

# A Study on Allegorical Narration and the Art of Argumentation in the Prose of Pre-Qin Philosophers

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**Abstract:** *In the evolution of Pre-Qin philosophical prose from the aphoristic style to the expository style, the incorporation of allegorical narration constitutes a pivotal juncture in generic transformation. Within the context of argumentation, allegory employs fictional narrative as a vehicle for rational persuasion, forming a deep mutual constitution with the art of argumentation. This study is developed across three dimensions: the fusion of genres, argumentative strategies, and the presentation of thought. The narrative turn enables allegory to acquire argumentative efficacy beyond that of mere exemplification; metaphorical reasoning, counterfactual narration, and the structure of dialogic refutation constitute the core mechanisms of argumentative strategy; and shifts in perspective, narrative control, and allegorical presentation realize a cognitive shift in the expression of thought. The study demonstrates that narrative elements are not merely ornamental adjuncts to argumentation but rather constitute the textual matrix through which the art of argumentation is realized. The deep isomorphism between narrative structure and argumentative structure reflects the Pre-Qin philosophers' conscious exploration of argumentative methods.*

**Keywords:** *Allegorical Narration; Art of Argumentation; Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose; Generic Fusion; Logical Construction*

## Introduction

As an important legacy in the history of Chinese thought and literature, the stylistic forms and argumentative methods of Pre-Qin philosophical prose have long garnered scholarly attention. Within the works of these philosophers, the extensive use of allegories constitutes a prominent textual feature; these allegories are not merely literary narrative fragments but also assume significant argumentative functions. However, existing research tends either to focus on the literary value of allegories or to concentrate on the analysis of argumentative logic, and it still lacks a systematic theoretical explanation of the intrinsic connection between allegorical narration and the art of argumentation. In fact, the stylistic evolution of Pre-Qin philosophical prose reveals a trajectory of transition from the aphoristic style to the expository style, in which the integration of narrative elements and the intensification of the argumentative context occurred simultaneously, thus forming a deep mutual constitution between allegorical narration and the art of argumentation at the textual level. An in-depth exploration of this relationship holds significant academic value for understanding the stylistic characteristics, argumentative methods, and mechanisms of thought presentation in Pre-Qin philosophical prose. This study takes the interaction between allegorical narration and the art of argumentation as its core perspective and develops its analysis across three dimensions: generic fusion, argumentative strategies, and the presentation of thought. It aims to reveal the structural function of allegorical narration in Pre-Qin philosophical argumentation, as well as how narrative elements participate in and shape the logical form and artistic quality of argumentation.

## 1. The Generic Fusion of Allegorical Narration and the Art of Argumentation

### 1.1 The Narrative Turn in Pre-Qin Philosophical Prose and the Context of Argumentation

The stylistic evolution of Pre-Qin philosophical prose presents a clear trajectory of transition from the aphoristic style to the expository style, during which the incorporation of narrative elements constitutes a pivotal juncture in generic transformation. In the early aphoristic style, records of discourses consisted primarily of brief questions and answers, with narration serving merely as

background indication. By the middle and late Warring States period, the works of various philosophers featured a large number of allegorical stories with complete structures and vivid plots, and narrative elements gradually moved from the periphery to the core of expository texts. This turn was not merely an evolution of literary form but was closely related to the intensification of the argumentative context.

The intellectual pattern in which the Hundred Schools of Thought contended required each school to respond to the critiques of others while expounding its own views, making argumentation the fundamental mode of intellectual production. In the context of argumentation, mere propositional statements often failed to achieve persuasiveness, whereas narrative assumed an argumentative function by virtue of its concreteness and situationality. Allegory, through the construction of fictionalized speech scenarios, transformed abstract propositions into perceptible processes of events, allowing both sides of an argument to engage in debate within a shared narrative framework. The narrative turn thus became an important stylistic strategy through which Pre-Qin philosophers responded to the demands of argumentation, forming a deep mutual constitution between allegorical narration and the art of argumentation at the textual level<sup>[1]</sup>.

