A critical consensus regarding Stratagems of the Warring States (ZhanGuo Ce), an iconoclastic collection of anecdotes gathered by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 B.C.), has proven to be elusive. Henri Maspero (1883–1945) demonstrated that much of the material in the Stratagems is fictional,1 and most historians have since rejected the text as a primary source of information, although it has been suggested that the Stratagems may be derived from some of the same sources that Sima Qian used in Records of the Historian.2 Still, it is generally agreed that Stratagems of the Warring States is very unreliable as a history book and was probably never intended to serve as one.

Others see the Stratagems as a manual of persuasive speaking, filled with debates and speeches that serve as models of superior rhetoric.3 Yet the value of the text as a handbook is dubious. There is no evidence of a conscious attempt by Liu Xiang (or the anonymous authors themselves) to classify the various items by style or theme. The anecdotes are ordered only by state of provenance and at that quite loosely. Readers of the Stratagems might sense that they are made privy to several gems of rhetorical strategy that can be employed when the appropriate situation should arise, but they discover neither a unified theory of rhetoric applicable to any occasion nor a systematic treatise that can be routinely consulted.4

By contrast, the most influential of the classical Western textbooks—such as the Rhetoric of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), De oratore by Cicero (106–43 B.C.), or the anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium5—share the advantage of clear organization: the discussions and examples are consistently arranged by topic. A primer should be coherent and lead the student’s mind directly to the points it wishes to convey. But Stratagems of the War-
ring States, though it may be valuable as something else, is inadequate as a textbook. None of the rhetorical skills that are demonstrated so brilliantly in these speeches are ever identified explicitly, let alone analyzed or categorized.

The most prominent Western scholar in the study of the Stratagems is James I. Crump, Jr., whose critical works and complete translation stand out as fundamental contributions. Crump’s own interpretation of the Stratagems (which he calls Intrigues) is encapsulated in the following paragraph:

Suppose a Chinese rhetorical tradition included some such device as the suasoria for training men in the art of persuasion: would that not explain much of what is most baffling about the Intrigues? If exercises by the masters or the disciples of such a “school” were part of the “school’s” heritage it would not only explain many of the contradictions in the Intrigues, but it would account for many other facets of this delightful work. Why, for example, do so many persuaders so often speak their entire piece with no interruption from the ruler, who simply says “so be it” when the persuader is finished? Why are the pieces in the Intrigues so beautifully polished? And how did the men in the Intrigues invariably think of just the right thing to say for the occasion? These become understandable if the training a man underwent to pursue the career he hoped for (political advisor, emissary, and the like) included model advice which would or should have been offered at certain historic occasions, and somehow found its way into what we now call the Intrigues of the Warring States.

This is the first formulation of a theory that has gained widespread popularity over the past forty years. David Hawkes, for example, agrees wholeheartedly, adding: “It is even arguable that Chan-kuo t’s’e meant not ‘Intrigues of the Warring States’ but ‘Imaginary Speeches on Warring States Themes.’” The most significant dissenting voice is that of Jaroslav Průšek, who finds that the “stress on the anecdotal aspect is not by any means subordinated to the stress on rhetoric” (more on this problem below). But neither Crump’s supporters nor his critics have applied a study of the tradition of the Roman suasoria to the rhetoric of Stratagems of the Warring States. This involves a comparison of several aspects of Chinese and Roman rhetoric, such as the use of language and devices as well as the theory of rhetoric and its ultimate goal.

