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Views from Within, Views from Beyond:

Approaches to the *Shiji*
as an Early Work of Historiography

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Introduction

For two millennia, the *Shiji*, truly a masterpiece of historiography and literature, has been read and studied not only in China but also in other East Asian countries, notably in Japan. Its authors, the two Western Han historians Sima Tan (?–110 BCE) and his son Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 86 BCE), proudly gave it the title *Taishigong shu*, the *Documents of the Grand Historian* (or *the Grand Scribe* or *the Grand Astronomer*, depending upon how one decides to translate the office that both historians were entrusted with by Emperor Wu of the Han). Having access to books and writings that must have been available in an archive or a library within the palaces in Chang'an and relying on many other sources, both Sima Tan and Sima Qian wrote down their view of the history of the world known to them down to their own times. Although their book was called a "true record" by early readers in the Han, it was also accused of being a slanderous work that criticized the Han dynasty. Maybe this is one of the reasons that, starting in the second century CE, the *Taishigong shu* was called *Shiji*, meaning "Records of the Scribes", or perhaps "Historical Records", a much more modest description of the contents of the book that might suggest it contains mere records and not the personal opinions of their authors. The tension that exists between the two ideas of a "true record" and of a historian's more personal view of things has influenced the reading of many Chinese authors writing on the *Shiji* during the last two thousand years.

At least since Édouard Chavannes introduced the book to a European readership more than one hundred years ago in his masterful translation of and his copious notes to the first fifty chapters, the *Shiji* has become an essential element in Western scholarship on China and studying it has become an indispensable part of any respectable education in Chinese studies. Despite the hundreds of traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Korean commentaries that piled up over the centuries as well as the thousands of research articles and monographs that have been produced during the last hundred years by modern scholars, in both the East and the West, the book continues to puzzle scholars and will certainly continue to do so for many centuries to come.

Given the huge amount of scholarship on the *Shiji* in the East Asian tradition, the articles collected in this volume cannot achieve much more than offering some new insights from scholars who, with one exception, are working in a Western environment. Raising both old and new questions and trying to give answers that at least in Western scholarship on China have not yet been given, this collection also provides an overview of some of the latest discussions in the ongoing debate on the *Shiji* and its authors. At the same time, the authors endeavor to offer new perspectives and present discoveries and innovative interpretations of certain aspects of the *Shiji* that in our opinion, despite the existence of rich scholarship, have not been fully explored so far.

The authors originally gathered at a conference entitled "*Shiji* and Beyond", organized by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation International Sinological Center in Prague in

- Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909–1992). 1990. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注. 4 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua.
- Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書. See Zhu Youceng 1980.
- Yuan Ke 袁珂 (1916–2001). 1980. *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 山海經校註. Shanghai: Shanghai guji.
- Zhang Dake 張大可. 2002. “Sima Qian de minzu yitong sixiang shitan” 司馬遷的民族一統思想試探, in *Shiji yanjiu* 史記研究 (Beijing: Huawen, 2002), 420–435
- Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, comp. by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE). Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1978.
- Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年. See Zhu Youceng and Wang Guowei 1997.
- Zhu Youceng 朱右曾 (*jinshi* 1838). 1980. *Yi Zhou shu jixun jiaoshi* 逸周書集訓校釋. Taipei: Hanjing wenhua.
- . 1997. *Guben Zhushu jinian jijiao* 古本竹書紀年輯校. Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927). *Jinben Zhushu jinian shuzheng* 今本竹書紀年疏證. Ed. by Huang Yongnian 黃永年. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu.

The *Shiji* chapter “Guji Liezhuan” (Traditions of Witty Remonstrants): A Source to Look for Rhetorical Strategies in Early China

Giulia Baccini

In oratore autem acumen dialecticorum, sententiae philosophorum, verba prope poetarum, memoria iuriconsultorum, vox tragoedorum, gestus paene summorum actorum est requirendus.

In an orator we must demand the subtlety of the logician, the thoughts of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer’s memory, a tragedian’s voice, and the bearing almost of the consummate actor.¹

The “Guji liezhuan” 滑稽列傳, Chapter 126 of the *Shiji* 史記, is among the last chapters of the category “traditions” (*liezhuan*) appearing in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 90 B.C.E.) work.² In the history of Chinese literature it holds a peculiar position, because it has been interpreted as one of the main early sources to investigate the topic of “humour” in classical China.³ In fact, it contains several anecdotes in which the protagonists are jesters (*you* 優), in particular, it has been said that this chapter records their “humorous” speeches (as regards the question if these speeches are really just “humorous”, we will get back to this aspect later. Moreover, the characters 滑稽 that occur in the title of the chapter and which are read *guji* in early Chinese and *huaji* in modern Chinese, do have the meaning “funny, comic”. Thus, the association of the chapter with the topic of “humour” at first seems consistent. Since these anecdotes are embedded in a text which has been considered, certainly not without reason, as “historical”, the chapter has not only been used as an historical source to analyse the figure of the court jester in ancient

* I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Olga Lomová, Dorothee Schaab-Hanke and Hans van Ess for their thoughtful comments and suggestions, which helped me to make several improvements. I am also grateful to Esther Klein for her critical reading and corrections.

1 Cicero, *De Oratore* I.128 (trans. 89, 91).

2 In this paper I will consider Sima Qian as the author of the *Shiji*. Authorship issues relating to this chapter will be discussed below.

3 Knechtges 1970–1971; Chen Wenxin 2002, 171; Myhre 2001, 134f, 141.

China,⁴ but also to investigate the beginning of Chinese drama, in which the jester is considered a key figure.⁵ Its title has been translated into Western languages in different ways; some scholars have laid emphasis on the role of the protagonists of the tales, translating the *guji* as a noun: “humorists”, “bouffons”, “wits and humorists”,⁶ or “jesters”;⁷ others translated *guji* as an adjective which denotes the quality of the speeches of the protagonists: “beaux parleurs”,⁸ “clever speakers”,⁹ “smooth talkers”,¹⁰ “ironical critics”,¹¹ and “slick reminders”.¹² However, there is no widespread agreement on how the term *guji* of the title should be rendered. According to Timoteus Pokora, “it was Sima Qian who made this binome meaningful”¹³ by identifying it with a particular concept. One purpose of this paper, and one which will be closely related to a discussion of the value of this chapter, is thus to find out how the historian understood it. This paper argues that Sima Qian perceived *guji* as a rhetorical ability to remonstrate indirectly, which is a skill that only highly professional speakers have. To illustrate this point I will make reference to Cicero’s *De Oratore*, which is the first text in the Mediterranean tradition to perceive “humour” as an important tool for the *ars rhetorica* and to devote to this topic a whole section of a treatise. The Latin orator in his text systematically listed several issues very similar to those which can be found in the anecdotes adduced by the Chinese historian as examples.

The structure of the chapter

In this section, I will closely look at the structure of the chapter, in the hope that my analysis will shed some new light on the character of the narratives and the intentions of the one who had decided to include them here.

The “*Guji liezhuan*”¹⁴ is one of the few traditions of the *Shiji* to contain both a small preface (*xu* 序), which introduces the subject, and a final appraisal (*zan* 贊, expressed by the standard formula *taishigong yue* 太史公曰, “the Grand Historian”¹⁵

4 Dolby 1988, 11; Tan Fan 2002, 11–13.

5 The jester (*youling* 優伶), is considered a key figure in the development of ancient Chinese drama, see Wang Guowei 1998 (1912), 4, Xu Muyun 2001, 2–11, in particular 3–4.

6 Quoted in Pokora 1973, 50, and n. 7–10.

7 Yang and Yang 2002, 323.

8 Chavannes 1895, Introduction, CCXLIX.

9 Bodde 1967, 110.

10 Knechtges 1970–1971, 83.

11 Pokora 1973.

12 Schaberg 2005b, 199.

13 Pokora 1972, 152.

14 The phonetic indication to read 滑稽 as *guji* is given by the *Shiji suoyin*, cf. *Shiji* 71.2307, n. 3.

15 The most common translation of the title. Stephen W. Durrant (1995) and Grant Hardy (1999) prefer “Grand Astrologer”.

said”), which briefly comments and sums up the chapter.¹⁶ It records eight anecdotes about three different protagonists, from Warring States time (Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 and Jester Meng 優孟) to the Qin dynasty period (Jester Zhan 優旃). It also includes a long addition (*xu* 續) by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (ca. 105–ca. 30 BCE) of which perhaps the most famous part is the account of Ximen Bao 西門豹 (5th century BCE), the famous Warring States official who was faced with a case of witchcraft and regulated the water channels of Ye.¹⁷

In his brief prologue at the beginning of the chapter, the author quotes a saying that he attributes to Confucius:

孔子曰：“六藝於治一也。禮以節人，樂以發和，書以道事，詩以達意，易以神化，春秋以義。

Confucius said: “Regarding the government [of a state], as far as the Six Disciplines are concerned, they all are equally [important]. The *Rites* help to give rules to men, the *Music* promotes harmony, the *Documents* record [past historical] events, the *Songs* help to express ideas, the *Changes* reveal supernatural influences, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* show what is right.”¹⁸

