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Writing Concepts in Chinese Writing Instruction

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Since Kaplan hypothesized English writing as direct and Oriental writing as circular in 1966, much research has been done in contrastive rhetoric. However, few studies have compared English writing and Asian writing in its original text or compared rhetoric across cultures. In addition, what causes Asian students to write differently from English speakers remains an arguable issue. In response to this debate, the researcher focuses on how Chinese writing instruction can cause negative interference for Chinese ESL students' writing in English. One representative work in Chinese literary criticism and four texts in Chinese rhetoric are analyzed to determine how Chinese and English writing utilize different rhetorical forms even though they may share some common elements.

Specifically, this study shows that in Chinese writing the main idea can be more general, as a theme, or specific, as a thesis statement, and can come at the beginning or the end of a paper, although the end is preferred by most accomplished writers. In addition, a Chinese writer is expected to build the overall organization on word and sentence level structures and to use various indirect techniques to arouse the reader's interest in the aesthetics of a piece of writing. The writer does not have to state everything explicitly. Rather, the reader needs to share the writer's responsibility in creating a text by incorporating his or her own interpretation into the writing in Chinese rhetoric.

INTRODUCTION

A native speaker of English can easily judge if second language learners have an accent when they speak English; however, a native speaker can not so easily determine whether the English expository writing of non-native speakers also has an accent due to the rhetorical influence of their native language. ESL students who write well in their first language are not necessarily equally talented at expressing themselves in written English. Occasionally, even when an excellent piece of writing is translated literally from another language into English, native English readers may not appreciate its "confusing" ideas. Some scholars wonder if this happens because "there is a decided 'English' way

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of handling a topic, of putting ideas together, and of connecting sentences" (Raimes, 1983, p. 115). Some scholars maintain that ESL expository writing reflects native rhetoric which includes different concepts and thought patterns from those of English.

In this paper, the researcher attempts to discover the rhetorical influence that Chinese speaking students transfer from their L1 expository writing instruction to their writing in English. The paper examines basic Chinese writing concepts, both from traditional literary criticism and from today's writing textbooks that prepare high school students to go to universities, with the purpose of helping English teachers understand the basis of the different rhetorical style found in Chinese students' English compositions. This investigation begins with a review of the literature on contrastive rhetoric with a focus on English and Chinese writing. It then provides a detailed analysis of Chinese rhetoric textbooks. This analysis provides a well-rounded view of Chinese rhetoric and dismisses the stereotype that Chinese rhetoric only follows an indirect pattern. At the same time, however, the analysis shows that a strong preference for a more indirect than direct style of writing is an important part of Chinese rhetoric.

CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC: ENGLISH AND CHINESE

Contrastive rhetoric has had a history of almost thirty years since Kaplan's "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education" was first published in 1966. By definition, rhetoric is "the method of organizing syntactic units into larger patterns" (Kaplan, 1967, p. 15), and contrastive rhetoric "implies a contrast between languages and cultures" (Kaplan, 1988, p. 285). Kaplan (1966) hypothesizes that people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds organize discourse differently, and this difference usually reflects their native culture and language. Hudleson (1989) synthesizes Kaplan's definitions by stating that contrastive rhetoric examines the influence of a writer's first language on the organization of his or her writing in a second language.

Regarding writing as a basically social, rather than personal activity concerned with acceptable writing conventions and the writer's purpose of communicating with an unknown audience, Kaplan (1983) explored cross-linguistic rhetorical schema. In his original research, he examined some six hundred English essays written by ESL students and generalized the organization of writing from five cultures into his famous cultural thought patterns as shown in Figure 1 (1966, p. 10).

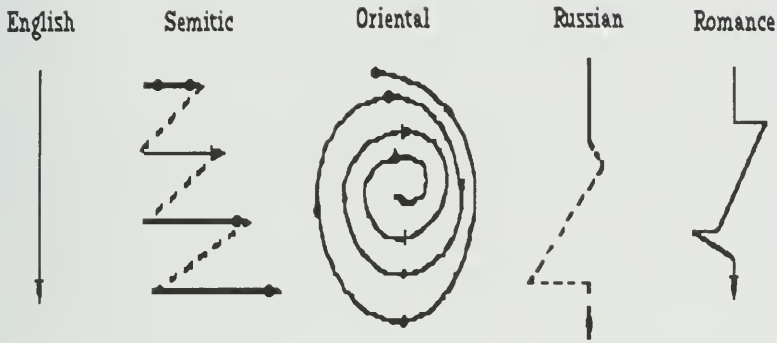

Figure 1. Kaplan's Proposed Cultural Thought Patterns (1966)

This paper is concerned with only two of these patterns: the English and the "Oriental." As shown in Figure 1, the English pattern is a straight line, illustrating the observation that English expository writing follows a direct and linear organization. Normally beginning with a topic sentence, a paragraph is then supported and explained by examples and details. After the main idea is fully developed, a conclusion is drawn to finish the text. Overall, all ideas relate to the theme, making each paragraph a tight coherent unit. In contrast, the indirect Oriental pattern is a spiral circling around a point, with no statement touching on the topic at the beginning of the text. In Kaplan's words:

> The circle or gyre turns around the subject and shows it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are (1966, p. 7).

