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### Deep Disagreement, Deep Rhetoric, and Cultural Diversity

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# Deep Disagreement, Deep Rhetoric, and Cultural Diversity: Argumentative Style in a Cross-Cultural “Rhetorical Borderland”

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**Abstract:** Taking issue with the current scholarship over the notion of a “rhetorical borderland,” we approach it as a disputable space in cross-cultural argumentation where arguers run into encounters with a composite audience. By drawing upon a few different theoretical resources, we propose a three-dimensional agenda for a new understanding of “rhetorical borderland”: as a discursive construct in the mental horizon; as a conceptual notion with essential uncertainties; and as a disputable space in cross-cultural argumentation.

**Keywords:** Community of minds, deep disagreement, deep rhetoric, incommensurability, style, cross-cultural argumentation

## 1. Introduction

Ways of arguing matter in social settings. From ancient to modern times, philosophers, rhetoricians, communication theorists, linguists, discourse theorists, pragmatists and the like have continuously offered their insights on this issue of style which is of crucial importance. Since ancient times, style has always been an important category in rhetorical studies. In the ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical thinking, style has already been categorized as an important component of rhetoric. For example, in the *Rhetorical Handbooks* compiled by sophists prior to Aristotle’s systematic theorizing in his *Rhetoric*, a rhetorical process covers “the three most important parts of classical rhetoric,” i.e., “invention,” “arrangement,” and “style” (Kennedy, 1994, p. 6), or in the words of Paul Ricoeur, “rhetoric covered the three fields of argumentation, composition, and style” (1977, p. 28). “Style” occupies the third place. This tradition extends to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where the meaning of style (*lexis*) as the theme of Book III is two-fold: the way in which “thought is expressed in words, sentences and a speech as a whole” in a broad sense and simply “word choice, diction” in a restricted sense (Kennedy, 2007, p. 193). Also in the Ciceronian five canons of rhetoric, style secures its third position in the sequence of invention, arrangement, disposition (style), memorization and delivery.

What is worthy of special attention here, is Aristotle’s observation of the role of style in disposing the audience’s state of mind. The Aristotelian category of appropriateness (or propriety) and clarity is conceptualized in this way. This is also exactly Aristotle’s point of departure in his observations of style. For Aristotle, “The *lexis* [style] will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character and is proportional to the subject matter.” For example, in the case of insolence, “emotion is expressed when the style is that of an angry man” (1408a [2007]). As is obviously

shown in the above sequential orders, the legitimate location of style was canonized somewhere after “invention,” and “arrangement,” but before “memorization” and “delivery.” This refers to the transitory position of style in a rhetorical process, being neither part of the inventing or arranging process of rhetorical discourse, nor entrenched in the memorizing and delivering processes.

This transitory or marginal status of style in ancient rhetorical thinking was rendered in such an unimportant way that it could miraculously survive the blitzkrieg campaigns from the philosophical tradition of anti-rhetoric, especially in the movements of Enlightenment and Humanism from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, initiated by philosophical icons Rene Descartes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Peter Ramus and the like. Echoing Platonic downgrading of rhetoric, these philosophical intellectuals’ attacks dealt a *coup de grace* to rhetoric as a discipline. Invention, arrangement, memorization and delivery had to leave their rhetorical inhabitancies one after another against the background of the death of rhetoric as a discipline in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Ricoeur, 1977, pp. 9-10), with style as the only surviving part that later developed into what is called “tropology” or studies on tropes and figures (pp. 44-64). Later, these studies developed into a specialized field of research called stylistics which, in the words of Frans H. van Eemeren, is “the twentieth century successor of the rhetorical study of *elocutio*” (2019, p. 154). Consequently, argues Ricoeur, “The reduction of all of these to the third part [style], and of that to a simple taxonomy of figures of speech, doubtless explains why rhetoric lost its link to logic and to philosophy itself, and why it became the erratic and futile discipline that died during the last century” (1977, p. 28). This reduction of rhetoric to an “erratic” and “futile” discipline reflects the embarrassing situation for style. Here style is reduced to something of an ornamental nature without the nexus. This probably explains why style as a theoretical category receives inadequate treatment in Chaim Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric*, and receives no attention at all in the influential Toulmin model proposed in *The Uses of Argument*. And as we’ve seen, in Robert J. Fogelin’s short piece on the logic of deep disagreement, it is only mentioned in passing by referring to “styles of acting and thinking” as part of a form of life (1985, p. 6).

However, today we could possibly resist this taxonomical enterprise dating all the way back to ancient thinkers of rhetoric in at least two senses. For one thing, style is part of inventing persuasive discourse. For another, style is the arguer’s projection of the audience’s state of mind. In this sense, style is neither something ornamental to make argumentative discourse look good, beautiful or elegant. Nor is it something instrumental in “trying to resolve a difference of opinion by convincing the intended audience or readership by means of argumentative discourse of the acceptability of the standpoint at issue” (van Eemeren, 2019, p. 154). But here, style is something of a fundamental importance in social settings in general and cross-culturally social settings in particular. Kenneth Burke in his *A Rhetoric of Motives*, provides a “simplest case of persuasion” by way of speaking: “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his. Persuasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in general” (1969, p. 55). Burke is not talking about persuasion or identification in a cross-cultural context, but what he says here sheds some light on the importance of style in general. Clearly, style is an indispensable part of his art of identification. Flattery, as a familiar argumentation scheme in daily communication, is also a kind of style. It is a special style of disposing the audience in a state of mind in the arguer’s favor. Seen this way, style is probably of crucial importance in cross-cultural argumentation that abounds in deep disagreements. In cross-cultural social settings, arguers often run into encounter with each other, without necessarily knowing the other side in question. The absence of what is called a “community of minds” and the presence of what is called “incommensurability” are said to be cooperatively undercutting the possibility of cross-cultural argumentation (Liu, 1999).

