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Rhetorical education through writing instruction across cultures: A comparative analysis of select online instructional materials on argumentative writing

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Abstract

Recent studies on Chinese–English contrastive rhetoric have argued that there is actually little to contrast and the traditional *qi* (beginning), *cheng* (transition), *zhuan* (turning), *he* (synthesis) structure has little influence on contemporary Chinese writing. A comparative analysis of select online instructional materials on argumentative writing for American and Mainland Chinese school writers reveals that although the two groups agree on the purpose, tripartite structure, and the use of formal logic, they differ in the discussion of some fundamentals for argumentative writing. Specifically, the American group considers anticipating the opposition a must while the Chinese group demonstrates epistemological and dialogical emphases and highlights the need to use analogies. The importance of analogies and epistemological and dialogical emphases can be traced to ancient Chinese rhetorical theories. This paper argues that the findings may help us to understand the assumptions and beliefs that underlie rhetorical conventions or textual features. Further comparative research on Mainland Chinese and American pedagogical materials on argumentative writing is suggested.

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Due to the growing population of international students in American universities, American composition instructors and researchers have become increasingly interested in the traits of rhetorical styles exhibited in these students' ESL writing. This has bred a body

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of research on contrastive rhetoric (CR) (Benson & Heidish, 1995; Connor, 1996, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989, 1996; Kaplan, 1966, 1972, 1988, 2001; Leki, 1991; Purves, 1988). CR was originally suggested as an “approach” (Kaplan, 1966) that uses contrastive analysis to study the rhetorical differences between ESL students’ writing in English and writing by native speakers of English. Hence in a narrow sense CR focused mainly on ESL writing in American universities (Connor, 1996; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989). In this article, CR is used in its broadest sense, i.e., it covers the comparison and contrast of writing across languages and cultures (Benson & Heidish, 1995; Connor, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989, 1996; Kaplan, 2001).

Because of the large proportion of Chinese students enrolled in American universities, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on Chinese–English contrastive rhetoric. Among Kaplan’s (1966) famous “doodles” intended to depict cultural thought patterns based on his study of expository writing by advanced ESL writers at the University of Southern California, the linear arrow characterizes English, and the spiral that goes from the periphery to the core depicts Oriental languages (including Chinese). These two patterns appear to contrast perfectly. Kaplan (1966) acknowledged the influence of Sapir-Whorf’s linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity on his study, a strong version of which argues that people who speak different languages have different thought patterns and different perceptions of the world. McLuhan, another important scholar who called attention to the relationship between languages and mental faculties, argued that American English reflected a high degree of left-hemisphere orientation (linear and visual) (McLuhan, 1988), whereas Chinese had a high right-hemisphere orientation (simultaneous and acoustic) (McLuhan, 1989). More recently, the interest in comparative studies of Chinese–Western rhetorics has been steadily growing (Lu, Jia, & Heisey, 2002). While these studies focus on ancient Chinese rhetoric (Kennedy, 1998; Lu, 1998), not much research has been conducted on contemporary Chinese rhetoric.

All in all, research based on text analysis constitutes the lion’s share of literature on contemporary Chinese–English contrastive rhetoric. In the past few decades both American and Chinese scholars have studied ESL texts written by Chinese students (Cai, 1999; Kaplan, 1966, 1972), Chinese and English texts composed by Chinese writers (Taylor & Chen, 1991; Wong, 1992), and Chinese texts by Chinese writers (Alptekin, 1988; Liu, 1990; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Tsao, 1983). The limitation of basing research solely on texts is that it is hard to prove that the texts selected by researchers are representative of the rhetorical preferences of a specific genre in the native language of the writer. In their attempts to understand the writing experience of Chinese students, others drew on their personal experience (Matalene, 1985; Shen, 1989), did ethnographic research and surveys in the US and China (Li, 1996), and examined the literacy acquisition of Chinese students (Carson, 1992; Severino, 1993). As Connor (2002) has observed, while retaining its traditional pedagogical applications, CR is becoming more responsive to new currents in literacy research. That trend is obvious in recent CR research. For example, several scholars have studied Chinese composition textbooks in search of the traits of contemporary Chinese rhetorical style (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 2002; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Wang, 1994).

Compared with research on text analysis, research on instructional materials helps to draw a more accurate picture of rhetorical conventions and what underlies these

conventions. Most of the existing studies on Chinese textbooks, however, fail to use up-to-date sources. Neither Wang (1994) nor Kirkpatrick (1997) used a Chinese textbook published later than 1990. Furthermore, a lack of comparative analysis in these studies (Kirkpatrick, 1997, 2002; Wang, 1994) also calls into question their claims about the differences between English and Chinese rhetorical styles. Though some scholars have examined American instructional materials, e.g., college composition textbooks (Connors, 1986; Fraizer, 1993; Kail, 1988; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Stewart, 1978; Welch, 1987), they did not adopt a comparative perspective. In this paper, I report the findings of a comparative study on two groups of online instructional materials on argumentative writing (one American, one Mainland Chinese, three samples in each group). First, I review the CR literature relevant to Chinese argumentative writing, show the need for a comparative study, and raise my research questions. After an overview of the context and content of these instructional materials, I answer my research questions through a thematic analysis of these materials by identifying commonalities among each group and then pinpoint cross-language similarities and differences. I conclude by discussing the findings and suggesting directions for future research.