Therefore, in order to understand the written context, readers have to "read between the lines" and infer meaning from the writing.

Later, Kaplan (1987) revises his analysis from a deterministic to a weaker version, suggesting that in any written language, all the different rhetorical modes illustrated are possible. However, the various rhetorical forms in a given culture never follow a parallel distribution; each culture prefers one writing pattern to another due to the influence of sociolinguistic and other cultural constraints.

Specifically, scholars have argued that English and Chinese writing show different preferences of writing forms based upon the level of directness.

Matalene (1985) points out that English written texts, especially argumentative tests, are characterized by cohesion, coherence, and explicit unity because writers need to make their argument "logical" (p. 790). On the other hand, Chinese rhetoric uses analogy and literary allusions in fixed forms, as it is greatly influenced by Chinese culture, education, literary tradition, and the authority of the past.

English and Chinese rhetoric also have contrasting philosophical foundations. Jensen (1988) looks at the rhetorical heritage of the two cultures and points out that historically Western rhetoric honors approaching or finding the truth, whereas Eastern rhetoric values keeping harmony within the society. Western rhetoric tends to express ideas logically, use direct organization, and choose a simple style in communicating with the audience. In contrast, Eastern rhetoric tries to keep silence and avoids breaking the rules or offending the audience; therefore, subtlety, analogy, and metaphor are welcomed to hide the writer's intuitive insights. Jensen's comparison between Western and Eastern rhetoric in a sense affirms the dominance of "Aristotelian (based on syllogistic reasoning) and Galilean (based on hierarchical taxonomies)" traditions in Western writing education (Kaplan, 1988, p. 290). With these differences in rhetoric, it is no wonder that some Asian students comment that English people write with a "cool head," since all their ideas are stated in words, while Asians write with emotion, as readers need to feel or guess the ideas from the writing in order to appreciate it.

Chinese Rhetoric

In contrastive rhetoric, research on Chinese rhetoric has focused on three indirect forms: *bagu*, the four-part pattern, and the spiral pattern identified by Kaplan. The *bagu* ('Eight-Legged Essay') form has the following eight parts: breaking open, accepting the title, embarking, introductory corollary, first middle leg, second middle leg, first final leg, and tying the knot (Kaplan, 1972, p. 49). Kaplan insists that although five centuries have passed since the development of the *bagu* form, it still greatly influences today's educated Chinese. Coe and Hu (1989) explain that this pattern occurs not only in rhetorical style but also in the traditional Chinese way of thinking in which repetition is widely used to strengthen or prove the importance of an author's point. As an American teacher in China, Matalene (1985) also claims that Chinese students now apply a new *bagu* form to their English writing. Her students' English writing normally begins with a narrative description of the topic, then the body paragraphs try to give the audience a deep impression of the topic by a "topic, restriction, illustration" pattern. However, the argument is basically supported by quoting authoritative sources, and the connection between sentences is loose.

Two other specific indirect Chinese writing patterns are discussed by Gu (1992) in her study of Chinese rhetoric. One is the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* pattern or 'four-part' pattern, in which *qi* means the beginning section of an essay, *cheng*

the following, *zhuan* the turning, and *he* the closing. This pattern does not have a thesis statement relating to the topic at the beginning of the text. Instead, the theme may occur in any paragraph depending on the author's needs. Still used in today's Chinese writing instruction as a beginning, middle, closing model with beginning covering *qi*, middle covering *cheng* and *zhuan*, and closing covering *he*, the looseness of this pattern contrasts with the English hierarchical pattern that is controlled by a main idea and supported specifically by details. The other pattern is known as "drawing the eyes of the dragon" (Gu, 1992), in which after the writer skirts a topic in several paragraphs, the main idea is finally stated at the end of the essay. This writing style reminds one of a painter who spends much time drawing a dragon, but saves the most important step, adding the eyes to make it alive, for last.

At the same time, other scholars have argued that Chinese rhetoric is similar to rhetoric in the U.S. Hinds (1987) considers the indirectness of Chinese writing from another viewpoint. He argues that classical Chinese might remain reader-responsible, that is, readers will need to draw meaning from the writing, but that modern writing in Chinese has become writer-responsible, as in English, and writers are now responsible for clarifying their ideas and viewpoints. Taylor and Chen (1991) confirm as well that not all Chinese writing is digressive. In Chinese scientific writing, the writer's purpose is clearly stated and no digressive ideas appear in the introductory paragraphs. Mohan and Lo (1985) choose examples from classical and modern Chinese writing to show that both deductive and inductive direct persuasive forms exist in Chinese rhetoric. They claim that, especially nowadays, direct writing is preferred to indirect writing in Chinese writing instruction. Many textbooks published in Hong Kong actually teach Chinese students in the same way that English writing textbooks do.