### ***1.2 The Stylistic Features of Allegory as a Vehicle for Argumentation and Its Functional Adaptation***

As a distinctive stylistic form, allegory is essentially characterized by its use of fictional narrative as a vehicle for rational persuasion. The allegories in Pre-Qin philosophical prose typically contain two levels in their structure: the surface level consists of specific characters, events, and plots, while the deeper level consists of propositions or viewpoints awaiting demonstration. This two-tiered structure enables allegory to acquire argumentative efficacy surpassing that of ordinary exemplification. Allegory possesses a strong capacity for situational construction; through the setting of time, space, and character relationships, it establishes a self-consistent virtual domain for argumentation. Within this domain, the speaker can break free from the empirical constraints of the actual context and test the validity of propositions under hypothetical circumstances.

The characterization of allegorical figures also serves its argumentative function, as roles are often simplified into carriers of a particular stance or viewpoint, with their words and actions becoming embodied manifestations of specific logical paths. The narrative closure of allegory ensures the concentration of the argumentative focus, as the development of the plot unfolds around the core proposition, preventing argumentation from sliding into unbounded discursive extension. These stylistic features make allegory an indispensable vehicle in the art of argumentation of Pre-Qin philosophers, and its advantages in narrative integrity, situational controllability, and clarity of intention form a high degree of functional adaptation with the logical rigor and persuasive effectiveness required by argumentation.

### ***1.3 The Structural Role of Narrative Strategy in the Construction of Argumentative Logic***

The role played by narrative strategy in the argumentation of Pre-Qin philosophers has transcended the level of rhetorical ornamentation and entered the structural construction of argumentative logic. The narrative arrangement of allegory directly participates in the framing of argumentation, in which the causal chain of the plot often corresponds to the logical connection between the premises and the conclusion of the argument. The choice of narrative sequence affects the pacing of argumentative progression: sequential narration can establish a cumulative effect of argumentation, while the use of anachrony to create suspense guides the reader to participate in the process of reasoning.

The setting of narrative point of view concerns the presentation of argumentative stance: the omniscient point of view endows the narrator with authority, whereas the limited point of view creates a cognitive discrepancy through the constraints of a character's knowledge, thereby reserving space for subsequent argumentation. The structure of dialogue among characters in allegory directly reflects the logic of argumentation, as the distribution of speech between the two sides, the sequence of refutations, and the shifts in topic all embody the deliberate design of argumentative strategy. The shift in narrative space also carries a logical function, as transitions between different settings often mark the progression of argumentative levels or the reorientation of the discursive domain. Through the conscious deployment of these narrative elements, Pre-Qin philosophers made allegory no longer merely an auxiliary illustration for argumentation but rather the textual matrix through which argumentative logic unfolds, achieving a deep isomorphism between narrative structure and argumentative structure at the textual level<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2. Argumentative Strategies and Logical Construction in Allegory**

### ***2.1 Metaphorical Reasoning: The Argumentative Efficacy of Allegorical Analogical Mechanisms***

Allegorical narration achieves the argumentative function of analogical reasoning through the construction of metaphorical structures. Between the surface narrative and the deeper meaning of an allegory exists a structural correspondence, in which the characters, actions, and outcomes within the narrative are designed as mappings of the propositions to be demonstrated. Through the systematic arrangement of narrative details, this mapping achieves structural isomorphism between matters from two different domains, thereby transferring the reader's judgment of the narrative events to their understanding of abstract propositions. The argumentative efficacy of metaphorical reasoning derives from the verifiability of the narrative situation; the causal chain presented in the allegory possesses intuitive logical self-consistency, and the reader accepts the implicit argumentative premises while affirming the logic of the narrative. The Pre-Qin philosophers' use of metaphorical structures is reflected in their precise control over analogical correspondences, in which the selection, omission, and emphasis of narrative elements all serve argumentative intentions, allowing analogical reasoning to achieve naturalized presentation within the narrative framework.

