

# A Rhetorical Analysis of *Shu Pu*: Exploring Interpersonal Metadiscourse as a Dimension of Ethos

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This paper examines how Sun Guoting employs interpersonal metadiscourse to realize the credible appeal in his treatise *Shu Pu*. The findings of the research indicate the credible appeal aided by this metadiscourse helps illuminate the rhetorical success of *Shu Pu*. Certainty markers as well as attitude markers prevail, which contribute to the ethos of a determined, upright and passionate calligraphy critic, scholar and supervisor. Meanwhile, hedges, commentaries and attributors of interpersonal metadiscourse also carry credible meanings for Sun's readers, though used less frequently.

*Keywords:* interpersonal metadiscourse, ethos, persuasive texts

## Introduction

*Shu Pu (Manual of Calligraphy)*, a calligraphy theoretical classic produced by Sun Guoting, has long been recognized as a landmark in the history of Chinese calligraphy and a great contribution to the study of the aesthetics of calligraphy. The treatise deals mainly with the writer's personal experiences and basic principles regarding calligraphy practice and criticism. In the treatise, Sun explicitly stated his objective: to eliminate what is complicated and superfluous in calligraphy practice, quality assessment, teaching and forgery detection, and direct the calligraphy practitioners of the future, in hopes that his work could be well received by his disciples and readers as a paradigm (Wang, 1998). Thus, *Shu Pu* is a highly rhetorical product, where Sun manages to act on his readers and convince them of his assertions. In this regard, *Shu Pu* can also be viewed as an academic discourse intended for persuasion. According to Hyland (1998), persuasive discourse depends on the writer's credibility or ethos. The perceived authority, sagacity and integrity contribute to the effectiveness of authors (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1989).

Despite the importance of *Shu Pu* and general consensus on its constructive role in shaping the cultural image of Chinese calligraphy, little research has been done on how the image is conveyed to readers. Previous studies are mainly concerned with the interpretations of Sun's philosophy on calligraphy practice and teaching, evaluations of the monograph regarding its literary value, and the quality assessment of the English translations of *Shu Pu*. These prior studies have lost sight of the discursive and rhetorical elements of the work, least of all ethos, which help to create a favorable image of Sun in the readers' minds.

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This study investigates the rhetoric features of *Shu Pu* to determine how Sun uses interpersonal metadiscourse to present an image of authoritative, confident, and rigorous calligraphy theorist, critic and master. It suggests those interested in the study of *Shu Pu* should become more aware of the function that interpersonal metadiscourse plays in achieving the credibility appeal.

### **Ethos, Interpersonal Metadiscourse and Chinese Calligraphy Monographs as Academic Discourse**

Ethos is considered by many rhetoricians to be the most significant factor in determining the effectiveness of persuasion (Crismore & Fansworth, 1989). Aristotle (2007) described ethos as persuasion through character, as to make a speaker worthy of credence (p. 38). It indicates that a speaker's ethos denote both the overall moral character and history of the speaker known by the audience before the speech has even begun, and the persona projected by his words in the speech. What I concern in this study is how ethos is reestablished by the rhetorician during the course of the discourse, as ethos is a dynamic process rather than a static quality or trait (Hauser, 1999). According to Hyland and Tse (2004), academic discourse seeks to inform readers of activities, objects, or people in the world, convince them of the writer's scholarly claims and credentials and persuade them to take actions. So it is true with *Shu Pu* as a calligraphy theoretical monograph. Thus, it is indispensable for Sun to build his personal ethos by means of discourse resources so as to make his words favorably received by readers.

