靈也；|| ③ 然龍

adversative

adversative

弗得雲，|| ④ 無以神其靈矣：| ⑤ 失其所憑依，信不可歟？²⁵

suppositional

explanatory

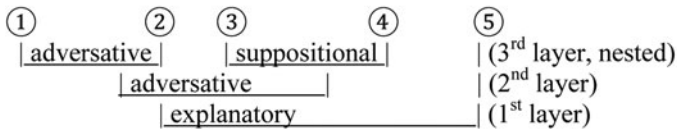


Figure 2. The second paragraph of the “Long shuo”

③ to ⑩, which argue that the clouds can be as numinous as the dragon because of the myriad transformations they inspire. With the two parts joined by *ran* 然 (but), the idea that the clouds are inferior is refuted. A semicolon is therefore placed in front of clause ③, with two vertical lines, indicating the second major pause, or the second layer.

The third layer is where the respective numina of the dragon and of the clouds are explained. Since there is no difference in hierarchy, the explanatory clauses are nested within the same layer. The first set, which concerns the numen of the dragon, is ① and ②, marked by three vertical lines in between the two clauses. Clause ① explains the reason for the common perception of clause ②: the clouds could not surpass the dragon, their creator. The adverb *gu* 固 (indeed) in clause ② confirms this message, but also suggests that the author is about to present a new, unexpected observation. *Gu* is essential in pinpointing the explanatory relation, without which the two clauses would have a causative relation. The second set, which concerns the numen of the clouds, is ③ to ⑩. The six clauses ⑤ to ⑩ reveal what the clouds assist the dragon to achieve; they elaborate upon the roaming of the dragon that rides on its clouds in clauses ③ and ④. Three vertical lines are thus put in front of ⑤ to indicate the third layer.

The fourth layer consists of three pairs, led by clause ③ and indicated by four vertical lines in front of clauses ⑦ and ⑨. This layer shows in progressive fashion the tremendous power the dragon displays, rising at each step: it crouches in the light of the sun and the glow of the moon, induces thunder and lightning, and produces torrents of rain to drench the mountains. The order of these pairs cannot be changed because each shows an increase in degree concerning the dragon’s manifestation of its awesome nature and its effect on the earth.

Each of these three pairs shows sequential actions in itself, as in ③ and ④. These four pairs are nested within the fifth layer, indicated by five vertical lines. The three pairs of ③ to ⑩ are all verb-object phrases consisting of only three words each, creating a short rhythm and a compelling force stressing the awe-inspiring power of the dragon. The order cannot be changed because they occur in a time sequence, but there is no change of degree. These pairs therefore are of the sequential relation rather than progressive.

The second paragraph mirrors the first and is another multilayered compound sentence with the principal clause at the end (see Figure 2).

²⁵ Ma’s edition has a full stop instead of a semicolon for the second clause. Since the principal clause is clause five, the first two clauses are actually parts of a compound sentence.

Before we delve into the analysis of semantic relations, we must identify the exact number of clauses. This sentence appears to have eight parts, but there are only five clauses. The commas in clauses one, two, and five are simply used to separate the subject from the predicate. While in English the subject can be analysed from the aspects of syntax, pragmatics, and semantics, in Chinese, the subject is often determined semantically; it is the most effective among the three methods because there is no subject-verb agreement to render the perspective of syntax meaningful,²⁶ and in pragmatics any subject is considered the topic, any predicate the comment.

In the semantic aspect, the subject can be the agent or the patient of a verb, or simply “non-agent; non-patient”, which means that the subject is not an agent that performs an action, or a patient that is subject to the effects of an action.²⁷ Both the first and second clauses have a “non-agent; non-patient” subject with a noun phrase as the predicate. The *ruo* 若 that begins the second clause is not a conjunction, but a demonstrative pronoun, meaning “this”. *fei* 非 is generally considered a negative particle that negates a nominal predicate, and is often used with *ye* 也 to mark the judgemental mode.²⁸ Some treat it as an adverb,²⁹ and some treat it as a copula.³⁰

The end of the first paragraph highlights the numen of the clouds/assistants, but the second paragraph begins by going back to the superiority of the dragon based on its ability to create numen; this presents the second flip of meaning. As we read on, however, we can see that the aim of this paragraph is to argue that the clouds are critical to the dragon when it comes to the demonstration of numen; in this sense, the dragon is also a dependent. All the preceding clauses serve to explain this central idea: “Losing what it relies upon – isn’t this indeed unfeasible?” Just as in the first paragraph, the primary pattern is “explanatory”; the major pause appears before clause ⑤, marked by a colon.

The third flip of meaning appears in the second layer, where the major adversative transition is again signified by *ran* 然 (but) in clause ③. This is where the second major pause of the sentence comes, and it is marked by a semicolon. The preceding clauses, ① and ②, confirm that the clouds are inferior because they do not have the ability to create numen. However, the following clauses, ③ and ④, point out that the dragon cannot demonstrate its numen without the clouds. In contrast to the first paragraph, which lays out in progression what the dragon can do riding on its clouds, this paragraph proves the numen of the clouds from the opposite viewpoint: the dragon can do nothing without them.

Nested within the third layer are clauses ① and ② and clauses ③ and ④. Clauses ① and ② show an adversative transition, indicated by the adverb *ze* 則 (yet) that contrasts the respective ability of the dragon and the clouds to create numina.³¹ This *ze* also helps to bring about the second flip of ideas mentioned above. *Ze* here connects only two clauses

²⁶ For the identification of the subject in Chinese, see Chow Kwok-ching 周國正, “Lun Hanyu ‘(jufa) zhuyü’ de shedding” 論漢語「(句法)主語」的設定, *Journal of Chinese Studies* 38, 1998, 339–62.

²⁷ For a study of the different types of subjects that are “non-agent; non-patient”, see Zhang Xuetao 張雪濤 (comp.), *Xiandai Hanyu* 現代漢語 (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2005), 330–31.

²⁸ Christoph Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 7, Part 1: *Language and Logic*, ed. Kenneth Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 109; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 106; Paul W. Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 110.

²⁹ Wang Haifen 王海霽, Zhao Changcai 趙長才, Huang Shan 黃珊, and Wu Keying 吳可穎, *Gu Hanyu xuci cidian* 古漢語虛詞詞典 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 81–2.

³⁰ Because adverbs are used only for modifying verbs and adjectives, some scholars, such as Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, treat *fei* as a copula verb. Yang Bojun, *Gu Hanyu xuci* 古漢語虛詞 (1981; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 37. Graham calls *fei* a negative copula, translated as “is-not” and generally reinforced by a final *ye*. A.C. Graham, “The relation between the final particles ‘yu’ 與 and ‘yee’ 也”, *BSOAS* 19/1, 1957, 105–23; 107.