But this also offers a good opportunity for us to rethink the nature of incommensurability and deep disagreement from the perspective of argumentative style. Aristotle was probably the first rhetorician to presuppose a “community of minds” for rhetorical argumentation. The observation was made by Barry Brummett in his *A Rhetoric of Style*: “Aristotle’s rhetoric ‘worked’ because he was writing about a tightly knit community of relatively homogeneous people in ancient Greece” (2008, p. xiii). This Aristotelian judgment was echoed about seventy years ago by Chaim Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in their *The New Rhetoric*: “For all argumentation to exist, an effective *community of minds* must be realized at a given moment” (1969, p. 14; emphasis added). Clearly, here they were presupposing the existence of a “community of minds” as a “condition of possibility for genuine argumentative interactions” (Liu, 1999, p. 297). In this line of reasoning, here acts of arguing refer to those of “using discourse to influence the intensity of an audience’s adherence to certain theses” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 14). Thus, there is an assumed “intellectual contact” whose “psychological and social conditions” render it possible for an audience to adhere intensely to those theses. Disagreement must be reached first on “the formation of this intellectual community,” and then on “the fact of debating a specific question together” (p. 14). Even in the case of inward deliberation where “a person must conceive of himself as divided into at least two interlocutors, two parties engaging in deliberation,” this kind of inward “community” of selves is required. Therefore, to increase an audience’s adherence, at least two indispensable minima are involved in an argumentative act, i.e., “the existence of a common language, of a technique allowing communication to take place,” and a “contact of minds” which is guaranteed by one’s willingness to enter into discussion with some other particular beings (pp. 14-17).

Similarly, ever since Thomas S. Kuhn’s coinage of the term “incommensurability of paradigm” in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1970, it has now been in wide circulation in the academic community of minds. Here paradigm refers to “a set tacit assumptions and beliefs within which research goes on” (Fish, 1999, p. 487). Though it was originally applied to academic fields, it has the potential to be applicable also in discussions of argumentation in public discourse and it has actually been so, especially in the field of cross-cultural argumentation. Kuhn ushered in the notion of incommensurability by uncovering the implicit change of fundamental assumptions in the paradigmatic shift of a science subject from a traditionally entrenched set of assumptions to scientifically revolutionary ones. Thus paradoxically in the same discipline, the logic of a new paradigm seems to be inconsistent with the logic of an old paradigm. Proponents of different paradigms seem to be using different parlances arising from different disciplinary belief systems.

Not necessarily following Kuhn’s suit, Robert J. Fogelin offers his warning for informal logicians over the existence of deep disagreements in ordinary argumentative language whose inherent logic constitutes the hindering factor that tends to keep parties concerned from winning over the other side to one’s side. According to Fogelin, deep disagreements are generated by “a clash of framework propositions” or a conflict between them (1985, p. 5). In his peculiar “logic of deep disagreements,” Fogelin argues that acts of arguing, i.e., those of “engaging in an argumentative exchange,” have a set of “shared commitments” as their presupposition. He goes on to argue that “an argument, or an argumentative exchange is normal” when and only when “it takes place within a context of broadly shared beliefs and preferences” (p. 3). Should an argumentative context, albeit without being made clear what this context specifically means “beyond an engagement with ordinary language” (Tindale, 2020, p. 1), becomes “less normal,” “argument, to that extent, becomes impossible” (Fogelin, 1985, p. 4).

Obviously, these different perspectives have at least one thing in common, i.e. it is proposed

that there must be an enabling precondition for all kinds of argumentation is purported to be an intellectual community, be it a “community of minds,” “an intellectual contact” or a shared belief system and referential preferences, etc. In these lines of reasoning, argumentation becomes impossible or unavailable or even unimaginable, once an incommensurability of referential system or an abnormal or less-normal context is encountered. In light of this reasoning, argumentation in a cross-cultural context, that is completely beyond consideration of the above argumentation theorists, and that abounds in cultural diversities, apparently “above the simplest level of complexity” (Fogelin, 1985, p. 4), is doomed to failure without the arguer and the audience speaking a common language, to say the least and the context being of a normal nature. As for a possible way out, both Thomas Kuhn and Robert Fogelin explicitly proposed the pathway to persuasion in cases where rational reasoning does not work. Fogelin at the end of his short piece unveils the true color of deep disagreements by referring to their recalcitrance to adjudication and resistance against subjection to rational resolution in such a way that we have to “fall back on persuasion” (p. 7). However, he not only demonstrates his optimism by pointing out that interlocutors concerned try to “surface the background propositions” for a direct discussion (p. 5), but also implies his pessimism expressed in the prospects for resolving deep disagreements (p. 7).

This pessimism could be found in his judgment that the source of deep disagreement arises not from “isolated propositions,” but from “a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking) that constitute...a form of life” (pp. 5-6). It is implied here that should nothing take place to this form of life, there could be little possibility for a deep disagreement of any kind to be solved. Here apparently is the implication that the origin of deep disagreement could be traced all the way back to the cultural diversities in which a special style of being in the world, including styles of thinking, speaking, writing, and doing things are forged, encouraged, implied or even imposed. It is precisely here, we argue, that the style of arguing as part of a living style could play its deserving role in the resolution of deep disagreements in a cross-cultural context in the two proposed senses: style of arguing cross-culturally as *the* face of an arguer, and style as the pathway to persuasion.

Here in the pathway to persuasion, the nongeographical space in the mental horizon where deep disagreements are located seems to be a labyrinth for arguers. What the arguer could do is to get the permit into this labyrinth in the first place. With the permit in hand, the arguer could manage to enter into the space, map out a workable routine, figure out the structure that underpins disagreements, get out old ideas and move in new ones to let them inhabit there. In this sense, style looks like the “face” of an argument and meanings read into this face carry far more significances than traditionally assumed. In the discussions to follow, we’ll address three kinds of tension, i.e., that between a local style and a universal (global) style, that between an aggressive style and an honest style, and that between an offensive style and an assertive style, to illustrate the often-assumed-unimportance or taken-for-granted-marginality of the role played by style in cross-cultural argumentation.