Suasoriae were Roman school exercises: pupils were reminded of a well-known historical event and asked to write persuasive speeches that
might have been delivered by the personages involved. If a contemporary high-school student were required to write his or her own version of George Washington’s address at Valley Forge, this assignment would be similar in spirit to the *suasoriae* of ancient times. *Suasoriae* are also considered a class of *prosopopoeiae*, or speeches in which a later writer “supplies the words which someone else, real or fictitious, might in agreement with the laws of necessity and probability have composed and delivered under a given set of circumstances.”10 The genre is not rare. The students of Seneca the Elder (54 B.C.–A.D. 39?) provided the exercises contained in the largest extant anthology of *suasoriae.*11 Quintilian (b. ca. A.D. 35) discussed them at length in his *Institutio oratoria*, and both Juvenal (d. ca. A.D. 140) and Persius (A.D. 34–62) remembered with disdain the days they spent as schoolboys producing them.12

There can be little disagreement that the several hundred items in the *Stratagems* are fairly categorized as *prosopopoeiae*. They contain too many internal contradictions, both factual and chronological, to be true history. It is more likely that the speeches in the text are merely a later author’s conjectures as to what the ancients may have said at certain moments of history. This is why some modern historians claim to find a kernel of truth in the *Stratagems*: the authors deliberately chose real events to embroider. But their compositions were intended as historical fiction or romanticized history, not as accurate accounts of the past.13

However, a *prosopopoeia* is not necessarily a *suasoria*. The latter genre is an idiosyncratic outcropping of classical Roman culture. Social advancement in Rome required the ability to speak well, and this entailed mastery of the complex rhetorical conventions of the day. Roman schoolmasters were aware that the stylized use of language typical of successful orators was an art that could be acquired only through intensive practice. The *suasoriae*, which furnished an unlimited selection of historical situations to re-create, represented one solution to the peculiar Roman problem of training youths to become competent statesmen in the classical mold.

But ancient China was another world, and although rhetorical ability provided material advantages in that society as well, some of the dissimilarities between the *suasoriae* and the *Stratagems* can be traced to the political contexts in which these two forms flourished. In both Greece and Rome, the main purpose of rhetoric was to convince masses of people.14 It followed that the most popular and effective rhetorical devices were those designed to sway large audiences, and these were the techniques that students practiced in their *suasoriae*. The situation was radically
different in Warring States China, where the final arbiter was the king alone. A minister who wanted to press his agenda needed above all to convince the sovereign, whose approval was required before any momentous decision could be carried out. This is why most of the arguments in the *Stratagems* are tailored to persuade a single figure of absolute authority.\(^\text{15}\)

Thus the intended audiences of Chinese and Roman rhetoric had a differing effect on the structure of persuasive speech and orators’ choice of devices. The manner in which Aristotle and Han Fei treated this problem is instructive. Aristotle devotes a substantial section of his *Rhetoric* (II.12–17) to a discussion of the psychological means by which speakers must match the character of the audience: the young, the old, those in the prime of life, the noble, the wealthy, and the powerful.\(^\text{16}\) Han Fei is also interested in molding speech to suit the audience, but his analysis considers the range of nuances in the character of a ruler—impetuous, self-satisfied, sanctimonious, and so forth\(^\text{17}\)—not a range of social classes that speakers address. For the only kind of oratory with real consequences is directed at a king.

However, there are indeed some remarkable similarities between the *suasoriae* and the *Stratagems*. For example, the following thoughts on *suasoriae*, by Quintilian, would be equally appropriate with regard to the Chinese material: “Consequently, as a rule, a *suasoria* is nothing other than a comparison, and we must consider what we shall gain and by what means, that it may be possible to form an estimate as to whether there is greater advantage in the aims that we pursue, or disadvantage in the means that we employ.”\(^\text{18}\)

One of the most readily identifiable traits of the *Stratagems* is precisely the sort of comparison of opposing arguments that, according to Quintilian, typifies the *suasoriae*. Consider, for example, the famous debate between Sima Cuo 司馬錯 and Zhang Yi 張儀. Where should the state of Qin attack? The renowned minister Zhang Yi advocates attacking Hán, which lies near the royal domain of Zhou. Eventually Qin should seize the Nine Cauldrons, arrest the Son of Heaven, and claim suzerainty over the world. But then Sima Cuo points out the adverse effects that such a brazen step would have on Qin’s relations with its neighbors.