However, it is important to know that in the past quarter of a century most of the research in contrastive rhetoric has been based on the comparison of rhetorical structures between English compositions written by native and non-native English speakers. Kaplan compared native English rhetoric texts to the English essays of ESL students. In addition, research on native language samples of languages such as Chinese has relied on a very limited number of texts that may or may not be representative. In a sense, most research has not actually contrasted rhetorical patterns between two different languages. Although efforts have been made by researchers to discover various factors that make Chinese students' writing in English consistently distinct from that of native speakers, few studies have aimed at studying the process of learning to write in Chinese or how Chinese writing theories may interfere with Chinese students' writing in English and make them reluctant to accept new English writing theories. The following analysis attempts to remedy this situation. It focuses on five Chinese writing textbooks and examines the process of teaching rhetoric in Chinese. This analysis also provides a direct comparison to that same process in English, as manifest in American rhetoric texts.

CHINESE WRITING INSTRUCTION

For this analysis, the following five Chinese writing texts were chosen: (1) Li, Y.G. (1976) *Zuowen Jiqiao Yu Fanli* (*Writing Techniques and Examples*); (2) Gu, Z. B. (1943) *Guowen Zuofa* (*Methods of Writing Chinese Composition, vol. 1*); (3) Yu, S. M. (1955) *Zhongxuesheng Xue Yuwen* (*Language Study for Middle School Students*); (4) Yang, X. A., Li, Y. Y., and Wen, D. K. (1958) *Xiandai Hanyu (Modern Chinese, vol. 4)* ; and (5) Shih, V. Y. (trans.) (1983) *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*.[1] These texts share several factors regarding the aesthetics and rhetorical features of a model Chinese essay. As will be discussed in the following four sections, these factors, first, relate to the skillful presentation of the theme of a paper, second, concern the techniques of writing a good introduction and conclusion, third, cover the proper rhetorical order in writing an essay, and fourth, reveal an emphasis on reader, rather than writer, responsibility.

Theme in Chinese Writing Instruction

In contrast to its Western counterpart, the thesis statement in English writing, the theme of a Chinese paper only provides a clue to the writer's ideas. A Chinese theme, called *zhuti* ('main theme') or *zhuyi* ('main idea') in Chinese (Li, 1976, p. 19), sets the boundary of the writing content or indicates the major aspect which the paper will focus on (Gu, 1943, p. 193). Defined by Yang, Li, and Wen (1958), a theme in Chinese also directly or indirectly shows the writer's attitudes toward a subject and gives an outline of the paper. It is well accepted that one paper should only have one main idea which guides the content of the entire paper and makes it coherent and focused (Li, 1976).

Three typical methods of writing the main idea are given by Li (1976) in *Zuowen Jiqiao Yu Fanli*. One method is to repeat the title. For example, if the title is "The importance of studying Chinese," no explanation is needed to make this idea clear. The writer can use the title as the main idea or repeat it in a main idea sentence and develop all further ideas relating to this sentence. Another method to state the main idea is to choose one side of the chosen topic. For instance, if the topic is "should students take part in social activities or not?", the writer can reword the title in a sentence (e.g., "students should take part in social activities" or "students should not take part in social activities") and use this expression of his/her choice as the theme. A third way a writer may state the main idea is by focusing on one aspect of the complex topic. As an example, if the topic is "reading," the writer should narrow it down to "reading methods," "the importance of reading," or "the purpose of reading," or something relating to the title before deciding on the main idea of the paper. This more

specific focus can be expressed in words or be kept in the writer's mind, but the writer is not required to state specifically what will be covered.

This main idea in Chinese writing has a similar function as that of the thesis statement in English because it controls and directs the writer's expression of ideas. However, analyzing the methods of writing a theme, the researcher finds that Chinese writers have their own standards of evaluating a well-written theme. In their mind, a theme is the soul of a paper and can be visible or invisible. Its definition differs from its English counterpart in that a Chinese "thesis statement" usually indicates a general aspect instead of stating a topic and making a specific assertion. There are other differences between writing a theme in English and Chinese as well.

First, a Chinese theme is used more flexibly than an English theme. Although Li (1976) describes the above three methods of writing a theme, he does not specify a proper position for stating it. Gu's (1943) *Guowen Zuofa* and Yu's (1955) *Zhongxuesheng Xue Yuwen* also mention the importance of using a theme to direct the content of a paper, but their shared opinion is that the most important thing is to have a main idea and to write the paper according to that idea. Where to put the main idea, if it occurs in written form at all, should be decided by the writer. In contrast, an English thesis statement is normally preferred at the end of the introduction of an essay and gives a clear outline of the paper.