## **2. Local vs. Global Style: From “rhetorical borderland” to disputable space**

Style is more often than not assumed to be deeply rooted in a cultural tradition. In this sense, every style abounds in its local and cultural characteristics. In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out, “to each social structure there correspond particular modes of expressing social communion” (1969, p. 164). For example, there is “the style of democratic societies” and “the style of hierarchic societies” (p. 164). To put it in a different way, style is always

spatially and temporally conditioned. More importantly, style is highly audience-specific in both *intracultural* and *intercultural* senses. Here there is always the tension between a local style, which applies to a particular audience, and a global style, which applies to a universal audience. No wonder argumentation in a cross-cultural context comes across a conflict of styles. For example, the Chinese cultural pursuit of social “stability” and “harmony” was held accountable by missionaries and sinologists from ancient to modern times for the juxtaposition of Chinese indirectness versus Western (more accurately North American) directness (Mao, 2005, p. 444). In this axiomatic juxtaposition with the latter being superior to the former, the Chinese indirection is pitted over against the Western directness. Regrettably, this comes at the price of Chinese indirection being feminized. However, argues Mao, this kind of juxtaposition or comparison resulting from what he calls “Oriental logic,” “however well-intentioned, inevitably runs the risk of overgeneralizing each communicative style and of decontextualizing its own internal complexities” (2005, p. 446).

Therefore, to better adapt to a local audience in a context, the appropriateness of style is anticipated, invented and projected from context to context. The acceptability or appropriateness of one style in one place does not necessarily guarantee its same acceptability or appropriateness in another place, in another context and for a different audience. For deep disagreements that are subtle and invisible, style is of utmost importance. Deep disagreements are firmly entrenched or structured within walls of mind marking very tricky territories or spaces that are invisible in the rearview mirror. These territories or spaces are historically, culturally and discursively informed, and these walls are rhetorically constructed. They are territories or spaces in a metaphoric sense, but not in a literal or physical sense. Thus the change of “reality” in these territories or spaces, to draw upon Lloyd Bitzer, could only be possible “not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (1968, p. 4). It is precisely here, we argue, that style can be a good mediator especially in a cross-cultural context. This also raises the question about the nature of these territories or spaces. Are they disputable spaces? Could we move through them? And in what ways could this be possible? Is style an important tool? To Fogelin, on grounds that these “disagreement” spaces are so deeply entrenched in the mental horizon that they are irresolvable “through the use of argument” (1985, p. 5), the answers are probably negative.

However, this is definitely not the true “color” of deep disagreement. Deep disagreement is a social intellectual entity with its premise and conclusion. If the warrant is unpacked or loosened, the assumed connection between the premise and conclusion no longer holds or will be called into question. In this sense, deep disagreement is not a self-contained entity, as is the case with Robert J. Fogelin. This entity could have its cultural, political, ideological, and intellectual dimensions. Or it might simply be a biased or prejudiced opinion. Besides, deep disagreements are not necessarily adversary arguments. Some deep disagreements arise from beliefs, while others arise from commitments. In the former case, they are adversarial, while in the latter case, they are not adversarial (Casey, 2020). Undeniably, theories of deep disagreements have strong interpretative power within an intellectual community, to say the least. Could what James Crosswhite called “deep rhetoric” be a panacea for deep disagreement? From *The Rhetoric of Reason* to *Deep Rhetoric*, James Crosswhite proposes a deep “rapprochement of rhetoric and philosophy” (2013, p. 28). Here a deep rhetoric, argues Crosswhite, is a “philosophical rhetoric that will not simply be in conflict with disciplinary conceptions of rhetoric but will instead help to interpret and explain and to some extent even justify and strengthen them” (p. 28). This is, apparently, an inheritance of Platonic conceptions of rhetoric in his dialogue *Phaedrus*. In this sense, “Rhetoric is a way of

being human, a way of educating human beings, a way of nonviolence, a way of reason and freedom, a political way . . . and more” (p. 29). For our purpose here, the interesting point is rhetoric as ways of being human, performing, acting, thinking and doing things. However, to my understanding, deep rhetoric makes two senses. For one, it refers to the concealment of rhetoric. Deep rhetoric here is subtle, invisible, and self-concealing in that its strategic practice of “self-effacement” or “sprezzatura” tends to make it not easily recognizable (Liu, 2004, p. 23), or that “rhetoric can succeed only when it can conceal its methods” (Hansen, 2008, p. 4270). For another, it means a reasonable way of presenting arguments, which paves the way for getting at the truth in a philosophical sense. In a word, deep rhetoric refers to the kind of rhetoric that does not expose its own rhetoricity or covers up its rhetorical craftiness in such a way that its rhetorical nature is not easily recognizable. This is, essentially speaking, the presentation of a neutral style in persuasive discourse. For example, “When one is trying to advance new and shocking value judgments,” Chaim Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue in *The New Rhetoric*, “these are more readily admitted when the style employed is not shocking” (1969, p. 152).

Then, one may ask, will a “shared rhetorical tradition” be an answer to the question of deep disagreement? Or will what Barry Brummett calls “social system that we all have in common” be workable? His point is that “despite the enormous diversity and fragmentation in today’s world, style is what knits the world into a relatively homogeneous system of communication” (2008, p. xiii). Brummett is in denial that “a rhetoric of style completely replaces earlier rhetorics, such as, those of Aristotle, George Campbell, or Kenneth Burke, which still find broad relevance” (p. xii). But his proposal for a global rhetoric of style is obvious in two senses. For one, “style is in some important ways the name for a system of persuasive signs and meanings into which nearly everybody, globally, has entered” (p. xii). For another, “there is also style, an increasingly global terrain of shared knowledge, action, and judgment” (p. xiii). For example, in the making of Chinese American Rhetoric as a new form of rhetoric, a style of “togetherness-in-difference” is proposed by LuMing Mao in addressing what he calls “rhetorical borderland” (2005, pp. 434-460). What Mao calls “rhetorical borderlands” here, is a notion he develops from what Mary Louis Pratt called “contact zones,” by which Pratt meant “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of asymmetrical relations of power” (Mao, 2005, p. 432). In contact zones, new forms of expressions are generated, one of which is what is called “autoethnographic” style. This new style enables people “to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (p. 432). Chinese American Rhetoric, which “both selects and invents from Chinese rhetorical tradition and European American rhetorical tradition,” develops into a new form of persuasive discourse where ways of expression “may blur boundaries” and even “may disrupt asymmetrical relations of power” between the two traditions (p. 432). However, as Yameng Liu (1999, p. 297) rightly questions in another context on the possibility of cross-cultural argumentation, is there such a “shared rhetorical tradition” which we could “fall back on as the ultimate guarantee for agreement”? What is the definition of “tradition” in a postmodernist era? Is there a tradition “out there” for arbitrary selection and invention? Is not tradition a result of selection and invention in itself? So on and so forth. Chinese American rhetoric remains ambiguous and controversial as a term in itself. We argue that a better alternative for “rhetorical borderlands” would probably be “disputed spaces” that abound in deep disagreements. As Christopher W. Tindale argues,

The argumentative situation is a *nongeographical space*, located in and created by discourse. We inhabit such spaces with different facility, some of us with ease, others with

discomfort. Yet they are crucial to our self-understanding and our understanding of others. Exploring these spaces, then, should be a priority and not an incidental by-product of an otherwise specialized education. (2004, p. 3; emphasis added)

This disputed space or nongeographical space is marked by walls of mind in the audience's mental horizon. In the discussions to follow, we will use a few cases in which Chinese individuals engage with their Western interlocutors to illustrate the role(s) style plays in cross-cultural argumentation.

