



The Rhetorical Organization of Chinese and American students' Expository Essays: a Contrastive Rhetoric Study

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ABSTRACT

A widespread assumption in the contrastive rhetoric field is the linearity/circularity dichotomy which suggests that Chinese writing is characterized by indirection. This study examines to what extent Chinese university students' writing differs from that of American students. A total of 200 expository essays (50 by American university students in English, 50 by Chinese students in Chinese, and 100 by beginning and advanced English learners in English) were analyzed. Results indicate that Chinese students, like their U.S. counterparts, also prefer directness in text and paragraph organization, but generally U.S. students tend to be significantly more direct than Chinese students. An examination of modern Chinese writing manuals found that Chinese rhetoricians also encourage directness in structuring expository essays. These findings point to a need for greater awareness of the similarities between writing in "contrasting" languages.

KEYWORDS: contrastive rhetoric; rhetorical organization; linearity; circularity; Chinese rhetoric, similarity

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his 1966 article, “Cultural Thought Pattern in Intercultural Communication,” Kaplan proposed that essays written in “Oriental” languages (Chinese, Korean) were characterized by indirect organization, which attracted widespread interest and caused much controversy as well. Since then there has been an ongoing debate on whether there are fundamental differences between East-Asian and English writing in the field of contrastive rhetoric.

Kaplan (1968) himself finds evidence of Chinese “indirection” in the *ba-gu-wen* or eight-legged essay, a classical essay format employed in Chinese imperial examinations for about 500 years. Kaplan claims that the English compositions written by his Chinese students display a part-for-part correspondence to the *ba-gu-wen* structure, which constitutes evidence that the *ba-gu-wen* “has clearly endured into modern times” (1968:3), which is echoed by scholars like Coe and Hu (1989) and Cai (1993).

Other sympathetic contrastive rhetoricians (Eggington, 1987; Fagan & Cheong, 1987; Hinds, 1983; Malcom & Pan, 1989; Tsao, 1983; Young, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1997) find rhetorical evidence of Chinese indirection in the established rhetoric sequence in East Asian expository writing: Chinese *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* and Japanese *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*. These sequences are representations of the same Chinese characters. The first part (*qi*) is an introduction which initiates the situation, but does not contain a thesis statement; the second part (*cheng*) is where the writer develops his/her argument; the third part (*zhuan*) is where the writer turns the development to a subtopic which is not directly connected to the major theme; the final stage (*he*) is equivalent to a conclusion in Western rhetoric. Specifically, they attribute the digression or indirection in Chinese writing to the third step “*zhuan*”.

These contrastive rhetoricians have identified the possible causes of the apparently different organizational patterns in ESL texts as either linguistic or cultural. Under the influence of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity which suggests that different languages affect perception and thought in different ways, Kaplan (1968) seems to hold the view that a writing pattern reflects a thinking pattern which in turn is affected by the language that one speaks as their mother tongue. Still more (Matalene, 1985; Scollon, 1991; Shen, 1989) attribute the organizational structures to the cultural background of the writer. Matalene (1985) maintains that the hierarchy of Chinese culture, language, and rhetoric has a powerful coherence or internal logic. Scollon (1991) and Shen (1989) attribute the indirectness in Chinese writing to the “Confucian” sense of self in Chinese culture which is different from the Western image of “selfness.”

However, still a large part of scholarship does not accept Kaplan's "Oriental indirection" hypothesis. A variety of methodological shortcomings have been critiqued, such as the lack of native writing samples and failure to control context and genre, cultural stereotyping, and particularly, confusion of cross-cultural differences with developmental interference (Connor, 1996). Mohan and Lo (1985), for example, attack Kaplan's assertion that Chinese texts approach the topic by indirection by quoting from two books on modern Chinese composition, which encourage clarity and directness in style and which bluntly condemn "the indirect approach". They also criticize Kaplan's claim that every language or culture has a paragraph pattern "unique to itself", pointing out that developmental factors may also be responsible for the problems at the organizational level in Chinese ESL compositions. Organization develops late and can be influenced by appropriate composition practices. Chinese ESL teachers, they find, tend to direct more instructional attention to grammar instead of to organization.

