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**The Art of Extreme Conciseness: A Linguistic and Rhetorical Analysis of Accusations and Rebuttals in Late Imperial China**

In the imperial period of China, forensic rhetoric manifested itself mainly in written form, not in spoken form. Influenced by Confucian ideology, the legal culture in China stressed social harmony and discouraged litigations. When involved in lawsuits, litigants were not allowed to hire anyone to represent them, as the profession of lawyers was never recognized or accepted by the government authorities. The only tools litigants could rely on to argue their cases were written complaints or counter-complaints prepared by certified scribes, litigation specialists, or simply classically educated men with some knowledge of law. The legal complaints were normally limited to a sheet of paper which could accommodate no more than 300 characters written with brush, as short as most modern conference paper abstracts. Based on these complaints, the magistrates decided whether to grant a trial or even form a verdict. With such enormous consequences at stake, the art of composing complaints naturally became highly valued. To uncover the magic formula contained in the writing of these powerful documents, this study conducts a review of archival materials to examine the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies displayed in their composition, including structural arrangement, extreme brevity, poetic symmetry, semantic exaggeration, and killer rebuttals.