³¹ For the use of *ze* 則 as a conjunction, see Wang et al., *Gu Hanyu xuci cidian*, 463–4.

that form part of the sentence, and is therefore of a lower hierarchy than the clauses marked by *ran* 然, an adverb used for a strong turn of argument; *ran* connects the two parts that form the complete sentence. Clauses ③ and ④ indicate supposition: the dragon could not demonstrate its numen if it had no clouds. These clauses stress that the clouds are indispensable.

The third paragraph is composed of three simple sentences and one compound sentence. It begins with a short exclamatory sentence, “*yi zai*” 異哉 (how exceptional), to highlight the paradox, to vary the length of the lines, and to introduce the next sentence: “*Qi suo ping yi, nai qi suo zi wei ye*” 其所憑依，乃其所自為也 (what it relies on is what it creates). Ma’s edition attaches these two sentences to the second paragraph. As they are the concluding remarks not of the paragraph but of the essay, it is more appropriate to group them into the third paragraph, in which Han quotes from the *Book of Changes*. The sentence “*Yi yue, ‘Yun cong long’*” 《易》曰：「雲從龍。」 (The *Changes* says, “The clouds follow the dragon”) has *Changes* as its subject, “to say” as its verb, and what the *Changes* said as its object. By quoting the *Changes*, Han brings in the fourth flip of idea, that the clouds are subordinate to the dragon. Han’s following comment is a compound sentence of causative relation, with the second clause being the result, inferred from the situation presented in the first: “*Ji yue long, yun cong zhi yi*” 既曰龍，雲從之矣 (As it is called “dragon”, the clouds should follow). It presents the fifth, and the last, flip of idea, that the existence of clouds is essential to validate the identity of the dragon.

“Long shuo” also makes use of various modal particles, thereby forming different sentence types to indicate the speaker’s perception and to increase the persuasive power of each claim. The first paragraph ends with *yi zai* 矣哉, thus creating an exclamatory sentence, “*Yun yi ling guai yi zai!*” 雲亦靈怪矣哉! (How numinous and marvellous are the clouds!) *Yi*, a sentential marker of perfective aspect,³² indicates a new situation: the state of the clouds’ numen once they accompany the dragon. By itself, it marks a narrative and declarative sentence.³³ With the aid of the sentence-final particle *zai* 哉, the line becomes exclamatory, showing Han’s admiration for the clouds. The second paragraph is composed of a rhetorical question indicated by *yu* 歟: “*Shi qi suo ping yi, xin bu ke yu?*” 失其所憑依，信不可歟? (Losing what it relies upon – isn’t this indeed unfeasible?) The question invites readers to contemplate the relation between the creator and the created. The third paragraph begins with another exclamation: “*Yi zai!*” 異哉! (How exceptional!) Han uses *zai* here to show his surprise over the paradoxical relation between the two. He then produces a firm declarative sentence on the dragon’s dependence on the clouds, ending with *ye* 也: “*Qi suo ping yi, nai qi suo zi wei ye*” 其所憑依，乃其所自為也 (What it relies on is what it creates). To end the paragraph, Han uses *yi* 矣 to create an affirmative sentence about their coexistence: “*Ji yue long, yun cong zhi yi*” 既曰龍，雲從之矣 (As it is called “dragon”, the clouds should follow). This time, *yi* is a particle of rhetorical finality.³⁴ It suggests that Han has considered all aspects of the issue and has come to this irrefutable conclusion.

“Long shuo” sets an intricate style that corresponds to its intriguing theme: the creator depends on its created, just as the Son of Heaven depends on his ministers. The repeated flipping of ideas successfully creates suspense, causing readers to question the actual standpoint and the true intention of the writer. By postponing his real point until the very end of each sentence, Han builds his persuasive argument progressively from one

³² Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 546.

³³ Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 7, 130.

³⁴ Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 546.

sentence to the next. He thus invites readers to contemplate the numen of the clouds from different angles: the created, the assistant, the definer. The miraculous nature of the topic induces different emotions, conveyed through various final particles that create different types of sentences based on tone, ultimately creating a sense of finality to conclude the argument. The devices of anadiplosis and chiasmus, together with the use of repetition, create rhetorical continuity and highlight the interdependence between the dragon and its clouds. These twisting, shifting arguments are visualized through the use of grammar and rhetoric, and they mimic the dragon winding across the sky.

The frequent use of adversative transitions that lead step-by-step to an irrefutable conclusion is fitting for such a convoluted linguistic and rhetorical structure. Most striking is the density of Han's long sentences, a key feature of his prose pointed out long ago by Li Tu 李塗 (fl. 1131–62); Li did not, however, support his comments with examples.³⁵ In “Long shuo”, a single sentence has meanings dense enough for Ma Maoyuan to treat it as a paragraph. Another is the technique of *nibi* 逆筆 (reverse writing); pointed out by Li Gangji 李剛己 (1872–1914), this is basically a presentation of the central idea towards the end that refutes the preceding assumption.³⁶ This technique, which later came to be considered a crucial skill for prose writers, also appears in Han's other works, for example in “Shou jie” 守戒 (Being on guard and taking heed).³⁷ The precise function of this technique and how it is achieved has not, however, previously been explained. As demonstrated in the analysis presented here, both of these features can be scientifically illustrated using modern grammatical theories to show how the central idea is presented forcefully in the end. The intricate grammatical structure also explains the flipping of ideas in “Long shuo” that has been observed by recent scholarship,³⁸ but which has not been technically explained from a linguistic point of view.

“Yi shuo”: a structural pattern for the enfeoffment system

“Yi shuo” argues that *ji gang* 紀綱 (strands and ropes; extended meaning “system”) – in this case, the enfeoffment system bolstered by the ethical values of benevolence and rites – is fundamental to the duration of a dynasty; only with the loyal support of imperial agnates would the empire be long lasting.³⁹ This system diffused central power, because it entitled imperial agnates and meritorious officials to fiefs that gave them a large degree of economic, political, and military independence. Yet in Han's vision, it could strengthen the imperial house because its implementation demonstrated the benevolence of the

³⁵ Li Tu, *Wenzhang jingyi* 文章精義, annotated by Wang Liqi 王利器 (1960; Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1998), 62.

³⁶ Wu Kaisheng 吳闓生 (1879–1949) and Li Gangji (annotator), *Tongcheng Wushi guwenfa* 桐城吳氏古文法 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1979), 79; Ye, *Han Changli wen huiping*, 22.

³⁷ Li, *Wenzhang jingyi*, 74.

³⁸ Wu and Wu, *Zuben Guwen guanzhi*, j. 7, 72; Xiong Wan 熊琬, “Han Yu ‘Huolin jie’, ‘Long shuo’, ‘Ma shuo’ sanpian zhi fenxi yanjiu” 韓愈〈獲麟解〉、〈龍說〉、〈馬說〉三篇之分析研究, *Zhonghua xueyuan* 中華學苑 45, March 1995, 239–58.