Second, the themes in Li's (1976) examples are expressed implicitly rather than explicitly. A Chinese theme usually originates from the title or slightly revises a broad title. It only provides the reader with a vague clue and lacks the specificity of the statement of opinion or the statement of intent of an English thesis statement. When closely studied, a Chinese theme is not equivalent to an English thesis statement, which gives the reader a subject together with a comment on that subject. In a sense, a Chinese theme in addition to a general statement about the theme is equivalent to an English theme. In the following analysis of the writer's and reader's interaction in appreciating the content of a paper, we will also find that the vague theme in Chinese writing is important to arouse the reader's interest in reading a paper and is more highly valued than an abruptly expressed sentence such as an English thesis statement.

Third, Chinese writing holds the philosophy that the theme of a paper has to be examined comprehensively, or from multiple perspectives. It is unnecessary to narrow one's focus to explore one point in depth. Instead, it is important to broadly discuss the theme or to divide the topic and discuss all of its aspects to ensure that every part has been exposed to the reader. Yang, Li, and Wen's (1958) understanding of the theme in *Xiandai Hanyu* reflects this point of view. According to this textbook, the theme of an article should center on a main point, but include several possible perspectives. When people talk, they try to clarify their points by discussing them from different points of view, and the same is true for writing. Although some aspects are more important

than others, after the important aspects have been explained, the article is considered complete.

Li's book also stresses the idea that the main theme cannot function well without the support of other smaller details. These details are relevant to the main idea because they have a strong inner relation. In other words, the focus on one main idea in Chinese writing does not exclude the existence of other subordinate ideas. Li teaches that Chinese writing should be made comprehensive by incorporating the main idea with subordinate ideas:

> Besides the main idea, there should be subordinate ideas that function as its background and help clarify or explain the main idea, making the paper a fully developed system. Without subordinate ideas, the main idea cannot stand out and catch the reader's attention; therefore, a topic should be explained or described either from its "front and back" or "opposite and side." Only after such description or explanation is done in a proper order can the main theme be strengthened. Otherwise, the main idea will lose its brightness (translation, p. 20).

A Chinese paper needs a central aspect as well as subordinate aspects to examine the subject from different angles: front, back, and side. Chinese subthemes not only develop the main theme and make it comprehensive but also clarify the theme step by step and make it look comparatively important. Without the subthemes, writing does not communicate the magnificence of the main theme; the main theme cannot stand on its own. It needs to be placed against its background, and the development of subordinate themes is decisive in deepening the main theme. However, to an American teacher, ESL students' written materials which elaborate on subthemes are usually marked as distracting or irrelevant to the development of a paper since they lead readers in a new direction. If ESL teachers give students an opportunity to explain and clarify the inner relation between the main theme and the subthemes, students may learn to present their ideas satisfactorily to meet English readers' needs. ESL teachers could also try to have the student narrow the theme to the subtheme level and then write the paper.

How to Write a Good Introduction and Conclusion

When covering the development of specific paragraphs (in particular, the introduction and the conclusion), Chinese writing instruction discusses both direct and indirect writing methods. Unexpectedly, the discussions on the direct method or *kan men jian shan*, (open the door to see the mountain) and the indirect method, *mai ti fa* (placing the soldiers in ambush) show that Chinese and English writers have a different interpretation of direct and indirect writing. Chinese writing regards touching on the topic as direct, but the same writing

may be interpreted as indirect by Westerners because of the subtle or vague expressions used in Chinese. On the other hand, Chinese writing favors the indirect suggestion of ideas, while without the same background knowledge, English readers may feel this indirectness equals obscure language.

Yang, Li, and Wen (1958) recommend the method termed *kan men jian shan* (open the door to see the mountain) for a good introduction. This metaphorical statement of method implies that the introduction should touch on the theme, or "open the door." Specifically, they categorize writing methods from Ji's *Writing Methods* and state that such an introduction can "create an environment, raise a question, determine the scope of the writing content, provide the sources of written materials, or explain the topic" (p.298). Summarizing Tan's methods from *Basic Steps of Writing*, Yang, Li, and Wen suggest the following issues to be considered in writing the introduction to an essay: "giving the topic, deciding on writing materials, preparing to start the content, indicating important points, or arranging the environment and the appearance of characters" (p. 298).

The directness of the "open the door to see the mountain" method is not only shown by the above methods but also by a detailed example chosen from *Junior High School Chinese Textbook, vol. V* in Yang, Li, and Wen's (1958) text, "In Memory of Bathune." Its introductory paragraph was thought of as direct because "the first sentence introduces who Bathune is, the second sentence introduces his internationalist and communist spirit, and the third sentence calls for every party member to learn this kind of spirit. All sentences relate to the theme" (Yang, Li, & Wen, p. 299). This direct writing technique is also presented as *po ti fa* in Li's writing methods (1976) in which the introduction touches on the topic and explains it later in body paragraphs. Unfortunately, Li does not discuss this method in detail, nor does he give examples for our analysis.