Kirkpatrick (1997) argues that the eight-legged essay, whose structure is extremely complex and rigid, is unlikely any longer contemporary influence upon the writing of Mainland Chinese, and contemporary Chinese scholars' views on eight-legged essay are dismissive. In another research, Kirkpatrick (1995), by analyzing the examples of the college entrance exam questions, student essays and examiners' comments, demonstrates that Chinese students do not have to learn traditional Chinese text styles in order to enter universities. Still some researchers (Becher, 1995; Taylor & Chen, 1991; Wang, 1992) by resorting to text analysis or examining the writing process of Chinese ESL students, come to the conclusion that Chinese writers are no less direct than English writers. They have come to realize the complexity of the issue and tend to reject Kaplan's over-simplistic assertion in his early writing about the effect of the eight-legged essay on Chinese ESL writers.

To sum up, the disputes that arose on Chinese writing mainly centered on these two issues: First, to what extent does Chinese writing differ from English writing? Second, what might be the causes of the differences if there are any? This study, by analyzing four groups of students' compositions, namely, first-year American college students' English essays, first-year Chinese students' Chinese compositions, and first-and third-year English major students' English compositions, hopefully attempts to make some contribution to the understanding of these two issues. In particular, this study was conducted to address the following research questions:

1. Do Chinese students exhibit indirectness by delaying their thesis statements in their Chinese and English compositions?

2. Does the paragraph organization in the Chinese and English essays by Chinese students differ significantly from that in American students' essays in terms of the placement of the topic sentences?
3. To what extent do the first-year ESL students' compositions differ from those of third-year ESL students in terms of the placement of thesis statement and topic sentences?
4. If there are (no) fundamental differences between Chinese and English expository essays in terms of the rhetorical organization, what are the possible causes?

II. METHODOLOGY

II.1. Subjects and Data Collection

Subjects involved in the study included both Chinese and U.S. college students. Altogether four groups of students participated: two classes of 72 English native speakers from the required composition classes at two colleges in Chicago, U.S.A.; one large class of 80 first-year Chinese majors, two classes of 53 first-year English majors and two classes of 50 third-year English majors from a university in Central China. The first-year EFL students (beginning EFL writers) had not received any English writing instruction before they wrote their composition, while third-year EFL students (advanced ESL writers) had had English writing class for at least one year. All four groups of Chinese and American students were assigned to write an essay on the same topic with prompts: the impact of individualism on society. The English prompt provided was: "What kind of impact do you think individualism has on society? Is it positive or negative? Why?" The assignment was given to first-year U.S. students and Chinese majors in the first two weeks after they entered the university so that any influence of their new major would not impact their writing. The two groups of Chinese EFL students were given the assignment two months after the new academic year started. The American subjects and the two groups of EFL students were asked to write an expository essay on the topic in English and the Chinese majors an essay in Chinese. All compositions were written at home rather than in class so that students could have more time to organize their writing. The length limit set for U.S. students and Chinese advanced EFL students was 500-700 words; the length limit set for Chinese majors was about 1000 Chinese characters. The Chinese first-year EFL students were asked to write an essay of at least 300 words, limited by consideration of their English proficiency.

After the compositions were collected, 50 pieces were selected from each group in the

way of the interval sampling approach. Since the sample in this study was small, that is, 50 subjects in each group (a total of 200), results from statistical analyses, while significant, can only hint at tendencies of similarities and differences in the aspects contrasted in the study.

II.2. Analysis of the essays

II.2.1. Recoding of the Essays

All the Chinese and English essays were assigned a code to facilitate their identification: NES is for native English speakers, NCS for native Chinese speakers, EFL1 for first-year EFL students, and EFL3 for third-year EFL students. For example, the identifier of a Chinese essay, NCS 5, thus means the fifth of the Chinese essays by Chinese speakers.