1. Relevant Chinese-English CR research on argumentative writing

In the body of literature relevant to Chinese–English CR research on argumentative writing, a recurring theme is rhetorical patterns/structure or organizational structures. This central issue can be traced to Kaplan’s (1966) first article on CR. Over the years scholars have adopted different stances; some supported Kaplan’s early claims, some qualified his claims, and some have argued there is not much to contrast. I begin this literature review by revisiting Kaplan’s earliest CR article.

Though the focus of this literature review is on argumentative writing, it is important to include early research in CR on expository writing by Kaplan because his focus on reasoning is particularly relevant. When Kaplan (1966) examined “expository writing” of advanced ESL students, he created the “doodles” to contrast the reasoning in essays by American students with reasoning in ESL essays by students from other major language groups. Kaplan’s (1966) linear–spiral diagrams attempted to capture the different patterns of reasoning in paragraphs. In a more detailed account, Kaplan (1972) asserted that the Chinese classical form of writing, the eight-legged essay, “has clearly endured into modern times” (p. 49). Since the Chinese eight-legged essay is an extremely important part of the Chinese literary tradition¹, Kaplan (1972) claimed, it was quite likely that an educated Chinese might instinctively write in the literary form when s/he was asked to create an essay in English. To support his claim, he presented the English version of a classic eight-legged essay and four ESL essays by Chinese students. Then he fit the four student essays into the “eight legs.” He remarked that although the ESL essays did include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, “along the way” there was a lot of seemingly unnecessary wandering around the topic (Kaplan, 1972). He

¹ The eight-legged essay gets its name from the rule that the last four paragraphs of such an essay have to include two sets of parallel and/or antithetical parts.

commented that in the traditional English sense these essays lacked unity and coherence (Kaplan, 1972).

Kaplan's pioneering project has inspired more inquiry into rhetorical patterns demonstrated in Chinese students' writing. Matalene (1985) backed up Kaplan's (1966) observation on preferences for different rhetorical structures across cultures. She found that most of her Chinese students' EFL persuasive essays, as well as the "arguments" in the Chinese–English newspaper *China Daily*, offered assertions rather than proofs and followed a standard pattern: "an opening description of a specific incident, a look back at the usually unfortunate history of the issue or practice, an explanation of the current much improved state of affairs and a concluding moral exhortation" (Matalene, 1985, p. 800). In a different context, with Chinese graduate students in the US as research participants, Alptekin (1988) identified some "rhetorical patterns" in their expository compositions that they translated from Chinese to English: a non-linear rhetorical organization, complementary propositions with Yin–Yang attributes, analogies, and a global perspective of the topic as an essentially indivisible entity. He attributed these to the fundamentals of the Chinese worldview: the movement of the human world in a cyclical pattern, the universe devoid of a fixed starting point, valuing of synchronicity instead of causality, and the harmonization of dualism (Alptekin, 1988). Cai (1999) studied a Chinese student's ESL writing portfolio for an undergraduate English composition course in the US. After analyzing six argumentative essays in English by that student, he concurred with Kaplan's (1972) claim about the influence of the eight-legged essay structure. He also argued that the *qi–cheng–zhuan–he* progression, instead of topic-support, characterized the student's paragraphs. Because the texts in the above three studies range from EFL writing, to L1 writing translated into English, and to ESL writing, it is very difficult for these studies to build on each other.

In the 1990s, scholars began to move out of the territory of student writing but continued to focus on organizational traits. Liu (1990) presented a text analysis of one piece of Chinese literary criticism from a Chinese newspaper, *Guangming Daily*. He described the basic organizational characteristics in Chinese writing, namely, *qi* (beginning), *cheng* (transition), *zhuan* (turning), *he* (synthesis), and *jie* (end), and identified them in the selected text (Liu, 1990). He suggested that the defining features culturally preferred in Chinese writing appeared to be *zhuan*, i.e., the emphasis on the ups and downs, twists and turns, as the author developed an argument (Liu, 1990). Taylor and Chen (1991) compared the introductions to papers written in a variety of related disciplines by three groups of physical scientists (one-third written by native speakers of English, one-third written in English by Chinese scientists, and one-third written in Chinese by Chinese scientists). They found all language groups and disciplines shared an underlying rhetorical structure. At the same time, they detected differences between Chinese writers and Anglo-American writers, the most salient being that Anglo-American scientists showed a preference for elaborated structures while Chinese scientists, regardless of the language in which they were writing, tended to omit a summary of the literature and preferred a simple, unelaborated pattern. Again, it is difficult to relate these two studies to each other because they examined completely different genres.

