

7-18-2005

# Reconstructing Writer Identities, Student Identities, Teacher Identities, and Gender Identities: Chinese Graduate Students in America

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Reconstructing Writer Identities, Student Identities, Teacher Identities, and  
Gender Identities: Chinese Graduate Students in America

by

Peiling Zhao

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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Date of Approval:  
July 18, 2005

Keywords: rhetoric, pedagogy, ideology, masculinity, femininity, binary

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## **Dedication**

Renzhang Jin, My Husband, for His Devoted Support and Unconditional Love

Junyuan Jin, My Son, for His Love and Inspiration

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to those who have changed me during my doctoral degree at University of South Florida.

First, I would like to thank Professor Debra Jacobs, my major professor, for her unflagging support for my studying, teaching, and job searching, for her creative programs for teaching English composition, for her careful guidance during this project and determined commitment to ensuring its completion, and for her sensitive understanding toward Chinese people living in the United States. I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to Professor Gary Olson for his encouragement, insightful instruction, intellectual mentorship, and constant assistance and advice that will sustain through my academic life. I am equally grateful to Professor Marilyn Myerson for having ushered me into the field of feminist studies with her successful liberatory pedagogy, to Professor Elizabeth Metzger for introducing me to contrastive rhetoric, to Professor Lynn Worsham for introducing me to the theories of Foucault, and to Professor Michael Amen and Professor Jack Moore for their wholehearted support for international students. I am deeply appreciative as well to many colleagues and friends, such as Greg Giberson for his mentorship in teaching; Allison Brimmer for her friendship and encouragement; Mary Angelo for her example as an excellent teacher; Julia Makosky for her thoughtfulness; and Xiqiao Wang, Hongwei Shang, and Hyejin Kim for sharing their experiences with me.

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Gender Identities: Chinese Graduate Students in America

Peiling Zhao

ABSTRACT

The increasing presence of Chinese international graduate students in American higher education has mandated a closer examination of their multi-faceted lives against stereotypes that hinder their efforts to find, transform, or assert their identities in the dominant discourses of American academia and culture.

Cross cultural studies of Chinese international students tend to reinforce stereotypes of their writer identities, learner identities, and teacher identities. Examining these various identities discloses dichotomies that read Chinese students' traits and behaviors as handicaps and thus characterize them as "abnormal" in relation to the "normal" traits and behaviors of Chinese students' Western counterparts. Whereas Western student writers are described as direct and logical, Chinese student writers are characterized as indirect and illogical. In comparison to the assertive and critical way of thinking that is regarded as the norm among American students, Chinese students are seen as submissive "rote learners." Conversely, the liberatory, student-centered approach to teaching that is promoted in the American educational system is thought to be antithetical to what is considered to be an authoritarian, teacher-centered approach of Chinese education.

Underlying these binaries is an unchallenged gender binary. Deeply entrenched Western notions about masculinity and femininity ultimately lead to a feminization of Chinese identities. Despite the constant critique from various disciplines, dichotomous views of gender persist and consequently lead to misconceptions about Chinese subjectivity in U.S.

This project argues that these misconceptions have produced consistently devastating effects on Chinese students and further demobilize them from acculturating themselves into the dominant discourse in the United States. To deconstruct these socially, culturally, and ideologically constructed binaries, this work uses scholarship on subjectivity and identity by Michel Foucault and Homi Bhabha to examine critically how identity is formed and transformed; it also draws heavily on scholarship in rhetoric and composition and in feminist studies to delineate how Chinese students' various identities are formed and transformed. The goal of this work is to advance a complementary thinking to advocate new conceptions about Chinese students' various identities and ultimately to allow Chinese students to assume more active agency in their identity transformation process in the U.S.

## Chapter One

### Lost in Translation: Chinese Identity and the Myth of Diversity

*The quest for self-understanding is a journey without end. Even in the deepest recesses of our psyches there are no experiences which, if evoked, will reveal our true identities. But the quest for such knowledge is itself a form of self-care, as ancient practitioners of the technologies of the self taught long before Freud. Therefore, as Foucault contends, we are condemned to a quest for meaning whose meaning is that our human nature is continually being reconstituted by the norms that we create along the way. The responsibility to create meanings and values anew is a perpetual task but nonetheless the foundation of all human endeavors. For Foucault, it is through such creativity that our power is revealed, and it is in our capacity to use it well that our destiny lies.*

-- Patrick Hutton

Our life is a constant and uneasy quest for who we are. Throughout different stages of our life, we attempt to translate the dominant language about who we should be into the specific moments of our individual lives. A lot is lost during the translation while a lot more is awaiting us to explore and to define. While we are lost, confused, and transformed as we live from one moment to the next, we are exercising our will power to submit to and to subvert the perceived conceptions about who we are.

In the highly-acclaimed and sometimes controversial 2003 movie *Lost in Translation*, such identity confusion and crisis starts with Bob Harris (played by Bill Murray) and Charlotte (played by Scarlett Johansson) before they

leave their American homes for Tokyo. Bob is experiencing mid-life crisis and hoping that his Tokyo trip for a two million commercial shoot of some whiskey will allow him space to escape from his wife, children, and the life that he seems to be getting tired of. A new graduate with a degree in philosophy from Yale, Charlotte does not have certainties about who she wants to be, as she is experiencing the unfamiliar role of a newly-wed but oftentimes neglected wife of a popular photographer.

Identity crisis that has started before one leaves one's home is suddenly and speedily exacerbated when living (temporarily or permanently) in a foreign country. The movie star and the new Yale graduate, whose lives are so disparate, feel empathy with each other at a splendid Tokyo hotel bar where they find that they are experiencing the typical insomnia and emptiness as a result both of jet lag and of cultural alienation. They are more lost when they are translating what they know about Japanese culture into their everyday moment of living with that culture, when they are seeking in a foreign culture for an answer about who they are and why they are where they are. If we define translation as a universal process of trying to understand and finding a simple answer for what is complicated and unfamiliar, we are lost in translation as we are questing for a simple answer to the unfathomable issue of who we are.

Though the movie depicts the theme of lost identity against the backdrop of the Asian culture as the "exotic" culture with the two main

characters experiencing that culture merely as temporary tourists, their need to connect with someone they can identify with is a basic human yearning everyone feels. Finding commonality in another affirms our own sense of identity. Understanding that this search can be a difficult venture even within our “native” culture might help us to better sympathize with some of the struggles the growing Chinese population in the United States faces on a daily basis.

In describing some such struggles, I focus in this chapter (and the entire project) on Chinese students in American universities as well as other institutions of higher education. I identify these struggles in terms of what could be considered, more or less, identity crises. Borrowing the title, which is sometimes problematic as some critics believe, from this movie, I am hoping to suggest that the theme of identity loss, confusion, and crisis is universal both in space and time even though I narrow my focus on Chinese graduate students who came from Mainland China after 1979 to pursue their graduate degrees in the institutions of higher education in the United States of America. Like Bob and Charlotte in the movie, these Chinese students have started their identity quests before they arrived in the United States, and their life as graduate students in America provides them a fuller, richer, and sometimes more poignant stage for them to continue their quest as new confusions are encountered and new identities are formed along the way.

In this first chapter, my aim is to detail what some of the more difficult

circumstances are that threaten the identities Chinese students understood themselves as having before arriving in the United States. To provide a theoretical framework for examining the very notion of identity, I consider in this chapter the works of two major theorists, Michel Foucault and Homi Bhabha. The critical perspective Foucault provides on the role Western binary thinking plays in the construction and policing of identity is especially important for recognizing the extent to which Chinese persons in the United States often feel “abnormal” and therefore pressured to conform. The sense of abnormality becomes an especially exigent circumstance to overcome when that which is considered abnormal is also, of course, typically viewed as inferior. Because Foucault’s notion of the policing function binary thinking has in the construction and maintenance of identity, I discuss what I consider to be the primary binary oppositions responsible for the most vexing circumstances Chinese students in the United States must succeed in negotiating. Different binaries involved in the formation and understanding of crucial Chinese identities relevant to their adjustments in the American educational system are also reconsidered through this project, in part serving as an organizational framework for my work.

This first chapter also considers the postcolonial theoretical scholarship of Homi Bhabha as contributing crucially important insights about Chinese identity transformations resulting from their experience in U.S. institutions of higher learning, as well as in the US culture in general. To my mind, Bhabha

offers somewhat of an advance over Foucauldian notions about identity because Bhabha, through his conception of hybridity and other key concepts, allows for greater potential for a subordinate culture to assert itself in the dominant culture. While it is not my intention to argue that the Chinese presence in American academia represents the kind of colonial culture Bhabha's work primarily addresses, I believe his views are nonetheless greatly useful to arriving at more critical and meaningful understanding of the identity transformation processes Chinese students undergo. It is also the case that I (and likely many Chinese and other international counterparts) regard Bhabha's ideas about cross-cultural identity transformation particularly affirming. Though both Foucault and Bhabha have agreed that there are potentials for active agency, Bhabha seems to be more optimistic about the potential and actuality of agency among the "colonized" and provides better for the kind of empowered subject position and active agency that I wish to address in this project.

Given that one of the goals of this project is to critique stereotypes and binaries produced in a cross-cultural context, it is difficult to balance between the two cultures without valorizing one culture or demonizing the other, as we might notice that any cross cultural context is a two-way translation. Just like Bob is confused when Ms. Kawasaki interprets in one sentence what the Japanese commercial photographer has said with gestures and passions in ten sentences, the Japanese culture is abbreviated by Charlotte's glimpses

into the temple and by Bob and Charlotte's collaborative glimpses into Japanese karaoke bars, clubs, TV programs, and sushi. On the other hand, Western culture—such as hiring an American movie star like Bob for a commercial for a Chinese brand of whisky, using a young American woman singing English (outdated) songs at the bar of the hotel in Tokyo, and the neon signs of dinosaurs—is also abbreviated while translated into Japanese culture. By trying to understand in several days what has been going for centuries, the movie, or the translation, or the two sojourners inevitably lead to stereotypes by uprooting things from their historical time and space.