今攻韓劫天子，劫天子，惡名也，而未必利也。又有不義之名，而攻天下之所不欲，危！臣請詁其故：周，天下之宗室也；齊，韓，周之與國也。周自知失九鼎，韓自知亡三川，則必將二國共力合謀，以因于齊，趙，而求解乎楚、魏。\(^\text{19}\)
Now if you were to attack Han and capture the Son of Heaven—capturing the Son of Heaven makes for a bad reputation and is not necessarily profitable. Moreover, you would have a reputation for being immoral, and it is dangerous to attack what the world does not wish you [to attack]. I, your servant, beg leave to explain my reasons. Zhou is the premier house in the world, and Qi is a state that cooperates with Han and Zhou. When Zhou knows that it will lose the Nine Cauldrons, and Han knows that it will lose [the district of] Sanchuan, they will surely take their two states and combine forces and plot together. They will rely on Qin and Zhao, and will ask Chu and Wei to release them [from Qin’s attack].

Sima Cuo argues instead for a campaign against the fecund but underdeveloped land of Shu 蜀, which Qin could take “as though one had set jackals and wolves to chase a flock of sheep” 譬如使豺狼逐群羊也. He adds that his plan promises immeasurable wealth and worldwide respect. The tension here is heightened by the great disparity in the influence of the two parties. Zhang Yi is one of the most revered advisors in the world, Sima Cuo (though later claimed by Sima Qian as an ancestor)^20 a relative unknown who does not appear anywhere else in the text. But the king follows Sima Cuo’s proposal, which, judging from hindsight, history seems to have favored as well.\(^{21}\) The author of this account, sensitive to the same concerns as Quintilian, recognizes that there must have been several reasonable points of view at the time. If Qin’s object was world domination, the most obvious approach would have been to attack Zhou directly and assume control of the Nine Cauldrons, the traditional symbol of Heaven-ordained rulership. But the debate would have little rhetorical value if there were no other opinions to consider. Thus the author employs the same solution as the writers of *suasoriae* and presents two competing arguments for the king—and the reader—to weigh.

However, the similarities between the *suasoriae* and the *Stratagems* are evident only on this structural level. The two forms differ considerably, for example, in their use of rhetorical devices. One of the salient features of classical rhetoric is its heavy reliance on conventional devices, ranged in taxonomies found in much of the ancient theoretical literature: anaphora, asyndeton, chiasmus, hypallage (transferred epithet), litotes, hendiadys, and so on. Most of these devices are inapplicable to classical Chinese because of its grammar. Because it is (discounting certain fossilized forms) an uninflected language, the logic of Chinese appears exclusively in the syntax; that is to say, the different functions of words are indicated by their placement in a sentence. There is generally much less opportu-
nity for variation with word order in languages of this type, as compared to Latin. The distinction is significant: while we may not be surprised to see very general devices—such as isocolon, simile, antithesis, assonance, or rhyme—in the literatures of all cultures, devices associated with liberal word order will tend to appear in inflected languages only. For this reason, many of the Latin figures, such as hendiadys and epithet transfer, are not likely to appear in Chinese rhetoric.

A typical example of chiasmus in Latin is found in the *suasoriae* of Seneca (VI.xxvi.24): *nostraeque cadens ferus Annibali iae*. In this clause, *cadens ferus Annibali* (literally “fierce Hannibal falling,” or, in this context, “when fierce Hannibal fell”) is in the nominative case and thus functions as the subject. *Nostraque . . . iae* (and to our wrath) is in the dative case. Taken together, the words mean “and when fierce Hannibal fell to our wrath,” although the chiasmus is lost in translation precisely because English is a largely uninflected language, and it is impossible to arrange the words in chiasmic form. Such a phrase could be found only in a language like Latin (or Greek, Sanskrit, and so on), whose complex nominal and adjectival declensions can accommodate the necessary word order.