Other scholars have questioned the "uniqueness" of Chinese rhetorical patterns. Kirkpatrick (1997) looked at the discussion on beginnings and endings, coordination, and

coherence in five Chinese textbooks (published between 1964 and 1990) and concluded that the Chinese textbooks reflected contemporary Anglo-American style more than traditional Chinese style. He argued that the “eight-legged essay” was unlikely to still exert influence on the writings of contemporary Mainland Chinese (Kirkpatrick, 1997). In another article, based on his examination of advice on argumentative writing in some Chinese textbooks, Kirkpatrick (2002) concluded that inductive argument was likely to be preferred, and that advice on ways to structure paragraphs all followed a linear pattern. He further asserted that much of the advice seemed similar to that offered by English teachers. In a similar vein, in his research on Chinese and Japanese scholarship on the indirect structure in essays (including argumentative essays), Cahill (2003) argued that the “turn” actually “serves as the occasion to develop an essay further by alternative means, contrary to the common assumption that it is a circular or digressive rhetorical move” (p. 170). In discussing the implications, he pointed out, “The possibility that the school essay has universal characteristics presents a theoretical challenge to the founding premise of contrastive rhetoric that writing across languages necessarily contrasts” (Cahill, 2003, p. 187).

None of the studies above, however, present a comparative study of instructional materials on argumentative writing. As anthropologist Francis Hsu (1981) has advocated, a method of systematic comparison provides the “proper perspective” for a student studying his/her own culture and another. I argue that a systematic comparison of instructional materials on argumentative writing for Chinese and American student writers will help to shed light on the fundamentals taught in each context. With the dawning of the digital age and increasing computer literacy among the young generation, I believe some established online instructional materials provide an excellent starting point because the Internet has become an increasingly important source of learning. The findings of the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicate that the Internet “has become an increasingly important feature of the learning environment for teenagers” (Lenhart, Simon, & Graziano, 2001). Surveys conducted by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) also suggest that the number of Chinese Internet users who identified learning as an online activity has doubled since 2001 (CNNIC, 2004). In addition, the Internet is more accessible to students in both Chinese and US schools, which means it is more likely to serve as a source of learning. According to *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2002* (Kleiner & Lewis, 2003), in Fall 2002, 99% of American public schools had access to the Internet. In China, Internet use has been growing by leaps and bounds. The Chinese government has also started to work on a project to make sure that 90% of Chinese schools have access to the Internet by 2010 (Chen, n.d.).

In the following sections, I examine two groups of selected online instructional materials on argumentative writing. My purpose is to find out what they consider to be the fundamentals of writing argumentative essays, namely the purpose, organizational strategies, and techniques. Specifically, I hope to answer the following questions through a thematic analysis of these materials:

1. What is the purpose of an argumentative essay?
2. What are the suggested organizational strategies?
3. What are the suggested techniques of argument?
4. What else is considered fundamental for argumentative essay writing?

The next section provides detailed background information about the websites that host these materials. Then, I compare and contrast the two sets of materials.

2. Context and content for select online instructional materials

All the websites are affiliated with educational institutions, publishers, and/or were created by college professors. As established sites, they provide detailed instructions/advice on argumentative writing. The American websites that host the instructional materials examined in this study are the Purdue Online Writing Lab (POWL) (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>), Paradigm Online Writing Assistant (POWA) (<http://www.powa.org>), and Guide to Grammar and Writing (GGW) (<http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm>). All of them were created by experienced writing teachers and experts. POWA and GGW are the two “useful websites for writing arguments” recommended in *Universal Keys for Writers* (Raimes, 2004, p. 115). The Chinese websites that host instructional materials are China Basic Education (CBE) (<http://www.cbe21.com>), People’s Education Press (PEP) (<http://www.pep.com.cn>), and Wave of Distance Education (WDE) (<http://oyrc.netease.net>). What follows is background information about these sites.

Run by the Purdue University Writing Lab since 1995, the POWL was the first online writing lab and the winner of eighteen awards. Among its numerous online handouts is one on argumentative writing with four sections: logical vocabulary, reaching logical conclusions, fallacies, and improprieties. Also available on POWL is a 21-slide PowerPoint presentation titled “Organizing Your Argument” (Kunka, 2000). Written by Jennifer L. Kunka, a former tutor at Purdue’s Writing Lab and now Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at Francis Marion University in the US, POWL’s contributors also include Muriel Harris, former director of the Purdue Writing Lab, and some former graduate instructors in the Purdue Writing Lab. The PowerPoint file ranks number four of the top five PowerPoint downloads on the Purdue OWL.

Launched slightly later than POWL, POWA went online in 1996, and it has won 11 awards, including WebEnglishTeacher.com Gold Star Resource, Study Web Academic Excellence Award, and the Schoolzone Five Star Site etc. The author, Chuck Guilford, is associate professor of English at Boise State University in the US with 30 years of experience in teaching college composition at different levels. According to the website, he is also author of a textbook, *Beginning College Writing*, and journal articles published in *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*. POWA was created as a “guide and handbook” for all writers. It has a large section on writing argumentative essays (Guilford, n.d.) with eight subsections.

Hosted by Capital Community College in the US, GGW is maintained by Charles Darling, Professor of English, for English courses at Capital Community College and for the general online public. It has been on the web since 1996 (Darling, personal communication, 15 December 2003). “Developing an Argument” (Darling, n.d.), one of its sections, contains eight subsections.

Brought online in 2000 by the Department of Basic Education, the Chinese Ministry of Education, and Beijing Normal University, China Basic Education has posted an article on

argumentative writing titled “A Guide to Writing: On Argumentative Essays” as “one of the best articles” under the Chinese Language Arts subsection. No author’s name is given, but the site indicates that the article was originally a post on Jingzhou (a city in China) Education Net. It has six subsections.