Chinese writing examples and explanations of the 'open the door to see the mountain' method demonstrate that the Chinese definition of direct writing differs from its English counterpart. In Chinese writing, after the theme has been touched on either implicitly or explicitly in the first paragraph, the door is opened to the reader. Whether the reader has "seen the mountain" or not, the writer has been direct in exposing his or her intentions. Yang, Li, and Wen also provide some interesting insights into their understanding of the Chinese direct writing technique by adding that direct ideas can be presented indirectly. They state that "touching on the main theme at the beginning" does not mean that the author has to show the main theme directly. This means only that the author cannot say anything unrelated to the theme (p. 299). In other words, any indication of the theme, not necessarily an explicit statement, can belong to the direct Chinese writing category.

Among Yang, Li, and Wen's summaries and illustrations of different direct writing methods, only the "explaining the topic" and the "giving the topic" methods appear similar to the direct English method of writing an introduction, although how the topic is explained or given is never explicitly addressed. The

rest of the methods simply relate to the point instead of coming straight to it. The introduction to "In Memory of Bathune" also demonstrates that this so-called directness is limited in Chinese writing. To an English reader, it is assumed that the point in a direct paragraph is clear enough that the reader does not have to guess it. This clarity is not the case for this Chinese paragraph. In the paragraph, the main idea, which is that memorizing Bathune will help party members learn the internationalist and communist spirit, will not come out unless readers make logical inferences from understanding all three statements as a whole. Although each sentence relates to the theme somehow, the writer's ideas in the following paragraphs remain at a suggestive stage, and they are hard for readers to predict.

In short, touching on the main theme in the introduction in Chinese writing looks similar to the introduction and thesis statement at the beginning of an English essay at first sight. However, an analysis of Chinese rhetoric textbooks reveals that the Chinese method of mentioning the theme is more general and indirect than giving the thesis statement in English. The 'open the door to see the mountain' method is defined by many Chinese writers as direct, but very often this directness becomes indirectness in English because the indication of the theme still leaves readers wondering about the real focus of a paper. In addition, touching on the theme in the 'open the door to see the mountain' method can be done implicitly rather than explicitly, which also makes it seem indirect from an English reader's perspective.

Alongside the Chinese direct method of 'open the door to see the mountain,' an indirect writing technique, 'placing soldiers in ambush,' is highly valued in Chinese writing instruction. Skillful generals who are planning in a war normally observe the situation first and do not expose their real force until soldiers are needed for fighting. Similarly, an experienced Chinese writer knows the best time to reveal the main point of the paper. Li (1976) explains that in this writing method, the writer circles around the topic and chooses a relaxed tone to influence the reader's mood before actually writing about it at the proper time. For narrative writing in particular, this technique is more skillful than touching on the theme directly and explicitly because it helps arouse readers' interest by piquing their curiosity.

This indirect writing method is also preferred for writing a conclusion. Chinese writing has the philosophy that "words have an end, but meaning does not." Especially for a narrative essay, the conclusion should not finish everything. It is better to be suggestive and to leave some room for readers to experience and enjoy what is written, thereby creating "overtones" (Li, 1976, p. 32). When Yang, Li, and Wen (1958) point out that the conclusion is intended to help readers further understand the content, deepen readers' impression, and strengthen the force of the composition, their suggestion of reaching this goal is also that the conclusion should be "concise, suggestive, and implicit; in other words, it should stop suddenly" (p. 299). They especially appreciate the conclusion of a persuasive article named "Lun Leifengta De Daota" (On the

Falling Down of Leifengta Tower) in which only one Chinese word *huogai!* ('serves him right!') is used to end the article. In their words, a special force is added to the paper by this short and suggestive conclusion which expresses the writer's strong anger toward the evil character in the story. However, it is unimaginable for English teachers to use a one-word conclusion as a model to show the force of being indicative and concise. English writing advocates conciseness in meaning, but not in length. The writer is required either to summarize the main points or give a sense of ending in a conclusion, thus such conciseness and indication as found in a Chinese conclusion will very likely appear illogical and make English readers feel lost.

Rhetorical Order in Chinese Writing Instruction

In this analysis, the researcher finds that the Chinese rhetorical order contrasts with that of English due to its emphasis on sentence-level structures. Chinese writing respects the rhetorical order that moves from lower to higher discourse levels or moves from smaller to larger elements. Word and sentence level structures are regarded as the basis of the whole organization of a composition. This point of view is shown by the definition of composition in texts as well as the discussions and suggestions for the revision process.

Defined by Yu (1955), a composition is "a group of well organized words that have a beginning and an end" (p. 130). A word is the smallest factor that helps the writer make up a composition, but it has the greatest importance in deciding the writer's expressions. According to Yu, for the same idea expressed in a sentence, the change of the subject could shift the writer's focus from person to place, time, or process. He also claims that with the same ideas, skillful writers can focus on different aspects when they structure the first sentence of the paper differently according to their purposes (p. 150).