³⁹ David McMullen's writings provide an overview of the tensions surrounding enfeoffment. For Taizong's intent to use hereditary enfeoffment to control, protect, and perpetuate his imperial bloodline so as to counter-check the power of the civil bureaucracy, see his “Big cats will play: Tang Taizong and his advisors”, *Journal of Chinese Studies* 57, July 2013, 315–8. For the overall debate on enfeoffment throughout Chinese history, see “Devolution in Chinese history: the *Fengjian* debate revisited”, *International Journal of China Studies* 2/2, August/September 2011, 135–54. For the significance of the Pu'an decree that enfeoffed various princes in 756, see “The emperor, the princes, and the prefectures: a political analysis of the Pu'an decree of 756 and the *Fengjian* issue”, *Tang Studies* 32, 2014, 81. For the policies that the post-rebellion emperors adopted towards the imperial clan, see “Put not your trust in princes: a political analysis of the Imperial clan from 755 to 805”, *Tang Studies* 36, 2018, 1–56.

Son of Heaven, who had immense faith in his family and subjects. This faith would earn the emperor great support at critical moments; as loyal feudal lords would be the buttresses of the state, protecting the Son of Heaven in the region. Since this system could only run smoothly when the values of filial piety, brotherly love, and ritual propriety were honoured, the system itself came to represent these values.

Han's support of the system in "Yi shuo" resonates with some of his other writings. It corresponds to his espousal of hereditary succession in "Dui Yu wen" 對禹問 (in response to the question concerning Yu): since a great sage can seldom be found, hereditary imperial succession promises less disruption to society and is better for maintaining order.⁴⁰ In "Shou jie", he notes that feudal states are buttresses and bulwarks to the royal house.⁴¹ The most crucial element, then, is to have the right person for the position.

The theme of "Yi shuo" is that the enfeoffment system is a simple and direct way to preserve the state, for feudal lords form the bedrock of the imperial house. The corresponding style is a balanced structure that models the symmetry and equilibrium of power. This structure is achieved through the use of parallel metaphors with coordinated clauses and identical particles.⁴² To facilitate analysis, the same syntactic patterns indicated mostly by the particles are in bold type in the original Chinese below:

Those skilled in medicine do not look at whether someone is stout or gaunt; [instead] they examine the pulse to see if it is failing and that's all there is to it. Those skilled in planning for the empire do not look at whether the empire is safe or in peril; [instead] they examine the "strands and ropes" to see if they are in order or disarray and that's all there is to it. The empire [is like] a person; its safety or peril [is like] being stout or gaunt; "the strands and ropes" [are like] the pulse. [So long as] the pulse is not failing, even if one is gaunt, there is no harm; one whose pulse is failing, although stout, will die. Those who are well-versed in this doctrine – surely they are aware of what they must rely on to rule the empire!

As for the decline of the Xia, Yin, and Zhou dynasties, feudal lords rose and wars and expeditions happened daily; that [the throne] was passed down through dozens of kings and the empire did not topple was simply because the "strands and ropes" were preserved in it (the administrative system; in this case the system of succession). As for the unification of the empire by the Qin emperor, he did not disseminate his power through feudal lords and had [their] weapons gathered and melted. That [his throne] was passed down for [just] two generations and the empire toppled was simply because the "strands and ropes" were no longer preserved in it (the administrative system; in this case the system of counties and commanderies). For this reason, even if the four limbs suffer no mishaps, this is not sufficient [for the physicians] to be reassured: the pulse is all there is to it; even if the four seas suffer no misfortunes, this is not sufficient [for the state planners] to be proud: the "strands and ropes" are all there is to it.

[These two attitudes –] being concerned about what one can be reassured by, and being anxious about what one can be proud of – those who are skilled in medicine and those who are skilled in planning refer to these as ways to obtain Heaven's support.⁴³ The *Changes* says, "One should look where he has trodden and examine the

⁴⁰ For a brief discussion, see McMullen, "Han Yü: an alternative picture", 607–8.

⁴¹ Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 1, 51–2.

⁴² "Ma shuo" demonstrates one of the major stylistic features pointed out by Spring: balance obtained through parallelism and antithesis. Spring, "A stylistic study of Tang 'Guwen'", 24.

⁴³ The original reads "wei zhi tian fu yu zhi" 謂之天扶與之. There are versions that do not include the character *tian* 天 or have *chi* 持 for *fu* 扶. Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 1, 34.

① 善醫者，不視人之瘠肥，|| ② 察其脈之病否而已矣；|

coordinative

coordinative

③ 善計天下者，不視天下之安危，|| ④ 察其紀綱之理亂而已矣。

coordinative

① | coordinative | ② | coordinative | (2nd layer)
| coordinative | ④ (1st layer)

Figure 3. The beginning of the discourse in “Yi shuo”

omens involved”.⁴⁴ Those who are skilled in medicine and skilled in planning will do this.⁴⁵

善醫者，不視人之瘠肥，察其脈之病否而已矣；善計天下者，不視天下之安危，察其紀綱之理亂而已矣。天下者，人也；安危者，肥瘠也；紀綱者，脈也。脈不病，雖瘠，不害；脈病而肥者，死矣。通於此說者，其知所以為天下乎！

夏、殷、周之衰也，諸侯作而戰伐日行矣；傳數十王而天下不傾者，紀綱存焉耳。秦之王天下也，無分勢於諸侯，聚兵而焚之；傳二世而天下傾者，紀綱亡焉耳。是故四支雖無故，不足恃也，脈而已矣；四海雖無事，不足矜也，紀綱而已矣。

憂其所可恃，懼其所可矜，善醫善計者，謂之天扶與之。《易》曰：「視履考祥。」善醫善計者為之。⁴⁶

“Yi shuo” is primarily composed of coordinated clauses, in which Han spells out the metaphorical treatment of the body and the state. Coordinated clauses have the benefit of creating a parallel, structured form. The beginning of the discourse is shown in Figure 3.

The first layer consists of two coordinated pairs set apart with a semicolon, incorporating the literary method of *duiyu* 對喻 (parallel metaphor); the tenor and the metaphor are listed side by side to establish the central metaphor that skilful state planners resemble skilful physicians.⁴⁷ The physicians are concerned with the pulse, the state planners with the system. Parallelism is achieved also by using the same syntactic pattern, “...zhe 者, ..., ...eryiyi 而已矣”. *Zhe* 者 is a demonstrative pronoun nominalizing the verb phrase *shan yi* 善醫 (to be skilled in medicine).⁴⁸ The compound of three modal particles, *eryiyi* 而

⁴⁴ The translation of this quotation comes from Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 203.

⁴⁵ The translation of this discourse has taken note of Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 134–5.

⁴⁶ Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 1, 33–4.