People’s Education Press Website is one of the “friend links” of CBE. Pep.com.cn (PEP) is the web home of the Chinese People’s Education Press. Founded in 1950, the People’s Education Press operates under the supervision of the Chinese Ministry of Education. PEP hires educational specialists to compile textbooks and materials officially designated for China’s primary and secondary schools and other educational purposes. The materials, posted in the “Chinese Language Arts” Section and titled “How to Write Argumentative Essays Well,” include three sections. The source is the People’s Education Audio-video & Electronic Multimedia Press, a subordinate unit of the People’s Education Press.

Online since 2002, WDE aims to create an online center for distance education with an emphasis on writing. The author, Ouyang Rencai, is associate professor at Deyang Distance Education University in Sichuan province with more than 16 years of composition instruction experience. According to his biographical information on the website, Ouyang’s name appears in *Dictionary of Chinese Talents*, Volume 3, suggesting that he is a recognized scholar. The materials, listed under “Instructional Materials Created by the Author,” have links to six sections of lecture notes on writing argumentative essays for distance education college students (Ouyang, n.d.).

The six select websites that host these instructional materials all have good credibility, and they are all designed for students at the intermediate or advanced level (late high school to college). These materials intend to teach the fundamentals of argumentative writing. In the next section I present a thematic analysis of the instructional materials in order to answer the four research questions.

3. Thematic analysis

3.1. Purpose of argumentative essays

Both groups state that the purpose of an argumentative essay is to convince the audience. In addition, they use the two words, “argumentative” and “persuasive,” interchangeably. For example, POWL’s handout is on “[argumentation/persuasion](#).” POWA puts it similarly: “The goal of argument is to gain your reader’s assent to your central proposition, despite active opposition” (Guilford, n.d., “Occasions” section). The notes for Slide 3 of the POWL PowerPoint presentation indicate that the purpose of an argument is to convince its audience. The Chinese group presents similar information. PEP defines argumentative essays as ones that “present a point of view about something and explain the reasons in order to win readers’ agreement” (para. 1, n.d.). Ouyang (n.d.) emphasizes that argumentative essays mainly strive to convince people by means of reasoning. Persuasion, therefore, is the purpose for writing argumentative essays for both groups.

3.2. Organization

The instructional materials all discuss the organization of argumentative essays at two levels: global organization and the organization of points/claims that support the thesis.

3.2.1. Global organization

The two groups seem to agree on a three-part structure regarding the global organization of argumentative essays. All the American materials either directly or indirectly give a prescriptive description of a three-part essay: introduction, body, and conclusion. The Chinese materials discuss a three-part structure as well. CBE characterizes the basic structure for an argumentative piece as raising the question (“what is it?”), analyzing it (“why?”), and solving the problem (“what to do?”). PEP’s description of the three sections is exactly the same as that of CBE, and it explains that the three parts are also known as the introduction, body, and conclusion, which are the same terms used by WDE.

3.2.2. Organization of supporting points

Although the American websites are not prescriptive about the organization of supporting points, two of them do suggest some methods of organization, which are different from those listed by their Chinese counterparts.

Two of the American websites offer suggestions regarding how to organize supporting points. According to POWA, an effective way of sequencing supporting points is to rank them in order of importance and then arrange them as follows: second most important point, point of lesser importance, point of lesser importance, and most important point (Guilford, n.d., “Form: Tradition & Innovation” section). The POWL PowerPoint presentation gives some suggestions in this regard as well: “Paragraphs may be ordered in several ways, depending on the topic and the purpose of your argument: general to specific information, most important point to least important point, weakest claim to strongest claim” (Kunka, 2000, Slide 14).

In a more detailed fashion, all the Chinese materials give advice on organizing supporting points. Specifically, they all cover two organizational patterns—*pingxing* (parallel) and *dijin* (progressive). According to the PEP website, *pingxing* (parallel) means discussing the main points relevant to the thesis. These points support the main argument (thesis) from different perspectives. In a *dijin* (progressive) structure, the supporting points build upon each other to support the thesis. Parallel and progressive appear to be the conventional organizational frameworks for supporting points suggested by the Chinese group.

The comparison above shows that although the two groups concur on overall organization, they give different suggestions for organizing supporting points. The American group is not prescriptive about organizational patterns. If they do give advice on organizing supporting points, they rank claims/points as individual ones in terms of how important or forceful they are in supporting the thesis. In other words, they tend to view them in terms of their importance to the thesis. The Chinese group is quite prescriptive about organizational patterns. The two patterns suggested by the Chinese materials consider not only the different roles the claims play in corroborating the thesis, but also how they relate to each other—whether they build on one another or just present different perspectives.

3.3. *Techniques of argument*

The techniques of argument is the topic on which salient differences between the two groups surface. The American websites all cover two categories regarding this topic: logical reasoning based on formal logic and informal reasoning. Informal reasoning, defined by POWA, is reasoning that “requires clearly linking your general claims with concrete, specific data” (Guilford, n.d., “Three Appeals” Section, para. 3). The Chinese materials distinguish themselves from the American ones with their emphases on dialectical logic, analogy, and the absence of discussion on logical fallacies.