Though stereotypes are inevitable and inherent in the very process of translation, it is our mission, as we quest for truths of our identities, to challenge these stereotypes. To challenge these stereotypes is, however, not to valorize one culture or to demonize the other. It is rather to demonstrate how generally and easily we produce stereotypes. It is to expose how we are trapped by the very stereotypes that we create for others. To challenge stereotypes is not to find an all-applicable answer to any identity crisis and confusion because by doing so new stereotypes are produced. As dynamic as the inherent nature of the cross culture context is, any individual in such a context will find that there are no generalizations that can adequately account for or bring insight to his or her moment-to-moment negotiations with the conflicts of the two cultures, of the two languages, and of the two ideologies that are in contact with each other, or to his or her hilarious moments in

exploring the commonalities in the people from the two cultures.

### **A Brief Overview of Chinese Graduate Students in Institutions of Higher Education in the United States**

Compared to the Chinese who came to the United States within the last century to work as railroad owners, laundry workers, farmers, miners, restaurant workers, menial laborers, business people, etc., Chinese students and scholars have been more favored and excluded from numerous horrendous discriminatory practices, polices, and laws in history of the United States. This is not only due to the fact that there has been less competition and “a shortage of teachers” in the profession of teaching but also due to the noticeably more democracy and “less prejudice” on U.S. university campuses (Kung 194). Though universities do subscribe to the dominant ideology, they enjoy relative independence from the dominant ideology because of the critical scholarship and pedagogy prevalent in the academia. In addition to these two reasons, both cultures show respect for both higher education and the profession of teaching. Moreover, American higher education is more accessible and open to foreign students. All these factors have interplayed and made America-China educational exchanges prosperous and consistent, with the least interruption from wars, exclusionary acts, and diplomatic issues.

The educational exchange has been accelerated since 1979 when the United States and the People’s Republic of China officially established

diplomatic relations. The increasing presence of Chinese students on American university campuses has been recorded in numerous studies. Between 1979 and 1995, "more than 220,000 Chinese students had gone abroad, mostly to America, to study"; in the year of 1999 alone, about 40,000 Chinese students were enrolled in American colleges and universities, making Chinese students the highest percentage of international students on many American campuses (Chu vii). According to the most comprehensive findings detailed in *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*, the total of Chinese student enrollment in American higher education in the year of 2001/02 was 63,211, representing an increase of 5.5 percent over the 59,939 in the year of 2000/01, ranking Chinese student enrollment second among international student enrollments on U.S. post-secondary educational institutions (8). In 2005, despite the 4%-5% decrease in 2004 as a lingering residue of September 11, the number of Chinese students exceeded 60,000, according to Donald Bishop, U.S. Cultural Attaché at Beijing, who made an encouraging speech to welcome more Chinese students to study and research at U.S. universities (1).

Most of the international Chinese students are enrolled in various types of graduate programs. Identifying the institutional types and programs that international students were enrolled during 2001/02, the *Open Doors* study reports that among international student population, Chinese students constitute the highest enrollment at Chinese students at 15.6% at Research I

and II, 11.4% at Doctoral I and II, 6.8% at Master's I and II, 3.2% at Baccalaureate I and II, 3.6% at Associate, and 6.5% at other types of institutions (41). Though nearly 2,500 institutions of all types hosted Chinese students in 2001/02, the above statistics show that Chinese student enrollment has typically concentrated in graduate programs, though undergraduate enrollment and community college enrollment has continued to ascend.

Following the general tendency of international students, Chinese students have traditionally concentrated in the natural sciences, medical fields, engineering, mathematics, computer programming, and technology, though there has been no statistics showing Chinese student enrollment in each specific discipline. However, in recent years their enrollment has noticeably increased in liberal arts, social sciences, humanities, communications, and library sciences; consequently it is safe to say that a Chinese student presence has begun to permeate every discipline at university campuses in the United States.

The presence of Chinese international students on U.S. campuses has benefited American higher education institutions in several significant ways. Many Chinese students pay for their tuition without any financial aid or tuition reductions, and tuition for international students is far more costly than it is for in-state residents. In spite of the unevenness of their financial status, Chinese students, as well as other international students, make undeniable economic contributions to their campuses and communities, according to "detailed

studies that have been made outlining the fees paid and other living costs met by international students” (McIntire xv). Besides the economic benefits, the “benefits derived from the diversity that the presence of international students lends to the student body on a college and university campus are undeniable” (McIntire XIV). Many Chinese graduate students also teach as low-paying teaching assistants many undergraduate general education courses in math, biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, and composition (McIntire xiv). At the same time, institutions with research missions have found effective ways to utilize international students and faculty in “pursuing their educational goal of developing a global perspective” (McIntire xiv-xv).

The opportunities to research and teach while getting a graduate degree are academically, professionally, economically, and socially rewarding to Chinese students, who venture to a foreign culture and endure multi-faceted stresses. The most obvious reason for their choice to pursue higher education is their deep-rooted respect for education that is rewarding both intellectually and financially. Education has been a five-thousand year old tradition of China and provided both upward social mobility and personal fulfillment to those persistently seeking it. As a Chinese saying goes, there are both gold houses and jade-looking high class ladies in the books (*shu li zi you huang jin wu; shu li zi you yan ru yu.*). Imbedded in this saying are the multi-dimensional promises that allure millions and thousands of diligent (especially poor) students and scholars to endure the most unendurable pain and stress to seek

higher and higher education. Due to the high selectivity of Chinese higher education, higher education does not only cultivate one's intellectual capabilities; it also increases his or her professional mobility. Consequently, for both men and women, college education also promises better marriage prospects because it gives men and women more opportunities to associate with others who are pursuing the same goals. In modern China, which opened its doors to Western culture, education, technology, and business, a graduate degree in such an advanced country such as America will earn the student the admiration and respect from colleagues, employers, family members—virtually all of society.

In summary, such a graduate degree from another country, especially a Western country (and especially an English-speaking Western country), bestows multi-dimensional cultural, social, economic, political, and marital promises. At a personal level, seeking a higher education in America will bring more prestige, respect, better job opportunities, more upward social mobility, and more chances to marry well. At a national level, such an educational opportunity is full of potentials in bringing new technology, new thoughts, new theories, and other changes to China.

It is widely held that the United States has the best higher education in the world. According to the same speech made by Cultural Attache Bishop, the United States has a massive, diverse, and creative higher educational system with more than 2,300 four-year universities and 1,800 two-year colleges and

community colleges, ranking the first among the most advanced Western countries—Britain with 228 four year universities, Germany with 368, France with 545, Japan with 709.

Because of the traditional emphasis on education and because of the accessibility and quality of American higher education, neither the wars nor the policies or treaties have ever discouraged Chinese students from waiting in a (literally) mile-long queue for their turn to enter American Embassies located in several large cities in China to apply for their student visas, or from leaving behind their parents, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, children, and their achievements in China. On the one hand, they are frustrated by the insufficient opportunities to realize their potentials in China, and on the other hand they are pushed by the zealous valorization of American culture, education, and technology, and they are prompted by the better educational opportunities. Thus, they venture into America, strongly believing that a higher education in America will enable them to better realize their potentials.

However democratic they believe American higher education to be, however beneficial their presence is to American higher education, however rewarding an American graduate degree is to their future, the life of Chinese students in the United States has never been easy. While offering excitements, surprises, joys, and freedom, it also imposes ordeals and confusions, necessitates searching and adjustments, and demands negotiations and

sacrifices because of the multitude of the differences between China and America in cultural and religious beliefs and in political, social, educational systems. Every Chinese student, regardless of gender, class, religious beliefs, or language fluency, has to overcome the culture shock and to transform himself or herself in order to succeed or simply to survive in American higher education. To rub salt into the wound, they have to bear the loneliness and the pain of being separated from their family or friends; feelings of the hopelessness about reuniting with parents, husbands, wives, and children; the anxiety and frustration in finding a Chinese boyfriend/ husband or girlfriend/wife among the limited number of candidates; apprehensions about political upheavals and minor personal oversights that would take away their scholarship or assistantship and deprive them of their legal status overnight. Finally, the diversity that they bring to U.S. campus is more statistical than real. Neither the dominant academic discourse nor the practical designing of the curricula has fully utilized their diversity as a valuable source to diversify, to transform the current curriculum, or to enhance the overall educational system. More often than not, they are advised, required, or indoctrinated to cut their edges to fit into the current mode of educational curriculum or degree policies.

Coming from a culture where they are adored as “the proudest children of the Heavenly God,” most Chinese students at the beginning of their graduate studies feel that their value shrinks as tremendously as the Chinese money they brought to the bank for exchange of American dollars; they feel

that they are suddenly transformed, upon entering the soil of the United States, from beautiful swans into ugly ducklings. Consequently, they feel lost, confused. They undergo a time of identity crisis when they are trying to translate Chinese culture into their new life in American culture and apply what they believe to be American culture into their day-to-day life. However, after a period of exposing to American culture and adjustments, with support from professors, with their friends as models, with achievements they make, they become more confident, though still confused. Either to return to China or to stay upon graduation, Chinese students find that their life has been markedly changed as they study, research, teach, and live in the United States. More specifically, their identities as writers, students, teachers, researchers, and as Chinese men or women have irrecoverably transformed. After undergoing the necessary adjustments, they achieve new understanding about American culture as well as their own culture.