The words quoted here occur again in Chapter 130 of the *Shiji* with only slight modifications,¹⁹ which in turn seems to rework a passage of Dong Zhongshu’s 董仲舒 (176–104 BCE) *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露.²⁰ Among these three occurrences, it is only in this chapter that these words are quoted as being from the mouth of the Master (*Kongzi yue* 孔子曰). The introduction of Confucius’s voice strengthens the quotation, which serves to draw a connection between the narrative material presented in the chapter and the Six Disciplines (*Liuyi* 六藝). The author then introduces himself, adding a personal judgment on the content of the anecdotes he will narrate:

16 An Pingqiu (2005, 107–110, in particular 108) briefly discusses the historian’s appraisal, the section “*Taishigong yue*” 太史公曰. The other chapters containing a preface and a final comment are: chapter 119: “*Xunli liezhuan*” 循吏列傳 (The Upright Officials), chapter 122: “*Kuli liezhuan*” 酷吏列傳 (The Cruel Merciless Officials), chapter 124: “*Youxia liezhuan*” 游侠列傳 (The Knight-Errants), and chapter 125: “*Ningxing liezhuan*” 佞幸列傳 (The Flatterers).

17 Ximen Bao was an official serving the Marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (r. 446–396 BCE). Chu’s addition consists of two stories, one about Ximen Bao freeing Ye from sacrificing to the River god (*Shiji* 126.3211–3212, trad. in Lin 2009, 418f) and one about him creating an irrigation system (*Shiji* 126.3213).

18 *Shiji* 126.3197. Translation loosely based on Yang and Yang 2002, 323.

19 *Shiji* 130.3297: 是故禮以節人，樂以發和，書以道事，詩以達意，易以道化，春秋以道義。

20 *Chunqiu fanlu* 2.36 (“*Yubei*” 玉杯): 《詩》道誌，故長於質。《禮》製節，故長於文。《樂》詠德，故長於風。《書》著功，故長於事。《易》本天地，故長於數。《春秋》正是非，故長於治人；as noted by Takigawa (cited in Han Zhaoqi 2009, 6359, n. 15). Though there are several other similar passages in the received literature Takigawa quoted only this one, probably because he thought that Dong Zhongshu was the main source for Sima Qian.

太史公曰：天道恢恢，豈不大哉！談言微中，亦可以解紛。

The Grand Historian says: the Ways of Heaven are infinitely vast, isn't that great! Even conversations and speeches may subtly point out correct points and serve to settle disputes.

This is the only brief remark on the content of the chapter that the historian makes. He does not introduce the protagonists, nor does he clarify the meaning of the title, but he calls our attention on the main focus of the material presented: “the conversations and speeches” (*tanyan* 談言); he is going to record discourses which in a subtle way (*wei* 微) are effective (*zhong* 中), and able to solve problems (*jiefen* 解紛). “Subtlety” is the main quality of these speeches, which will be reflected in the rhetoric strategies used in their argumentations. Their ability to “settle disputes” reveals their usefulness. This last quality links them directly to the *Six Disciplines* quoted earlier, as the disputes and problems to be solved are strictly connected with the government of the state.²¹

The first protagonist to be introduced is Chunyu Kun (385–305 BCE),²² who, we are told, was from Qi and a *zhuixu* 贅婿, a man with a poor family background resolved to live in his wife's family (implying his low social status).²³ The other information added is that he was “less than seven *chi* tall” (around 140 cm). This does not make him a dwarf, as sometimes has been recorded,²⁴ but short. The historian in describing Chunyu Kun's characteristics highlights those features which make him similar to the image of the other two protagonists: two jesters, i.e. characters from a lowstanding social class, one of whom was a dwarf, as we will discuss later. The last concise phrase added in Kun's regard is that he was “a *guji* person and a good debater” (*guji duobian* 滑稽多辯), [so] he was sent several times as an envoy to [the states of other] feudal lords. This ability allowed him to be successful in his diplomatic mission and is consistent with the description given of him in Chapter 74, the “Mengzi Xun Qing liezhuan” 孟子荀卿列傳 (Traditions of Mengzi and Xun Qing). Here the historian devotes to this character a much longer biography. Sima Qian acknowledges Chunyu

Kun as a member of the Jixia Academy,²⁵ and even though he states that those scholars who “composed books teaching on matters of [political] order and disorder”²⁶ with which they sought favour from the rulers of the time²⁷ were too many to be all discussed in his work, he decides to include Kun's among those worthy of being recorded.²⁸ This could show the actual importance of Chunyu Kun in this context.²⁹ The historian describes him as having a “broad learning and a strong memory”,³⁰ and “not following any school in his studies”,³¹ a feature which seems common to most of the Jixia thinkers.³² Most importantly, we know from the historian that “in his remonstrances (*jian* 諫) and persuasions (*shui* 說), he admired the conduct of Yan Ying 晏嬰 (?–500 BCE), but worked hardest at deducing intent (*cheng yi* 承意) and observing expressions (*guan se* 觀色).”³³ Chunyu Kun, then, was aware and esteemed the rhetorical ability of Yan Ying who was a famous minister and remonstrant of the same state;³⁴ moreover, he tried to improve those qualities which enable one to perform a good and effective speech: before starting a performance one has to know

25 Bai Xi (1998, 68) states he was the first master (*xiansheng*).

26 Sato 2003, 69f: “theoretical interest in the mechanisms of a society”.

27 *Shiji* 74.2346, trans. Nienhauser 1994b, 182.

28 After Chunyu Kun, the others with whom the historian deals with here are: Shen Dao 慎到 (c. 350–c. 275 BCE), and Xunzi 荀子 (328–235 BCE). The historian in the end of the chapter also quotes Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (c. 320–c. 250 BCE) and Mozi 墨子 (c. 480–c. 390) among others, stressing their value in constructing rhetorically well-arranged discourses; *Shiji* 74.2347–2350.

29 Sato (2003, 77) states that scholars attached to the Jixia academy held a rank “which was equivalent to that of a higher-ranking officer at the Qi court (*shangdaifu* 上大夫)” and is convinced (78f) that Chunyu Kun was an important government officer “like a minister, rather than merely a policy counselor”. See *Shiji* 46.1895.

30 Trans. Nienhauser 1994b, 182. Regarding this quality, Cicero considers strong memory as one of the skills required by a good orator; according to him this quality can be a natural ability (*De Oratore* 1.128) or can be acquired through training (1.157).

31 *Shiji* 74.2346, trans. Nienhauser 1994b, 182.

32 Bai Xi 1998, 67–68.

33 Trans. Nienhauser 1994b, 182. Han Zhaoqi (2009, 4196) states that here the phrase means: 察言觀色, 順著統治者, “to carefully observe someone's words and expression and follow the ruler”. This is also my understanding of “deducing intent (*cheng yi* 承意) and observing expressions (*guan se* 觀色)”, i.e. it implies that Chunyu Kun before daring to speak, carefully analyzed the ruler's mood.

34 Yan Ying, also called Yanzi, was a famous minister of Qi. He is the protagonist of several anecdotes centred on his speeches. Schaberg (2001, 230–232, 279f) discusses some of his speeches contained in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳. The *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 collects anecdotes in which Yanzi is the protagonist; mostly they are centred on his speeches, which aim to give advice to different rulers about government. Sato (2003, 205, 211–216) highlights the value of this text regarding the concept of *Li* for the pre-Qin thinkers, in particular to Xunzi. Sima Qian also dedicates a biography to this character in his *Shiji*, the “Guan Yan liezhuan” 管晏列傳 (Traditions of Guanzi and Yanzi). In the final appraisal of this chapter (*Shiji* 62.2137), Sima Qian admits to have read the *Yanzi chunqiu* – *wu du Yanzi chunqiu* 吾讀晏子春秋 – and expresses his appreciation toward Yanzi because he dared to directly remonstrate with his lord.

21 Ruan Zhisheng (1996, 352) explains *jiefen* 解紛 (settle disputes) as *jieluan* 解亂 (to settle a situation of disorder). This means that, analogously to the *Liuyi*, these speeches *zhizhi* 致治 (contribute to settle the government).

22 *Shiji* 126.3197–3199. Dates according to Bai Xi 1998, 304.

23 Qian Mu (1985, 364) deals with the figure of Chunyu Kun in his *Xian Qin zhuzi xinian* 先秦諸子繫年. He specifies that Kun 髡 was the name of a punishment consisting in shaving the head of a criminal. About this term and Chunyu's status, Qian Mu states that maybe he was born a slave. *Kun*, as a punishment, was common among slaves. Later Chunyu, when he became a respected thinker of Jixia Academy, called himself Kun. See also Guang Shaokui 2004.