### 3. Aggressive vs. Honest Style: Revisiting the Trish vs. Xin Debate

The way in which China engages the West matters, especially when the Chinese style is frequently accused of being too "assertive" or even "aggressive." In current fields of cross-cultural argumentation, there are many disputable or nongeographical spaces of this kind. For example, there are disputed spaces ranging from bilateral trade, human rights, intellectual property rights, Taiwan, South China Sea to climate change between the U.S. and China. On the one hand, the geopolitical and ideological frameworks indeed condition individuals' understanding and interpretation of the nature of these spaces. There seems to be not much room for dispute. On the other hand, individuals can contribute to dialogues or conversations between parties concerned in managing these spaces to make them into *consubstantial* spaces. This means that *consubstantial* spaces can operate as the common ground for departure rather than as the dividing line for departure. This idea is derived from Kenneth Burke's discussion of identification and consubstantiality in his *A Rhetoric of Motives*:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so...In being identified with B, A is "substantially one" with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (1969, pp. 20-21).

Here, argues Burke, "two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common" (p. 21). By drawing upon Burke's theory of identification and consubstantiality here, disputed or nongeographical space is essentially a (deep) principle in the audience's mental horizon. An arguer can manage to project a second self to make it *consubstantial* with her audience to redefine the nature of the nongeographical space. In this sense, nongeographical space is not a point of deep disagreement, but a joint point of departure.

A recent case in point is the Trish vs. Xin debate which had "sparked widespread attention from media across the world."<sup>1</sup> On May 29, 2019, Ms. Liu Xin, Chinese CGTN anchor for the talk show "To the Point,"<sup>2</sup> joined Ms. Trish Regan, Fox Business Network host on her "Primetime" show for a live television discussion on China-U.S. trade issues.<sup>3</sup> This event did not come all of a sudden. But actually it was the latest development of a series of verbal exchanges either on social media or on their talk shows against the background of increasing U.S.-China trade disputes. All

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<sup>1</sup> "Liu Xin looks back at her debate with Trish Regan," available at:

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674d7a6b544f34457a6333566d54/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> CGTN, an acronym for China Global Television Network, is the international division of China Central Television (CCTV).

<sup>3</sup> A full transcript of the live discussion is available at this website:

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774d3245444d35457a6333566d54/index.html>



this was dated back to Trish Regan's argument in her talk show two weeks before, in which she accused the Chinese people and Chinese companies of stealing \$600 billion worth of U.S. technology. Then Liu Xin filed back her rebuttal in her show that Regan's argument was "all emotion" and "little substance." After this, both sides "exchanged more salvos on-air," "traded tweets," and then a debate was set for them to face off on May 29. (Shih, 2019) However, the much-anticipated "debate" turned out to be a Q&A session between the two TV anchors. In this 16-minutes-long event, their discussion covered subjects ranging from trade talk to intellectual property theft, from technology transfer to China's developing nation status at the WTO, from tariffs to state capitalism. All together, Regan raised six questions, and Liu responded to each of the questions in an "honest" way. This analysis is not meant to be a reconstruction and evaluation of the debate-qua-discussion to declare the winner or loser, but is meant to be a *deconstruction* of the "honesty" style, and to distance itself from most of the currently available post-debate commentaries, home and abroad. We don't adopt the winner vs. loser approach. Rather we look specifically at how two different argumentative styles had worked out in the exchange of arguments, and what this might have meant for the audiences on both sides.

The post-debate controversy is centered around the "honesty vs. aggressive" style rather than the content of the discussion. On this account, no matter how successful Liu's efforts were in helping clarify the position of the Chinese side regarding the ongoing trade disputes between the U.S. and China, the honesty or politeness style adopted by Liu Xin is said to undercut the perlocutionary effect of the discussion, especially when it was put in stark contrast to the aggressiveness style employed by Trish Regan. Among the signs on the basis of which Liu was accused of being too polite in the discussion was the fact that she was unable to raise any question for her interlocutor. At this point, Liu was characterized as a passive participant of discussion or outsider-as-guest with Trish Regan playing host in her homeland as an aggressor-like inquirer into the shared discursive space between CGTV and Fox Business Network in a narrow sense, or China and the U.S. in a broad sense. It is precisely here that the honesty or politeness style is pitted against the aggressiveness style.

Apparently, there is an implicit binary opposition in this rendering, with the latter style being prioritized over the former one. No matter whether it is the honesty style or the assertiveness style, the style of argumentation is correlated with the arguer's ethos, which, according to Aristotle, is the "most authoritative form of persuasion" in relation to logos and pathos (1356a [2007]). Therefore, the first consideration for every arguer, is the projection of an ethos which helps build up the arguer's credibility. In terms of place, ethotic arguments involve the physical and nonphysical dimensions (Wang, 2020), and in terms of *Kairos*, there is also the timing dimension. In this debate, for Liu, place here refers to her identity as an anchor with CGTN, grown up in the Chinese rhetorical tradition that attaches great importance to rhetorical or discursive honesty as a basic principle. Should an arguer's words sound dishonest, there is little credence for the arguer's character. Whatever Liu says must also be in accord with her identity. Otherwise, her words will not be trustworthy or honest. *Kairos*, as a principle of rhetorical timing since ancient Greece, demands that an arguer says the right thing at the right time for the right audience. For the Fox audience, they wanted to learn through Liu's words, how the Chinese side sees the current trade disputes between the two countries and what the Chinese version of solution is. For Liu's domestic audiences in China, where the debate was "eagerly anticipated" and where "nationalism and distaste for the United States are running high," she was expected to play tough, and most importantly, her discourse was produced to change or challenge as much as possible the American audience's received perception of the China-U.S. trade deadlock. This, in large measure, hinges

upon what sort of ethos she has projected in American audiences' minds and in what ways she has engaged her discursive partner, for that matter, and more importantly, what sort of ethos her American audiences have conceived of her and her country.