⁴⁷ Chen Kui defines “parallel metaphor” as listing the metaphor in the first clause and revealing its meaning in the second. Chen Kui, *Wen ze*, 13.

⁴⁸ Wang Haifen and his colleagues treat *zhe* 者 as a demonstrative pronoun; Wang Haifen et al., *Gu Hanyu xuci cidian*, 469. Wang Li 王力 treats it as a pronoun; Wang Li et al., *Gu Hanyu changyongzi zidian* 古漢語常用字字典 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), 494. Pulleyblank treats it as a pronoun substitute; Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, 66–7. Kroll’s dictionary treats it as a verb or verb-phrase suffix; Kroll, *A Student’s*

① 天下者，人也；| ② 安危者，肥瘠也；| ③ 紀綱者，脈也。

coordinative

coordinative

(Note: Because there is only one layer, the structural diagram is omitted here.)

Figure 4. The second sentence of the first paragraph

已矣 (that's all there is to it), creates a strong rhetorical effect of outright truth:⁴⁹ there is nothing more significant than the system, just as nothing is more significant than the pulse.

Han then lays out the extended metaphors, this time simply coordinating three clauses with the same structure, "...zhe 者, ...ye 也" (see Figure 4).

These three clauses have no difference in hierarchy; thus they belong to the same layer. This time the particle *zhe* is a sentential topic marker for the noun subjects *tianxia* 天下 (the empire, literally "all under Heaven"), *an wei* 安危 (safety or peril), and *ji gang* 紀綱. Likewise, *ye*, a final grammatical particle in nominal (noun-predicate) sentences, indicates that the subjects are identified with the predicates,⁵⁰ which in this case are *ren* 人 (a person), *fei ji* 肥瘠 (to be stout or gaunt), and *mai* 脈 (pulse). It is noteworthy that *fei* 肥 carries a positive meaning. The *Book of Rites*, one of the major classics for the imperial examination and a text in which Han was well-versed,⁵¹ points out that *fei* is an indicator of good health in a person: it can be used metaphorically to describe harmonious relations within a household, absolute order within the administration, and great peace of all under Heaven, known as "stoutness of the household" 家之肥, "stoutness of the state" 國之肥, and "stoutness of the empire" 天下之肥.⁵² In "Yi shuo", however, Han argues that even "stoutness" is not a reliable indicator. Nonetheless, the literary allusion reinforces the idea that this discourse is about the enfeoffment system, for the system also stresses harmony among family members of different status. Instead of tying these harmonious relations to the metaphor of "stoutness", he points right to the "pulse", the inner rhythm that is far more telling than the outward appearance.

The first paragraph then continues with some variety in sentence structure, as shown in Figure 5.

The primary pattern, which is also the first layer, juxtaposes the respective results of the strength or weakness of the pulse; they are coordinated clauses even though they have different syntactic patterns. A semicolon is thus used to separate them. The second layer shows that the major condition for survival is a vigorous pulse; it is of a higher hierarchy than the third layer, which is composed of two clauses with adversative transition. This

Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese, 597. If *zhe* is a suffix, however, it can only be used to create a word, not a nominalized phrase. Yang Bojun treats it as an auxiliary particle; Yang Bojun, *Gu Hanyu xuci*, 335.

⁴⁹ *Eryi* 而已 (and that's all there is to it) shows a restrictive meaning and is often followed by the perfective-aspect final grammatical particle *yi* 矣 for additional rhetorical effect. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 101–2. In Chinese linguistics, *er* and *yi* are treated as modal particles. Yang, *Gu Hanyu xuci*, 31; Wang et al., *Gu Hanyu xuci cidian*, 75.

⁵⁰ For this use of *ye*, see Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 538.

⁵¹ Hartman observes that Han's writings show an intimate knowledge of the entire *Book of Rites*. Hartman, *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity*, 179.

⁵² "Li yun" 禮運 of *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, j. 22, p. 22, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, coll. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), vol. 5 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1980), 440.

① 脈不病，|| ② 雖瘠|| ③ 不害；⁵³| ④ 脈病而肥者，死矣。

conditional adversative coordinative

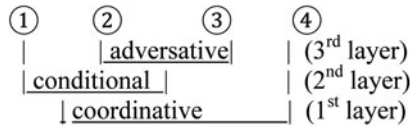


Figure 5. The third sentence of the first paragraph

sentence refutes the clinical concern about gauntness, proposing that this is not a critical illness as many might presume. Here, Han argues that stoutness, contrary to common sense, is also an unreliable indicator of health; the real indicator is the pulse. Even one who is stout can die if the pulse fails.

To match the beginning of the essay, the pattern “..., ..., ...; ...*zhe* 者, ... 矣”, which resembles the pattern “... *zhe* 者, ..., *eryiyi* 而已矣”, is used. *Yi* 矣 by itself is a particle of rhetorical finality, thus concluding that the pulse is the crucial factor for survival. The paragraph ends with an exclamatory sentence that carries a rhetorical interrogative sense.⁵⁴ “*Tong yu ci shuo zhe, qi zhi suo yi wei tianxia hu!*” 通於此說者，其知所以為天下乎！ (One who is well-versed in this doctrine – surely he is aware of what he must rely on to rule the empire!) The pattern “... *zhe* 者, ... *hu* 乎” creates a sense of parallelism with the previous pattern “..., ..., ...; ... *zhe* 者, ... *yi* 矣”.

The second paragraph begins with another set of coordinated clauses; each has a predicate composed of a subject-predicate phrase. It spells out the metaphorical meaning of the previous sentence. The Three Dynasties (Xia, Yin [Shang] and Zhou, c. 2070–221 BCE) declined when the feudal lords began to disrespect the Son of Heaven and competed to become the hegemon. Losing order within the administration is like losing weight; this is suggested by the *Book of Rites*. Although the situation was undesirable, so long as the enfeoffment system remained in place, the imperial throne would not be overturned. The sentence is given in Figure 6.

The decline of the Three Dynasties contrasts with the continuation of their royal lines; the two statements are separated by a semicolon.⁵⁵ They are coordinative clauses rather than adversative because the two phenomena are simply laid out, with no conjunctions. To show that they are actually coordinated, the matching patterns *ye* 也 ... *yi* 矣 and *zhe* ... *er* 耳 are employed. In the first clause, *ye* 也 is a particle that marks the noun phrase as the topic of discourse,⁵⁶ which is also the subject. The predicate explains the competition for hegemony, finishing with the particle *yi* 矣 of rhetorical finality. In the second clause, *zhe* is also a particle that marks the topic of discourse, this time a verb phrase, which is also the subject. The predicate explains that the enfeoffment system that advocates the ethical values of filial piety, loyalty, and ritual propriety is the only reason for the long duration of the Three Dynasties, and therefore the restrictive particle *er* 耳 (that’s all; roughly translated as “simply” to reflect its restrictive sense) is used. Since *er* is a phonetic

⁵³ The pause between “even if one is gaunt” 雖瘠 and “there is no harm” 不害 is very short and does not need to be punctuated. They can be considered contracted clauses.