Their frustrations, adjustments, transformations, and achievements, as well as the discriminations they have faced, have been recorded, questioned, and critiqued in numerous studies by scholars from various disciplines and cultural backgrounds. Some contribute to the stereotyping of Chinese students while others are determined to question and demystify them; some emphasize the cultural differences while others seek the common grounds; some argue in complicity with the stereotypes whereas others attempt to construct meaningful understandings about the cross-cultural contexts. Many slip into

the trap of binary thinking, reinforcing essentialist and monolithic notions about rhetoric, education, pedagogy, and gender while attempting to critique them.

Despite the cultural, linguistic, and educational differences, despite the initial identity crisis and confusions, most Chinese students survive and even succeed in the higher education. During the last two decades their burgeoning presence in American academe and their laudable achievements have been increasingly, though oftentimes unequally, recognized in various disciplines at American universities and colleges, and this recognition in return encourages an even greater exodus of intellectuals from China. The fact that these Chinese students excel in American universities despite the conflicts in culture, ideology, educational systems and despite their linguistic disadvantage has invited scholars to explore the differences as well as similarities in numerous aspects between the two countries. Their increasing presence mandates closer examination of the issues involved in their identity confusion and reconstruction process.

A lot of previous research has been done on the history of Chinese Americans, on Chinese students' various adjustments to the new academic, cultural, social life, and on their difficulties and achievements as ESL writers, students, and teachers. The significant changes in the myriad aspects of Chinese students' life, meticulously recorded in Qian Ning's *Chinese Students Encounter America*, are significant and caused a wave of shock when published both in China and in the United States. The sorrows and joys in his

interviews with hundreds of Chinese students have provided raw materials and space for theoretical scholarship that will develop a deeper analysis of the process of changes.

Amy Wang, a Chinese graduate student studying in sociology at a southern university in America, explores in her master's thesis, "Educational Values and Academic Performance: Chinese Students in the United States," how differences in culture, educational systems, and ideologies between China and the United States have produced differences in educational beliefs and values and study habits between Chinese students and American students. As Wang observes, many researchers have focused their attention on Chinese students' strengths, such as their work ethic and their close bonds with their family, and on their weaknesses in language proficiency; however, they do not explore sufficiently the foundations of these strengths and weaknesses, nor have they explained how these strengths and weaknesses have affected Chinese students when they encounter America (Wang 2-3). To ferret out the factors that both advantage and disadvantage Chinese students in their academic performance in a new educational system, a new culture, and a new ideology, Amy Wang conducts a cross-cultural comparison study to explore how Chinese students' educational values and beliefs and study habits have been shaped by Chinese culture, educational system, and ideology. On the one hand, as her study shows, the centrality of education, the centrality of

moral ethnics both in Chinese culture and in Chinese educational goals, and the centrality of collectivist ideology have turned Chinese higher education into a privilege and developed high motivational levels in Chinese students. On the other hand, the emphasis on progressivism, the ideals of exploration and experiment, and the concept of democracy have made American higher education more exploratory, more accessible, and less emphatic on morality. As a result of these cultural differences, high morality, high motivation, unconditional obedience to authority, collective consciousness, and rote learning of Chinese students stand in sharp contrast with American students' self-motivation, freedom to challenge or even defy authority, individualism, and proficiency in experiment.

Wang's insightful and in-depth comparison has offered us a useful lens to look at the factors that are defining Chinese graduate students' identities at American universities. However, one wants to question how typical this identity could be and wonder if this identity, so culturally and ideologically rooted, is changeable or not. The study has thus left us a space to further investigate how these culturally, ideologically defined student identities have transformed in a cross cultural context and to explore what kind of new student identities these students will recreate through the transformation process. More important, while trying to understand the transformation process, we need to know if some of the characteristics of Chinese students' identities may also be applicable to American students' identities. In other words, we need to

question the fixed binaries between American students' identities and Chinese students' identities, to challenge them and the stereotypes and monoliths that misrepresent Chinese students in America. Such critical examination will shed more light on Chinese students' transformation process and assist them in reconstructing new identities, identities that allow them meaningful agency and due subject position in the dominant discourse.

The stereotypes and monolithic view of Chinese students' identities are repeatedly reinforced by research in other fields that compare and contrast the two cultures. Contrastive rhetoric is one such example. Contrastive rhetoric, initiated by Robert Kaplan thirty years ago, has examined the differences and similarities in writings across cultures. Kaplan concluded that typical Romance and Slavic language writing starts as an arrow headed down but soon deviates into zigzags down the page, representing digressions; Arabic is represented by a series of parallel lines linked with dotted diagonal lines; the Oriental pattern is a spiral gradually closing in on the middle of the page; the English paragraph is an arrow going straight from the top of the paragraph to the bottom (Leki 89). The binary between the linearity of Western rhetoric and the spiral shape of Chinese rhetoric is reinforced by studies in the 1980s that argue that English writings are writer-responsible, thus more direct and clear, than Chinese writings, which are reader-responsible, thus more indirect and ambiguous:

Analyses of the English writing of highly educated Chinese fairly proficient in English reveal that typically the English writer

provides a series of concrete examples to make a point but may neither state the point nor relate the examples to each other. The writer leaves it to the reader to make inferential bridges among the statements, confident that the reader, also educated, knows exactly what links those examples. For the Chinese writer, this style of writing shows respect for the knowledge, scholarship, and intelligence of the reader. For the English reader accustomed to being shown how an example is linked to a generalization, this approach is perceived as failing to make an argument. (Leki 96)

Undeniably, the pioneering research of Kaplan and others has laid down solid cornerstones for the study of ESL writing, making writing teachers more aware of the differences in rhetorical conventions between America and other cultures. Most of these studies, however, have been based on several questionable and shaky assumptions, such as the assumption that rhetorical conventions in each culture are natural or given; that rhetorical conventions in each culture are unitary and single; that rhetorical conventions in each culture are fixed and immutable; that rhetorical conventions in all cultures share the same understanding about such rhetorical concepts as clarity, linearity, and directness; that directness and clarity in English language are better and superior rhetorical conventions than indirect and ambiguous rhetorical conventions in other cultures (for example, Asian culture); and that writing

functions in the same way in all cultures.

These assumptions about Chinese student's writer identities, as well as those about their student identities, are constantly echoed in theories and discourses about pedagogy. Student identity is positional to teacher identity for two reasons. First, student identity is shaped by the teacher's pedagogy, and the teacher's pedagogy is a major component of teacher identity. Second, many the Chinese students are also teachers, teaching assistants, or research assistants, so teacher identity is also a key to understanding their life. I also gleaned from a number of studies by such scholars as Ilona Leki, Amy Wang, and others that Chinese teacher's pedagogy is more teacher-centered while the American teachers' pedagogy is more student-centered. They mainly base their beliefs on that the former likes to lecture and dictate to the students and demands students' unconditional submission to authority while the latter tends to give more power to students by designing group work and peer editing. The former is identified as authoritarian and the latter as liberatory and democratic. Also, Chinese writing teachers' pedagogy of imitation is strongly shunned by American writing teachers, many of whom believe that students need to learn to express their own feelings and opinions through their own style and to discover and develop their own voices. Such binaries between authority and liberation, between teacher-centered pedagogy and student-centered pedagogy, between tradition and individuality make assumptions about

(Chinese and American) teacher identities, such as the assumption that there is a unitary teacher identity in each culture; there is a shared understanding about teacher-centered pedagogy and student-centered pedagogy; there is a shared, unitary, immutable standard about “good” teaching or “good” pedagogy; “good” pedagogy works well with any teacher regardless of his or her gender, class, race, and age; and “student-centered” pedagogy is superior to “teacher-centered” pedagogy.

The binary and monolithic thinking that is uniformly entrenched in sociology, rhetoric, and pedagogy, also persists in feminist studies. In their review of the five prevalent feminist frameworks, Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Culkanz point out that the general project of feminist theory has been in one way or the other attempting to explicate “areas of oppression arising from the Western philosophical focus on dualistic thought.” They argue that the “limitations of this approach are that nearly all feminist writers have discussed more than one pair of dualisms, that there is no easy or ultimately correct way to draw boundaries among them, that the assumptions themselves are intimately intertwined so that criticism of one often imply, or rest on, criticisms of the others” (19).

The most obvious and damaging binary in cross cultural studies on Chinese men and women is the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. According to this binary thinking, masculinity and femininity are exclusive to each other, and therefore one can have either masculinity or femininity. This

either/or thinking excludes the possibility that one can have both, standing in sharp contrary to Chinese complementary notion of gender that they are mutually inclusive. Seen from this Western binary lens, Chinese women are super feminine while Chinese men are less masculine and therefore weaker than Western men.

Equally as damaging as this binary thinking is the unitary notion about women's liberation. This unitary notion about women's liberation agenda is reflected in Hillary Clinton's speech at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. She announced, "However different we may appear, there is far more that unites us than divides us," and concluded, "human rights are women's rights . . . and women's rights are human rights, once and for all." Although it is well and good to look for what unites us, it is also important that differences are not overlooked or discounted. The "global sisterhood" Hillary Clinton invokes cannot define the goal for all feminists regardless of race, nation, and time, nor can a single voice speak on behalf of all feminists, universalizing or reducing women to one woman in an effort to assume automatic solidarity among women.