The particular value of metaphorical reasoning in the argumentation of Pre-Qin philosophers lies in its capacity to address abstract propositions. For metaphysical propositions or value judgments that cannot be directly verified through experience, allegory transforms them into perceptible and discussable objects through the construction of concrete situations. The openness of metaphorical structures allows the same allegory to be reactivated in different argumentative contexts; while the narrative framework remains unchanged, the mapping relations shift, thereby endowing argumentative efficacy with the capacity for cross-contextual transfer. The common metaphors found in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories, such as those drawn from natural phenomena, artifact production, and bodily experience, all embody an argumentative approach that concretizes abstract principles. Metaphorical reasoning stimulates the reader's participation in reasoning through the similarity of situational cognition, transforming the argumentative process from unidirectional propositional assertion into a co-construction of meaning between the reader and the text<sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***2.2 Counterfactual Narration: The Expansion of Argumentative Boundaries Through Hypothetical Scenarios***

Counterfactual narration achieves a deliberate expansion of argumentative boundaries through the construction of hypothetical scenarios that contradict common experience or common sense. This type of allegory sets up situations that are impossible or have not yet occurred in reality, deducing the logical consequences of events under hypothetical conditions, thereby testing the validity of a certain principle or proposition. Counterfactual narration strips away numerous contingent factors of the actual context, focusing the argumentation on the examination of core logical relations. The fictionality of hypothetical scenarios does not diminish their argumentative efficacy; by suspending the constraints of actual conditions, allegory can unfold its reasoning in a purified logical space, revealing connections of principles that are obscured in conventional contexts. The Pre-Qin philosophers' use of counterfactual scenarios is reflected in their conscious exploration of the boundaries of possibility, pushing propositions toward extreme situations through hypothetical extremes to test their logical self-consistency.

The argumentative function of counterfactual narration is also manifested in its expansion of argumentative space. When an argument becomes mired in disputes over empirical facts, counterfactual scenarios can elevate the discussion from the level of factual description to the level of logical deduction, enabling both sides of the argument to reach a temporary consensus on their positions under hypothetical premises. The counterfactual scenarios in allegories are often designed as narrative structures with inherent tension, forming a logical necessity between the hypothetical conditions and the deduced conclusions, and this necessity in turn demonstrates the validity of the hypothetical conditions themselves. The frequent appearance of hypothetical narrative frameworks in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories reveals a conscious application of counterfactual reasoning methods. This narrative strategy liberates argumentation from being constrained by the citation and interpretation of empirical materials, allowing it to unfold at the level of logical deduction, thereby enhancing the theoretical depth of argumentation and the universality of its demonstrations.

### ***2.3 The Structure of Refutation in Dialogic Allegory and Its Rhetorical Tension***

Dialogic allegory presents the process of argumentation directly as verbal confrontation between characters, with the structure of refutation serving as the core driving force of the narrative. This type of allegory integrates the dual features of dialogic and narrative forms at the stylistic level: dialogue constitutes the main content of the text, while narration provides the situational setting and behavioral description for the occurrence of dialogue. The design of the structure of refutation is reflected in multiple dimensions, including the allocation of roles between the two speakers, the control over the length of speech, the arrangement of rebuttal logic, and the regulation of the rhythm of conversational turns. In dialogic allegories, the Pre-Qin philosophers set up interlocutors with differing levels of cognitive ability, conveying their argumentative intent through the cognitive reversal experienced by the participants during the dialogue. The question-and-answer relationship within the structure of refutation constitutes a carefully designed sequence of logical progression, in which each round of questioning advances the argument on the basis of the previous exchange, gradually approaching the core proposition<sup>[4]</sup>.

The rhetorical tension in dialogic allegory derives from the cognitive disparity between interlocutors and the asymmetrical configuration of discursive power. The party who holds the argumentative advantage in the allegory possesses the right to define the narrative framework and can guide the opponent into a predetermined path of reasoning through the use of questions. The party in a disadvantaged position represents everyday experience or common judgment, and their statements are gradually refuted or corrected in the course of the dialogue. This asymmetrical structure creates dramatic tension in the dialogue, endowing the argumentative process with the characteristics of a plot. The reader becomes drawn into the logical progression of the dialogue during the reading process, experiencing the unfolding of reasoning and the presentation of conclusions alongside the interlocutors. The meticulous arrangement of the structure of refutation in the dialogic allegories of Pre-Qin philosophers reflects a conscious reflection on the argumentative process itself, in which dialogue is not merely a mode of presenting argumentation but also the internal mechanism through which argumentation unfolds.