And it is absent from the *Stratagems*: a Chinese sentence usually cannot be wrenched to form a chiasmus. It is similarly inappropriate to speak of asyndeton in Chinese, since words are regularly connected without conjunctions. For example, the “jackals and wolves” invoked by Sima Cuo appear literally as “jackals wolves” 豺狼. Only in languages with habitual use of conjunctions can there be any discussion of asyndeton as a rhetorical device, because only in these languages does asyndeton have any unusual effect. When Shakespeare writes “hang, beg, starve, die in the streets” (*Romeo and Juliet* III.v.194), readers of English are struck by the stark desolation of the phrase. In classical Chinese, it would seem unnerving to coordinate a similar series of words in any other way.

Hendiadys, furthermore, is impossible in the language of the *Stratagems*, which makes no essential separations between parts of speech. (These are determined entirely by syntax.) Anaphora, wordy and repetitive, would normally be out of place in the terse style of the *Stratagems*. And transferred epithets, while readily identifiable in the five-case nominal system of Latin, would be unintelligible in Chinese.

But do the Chinese speeches display rhetorical devices of their own? This question is rarely asked in studies of ancient Chinese rhetoric. Crump notes that the prose of the *Stratagems* “will be found to have very strong rhythm, a penchant for antithesis (or chiasm), parasis (or symmetry of units), consonance verging on rhyme, and all the other devices
peculiar to the orator’s self-conscious and somewhat fulsome use of language.”25

These are all, naturally, devices that fit an uninflected language like Chinese. Whatever chiasmus is found in the *Stratagem* is not semantic or syntactic chiasmus (as in the example from Seneca), but thematic chiasmus, where the explication of whole themes or concepts may form a chiasmus. This appears even in the Hebrew Bible,26 and it is probably a universal feature of human expression.

Some other rhetorical devices known to Roman orators appear in the *Stratagem*; these are linguistic flourishes that can be employed effectively in Chinese. Sententia (a maxim or aphorism conveyed in a dense phrase) is a good example: the inherent power of such a pithy utterance is rendered even more forceful by the lapidary rhythm of classical Chinese.27 Litotes (as in the ubiquitous “not a little” 不少) and other ornamentations appear as well.28 But the most powerful Chinese devices involve not simply the use of language but entire methods of argumentation and thematic arrangement of material. These are comparable to the topoi or *loci communes* (commonplaces) of classical rhetoric.29 The following is a representative overview.30

**Historical Allusion.** The direct reference to a historical incident, citing the circumstances that brought it about as well as the aftermath, serving the twofold function of displaying the speaker’s erudition and providing historical justification for a position. Examples: (1) Su Qin 蘇秦 presents a catalog of opportunistic warriors who took up arms.31 (2) Chen Zhen 陳轸 refers to Xiaoji 孝己 and Zixu 子胥, loyal men of old.32 (3) Zhang Yi 張毅 ventures to speak of “the past” 往昔.33 This topic is very common and is so firmly identified in the Western mind with Chinese rhetoric as to have been labeled the “Chinese argument” by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) in his famous catalog of fallacies.34

**Literary Allusion.** The reference to a venerable work, serving much the same purpose as Historical Allusion. Examples: (1) From the *Odes*.35 (2) From the *Documents*.36 (3) From a commentary to the *Changes*.37 (4) From *Laozi*.38

**Apophthegm.** Citing a proverb, with the implication that conventional wisdom is on the speaker’s side. Examples: (1) “Those whose feathers are not abundant cannot fly high” 毛羽不豐滿者不可以高飛.39 (2) “Three men make a tiger [if they all claim to see one]” 三人成虎.40 (3) “When Qiji [a legendary thoroughbred] jades, a nag will pass it; when Meng
Ben [a warrior famed for his strength] is tired, a woman will defeat him.”

Induction. Asking questions of one’s opponent in order to lead him or her to agree to certain premises, after which one’s argument becomes irrefutable, because the opposing party has itself assented to the clinching proposition. Examples: (1) Su Qin leads the King of Qi to attack Song (even though it is hardly clear that this invasion would be profitable). (2) Su Dai 说服 convinces the King of Wei to maintain Tian Xu 田需, a loyal vassal who has apparently fallen out of favor with his liege, in order to watch over two other followers, who, as the king himself admits, are not trustworthy.