Interpersonal metadiscourse, a term of systemic functional linguistics pioneered by Halliday (1973), involves linguistic elements that help realize the credible appeal (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1989), which has characterized persuasive discourse. It helps writers express their personalities, their attitudes towards ideational material, shows the role in the communication situation they are choosing, and indicates how they hope readers will respond to the ideational material (Vande Kopple, 2002, p. 3). I therefore argue interpersonal metadiscourse serves as a linguistic device in projecting a writer himself into his work, thereby establishing his trustworthiness or ethos in the discourse. In other words, interpersonal metadiscourse can help realize the credible appeal by means of presenting an authoritative, competent and trustworthy image of the writer. I will now discuss how interpersonal metadiscourse is used in the *Shu Pu* to realize rhetorical success.

### **Corpus and Methodology**

This research takes a corpus-based approach to investigate the distributions of interpersonal metadiscourse items in *Shu Pu*. The text of *Shu Pu*, which was published by Henan Fine Arts Publishing House in 2007, was scanned to generate an electronic corpus of 3500 words after excluding footnotes, appendices and references.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to analyze the corpus. I first propose an extended analytical framework based on Dafouz's interpersonal model of metadiscourse, classifying five categories of interpersonal metadiscourse into ten subcategories. Then, assisted by UAM Corpus Tool Version 3.3 (O'Donnell, 2009), two departmental colleagues and I independently coded the sample of analysis based on the schema described below. We then discussed all the divergences and reached a consensus. Finally, the frequency of occurrence and percentage of interactive metadiscourse markers were calculated. For qualitative analysis, I will determine how the ethos of Sun is built by interpersonal metadiscourse.

### Functions of Interpersonal Metadiscourse

The taxonomy employed here is primarily based on the interpersonal metadiscourse model for analyzing persuasive writing developed by Dafouz (2008), which has been moderately modified. Specifically, the attitudinal adjectives have been further classified into positive, negative and neutral ones, as negative ones occur very frequently. Though the subcategory of relational markers comprises rhetorical questions, first-pronouns, second-person pronouns, inclusive expressions and asides, I chose to investigate only the previous three. The reason is that there is no inclusive expression and aside in the corpus. Table 1 shows the interpersonal metadiscourse I selected.

Table 1

#### *Interpersonal Metadiscourse Categories Used for Shu Pu (Dafouz, 2008)*

Category	Subcategory	Example
1. Hedges	(a) Epistemic verbs	May/might/it must be...
	(b) Probability adverbs	Probably/perhaps/maybe...
	(c) Epistemic expressions	It is likely, unclear
2. Certainty markers		Undoubtedly, certainly, really, completely, totally, definitely
3. Attributors		According to/X says
4. Attitude markers	(a) Deontic verbs	Have to/need to/must...
	(b) Attitudinal adjectives	It is absurd/it is surprising...
	1. Positive adjectives	Crucial/valuable/remarkable
	2. Negative adjectives	Useless/ridiculous/absurd
	3. Neutral adjectives	Late/easy/difficult
	(c) Cognitive verbs	I feel/I think/I agree/I believe
5. commentaries	(a) rhetorical questions	Is not his claim excessive?
	(b) personalisations	I, me, mine
	(c) Direct address to readers	You

Interpersonal metadiscourse in Dafouz's model comprises five categories. Hedges and certainty markers are used to evaluate writer's degree of commitment to the truth-value of the text. Hedges indicate writer's uncertainty towards the propositional content. Certainty markers represent writers' conviction towards the ideas he presented. Attributors assist writers in gaining support for his/her own arguments through indicating the source of the information. Meanwhile, attitude markers express writer's positions. Finally, commentaries seek to establish a writer- reader rapport.

In Chinese, interpersonal metadiscourse is realized by hedges including “当”, “谓”, “尚”, “可” (epistemic verbs); “可能”, “可以”, “也许” (probability verbs), and certainty markers such as “信”, “断”, “真”, “甚”, “故”, “殊”, “尽”. Besides, attitude markers like “尚”, “贵”, “务”, “尤宜” (deontic verbs); “贵”, “过”, “妙”, “谬” (attitudinal adjectives); “疑”, “以为” (cognitive verbs), and attributors such as “云” also function as significant interpersonal discourse resources.