This global sisterhood is further reinforced by the idea that Western women are more liberated than women in developing countries. Believing that American women enjoy higher status than their counterparts in developing countries, some feminists tend to believe that by coming to the United States, Chinese women are automatically liberated from Chinese patriarchy and

automatically benefit from the fruits of feminist movements, that Chinese women necessarily want what American women want. In *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, Xiao-huang Yin notes that the rise of Chinese women and the fall of Chinese men are the common themes of Chinese immigrant writers who believe that Chinese women have more individual freedom and more economic opportunities than when they were in China while Chinese have fewer power and fewer economic opportunities than before. Again, the binary, essentialist thinking is in play. The belief that the fall of Chinese men leads automatically to the rise of Chinese women is based on a few identifiable assumptions: that the disempowerment of Chinese men necessarily leads to the empowerment of Chinese women; that Western patriarchy is better than Chinese patriarchy; that Chinese women are free from Western patriarchy. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the relative relaxation of traditional social and cultural pressures on Chinese women and the relatively flexible economic opportunities offered to Chinese women has to some degree lessened the effects of the racial discrimination that exists in every aspect of Chinese people's life in America, though not to the extent that Chinese people have experienced a full integration into American mainstream culture.

Essentialist, binary thinking has led to the feminization of Chinese student identity, just as it has led to the feminization of their writer, teacher, and gender identities. By being interpreted as less direct and less assertive in

their writings than Western writers, Chinese students are defined as feminine writers; by being submissive and quiet, Chinese students are portrayed as feminine learners. In the discourse on teacher identity, the disadvantages they have makes them vulnerable in a classroom of native speakers in which they are to utilize a pedagogy with which they are unfamiliar, a pedagogy that is in part meant to give away the some of the “power” they have to the students. The overall feminization has helped to reinforce the stereotypical images about Chinese students, resulting in devastating effects to their identity transformations. The feminization of the multiple identities of Chinese graduate students has been damaging not only to their self-esteem and their ability to perform but also to their mental and physical health.

These stereotypical images have been so entrenched in discourses that Chinese students tend to accept them as truths, developing an inferiority complex that is not only preventing them from fully immersing into American culture but also reinforcing those inferior images. At the same time, these stereotypes are passed on and on to the newcomers as a heritage or legacy that further disadvantages Chinese students from achieving proper subject position in dominant discourses in the United States. They unconsciously act as accomplices to the normalizing power of the dominant discourse that harms their own subject positions.

Their subject position has, thus, either been ignored or persistently misunderstood. Chinese people who strive to make a living in the United

States have been historically, culturally, socially, politically, academically, and professionally marginalized in various discourses, despite their five-thousand-year long historical and cultural heritage; despite their forebears' two-hundred-year long immigration history that witnesses Chinese people's contribution to the construction of America through their hard work as laborers, soldiers, scholars, businessmen, and politicians; despite the policies and practices that are meant to prevent discrimination; and despite the excellent record of their academic and professional performance as "model minorities."

This collective marginalization has not only relentlessly demobilized them from further acculturation into American mainstream culture but also deplorably prevented American mainstream culture from benefiting from the cultural diversity they bring from China. The various discourses have stereotyped the differences between American culture and Chinese culture but also the transformation processes from their home culture to the host culture.

Differences are dichotomized as binary, oppositional, positing harmful stereotypes. These stereotypes in turn have been reinforced by Chinese students who accept them as truth, internalize them, and transmit them to the new generation, the inferiority status assigned to them as a result of their marginalization based on their race, culture, and ideology made a part of their inheritance. The Eurocentrism or American-centrism, fueled by binary thinking that dichotomizes the West and the Orient, has left the Western thoughts unquestioned and unchallenged. In fact, it has placed Western on a pedestal

that non-Westerners cannot reach, disadvantaging American universities and culture from benefiting from Chinese students' diverse cultural heritage.

### **Michel Foucault and the Policing Process of Binary Thinking in the Formation and Maintenance of Identity**

Since all Chinese students have been through stages of identity confusion, identity ambiguity, and identity reconstruction during their years of graduate studies in the United States, I find identity a useful framework for me to locate the conflicts and confusions that they experience, to trace the sources of the above-mentioned stereotypes, to delineate the projectory of how they piece together the fragmented pieces of their identities to reconstruct new identities, to explore effective ways to diminish the pernicious effects of stereotypes, and finally to find ways to help them construct more satisfying and active subject position in the mainstream discourses in the United States.

Identity is understood in a Foucauldian notion. In "Afterword: The Subject and Power," Michel Foucault summarizes that the objective of his work "during the last twenty years" has been to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our nature, human beings are made subjects;" that is, "my work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects" (208). These three modes, as Foucault continues to explain, are modes of inquiry (discourses), modes of dividing practices (disciplines), and modes of subjectification, the ways in which " a human being turns him-or-herself into a subject" (technologies of self) (208). Thus, Foucault

concludes that “it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research” (209). I find these three modes are very useful and relevant to my discussion of identities because these three modes provide a framework for us to understand how identity is produced, formed, maintained, and transformed.

Patrick Hutton helps us understand how Foucault uses the disciplinary mode, the dividing practices, to conceive the formation and maintenance of identity. In “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” an article published in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Hutton summarizes clearly how Michel Foucault conceives identity in a different way. Hutton argues that though Foucault continues Freud’s work on the mind, their approaches are “diametrically opposed”: unlike Sigmund Freud, who focuses on investigating the internal workings of the psyche, Foucault contends that “our conceptions of the psyche” have been “sculpted by the techniques that we have devised to probe its secrets” (120-21). For Foucault, identity is sculpted externally by such technologies as social customs, cultural conventions, normalizing institutions, material environment, and linguistic usage, which collectively create boundaries, directions, and “collective psychological milieu in which the individual mind is immersed” (Hutton 122). In other words, whereas Freud believes that to know oneself is to internally retrieve from the oblivion of the unconscious mind lost memories of painful experiences or unsolved conflicts,” Foucault looks externally for the social institutions and

agencies, cultural and linguistic norms and conventions, and social customs that have been believed to be natural and normal (Hutton 126). Seen from his perspective, identity is not a natural given; it is a social, cultural, and linguistic construction.

This collective construction of identity is regulated and maintained by a policing process. Foucault believes that psyche is an abstraction that is conjured up by “public authority to satisfy the need of modern society for a more disciplined conception of the self” (Hutton 126). The more advanced the society becomes, the more explicit the policing process requires “definitions for what is appropriate to human behavior” (Hutton 126). Foucault elaborates on what he means by policing process by using the definition of “madness” as an example. According to Foucault, madness is not just a medical or psychological definition; it is a historical definition because what constitutes as sanity in one historical moment may change in another historical moment.

The social, cultural, and linguistic construction of identity and the policing process, explicated in Hutton, leads us to see the inherent nature of binary thinking in the formation of identity. As Hutton helps us see, for Foucault, the policing process functions by establishing boundaries between regulated and unregulated domains of human activity, between normal and abnormal, between sanity and insanity, between morality and immorality, between health and disease, between beautiful and ugly, between legitimate and illegitimate marriage, between masculinity and femininity, between appropriate behaviors

and inappropriate behaviors in all aspects of human life. Consequently, the policing process produces binary oppositions in every aspect of human life.

No matter how pervasive the policing process is in human life, its ultimate purpose is not to restrain and repress human being as Freud believed; rather, according to Foucault, its purpose is to entice human beings to produce, In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, Foucault explains how the policing process or disciplinary power functions in a double move:

all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc). (199)

Because of the disciplinary mechanisms of the institutions and techniques that measure, supervise, and correct abnormal behaviors, individuals are enticed to participate in the policing process, to accept the validity of the policing process, and consequently to enjoin its effort in disciplining themselves and others into conforming to the definitions about human behaviors. Those who rebel against the policing process are branded, then excluded, and finally corrected or punished until they accept the validity of the policing process. So, it becomes clear that the ultimate goal of policing

process is to discipline individuals so that they can discipline themselves better, so that they can produce better.

The tools or technologies through which the policing process exercises its disciplinary power are social institutions and agencies, cultural and linguistic norms and conventions, and social customs, all of which are expressed in various discourses. Since the technologies of self are ever changing, identity is an ongoing process, and is continually “redesigned in an ongoing discourse generated by the imperatives of the policing process” (Hutton 132). Accordingly, individuals must commit themselves to continuously adjust themselves to new norms and conventions. Identity within any particular culture has never been a fixed notion; it adjusts, changes, transforms, and reconstructs.

Identity functions through dividing practices that divide the normal from the abnormal. Chinese dominant discourses categorize Chinese students as an acclaimed group of people. In Chinese culture that, a culture that centralizes education, Chinese students are acclaimed as “the chosen descendents of the Heaven” (tian zi jiaozi), and as “the favorite sons of Fate” (mingyu de chong'er), enjoying an enviable “superior” identity status. Using the same dividing practices, the dominant discourses in the United States categorize Chinese students' behaviors as writers, students, teaching assistants, and men or women as abnormal against the normal behaviors of their American counterparts. Measured against the norms of American culture,

they are excluded and categorized as abnormal: they are linguistically incompetent; they are ignorant of the culture; they do not look, behave, eat, and think like Americans; they are not as aggressive as Americans; they are too obedient, too-quiet in the classroom, too hard-working outside the classroom; their writing is too indirect and less authoritative and thus more feminine; their teaching is too authoritative and teacher-centered; their men are too patriarchal but still less masculine, while their women are too submissive and too tightly confined by society and tradition.

The new identity that American dominant discourses imposes on Chinese students is formed through the invisible yet powerful “exclusionary practices” that Foucault calls “dividing practices” that “divide the normal from the abnormal” (McLaren 123). Because “normal refers to the majority or dominant group, those who deviate from this norm are marginalized” (McLaren 123). As feminist Margaret McLaren summarizes for Foucault, the effects of marginalization are multifaceted. Marginalization means not only less economic power and less social mobility; it also means less authority to speak. As a result of this marginalization, Chinese students cannot define who they are or what they want to be; they are deprived of the authority to speak for themselves; they have to wait for and listen to what the American mainstream culture, ideology, or dominant discourses speak for them and about them, thereby representing them, deciding for them.