⁵⁴ For this use, see Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 163.

⁵⁵ Ma’s edition has a full stop instead. Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 1, 33. The full stop is replaced by a semicolon to be consistent with the compound sentence that follows.

⁵⁶ For this use of *ye*, see Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 538.

① 夏、殷、周之衰也，諸侯作而戰伐日行矣；|

coordinative

② 傳數十王而天下不傾者，紀綱存焉耳。

(Note: Because there is only one layer, the structural diagram is omitted here.)

Figure 6. The beginning of the second paragraph

fusion of *eryi* 而已 (that is all; nothing more), this pattern also echoes that of “... *zhe* 者, ..., *eryiyi* 而已矣” in the first paragraph.

The fate of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) is then presented as a contrast. The Qin replaced the enfeoffment system with the system of counties and commanderies, switching from a decentralization of power to centralization based on the belief that feudal lords were a threat to the state. It quickly achieved order within the administration through harsh measures, but the empire only survived for two generations. The Qin emperor did not value the enfeoffment system that was rooted in the ideas of benevolence and rites shared among hereditary ruling families; but benevolence and rites were actually the ethical values that bolstered the “stoutness of the empire” and were beneficial for “the pulse of the royal house”, that is, the continuance of the imperial bloodline. Even when these values declined, as occurred during the Warring States period (403–221 BCE), the system itself still served as a reminder of them. Its existence therefore discouraged open defiance of these ethical values and also of the Son of Heaven. By using strict laws and relying on absolute control of the central government, the Qin empire might attain an appearance of strength in the short run, but it would not last long because its pulse was weak, signified by the lack of aristocratic blood to support the sovereign. The sentence is shown in Figure 7.

The first layer simply coordinates the Qin emperor’s centralization of power and the collapse of his empire; no conjunctions are used. The second layer, composed of clauses ① and ②, describes the sequential actions he took to strengthen his rule: he abandoned the enfeoffment system and melted down the weapons of the feudal lords. To match the previous sentence, the same topic marker *ye* 也 is used, with the same explanatory pattern of *zhe* 者... *er* 耳. The essay concludes that the pulse is crucial (see Figure 8).

① 秦之王天下也，無分勢於諸侯，|| ② 聚兵而焚之；|

sequential

coordinative

③ 傳二世而天下傾者，紀綱亡焉耳。

① ② ③
|sequential| | (2nd layer)
|coordinative| (1st layer)

Figure 7. The second sentence of the second paragraph

① 是故四支雖無故，||| ② 不足恃也，|| ③ 脈而已矣；
 adversative explanatory coordinative

| ④ 四海雖無事，||| ⑤ 不足矜也，|| ⑥ 紀綱而已矣。

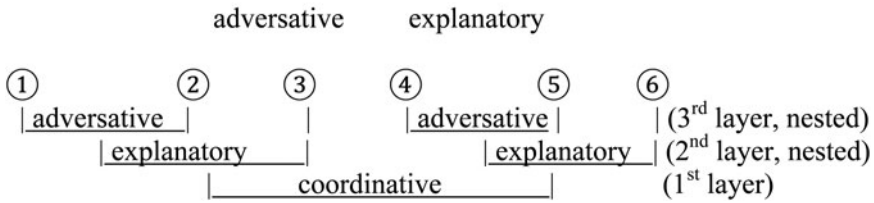


Figure 8. The concluding sentence of the second paragraph

The parallel metaphors are coordinated within this compound sentence in the first layer. Nested within the second layer is the explanation: the pulse is critical to life span, just as the enfeoffment system is critical to dynastic length. Nested within the third layer is the adversative transition. These clauses point out that the external cannot reflect the real condition either of the body or of the state. The parallel pattern “..., ...ye 也, ...eryiyi 而已矣” concludes the argument using exactly the same sentence-final particles as in “...zhe 者, ..., ...eryiyi 而已矣” at the beginning of the essay, creating a parallel structure that matches the style overall. However, this time *ye* does not highlight the topic, but shows affirmation.

The last paragraph is composed of three simple sentences. The first sentence looks like a compound sentence, but is actually a simple one. The two verb phrases, “*you qi suo ke shi, ju qi suo ke jin*” 憂其所可恃，懼其所可矜 (being concerned about what one can be reassured by, and being anxious about what one can be proud of), are coordinated to create a “non-agent; non-patient” subject. The predicate is composed of a subject-predicate phrase, pointing out that the two actions are the methods used by exceptionally skilled physicians and state planners to receive the help of Heaven. As in “Long shuo”, a quotation from the *Book of Changes* supports Han’s final comment on the matter. All of these take the form of descriptive sentences to suggest that he is presenting facts; therefore no modal particles are used.

The frequent use of parallelism, achieved through coordinated clauses, identical particles, and parallel metaphors, creates a visual effect of stability and balance, reminding readers of the stabilizing effect brought forth by a balance of power that can be achieved through implementing the enfeoffment system. To create a sense of variety despite the repeated use of *zhe* and *ye*, Han uses the former alternately as a demonstrative pronoun or as a topic marker, and the latter alternately as a final grammatical particle or as a topic marker.

“Ma shuo”: Talent gone to waste

“Ma shuo” is the most widely read of the three essays. Traditional commentators focus on the sad fate of thousand-*li* horses vainly awaiting recognition by a horse master like Bo Le, a metaphor for the finest appraiser of worthy men. Han made use of this common metaphor to argue that there were many talented men who could have served the state, but

because of the scarcity of discerning ministers who could judge men like the horse-connoisseur Bo Le 伯樂 judged horses, they instead wasted away.⁵⁷

The seven repetitions of *qianli* 千里 (a thousand *li*) and the profuse use of modal particles have been stressed for their effects in strengthening the sense of sorrow in traditional commentaries. Here I argue that these repetitions also create a visual effect to highlight the theme that talented men are plentiful and their great potential could only be brought out by the right hands. To match the theme of numerous worthy men, Han makes *qianli* a frequent occurrence; to highlight their great potential, Han explores the many possible ways repetition can be used by incorporating into it anthimeria, antanaclasis, anastrophe, anadiplosis, and chiasmus.

Repetition as a rhetorical technique is often considered “simple”. In “Ma shuo”, however, Han explores its multitudinous possibilities; indeed, repetition is the key feature of this discourse. In the other two essays, repetition is used in a straightforward fashion for emphasis and plays a subsidiary role. In “Long shuo”, the repetition of three words, *long*, *yun*, and *ling*, supplements anadiplosis and chiasmus to create a visual effect of winding, similar to the shape of the dragon and its transforming power, and to stress the interdependence of the dragon and its clouds. In “Yi shuo”, repetition of demonstrative pronouns and particles is employed for parallelism. In “Ma shuo”, repetition is highlighted to drive home the theme. To facilitate analysis, *qianli* is put in bold below:

There is Bo Le in the world, [and] only then are there **thousand-li** horses; there have always been **thousand-li** horses, but there has not always been a Bo Le. Therefore, even though there have always been fine horses, they have been abused at the hands of servants, dying in stables side by side, never acclaimed for galloping **a thousand li**.