## Overall Results

The table below indicates that the five categories of interpersonal metadiscourse are all used in the *Shu Pu*. The frequency of occurrence and percentages of interpersonal metadiscourse markers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

### *Functions of Interpersonal Metadiscourse in Shu Pu*

Category	Subcategory	frequency	total	% of total
1. Hedges	(a) Epistemic verbs	6	20	16%
	(b) Probability adverbs	6		
	(c) Epistemic expressions	8		
2. Certainty markers		36	36	29%
3. Attributors	Indicate the source of quoted information	14	14	11%
4. Attitude markers	(a) Deontic verbs	5	30	24%
	(b) Attitudinal adjectives			
	1. Positive adjectives	7		
	2. Negative adjectives	16		
	3. Neutral adjectives	1		
	(c) Cognitive verbs	1		
5. Commentaries	(a) rhetorical questions	12	24	19%
	(b) personalisations	9		
	(c) Direct address to readers	3		

The finding suggests that Sun used more certainty markers (29%) and attitude markers (24%) than any other types of metadiscourse. Commentaries and hedges are used less frequently, with 24 occurrences occupying 19% and 20 occurrences taking up 16% respectively. Although the type of attributors (11%) is the least frequently used among the five categories of interpersonal metadiscourse, all these interpersonal types make a difference to ethos.

We hold that Sun's ethos is established from aspects taken from the following: the well-learned, competent and cautious calligraphy theorist; the honest, confident and tireless instructor; the skilled presenter of ideas; the trustworthy master, briefly, the authoritative, firm, friendly and well-respected Mr. Sun whose position is clearly defined.

### Credibility Appeals Contributed by Interpersonal Metadiscourse

In the treatise, the rhetorical purpose is essentially persuasive, seeking to gain the audience's acceptance of some particular ideas preferred by the writer. One of the element contributing to persuasiveness is the writer's credibility, such as authority, confidence, and trustworthiness. Interpersonal metadiscourse functions to project the writer into the text to present a competent and trustworthy persona. The aspects of interpersonal metadiscourse contributing to the writer's credibility appeals, include certainty markers, attitude markers, hedges, commentaries and attributors.

### Certainty Markers

The findings reveal that certainty markers are the most frequently used category in the corpus, which seems strongly linked with the objective of the *Shu Pu*: to eliminate what is complicated and superfluous concerning the

existing calligraphy theories, and help calligraphy practitioners to grasp the secret of calligraphy (Wang, 1998). To attain the objective, Sun widely employs certainty markers to highlight what he really believes, underline his certainty and display his expertise. Thus he stamps an authority on the text, establishing his credibility. Just as Dafouz (2003) remarks, certainty markers hold an important position in the construction of ethos in persuasive writings. With the aid of certainty markers, Sun demonstrates a passionate and confident image with expertise. Thus, he instills trust within his readers through an impression of certainty, assurance and conviction in the views presented. For example,

尝有好事，就吾求习，吾乃粗举纲要，随而授之，无不心悟手从，言忘意得，纵未穷于众术，断可极于所诣矣。至如初学分布，但求平正；既知平正，务追险绝；既能险绝，复归平正。(Ma, 2019, p. 101)

Once there were some interested in calligraphy who sought me and asked me how to study it. Then I set out a rough outline and taught them the main points. For each of them the mind understood and the hand followed, forgetting the words once the meaning had been grasped. Although they had not *totally* mastered the various techniques, they *surely* reached the peak of their aims. As for the beginners who studied the structure of character, they simply pursued above all balance and stability; once they were acquainted with balance and stability, they *naturally* aspired to steepness and boldness; once steepness and boldness were possessed, they returned to balance and stability. (De Laurence, 2011, p. 58)

In the above example, Sun begins the chapter with an emphatic “穷” (totally), as he mentions the fact that his students have not yet mastered all the techniques he passes on to them. This is followed by another emphatic “断” (surely), when it comes to his certainty towards the teaching effectiveness. With another certainty marker “务” (must), he discloses the fundamental law of calligraphy learning. Sun uses the emphatics for the same rhetorical move, regarding the ranking of the four calligraphy grandmasters in history.