II.2.2. P-unit and T-unit

To acquire quantitative data in reasonably comparable forms from texts written across languages, it is necessary to define specifically several terms that are indispensable in text analysis in contrastive rhetoric study. For contrastive rhetoric studies, writing-specific features such as sentence and paragraph boundaries can be particularly significant to text analysis. For this research the notions of P-unit and T-unit are introduced as paragraph-and sentence-segmentation concepts that are useful for the identification of the placement of the thesis statement and the topic sentence.

II.2.2.a. P-unit

A P-unit is a “segment of a text that could be taken as an independent and self-contained text itself, which can reasonably stand in isolation from the preceding and following text” (Chesterman, 1998:152). The crucial criterion is that a P-unit is marked by closure at both ends (Grimes, 1975:21). Methodologically it may be more appropriate for contrastive rhetoric researchers to work with P-units rather than other less independent text-segments (Chesterman, 1998:152). This term is consistent with the notion of the topical paragraph in the rhetorical field. For the purpose of this study, a P-unit is delimited as a self-contained segmentation of text that expresses a sub-theme that is one level lower than the thesis statement in the levels of generality. Specifically, it is a topic paragraph in the body part of a composition that centers on one aspect of the impact of individualism on society, including the explanations and exemplifications of the aspect. No consideration is given to the sub-

division subordinate to the P-unit, even though these sub-divisions may be also relatively independent and self-contained.

II.2.2.b. T-unit

T-unit, abbreviation for “minimum terminable unit”, was first used in Hunt (1965). It is defined as “a single clause (or independent clause) plus whatever other subordinate clauses or non-clauses are attached to, or embedded within that one main clause” (Hunt, 1965:93).

However, deciding a T-unit in Chinese writing turns out to be a problematic matter because in Chinese writing the sentence boundary is not as clear-cut as it is in English writing. Therefore, it is necessary to establish some rules regulating what constitutes a T-unit in Chinese. To accommodate the demands of written Chinese, the T-unit is defined as follows:

- a. A sentence that has one subject (topic) and a chain of verbal expressions.
- b. A sentence that is composed of two or more clauses linked by pairs of connectives or their near-synonyms.
- c. If a sentence is composed of several clauses which have different subjects and are relatively independent and can be punctuated as independent sentences, each clause can be regarded as a T-unit.

II.2.3. The Thesis Statement and the Topic Sentence

According to rhetoricians writing in English, the thesis statement should provide the stance, the belief, or the point of view of the writer; or it states the purpose of the essay and conveys the central or main idea of the text (Sullivan, 1986). For this study, the thesis statement is specifically defined as the statement which summarizes the writer’s viewpoint on the impact of individualism on society.

In English rhetoric the topic sentence is the sentence “whose assertion is supported or whose meaning is explicated or whose parts are detailed in a paragraph” (Christensen, 1963:236). Sullivan (1984:23) thinks that a well-chosen topic sentence should be a complete, clear, and specific sentence. To accommodate the fact that there is not such a concept in traditional Chinese writing, the topic sentence as is understood in English writing needs to be reformulated. For the purpose of this study, it is defined as: (1) a statement that summarizes the idea to be developed in a P-unit; (2) a statement that introduces the specific topic which is to be elaborated in the P-unit. For example, the statement “Let me elaborate on the positive

impact first (EFL3 36)” is considered as the topic sentence because it introduces the topic to be elaborated in that paragraph—the positive impact. Generally, the first definition has precedence over the second, that is, if both statements appear in a P-unit, the first statement is taken as the topic sentence.