Of horses that could gallop **a thousand li**, some consume as much as one bushel of millet in one feeding. Those who feed the horses feed them without knowing that they could gallop **a thousand li**. [But if] these horses, though they have the ability of galloping **a thousand li**, have not eaten their fill, their strength is not sufficient; their talent and beauty cannot be revealed. It will be difficult for them to compete even with ordinary horses. How then can one expect them to be able to gallop **a thousand li**?

Whipping them and not using the proper methods; feeding them and not realizing their abilities; making them neigh and not understanding what they mean – [the grooms] hold their whips and look down at them, exclaiming, “There are no [more fine] horses in the world!” Alas! Is it true that there are no [more fine] horses? They truly do not understand horses!⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Horses are often metaphors for worthy literati. Madeline K. Spring, “Fabulous horses and worthy scholars in ninth-century China”, *T'oung Pao*, 2nd Series, vol. 74, Livr. 4/5, 1988, 173–210; and Chapter 4, “Horses and their masters”, in Madeline K. Spring, *Animal Allegories in T'ang China*, 101–32. Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924) compares the essay with “Huo lin jie”, suggesting that both texts address the issue of recognition. Lin Shu, *Han Liu wen yanjiufa* 韓柳文研究法 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1914), 5–7.

⁵⁸ The translation of this essay has taken note of that of Spring; see Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 136–7, and the revised translation in Spring, *Animal Allegories in T'ang China*, 107–8. The original Chinese does not specify the subject who performs the series of actions in the last part, but the verbs suggest that the subject is likely the groom. Both *si* 食 and *ming* 鳴 are causative verbs, with the pronoun *zhi* 之 serving as object, referring to the horses.

世有伯樂,⁵⁹ 然後有千里馬;⁶⁰ 千里馬常有, 而伯樂不常有; 故雖有名馬, 祇辱於奴隸人之手, 駢死於槽枥之間, 不以千里稱也。

馬之千里者, 一食或盡粟一石。食馬者, 不知其能千里而食也; 是馬也, 雖有千里之能, 食不飽, 力不足, 才美不外見, 且欲與常馬等, 不可得, 安求其能千里也?

策之不以其道, 食之不能盡其材, 鳴之而不能通其意, 執策而臨之, 曰: 「天下無馬。」嗚呼! 其真無馬邪? 其真不知馬也!⁶¹

In the first two paragraphs, which consist of just 107 words, Han repeats *qianli* 千里 (a thousand *li*) seven times. While repetition creates emphasis and a focal point,⁶² it can easily give a mechanical and monotonous impression. This is particularly the case when the same word or phrase appears many times in a short text. In “Ma shuo”, however, the frequent occurrence of *qianli* is not redundant, because Han brilliantly embeds rhetorical devices of anthimeria, antanaclasis, and anastrophe to create variation.

Anthimeria is the substitution of one part of speech for another. *Qianli* is a compound composed of the numeral word *qian* and the measure word for distance *li*. Normally, it is used as the attributive modifier for a noun, such as *qianli ma* 千里馬 (thousand-*li* horses) and *qianli zhi neng* 千里之能 (the ability to gallop a thousand *li*), or as the object of a verb, such as *ri xing qianli* 日行千里 (to travel a thousand *li* in a day). In “*bu yi qianli cheng ye*” 不以千里稱也 (never acclaimed for galloping a thousand *li*), however, he uses it as the object of the co-verb *yi* 以 (for); *yi qianli* 以千里 (for galloping a thousand *li*) then serves as an adverbial modifier for *cheng* 稱 (to be acclaimed). In “*bu zhi qi neng qianli er si ye*” 不知其能千里而食也 (feed them without knowing that they could gallop a thousand *li*) and “*an qiu qi neng qianli ye*” 安求其能千里也 (how then can one expect them to be able to gallop a thousand *li*), he uses it as a verb, modified by the auxiliary verb *neng* 能 (can). Here anthimeria is used in combination with antanaclasis; the latter refers to the repeated use of the same term in close proximity with different meanings.⁶³

Anastrophe is the inversion of normal word order to emphasize the key message,⁶⁴ which in “Ma shuo” is the central argument concerning the capacity to gallop a thousand *li*. Anastrophe is used in the phrase “*ma zhi qianli zhe*” 馬之千里者 (of horses, those that could gallop a thousand *li*). Its expected order would be “*qianli zhi ma*” 千里之馬, with *qianli* serving as a metonymy for thousand-*li* horses and as a special type of attributive modifier – the former being the sub-category and the latter the main category.⁶⁵ The phrase can also be abbreviated as *qianli ma* 千里馬. With inversion, Han creates a partitive construction in the pattern of “head noun + *zhi* + attributive modifier + *zhe*”. *Zhe* can be

⁵⁹ Yang Yong 楊勇 agrees with Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1731–1815) that there should be no punctuation here; otherwise the impact on the reader is less vigorous. Yang Yong, “Lun Han Yu wen zhi wenqi” 論韓愈文之文氣, in Han Yu xueshu taolunhui zuzhi weiyuanhui 韓愈學術討論會組織委員會 (comp.), *Han Yu yanjiu lunwenji* 韓愈研究論文集 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 136–48; see p. 147. From the grammatical aspect, however, there should be a comma. Without punctuation, these two clauses would be considered “contracted”, but this kind of contraction is rare with the conjunction *ranhou* 然後 (only then).

⁶⁰ The period in Ma’s edition has been replaced by a semicolon here, because the first two clauses are juxtaposed with the next two. Together, they present the two major causes for the disappearance of thousand-*li* horses: the need for connoisseurs and the scarcity of such people.

⁶¹ Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 1, 35–6.

⁶² These are two of the three main ways repetition is used. It can also be used as an indicator of a shift or pause. Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 38–40.

⁶³ The combined use of anthimeria and antanaclasis is a stylistic feature of Han’s prose. Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 47–53.

⁶⁴ The definition of anastrophe follows Spring, “A stylistic study of Tang ‘Guwen’”, 31.

⁶⁵ For an explanation of this partitive construction and examples, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 and He Leshi 何樂士, *Gu Hanyu yufa ji qi fazhan* 古漢語語法及其發展, 2nd edition (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2003), 483.

treated as a marker for such inversion, which involves placing an attributive modifier of restrictive nature behind its head noun. Yang Bojun has pointed out this pattern and proposed that *ma* 馬 (the horses) are similar to a “denominator”, and *qianli zhe* 千里者 (those that could gallop a thousand *li*) is similar to a “numerator”.⁶⁶ In this case, *zhe* is a demonstrative pronoun used to create a partitive construction. The inversion places *qianli* in the position of a head noun, thus highlighting the potential of these horses.