The normal/abnormal binary with its concomitant exclusionary practices

limits Chinese students' upward mobility or access to the center. Because cultural and social norms and forces together with discourse collectively create a psychological milieu in which the individual mind is immersed (Hutton 122), Chinese students suffer psychologically from being marginalized. One's sense of identity is forged out of the behavior patterns established through the psyche's reckoning with particular experiences. In a social, cultural, and psychological milieu that marginalizes Chinese, the Chinese themselves internalize the inferior, marginalized identity, forcing themselves to give up the expired "beautiful swan" identity. Chinese people are enticed into participating and, hence, "confirming the validity of the policing process" (Hutton 127). They use the same American linguistic, cultural, institutional norms to monitor their behaviors, and they start to buy into the truths that are produced by these normative categories.

The picture having been depicted so far looks very pessimistic in that it seems that, in the power relationship between individuals and dominant discourse, the dominant discourses possess all the power over individuals, who have no choice but to conform to the dominant discourses, who are deprived of any freedom to exercise power to the dominant discourses. It seems to suggest that there is no use to discovering who we are if there is no hope in changing who we are. Identity so far has appeared to be very negative, restrictive, and limiting.

This notion derives from the popular view that precludes any sense of

freedom to exercise power, which is in this view entirely repressive and oppressive. However, for Foucault, power is productive, and freedom is the precondition for exercise of power. Rather than seeing power as something that can be owned, possessed, and passed on, Foucault designates power as relationships, as an “ensemble of actions” (“Afterword” 217). As he continues to argue, “when one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the action of others,” one “includes an important element: freedom” (221):

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized. (221)

To Foucault, a power relationship is not a zero-sum game that suggests that the appearance of freedom means the disappearance of power. In other words, Foucault does not conceive power and freedom as mutually exclusive:

In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination).

(“Afterword” 221)

Thus, Foucault finds it important to remind us that “[t]he relationship between

power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated" (221). On the one hand, we should also be aware that there is will and freedom at the core of the power relationship, and on the other hand, we should not speak of an "essential freedom"; instead we should "speak of an 'agonism'—of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation" ("Afterword" 222).

If there are possibilities allowing individuals to resist the dominant discourses and to choose, of course within restraints and limitations, what constitutes their own identities, we can then see technologies of the self as sites of both submission and resistance. Though four technologies—of the self, of domination, of production, and of signification—are present simultaneously, technologies of the self are especially helpful in explicating how individuals both submit to the dominant discourses and exercise their freedom to create and choose among the possibilities within the power relationship. McLaren explains to us how Foucault defines technologies of the self as "techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves" (147).

Technologies of the self are present and employed in all cultures though in different times. As McLaren points out, Foucault believes that writing is a technology of the self that has an especially long history. The journals, the

notebooks, the autobiographies, and the epistles are all techniques of self-writing through which the self is related both to the dominant discourse, to the truth, and to the self (McLaren 149-151). For Foucault, philosophical writing is a “process of self-transformation” (McLaren 151). As McLaren notes, “philosophy” has a wide meaning for Foucault: “the displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has to be done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is—that, too, is philosophy” (151). In other words, these technologies of the self allow the individuals both the opportunities to relate to the dominant thinking and the possibilities to transform the prescribed identities.

Just as one can resist the dominant discourse at a personal level, one can also resist it at a collective level. I find that McLaren, a committed feminist engaging transformations at both personal and collective levels, offers a very enlightening explanation of Foucault’s use of *parrhesia* (truth telling) because “[a]n examination of *parrhesia* may serve to further illustrate the connections in Foucault’s work between the individual and the political, between practices of self-transformation and possibilities for social transformation” (152). As she notes, Foucault believes that because truth telling involves both the self and the other, *parrhesia* is both personal and political. Though self-transformation is the content of truth telling, this transformation is constituted “with the help of at least one other, the listener, in a political context” (154). It provokes

questions such as these: Who can speak? About what? What power relations does *parrhesia* shift, transform, or change? (154).

What Foucault, Hutton, and McLaren suggest to me is that Chinese students should not only learn to understand the linguistic conventions and social and cultural norms that prescribe their identities in both cultures but also realize that these norms are constructions. Meanwhile, while internalizing these norms, Chinese students should also be aware that they have much more freedom, options, and possibilities than they seem to believe. Instead of remaining quiet and eating all the bitterness (*chi ku*), they could assume more active agency in self transformation and social transformations. They are responsible for creating “meanings and values anew” because such a responsibility “is a perpetual task but nonetheless the foundation of all human endeavor,” as is stated in the epigraph with which I begin this chapter. As a matter of fact, Foucault encourages all of us as human beings to use our capacities to create, and he reminds us that “it is in our capacity” to create well that “our destiny lies” (Hutton 140). The questions for Chinese students are not only to know how their identities are formed and maintained in both cultures but also to explore effective ways to reject who they are and transform those identities.

## Homi Bhabha and the Cross-Cultural Effects of Hybridity and Identity

*A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, a boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.* --Martin Heidegger

The new abnormal and inferior minority identity ascribed to or forced upon Chinese students is problematic because it suggests that there is a discontinuity in their identity. Either to retain the old identity or to embrace the new identity, there is still a continuity in one's identity. Because no matter how hard one tries to reject the new identity or to retain the old identity, one cannot ignore the policing power of cultural, social, and linguistic norms that shape one's identity. In either attempt, whether the attempt to retain completely the former identity—Chinese identity— or the attempt to change completely to an Americanized identity, one is haunted by the same disciplining power, though the power is configured in different forms in different languages.

In the process of inventing a new identity, there are two extreme attitudes that demand our attention. Some Chinese go to one extreme to attempt to preserve a one-hundred percent pure Chinese identity by totally dismissing American culture and opposing American culture against Chinese culture. Others go to the other pole by totally dismissing Chinese language and

culture in an attempt to be fully Americanized. Either attempt has been vividly captured in the field of Asian Americans studies and Asian American literature. For example, in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, both she (Kingston) and her mother are examples of these two extremes. While the mother tries to retain a continuity in their identity, the daughter seeks deliberately to create a discontinuity of their identity. The shift from one set of norms to another, for Foucault, should not necessarily produce a discontinuity in one's identity. Rather, it attests to continuity, because the new identity is constructed the same way by the same technologies—social norms, cultural conventions, institutions, and linguistic structures. From this perspective, either attempt is a naïve and impossible project.

But Foucault's theory of identity ceases to be helpful with our understanding of the new identity reconstruction process because he fails to address the differences between the two communities in social norms, linguistic usages, cultural conventions, and uneven distributions of power. His theory works well as long as two cultures share the same definitions for what is normal and what is abnormal or different definitions for normality have the same disciplining power to the individuals in a cross-cultural context.

Homi Bhabha reminds us not only that pure identity is nonexistent in a cross-cultural context but also that cross-cultural identity is essentially affected by the power relation of both the host and the home cultures. If Foucault provides us a lens to analyze how identity has been formed and reinforced by

social and cultural forced and individual participation in any given culture, Bhabha will guide us to understand how identity is fractured and reconstructed in a cross-cultural context, especially in the colonial discourse where the power distribution of two cultures is not even, where stereotypes about people from other cultures persist. Bhabha also illuminates how the disrupted identity of individuals from other cultures has in turn disrupted social norms and linguistic conventions in the dominant discourse. Finally, Bhabha sheds light on how the marginalized reconstructs meaningful subject position in the dominant discourse of the host culture.

Essential to the imposition of a stereotype, Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture*, is the process of ambivalence, for “it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency” (95). For Bhabha, stereotyping, a major strategy for fixing identity of others as rigid, unchanging, and repeatable in any time and context, is a form of knowledge and power that vacillates between what is “in place,” already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (95)

To interrupt stereotypes is not to recognize “images as positive or negative” but to “understand the processes of subjectification made possible (plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (Bhabha 95). Bhabha also explains that the

“stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself” (100). For Bhabha, a stereotype is a “simplification because it is an arrested, fixed, form of representation that . . . constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations” (Bhabha 107).

If Foucault helps us understand the collective construction of individual identity by social and cultural norms, Bhabha lends us a lens to focus on the difference of cultural and social norms in a cross cultural context and explains how failure to recognize those differences produces stereotypes about identities from other cultures and how differences between those norms enable us to see where individual identity is ruptured, disrupted.

While conforming to and participating in the new policing process in the host culture, individuals from other cultures always desire to achieve, through mimicry, an authentic identity according to the norms of the host culture.

Bhabha explains,

What I have called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask: it is not what Césaire describes as ‘colonization-

thingification' behind which there stands the essence of the presence Africaine. The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. (126)

During the process of their mimicry of the dominant discourse where power distribution is uneven, mimicry becomes another normalizing strategy that interpolates the colonial subject (Chinese students) within the ideology of the American culture. The subject (Chinese students) adopts the values and beliefs of the center (the colonizer/America) and recognizes the authority of the colonizer (Williams 590). The result of this mimicry is ambivalence in their new identity: something lacking and something extra.

However, the moral imperative of the colonizer—the “civilizing mission”—is undermined by the response of what Bhabha calls “its disciplinary double” (Williams 592). This new identity is a hybridity that mirrors the identity in the home culture and the identity in the host culture, yet the hybridized identity does not fully represent either cultural discourse. It is a partial presence, partial as in both virtual and incomplete (Williams 592). This partial presence in turn disrupts the linguistic and cultural discourse of both cultures. This disruption has yet been deliberately subdued and distorted in discourse. This explains why on the one hand many American colleges and universities recruit students from China and many other countries to increase its campus

diversity, but on the other hand do not redesign their curriculum or program to acknowledge this disruption. Nor do they actively seek to enhance their students' learning by letting them benefit from the disruption from the cross cultural hybridity. The diversity remains rhetorical rather than real.