It is precisely here that the tension between (de)individualizing efforts and (de)institutionalizing efforts came into being. In a news story delivered one day before the debate took place, the focus was on the character of the two female anchors. For Trish Regan, between the lines, the different versions of her character are: "a star of one of President Trump's favorite television networks, Fox Business," and an anchorwoman who "isn't exactly known for her adversarial stance toward the Trump administration." There is inconsistency between Trish A as a star of pro-Trump TV Network and Trish B as an adversary of the Trump administration. Could it be possible that Trish A was from the same Television network that happened to be one of President Trump's favorites while Trish B was depicted as a well-known (but without being exactly so) critic of the Trump administration? As far as her stance toward the U.S.-China trade disputes was concerned, the implicitly fundamental assumptions (on tariffs, state capitalism, IP theft, etc.) were similar to the stance explicitly expressed by the former White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon in his widely circulated newspaper article. In this article, Steve put forward his six theories of understanding China that cover China Threat, state capitalism, economic development model, tariff policy, IP theft, and totalitarianism (Bannon, 2019).<sup>4</sup> In both Trish A and Trish B, there seemed to be a shadowed Stephen K. Bannon. But unlike Stephen K. Bannon characterized here as a US "ultra right-wing opinion leader,"<sup>5</sup> Trish Regan was hardly mentioned in the Chinese media before the event. Actually, she was hardly known until Liu Xin directly took aim at her by criticizing her poorly supported overgeneralizations. But after the event was announced, there was some coverage of her profile and background. Basically, she was portrayed as a pro-Trump figure.

However, for Liu Xin, there are many selves uncovered one by one here: a polished debater; CGTN anchor; "one of China's best known faces"; "a symbol of Chinese toughness and rationality"; one of Chinese state media reporters who are "getting bigger and bolder"; "a woman who is unapologetic about championing China"; "an English major from eastern China who speaks flawless English, some French, German and Turkish"; "the first Chinese student to win an international public speaking competition in London in 1996"; "one of [CCTV's] highest-profile correspondents, covering events like President Barack Obama's state visit to Beijing, the Iran nuclear talks and the conflict in Syria"; the current wife of "a German man of Turkish descent"; a mother of several children; an experienced "China Story" teller inside and outside home in the past ten years; a reasonable anchor who cares about the foreign audience; a journalist who frequently urges her Chinese peers to be "more assertive and self-confident"; a vehement critic of Western media; a strong believer in the "validity and rationality of [China's] development path"; an employee with CCTV whose U.S. division was ordered by the Justice Department of the U.S. "to register as an agent of foreign influence"; possibly one among "some CCTV correspondents [who] have embraced overt displays of nationalism"; a colleague of some nationalistic correspondents; and a CCTV reporter who was complicit in the Chinese Foreign Ministry's censorship and punishment of BBC's "inappropriate" and "unfair" coverage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Chinese Communist Party National Congress by suspending the British broadcaster's visa renewals. (Shih, 2019) These unprecedented layer-after-layer peelings of Liu Xin's selves were conducted in such an astonishing way that the remaining innermost self of Liu Xin could not be anything but a spokesperson of the

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<sup>4</sup> Bannon's theories were refuted as "US far-right nationalist" thinking by China's Global Times in an editorial. But in both the argument and counterargument, *argumentum ad hominem* is rampant. See "Bannon confronts China with fringe theories," which is available here: (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1150055.shtml>.)

<sup>5</sup> "Bannon promotes economic fascism." (<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1151277.shtml>)

Chinese Communist Party. For us, we reject the essentialist belief that for every human being, there is an innermost self “out there” in the bottom of the human mind, and that the other selves is just an extension of this innermost self into different contexts.

This kind of essentialist approach is consequential discursively, often detrimental to the ethos of an arguer. The discursive reality constructed out of these many selves of Liu Xin provided an opportunity for the American audience to locate or relocate Liu’s position and Regan’s as well in the disputed space between Fox Business Network and CGTN. Unfortunately, in return, this positional judgment worked as a vantage point or rationality from where Liu’s and Regan’s discursive behaviors would be judged. The above in-depth exposure of Liu’s multi-dimensional identities had left little room for Liu’s self-denial of being a communist party member upon such a claim by Trish Regan in the opening remarks. Anything said against this rationality or being not something radiating from this vantage point could be rendered as irrational or unreasonable. In sum, this rationality had become the defining characteristic of the newly constructed reality. Now this rationality extended into Trish Regan’s opening remarks:

“She’s the host of a primetime English language television programme overseen by the *CCP*, the *Chinese Communist Party*...As these trade negotiations stall out, it’s helpful to know how the *Chinese communist party* is thinking about trade and about the United States. In the interests of transparency, I should explain that *I don’t speak for anyone but myself* as the host of a Fox Business show. My guest however is part of the *CCP* and that’s fine... (see “Full transcript of Liu Xin’s live discussion on Fox,” emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

Here clearly a kind of intertextuality is formulated between Trish Regan’s remarks and the U.S. media’s coverage of this big event between the two countries at a particular time. This meant that Regan’s location of Liu’s identity was authorized by *the* rationality established in the audience’s mind. Here’s Liu’s response to Regan’s remarks:

“I have to get it straight, I am not a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC), this is on the record. So please don’t assume that I’m a member, and I don’t speak for the Communist Party of China, here today I’m only speaking for myself, as Liu Xin, a journalist working for CGTN.” (Note: from the same source as the preceding one)

Seen from the perspective of discursive authorization, Liu Xin’s counterstatement following Regan’s statement here paled in comparison to the well-established rationality. Worse, Liu’s counterargument here would most probably be judged as dishonest since it was not only against the rationality but also against the commonsense. This commonsense was that the so-called “objectivity” or “transparency” claimed by Chinese media that were overseen by CCP could never be “objective” and “transparent.” By contrast, Trish Regan stated that she was not speaking for anybody but herself, and that it had been a tradition of her show to “welcome different perspectives.” Therefore, on the one hand, under the umbrella word “transparency,” whatever word Trish Regan uttered would be authorized and protected by the principle of transparency. On the other hand, this very attitude toward transparency of hers was in itself an honest enactment of the very spirit of journalism: “And though she and I may not agree on everything, I believe this is actually a really unique opportunity, an opportunity to hear *a very different view*.”