Repetition is also used with chiasmus and anadiplosis. Chiasmus is used to illustrate the interdependent relation between Bo Le and thousand-*li* horses; this use of chiasmus inevitably combines with that of anadiplosis:

① 世有伯樂，② 然後有千里馬；③ 千里馬常有，④ 而伯樂不常有

The second pair of clauses is almost a mirror image of the first. In the first pair, Bo Le and *qianli ma* are both objects; in the last pair, they act as subjects. The verb is the same for all four clauses: *you* 有 (literally “to have”; often translated as “there is/there are”). The combined use of anadiplosis and chiasmus fits the later discussion of the horses’ dependence on Bo Le; it is Bo Le that is truly hard to find, not thousand-*li* horses.

The short clauses and the variable use of the same modal particle *ye* 也 also serve to highlight the theme. The compound sentence in the second paragraph contains only 48 characters, but there are eight clauses. Since this discourse addresses the pressing problem of swift horses languishing in ordinary hands, short clauses help create a rhythm of urgency, like hoofbeats. To express his deep concern, Han uses *ye* 也 for different functions at the end of each paragraph. The first *ye* articulates a fact, marking the unchanging, ongoing condition that fine horses are dying without ever stretching their legs.⁶⁷ The second *ye* is used with *an* 安 (how) to create a rhetorical question, emphasizing the grooms’ ignorance. The third *ye* is used with the adverb *zhen* 真 (truly) to create an exclamatory sentence, intensifying Han’s deep lament for the ill fate of the fine horses.

The last paragraph begins with a single-layer compound sentence of sequential relation. It is composed of verb-object sequential clauses, creating a compelling force that criticizes the grooms’ missteps and their condescending and unjustified comment on the horses. The concluding remarks include a short interjection, a rhetorical question, and an exclamation.⁶⁸ “Alas” expresses Han’s deep sympathy for these horses, that is, for wasted talent. The rhetorical question condemns the grooms’ obliviousness – metaphorically, mediocre ministers. The final exclamatory sentence affirms this idea. The criticism comes down with full force, filled with indignation and manifesting the vigour of Han Yu’s prose.⁶⁹

This analysis supports the traditional commentaries on the key feature of repetition, and it goes further in exploring the intricacy underlying this rhetorical device in “Ma shuo”. The repeated use of *qianli*, in combination with the rhetorical devices of anthimeria, antanaclasis, anastrophe, anadiplosis, and chiasmus that help create variety, emphasizes the theme that thousand-*li* horses are plentiful but lack a Bo Le to recognize and foster their abilities. The short and sequential clauses speed up the rhythm, addressing the urgent issue of horses perishing in ignominy. The same particle *ye* is used to create descriptive, rhetorical, and exclamatory sentences; all lament fine horses whose great potential never sees the light.

⁶⁶ Yang Bojun, *Wenyan yufa* 文言語法 (Beijing: Dazhong chubanshe, 1962), 118–20.

⁶⁷ For this usage of *ye*, see Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, 538.

⁶⁸ Sun treats the last two sentences as question and answer. Sun, *Han Yu sanwen yishulun*, 161–2.

⁶⁹ Yang believes that a final judgemental comment contributes to the vigour of Han’s writing. Yang, “Lun Han Yu wen zhi wenqi”, 147.

Conclusion

While the titles of “Long shuo”, “Yi shuo”, and “Ma shuo” may suggest that the dragon, the physicians, and the horses are the focus of attention in the respective discourses, the central thread joining them is actually the essential role of fine ministers and their collaboration with the ruler. The two discourses, “Long shuo” and “Ma shuo”, cover both ends of the spectrum of the three-tier government: the top tier involves the relations between the ruler and his ministers; the bottom tier involves the relations between the ministers and the myriad officials under their guidance. The design of these two is thus similar. The dragon has to rely on its clouds to demonstrate its numen. It is a metaphorical presentation of the ruler’s reliance on his ministers to bring into full force his imperial power. Similarly, the fine horses have to depend on the connoisseur Bo Le to bring out their full potential. It is a metaphorical presentation of the worthy men’s reliance on the ministers for recognition. Both discourses use function words profusely to create modal expression; of admiration in “Long shuo”, and of lamentation in “Ma shuo”.

“Yi shuo”, the discourse in the middle, is slightly different; it presents an example demonstrating the collaboration of the ruler and his ministers in consolidating a three-tier government. In this discourse, Han Yu compares the physicians to fine state planners; they are in fact metaphors for the ruler and his ministers, who are in charge of the central government. With the support of his ministers, the ruler could enfeoff his imperial agnates to strategic areas as buttresses of the state. These feudal lords constitute the mid-tier; they are crucial in creating a balance of power between the central and the regional areas, in upholding the moral basis of governance, and in encouraging good rule. Function words that express emotions are not used at all; particles of restriction and confirmation are used instead to create descriptive sentences.

This research argues that this series features an intentional blending of style and theme to increase persuasive force, that the three discourses are consistent across this literary experiment, and that they form a holistic unit to present Han’s idea of a three-tier government. It further argues that our understanding and appreciation of Han’s invention of prose technique more generally and of the unity of this series more specifically benefits from linguistically informed analysis. Such analysis allows us to articulate the structure and dynamics of the texts with precision and ultimately greater clarity.

Of the three essays, “Long shuo” shows the highest level of sophistication. Linguistic analysis of Han’s long sentences and his “reverse writing” in “Long shuo” helps us better understand the two major features identified by traditional commentators but left without precise explanations. It illustrates how Han creates clauses with multilayered semantic relations to express complex thoughts, revealing his central idea at the end to lend finality to his argument. The analysis demonstrates Han’s contribution to the rapid development of compound sentences during the Tang dynasty: the multiplication of semantic layers and the growing complexity of semantic relations.⁷⁰ It also scrutinizes other techniques Han employed to intensify the persuasive power of his prose. These include his use of varied particles to compose exclamatory, rhetorical, and declarative sentences to strengthen his conclusion; and of chiasmus, anadiplosis, and repetition to stress the paradox at hand. The intriguing nature of the claim that the dragon depends on its clouds, to the point that it is also defined by them, matches the intricate grammar and rhetoric used. In other words, the style features “change”.