By disrupting discourses in both the host culture and the home culture, the new identity of individuals in cross cultural context has blurred the boundaries of both communities. Though it is dangerous to fail to recognize the differences between the two communities, it will be equally dangerous to fix the differences as impermeable, un-trespassable, immutable, un-intermingable in a global context where different communities have intermingled with each other and become more and more entwined with one another.

In the cross cultural context, the boundaries between two communities, two ideologies, two cultures, two kinds of identities are always blurred, because the boundaries are themselves subjective creations that constrain community members, who will subscribe to and continually recreate the boundaries. With the interaction of two hundred years between American and Chinese cultures, with the increasing globalization of most cultures, it makes it even harder for us to clearly delineate the boundaries between American culture and Chinese culture, though synchronically speaking, they do have cultural features that distinguish them from each other.

What Foucault and Bhabha share is that binary thinking is the source of the power of the dominant discourse. Foucault helps us understand that “all authorities exercising individual control functions according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding” (*History of Sexuality* 199). The constant division between the normal and abnormal, between the colonizer and the colonized, between the White and the people of color, between West and Chinese, between mainstream and minority, between masculinity and femininity, subjects each Chinese student to a category, a branding, a naming, an identity that is almost “natural” enough to be true. The result of the categorization, the division, and the discipline is that Chinese students have not fully achieved a subject position that allows them to speak for themselves, to represent themselves in the dominant discourse.

Furthermore, we also need to problematize our unitary notion of cultural identity. If we remember that China has fifty-six ethnicities with a five thousand year history that records the numerous changes of political systems and dominant discourses, we will not be able to say that Chinese identity is single, unitary, fixed, and immutable. Though homogeneous in general, Chinese culture and ideology have also been largely shaped by Western culture and ideology in the last century. In the same vein, the multicultural ethnic landscape of the United States makes it increasingly harder to define a unified American identity, even though individual identity is shaped by social norms, cultural norms, and linguistic norms. Because each individual is positioned

differently against the dominant discourse and ideology, each individual's identity is shaped accordingly by his or her social status, class, gender, race, and past history.

However, to say that identity is tied closely to cultural, social, linguistic norms and ideology is not to say that we have no other choices but to subject ourselves to the norms, adapt ourselves to the norms, and accept the identities that norms define for us. Quite contrary to the general belief that Foucault is too pessimistic to offer any hope for us, Foucault firmly contends that we have more freedom and options than we thought: "Who we are has as much to do with what we affirm in the present as it does with what we revere in the past" (Hutton 140). We are part of the agency that constructs and reconstructs our identities, and our identities are continually shaped and reshaped by the very norms that we create along the way. For Foucault, as well as for Bhabha, our identity is a process rather than a product, a "perpetual task," a process in which both we and others participate, create, and recreate.

For Chinese students, it is imperative that they should strive to achieve their subject position in the dominant discourse so that their identities in various aspects both academic and non-academic can be reformed, transformed, and recreated. Identity is dialogic, meaning that one cannot achieve one's identity alone. One has to recreate one's relationship with others, appealing to language, discourse, and social forces to make the new identity recognized. Chinese students need to reposition themselves as writers,

teachers, and students in the dominant discourse about rhetoric, learning, and pedagogy; they need to reposition their relationship with the American dominant discourse on femininity and masculinity. They need to examine how binaries are formed and stereotypes disseminated so that they will not be trapped by those stereotypes and so they will not trap newcomers with those stereotypes. To achieve a more satisfying subject position, they should understand that binaries between the two cultures are linguistic, social, cultural, and ideological constructions which are created, recreated. To overcome the binaries, they first should know that binaries are not fixed and are going through changes all the time, so they will find useful a complementary thinking that allows them to benefit from both American culture and Chinese culture, that allows them flexibility to travel between two cultures, without having to struggle to choose one over the other once and for all.

### **Project Overview: Locating Oppositions in (Trans)formational Contexts and (Re)Discovering Rhetorical Agency**

My dissertation responds to prevalent binary oppositions between the East and the West, between Chinese identity and American identity, between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, between authority and innovation. Incorporating my Chinese cultural heritage and my newly-acquired feminist perspective, I am proposing a complementary thinking that illuminates a perspective for understanding the differences of the two cultures in writing,

learning, teaching, and in gender issues as well. I am looking to assist Chinese students specifically and immigrants in general, in their stressful process of transforming their identities.

By historicizing and contextualizing the differences that have been dichotomized and stereotyped in discourses about writing, learning, teaching, and gender, I attempt to challenge such binaries as individualism/collectivism, active/passive, empowerment/disempowerment, masculinity/femininity. I argue that these binaries influence perceptions of Chinese identities as writers, students, and teachers, and that they also influence notions about Chinese gender identity. By critically examining these oppositions that are entrenched in the dominant ideology of the West that is expressed in its dominant discourse and discursive practices, I am taking a stance against essentialist, monolithic notions of Chinese identities, notions I believe disenfranchise Chinese students, and more generally any Chinese person living in the United States.

As I examine the writer, student, and teacher identities of Chinese graduate students in American universities, I focus on certain traits or behaviors of Chinese students as they have been identified in cross cultural scholarship. The traits and behaviors all serve to subordinate Chinese students to their Western peers. I characterize this subordination as a feminization of Chinese identities. It is important to underscore that I am referring to a feminization that is based on the Western dichotomy of what

femininity means, not on the notion of femininity as it is understood within feminism. That a masculinity/femininity dichotomy would be expressed in constructions of identity that I attribute more immediately to other binaries makes sense when a masculinity/femininity binary is understood as precursory to other binaries. To counter this pervasive binary thinking, I ultimately propose an incorporation of the Chinese classical philosophy of Yin-Yang into Western ways of thinking. Yin-Yang, I submit, can be a useful framework for reconceptualizing binary oppositions as complementarities, as more flexible and fluid dualities. Such a perspective can provide for what Homi Bhabha might call a hybridity of identity, an identity constituted by multiple and sometimes conflicting identities. Conceiving of Chinese student identities in this way may allow Chinese students to shuttle between their multiple identities with more ease, more confidence, more flexibility, more open space, more subjectivity, more “self”-assertion.

Situating my work in many a field such as feminist studies, rhetoric theory, composition pedagogy, and cultural studies, this interdisciplinary project will examine the key issues that are vital to the transformation process of Chinese students' identities. It will examine critically binaries that lead to interpretations of Chinese writer identity as indirect, collectivist, reader responsible, and feminine against the Western writer identity as direct, and individualist; between the quiet and uncreative Chinese learner identity and the spontaneously assertive and creative Western learner identity; between the

teacher-centered Chinese pedagogy and the student-centered Western pedagogy; between masculinity and femininity. The approach this undertaking adopts is to examine synchronically the cultural differences with regard to identity between China and the United States in writing, teaching, learning, and gender that forecast the differences in the two cultures' writer identity, teacher identity, student identity, and gender identity. It will also identify diachronically the evolution of those identities in both countries. Through the synchronic and diachronic analysis, this work will also attempt to identify the similarities in the two cultures that suggest potentials for a complementary confluence of two cultures and for a more meaningful hybridity.

Examining scholarship that focuses on the differences as well as similarities between Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric, Chapter Two offers a detailed critique of two major binaries and essentialism prevalent in contrastive rhetoric. The first critique points out the essentialism and binary imbedded in the argument that there is no rhetoric existing in non-western cultures such as Chinese culture, and then reviews scholarship by both Chinese and Westerner scholars who are eager to demonstrate that there are numerable similarities between Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric. I argue that both kinds of scholarship have reinforced the Western paradigm and forgotten the close tie between rhetoric and ideology. The second critique intends to challenge the well-cited binary between Chinese collectivistic writer identity and Western individualistic writer identity. To critique the binary, the

chapter examines existing studies that have created a unitary, and fixed writer identity for each culture and attempted a divorce between the individual and society.

Chapter Three focuses on binary thinking that constructs Chinese student identity and American student identity. I show that Chinese students are considered to be rote learners who are silent and passive in the classroom while American students are, by contrast, critical thinkers who are quick to engage in active learning. The chapter deconstructs the binaries by arguing that rote learning is not only a learning strategy necessary and rewarded in both cultures but also a strategy related to both surface and deep understanding. The chapter also argues that Chinese students encounter difficulties in breaking their silence to participate actively in the American classroom because their silence is caused by multiple factors, such as cultural habit, pedagogy, and marginalization in the dominant discourse in the United States. In addition, I take issue with the notion that rote learning and silence are not conducive to learning. Ultimately, the chapter raises questions about how we conceive of and identify “good” learner identity in the Western academic discourse.

Addressing the issues concerning the well-discussed international teaching assistant phenomena, Chapter Four focuses its critique on the binaries between teacher’s authority and critical and liberatory pedagogy,

between empowering students and empowering teachers. Rather than seeing teacher's authority as a repressive factor, as critical or liberatory pedagogies have suggested, this chapter maintains that teacher's authority is a necessary condition for any pedagogy. Then the chapter, however, moves on to argue that not all teachers have the same amount and kind of teacher authority in the classroom because teacher authority is affected by his or her gender, race, and positioning within the dominant discourse. Discussing how both teachers and students have the possibility of being marginalized and have the necessity to be empowered, the chapter concludes that the binary between empowering students and empowering teachers is not an effective framework for us to conceive the power relationship between teachers and students. Chinese graduate teaching assistants, therefore, need to reposition themselves in order to gain the teacher authority necessary to execute any pedagogy, traditional or critical, teacher-centered or student-centered.