In revising papers, Chinese writers pay much attention to word choices and sentence level structures as well. Usually, the overall rhetorical structure is not examined until the writer has made sure that the words and sentences are well written. For instance, Shih states in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* that:

> The brilliance of a literary piece depends on the faultlessness of each paragraph; the clarity of each paragraph depends on the flawlessness of each sentence; and the purity of each sentence depends on a happy choice of words. For when the stem stands up, the branches naturally follow (Shih, 1983, p. 361).

Shih also suggests that the writer judge the organization of a paper from sentence formation. "If there is any sentence that can be deleted, we know the writing is loose; and when not a word can be moved, we know the writing is well-knit" (Shih, 1983, p. 349).

In today's writing instruction, Li (1976) shares Shih's viewpoint and paraphrases this position as a guide for writing good papers: When writing is evaluated or examined, it is proper for writers to check various levels, from individual sentences to the discourse structure. The same strategy is given by Yu (1955) in his suggestions for students' revision of their papers:

Step 1. Check the title to see if it has covered the main idea of the paper.
Step 2. Check sentence level grammatical problems.
Step 3. Is there a sentence that can be deleted or added? Is there a paragraph that has irrelevant ideas?
Step 4. Are there transitional problems between sentences and paragraphs?
Step 5. Check the organization of the whole paper. Does it follow a proper order?
Step 6. Are the ideas in the paper objective?
Step 7. Have the ideas been thoroughly developed?
Step 8. Are there any punctuation and spelling errors?
(translation, p. 154)

These eight steps maintain the following order: topic, sentence, coherence, transition, discourse, viewpoint, idea development, and mechanics. In other words, in Chinese writing theory, the entire organization should not be examined until each paragraph has been examined. And, defined as an expanded sentence in Chinese writing, the paragraph should not be examined until each sentence expresses the ideas well and all are related nicely to one another. This Chinese revision process is almost opposite to that of an experienced English writer which starts from examining the overall organization of the paper, moving slowly to the structure of each paragraph, and later ending with sentence level, word choice, and mechanical problems.

Thus, according to both Liu and Li, word and sentence level structures in Chinese writing are the most important frame which helps the writer build the higher level structure of a paper. After words and sentences are polished, the whole essay will be improved consequently and naturally. In other words, the word and sentence level structures should be built solidly enough to hold the higher level structures. In response to this writing philosophy, Chinese writing instruction emphasizes word choice and sentence formation as fundamentally effective practice in training students to write good papers. In contrast, English writing instruction emphasizes the higher level discourse structure and maintains the opinion that only after a good frame has been properly and strongly set up can those lower level elements belonging to it be added to support and strengthen the frame. Therefore, in writing an English paper, it is usually not meaningful to examine those details relating to weak structure because sooner or later when the old frame is rebuilt, new details will be needed and irrelevant ideas will be

deleted. In short, English writing instruction does not share the viewpoint with Chinese instruction that a paper will be naturally improved after its sentences have been improved.

WRITER AND READER RESPONSIBILITY

Compared to English readers, Chinese readers are not only responsible for reading essays but also for feeling and interpreting them to understand the deeper meanings and appreciate the artistic beauty. English writing requires the writer to make the ideas clear while Chinese writing prefers the writer to make the ideas impressive, lively, and even suggestive.

From the former discussions on how to write a good introduction and conclusion, we have found that the need to make an idea interesting and impressive influences Chinese writers when they plan the organization of a paper. Normally, the introduction is considered the first and most important step in preventing the reader from deciding not to read the rest of the paper after "tasting" one paragraph. Yang, Li, and Wen (1958) clarify that the purpose of writing an introduction is to introduce the content of an article, stimulate the reader's interest, and catch the reader's attention. And among these three, the first one satisfies the reader's need to get information and prevents the reader from losing interest in continuing reading the paper.

From another perspective, the intention to make ideas impressive leads the Chinese writer to place the topic sentence of a paragraph or the thesis statement of a paper in a different position than an English writer would. Li (1976) indicates that because the beginning and the end of a paragraph catch readers' attention more effectively than other positions, it is better for the writer to place the important ideas in either one of these positions. The same principle applies to placing the main idea or thesis statement in a paper if they are explicitly stated. This is why the introduction and the conclusion are always major units covered by Chinese writing instruction. As the ending position catches people's attention in Chinese writing in the same way as the beginning position does in English writing, Chinese students do not think it is improper to delay their English thesis statements to the end of their essays, whereas English teachers think Chinese students' writing is indirect because the papers do not state the main point at the beginning. It is likely that once the important positions are redefined in English writing instruction, Chinese students may face fewer problems in finding a suitable place for their thesis statements or topic sentences when writing for English speaking readers.