Dilemma. This versatile commonplace is found in three general forms.

Type A: Reducing the number of possible solutions to two and then refuting one, thereby affirming the other. Examples: (1) the debate between Zhang Yi and Sima Cuo (discussed above). (2) Zhang Gai 張丐 persuades the state of Lu to remain neutral for the time being, since one can attack now or later, and attacking later is better than attacking now.

Type B: Showing that an action will have the same result in all possible sequences of events. Examples: (1) Queen Dowager Xuan of Qin 秦宣太后 should not insist that her lover, Wei Choufu 魏趙夫, be buried alive with her. If there is no life after death, she has no use for her paramour, and if there is life after death, then she will be busy appeasing her irate husband, with no time left for Wei Choufu. (2) Zou Ji 鄒忌 (385–319 B.C.), the Marquis of Cheng 成 and Prime Minister of Qi, can overcome his nemesis, Tian Ji 田忌, by recommending that the latter engage in battle: for if Tian Ji should succeed, the king would reward Zou Ji for his good counsel, and if Tian Ji should fail, Zou Ji would be rid of a troublesome competitor. (3) Zheng Shen 鄭申, the envoy of the King of Chu, takes matters into his own hands by giving land to the embattled crown prince. Zheng has determined, through an intricate series of calculations, that the king will profit whether his son succeeds or fails.

Type C (Scylla and Charybdis): Finding a clever solution to a Type B Dilemma by navigating through two apparently irreconcilable impediments. Examples: (1) Hui Shi 惠施 is an enemy of Zhang Yi but a friend of the King of Song 宋. So how should the King of Chu proceed? If he treats Hui Shi well, Zhang Yi will be offended, but if he treats Hui Shi badly, the King of Song will be offended. A counselor, Feng He 馮郝, hits on the solution: support Hui Shi well but then send him away to the
King of Song. This course of action will please both Zhang Yi and the King of Song.\textsuperscript{49} (2) An adulterous wife plans to poison her husband, and a concubine learns of the plot. How can she now avoid betraying either her master or her mistress? The concubine knocks over the poisoned chalice, and is beaten for it, but manages to escape from the dilemma.\textsuperscript{50} (3) Without an intermediary, a girl cannot be married. If her father does not show her to anyone, she will become an old spinster for lack of suitors, but if he displays her himself, she will be cheapened and remain unwanted. The intermediary is the only solution.\textsuperscript{51}

Dilemma, especially of the third and most polished type, is a productive topic in the \textit{Stratagems} and is widely attested elsewhere in ancient Chinese literature.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Enthymeme of Comparison.} A type of refutation: citing an instance in which a proposal failed even though its probability of success was much greater than that of the argument presently being considered. This topic generally takes the form: “If even X, then certainly Y, given that X is less likely to occur than Y.” Examples: (1) Even the mother of Zeng Can 薛,\textsuperscript{53} a leading disciple of Confucius, finally believed that her son was a murderer after hearing such a rumor three times. How much more precarious now is the position of Gan Mao 甘茂, since the king has less faith in him than Zeng Can’s mother had in her son, and Gan Mao’s enemies number far more than three?\textsuperscript{54} (2) If even Zou Ji is duped by flatterers, the mighty king can expect no less.\textsuperscript{55} (3) If the King of Wei can be moved to believe the preposterous idea that there is a tiger in the market after only three reports to that effect, then he can hardly avoid being swayed by false accusations of Pang Cong, who has more than three detractors.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Tiger and Fox.} Showing that the root cause of a phenomenon lies hidden behind the ostensible cause. Or vice versa: obscuring the root cause by pointing to the ostensible one. Examples: (1) Zou Ji is praised not because of his beauty but because of his influence.\textsuperscript{57} (2) King Xiang of Qi 齊襄王 can take all the credit for extraordinary acts of charity undertaken by Tian Dan 田單 by ordering grandly that everyone protect the needy. Then people will assume that Tian Dan is merely carrying out the king’s beneficent instructions.\textsuperscript{58} (3) A tiger is about to eat a fox, when the fox declares that he is the most powerful creature in the world, challenging the tiger to follow him around and see for himself. The tiger does so and is convinced when he sees all the other animals flee; he does not realize that they are afraid of him, not of the fox.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Adding Feet to the Snake.} Showing that too much of a good thing can be ruinous. Examples: (1) The archer Yang Youji 餘由基 should stop
after a hundred consecutive bull’s-eyes, lest he miss once and nullify his achievement.\textsuperscript{60} (2) A group of associates agree on a novel way of drawing lots for a single cup of wine: they should each draw a snake, and the drink will go to whoever finishes first. One of them claims victory, takes hold of the cup, and proudly adds feet to the snake with his spare hand. But then another contestant finishes his own snake and snatches the goblet away: for a snake with feet is no longer a snake at all.\textsuperscript{61}