It deserves mention that in Chinese students’ writing occasionally the topic statement can be merely a topic-identifying sentence fragment. For example, in the following paragraph, “Negative impacts” is taken as the topic statement:

Negative impacts: individualists are often considered to be indifferent to others in society and selfish. In order to achieve their goals and ends, they will go all out to accomplish it.... (EFL3 46)

Regarding the placement of the thesis statement, this study follows the approach introduced by Tirkkonen-Condit & Lieflander-Koistinen (1989). For the placing of the theme summary in a text. It is decided that, if the thesis statement appears in the first one-third of a text, it is taken to be at the beginning; if it is in the second one-third, it is considered to be in the middle; and if it appears in the final one-third, it is considered to be at the end of a text. If there is not an explicit statement summarizing the writer’s stance in a text, the thesis is seen as being implied. The judgment of the placement of the thesis is based on the number of T-units. The same approach is applied in identifying the position of topic sentences in paragraphs. Degree of directness was indexed by the placement of the thesis statement and topic sentence. As is the common practice in the contrastive rhetoric field, the earlier the thesis statement or topic sentence appears, the more direct the text or paragraph is considered to be.

II.2.4. Reliability

Each text is analyzed in terms of the placement of the thesis statement and the use of topic sentences. To avoid subjectivity two independent coders participated to establish inter-code reliability. One was a doctoral student in applied linguistics with experience in teaching English as a second language in China. The other was an experienced Chinese EFL writing teacher. 20% of the essays from each group were randomly selected and analyzed. Regarding the placement of the thesis statement, they agreed on 95% of the judgments; on coding the employment of the topic sentences the inter-code reliability was about 91%.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

III.1. Degree of Directness in Overall Organization

The placements of the thesis statements in the four groups of essays are summarized in the following table.

GROUP	PLACEMENT TYPE				TOTAL
	INIT	MED	FIN	IMP	
NCS	33 66.0%	2 4.0%	6 12.0%	9 18.0%	50 100.0%
EFL1	33 66.0%	4 8.0%	12 24.0%	1 2.0%	50 100.0%
EFL3	35 70.0%	3 6.0%	10 20.0%	2 4.0%	50 100.0%
NES	43 86.0%	2 4.0%	3 6.0%	2 4.0%	50 100.0%
TOTAL	144 72.0%	11 5.5%	31 15.5%	14 7.0%	200 100.0%

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Placements of the Thesis Statements in the Four Groups of Compositions. (*INIT* = initial placement of the thesis statement; *MED* = medial position; *FIN* = final position; *IMP* = implied thesis statement)

Table 1 reveals that all the four groups of students prefer the initial placement of the thesis statement. Since the last three positions of the thesis statements exhibit indirectness to different degrees, they can be combined into one type. The results after combination are shown in Table 2.

PLACEMENT TYPE	GROUP				TOTAL
	NCS	EFL1	EFL3	NES	
INIT	33	33	35	43	144
	66.0%	66.0%	70.0%	86.0%	72.0%
COMB	17	17	15	7	56
	34.0%	34.0%	30.0%	14.0%	28.0%
TOTAL	50	50	50	50	200
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2. Placement of the Thesis Statements with Three Columns Grouped Together

(INIT = initial placement of the thesis statement; COMB = the combination of the three situations in which the thesis is implied or placed in the medial or final position)

In order to detect the extent of difference between each two groups, especially between the essays by U.S. students and Chinese students, separate tests are performed in the following.

1) Cross-Language/Cross-Nationality Comparison

This comparison is conducted between Chinese students' writing in Chinese and U.S. students' English writing. The result of Continuity Correction test ($X^2=4.441$, $df=1$, $p=0.035<0.05$) indicates that at the 95% significance level there is significant difference between the two groups in terms of the placement of the thesis statement, that is, U.S. students' writing tends to be more direct than Chinese students' Chinese writing, although both groups of students prefer direct text organization.

2) Cross-Nationality/within Language Comparisons

This set of comparisons are conducted between U.S. students' writing and the two groups of Chinese ESL students' writing. The result of Continuity Correction test between NES group and ESL1 group ($0.035<0.05$) indicates that at the 95% level the difference is statistically significant. However, the difference between the NES and EFL3 texts ($X^2=2.855$, $df=1$, $p=0.091>0.05$) is not quite significant, but the low p value suggests that the difference is still considerably prominent.