Through the use of certainty markers, Sun presents his views in a sonorous and powerful way, and develops his image as a determined, confident and earnest supervisor, who spares no effort in working with his students. Such an image is in line with that of instructors working in the traditional Chinese cultural context. They are usually knowledgeable, confident and ascertain about what they preach, who take great care to inculcate his students with both morality and knowledge. As a traditional Chinese calligraphy classic, *Shu Pu* demonstrates the authoritative image of the writer, who has a strong desire to gain recognition from his students and readers.

### Attitude Markers

The finding reveals that the category of attitude markers is the second most frequent one in *Shu Pu*. The high ranking of attitudinal adjectives suggests that Sun expresses his personal feelings and concern in an explicit and extensive manner. They appear quite frequently in the text concerning the inheritance and innovation of calligraphy, and the characteristic features of the seal script, clerical script, running script and regular script.

贵能古不乖时，今不同弊，所谓文质彬彬，然后君子。(Ma, 2019, p. 62)

*It is therefore crucial* to be capable of being ancient without opposing one's own times, and of be modern without confirming to its harms, namely, to attain human perfection possessed by a gentleman through the balance of elegance and substance. (De Laurence, 2011, p. 43)

In this example, the attitudinal adjective “贵” (precious) conveys the writer's positive attitudes towards the issue discussed: the harmony between inheritance and innovation leads to a calligraphy works as perfect as a

gentleman. With the help of the attitude marker, Sun stressed the significance of noble character owned by a calligrapher, for a calligraphy work in itself is the manifestation of a calligrapher's ethos.

According to Oravec (1976), the speaker may indirectly promote his credibility through extolling good conducts. The positive attitude adjective helps Sun to establish his image as a pursuer of the highest level of ethics and art. Such rhetorical personality is undoubtedly a powerful means of persuasion, for once readers are charmed by the writer's ethos reflected by his wise and virtuous words, they will be drawn in to accept his views (Ju, 2015). The rhetorical image of Sun is hardly constructed without attitude markers, which plays an indispensable role in the transmission of Sun's philosophy on calligraphy.

It is also worth noting that the negative attitude adjectives, with the occurrence of sixteen times, account for 67% among the attitudinal adjectives. This is in unity with the intention of Sun: to clear up all the confusions and rectify all reversals of right and wrong. To express strongly his disapproval and criticism towards the propositional content, Sun uses negative attitude markers combined with certainty markers, which is an explicit attempt to build his personal ethos of candid, integrity and firmness.

心昏拟效之方，手迷挥运之理，求其妍妙，不亦谬哉！（Ma, 2019, p. 71）

For those who bear a muddled mind in the ways of copying and a puzzled hand in the principles of wielding and moving, It is *absurd indeed* to expect beauty and perfection. (De Laurentice, 2011, p. 50)

又云与张伯英同学，斯乃更彰虚诞。（Ma, 2019, p. 85）

These scholars also state that Wang Xizhi was a companion of Zhang Boying, and what a excessive *flagrant falsehood* it is!

In the above examples, the negative attitude markers “谬” (absurdity), “虚诞” (flagrant falsehood) work with emphatics “亦” (too), “更彰” (excessive) to reinforce an emphatic disapproval of the poor conducts of some calligraphy scholars and practitioners regarding calligraphy learning methods and textual research, promoting the image of a rigorous, confident, knowledgeable calligraphy critic.

Sun employed attitude markers ranging from quite positive “要” (crucial), “先” (important), “贵” (valuable), “绝” (remarkable) to negative “无取” (opposed, disagree, disapprove), “虚诞” (excessive flagrant falsehood), “伪” (fake), “无益” (useless). Aided by the attitude markers, Sun guides his readers' understanding of what is to be considered valuable and useless, good and evil, genuine and fake, important and unimportant.