All the American websites list logical reasoning and using examples as techniques of argument. Using examples and facts and logical reasoning appear on the lists on GGW and POWA. POWL does not explicitly discuss the techniques, but its PowerPoint presentation defines an argument as proving one’s claim with the use of logical reasoning, examples, and research. The POWL handouts on argumentative writing elaborate on the vocabulary of formal logic and use examples to illustrate deduction, induction, logical fallacies, and improprieties. GGW’s section on logic also discusses logical fallacies that writers should avoid.

Logical reasoning is also a common topic in the Chinese materials, but with a different exposition. According to PEP, methods of reasoning are related to logical reasoning (by logic PEP refers to formal logic), but they are not exactly the same. It explains that methods of reasoning vary and writers can use them flexibly according to their needs. Some commonly used methods are examples (classified as an inductive method) and deductive reasoning from theories. The third method is to disprove, i.e., instead of directly proving the thesis, the writer disproves the opposition, which is also classified as a deductive method. This is similar to “anticipating the opposition,” which the US materials discuss as an independent topic, not one under logical reasoning. The rest of the list includes: comparison and contrast, cause and effect, analogy, and reduction to absurdity. As for reduction to absurdity, the author first assumes that the opposition is correct. Then with the opposition as the premise, s/he comes to the conclusion that the opposition is obviously absurd, and therefore disproves it. This seems to be one way to counter-argue.

CBE’s list of techniques is similar to that of PEP. Following the list is a section on the logical nature of argumentative essays. Like PEP, by “logic” CBE refers to formal logic. Following the section on formal logic is a section titled “More Philosophical Thinking Is Needed in Writing Argumentative Essays (than formal logic).” This section calls the attention of student writers to the philosophical theories and principles taught in their courses on politics. These compulsory courses in high school and upper levels of primary school, known as politics or political thought courses, are about Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist theories, especially dialectical materialism. Student writers are advised to learn to analyze real-world issues from the perspective of dialectical materialism, “the official name given to Marxist philosophy by its proponents in the Soviet Union and their affiliates elsewhere” (Wood, 1995). It is important to note that though PEP does not use the term dialectical materialism per se, “basic principles of Marxism and Maoism” top its list of “theoretical arguments” that can be used to support a thesis.

WDE illuminates logical reasoning in great detail. Ouyang (n.d.) elaborates on two kinds of logical reasoning techniques commonly used in writing an argumentative essay: formal logic and dialectical logic. First, he presents techniques that derive from formal logic, arguing that they are vital for the development of individual paragraphs. Specifically, the methods of development are: induction, deduction, analogy, and disproof. Ouyang argues that though formal logical reasoning is indispensable in argumentative writing, dialectical logic plays a powerful role in planning the global organization:

Bianzheng luoji de lunzheng, buxiang xingshi luoji de lunzheng moshi nayang xianyou lundian, ranhou xuanze lunju zuzhi lunzheng. Bianzheng luoji de lunzheng zhi chengren xingshi luoji de fangfa zai youxian de jubu fanwei nei you qi heli xing. Bianzheng luoji lunzheng suo qiangdiao de shouxian shi dui lundian jia yi fenxi. Yinwei duoyu bianzheng luoji laishuo, bu cunzai yonghe de wu tiaojian xianzhi de, juegui de lundian, beiyige lun dian dou yao shou dao tian jian xian zhi, zai tiao jian bian hua shi, lundian ye yao fazhan, lundian jiushi zai fenxi de guocheng zhong deyi quelu de. Bianzhen luoji lunzheng dui lunju de yaoqiou ye youxie teshuxing. Youshi ta fenxi de lizi bing bushi yi jianduan huo shuliang qusheng, ershi yi zui pingchang, zui yiban, zui buqiyian de lizi, boxi qi neibu maodun huo cailiao zhijian de maodun dechu putongqing de kexue jielun.

[Proving a point in dialogical logic is different from doing so in formal logic. Within formal logic, one has a thesis first, and then chooses and organizes the supporting evidence to prove the thesis. In proving a point, dialectical logic acknowledges that the methods used in formal logic are only reasonable to a limited extent. Reasoning by dialogical logic values first and foremost the analysis of the thesis. That is because according to dialectical logic, there is no eternal and absolute thesis unbound by conditions. Every thesis is limited by conditions. When the conditions change, the thesis develops. The thesis is established in the process of analysis. Dialectical logical reasoning also needs special evidence. Sometimes the examples used in such kind of reasoning are just the most ordinary ones].² (n.d., Lecture Six, para. 2)

Ouyang continues to discuss the organization of an argument that uses dialectical logic:

Bianzheng luoji lunzheng jiegou buxiang xingshi luoji nayang duiyu lundian de chuzhi kending, ershi zhuiqiu maodun, zhuiqiu guandian neibu de maodun, guandian yu cailiao zhijian de maodun, cailiao zishen de maodun, zongzhi zhuiqiu guandian yu cailiao de dongtai tongyi, ji bianzheng tongyi. Yin'er ta de jiegou changchang shi yizhong luoxuanxing de quxian. . . Huanjuhuashuo, bianzheng luoji de lunzheng jiegou buxiang xingshi luoji nayang lundian zaiqian, lunju, lunzheng zai hou, ershi xianyou yige neihan danchun de lundian, ranhou cong jige fangmian qu fenxi ta, shi qi neihan budian kuozhang, cengceng shenhua, zuihou guijie qilai, xingcheng yige yangmi de luoxuan shi shangsheng de jiegou.