3) Comparisons Within the Three Chinese Groups

Table 2 shows little variation among the three Chinese groups in terms of the degree of directness in the overall textual organization. In fact, no difference is found between the Chinese writing and the Chinese first-year EFL students' English writing. The results of the

Continuity Correction test between NCS group and the two EFL groups (Both are $X^2=0.046, df=1, p=0.830$) reveal great similarity among the three Chinese groups in the frequency of the initial placement of the thesis statements, which is a demonstration of cross-cultural transfer when Chinese students wrote in English.

III.2. The Organization of Paragraphs

The employment of the topic sentences in the four groups of compositions is summarized in the following table.

GROUP	PLACE MENT TYPE				TOTAL
	INIT	MED	FIN	IMP	
NCS	87 63.5%	10 7.3%	12 8.8%	28 20.4%	137 100.0%
EFL1	51 56.7%	12 13.3%	14 15.6%	13 14.4%	90 100.0%
EFL3	103 74.1%	5 3.6%	18 12.9%	13 9.4%	139 100.0%
NES	115 85.8%	7 5.2%	4 3.0%	8 6.0%	134 100.0%
TOTAL	356 71.2%	34 6.8%	48 9.6%	62 12.4%	500 100.0%

Table 3. Placement of the Topic Sentences in the Four Groups of Compositions

(INIT = initial placement of the thesis statement; MED = medial position; FIN = final position; IMP = implied thesis statement)

This table shows that the initial placement of the topic sentences is the method most frequently adopted by all the four groups of students as a way of organizing paragraphs; however, the extent of its employment varies greatly in the four groups. Again separate tests are performed in the following in order to detect the extent of difference between each two groups.

1) Cross Language/Cross-Nationality Comparison

This comparison is conducted between U.S. students' essays and the Chinese students' Chinese texts. The result of Pearson Chi-Square test ($X^2=19.491, df=3, p=0.000<0.05$) indicates that at the 95% significant level the difference between the two groups in terms of the employment of the topic sentences is very significant.

2) Cross-Nationality/within Language Comparisons

Pearson Chi-Square tests conducted between the U.S. group and the two Chinese EFL groups ($X^2=25.061$, $df=3$, $p=0.000<0.05$ between NES and EFL1, $X^2=11.006$, $df=3$, $p=0.012<0.05$ between NES and EFL3) indicate that at the 95% significant level the difference in terms of the employment of the topic sentence is very significant. Evidently, the difference between the NES group and EFL1 group is broader than that between the NES group and EFL3 group.

3) Comparisons within Three Chinese Groups

Obviously Chinese third-year EFL students used a higher frequency of the initial-positioned topic sentences than did the first-year ESL students and students writing in Chinese. The results of Pearson Chi-Square tests indicate that, at the 95% significant level, the difference between the two EFL groups ($X^2=10.958$, $df=3$, $p=0.012<0.05$) and between EFL3 and NCS ($X^2=9.688$, $df=3$, $p=0.021<0.05$) in the employment of the topic sentences is significant. However, the difference between first-year EFL students and students writing in Chinese is not so distinct ($X^2=5.729$, $df=3$, $p=0.126>0.05$).

The comparisons within the three Chinese groups again demonstrate cross-culture transfer in the employment of the topic sentences in paragraph organization. This transfer appears more evident in the essays by first-year EFL students who have not learnt English writing, and becomes weaker in the writing by advanced EFL learners. However, the difference between advanced ESL learners and American students in the use of topic sentences is still significant ($p=0.012<0.05$).

III.3. Summary

To sum up, the quantitative study of four groups of compositions shows that, either in text organization or paragraph organization, Chinese college students, like their American counterparts, generally prefer directness. However, at both levels U.S. students tend to be significantly more direct than Chinese students. In addition, it has been found that advanced EFL writers demonstrate more directness than low-level EFL writers as a result of having had more than one year of English-writing training.