In addition to making their writing impressive, Chinese writers have another goal of making the writing visually proper, which may also affect Chinese students' organization of their ideas in an English paper. In comparison with English writing, Chinese writing requires that a good visual impression be given

by the writer, mainly due to the Chinese calligraphic language system. In addition, Chinese writing requires that forms agree with ideas. The length of a paragraph is discussed as an influential factor which can make the writing either lively or monotonous. Usually the length of a paragraph should be decided by the length of the paper (Li, 1976, p. 34). For example, Li (1976) mentions that short papers need short paragraphs, which easily turn from one point to another and avoid creating a long monotonous chunk due to the change of visual forms. On the other hand, long paragraphs match long essays since they can express ideas thoroughly and avoid breaking a long paper into many smaller pieces, which may weaken the force of a long paper.

However, in English writing, idea development is more important than visual effects in deciding on the length of a paragraph. In a long Chinese paper, in order to match paragraph length with paper length, the writer is allowed to place more than one idea in that paragraph in a synthesized form. But in an English essay, whether long or short, only one idea is normally expected in one paragraph. A long English essay can have short paragraphs separating different ideas without fear of losing its balance. After one main idea is fully developed, it is normal for the writer to start a new paragraph. So it is important for Chinese students to change their concept that long paragraphs are needed for long papers and a long paragraph can include several different ideas. It is hypothesized by the researcher that English teachers can choose paragraphs from short Chinese persuasive essays as models to teach Chinese ESL students that one paragraph should focus on only one idea when they write in English.

Another point for analysis of these Chinese rhetoric texts concerns why Chinese students are often stereotyped by English teachers as writing indirectly and implicitly. It is interesting to see how the same writing characteristic that confuses English readers is highly valued in Chinese writing instruction. It is clearly stated by Shih that "to be too straightforward will most certainly involve many mistakes, and yet to be too consistently tentative will also do harm to the composition" (Shih, 1983, p. 440). In a sense, "to be too straightforward" and "to be too vague" are the same weak point in writing an essay. Writers should choose a middle stage between directness and indirectness. For example, they can mention the idea to a certain extent and motivate the reader to think of the rest of it. If writers are too straightforward, they will lose their freedom in explaining or interpreting their ideas from different angles and for different purposes; therefore, they are more likely to make mistakes because of their definite statements. On the other hand, those writers who hide some of their ideas are similar to painters who shade the trees in water-painting, thus making the pictures more beautiful.

In today's writing instruction, Li (1976) gives us a detailed description of what he thinks of the indirect writing technique:

> Writing needs to be concise and to use parts to represent the whole in the same way as painting or taking pictures. Water

> painting usually only focuses on the most important part of a picture since it could represent all scenery. If everything is painted, not only more time is taken, the picture will also not be as successful as showing only part of the scenery. The same thing is true for writing. After the most important and brilliant part is written, the rest of the content should give readers more freedom in imagining, in finishing, and in thinking about the topic. Since these readers think of the rest of the author's ideas in the same way as that has been implied by the paper, they will polish the unwritten parts, therefore contributing to the expression of the topic when they read (translation, p. 28).

In short, Chinese writers are responsible for making readers interested in reading papers, but they are not responsible for ensuring that readers get an exact idea about the topic. In a sense, Chinese writers are successful if they are able to attract their readers to their writing and encourage them to think about their theme.

Consequently, Chinese readers have more responsibility than English readers in feeling and interpreting the writer's ideas in order to appreciate a piece of writing. Chinese readers' roles are to comprehend, finish, and even polish the writer's ideas when they read. They are expected to infer from part of the written information to get a deeper sense of unexpressed ideas. They are also expected to imagine and interact with the writing by activating their own understanding and background knowledge. Logic is not enough for Chinese readers to appreciate the beauty of Chinese essays. They need to feel the aesthetic in their reading because Chinese rhetoric favors

> ...simplicity in conveying thought, linguistic richness in embodying emotions, logical clarity in establishing fundamental principles, and allegorical and figurative speech as a means of suggestive demonstration. (Shih, 1983, p. xxxi).

This description seems contradictory at first sight, since it includes opposites, such as simplicity and richness, logical clarity and suggestive demonstration. However, to the students who have a background in Chinese culture and writing, the above statement makes perfect sense. This concept of "simplicity in conveying thought" differs from the concept of logical conciseness emphasized in English writing. It focuses on asking the writer to use fewer words to express the same ideas; therefore, at least some of the writer's ideas have to be written suggestively. This process of indication together with other language processes is necessary to add color to a paper. And once the very basic structure of the paper has been set up, figurative language also reflects the writer's control of his or her expressions, as well as writing techniques.