² Translations from Chinese to English in brackets in the article are by the author.

[An argument developed by dialogical logic does not go for the kind of linear validation of thesis in formal logical reasoning. Instead, dialogical logic is interested in contradictions—the internal contradictions in a viewpoint, the contradictions between the viewpoint and supporting materials, the contradictions in the supporting materials per se. In one word, it pursues the dynamic unity of the point of view and materials, or dialectical unity. Therefore, the structure of this kind of reasoning is like a spiral. . . In other words, the organization is unlike that used in formal logic with the thesis in the beginning and the evidence and explication next. Instead, it presents a simple thesis, and then analyzes it from several perspectives, expanding its content and deepening its depth layer by layer. In the end, the author synthesizes and gets a well-knit ascending spiral structure]. (n.d., Lecture Six, para. 2)

Ouyang (n.d.) illustrates the spiral development by analyzing a piece of literary criticism step by step. According to his analysis, in the beginning of the essay, the author argues that Zhang Jie³ aimed for a kind of beauty in her literary works. Then the author supports his/her point that the beauty depicted in Zhang's works is not affluence or physical beauty, but the beauty of the human spirit. Third, the article argues that the kind of beauty that Zhang Jie pursues falls into the category of moral beauty, and moral beauty is more important to the characters in Zhang's works than material wealth or even life itself. Fourth, the author adds another layer of meaning to the beauty—a sense of responsibility for life and of a social mission. Fifth, the author argues that this kind of beauty is not masculine, but simple and elegant. Finally, the author argues that this kind of beauty has become a trademark of Zhang Jie's creation of beauty as a writer, and this creation has its limitations despite its strengths. Ouyang explains that in the essay, the main thesis does not appear as a whole. Instead, the supporting arguments lead to each other and together they make an integrated main thesis. Ouyang then explains the four methods of dialectical logical reasoning: (1) global analysis, which means the writer should consider not only two sides of a contradiction (*maodun*), but consider one issue by putting it in different relations (*guanxi*); (2) analyzing the essence; (3) dialectical analysis, which means taking into consideration the unity of opposites and the fact that everything is fluid; (4) finding the conditions that transform a contradiction (n.d., Lecture Six).

What is also worth mentioning is that only one of the American websites lists analogy as a technique of argument while all Chinese websites do. The Chinese materials all consider analogy as a very important technique in composing argumentative essays. Ouyang (n.d.), for instance, lists analogy as one of the three important methods for developing an argument, together with induction and deduction, calling it convincing and vivid.

In brief, on techniques of argument, the American materials all stress formal logic. Two of them explain logical fallacies in detail. The Chinese group discusses the need for analogies, formal logic and dialectical logic, and two Chinese websites stress explicitly dialectical logic. Methods based on formal logic suggested by the two groups are very similar, but the Chinese group does not touch upon logical fallacies at all. Another salient difference in the American instructional materials is the absence of dialectical logic and little reference to philosophical thinking.

³ Zhang Jie is a famous female Chinese writer.

3.4. *What else is crucial/fundamental for a successful argumentative essay*

Another trait that differentiates the American group from the Chinese one is its emphatic treatment of “anticipating the opposition,” which suggests that the American materials consider it vital to address the opposition. GGW mentions “anticipating the opposition” in its list of techniques of argument but devotes a separate section to the topic because “writers of an argumentative essay must consider what others will say to refute their argument” (Darling, n.d., “Anticipating the Opposition” Section, para. 1). The reason is well defined: “The argumentative essay has to take into consideration the fact that the writer is the only one who has permission to speak; . . . what counts in an argumentative essay, then, is the writer’s ability to create a sense of interior debate, of allowing other voices their say, and maintaining equilibrium among those voices. It is a matter of fairness and reasonableness” (Darling, n.d., “Developing an Argument” section, para. 2). In POWA, “Anticipating Opposition” stands as one independent section, not as a subsection in “Expanding the Argument.” The section begins with: “One essential characteristic of argument is your sense of an adversary. You aren’t simply explaining a concept to someone who will hear you out and accept or reject your idea on its merit. Argument assumes active opposition to your proposition” (Guilford, n.d., “Anticipating Opposition” Section, para. 1). In POWL’s PowerPoint Presentation, the first slide on this topic claims: “addressing the claims of the opposition is an important component in building a convincing argument” (Kunka, 2000). The words the American websites use to discuss this topic such as “has to,” “essential,” and “important,” all suggest how crucial they deem “anticipating the opposition” to be in an argumentative essay. The Chinese materials, nevertheless, only mention addressing the opposition as one of the many techniques of argument, i.e., as an option instead of a must.

4. Discussion

The thematic analysis demonstrates that compared as two groups based on commonalities in each, the American and Chinese instructional materials share certain traits in the description of the purpose and tripartite structure of argumentative essays, and the role of formal logic in composing argumentative essays. They, nevertheless, differ in their discussion of some fundamentals for argumentative writing, the fundamentals that previous studies have never revealed: the need to address the opposition in American materials, and epistemological and dialectical emphases in Chinese materials.