24 Nienhauser 1994b, 182, n. 40. This feature of Chunyu Kun is also the focus of a lost anecdote from *Shuiyuan* 說苑 (The Garden of Persuasions), appearing in *Taiping yulan* 378.1745. According to the story, Chunyu Kun was sent to the state of Chu as an envoy, and when the King of Chu saw him, he mocked his short stature asking why Qi sent a child and not a man.

when and what to say observing the addressee of his discourse,³⁵ in his case a ruler, King Wei 威 of Qi (r. 356–320).³⁶

The second character is Jester Meng 優孟,³⁷ who was a musician (*yueren* 樂人) of Chu. According to the account in this chapter, he lived “more than one hundred years” (*bai yu nian* 百餘年) after Chunyu Kun at the court of King Zhuang 莊 (r. 613–591 BCE). Regarding this claim, already Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721 CE) had noticed that this is an error because Jester Meng might have lived two hundred years before Chunyu Kun, but certainly not after him.³⁸ However, Han Zhaoqi has noticed that the historian probably meant King Qingxiang 頃襄 (r. 298–263 BCE), whose name has been recorded several times mistakenly as Zhuang.³⁹ According to this account, the jester would have lived nearly fifty or more years after Chunyu Kun, given the chronological arrangement of the narration. We could point out that the historian was quite imprecise in the historical details,⁴⁰ but, as we will see, factual information was not his primary intent in this chapter.

35 This appears to be very similar to one of the abilities required by Roman orators, namely being able to fit to the rhetorical principle of *decorum*: “[*decorum*] corresponds to the necessary adaptation between the rhetorical discourse and the general communicative context in which it is produced or delivered by the orator and received by the public. This adaptation should take place, on the one hand, on all the levels which pertain to the referent of the text and to the text itself or the rhetorical discourse and, on the other hand, on those levels and distinct elements of the rhetorical fact. The latter includes not only the rhetorical discourse but also the interaction between that discourse, the orator, the public, the referent of the text, and the context in which the rhetorical communication takes place.” (Tellegen-Couperus 2003, 207.) Cicero stresses this point describing the eloquent orator: *qui ad id quodcumque decebit poterit accommodare orationem* “he who can adapt his speech to fit all conceivable circumstances,” *Orator* 123, as quoted in May, 2007, 261.

36 In *Shiji* 46.1985 the historian places him later than in the “Guji liezhuan”, at the time of King Xuan of Qi (r. 319–301 BCE); Han Zhaoqi (2004, 3156, n. 94) states that is an error for King Wei of Qi. However Sato (2003, 80) does not regard this passage as problematic. He seems to accept the possibility that Chunyu Kun served also under King Xuan, maybe because Chunyu Kun is also mentioned in the *Mengzi* (4A/17, 6B/6), and Mengzi served this same king (319–312 BCE). In the “Guji liezhuan” only King Wei is quoted.

37 *Shiji* 126.3200–3202. Jester Meng is not found in any previous texts, even in those which record the deeds of the other historical characters here presented (Sunshu Ao, the King Zhuang etc).

38 Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 says that from the reign of King Zhuang of Chu to that of King Wei of Qi, 271 years had passed; see Takigawa 1999, 5036.

39 Han Zhaoqi (2009, 6150, n. 3, 6151) quotes Qian Mu, who explains this issue showing five examples. According to him, Sima Qian consciously in one anecdote of the “Guji liezhuan” used a character of the time of the first Zhuang, Sunshu Ao, and at the same time placed the story at the time of the second king Zhuang.

40 Later in the narration the historian records that Jester Zhan lived “more than two hundred years” after Jester Meng (*Shiji* 126.3202). Cui Shi 崔適 (cited in Takigawa 1999, 5041) says that, according to what recorded previously in the chapter, Zhan lived three hundred and seventy eight years after Meng. If we take into consideration what Han Zhaoqi suggested, King Zhuang as King Qixiang, (298 BCE), seventy-seven years passed; neither date coincides with the

Very much like the previous protagonist, Jester Meng is introduced as a person with only a few words. He was very tall (eight *chi*, around 184 cm) and, like Chunyu Kun, “a good debater” (*duobian* 多辯). We know, then, that the two men shared the ability of eloquence. The historian adds “he often remonstrated by indirection (*fengjian* 諷諫) speaking and making [the listener] laugh (*tanxiao* 談笑).” While Chunyu Kun used his ability in diplomatic missions, Jester Meng helped the state he served by giving advice to the ruler. The exact term used to indicate Jester Meng’s performance is “remonstrating by indirection” (*fengjian*), a kind of speech which leads the addressee to the point in a subtle way. How he accomplished that is immediately anticipated: making the listener laugh. The “humorous” feature of his speeches will mark the anecdotes, and will be a key aspect of this chapter.

The last character is another jester, Jester Zhan 優旃, who served at the court of the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 247–210) and his son.⁴¹ He is the only real dwarf among the three central protagonists. Regarding his rhetorical abilities the historian states that he “was good at making jokes” (*shan wei xiaoyan* 善為笑言); hence, like the other jester, he was able to make the listener laugh, and his speeches “were in accordance with the Great Dao’s [teachings]” (*he yu da dao* 合於大道). Han Zhaoqi is right in identifying in this last phrase a deep connection between the content of the jester’s speeches and the reference about the *Six Disciplines* contained in the prologue of this chapter.⁴² The speeches of the key character, once again, under a playful surface hide important aims and meanings.

Each character in this chapter is introduced through two or more brief anecdotes, in which their speeches figure prominently; they may all be regarded as cases of indirect remonstrance. The protagonists advise their sovereigns on appropriate behaviour regarding political matters and ritual propriety, but in order to achieve a positive result they do not openly express their opinion or critique. In their speeches, they make use of tools of diversion to engage (by riddle), to please (by rhymed verse), to surprise (by quick wits), and entertain (by humour) the listener and thus subtly (*wei* 微) guide him to the right behaviour. Chunyu Kun by a riddle awakes his lord from a licentious life, saving the destiny of the state of Qi,⁴³ by retelling a humorous anecdote, he advises on a proper gift to exchange in diplomatic affairs,⁴⁴ and by a rhymed speech in *fu* 賦 form, he warns against excessive behaviour.⁴⁵ Jester Meng by a sarcastic and vividly argued answer, advises on a proper burial for the

historian’s indication.

41 *Shiji* 126.3202–3203. This character, as Jester Meng, does not appear in any previous texts. The historian introducing him, again shows carelessness regarding the accuracy of historical details, see the note above.

42 Han Zhaoqi 2009, 6156, n. 2.

43 *Shiji* 126.3197.

44 *Shiji* 126.3198.

45 *Shiji* 126.3199.

king's beloved horse;⁴⁶ by staging a performance worthy of an actor and chanting rhymed verse, he also succeeds in granting the son of an upright minister a fief.⁴⁷ Jester Zhan instead, by a clever trick, establishes two shifts of work for the guards to make them rest;⁴⁸ by a sarcastic quick wit, he dissuades the king from enlarging his imperial park and instead encourages him to proceed in securing the state's borders;⁴⁹ and finally, by another sarcastic remark, he prevents the waste of the state's resources by dissuading the king from having the city walls lacquered.⁵⁰

The final appraisal briefly sums up the content of the chapter, by mentioning one accomplishment for each protagonist, and the historian reveals his positive judgments towards these characters ("Isn't that also great!" *qi bu yi wei zai* 豈不亦偉哉).⁵¹

The anecdotes' structures: tales of indirect remonstrance

As far as the narratives of these tales are concerned, Sima Qian, in compiling these anecdotes, followed the tradition of tales about remonstrance recorded in (late) Warring States texts such as *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, *Guanzi* 管子, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and those political speeches collected later in *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策. David Schaberg has devoted a major part of his research to the analysis of narrative strategies and structures of remonstrance tales. The common patterns he identified in several anecdotes of indirect remonstrance⁵² can also be found in the stories recorded in this chapter. Each anecdote can be divided into five sequences, a fact which suggests that the narrative patterns were consciously constructed. The five sequences are: 1) At the beginning, we have a ruler who behaves contrarily to ritual propriety and indulges in selfish behaviour; 2) The remonstrator, here each of the three protagonists, pretends to entertain his lord with some sort of word play (riddle, poetry, etc.); 3) The performance of the remonstrant -entertainer engages the ruler in "a game of decoding", in which he has to grasp the meaning underlying the protagonist's speech; 4) The ruler uncovers the critique hidden behind the words (when this happens, if he laughs, this is the sign that he has understood the real meaning of the

46 *Shiji* 126.3200.

47 *Shiji* 126.3201–3202.

48 *Shiji* 126.3202.

49 *Shiji* 126.3202–3203.

50 *Shiji* 126.3203.

51 *Shiji* 126.3203.