## **3. The Artistic Dimension of Argumentation and the Presentation of Thought**

### ***3.1 Shifts in Point of View in Allegorical Narration and the Expression of Argumentative Stance***

The mechanism of shifts in point of view within allegorical narration constitutes an important means of expressing argumentative stance. In the allegories of Pre-Qin philosophers, shifts in point of view frequently occur during the narrative process: the narrator begins from the perspective of one character and then switches to the observational position of another as the narrative progresses, revealing multiple dimensions of the subject matter through the differentiated presentation of the same event from different points of view. Shifts in point of view prevent the argumentative stance from being fixed to a single speaking subject; instead, the fluidity of narrative point of view enables a multi-layered expression of argumentative stance. When the cognition presented from a particular character's point of view is subsequently revised or refuted by a later point of view, the author's argumentative stance emerges in the gaps created by the shift in point of view, rather than being conveyed through the narrator's direct assertion. This indirect mode of expressing stance enhances the indirectness and inclusiveness of argumentation, allowing the reader to complete a cognitive adjustment independently while experiencing the shift in point of view<sup>[5]</sup>.

Shifts in point of view in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories also undertake the function of concealing argumentative stance. When an argumentative stance is presented directly through a character's speech, its persuasive efficacy is often constrained by the authority and credibility of the speaker; however, by embedding the stance within the overall arrangement of the narrative structure through shifts in point of view, one can circumvent the reader's psychological resistance to direct didacticism. The common shift in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories from a limited point of view to an omniscient point of view achieves a cognitive leap from partial cognition to comprehensive understanding, and this process of transition itself constitutes an argument for the argumentative stance. The cognitive discrepancy created by shifts in point of view allows the reader to undergo a transformation in understanding similar to that experienced by the allegorical characters during the narrative progression, thereby making the argumentative stance a cognitive achievement actively acquired by the reader rather than an external imposition passively received. This narrative strategy expands the art of argumentation from

confrontation at the discursive level to reconstruction at the cognitive level, reflecting the profound self-consciousness of the Pre-Qin philosophers in their argumentative methods.

### ***3.2 Narrative Modulation of Argumentative Rhythm: Elaboration, Transition, and Convergence***

The modulation of narrative rhythm serves as a key artistic means by which Pre-Qin philosophical allegories achieve argumentative efficacy, with elaboration, transition, and convergence constituting the three fundamental modes of rhythmic modulation. In the stage of elaboration, the accumulation of details, the rendering of scenes, and the extension of the plot establish a cognitive foundation for the unfolding of argumentation. Although this stage may appear to have no direct connection to the core of the argument, it in fact lowers the reader's psychological resistance through the immersive effect of narration, allowing subsequent argumentative interventions to occur more naturally. Every narrative element in the elaboration phase carries a functional orientation, whether establishing a frame of reference for understanding the subject matter or laying the groundwork for the preconditions required for the subsequent transition. The control of narrative density in the elaboration stage of Pre-Qin philosophical allegories reflects a precise grasp of the reader's cognitive pacing: excessive brevity results in insufficient groundwork, while excessive complexity disperses focus; the measure of elaboration directly affects the achievement of argumentative efficacy.

Transition and convergence constitute the more explicit elements in the modulation of argumentative rhythm. Transition serves as the concentrated manifestation of argumentative force in allegorical narration, breaking the cognitive equilibrium established during the elaboration stage through plot reversals, cognitive inversions, or the frustration of expectations, thereby compelling the reader to reexamine their existing framework of judgment. The intensity and rhythm of transition directly affect the impact of the argumentation: an abrupt transition may diminish logical credibility, whereas a well-prepared transition can maximize argumentative efficacy. The convergence stage solidifies the new cognitive equilibrium formed after the transition, completing the final closure of the argumentation through conclusive narration, character commentary, or the closure of subsequent plot developments. The choice of convergence methods in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories reflects different argumentative strategies: open-ended convergence invites the reader to continue pondering, while closed-ended convergence reinforces the certainty of the argumentation. The organic combination of elaboration, transition, and convergence endows allegory with a complete argumentative structure at the narrative level, making the modulation of narrative rhythm an indispensable component of the art of argumentation.