IV. DISCUSSION

This research finds that Chinese students also prefer directness in text and paragraph organization, but they are significantly less direct than American students. The result of this study seems a compromise between the view that Chinese and English writing differ fundamentally and the view that there is no difference between the two. What might be the causes? While culture as a whole may have important impact on students' rhetorical patterns, as is emphasized by Matalene (1985), Scollon (1991), Shen (1989), the influence of school education, which is direct and immediate, is non-negligible. Children, as Cooper and Greenbaum point out in the preface to Purves (1988), learn to speak through frequent exposure to samples of their language, and through interaction in speech with their peers and with adults; in contrast, they learn to write through formal instruction, normally in a school setting. Writing as a whole is a technology, a set of skills that must be practiced and gained through conscious effort and much practice. In other words, writing, as Liberman and Liberman (1990) assert, is not a natural ability that automatically accompanies maturation, and writing—particularly the more complex composing skill valued in the academy— involves training, instruction, practice, experience, and purpose. Since the goal of school writing is to demonstrate text production itself, regardless of the intended addressee (de Beaugrande, 1984:108), it would be helpful to examine the rhetorical organization of ancient Chinese writing and the description of expository text organization in modern Chinese writing manuals which may have influenced Chinese writing teachers.

IV.1. The Structure of Chinese Expository Writing

Although the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* pattern is occasionally mentioned in Chinese rhetoric handbooks, Chinese expository writing is not necessarily bound to this text structure. As is shown by the following analysis, Chinese rhetoricians also advocate directness in text organization, although they might not agree with each other on the structure of expository essays. Wang and Zhang (1992:208) declare that ancient Chinese writers attached much importance to the beginning of a text, and insisted that a good beginning should let the reader know the topic or the “crucial point” of the text as soon as possible. They list six approaches usually employed by ancient Chinese writers to initiate texts of various types, ranking first is “to come straight to the point” (*ru shou qing ti*). Wang and Zhang (1992:208) exemplify this approach with *A Memorial to the throne: Remonstrance Against Expelling the Consultants* (*jian zhu ke shu*), a well-known essay by Li Si, the Prime Minister of Qin Shi Huang, First

Emperor of Qin Dynasty, in which the writer presents his viewpoint in the first sentence: “I think it is wrong to expel the consultants.” Wang and Zhang see this kind of beginning as direct and courageous, which startles the reader at the very beginning and in consequence attracts him/her to read on. As a matter of fact, this form of directness has acquired some popularity among some classical Chinese writers. Liang Qichao (cited in Wang and Zhang, 1992: 209), an influential literary figure and reformer at the end of Qing Dynasty, suggests: “A text is not attractive unless it lets the reader know the essential point (*zong zhi*) at the first sight....How can a text be attractive if the reader does not know what it is about? So the best way for the writer is to put forward the gist (kernel) at the exact beginning of the text.”

Our examination of the senior high school Chinese textbooks published in 2002 by the People's Education Press reveals that deductive and linear rhetorical structures are quite common in the expository essays by ancient Chinese writers. Specifically, 66.7% (4 out of 6 texts) of the classical expository essays are organized in a deductive way. This proportion, of course, does not mean that the same percentage of all classical expository essays were deductively organized. However, these texts are powerful evidence that Chinese classical writers could, and also frequently, write in a direct way. For example, Su Xun's *On the Fall of the Six States*, a classical essay written more than 1000 years ago and most widely read nowadays, is exactly organized in what is called by contrastive rhetoricians as the deductive way:

General statement: The fall of the six states was caused by bribing the Qin state.

Support 1: The decline of some states was the direct consequence of bribing the Qin because their power was weakened when they parted their land to their enemy for peace.

Support 2: The fall of other states was indirectly caused by bribing because those states that bribed the Qin state refused to reinforce them in their wars with the Qin.