52 Schaberg 2005b, 197. Regarding tales of indirect critique, he states that during the Warring States period they were seldom recorded and the speeches were performed by those who occupied an inferior position at court; "by Liu Xiang's time, however, indirect critique had a place within an established formal typology of remonstrances;" (Schaberg 2005b, 201). See also Schaberg 2001.

remonstrant's speech); 5) The ruler is transformed and corrects his wrong behaviour or dismisses ideas that could damage his subjects.

A similar pattern can be identified in the stories about the protagonists of *Shiji* chapter 126 of which hereafter three examples will be adduced. The first anecdote recorded by Sima Qian is centred around the speech of Chunyu Kun, the protagonist, and runs as follows:

齊威王之時喜隱，好為淫樂長夜之飲，沈湎不治，委政卿大夫。百官荒亂，諸侯并侵，國且危亡，在於旦暮，左右莫敢諫。淳于髡說之以隱曰：“國中有大鳥，止王之庭，三年不蜚又不鳴，不知此鳥何也？”王曰：“此鳥不飛則已，一飛沖天；不鳴則已，一鳴驚人。”於是乃朝諸縣令長七十二人，賞一人，誅一人，奮兵而出。諸侯振驚，皆還齊侵地。威行三十六年。語在田完世家中。

King Wei of Qi (378–320 BCE)⁵³ liked riddles and was so given up to pleasure that he [often] spent the whole night drinking. He was so intoxicated by alcohol that he was not able to govern and had to entrust the affairs of state to his ministers. All the officials indulged in licentious attitudes and the feudal lords invaded [the state]. The state [of Qi] was in imminent danger of destruction, yet, from morning to evening, none of his courtiers dared to remonstrate. [Then] Chunyu Kun [tried to] persuade⁵⁴ the king with a riddle: "In the kingdom there is a big bird. It has alighted on the royal court. For three years it has neither spread its wings nor cried out. Do you know why it is doing it?"⁵⁵ The king replied: "This bird may not have flown yet, once it does, it will soar into the sky. It may not have cried out yet, but once it does, it will astound everyone." Then he summoned the magistrates of all seventy-two prefectures to the court, rewarded one, punished another, and led out his army. The feudal lords were alarmed and returned to Qi the land that they had overrun. King Wei ruled for thirty-six years, as is recorded in the chapter devoted to the Hereditary House of Tian Jingzhong.⁵⁶

At its beginning, the anecdote presents a situation in which the ruler indulges in wrong behaviour. The King Wei of Qi is, in fact, totally committed to licentiousness (sequence 1). Chunyu Kun is the only courtier who dares to remonstrate (*jian* 諫),

53 Guang Shaokui (2004, 16) says that at this time Chunyu Kun was already a member of the Jixia Academy.

54 Here the character *shui/shuo* 說 has to be read as *shui* (to persuade).

55 This story with the riddle is quite identical to that found in the *Shiji*'s "Hereditary House of Chu" 楚世家 but here the protagonist is Wu Ju 伍舉 not Chunyu Kun and the King is King Zhuang of Chu, *Shiji* 40. 1700. For further information see Takigawa, 1999, 5033. This riddle appears also in the *Hanfeizi* at the "Yulao" 喻老 chapter (story n. 19) *HFZ* 8/21. 973. In Liu Xiang's 劉向 *Xinxu* 新序 2.71–72 ("Zashi'er" 雜事二), Chunyu Kun asks Zou Ji 鄒忌 three more riddles. See also *Lishi chungqiu* 18/102.6, translated by Schaberg (2005b, 204f).

56 *Shiji* 126.3197f. See *Shiji* 46 ("Tian Jing Zhong Wan shijia" 田敬仲完世家). Trans. based on Yang and Yang 2002, 323–324, with changes.

however, he does not openly criticize the ruler's behaviour. He decides to trick him. He knows that the king "likes riddles" (*xi yin* 喜隱), so pretending to entertain him with one of them, he actually uses the entertainment as a tool to remonstrate against his conduct (sequence 2). The king, at first unaware of Chunyu Kun's plan, listens to Chunyu's performance, trying to solve the riddle (sequence 3). King Wei then understands the covert critique (sequence 4). This passage is exemplified by the ruler's answer, which already shows his being awakened ("It may not have cried out yet, but once it does, it will astound everyone"). Thanks to the remonstrance, the ruler understands his error. He corrects himself and regains the control of the government, saving his state (sequence 5).

Jester Meng in one anecdote deals with a problem of ritual propriety. His king loved his horse so much that he gave it all kinds of luxuries it wished, and as a consequence of overfeeding it, the horse died. The king wished that the horse should be buried with the ritual befitting the funeral of a high rank official, which was clearly an improper act (sequence 1). Moreover, he ordered that anyone who would dare to criticize his decision should be put to death. Only Jester Meng dares to talk to the king. This is how the anecdote goes on:

優孟聞之，入殿門。仰天大哭。王驚而問其故。優孟曰：“馬者王之所愛也，以楚國堂堂之大，何求不得，而以大夫禮葬之，薄，請以人君禮葬之。”王曰：“何如？”對曰：“臣請以彫玉為棺，文梓為槨，楓樟豫章為題湊，發甲卒為穿墻，老弱負土，齊趙陪位於前，韓魏翼衛其后，廟食太牢，奉以萬戶之邑。諸侯聞之，皆知大王賤人而貴馬也。”王曰：“寡人之過一至此乎！為之柰何？”優孟曰：“請為大王六畜葬之。以壘窳為槨，銅歷為棺，齋以薑棗，薦以木蘭，祭以糴稻，衣以火光，葬之於人腹腸。”於是王乃使以馬屬太官，無令天下久聞也。

When Jester Meng heard about it, he went to the palace. He raised his eyes to Heaven and cried loudly. The king was surprised and asked him for the reason [of his crying]. Jester Meng said: "That horse was Your Majesty's favourite. With a great state like Chu, one can get anything done. However, to bury it with the rites befitting a high official is too ungenerous. Why don't you entomb it according to royal rites?" The king said: "How can it be done?" Meng replied: "Your minister suggests that the inner coffin has to be made of carved jade and the outer coffin made of the finest catalpa's wood, and the layers that have to protect the coffin might be made of cedar, sweetgum, camphor tree and other precious wood. Send armoured soldiers to excavate the coffin pit, while the old and weak will carry earth. Let the envoys from Qi and Zhao stay ahead co-presiding over the sacrificial rites, and the envoys of Han and Wei guard the back. Establish an ancestral temple,⁵⁷ sacrifice a *tailao*,⁵⁸ and institute a fief of ten thousand households to

57 To worship the deceased horse.

provide the offerings. [When] the feudal lords hear of this, they will know that Your Majesty despises men but cherishes horses." The king said: "Did I go this far? What can I do?" Jester Meng said: "I request Your Majesty to bury the horse like the other livestock.⁵⁹ Use the fireplace as its outer coffin and a bronze cauldron⁶⁰ as its inner coffin, present it with ginger and jujubes and give it magnolia barks. Offer a sacrifice of glutinous rice, caparison it with flames and bury it in men's bellies!" So the king gave the horse to the official in charge of the Palace food, and prevented the fact from being heard in the kingdom for long.⁶¹

Before talking, the jester introduces himself with a gesture "that will draw attention to his figure of speech";⁶² he "looks up to the sky and cries aloud" (*yangtian daku* 仰天大哭). After the speech it becomes clear that this gesture shows the jester's disagreement with the ruler's plan.⁶³ Then, Jester Meng stages a vivid description of the arrangement for a luxurious funeral ceremony for the horse (sequence 2). The king first hears the jester's plan and is, we can presume, amazed by the grandiose details presented; then gradually understands that there is another point in the jester's answer (sequence 3). The king's question ("Did I go this far?") is the sign he has understood the remonstrance (sequence 4). Then, following the jester's advice, he will abandon his former plan (sequence 5) and will feed his courtiers with the horse meat, which would be the proper conduct.

The last story with Jester Zhan, like all those concerning him in this chapter, is very brief, so its plot lacks narrative details. However, it also contains the five sequences. The story is recorded as follows:

二世立，又欲漆其城。優旃曰：“善。主上雖無言，臣固將請之。漆城雖於百姓愁費，然佳哉！漆城蕩蕩，寇來不能上。即欲就之，易為漆耳，顧難為蔭室。”於是二世笑之，以其故止。

When the Second Emperor (230–207 BCE) came to the throne, he decided to lacquer the walls [of his capital]. Jester Zhan said: "Splendid! If you had not ordered this, Your minister would have certainly proposed it. Lacquer the walls, although it will cause suffering and costs to people, but what a fine

58 The animals used in the *tailao* offering are an ox, a sheep and a pig.

59 *Liuchu* 六畜 are the six domestic animals: the horse, the ox, the sheep, the chicken, the dog and the pig.

60 The *Shiji Suoyin* (*Shiji* 126.3201, n. 5) says that *li* 歷 is equal to *li* 鬲, a type of cooking tripod.

61 *Shiji* 126.3200. Trans. loosely based on Yang and Yang 2002, 328–329 and on Schaberg (2005b, 211–212).