### ***3.3 Allegorical Presentation of Philosophical Propositions: From Concrete Narration to Abstract Speculation***

Allegorical presentation constitutes the core method by which Pre-Qin philosophers transformed abstract philosophical propositions into perceptible textual forms, a process that achieves a cognitive shift from concrete narration to abstract speculation. The allegorical presentation of philosophical propositions does not merely seek concrete images for abstract concepts; rather, it embeds the logical structure of the propositions within the overall architecture of the narrative. The characters, plots, and settings in allegory constitute the textual field in which philosophical propositions unfold, with the logical elements of the propositions receiving corresponding concrete representation within the narrative. This transformation renders originally highly abstract philosophical propositions accessible, allowing the reader to grasp the logical core of the propositions by apprehending the narrative structure. The narrative treatment of everyday experiences such as natural phenomena, artifact production, and interpersonal interactions in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories reflects a methodological self-consciousness that grounds abstract speculation in perceptible experience, thereby enabling philosophical propositions to break free from the closure of pure speculation and gain the possibility of public discussion.

Concrete narration and abstract speculation form a dynamic dialectical relationship in allegorical presentation. The concrete level provides cognitive anchoring points and a field of verification for speculation, allowing abstract propositions to be tested within the narrative situation; the speculative level, in turn, endows concrete narration with theoretical depth, enabling allegory to transcend empirical description and enter the realm of intellectual construction. The multiple allegorical presentations of the same philosophical proposition in Pre-Qin philosophical allegories reveal an exploration of approaching the theoretical core through different narrative pathways. The narrative framework of allegory not only serves as a surface presentation of the philosophical proposition but

also constitutes an interpretation and delimitation of the proposition itself, with the selection and combination of narrative elements directly affecting the direction in which the proposition is understood. The shift from concrete narration to abstract speculation is not accomplished in a single step but is gradually realized through a reciprocal movement between the allegorical narrative and the reader's understanding. Through the deliberate design of allegorical narrative structures, the Pre-Qin philosophers enabled readers to engage in abstract speculation while grasping concrete events, thereby endowing philosophical propositions with a narrative mode of existence and a transmissible textual vehicle.

## Conclusion

This study systematically examines the interactive relationship between allegorical narration and the art of argumentation in Pre-Qin philosophical prose from three dimensions: generic fusion, argumentative strategies, and the presentation of thought. The research demonstrates that allegorical narration is not a subsidiary rhetorical device of argumentation but rather the textual matrix through which the art of argumentation unfolds. At the generic level, the narrative turn enables allegory to acquire argumentative efficacy beyond that of mere exemplification, achieving a deep isomorphism between narrative structure and argumentative structure. At the level of argumentative strategies, metaphorical reasoning realizes the concrete argumentation of abstract propositions through analogical mechanisms; counterfactual narration expands the logical boundaries of argumentation by means of hypothetical scenarios; and the structure of refutation in dialogic allegory achieves an organic unity between rhetorical form and argumentative function. At the artistic dimension, shifts in point of view enable multi-layered expression and covert communication of argumentative stance; the modulation of narrative rhythm, through the organic combination of elaboration, transition, and convergence, constitutes the artistic support for argumentative efficacy; and allegorical presentation accomplishes the cognitive shift from concrete narration to abstract speculation. The Pre-Qin philosophers' conscious deployment of allegorical narrative elements endowed the art of argumentation with a textual form that transcends mere logical deduction, making narrative factors an important mode of intellectual production and meaning construction. Future research may be extended to comparative analyses of narrative styles across different schools of thought, investigations into the mechanisms of interaction between allegorical narration and cognition from the perspective of the receiver, and explorations of the evolutionary trajectory of allegorical narrative forms in light of excavated texts.

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