**Dueling Tigers.** Showing that contending enemies weaken each other and that the best policy is therefore to bide one’s time and strike when they are both exhausted. Examples: (1) Guan Zhuangzi 管莊子 comes upon two tigers fighting over carrion. He is about to slay them, but Guan Yu 管與 persuades him to wait until one is dead and the other wounded. Then he can win fame for killing two tigers with less effort than it would take to defeat a single healthy one.\textsuperscript{62} (2) A mussel has caught a predatory heron by the beak. Neither animal is willing to give way, so they are both caught by a passing fisherman.\textsuperscript{63}

**Bad Faith.** Obtaining a valuable concession (such as property or territory) from an opponent in exchange for a reciprocal favor that is supposed to be granted later, but then reneging when circumstances are such that the opponent does not find it expedient to complain or seek redress. Agents who negotiate in bad faith never have any intention of honoring their agreements in the first place. Examples: (1) Yan Shuai 顏率, Zhou’s ambassador, secures an alliance with Qi by promising to hand over the Nine Cauldrons. But Yan Shuai never transports the cauldrons, claiming that there is no safe route from Zhou to Qi. Qi does not dare have them sent.\textsuperscript{64} (2) Zhang Yi, Qin’s ambassador, offers the King of Chu 600 square li 里 of land as enticement to break with Qi, Chu’s most powerful ally. Although the minister Chen Zhen is suspicious, the king ignores him. Just as Chen Zhen surmised, Zhang Yi later refuses to cede the land when he is sure that Chu has indeed ended its alliance with Qi. The King of Chu is incensed and attacks Qin—again despite the protestations of the loyal Chen Zhen—but is defeated by the combined might of Qin and Qi, Chu’s former ally.\textsuperscript{65}

**Subreption.** The use of mendacious testimony, forged documents, or the procured loyalty of venal officials. Usually, the purpose is to destroy a rival in front of the king, but sometimes the ruler himself is the victim. Examples: (1) Gan Mao, the Prime Minister of Qin, has learned of the king’s secret plan to replace him with Gongsun Yan 公孫衍. Gan proceeds, with great fanfare, to compliment the king on his excellent choice and, when interrogated, explains falsely that Gongsun Yan himself told
him the news. Gongsun Yan is banished.\textsuperscript{56} (2) Zou Ji’s minion plants an agent in the marketplace who pretends to be an assistant of Zou Ji’s enemy, Tian Ji. The spy loudly announces that his supposed master, Tian Ji, is plotting to usurp the throne and calls for a fortune-teller to divine the likelihood of success. The upright fortune-teller promptly informs the king, and Tian Ji is forced to flee.\textsuperscript{67} (3) The King of Zhao seizes the sacrificial precinct of Zhou but is cozened into abandoning it when he falls ill and is told by his Grand Diviner, who has been suborned, that the precinct is the cause of his affliction.\textsuperscript{68} (4) Naïveté costs a delightful young concubine her nose. (This piece will be discussed further below.)\textsuperscript{69}

These examples are by no means exhaustive. Other topics include executing disloyal henchmen, warning the king of slander, and more methods of dealing with underhandedness. \textit{Stratagems of the Warring States} also displays the familiar Warring States concern that names fit reality. Kings are encouraged to identify their favorite wife through a gift of distinctive jewelry,\textsuperscript{70} or to grant a large fief or lofty title to an especially meritorious minister, so that all may know who is in favor—and who is not. Such anecdotes can be seen as variations on the theme of distinguishing reality from misleading appearances, or Tiger and Fox.