62 Schaberg 2005b, 214.

63 This gesture has a rhetorical meaning similar to the "looking up to the sky and laughing hard" (*yangtian daxiao* 仰天大笑) performed by Chunyu Kun when seeing the inappropriate gift prepared by the king for the purpose of asking help from other states; the second anecdote at *Shiji* 126.3198.

thing it will be! A lacquered wall is so bright and shiny that if enemies come, they will not be able to climb it. If you desire it, it will be done, [but] lacquering is easy, the only difficulty will be building a shelter large enough to dry it.” So the Second Emperor laughed at this [wit], and in consequence of this gave up [his idea].⁶⁴

This story starts with the Second Emperor of Qin planning to lacquer the city-wall, an action which is understood as a useless excess (sequence 1). Jester Zhan then, similarly to Jester Meng, pretends to agree with the Emperor’s plan and vividly describes its realisation (sequence 2). The Emperor first listens to his speech (sequence 3), then uncovers the critique. He laughs; this is the sign that he has understood the real meaning of the jester’s words (sequence 4). As Schaberg points out, the laugh marks the “moment of relief, when all obscurities are dispelled”.⁶⁵ This story ends, as the other two, with the ruler transformed by the remonstrant’s speech, as the Second Emperor dismisses his plan (sequence 5).

As far as all the speeches recorded in this chapter are concerned, some are embellished by two typical rhetoric devices: the riddle⁶⁶ and *fu*-like poetry.⁶⁷ As previously said, they both have the function of entertaining the listener and at the same time marking the quality of indirection. This would deserve further discussion, but I will here focus on the examples cited.

As far as the speeches of the two jesters are concerned, the remonstrants achieved their aim by engaging in argumentation by *reductio ad absurdum*.⁶⁸ First the jesters assume that the idea of their lord might well be put into practice; then they vividly describe the realisation of the assumption, showing that it leads to an absurd result (to cherish a horse more than the people in one case, and the

64 *Shiji* 126.3203. Trans. based on Yang and Yang 2002, 332, with changes.

65 Schaberg 2005b, 206.

66 *Shiji* 126.3197. Chunyu Kun’s ability to talk using *weiyán* 微言 (translated in Han Zhaoqi 2009, 3151, n. 62, as *yinyu* 隱語) is recorded in another anecdote in *Shiji* 46.1890. Here he dialogues with Zou Ji employing this tool. Ikeda Hideo 池田英雄 quotes Fang Bao’s 方苞 (1668–1749) statement that this anecdote is worthy to be recorded in the “Guji liezhuan” (as quoted in Han Zhaoqi 2009, 3151) The riddle as a tool for indirect persuasion is found in other anecdotes, see *Han Feizi* 6.799–800 and *Zhanguo ce* 8. 209.

67 *Shiji* 126.3199. Hu Shiyong (1980, 9) and Wang Yunxi (2002, 289f) both state that the remonstrance by which Chunyu Kun made the King of Qi stop drinking is a piece of *fu* poetry.

68 This particular feature was noticed by Qian Zhongshu (1979, 378). Arthur (2010, 147) defines *reductio ad absurdum* as: “The *reductio* is a way of refuting a proposition by showing that it leads to an absurdity, by *reducing it to absurdity*- hence the Latin name, which translates as “reduction to an absurdity”. Generally, of course, such a reduction cannot be achieved without enlisting the aid of the premises. But this very fact explains the rhetorical force of this style of arguing: you refute your opponent’s proposition by getting her agreement on a number of premises, supposing the proposition at issue, and then showing that together with those premises the supposition leads to an absurdity. Given those premises, therefore, the supposed proposition must be false.”

construction of an enormous drying shed for the lacquered walls in the other). In the end both arguments show that the ideas should not be realized. This last step is left to the King. The remonstrants lead their lord along the line of reasoning, but they do not comment on or make manifest the result of their argumentation; they arrange the discourse so that the last step, the implausibility of the idea, must be self evident making the king able to understand it by himself. This kind of argumentation is considered very effective,⁶⁹ especially “because of its supposed irony and use of ridicule or humour”.⁷⁰ This brings us back to the meaning of *guji* 滑稽.

The meaning of *guji* in the Historian’s view

The *Shiji suoyin* commentary says: “*Gu* means *luan* 亂, ‘chaotic’, and *ji* 稽 has the same meaning. The men who can speak and argue quickly, regard as *fei* 非 (“it is not so”) what is *shi* 是 (“it is so”), and explain *shi* as if it were *fei*. Their speeches can confuse what is different and what is the same (*yi tong* 異同).”⁷¹ This explanation identifies *guji* with a language ability, the skill to speak fluently and be able to play with words, to turn upside down what is regarded as common sense. To explain in more detail, the commentary cites a passage of the “Buju” 卜居 (Divining over position) poem from *Chuci* 楚辭 in which the term *guji* occurs.⁷² It says: “[I]s it better to be incorruptible and upright and keep oneself pure], or be slippery (*tuti* 突梯) and smooth (*guji*) like the lard and the leather?”⁷³ In the poem, in which the lyric voice of Qu Yuan is questioning the attitude one should adopt towards life, the words *tuti* and *guji* have a similar pejorative meaning of “being slick and sly”,⁷⁴ and to be able to find a place in society and follow convention.⁷⁵ In this passage there is no direct

69 Arthur 2010, 156.

70 Jansen 2007, 2.

71 *Shiji* 126.3197, *Shiji* 71.2307, n. 2. This explanation is very similar to a passage found in *Xunzi* 1/2.24 (“Xiu shen” 修身), trans. Knoblock, 1988, 153: 是是非非謂之知; 非是是非謂之愚。 “To recognize as right (*shi*) what is right and as wrong (*fei*) what is wrong is called ‘wisdom.’ To regard as wrong what is right and as right what is wrong is called ‘stupidity.’” As Knoblock notices, this is also similar to the “tong yi” 同異 (Identity and Difference) paradox of the Logicians (Hui Shi 惠施, 380–305 BCE, and Gongsun Long 公孫龍, ca. 325–250 BCE). In the *Xunzi*, it refers to “treating different entities as though they were identical and identical entities as though they were different” (Knoblock, 1988, 150).

72 *Shiji* 126.3203.

73 Zhou Binggao 2003, 231; Zhang Yushan 1986, 236. Trans. Knechtges 1970–1971, 83, n. 17. Hawkes (1959, 205) translates as: “Is it better to be honest and incorruptible and to keep oneself pure, or to be accommodating and slippery, to be compliant as lard and leather?”

74 In particular *tuti*, here employed to mean “be able to understand people’s mind and act accordingly”.

75 This last meaning corresponds in particular to *guji*. See Zhou Binggao 2003, 234, n. 21; Zhang Yushan 1986, 237, n. 5.

reference to language, but we may assume that the “slick and tactful”-behaviour can be reflected also in the way someone talks. Then, the commentary records the gloss of Cui Hao 崔浩 (381–450 CE), who deduces the term *guji* from a drinking vessel: “*Guji* is a drinking vessel, it pours wine all day without stop, like the speech of the jesters (*paiyou* 俳優) that comes out and becomes a literary piece; the words are inexhaustible (*bu qiongjie* 不窮竭), slippery as the wine that endlessly flows out of it.”⁷⁶ In the image of the wine that constantly flows we find an allusion to the jester’s language skill, to his being able to talk endlessly. At last, Yao Cha’s 姚察 (533–606 CE) comment acknowledges the “humoristic” features of the word *guji* and records: “The speech is composed of witticism and is smooth; its clever remarks come out very quickly, so it is said ‘*guji*’.”⁷⁷

It is important to point out that the historian called his chapter *guji* but he did not explain what the word meant. He constructed the anecdotes such that the meaning is self evident. As we can understand from the excerpts provided, even if two of the three protagonists are jesters, Sima Qian in reality had no interest in providing exact and detailed historical data on the “jesters” included in this chapter, neither did he want to provide a definition of the “*guji*” as a distinct social category. He dedicated this chapter to those people who, according to him, shared the *guji* quality, understood as the capacity to express an indirect remonstrance (*fengjian* 諷諫) by entertaining speech and behaviour.⁷⁸ Their language skill involves also the ability to be “humorous”, that is, pleasant to listen to, and able to make the listener smile or laugh. However, it is undeniable that the words expressed by Chunyu Kun and the jesters are nearer to a harangue than to a *bon mot*. This makes evident that the “*guji*” – a humorous feature characteristic of the protagonists’ speeches is understood as a rhetorical tool for persuasion.

Martin Kern has pointed out that “Early China differs decidedly from the Mediterranean classical period. Nobody in pre-Han or Han China wrote anything even remotely comparable to Aristotle’s *Peri poiētikēs* (On the art of poetry) [...] or Cicero’s *De Oratore* (On the Orator).”⁷⁹ This is an interesting point to reflect on.