Underlying all the binaries discussed and critiqued in the previous chapters is the Western gender notion that dichotomizes femininity and masculinity. Since Western gender notions are closely related to Western consciousness, just as Chinese gender notions permeate all of Chinese epistemology, Chapter Five argues that understanding the masculinity/femininity binary is crucial to our discussion. Consequently, this chapter focuses on how Chinese identities as writers, students, teachers, and men and women have been feminized through this either-or gender framework.

To challenge the feminization of Chinese students, this chapter proposes that a theory of Yin and Yang offers an effective framework for us to conceive writer identities, student identities, teacher identities, and gender identities.

## Chapter Two

### The Paradigm of Western Rhetoric

#### and the Submersion of Chinese Rhetoric and Writer Identity

As mentioned in Chapter One, Sofia Coppola's popular and critically acclaimed movie *Lost in Translation* has received some criticisms for its portrayal of the Asian culture and people of Japan. Virtually all of the top movie critics in the United States, however, fail to mention any of these criticisms. The most negative comment I found in American reviews of the movie is a one-sentence aside made in the March 8, 2003 issue of RollingStone.com by movie critic Peter Travers: "OK, maybe a few of the culture-clash jokes are facile." Travers then immediately continues, "But suddenly Tokyo comes alive, and so do Bob and Charlotte." If other top American movie critics found the stereotyping of the Japanese people problematic, they did not voice it. Indeed, the movie was among the top picks in publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun Times* (four stars by Roger Ebert), and the *Los Angeles Times*. Moreover, it was nominated for four Oscars (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, and Best Actor; it was named "Best Movie of 2003" by both the San Francisco Film Critics and the Toronto Film Critics Association; and it received the 2003 Golden Globe for "Best Picture" ("*Lost in Translation*," Metacritic.com)).

Asian viewers, however, have voiced ambivalent attitudes about the

movie. On the one hand, the storyline of the movie is a poignant tale of the human search for identity. As the tagline of the movie reads, "Everybody wants to be found." But on the other hand, it is hard to believe, at least for many non-American viewers, that a 21<sup>st</sup> Century American movie would show the kind of lack of sensitivity to Asian culture that is evident in *Lost in Translation*. Viewer Kiku Day, writing for the "Commentary" section of *The Guardian*, states,

The viewer is sledgehammered into laughing at these small, yellow people and their funny ways, desperately aping the western lifestyle without knowledge of its real meaning. It is telling that the longest vocal contribution any Japanese character makes is at a karaoke party, singing a few lines of the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen."

Day, who identifies herself as half Japanese/half American, confesses that either side of her identity is insulted by the portrayal of "the contemporary Japanese as ridiculous people who have lost contact with their own culture."

I include some critical observations about *Lost in Translation* in this project because I believe that the film, along with its popularity, demonstrates the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism and binary thinking in American culture. Although I personally enjoyed the movie on the whole, I do share with Day and others who have expressed similar views a sense of being troubled by the same negative stereotypes Day identifies. Further, I find the ideas she expresses about "aping" Western lifestyle and losing one's (Asian) culture

against the cultural “empire” of the United States to have even farther-reaching implications than perhaps Day intends. Day’s comments about losing cultural identity by attempting to mimic Western ways is particularly relevant within the context of this present chapter on writer identity.

I contend that recent scholarly efforts in American academia to elucidate Chinese rhetoric typically result in subordinating Chinese rhetoric to Western rhetoric. First, Asian scholars in America seem to want to offer assurances that Chinese rhetoric is actually quite similar to Western rhetoric. Second, American scholars of ESL tend to contrast Chinese rhetoric and writing with Western (American) rhetoric and writing. In either case, there is a resulting disconnection of Chinese identity to Chinese culture. Since writer identity (and identity in general) is inextricably linked to rhetoric and discourse, I argue that such scholarship, although helpful for the many contributions it makes to understanding some aspects of Chinese rhetoric and for bringing Chinese rhetoric to the attention of the field of rhetoric and composition, needs also to include examinations of Chinese rhetoric outside the Western rhetoric paradigm if Chinese writer identity is to be better understood and asserted.

My investigation of Chinese rhetoric and writer identity in this chapter focuses on accepted views about rhetoric among scholars in the United States. I center my discussion of writer identity on conceptions of rhetoric because the practices, norms, and conventions of rhetoric are culturally specific. To borrow the social-constructionist view, all knowledge is socially constructed. In the

same light, all rhetorics as tools for making meaning or truth are socially constructed. However, I attempt to show that despite the widespread acceptance of this social constructionist view, there remains a pervasive, deeply ingrained Eurocentric understanding of rhetoric among American scholars and teachers of rhetoric and writing. In her article “Contrastive Rhetoric: An American Writing Teacher in China,” Carolyn Matalene details ways in which she experienced first-hand the fact that, as Robert Oliver puts it, “the standards of rhetoric in the West which have had a unitary development since their identification by Aristotle are not universals”; rather, they are “expressions of Western culture, applicable within the context of Western cultural values” (qtd. in Matalene 789). While Matalene may have understood this at a certain level before her teaching experience in China, it took the actual experience for her to fully integrate that understanding. For example, she notes that because “our own rhetorical values are profoundly affected by the fact that we are post-Romantic Westerners, teaching and writing in the humanities,” we “value originality and individuality, what we call the “Authentic Voice”; “we encourage self-expression and stylistic innovation”; “we subscribe to Aristotle’s dictum” (790). As she contends with detailed explanation of Chinese rhetorical practices and conventions, Westerners need to “understand the limits as well as the virtues” (790) of the Western rhetorical tradition and to learn to understand that “invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery can all be defined, practiced, and valued in ways other than our own” (804).

Remembering James Berlin, we understand that a rhetoric can never be innocent and disinterested because rhetoric is always already serving certain ideologies. The ideological dimension of rhetoric, Berlin argues in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” means that to examine any rhetoric we must “first consider the ways its very discursive structure can be read so as to favor one version of economical, social, and political arrangements over other versions” (Berlin reminds us that ideology defines for us what exists, what is real, what is good, and what is possible, and this strong social endorsement is always transmitted through language. Further, rhetoric in a given culture has been shaped by attempts to reconcile competing ideologies and to justify the dominance and validity of the dominant ideology. In other words, ideology relies on rhetoric to be transmitted, to be spread, to be reinforced, and finally to be internalized, and it takes another rhetoric to disclaim the existing ideology and replace it with new one. We can go further to suggest that writer identity in a given culture is influenced by its dominant ideology and other competing ideologies. Therefore we seem to be able to say that since different ideologies discipline individual writers with different rhetorical practices, norms, and conventions, writer identity shaped by one type of culture and ideology will be different from writer identity shaped by a contrary culture and ideology. In this chapter, I examine this assumption with regard to Chinese and American writer identities.

## **Western Rhetoric or No Rhetoric: Challenging the Eurocentrism of Western Rhetoric**

It may be somewhat startling to consider that the idea that China even has a conception or theory of rhetoric at all is quite new in American scholarship. I attribute this to an enduring essentialism in the scholarship on the history and development of rhetoric in Western culture. For example, we can find evidence of essentialist thinking in the work of James Murphy, a highly respected scholar of rhetorical history. In "The Origins and Early Development of Rhetoric," Murphy declares that "rhetoric is an entirely Western phenomenon" because "Greeks were the only people of the ancient world who endeavored to analyze the ways in which human beings communicate with each other." Elaborating on this claim, Murphy goes on to state explicitly that "neither Africa nor Asia has to this day produced a rhetoric" (1). This Eurocentrism comes from traditionalists' definition of rhetoric as persuasion. As Guanjun Cai, a Chinese student at Arizona State University who wrote his dissertation on the history of Chinese Rhetoric, points out, persuasion "is generally associated with deliberative debate in which individuals openly express personal differences and make free choices" (11-12). Societies that do not operate as Western democracies and even worse are ruled under political hierarchies such as those of China do not, it is thought, need or develop rhetoric (Cai 12). Under the spell of this Eurocentrism, rhetorical studies and

research have focused largely on Western rhetoric and research on Chinese rhetoric has been virtually nonexistent in the purview of most rhetorical scholarship in the United States.

Over the past decade or so, Chinese researchers studying at American universities (typically in rhetoric or linguistic programs) have argued that while there are cultural, historical, social, and political differences between China and the West, these differences do not preclude the existence of Chinese rhetoric. In fact, their research shows that there are many similar rhetorical values, practices, and conventions shared between Western and Chinese rhetoric. Bih-Shia Huang, for instance, wrote a dissertation entitled “A Comparison of Greek and Chinese Rhetoric and Their Influence on Later Rhetoric” at Texas Tech University in 2002. One of the main goals of the dissertation was to demonstrate that many ancient civilizations, including China, did not neglect the study of rhetoric, although the ways it was studied differed from the ways it has been studied in the West (7). With a similar goal of establishing that China has a long history of theorizing and studying rhetoric, Heping Zhao, who completed his PhD in rhetoric and composition at Purdue University, undertook a scholarly examination of one important Chinese work exclusively: *Wen Xin Diao Long*, a work that Zhao believes is perhaps the first complete treatise, written in the early fifth century, of rhetorical theory ever produced in the Chinese culture. With his scrutinization of the fifty chapters by Lu Xie, a prominent scholar in the Qi Dynasty of China, Zhao argues that a

non-Western treatise of rhetoric appeared in the fifth century, a rhetoric that is indebted to the rhetorical teachings of ancient Taoist and Confucianist philosophies. Zhao believes that this treatise was written at the time literacy had been highly developed and “deals exclusively with written discourse” (VII).