Several of the topics in the \textit{Stratagems} appear, at least in some form, in Greco-Roman rhetoric as well. Historical Allusion, Literary Allusion, and Apopthegm are arguments from authority and correspond to what Aristotle calls “from a previous judgement” (\textit{ek kriseôs}),\textsuperscript{71} while Enthymeme of Comparison is similar to Aristotle’s topic “from the more and less” (\textit{ek tou mallon kai hêton}).\textsuperscript{72} Cicero lists several commonplaces in his \textit{De inventione}—a work that he later repudiated but that can still serve as a reliable source of devices that were fashionable in his day—including \textit{in-ductio} (induction), precisely the same strategy exploited by the persuaders of the \textit{Stratagems}.\textsuperscript{73} Such general techniques of rhetoric may be common to several disparate cultures, if not all humanity.

However, other topics in the \textit{Stratagems} raise deeper problems about the place of rhetoric in the work as a whole. What do these strategies accomplish? In Historical Allusion, Literary Allusion, and Apopthegm, the speaker merely finds a proper quotation from the font of received wisdom. Of themselves, such sayings are ineffectual, because any audience will certainly have heard them before (and some of them, such as “Look before you leap” and “He who hesitates is lost,” may be mutually contradictory). The persuader’s challenge is to fit them into the oration as appropriate and not to exhaust their efficacy by overusing them.
Induction, Dilemma, and Enthymeme of Comparison are entirely different: these are topics with a limitless range of possible applications. They are blueprints of argumentation that can be used repeatedly and with undiminished power, because they can appear in a variety of contexts. Tiger and Fox, Adding Feet to the Snake, and Dueling Tigers lie somewhere in between the arguments from authority and the broader topics like Induction and Dilemma. They are not simply recitations of proverbs, but they are not universally applicable, either. They are, rather, illustrative clichés: they can be used only in certain situations but can be varied with different parables and examples.

But how do Bad Faith and Subreption relate to any of these topics? These two are not rhetorical topics at all, because they do not use language as their only tool—or even their primary tool. Indeed, they demonstrate the general inadequacy of classifying the *Stratagems* as exercises in rhetoric: such an interpretation only diminishes the book’s worth and fails to account for the nonrhetorical pieces that make up so much of the anthology. Consider, for example, the following anecdote:

魏王遣楚王美人，楚王説之，夫人鄭袖知王之説新人也，甚愛新人，衣服玩好，擇其所喜而為之；宮室臥具，擇其所善而為之。愛之甚於王，王曰：婦人所以事夫者，色也；而妒者，其情也，今鄭袖知寡人之説新人也，其愛之甚於寡人，此孝子之所以事親，忠臣之所以事君也。鄭袖知王以己不妒也，因謂新人曰：王愛子美矣，雖然，惡子之鼻，子為見王，則必掩子鼻。新人見王，因掩其鼻，王謂鄭袖曰：夫新人見寡人，則掩其鼻，何也？鄭袖曰：妾知也，王曰：雖惡必言之。鄭袖曰：其似惡聞君王之臭也。王曰：悍哉！令劓之，無使逆命。74

The King of Wei sent a beautiful woman to the King of Chu; the King of Chu was pleased by her. His wife, Zheng Xiu, knew that the king was pleased by the new woman and was very kind to her. Whatever clothing or baubles [the new woman] liked, [Zheng Xiu] gave her; whatever rooms and bed furnishings she liked, [Zheng Xiu] gave her. She was kinder to her than the king was.