Also in the opening remarks of both sides, there is the tensions between institutionalization

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<sup>6</sup> <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774d3245444d35457a6333566d54/index.html>

in the case of Liu and de(institutionalization) in the case of Regan, and also between individualization and de(individualization) in both cases. This surely involved the principle of essentialism, and often in the argumentation scheme of *ad hominem argumentum*. But of course this argumentation scheme is not unfamiliar in both sides' public discourse, to be fair. Such an essentialist approach adopted in the anatomy of Liu Xin's historical and current ethos could only serve to render in advance of the event every word Liu would utter in the debate the next day as sensational communist propaganda and totally dishonest and unacceptable to the American audience. The reason was simple: the audience's cognitive environment had been completely changed and a discursive reality was successfully constructed which was in Regan's favor, but to Liu's disadvantage.

The above-discussed widely-circulated ethos of "assertiveness" for Chinese state-run Media Networks and their journalists as a whole must have conditioned Liu Xin's way of expressing opinions in the debate on Fox. This could be counted as the latest evidence for the collectively "getting bigger and bolder" ethos of Chinese journalism, which was provided in a news story predicting this event. Here in this preview, in contrast to the seemingly "neutral stance" suggested in the title "Anchors from China's state TV and Fox are facing off," the collective ethos of Chinese journalism became unfortunately the new "rationality" or "reasonableness" in the audience's mental horizon. This was basically the context that constrained Liu's way of self-presentation in the debate. In such a rhetorical situation, the only available choice of presenting her arguments was the style of being polite, honest and reasonable. Otherwise, in the words of Yuan Zeng, a lecturer from School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds, such events as Liu's debate could only serve to "offer more proof to the network's [CCTV's] critics" (Shih, 2019). Therefore, the style of being polite, honest and reasonable could be a result of Liu Xin's careful and thoughtful calculation and design in her preparation for this debate, rather than a natural overflow of her being inherently honest. To draw upon Hannah Arendt, these other selves are not of "a permanent fixture annexed to the inner self." What Arendt denies here is the existence of such an innermost self that represents the voice of conscience that will speak to the other selves to monitor their behaviors (2003, p. 13).

#### **4. In pursuit of the "honesty-qua-assertiveness" style**

However, the nonexistence of an innermost self does not rule out the possibility of sounding this way from occasion to occasion, from time to time, from context to context, and most importantly from audience to audience. In the case of Liu Xin as a journalist, this is also required by her professionalism. If an audience believes in Liu Xin as a journalist, whatever she says from her studio or newsroom will sound trustworthy or believable, or vice versa. Seen this way, the honesty style is inherent in the professionalism's requirement. All this involves the establishment of an honest ethos. According to Aristotle, this ethos (character) has nothing to do with an arguer's human records and social reputation, but is established through one's discourse. This means that an arguer's discursive credibility plays a crucial role in the process, and once this credibility is established in the first place, an intended ethos manifests itself in the audience's mental horizon. In this sense, in the case of Liu Xin, a particular ethos is highly important but was unfortunately downplayed or neglected in the afore-mentioned media coverage. This is her ethos of multiculturalism.

We could hardly imagine now how Liu Xin could have been a "flawless" English speaker and could have decided to marry a German gentleman and could have demonstrated her

outstanding multilingual abilities in French, German and Turkish, if she would not have been an enthusiastic lover of Western languages and cultures, at least English and German cultures. And if she would not have cherished this multicultural ethos so strongly to boost up her international reputation and perhaps more importantly to hold her international family together, where could have her rare courage come from to publicly and directly deny the accused CCP membership? She has other alternatives available to her at that moment before such an accusation. For example, against the cruel discursive reality of her being “stigmatized” as a CCP member, she could simply pay no attention to Trish Regan’s statement that she was a CCP member. Or she could instead, as she had always claimed so, see and use the opportune time to “lay out the facts” of CCP’s numerous good deeds done to her people since the reform and opening up, and briefly tell these “Chinese Stories” in a reasonable way to “win over the foreign audience” [her interlocutor and Fox audiences] to CCP’s side, and then expressed her great regret she had actually not been a CCP member. Was this not a double-win for her at that moment in the senses that she not only offered an effective counterargument and defended CCP’s reputation before American eyes? Was this not a good opportunity to win hundreds of millions of domestic audiences to her side, though she was said to be already one of China’s best-known faces? So when we look back at this event to reconstruct and evaluate both sides’ arguments, Liu’s politeness and honesty style is not something that could be easily accounted for, while Trish Regan’s style of aggressiveness (in the way she raised all those tough questions) is obviously consistent with the previous “Trish style” in her show series.

Therefore the style of honesty and politeness does not come from Liu Xin’s innermost self, and there is no such inner self of hers. Rather the honest self of Liu Xin is her ethos as a journalist. This also represents her work ethic of honesty and rationality. Most importantly, this work ethic has proved to be an effective principle, and is not inconsistent with her persona as “a symbol of Chinese toughness and rationality” on her talk show on CGTN. This is because being tough and rational before her Foreign or domestic viewers who live in China appear to be the embodiment of honesty in the rise of narrow nationalism.<sup>7</sup> Hence the “Liu Xin” as a critic of Western media, for instance. However there might be another interpretation as well. This bigger and more recent context of the live discussion could be an extension of her family context of numerous multicultural experiences. As she recalled in her interview with Thepaper.com in 2017, feeling frustrated with moments when her German husband and their kids complained about her praising China again upon hearing her version of China Story (Shih, 2019), there were successful moments and failure ones as well during her 10 years’ efforts of this kind. Thus, for her, the best workable style is the honesty and politeness style or what she calls “lay-the-fact and speak-with-reason” style. But this is aimed at winning over the foreign audience. Audience consideration is the most important dimension here.