As far as *De Oratore* is concerned, Cicero, in his discussion on the ability required for a good orator, regarded speaking with “humour” as an essential skill. He tried to delineate a systematic analysis of this issue (*De Oratore* II. 216–290) dividing it in *cavillatio* (“humorous or sarcastic tone which pervades all one says on a particular occasion”), and *dicacitas* (“witticism proper, which are sudden, sharp,

76 *Shiji* 71.2307 n. 2. This explanation is also briefly given in *Shiji* 126.3203 n. 2, added by a reference to Yang Xiong’s “*Jiufu*” 酒賦 (Rhapsody on wine): 醜夷滑稽，腹大如壺，盡日盛酒。 “The leather bag is slippery (*guji*), its belly is big like a kettle, all day filled with wine [...] (This *fu* is preserved in *juan* 72 of the *Yiwen leiju* 72.1248; cf. the translation by Knechtges 1970–1971, 93).

77 *Shiji* 126.3203f, n. 2. For a more detailed analysis of this term see Pokora 1972.

78 Kern (2003a, 308), citing this *Shiji* chapter, translates “*guji*” as “eloquent wits”.

79 Kern 2003a, 389, n. 15.

and brief”).⁸⁰ He, then, divided his explanation into five points: 1. “the nature of humour”, 2. “its source”, 3. “whether willingness to produce it becomes an orator”, 4. “the limits of his licence” and 5. “the classification of things laughable”.⁸¹ I would like to quote extensively the discussion of the third point. Cicero states as follows:

It clearly becomes an orator to raise laughter, and this on various grounds; for instance, merriment naturally wins goodwill for its author; and everyone admires acuteness, which is often concentrated in a single word, uttered generally in repelling, though sometimes in delivering an attack; and it shatters or obstructs or makes light of an opponent, or alarms or repulses him; and it shows the orator himself to be a man of finish, accomplishment and taste; and, best of all, it relieves dullness and tones down austerity, and, by a jest or a laugh, often dispels distasteful suggestions not easily weakened by reasoning.⁸²

Edward Rabbie paraphrased this passage explaining that what Cicero meant is that “to arouse laughter indeed befits the orator. [...] laughter secures him benevolence and admiration; it defeats the opponent; it leaves the audience with good impression; and above all, it takes away seriousness and sternness, and refutes things that cannot easily be disproven by means of actual arguments.”⁸³

Regarding the speeches recorded in the “*Guji liezhuan*”, Timoteus Pokora has pointed out that the protagonists of this chapter used “wit, irony and satire in such a way as to achieve their aim without running into difficulties and eventual punishment.”⁸⁴ I agree on this, and this assertion is actually consistent with Cicero’s

80 *De Oratore* II. 218: *Etenim cum duo genera sint facetiarum, alterum aequabiliter in omni sermone fusum, alterum peracutum et breve, illa a veteribus superior cavillatio, haec altera dicacitas nominata est.* Grube 1965, 187.

81 *De Oratore* II. 235: *unum, quid sit; alterum, unde sit; tertium sitne oratoris, velle risum movere; quartum, quatenus; quintum, quae sint genera riduli.* Trans. Sutton and Rackman, 1942, 373.

82 *De Oratore* II. 236: *Est autem, ut ad illud tertium veniam, est plane oratoris movere risum; vel quod ipsa hilaritas benevolentiam conciliat ei, per quem excitata est; vel quod admirantur omnes acumen uno saepe in verbo positum maxime respondentis, nonnunquam etiam lacessentis; vel quod frangit adversarium, quod impedit, quod elevat, quod deterret, quod refutat: vel quod ipsum oratorem politum esse hominem significat, quod eruditum, quod urbanum, maximeque quod tristitiam ac severitatem mitigat et relaxat, odiosasque res saepe, quas argumentis dilui non facile est, ioco riusque dissolvit.* Trans. Sutton and Rackman 1942, 373, 375.

83 Rabbie 2007, 210.

84 Pokora 1973, 59. On the same page he states: “The ku-chi proposed serious criticism of the sovereign’s conduct and policy, using irony to present their remonstrances; but they did not have the pure jester’s licence – they were by no means sure of escaping punishment if they offended their ruler.” As far as the “jester’s licence” is concerned, this concept is exemplified in the answer of Jester Shi 優施 to Li Ji 驪姬 (?–651 BCE), the concubine of Duke Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676–651 BCE), as it appears in the *Guoyu* 國語 (“*Jinyu* er” 晉語二 section, 300). Here the

explanation of why an orator has to employ humour in the arrangement of his speech. Humour has the positive effect of bringing relief to the audience; in this way it becomes easier to convey a message, even if it is a remonstrance. Employing humour makes it easier for the addressee to bear the critique embedded in the speech.⁸⁵ This tool, then, makes the speech effective in a subtle way, because it does not express its message directly but instead plays with the disposition and the feelings⁸⁶ of the audience.

Martin Kern adds that “one reason why there are no major early Chinese works on topics like rhetoric, grammar, and poetics might be that early China did not develop the professionalization and institutionalization of scholar-teachers, their disciplines, and their public arena in the way ancient Greece and Rome did.”⁸⁷ This may be true; Cicero wrote his work out of his experience as an orator. However, the *Shiji* anecdotes, like the remonstrance tales recorded in Warring States-Former Han texts, could provide testimony of an effort to transform into a written and idealized form what was originally an oral practice.⁸⁸ The rules for a well-arranged and effective speech, nevertheless, were never systematized in a text.

The protagonists of this chapter use speeches with the quality of *guji* then, because they were effective, but their aim was not only to win an argument, but also to elucidate a moral issue and move the decision of their ruler in the right direction.⁸⁹ According to this chapter, eloquence and language ability have to be

jester gives advice to Li Ji on how to eliminate Li Ke 里克 (?–650 BCE); at one point he states: 我優也，言無郵 (“I am a jester, for me no words are excessive”), which means that he has the license to speak without incurring punishment; see Qian Zhongshu 1979, 378. The rebellion and plot of Li Ji is recorded also in the *Zuozhuan* at the fourth year of Duke Xi 僖 of Lu (295–300); however, the character of Jester Shi is absent. He appears again only in the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (327f) but as a servant of the state of Qi. Here, the people of Qi made him dance under Duke Ding of Lu’s banner, to make fun of the Duke, and Kongzi suggested putting the jester to death for this insult (the tenth year of Duke Ding of Lu). This is the only incident in which the name of this jester is cited. This last anecdote is quoted again in Lu Jia’s 陸賈 *Xinyu* 新語 (New Speeches) (5.79). Here, though, the name of the jester is Zhan 旃, the same name as Sima Qian’s jester. Kang Qinglian (2002), echoing the title of one chapter of Liu Xiang’s *Shuiyuan*, the “Shui nan” 說難 (Difficulties of the Persuasion), defines the speeches of the protagonists of this chapter as *shui bu nan* 說不難, “persuasions which do not create difficulties”, because the remonstrants are never punished.

85 *De Oratore* 1. 143 *etiam illa cognoram, et acceptaram, antequam de re diceremus, initio conciliandos eorum esse animos, qui audirent*; “I had also been taught that, before speaking on the issue, we must first secure the goodwill of our audience.” Trans. Sutton and Rackman, 1942, 99.

86 See Rabbie’s (2007, 210) connection of humour with emotions.

87 Kern, 2003a, 389, n. 15.

88 Martin Kern (2003c, 276) remarks (on the dialogues in the *Zuozhuan*) saying: “This is not to suggest that these are orally composed or performed texts; but, like the speeches in historiographic narrative, they all are certainly rhetorical representations of speech.”

89 This is what differentiates these speeches from mere examples of eloquence, which could be

paired with high moral values. The “humorous” quality is only a feature of their speeches, in which the principal aim is not to entertain but to educate, and their words are endowed with the capacity to bring about morally good action, because the speakers of the *guji* words “practised the Way”.⁹⁰

Chu Shaosun’s addition: a different way to understand the term *guji*.

This chapter contains a long section added by Chu Shaosun.⁹¹ He makes visible his addition by presenting himself and explaining why he adds passages to the chapter. In his self presentation Chu seems to show an understanding of the term *guji* which differs from that of Sima Qian; he says:

臣幸得以經術為郎，而好讀外家傳語。竊不遜讓，復作故事滑稽之語六章，編之於左。可以覽觀揚意，以示後世好事者讀之，以游心駭耳。

Your servant has had the luck to become a courtier because of his training in the canonical learning, and he liked to read the transmitted words of other traditions outside court. He has allowed himself not to hold [his views] back and, in addition, wrote six *zhang* of *guji* stories, adding them on the left (that is after those written by the Grand Historian). It is possible to read them to stimulate the feelings and [to keep them] in order to make those in later generations who like facts and events read them, and enjoy them.⁹²

This paragraph could be understood as a statement on the reading paradigm of Chu’s additional tales: they serve to “stimulate the feelings” (*yang yi* 揚意) and possibly as a source of reading pleasure; literally to read them “moves the hearts and stirs the ears” (*you xin hai er* 游心駭耳).⁹³ It seems that Chu Shaosun recorded these stories primarily for the amusing narrative they provide, leaving their possible didactic aims

easily come to mind when talking about language strategies. Already in the *Lunyu* we find harsh critique against those who play with words confusing the meaning of *shi* and *fei* (a reference to the Logicians and other debaters). One passage (*Lunyu* 17/18.187: 惡利口之覆邦家者) says that the sharp speakers can “overturn families and states”. See also *Lunyu* 15/11.164. It is interesting to note that Cicero also expressed a criticism against those *officinae rhetorum* who taught the *ars rhetorica* without a training in moral philosophy and other topics (see Grube 1967, 170f).