4.1. *Similarities*

The two groups are almost identical in the description of the purpose of argumentative essays: to convince readers. They also give a similar description of the three basic parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. In addition, both groups include formal logic in their discussion of methods of reasoning, especially in paragraph development. They also acknowledge the validity of informal reasoning, i.e., using concrete, specific data to support the thesis. These similarities confirm earlier findings on global organization

(Kaplan, 1972; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 1997) and paragraph development (Kirkpatrick, 2002). These shared traits strongly support the need not only to contrast, but also to compare in CR research.

4.2. Differences

Among the differences identified, two are extremely significant. The American group considers “anticipating the opposition” essential in argumentative writing. This may be rooted in the Greek dialogical rhetorical tradition, where a dialogue works as the best means for seeking truth. By addressing the opposition, the writer is engaged in a dialogue by giving a voice to the opposition. Yet the Chinese group treats counter-arguing as only one of the techniques of argument. Anticipating the opposition is only an option in the Chinese online materials. The Chinese tradition to privilege the literati (Fairbank, 1983) may have contributed to the writer’s dismissal of the opposition in certain circumstances because writers, who were usually members of the literati, did not expect to be challenged and therefore did not see the need to address the opposition. This also coincides with Li’s (1996) findings that Chinese writers are expected to “tell” while American English writers are expected to “show.” “Telling” your readers that your argument holds water does not necessarily require addressing the opposition.

A second important difference is the epistemological emphasis in Chinese materials and its absence in American materials. The Chinese materials urge students to understand the world in terms of dialectical materialism and use dialectical logic to produce an argument. When examining argumentative writing instruction in China, every researcher needs to be aware that “politics” (mainly Marxist philosophy) is a mandatory course in Chinese high schools and the upper primary school level (now it is known as moral education in Chinese primary schools). This required course in Chinese high schools offers an overview of dialectical materialism by explaining Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist theories on politics, economics, and culture. Students are inculcated in a world outlook based on dialectical materialism. They are told that it will help them to understand the world, analyze issues, solve problems, and predict the future. In a sense the Chinese students have a compulsory Marxist philosophy course at all levels. Philosophy, however, is not required in most US high schools. This epistemological emphasis in the Chinese instructional materials is reminiscent of the Chinese cosmology of yin and yang and the Chinese understanding of the world, including rhetoric, “in terms of the dynamic interlay and mutual influence of these two universal elements” (Lu, 1998, p. 291).

The other side of the coin of Chinese rhetorical education as manifested in these instructional materials is its heavy reliance on analogy and dialectical emphasis, which are also features of ancient Chinese rhetorical theories (Lu, 1998). In hindsight, the eight-legged essay displays a dialectical characteristic because its last four paragraphs have to include two sets of parallel and/or antithetical parts. Most interestingly, Ouyang’s (n.d.) description of the spiral development of an argumentative article based on dialectical logical reasoning is quite likely to remind one of the spiral diagram in Kaplan’s (1966) doodles. Though Kaplan (1966) studied paragraphs, he labeled the structures of development “cultural thought patterns,” probably assuming that they apply to the whole essay as well. The spiral development also echoes Shen’s (1989) description of the

principle of moving “from surface to core” in Chinese writing in general. To illustrate this point, Shen (1989) compared the preferred development of ideas in Chinese writing to peeling an onion. This visual image would resemble a spiral diagram as well. The literary criticism that Ouyang used as an example also develops in a nonlinear fashion, unlike the thesis-support structure. The author starts from the “surface,” with a simple statement that there is a kind of beauty in Zhang Jie’s work. Then s/he moves on to say that it is a beauty of the human spirit—moral beauty—and on to the source of the beauty, a sense of responsibility for life and for society. S/He adds that the beauty is simple and elegant before finally identifying it as Zhang Jie’s trademark and pinpointing its limitations. One should notice that the author does not state that that kind of beauty is Zhang Jie’s trademark in the very beginning. Hence it does seem that the author moved from the surface (touching upon the thesis) to the core (stating the thesis).

The fundamentals of dialectical logic and dialectical materialism seem to shed a fresh light on the traits of Chinese graduate students’ Chinese writing identified by Alptekin (1988). The belief in the unity of opposites, the importance of analogies, and a global perspective were probably at play in those Chinese students’ essays. This dialectical emphasis in Chinese rhetoric certainly has roots in Chinese philosophy, in particular the dialectics of Laozi and the Yin-Yang tradition which believes in the unity and interplay of opposites. One of Laozi’s most famous sayings is: “*huoxi fuzhi suoyi, fuxi huozhi suofu*” [Ill Fortune lies beside good fortune; Good fortune lurks beneath ill fortune]. This unity and interplay of the opposites, namely ill fortune and good fortune, is well illustrated in an ancient Chinese folk story and a proverb, *saiwong shima, yanzhi feifu* [When the old man on the Frontier lost his mare, who would have guessed it was a blessing in disguise]?⁴ Another influence may have come from Marxism. In fact, one of the reasons that the Chinese readily embraced Marxism may be that the Marxist dialectical materialism echoes its ancient dialectical philosophy. One Hegelian scholar, for example, calls attention to the “circular structures” of dialectical logic, which fits Ouyang’s (n.d.) description (Bencivenga, 2000). This similarity in structure is not surprising because Hegel’s works were influential in the formulation of Marxism.