As most of these essays are well-known pieces in Chinese classical literature, it is likely that they have had, and continue to have, considerable influence on later writers. Therefore, Wang (1992) is mistaken when he attributes the adoption of deductive style by many Chinese writers to the interaction between Chinese rhetorical traditions and the influence of newly imported English writing patterns.

IV.2. Directness in contemporary Chinese writing

This tendency for direct organization is more clearly shown in contemporary Chinese writing manuals. Like Liang Qichao, Zhang (1996:129) thinks that the opening part of a text is to point out the problem to be discussed in the text or summarize the content to be expressed; generally the introduction should be brief, and it is the best if it allows the reader to “open the door and see the mountain” (*kai men jian shan*, a Chinese idiom which means “being direct”). Zhang’s suggestion that the content of a text be summarized at the opening part reminds one of the thesis statement as defined in English writing manuals.

Zhang (1983: 265) points out that the writer can directly provide the central point for argument or exposition (*lun dian*) in the introduction of the text; sometimes the general point is divided into several separate supporting points in the second part (*ben lun*). These divided points are either in parallel with each other or each develops on the basis of the previous one. After the analysis of the problem or argument of the central point usually comes the resolution or conclusion. But it also happens that some texts do not have a conclusion, and come to the end when the analysis or argument is finished.

Wu (1989) provides a full discussion on the overall structure in expository texts. Having analyzed a large number of classical and contemporary expository texts, Wu (1989) suggests that there are four ways of structuring expository texts: the “deductive”, the “inductive”, the “deductive/inductive”, and the “multi-topic” pattern. In the “inductive” pattern, according to Wu (1989:122), the general statement is placed after the divided arguments (*ibid*: 125), while in the deductive pattern the conclusion (the thesis) is stated first, followed with support. The first two patterns, essentially two-part structures, can be combined to form the three-part hybrid structure (thesis-support-conclusion) of the deductive/inductive essay (Cahill, 2003). This, in fact, is the structure repeatedly described in Anglo-American writing manuals. In the first three patterns the general statement plays an important role in a text because, although it does not take much length, it expresses the central idea which summarizes the whole text (*ibid*: 134). In the multi-topic pattern, in which a general statement is unnecessary, the overall topic is divided into two or more sub-topics, each of which is a complete and independent text itself. Evidently, two of the four patterns—the deductive pattern and the deductive-inductive pattern—emphasize direct organization.

Qing (2000: 67) points out that an expository text has one general statement, which is the central point of the argument of the text. Under the general statement there may be several more specific points, which are developed in the argument. Generally, the central point is found more often at the beginning than in other positions. Sometimes it occurs in the process

of argument, or in the conclusion. It is also likely that the central statement is absent in a text, but that does not mean that the text does not have a central point; it is just implied, and the reader can grasp it from the text. This view on the position of the central point is concurred by many contemporary Chinese rhetoricians, such as Liu and Zhu (1986).

Although there are slight differences among these rhetoricians on the organization of expository texts, they adhere to varying degrees to direct organization. Some of these views are so close to those in English writing manuals that we cannot help speculating that they are influenced, more or less, by Anglo-American rhetoricians. As a matter of fact, no Chinese writing manuals tell students to approach their topics or organize their essays in an “indirect” way.