90 In his concluding appraisal to the “Guji liezhuan” chapter the historian says: 不流世俗，不爭執利，上下無所凝滯，人莫之害，以道之用。作滑稽列傳第六十六。“(Those people) were not dragged down by the customs of their times, nor did they fight for power or profit. There were never misunderstandings with [their] superiors and inferiors. They were not harmed by any man since they practised the Way; so I wrote the “Guji liezhuan” (*Shiji* 130.3318). Trans. based on Pokora 1973, 54.

91 *Shiji* 126.3203–3210. For more information about this author see Schaab-Hanke 2003–2004.

92 *Shiji* 126.3203.

93 Pokora 1973, 54.

in the background. These didactic aims are implied by *yang yi*, which could also be translated as “to broaden one’s knowledge”, “to express ideas”⁹⁴ or “to express one’s will”;⁹⁵ in this case, since these stories can also entertain the readers, the mention of their possible didactic use reminds one of the way the presence of the “Xiaoshuo jia” 小說家 (Lesser sayings) category is justified in the bibliographical chapters: because even if superficial, *xiaoshuo* have something “worth looking at” (*keguan* 可觀).⁹⁶ The stories recorded by Chu, in fact, are very heterogeneous and do not function as tales of remonstrance. They are more focused on the clever wits and funny remarks of the protagonists.⁹⁷ These, however, are primarily an expression of their acumen, and moral aims are seldom involved.⁹⁸ Chunyu Kun, whom Sima Qian presented as successfully remonstrating with his ruler, appears again in one anecdote, but Chu Shaosun presents him differently, as an able talker whose language ability is used only to acquire personal profit.⁹⁹ Even if Chu Shaosun tried to fill the gap of historical records regarding Han times (the period omitted by the *taishigong*) adding stories which occurred during this period,¹⁰⁰ his anecdotes are not presented in chronological order. They neglect the diachronic arrangement of the events that the historian often tries to offer, appearing more as a collection of stories than as a record of events according to the natural chronological order.

Consider now the previously quoted explanation of *guji* given by Cui Hao, who identified it as a drinking vessel, and that of Yao Cha, who remarked on the “humorous” and clever features of the *guji* speeches. The reading which sees in the image of the wine that constantly flows an allusion of being able to talk endlessly and including “humorous” features in the talk, fits better with the stories added by Chu Shaosun. As Pokora has suggested,¹⁰¹ the stories presented by Chu are written down mainly to please the reader. *Guji*, then, here marks their entertaining quality.

94 Han Zhaoqi 2009, 6160, n. 4

95 Yang Yanqi 2001, 4332.

96 *Hanshu* 30.1745, *Suishu* 34. 1012.

97 The protagonists are mostly from Former Han times, in particular recorded as living under Emperor Wu’s reign: Attendant Guo 郭舍人, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (c. 161–86 BCE), Master Dongguo 東郭先生, Lady Wang 王夫人, and Master Wang 王先生. Only two are from the Warring States period: Chunyu Kun and Ximen Bao.

98 Pokora 1973, 54, 57. Remarkd also by Ruan Zhisheng (1996, 366) and by Schaberg (2005b, 200). However this does not mean that Chu Shaosun is not interested in didactic aims at all. In the chapter 20, for instance, he clearly states that his purpose is to add information about Han history, and thus provide a more precise picture of the historical events in order to highlight those features which could lead the reader to understand a lesson; see *Shiji* 20.1059.

99 *Shiji* 126.3209f. This story reworks the literary motif of an envoy who is sent by his lord to another state bringing a precious bird as a gift.

100 In particular, he recorded several anecdotes concerning a well known figure of Emperor Wu’s court (*Shiji* 126.3204–3208).

101 Pokora 1973, 54.

The question of the authorship of the “Guji liezhuan”

Scholars have long discussed the authorship of the *Shiji*, trying to identify which chapters Sima Qian wrote, which parts were probably drafted by Sima Tan¹⁰² and which by later authors.¹⁰³ However, the debate is still open and maybe a definite answer will never be provided.

As far as “Guji liezhuan” is concerned, the authorship of the whole chapter has been questioned. Derk Bodde¹⁰⁴ has stated that the first part of the chapter was *not* written by Sima Qian but by later interpolators, citing as a proof the appearance of the taboo character *tan* 談, the given name of Sima Qian’s father. In the chapter, the character is in fact found four times, three of which appear in the part supposedly written by Sima Qian. However, some Chinese scholars pinpoint the same issue, but instead ascribe those chapters which contain the character *tan* to Sima Tan.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, several specialists in the *Shiji*’s textual exegesis never questioned Sima Qian’s authorship of the first part of the chapter.¹⁰⁶ It is also important to point out that already Hu Shi (in *Xi Hanren lin wen bu hu hao* 西漢人臨文不諱考) and Chen Yuan (in *Shi hui juli* 史諱舉例) have stated that during Han times the rules about taboo characters were not applied so strictly; hence, an analysis of the authorship which is based only on the discussion of taboo characters is not sufficient to provide any reliable proof.¹⁰⁷ However, highlighting some features of the chapter, and

102 See An Pingqiu 2005, 434f (“Sima Tan zuo shi” 司馬談作史).

103 See An Pingqiu 2005, 451–464 (“*Shiji* canque yu xu bu cuan fu” 史記殘缺與續補竄附).

104 Bodde 1967, 110f.

105 See the analysis made by Li Changzhi 李長之, quoted in An Pingqiu 2005, 438–441.

106 Zhang Dake questioned some parts of the *Shiji* in his *Shiji wenxian yu bianzuanxue yanjiu* 史記文獻與編纂學研究 (that has been incorporated in the collectanea “*Shiji yanjiu jicheng*” 史記研究集成 edited by him), but never raised doubts about this chapter, see Zhang Dake 2005, 108–137; see also An Pingqiu 2005, 451–463.

107 As quoted in An Pingqiu 2005, 441. In the *Fayan* 法言 (Exemplary Sayings), written by the Han dynasty scholar Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18 CE), we find a phrase referring to Dongfang Shuo (a character that appears in Chu’s addition) which says: “the humorous men have the way of speaking and behaving characteristic of the humorous men (*tan yan tan xin* 談言談行);” *Fayan* 11B/17.483. Chinese trans. Li and Hong 2003, 180. The phrase *tan yan tan xin* 談言談行 is glossed as *hui yan hui xing* 談言談行 (literally: funny words funny behaviour), because in the commentary Chen Zhongfu says that *tan* 談, in reality, is a mistake for *hui* 諷; *Fayan* 11B/17.486. Then he says that the character *tan* found in the *Shiji*’s “Guji liezhuan” could be the same case of erroneous transmission; *Fayan* 11B/17.486. It is true that all three occurrences would still make sense with the two characters exchanged. The first occurrence is at the beginning of the chapter (*Shiji* 126.3197): 談言微中，亦可以解紛。“Even the speeches may subtly point out correct points and serve to settle disputes.” This could be emended to: “Even humorous speeches may subtly point out correct points and serve to settle disputes” (“humorous” must always been understood in a broad sense). Another one regards the second protagonist of the chapter (*Shiji* 126.3200): 多辯，常以談笑諷諫。“[Jester Meng] was good in arguments and often indirectly admonished the king by speaking in a funny way”. This would

reviewing some features previously described, it is perhaps possible to identify some points which could say something about the author.

The first part of the chapter generally ascribed to Sima Qian shows an internal coherence which enables us to suppose a single authorial voice. The protagonists are consciously depicted in a particular way (coherence of descriptive features: physical features, language abilities etc). All the anecdotes here also show a coherent narrative structure, identified in tales of indirect remonstrance, a narrative structure widely found in former Han times textual material belonging to a previous anecdotic tradition that Sima Qian is acknowledged to follow.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, considering this chapter in the context of the whole *Shiji*, the introductory words recorded in the preface demonstrate a point of view consistent with that expressed in the *taishigong* section of the autobiographical last chapter, chapter 130 of the *Shiji*, and Chunyu Kun's description as a worthy figure is also coherent with his brief biography recorded in chapter 74.