According to *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, Chinese readers also need to "feel" the writing because the harmony between external nature and the writer's internal feelings as intertwined in a literary work is highly valued. Famous ancient writers are admired because of their ability to build forms on emotions (Shih, 1983). Only in unifying the internal and external aspects can rhetoric bring "physical things through the sense to apprehension" (Shih, 1983, p. xliii). In this way, readers should cultivate their ability to feel or sense the writer's internal unwritten ideas. Being able to read the writer's mind is an effective way for the reader to appreciate the deep meanings or the beauty of a literary work. In a sense, the written information in Chinese texts is not active until the reader takes an active role in interacting with the writer. What is written functions like a bridge between the reader and the writer. Writers are responsible for building a solid bridge and readers are responsible for going across it.

Concerning Chinese students' English writing, some concepts in the text marked by English teachers as vague or irrelevant could possibly be organized according to "an underlying unifying principle which makes factors belong to different perspectives harmonious" (Shih, 1983, p. 437). This principle can only be discovered when the reader explores with great effort the surface meanings expressed in the written forms. Usually, even a "badly" organized ESL student's paper viewed from the perspective of English rhetorical principles can make good sense once it is explained by that student. Sometimes, English teachers need to be patient in giving ESL students a chance to share their ideas with people from a different rhetorical background. In sum, feelings together with ideas give a Chinese essay its soul (Shih, 1983) and allow it to stand up and be powerful. Therefore, feelings embodied in a Chinese student's English writing, which may distract English teachers' understanding of the paper, should not be totally denied but may need to be explained more fully to bridge the cultural gap in the standards used to appreciate good writing.

CONCLUSION

In sum, Chinese rhetoric includes forms that are similar to English expository rhetoric, but preferences in Chinese writing are for rhetorical forms that are less popular in English. First, a Chinese theme is preferably spread out and examined from different perspectives, while an English topic is ideally focused on one perspective and presented in more detail in a thesis statement. Second, the thesis statement can appear in the introduction or conclusion in Chinese and in English, but English writers tend to prefer it in the introduction and Chinese writers in the conclusion. Third, both Chinese and English writing texts discuss rhetorical order in writing, but the Chinese texts take words and sentences as the starting point while English texts stress organization as the

main frame. Fourth, Chinese rhetoric holds the opinion that the writer's task is to make the writing interesting and the reader's task is to interpret the ideas and feel the art of writing. In contrast, English rhetoric regards ideas and logic as most important, and the writers are expected to make everything clear in order to avoid the reader's misinterpretation of the writer's ideas. Therefore, ESL teachers need to tell their Chinese students that they understand and appreciate these differences but that an English language readership will understand their ideas better if: the thesis statement is in the introduction, the English rhetorical order is followed in organizing ideas and revising papers, and writers take more responsibility in making ideas explicit and specific, as well as interesting.

Therefore, even though this study establishes that Chinese rhetoric has both direct and indirect styles or patterns, it shows that the dominant writing styles of Chinese do differ from English expository rhetoric. ESL students may transfer not only their first language sentence structures but also the writing instruction they get in their first language. Together with their former writing instruction, ESL students usually bring with them to their new English world their cultural values and specific standards that are widely used to evaluate a piece of writing. Specifically, Chinese writers think that making readers interested in reading their papers is the most important element in ensuring successful writing. Another interesting and important result of this study is that although English and Chinese writing share some common terms in discussing writing concepts such as directness and indirectness, they actually have different definitions of those basic concepts; therefore, people in the field of rhetoric also need to be careful when using and comparing the literal meaning of a foreign concept with a native one in contrastive rhetoric studies.

Lastly, summarizing the applications of this study to native English speaking readers or to ESL writing teachers, the researcher would like to point out that first, as most contrastive rhetoric studies conclude, there is no good way or bad way to write. What exists is only a different way of presenting ideas across cultures. Only after realizing this can English teachers positively motivate ESL students' unique writing styles. Second, English teachers need to be patient in waiting for students' explanations of their logic in writing. For example, Chinese students may hide their thesis statements or delay them to the end of their papers in order to make the papers more technically or artistically appropriate. They may incorporate many subthemes when trying to make their viewpoints comprehensive, which gives English speakers the impression that they are being digressive and out of focus. Chinese students may also start a paper with a long introduction which seems to be far away from the topic, but their goal is to provide readers with background knowledge or to create a necessary environment for introducing the main content. All these "problems" in ESL students' writing need good listeners who attempt to understand the real intentions of the writer. Third, English teachers could also select ESL students' writing examples from their first language and compare them with other examples chosen from English texts to teach students the proper or acceptable

forms for writing in English. In this way, ESL students will feel at ease with the expected forms and be less hesitant to adapt their native writing forms to their new English writing style or to adapt direct forms from the Chinese repertoire and develop a direct form in their English writing. All in all, it seems too simple to describe English writing as direct and Asian writing as indirect. More specific factors behind this basic concept are awaiting further discovery and analysis by researchers.

NOTE

[1] Liu Xie is the author of the original Chinese version of this book. Because the English translation is the only version available to the author, however, Shih will be the name used in this paper to reference the textbook. The translation is listed under the original author, Liu, below.

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