The epistemological emphasis and dialectical emphasis unite in dialectical materialism, the Marxist philosophy upheld by the Chinese government. In fact, the lecture of another Chinese scholar, Wei Caijin (n.d.), posted on CBE indicates strongly that the dialogical logic explained in Ouyang’s (n.d.) online lecture notes is based on dialectical materialism. It is crucial to introduce Wei’s works in this study because he has authored a monograph on training students how to think in Chinese language arts courses posted online by CBE⁵. Wei, professor of Chinese at Shanxi Normal University, published the first edition of this

⁴ The story goes: an old man lived in China’s northern frontier. One day his horse wandered away and did not come back. His neighbors comforted him over his loss. “Maybe this will turn out to be a blessing,” said the old man. A few months later, his horse came back accompanied by a mare. His neighbors congratulated him. The old man commented: “This could turn into misfortune.” The mare bore some fine horses and the old man made some money till one day his son fell from a horse and broke one of his legs. When the neighbors again came to comfort him, the old man thought: “This could be a blessing.” One year later, a war broke out and all young men with no disabilities were conscripted. The old man’s son was exempted because of his broken leg.

⁵ See chapters of this monograph online at www.cbe21.com/subject/chinese/articlelist.php%3Fnext=2%26-column_code=010306.

monograph in 1993 and the revised edition in 1997. His monograph, according to BCE, has been popular among Chinese language arts teachers. The lecture, “On Cultivating Thinking for Argumentative Essays,” appears in a special section for “Chinese language arts education.” It is not included as one of the instructional materials for this study because it is for teacher education. It does, however, offer important insights. Wei’s lectures have been reposted on at least three official Chinese education websites at the provincial level. Wei (n.d.a, n.d.b) argues in this lecture that teachers should train students in dialectical thinking after they have learned to think along the lines of formal logic. Wei (n.d.b) emphasizes that the unity of opposites is the most important law. In dialectical materialism, the unity of opposites refers to the relationship between the two sides of one contradiction. Wei (n.d.b) suggests that students should think about issues in a global manner (*quanmian*), consider the relations (*lianxi*) and changes/developments (*fazhan*). The perspectives Wei (n.d.a, n.d.b) highlights are in line with three of Ouyang’s four methods for dialectical logic. Ouyang’s “overall analysis” adopts a global perspective; “dialectical analysis” is based on the belief in the unity of opposites; and “finding the conditions that transform a contradiction” is based on changes/developments (Ouyang, n.d., Lecture Six, para. 8). Dialectical materialism is clearly the preferred philosophy that Wei and Ouyang deem as the lighthouse for writers in composing arguments.

5. Conclusion and directions for future research

Findings of this exploratory study do not warrant generalizations about online instructional materials on argumentative essays in China and the US, yet an analysis of these materials does reveal some assumptions that underlie argumentative writing instruction, which is part of the rhetorical education in both countries, and provokes us to think about these assumptions. One assumption in American materials to which previous CR research based on text analysis has not called attention is that the writer must address the opposition. This assumption seems to stem from the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition in Anglo-American English composition instruction. Likewise, pure text analysis of Chinese essays can hardly uncover the assumption reflected in the Chinese instructional materials that dialectical materialism is the philosophy that guides argumentative writing as well.

In addition to disclosing assumptions, the findings of this study challenge those claims that Chinese rhetorical conventions are no different from Anglo-American ones. We can still identify in these contemporary instructional materials the legacy of the ancient Chinese rhetorical tradition that emphasizes analogies, epistemology, and dialectics. For historical reasons, especially China’s long history of ethnocentrism, colonization by Western countries, and Soviet Marxist influence, hybridity is probably the best word to describe contemporary Chinese rhetoric. Western influences have been extremely powerful in the past century, which may account for the similarities between the two groups of instructional materials. But one cannot jump to the conclusion that the Chinese have discarded their rhetorical tradition altogether. The epistemological emphasis and dialectical emphasis are clearly still part of the Chinese rhetorical education. The similarities between Hegelian dialectic and Chinese traditional philosophy also send us a cautionary note that it is an oversimplification to label contemporary Chinese rhetoric as

either uniquely Chinese or Westernized. Instead, the interplay of historical, cultural, and other factors have produced it. One may actually attribute the circular/spiral development of a Chinese argumentative essay to both ancient Chinese dialectical philosophy and the dominant contemporary philosophy in China, Marxist philosophy (especially dialectical materialism).

In sum, a comparative analysis of these instructions/suggestions indicates that the two groups do share certain traits: the purpose of argumentative writing, the tripartite rhetorical structure, and the use of formal logic. The analysis has also identified some differences: the emphasis on the need to anticipate the opposition in the American group and the epistemological and dialectical emphases in the Chinese group. What is most interesting is that although the Chinese materials do not mention *zhuan* (turn), one of them does characterize the development of an argumentative essay that uses dialectical logic as spiral, inviting us to rethink Kaplan's (1966) doodles. Further research needs to examine more pedagogical materials (both online and print) on argumentative writing for L1 writers in the US and Mainland China respectively and examine the cultural assumptions more closely. To advance our knowledge of rhetorical conventions for argumentative essays across languages and cultures, we not only need to identify textual features, but also need to understand what drives these conventions.

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