Several scholars, actually, have read in these small narratives a direct reference to Sima Qian's own life time. The Qing scholar Bo Xiu 柏秀 in his *Shu Shiji guji zhuan hou* 書史記滑稽傳後 read the account of the brave and worthy advisers depicted in the anecdotes as a criticism aimed at awakening Emperor Wu from his blind faith in tales of *fangshi* 方士 about immortals.¹⁰⁹ Modern scholars too see references to Sima's contemporary situation, perceiving in these characters, who honestly express their advice not to be afraid of punishment, a subtle polemic against those *ru* 儒 (like Gongsun Hong 公孫弘, 200–121 BCE)¹¹⁰ who in their suggestions only followed Emperor Wu's mood.¹¹¹ It is well known that Sima Qian in 99 BCE received a harsh punishment because he spoke in defense of general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE) who was defeated after a campaign against the Xiongnu.¹¹²

be: “[Jester Meng] was good in arguments and often, being humorous, indirectly admonished the king.” The third, and last, occurrence by Sima Qian is written (*Shiji* 126.3201): 即為孫叔敖衣冠，振掌談語。“[Jester Meng] wore Sunshu Ao's clothes and hat, and clapping his hands [began to] talk (he is trying to imitate Sunshu's way of speaking).” This would be transformed into: “[Jester Meng] wore Sunshu Ao's clothes and hat, and clapping his hands joked with words.”

108 See Kern 2003b, 289.

109 Collected in Jiang Biao's 江標 *Yuanxiang tong yi lu* 沅湘通藝錄, *juan* 2, as quoted in Yang Yanqi 1986, 721f (also in Yang Yanqi 2005, 598).

110 Sima Qian, in his work, often uses the pattern of portraying figures of the past in an exemplary way; on the contrary, regarding the people of his time, especially those scholars summoned by the Emperor Wu of Han, he does not refrain from harsh criticism. One example is the way in which he describes Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (d. 121 BCE), a prominent *ru*-scholar who served as prime minister (*chengxiang* 丞相) under Emperor Wu. In spite of his fame as an erudite, Sima Qian describes him as a two-faced man; see *Shiji* 112.2951. See also Shankman and Durrant 2000, 131–132.

111 See the analysis of this chapter in Han Zhaoqi 2005, 361–363, in particular 362.

112 *Hanshu* 62.

Before this happened, his beloved father had probably died of humiliation after being left aside by Emperor Wu during the celebration of the *feng* and *shan* ancestral sacrifices.¹¹³ It should be pointed out that in chapter 126 the historian did not include in his narration facts about his own times. He presents us with tales of different figures from pre-Han times which may also be read as exempla of worthy relations between a lord and his subjects (be they jesters or *shi*); we may assume that such relationships did not exist during the Han dynasty.¹¹⁴ Following the reading which sees in some parts of the *Shiji* a direct reference to Sima Qian's own experience and polemical instances regarding Emperor Wu's court,¹¹⁵ it is possible to speculate that Sima Qian conceived the “Guji liezhuan” chapter as a piece of indirect remonstrance itself. Chunyu Kun and the other protagonists used their rhetorical skills in order to influence the conduct of their kings, analogously Sima Qian, recording the deeds of those men who dared to criticise their ruler, may be sending a message to Emperor Wu, showing the ideal kind of relationship between the lord and his ministers.

Even though the authorship of this chapter has been at times questioned for its evident historical errors,¹¹⁶ it should be pointed out that factual accuracy is not always the most important feature in traditional Chinese historical and anecdotal writings.¹¹⁷ This chapter is not the only one that has been reproached with inaccuracy. For example, in the “Hereditary House of Duke Zhou of Lu” 魯周公世家¹¹⁸ the historian added stories regarding the cultural hero Duke of Zhou 周公 diverging from the facts transmitted by the orthodox tradition; in particular, a dialogue between the Duke and his son Bo Qin 伯禽, and events regarding King Cheng 成王 once he grew up.¹¹⁹ For this Sima Qian was criticized by later commentators, accused of using unreliable sources and petty talks.¹²⁰ As Cao Weiguo has remarked, the historian added these accounts because they served to develop and highlight the worthy character of the Duke.¹²¹ David Schaberg has

113 *Shiji* 130. 3295.

114 Already Pokora (1973, 56) pointed out this issue: “[Sima Qian] did not find under the Han any personality who, in his opinion, would have been able to offer bold criticism under the existing strong political and ideological pressures.”

115 It is the thesis embraced in Durrant's *The Cloudy Mirror* (1995) and reaffirmed in Shankman and Durrant 2000, 125–137.

116 Huang Shirong's 黃世榮 (1848–1911) doubts are recorded in his *Weitui juwen waiji* 味退居文外集 (quoted in Yang Yanqi 1986, 721f and in Yang Yanqi 2005, 597f); Bodde 1967, 110.

117 As Schaberg (2005b, 202) states: “In indirect remonstrance, the striking figure of critique matters more than the historical particulars that are supposed to have triggered it;” see also Schaberg 2005b, 203–204. See Schaberg's discussion of *Zuozhuan*'s tales (Schaberg 2005a, 177–180).

118 *Shiji* 33.1515–1548.

119 *Shiji* 33.1518 and 1520, trans. Nienhauser 1994a, 134f and 136–138.

120 See the comments of Wang Ruoxu 王若虛 (1174–1243) and Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1745–1819) as quoted and discussed in Nienhauser 1994a, 163.

121 Nienhauser 1994a, 164.

pointed out that tales of indirect remonstrance were a creation of the *shi* (men of service) to express their identity in relation to the imperial power.¹²² Accordingly, the deviations from orthodox records, new details about characters never found in previous texts, and additional events contrasting with already existing material found in the *Shiji* could be consciously created by the historian because functional to the message he wanted to convey.¹²³ Given these considerations, hence, even if there are not undeniable proofs to ascribe the authorship to Sima Qian, according to what was said above, it is quite plausible to suggest Sima Qian's authorship.

Conclusions

The stories of Chunyu Kun and the two jesters became a well known part of Chinese literary tradition. However, it seems that their original main purpose as successful examples of remonstrance was mostly replaced by a reading which saw in them primarily a collection of entertaining stories; this is to say, the reading of Chu Shaosun eventually prevailed. This can be seen already in Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) who, dismissing *fu* poetry as a tool for moral instruction because it was ineffective in admonishing, stated that Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) and other Han dynasty rhapsodists¹²⁴ were “followers of Chunyu Kun and Jester Meng”, because they aimed to admonish but they were only able to provide amusing entertainment to their ruler.¹²⁵ According to Sima Qian's view, these two men performed *fu* that were real *feng* (remonstrance), while Yang Xiong considered them in depreciative terms and focused his attention basically only on the “amusing” nature of their speeches. Maybe he read Sima Qian's part with a different horizon of expectations from that implied by the historian, understanding the term *guji* in Chu Shaosun's way.

Half a millennium later, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 520) mentioned Chunyu Kun and Jester Meng in the chapter “Xie yin” 諧謔 (“humour and enigma”) of his *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍. He quoted their wits as examples of the correct form for humour because they were aimed at correcting the wrongdoings of the kings.¹²⁶ However, it seems to me that another reason for Liu Xie to mention them in this

122 Schaberg 2005b, 194–195.

123 Saying this I do not mean that all the contradictions and twisting of historical facts found in the *Shiji* are consciously constructed. About the *shi* 士 as the class that produced and transmitted the anecdotal tradition see Pines 2009. His discussion refers in a more general way to all the tales of indirect remonstrance, among which we also find the anecdotes with the jester-character, see in particular pp. 115–184; see also Schaberg 2005b, 194–195.

124 For the translation of *fu* poetry as rhapsody see Knechtges 1976.

125 *Hanshu* 87.3575, the translation of the passage is in Knechtges 1976, 4; he states that Yang Xiong's biography in the *Hanshu* is based on his autobiography.

126 *Wenxin diaolong* 3/15.194.

chapter was that the most striking quality of their stories was not their ability in performing remonstrances, but the “humorous” feature of their speeches. It is possible to speculate that the humorous and witty reprimands of the protagonists made these anecdotes agreeable reading for later readers as well, readers whose primary interest was certainly not to use them as a historical source and who may thus not have been able to fully comprehend the historian's original purpose.¹²⁷ But no matter if they were criticized or praised, these stories were read anyway, most probably thanks to their humorously entertaining features.

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127 Wang Liqi in his *Lidai xiaohua ji* 歷代笑話記 collected six different versions of the *Qi yanlu* 啓顏錄 (Record of bright smiles), a Sui dynasty collection of humorous anecdotes: one gathering passages from the *Leishuo* 類說, one from the *Xu Baichuan xuehai* 續百川學海, one from the *Guang huaji* 廣滑稽, one from the *Pengfu bian* 捧腹編, one from a manuscript found at Dunhuang and one from the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記. It is worth noting that this last version contains the two *Shiji* stories about Jester Zhan (Wang Liqi 1956, 23; *Taiping guangji* 164.1195f).

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