Now the honesty and politeness style, out of thorough consideration, could work as a conceptual bridge between China and the U.S. Liu Xin managed neither to incur a curse from each side, nor to impose a blessing on each side. This was proved to be her best strategy in the debate. As was commented, her exposure there on Fox Business Network was itself a hard-earned credit not just for her employer CGTN but also for herself (Shih, 2019). She was honest and polite in her opening remarks to express her gratitude to her host anchor for what she called “a great opportunity, unprecedented.” It has been a long-cherished tradition for Chinese to express their heartfelt

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<sup>7</sup> With regard to the increased scrutiny, regulated operations and limited exposure in North America, Europe and the rest of world (Peter, 2018), the major audience for CGTN, so to speak, are chiefly foreigners living or working in China, or Chinese English language learners, who are not necessarily its targeted audience though.

gratitude to persons concerned for whatever goodness done to them. Liu Xin must have thought there should be no exception for her. Therefore, “thank-you” slipped out of her mouth twice in a straight row, followed by her redundant remarks that she had never “dreamed” that she “would have this kind of opportunity to speak to [her] and to speak to many audiences in ordinary households in the United States.” These remarks could be believed to be honest ones, but there could still be another interpretation: they could be meant to be ironical since Liu was already a household name in China simultaneously enjoying a certain degree of international fame, good or bad. Perhaps for some audiences, she should not have been so grateful. But whether all this was meant to be honest gratitude or ironical comments, Liu’s intention could be one mode of interpretation. The audience’s affection could be another.

Apparently, Liu’s intention was to call all those “blanket statements” and “broad generalizations” into question (Tangen, 2019). But while doing so, she had to partake in the discussion in the name of “only speaking for myself, as Liu Xin, a journalist working for CGTN,” in denial of the CCP membership, and in a polite way. As for the representational style, she mentioned specifically the styles of clarity, brevity, appropriateness and honesty. On recalling her performances in the discussion, she said: “I tried my best to make myself clear, to make my sentences short, to reach out to her, to answer Trish’s questions in an honest measure.” Stakes are high for the honesty style, since it is “the only way we can move forward.” She insisted on the necessity of being honest in verbal communication, and this also explains why she “didn’t go in with a confrontational mood.” Trudy Govier in her *The Philosophy of Argument* entertained the possibility of arguing “in nonconfrontational ways” (1999, p. 55). She suggested there that we could “present arguments to offer reasons and evidence, with due respect for those whom we are addressing, and consideration for their beliefs and values” (p. 55). Here, in the Chinese cultural context, the honesty style originates from the kernel of ancient Chinese rhetorical theories, i.e. the principle of “Rhetoric Establishes Sincerity” [修辞立其诚/xiū cí lì qí chéng] from Chinese cultural classic *The Book of Changes*, which means that rhetoric comes into play only if one’s discourse sounds sincere or honest, and only in this way can one outstand him/herself in the social world.<sup>8</sup> It is also here in this classic book that the two Chinese characters [修/xiū, meaning “to adjust or modify”] and [辞/cí, meaning “speech,” “discourse” or “words”] are juxtaposed together to make a phrase [修辞/xiū cí], which is rendered into the English language as “rhetoric,” though there is no perfect equivalence involved here in this rendering. This principle of Chinese rhetoric sheds some light on the importance of style in persuasive discourse. The rhetoricity of discourse is contingent, to some degree, upon the nature of the voice conveyed in the discourse.

Seen this way, it is understandable that Liu’s adoption of the honesty or politeness style is out of a series of considerations behind the scenes. In preparing for this event, she defined the nature of the live discussion as “not a conversation between two countries or two people[s], and not even between Fox and CGTN,” but “a conversation between me and Trish, as journalists, as human beings, as if she wants, women.” Apparently, she was trying to deinstitutionalize her identity and dissolve it into a simple human being of blood and flesh. Only in this way could she dispense with all kinds of noises, bias, prejudice, institutional constraints, or pre-concepts. However, warns Catherine Hundleby, “Politeness institutionalizes rather than moderates certain aggressive tendencies in argumentation, creating gendered power strata in discourse, and preventing metaphors of war and aggression from losing their confrontational implications” (2013, p. 242).

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<sup>8</sup> This principle of Chinese rhetoric, ever since its coinage during the Western Zhou (1046-771 B.C.E.) dynasty, has been subjected to interpretations over the historical times of approximately 3,000 years, which in many cases clash with one another. The translation term here is taken from Google.com, but the interpretation is mine.

In supposing an idealized context through the sincerity or politeness style, Liu Xin was also trying to intervene in the discursive reality in the audience's mental horizon, or at least to drive a stake or wedge in the conceptual space. This of course constituted a huge challenge for her even if she had already become a well-established journalist with exceptional multilingual ability. However, notwithstanding having consciously "put herself in a disadvantageous situation" in that she had "agreed to be on Trish's turf," she explained that she "wanted to change Trish's perception of Chinese people," "change her perception of Chinese women, and possibly of Chinese people." All in all, she wanted to make present the new collective ethos of Chinese women who are "willing to talk to [American women]," "not afraid," and are "not hiding away from the problems that we face."

To be sure, this was quite successful. And the style of honesty or sincerity seemed to be the only available pathway to persuasion in this case. But she had to sacrifice something in order to make present her ethos of being an honest and sincere public figure before American audiences' eyes. In the words of hers, she had to "put myself in her hands" and "let Trish call the shots about the time and place of the debate and nature of questions, which...were not communicated to her prior to the show," except for a couple of keywords. In a word, Trish named almost everything of this debate, and Liu seemed to be a downright passive participant, in the words of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticist poet William Wordsworth, "the solitary reaper" in the discursive field, and this image of solitude could have reaped some sympathy from the American audience if she would have managed to leave an impression that whatever word she uttered on that occasion was coming out of her mouth in exactly the same way as leaves were falling down from trees naturally in the fall, as had been suggested in the Romanticist stance of anti-rhetoric.