The king said: “A wife serves her husband with sex, but she is disposed to jealousy. Now you, Zheng Xiu, know that I am pleased by the new woman, and you are kinder to her than I am. This is how a filial son would serve his parents, how a loyal minister would serve his lord.”

Relying on her knowledge that the king did not consider her jealous, Zheng Xiu addressed the new woman, saying: “The king loves your beauty! Though this is so, he dislikes your nose. When you see the king, you must
cover your nose.” So the new woman would cover her nose whenever she went to see the king.

The king addressed Zheng Xiu, saying: “Why does the new woman cover her nose when she sees me?”

Zheng Xiu said: “I know why.”

The king said: “You must say it even if it is horrible.”

Zheng Xiu said: “It seems she hates to smell your odor.”

The king said: “Shrew!” He ordered [the new woman’s] nose cut off and would not allow anyone to disobey the command.

This trick is memorable, but it is not rhetoric. Yet no one would argue that it is out of place in the text. But then what kind of a text is it?

Stratagems of the Warring States is a document from turbulent times, an imaginative record of the devious means that clever people might have used to obtain their desired objects: position, fame, revenge, glory, and so on. Since the advisors in the Stratagems often find the best resource to be the king, they naturally focus their attention on motivating him with candied speeches to undertake some action—action that is sometimes beneficial to the king and his state but often more advantageous to the counselors themselves. These are the pieces that have established the book’s reputation as a repository of brilliant rhetoric. The cynicism of much of this material, moreover, explains why figures who were famed for their rhetoric in ancient China were generally considered eristic and unprincipled.76 (This antipathy discloses yet another contrast with ancient Rome, where the greatest orators were immortalized as titans of their culture.) But there are other kinds of stories in the collection as well: often, the characters dispense with rhetoric altogether and resort to such methods as conspiracy, espionage, or false incrimination.

The text as a whole, then, is primarily about intrigue. The lively and disjointed narratives present a coherent and irreverent picture of Warring States politics. Cunning advisors live by their wits, rising and falling according to their ingenuity, while kings are continually hoodwinked by their own ministers. Some, like Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君,77 tolerate the chicanery of their retainers and even encourage it, on a manageable scale, rather than oppose it fruitlessly. But most lords do not have such an enlightened attitude and are deceived throughout. The milieu of the persuaders is the court, the cockpit where diverse interests collide and where shrewd ministers can accumulate fortunes with self-serving counsel and cajolery. This is the same treacherous world in which the great rheto-
rician Han Fei thrived—that is, until he too was ensnared by a scheming adversary.

It is worth remembering in this connection that *Stratagems of the Warring States* was not traditionally understood as a handbook of rhetoric or a chrestomathy of school exercises, but as a collection of anecdotes that illustrates the dangerous arts of machination and dissimulation, and thus implicitly espouses a world view antithetical to orthodox Confucianism.78 And precisely therein, for ancient readers, lay the book’s value.79 To conclude with the words of the redactor himself:

戰國之時，君德淺薄，為之謀策者，不得不因勢而為賞，故其謀，扶急持顛，為一切之權，雖不可以臨國教化，兵革救急之勢也。皆高才秀士，度時君之所能行，出奇策異智，轉危為安，運亡為存，亦可嘉，皆可觀。80

In the age of the Warring States, the virtue of lords was shallow and meager; those who made schemes and stratagems for them could not but rely on strategic advantage when rendering assistance [to their lords] and make [plans]81 in accordance with the times. Thus their schemes, which provided stability during emergencies and shored up precarious situations, were methods of expedience; although they cannot be compared to instructing and transforming the nation,82 they [exemplify] strategic advantage, which involves warfare and rescuing [the state] from emergencies. These were all outstanding men-of-service of lofty talent; they gauged what the lords of the time were able to do and produced extraordinary stratagems and uncommon bits of wisdom. They turned danger into security and converted doom into preservation—indeed, in a manner that can be entertaining. All these things are worth reading.83