## Hedges

Sun constantly projects the ethos of the modest, trustworthy and cautious scholar. This self-projection is mainly accomplished through the use of hedges, which comprise nearly one fifth of all metadiscourse items in the corpus. We can see evidence of this in the text regarding the calligraphy criticism, detection of forgery and the pitfalls of calligraphy learning.

以子敬之豪翰，绍右军之笔札，虽复粗传楷则，实恐未克箕裘。（Ma, 2019, p. 66）

Given Zijing's calligraphy as continuing that of his father, it was *probably* not capable of carrying on the paternal specialty, though it roughly transmitted its rules. (De Laurentice, 2011, p. 44)

张草犹当雁行。（Ma, 2019, p. 59）

As for Zhang's cursive, my calligraphy *may* be moderately inferior.

顷见南北流传，疑是右军所制。(Ma, 2019, p. 85)

It was *likely* that it was written by Wang Xizhi.

Given the fact that there was neither quality assessment criteria concerning the calligraphic works and nor available high technology to detect the forgery at the then society, Sun employs epistemic verbs “恐” (probably), “犹” (probably), “疑” (likely) to decrease his commitment to the statements. For one thing, the use of hedges functions to display the writer's respect towards readers, making the text appear to be polite and friendly. For another, withholding commitment could be a prudent insurance against overstating his assertion, which later may prove to be erroneous.

### Commentaries

Commentaries function to build writer-reader relationships. First-person pronouns only appear nine times in the *Shu Pu*, which indicates the differences between English and archaic Chinese: archaic Chinese grammar encourages users to omit the subject, while English, a typical Subject-Verb-Object language, discourages ellipsis in formal writings. Interestingly, although less frequently used, most of the first-person pronouns are combined with certainty markers. It assists Sun to express his personal beliefs and convictions, directly aligning him with the viewpoint expressed.

余志学之年，留心翰墨... 极虑专精，时逾二纪。(Ma, 2019, p. 68)

Since *I* was fifteen years old, I have *completely* dedicated my mind to calligraphy, pondering the writing techniques for over twenty-four years.

吾尝尽思做书，谓为甚合。(Ma, 2019, p. 117)

*I* had *totally* committed myself to a calligraphy, and I believed it was *extremely* harmonious.

The first person pronouns such as “吾”，“余”，which means “I”，in the above examples function to build the writer's credibility through alignment with certainty markers, highlighting Sun's endeavor in calligraphy practice. They also aid the writer to shorten the distance with his readers, and promote an image of cordiality, which make his views easy to be received.

### Conclusion

With the examination of several categories of interpersonal metadiscourse used by Sun, I have argued that the credible appeal aided by this metadiscourse can help illuminate the rhetorical success of *Shu Pu*. The certainty markers and the attitude markers are of considerable significance for Sun as a rhetorician, which contribute to the ethos of confident, upright and knowledgeable calligraphy critic, scholar and supervisor. Meanwhile, hedges, attributors and commentaries of interpersonal metadiscourse also carry credible meanings for Sun's readers, though used less frequently. The findings is closely linked with the writer's cultural preference, just as Dafouz (2003) and Hyland (2004) highlight that the use of interpersonal items can be impacted by such elements as social background and cultural norms.

Another important implication of my research is that the concept of metadiscourse carves a new place for the research on monographs in Chinese language and their translations. The findings offer strong backing for studying metadiscourse as a constituent of rhetoric in calligraphy monographs and provide a fundamental baseline for comparisons with their English translations. It would be interesting to uncover how interpersonal metadiscourse as a significant language resource helps translators to implement persuasive objective of the source text, and how the similarities and differences in the use of interpersonal metadiscourse characterize the different versions of translations. It might be rewarding as well to identify the intrinsic relation between relative frequencies of the metadiscourse items employed and the sociocultural context where translators are located.

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