In this sense, Liu seemed to be more than a "polished debater" as claimed by Western media, and not at all her self-claimed "poor debater." A true debater is probably someone who does not look like one, but who has the capacity to wield one's sword into the very most fatal area. Liu Xin, to my mind, proved herself to be a stellar debater of such kind. She had lived up to her reputation as an internationally champion debater in 1996 on the British soil. Her sophistication as a debater manifests itself in the following words: "But if you really truly want to engage with someone, you go there unarmed. You go there and you don't become defensive. You open your heart, and you open your mind and you talk. And that's why I had to talk from my personal perspective, because then I have greater freedom to express what I really feel. And that was exactly what I did."<sup>9</sup> Liu's words suggest, being honest or sincere does not necessarily mean being weak or deferential. The audience is never completely passive in verbal communication or argumentative exchanges. Rather it was precisely the projection of the ethotic honesty or sincerity that paved the way for Liu to enter into the conceptual space and take issue with Trish's blanket statements and broad generalizations. More importantly, it was precisely the Liu Xin style of being honest, gentle, and sincere that put so much pressure on Trish's aggressive style that she had to tone down her aggressiveness, especially when she was enjoying some advantage as the de facto host anchor.

As a well-trained or even genius debater, when she finally managed to appear in the social space which abounded in deep disagreements hidden in Trish's six questions. These deep disagreements include trade talks, IP theft, China's developing nation status, tariffs, state capitalism, Chinese economic system. Each deep disagreement originates from the fundamental clashes between the two countries, and there is no easy answer for each one of them. In the case of intellectual property rights, indeed one of the biggest issues between the two countries, for

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<sup>9</sup> The source of this section is from "Behind the scenes: How does Liu Xin see the unprecedented debate on Fox?" (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e316b544f34457a6333566d54/index.html>)



example, Trish pointed out an agreed-upon consensus between both sides that “it is never right to take something that’s not yours.” Then she cited quite some cases from WTO, DOJ and FBI as what she called evidences to support her accusation that “China has stolen enormous amounts of” and “hundreds of billions of dollars’ worth” of “intellectual property.” Then there came her question about how American companies could operate in China if they were at risk for having their property, their ideas and their hard work stolen. Trish’s style remained as direct and aggressive as usual. Liu did not take aim at this style, but instead demonstrated her usual style of being calm, sincere, and forceful. She was calm in that she did not hurl harsh criticism back at her interlocutor’s accusation. Instead, she endeavored to construct a bright and promising reality that was different from the risky one cloaked in darkness. There in Liu’s version of reality, the majority of American companies were profitable and were willing to come back to invest more and explore the Chinese market. This was indeed the bigger picture. But now this bigger picture might be disrupted by the Trump administration’s tariff policy. It was the new tariffs that could make companies and consumers from both sides suffer. This suffering was incurred not by IP theft, but by unilateralism of the U.S. side.

Liu’s being sincere could be manifested in her public acknowledgement that IP theft is a common practice in every part of the world. Her point was that since this was a universal problem, it was unfair for only Chinese people and Chinese companies to be singled out and be stigmatized as thieves. But she did not take this as justification for acts of IP theft for some persons and some companies in China. She was interpreted as “not talking about China, but about all human beings” (Tangen, 2019). Here apparently she tried to expose the ridiculous logic inherent in Trish’s overgeneralization. To her, “blanket statements” of this kind were not helpful at all. As was pointed out in her counterstatement, against the popular belief that intellectual stealing was rampant there, there had been “a consensus because without the protection of IP rights, nobody, no country, no individual can be stronger, can develop itself. I think that is a very clear consensus among Chinese society.” But even though such a consensus is in place, there remains much room for improvement, to be sure. The forcefulness of her counterargument was further demonstrated in her point that there should have been a distinction between (paid) learning and theft. If one pays for whatever knowledge one learns, this should not constitute theft. Since the U.S. remains the technologically most advanced country in the world, international students have been and are still flooding into universities and academic institutions there from all over the world. They pay tuitions, and get educated. Is this not paid learning? Then when they return to their homelands to serve for people there, they become thieves all of sudden? Liu’s central point was that it was very hard to draw the dividing line since we human beings had prospered through mutual learning, and cooperation.

Liu’s penetration of Regan’s logical soundness and her style of honesty in doing so had won credits for her counterarguments in the live discussion not only from her interlocutor on the occasion but also from some post-debate commentators. Tom Fowdy (2019), a British political and international relations analyst, argued in his commentary that “Liu gives us the bigger picture.” Contrary to anticipation that this debate would be a “heated and contentious encounter,” it turned out to be “in fact thoughtful, fair and pleasant to watch.” To his surprise, Liu demonstrated a style of confidence and calmness in challenging those overriding assumptions of the other side. Both sides cooperatively presented a “positive, civil and constructive” conversation in clarifying each side’s position. Similarly, Einar Tangen in his commentary defined the live discussion as “a nice debate, having two people actually talk to one another for a change, rather than making just broad generalizations.” He pointed it out for Trish that it was not right to make blanket statements or stereotypes about other countries and other people. He reminded Trish that she was not talking to



“a monolithic body [CCP],” but “a very nice lady who was going to explain *very reasonably* what China is about, and how she viewed all of these events” (Tangen, 2019, emphasis added). Liu’s style of reasonableness was recognized. But how could we know whether Liu had succeeded in changing her audience’s perception of China? To what degree? By what standard? Questions remain as we move forward along this path of style.

## 5. Conclusion

None of these questions has an easy answer, and we cannot expect deep disagreements, blanket statements, overriding assumptions to disappear over a debate. The resurgence of interest in style as a dimension in contemporary studies of argumentation captures its negligence by scholars in this field in the past decades. However in the field of rhetoric studies, style has always been recognized as an important component. From Aristotelian notion of style in his *Rhetoric*, to Ciceronian five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery), from the specialized study on style resulting from what Paul Ricoeur called “the death of rhetoric,” to the present-day notion of style as a stylistic device for strategic maneuvering in argumentation (van Eemeren, 2019), studies on style are always there. But these studies are not without problems. For one, the significance of style has been downplayed by rhetoricians almost unanimously. For another, the traditional sequential order of a rhetorical process is also problematic. In many cases, style precedes the very progression of argumentation. Seen this way, style must be part of invention, and it proves itself to be an effective weapon in penetrating social spaces which abound in deep disagreements. Style is of no less importance than argument per se. There is no way for style to be separated from argument. Style is, in many cases, the very argument itself. The issue over the appropriateness of style in a cross-cultural argumentative context also calls our attention to its relevance to the position of an arguer. The position of an arguer decides not only the content of an argument, but also the way an argument is presented, i.e. the style of an argument, as is shown in the above discussions.

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