IV. 3. Paragraph Organization

It is noteworthy that Chinese rhetoricians seem to pay much less attention to paragraph organization. Ancient rhetoricians did not even mention the notion of the paragraph at all. Dong (1926), the first work on Chinese vernacular rhetoric, was also the first that devoted some attention to the concept of the paragraph. Dong says: “If we take a paragraph as the expansion of a sentence, then naturally a paragraph is also a miniature text, which has its own purpose and illustrating examples” (Dong, 1926, cited in Yuan & Zong, 1995:377). Interestingly, Dong suggests that a paragraph be taken as a miniature text, as many Anglo-American rhetoricians have done. Considering that English composition theory was formulated at the end of the 19th century, it is possible that Dong, to some extent, might have been influenced by it. Dong’s view on the paragraph was echoed by Zhang (1996: 141) who points out that the organization of a paragraph is similar to a whole text. Nevertheless, except in few academic works (e.g. Zheng, 1985), the discussion of paragraph organization is rare in Chinese writing manuals. The notion of “topic sentence” in English rhetoric has never been mentioned by the few Chinese rhetoricians who paid any attention to the structure of the paragraph. However, deductive paragraphs are far from being rare in Chinese writing. Mohan and Lo (1985), by drawing examples from *The Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius*, point out that the evidence in Classical Chinese literature affirms that Chinese writers are capable of writing direct paragraphs.

To sum up, our analysis of Chinese rhetoricians’ views on text structure seems to explain the results of the quantitative study of the previous section—that Chinese students also prefer

directness in text organization. In Chinese expository writing, directness is also emphasized, if not so much as it is in English writing manuals. Furthermore, the common neglect of paragraph organization in Chinese rhetoric leads to the greater difference between Chinese and American students in terms of paragraph organization.

V. CONCLUSION

Since the initiation of contrastive rhetoric, English expository discourse pattern is typically described as linear, direct, deductive, and logical, and Chinese as inductive, indirect, and non-linear (Kaplan, 1966, 1972; Young, 1994; Harris, 1997). This linearity/circularity dichotomy in the contrastive rhetoric field implies that the cultures of the East and the West and their respective rhetorical traditions differ profoundly and fundamentally. Such a view is detrimental as it is liable to essentialize and construct “static, homogeneous, and apolitical images of the rhetorical patterns” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004: 9) of written Chinese and English and rules out the possibility of any rhetorical similarities across the two cultures. Binary essentialism fails to take into account the “dynamic nature of language related to inter-linguistic/cultural influence” (Kubota & Lehner, 2004), especially for a language like Chinese which has experienced great changes in syntax and rhetoric as a result of Western influence since the dawn of the 20th century (Hu, 1999).

This study addresses the question whether rhetorical patterns across cultures are so different that they differ fundamentally. Cahill (2003), for example, reveals that the alleged indirect/spiral organization of Chinese and Japanese writing exemplified in the so-called (*zhuan/ten*) “turn” is not in fact a rhetorical move of “circularity” or “digression” but rather an expansion or further development of preceding ideas. The implication is that, as Leki (1997: 241), who found the alleged indirectness and other such features said to characterize Chinese and Japanese discourse are in fact common to the writing of most languages, including English, contends, “[r]hetorically we do not appear to be much different.”

The findings in this study have direct pedagogical implications for ESL composition teachers. As Chinese expository rhetorical pattern does not differ significantly from that of English, and Chinese students also prefer directness in text and paragraph organization, English school essay need not necessarily be an obstacle for student writers. Therefore, ESL/EFL writing teachers need not be guilty of colonization when they teach English rhetorical patterns to Chinese students. In addition, ESL teachers need to pay more attention to teaching paragraph organization to Chinese students, because the latter may not have

learned how to organize a paragraph in Chinese writing learning. Finally, ESL/EFL composition teachers, influenced by traditional contrastive rhetoric, may make the writing classroom more congenial to students from other cultures like Chinese if they begin to stop viewing the rhetoric from other cultures as something fundamentally different from and alien to English rhetoric.

This study also suggests some areas worthy of further research. Analysis of contemporary Chinese composition textbooks has revealed much similarity between Chinese and English expository writing in terms of rhetorical structure. However, how students are taught to write at school, and especially, how they learn to structure a text, still remains unknown. It is suggested that more inquiry is needed into students' learning experiences in writing in their native language and their perceptions of the difficulties in composition in native language. For the purpose of EFL/ESL writing instruction, it would be valuable to compare the teaching of composition in Chinese and English in China. Finally, more comparative studies of English composition teaching in different countries and languages are required.

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