In contrast, “Yi shuo” displays a parallel and systematic structure, which mirrors the enfeoffment system as a balancing mechanism between the central authority and its

⁷⁰ Xie comments that these two features helped created the vigorous effect so often associated with ancient prose writers such as Han Yu. Xie Xuhua 謝序華, *Tang Song fanggu wenyan jufa* 唐宋仿古文言句法 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 255.

regions, and as a formula for dynastic durability. The syntactical structure of “Yi shuo” is recurrent, its prose straightforward. The new observation offered here is that Han deliberately used this style to restate the discourse’s theme of a simple truth for securing the empire. Adhering to the enfeoffment system that represents benevolence and rites is the direct way to dynastic duration, as proven by the long rule of the Zhou (1046–256 BCE) dynasty, which is a striking contrast to the short span of the Qin dynasty. The discourse’s extensive parallelism, including parallel metaphors and coordinated clauses, creates a style that showcases structure, corresponding to its concern with the governing system. The study also reveals the different functions of the systematic use of *zhe* 者 and *ye* 也 in creating declarative and affirmative sentences: they are used to suggest that the ideas presented are hard facts. “Yi shuo” occupies the middle tier because enfeoffed princes held the dual role of ruler and subject. They were subjects of the Son of Heaven but rulers of their enfeoffed states. The style features “stability”.

“Ma shuo” confirms the message in the first discourse, “Long shuo”: when the ruler does not have wise ministers, he will be unable to recruit worthy men, and as a result there will be no one who could efficiently implement imperial policy. This study proposes that the rhetoric of “Ma shuo” is more sophisticated than simple repetition. Han’s recurring deployment of *qianli* matches the themes of plentiful worthy scholars and their great, but wasted, potential. He makes use of varying rhetorical devices: anthimeria, antanaclasses, anastrophe, chiasmus, and anadiplosis. The repetition of the modal particle *ye* at the end of each paragraph lends variety, as it is used to create a different type of sentence each time: declarative, rhetorical, and exclamatory. The style features “potential”.

The three discourses strikingly match style with theme, generating a visual effect in a form that underscores the message. In each one, Han keeps the major characteristics of the genre with its use of metaphor and narration,⁷¹ but goes further to play with the versatility of ancient-style prose to present an argument. His works differ from those of his contemporary, the influential prose writer Liu Zongyuan, who simply used ancient-style prose as a vehicle for conveying didactic messages in metaphorical discourses.⁷² Han’s series is also more argumentative in the sense that it tackles three paradoxes: the all-powerful ruler’s reliance on the ministers he appoints; the diffusion of power in enfeoffment as a means to strengthen the empire; and the lack of able ministers rather than the lack of worthy men. He employs grammar and rhetoric to strengthen his points, presenting advice that concerns the overall functioning of the empire.

As demonstrated above, all of these styles can be visualized through the grammar and rhetorical devices employed. It constituted Han Yu’s attempt to showcase the flexibility, complexity, and functionality of ancient-style prose, a type of writing that he believed to demand more of the writer.⁷³ Creating an accord between style and theme to undergird the persuasive power of ancient-style prose was a notable literary invention of Han Yu, and this series is an exemplar of that ingenuity.

⁷¹ For the major characteristics of “Miscellaneous Discourses”, see Nan Zhezhen 南哲鎮, “Tangdai zashuo yanjiu” 唐代雜說研究, *Guji yanjiu* 古籍研究, no. 1, 2004, 196–200; 197.

⁷² For example, “Pi shuo” 罷說 (On the brown bear) ridicules a hunter for driving away an animal by mimicking the sound of a stronger one, only to fall prey to the latter; it shows that those who rely on external force will perish. The other type of discourse is not metaphorical. It takes the form of a dialogue on an issue and can be explicitly didactic. For example, “Tian shuo” 天說 (Discourse on heaven) records his conversation with Han Yu on whether Heaven has a will to exercise reward and punishment. “Bu she zhe shuo” 補蛇者說 (Discourse on the snake-catchers) has the Jiang 蔣 family speak of the tragic deaths its members suffer for capturing poisonous snakes in exchange for tax exemption, thereby condemning harsh government policies. For Liu’s eleven discourses, see Liu Zongyuan, *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (1979; rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), v. 2, j. 16, 441–70.

⁷³ For Han’s promotion of ancient-style prose to replace parallel prose, see Sun, *Han Yu sanwen yishulun*, 40–62.

This series of “Miscellaneous Discourses” thus provides a lens through which we perceive and investigate Han’s literary experimentation. It displays a cross-over of genres: in its intricate prose, the boundaries of miscellaneous discourses are pushed back to take up features of argumentative prose, whereas the advice given on a three-tier government can almost be read as a memorial written in an alternate literary form. Moreover, the series demonstrates that both grammar and rhetoric had reached an advanced level during Han’s time, so that he was able to use language innovatively to achieve a stunning effect. Han deliberately worked on well-known metaphors to test his own literary ability to transform the commonplace into the extraordinary. In his own words, “an ordinary thing frequently seen does not attract attention; only the exceptional can have such an effect”.⁷⁴ The only way to excellence, then, is to establish a personal style different from the norm.⁷⁵

In this series, Han Yu made even mundane metaphors spectacular, and he did so without depending on the ornate words and restrictive forms that were the hallmark of parallel prose, then considered the most polished and appropriate style for official documents and imperial examinations. In Han’s view, that form of writing, which elaborates parallelism in words, sentence structure, and meanings, as well as employing the regulation of tones and profuse allusions, was something effortlessly attainable. He called it “*suxia wenzhi*” 俗下文字 (commonplace words),⁷⁶ a type of formulaic writing composed simply to entertain superiors and of little value in itself. He himself, he says, was uneasy for months when he complied with the prevailing trend and tried to acquire an official position through this means.

Instead, Han believed that it was in writing ancient-style prose that one’s true skills were tested. As he demonstrated in this series, ancient-style prose could reach a high level of sophistication, one that far exceeds parallel prose. His devotion to the creation of extraordinary effects propelled him to experiment with something different, even strange. His remarkable combination of style and theme by way of grammar and rhetoric is unique: it cannot be found even in the “Miscellaneous Discourses” of his follower Li Ao 李翱 (772–841). It is hardly surprising that his works were sometimes criticized in his own time for being unconventional. His unprecedented experiments with ancient-style prose, enabled by his exceptional linguistic and rhetorical skills, made his writings difficult to emulate. This might have been one of the reasons why he was unable to induce a broader effect on the literary trends of the mid-Tang. Bringing together linguistic and literary analyses of this series helps us better comprehend mid-Tang developments in genre and in literary Chinese. It allows us to appreciate more fully how remarkable Han Yu’s prose writings are, and to better comprehend precisely what made them so extraordinary.

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⁷⁴ “Da Liu Zhengfu shu” 答劉正夫書, in Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 3, 206–8.

⁷⁵ “Da Liu Zhengfu shu”, 207; “Da Li Yi shu” 答李翊書, in Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 3, 170.

⁷⁶ “Yu Feng Su lun wen shu” 與馮宿論文書, in Ma, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, j. 3, 196.

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