### **Why the Challenge Fails to Challenge: A Focus on Similarities Between Western and Chinese Rhetorics**

Both Huang and Zhao challenge the Eurocentrism of rhetorical studies in the West by demonstrating that Western rhetoric has no exclusive scholarly claim on the study of rhetoric. However, they also both focus on the similarities they find in the Chinese rhetorics they examine and Western rhetoric. Zhao’s careful analysis of the three rhetorical canons in *Wen Xin Diao Long* ultimately serves the purpose of showing that Chinese rhetoric has shared four of the major rhetorical practices with Western rhetoric: 1) a typology of written discourse, specifically some thirty-two types of genre patterns ranging from the most aesthetic to the practical; 2) strategies for different writing processes, including acts of invention, drafting, and revision, and the necessary adaptation of all these acts to the situational context; 3) strategies for the art of organization, including such structural elements as words, sentences, paragraphs, and the whole composition; and 4) strategies for the art of style, including rhetorical schemes and tropes (viii).

Likewise offering a comparison of Greek and Chinese rhetoric, Huang’s

cross-cultural study examines a myriad of similarities between the two rhetorical traditions. Fully aware of the different notions of rhetoric within the Western paradigm, Huang demonstrates that “classical Chinese rhetoric is not only a natural practice but also a study of effective discourse, like classical Greek rhetoric” (v). Evoking both the notion of rhetoric as a natural practice in the sense of George Kennedy and the notion of rhetoric as a study of effective discourse from the perspective of Fiedrich Solmsen (which includes logos, ethos, pathos, enthymeme, and topoi) (2-9), Huang points out that both Confucius (552-479 B.C.), the founder of Confucianism who placed morality above anything else, and Aristotle thought ethos was crucial in persuasion (9). She also notes that like Aristotle, Mencius (372-289 B.C.), Confucius’s follower, “understood the psychological features of the speaker when he listened to the speaker” (9).

In fact, the contrasts that Huang does focus on concern those between different Chinese rhetorics. For example, Confucian rhetoric, according to Huang, emphasizes ethical appeals more than does Mohist rhetoric (founded by Mo Tzu (480-420 B.C.), which focuses more on logical appeals and the three tests of theory: “evidence, validity, and applicability” (9). Another point of contrast among Chinese rhetorics that Huang discusses is the extent to which the rhetoric of Han Fei Tzu (280-233 B.C.), a representative of legalism, insists that persuasion must be directed to psychological appeals. Huang also detects discussions on persuasion exemplified by *you shui* (“traveling rhetors”) or *bian*

*shi* (“the art of rhetoric”) in *Chan-kuo Ts’e (Intrigues of the Warring States, 475-221 B.C.)*. (These two phrases will be discussed in some more detail in the next section.)

Despite the contrasts that can be noted among Chinese rhetorics in terms of differing views of which features or elements are most important, none of the elements or features Huang identifies is at odds with those deemed important in Western rhetoric. Huang’s intention, in fact, is just the opposite. Huang argues that as a study of effective discourse, Chinese rhetoric, as advocated by Teng His (Deng Xi, 546-501 B.C.) and Hui Shih (380-320 B.C.), is concerned with relative values in a very similar way to Greek sophistry as represented by Protagoras and Gorgias. Huang states, “Teng His proposed a theory called *liang ke* (dual possibilities) and *liang shuo* (dual interpretations)” (133), a theory very similar to the Greek *dissoi logoi*—“every issue has two arguments opposing each other” (10). Huang thus in effect has interpreted Chinese rhetoric to reflect and reinforce a kind of oppositional thinking that I contend characterizes Western rhetoric.

Huang references the work of contemporary rhetoric scholar Xing Lu with regard to the *dissoi logoi* comparison. Lu’s influential work *Rhetoric in Ancient China Fifth to Third Century BCE: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*, published in 1998, is another example of the kind of comparative research that characterizes Chinese scholarship in America on rhetoric. More recently, an article by Lu, “Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western

Rhetorics: Reflections and Challenges” was included in the collection *Chinese Communication Theory and Research: Reflections, New Frontiers, and New Directions*, published in 2002. The main thesis Lu develops is that Chinese rhetorics have “shared ethical, epistemological, dialectical, and psychological concerns” with Western rhetorics (150). Even in an article with a title that would lead to thinking that it would not submerge Chinese rhetoric into Western through comparisons, “To Capture the Essence of Chinese Rhetoric: An Anatomy of a Paradigm in Comparative Rhetoric,” by Yameng Liu, the comparative tendency persists. What Liu examines in the article are some Western rhetorical values in a popular Chinese rhetoric of the sixteenth century, such as “originality, newness of expression, and directness of discourse” (qtd. In You “Conflation” 150).

Studies such as the ones I have described above have made meaningful contributions to and added new perspectives to the study of rhetoric. First, they have challenged the assumption that there is no rhetoric in China. Second, they have proved that Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric have shared many rhetorical practices and conventions. Third, they have refuted the popular assumption that rhetoric exists only in democratic societies. Nevertheless, while challenging the Eurocentrism in Western rhetoric studies, Chinese scholars such as Liu, Zhao, Lu, and Huang, because of their strong eagerness to demonstrate the similarities between Western rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric and their nearly exclusive focus on those similarities, seem to

privilege and endorse the norms of Western rhetoric. In all of their studies, they use the Western rhetorical paradigm as framework to search for counterparts or equivalents in Chinese culture—to prove that what is discussed in Western rhetorics could also be found in Chinese rhetorics. Though intending to add new perspectives to understand Western rhetoric, they leave the norms of Western rhetoric unchallenged and unquestioned. Unintentionally, they, too, are buying into an essentialist, universalist notion of Western rhetoric. Unfortunately, they seem to suggest that the interpretation of Chinese rhetoric depends on theoretical framework of Western rhetoric, therefore reinforcing the universalism of a Western rhetorical paradigm, whether historical or contemporary.

### **Appearance of the Self-Evident: Rhetoric and Ideology in the United States and in China**

Without doubt, Chinese scholars of rhetoric in the United States have unanimously declared the existence of Chinese rhetoric; however, these studies are not enough to dissolve the Eurocentrism and universalism imbedded or entrenched in countless rhetoric studies. Perhaps essentialist views continue to be insinuated in some of the scholarship on rhetoric in the United States in part because rhetoric in the Western sense is thought to be available and developed only in democratic countries. But surely such a view reflects that some American rhetoric scholars do not recognize that rhetoric is

always and completely ideological. A pervasive Eurocentrism, one that has led some rhetoric scholars to go so far as to declare that there is no rhetoric in China (as well as certain other countries that do not have a democratic form of government), is, in essence, a kind of universalism. To deny the existence of Chinese rhetoric is to deny the ideological dimension of any rhetoric. Western rhetoric becomes universal within a Eurocentric purview because the ideologies which Western rhetoric has served from Aristotle till the present are considered to be universal.

In "The Origins of Rhetoric: Literacy and Democracy in Ancient Greece," Richard Katula notices the close tie between democracy and rhetoric in classical rhetoric. Katula details how rhetoric has served as the handmaiden of democracy. As he summarizes, in *Rhetoric* Aristotle notes "four advantages" of studying rhetoric to be citizens in democracy: rhetoric "helps us understand the difference between truth and falsehood," to see how "we are moved to action," to recognize "both sides of issues," and to "defend ourselves against other's arguments." Katula argues that what is imbedded in classical rhetoric is that rhetoric and democracy are intertwined with each other: one must understand rhetoric to understand democracy and one must understand democracy to understand rhetoric. This view toward rhetoric seems to suggest that rhetoric will not exist without democracy.

In "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Context: Interpreting Historically," James Berlin seeks to demonstrate the crucially important understanding of rhetoric

as arising from competing ideologies. As stated earlier, Berlin insists that rhetorics are culturally specific and therefore expressions of ideology. What is more, rhetorics are essential to the transmittal, acceptance, and reinforcement of ideology. In his article on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Berlin applies this view on rhetoric and ideology to his examination of the *Rhetoric*. Historicizing Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric, Berlin demonstrates that this monumental work represents Aristotle's attempt to address competing political and ideological interests of "his own divided age." According to Berlin, the result is an incoherent gesture to reconcile the competing claims of the polis and the supporters of oligarchy and the conflicting class interests that "represent important ideological differences" (55-62). Aristotle thus devises a rhetoric that, as Berlin sees it,

will attempt the reconciliation of an educated aristocracy deserving of absolute authority with what he [Aristotle] regards as an uneducated and ill-willed mass that insists on sharing political power. The result, however, is a contradictory division of the rational and emotional proofs that reflects and reproduces, rather than resolves, the major contradictions in the Athenian class structure. (62)

This same contradictory division occurs in Aristotle's discussion of the ethical appeals. The contradiction, as Berlin rightly points out, is that on the one hand, ethical appeals should be achieved before the speaker speaks, but on the

other hand, the ethical appeals—liberality, temperance, magnificence, prudence—require “membership in a privileged social class,” the moneyed class, and the result of this contradiction is that Aristotle offers the ruling class the rhetorical means to maintain dominance over an uneducated and irrational but free populace in need of direction (63).

Berlin’s insistent focus on the relationship between rhetoric and ideology is also at the heart of his well-known criticisms of cognitive rhetoric and expressionist rhetoric. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” we can see in Berlin’s treatment of both of these contemporary rhetorics his notion that a rhetoric develops from a struggle between competing ideologies in which the dominant ideology shapes the methods and practices of what become constituted as the norms of the rhetoric, a rhetoric that in turn serves and shapes the dominant ideology. As Berlin argues in this article, cognitive rhetoric, with its look to science for validity, serves the dominant ideology and discourse of late capitalism (11-5). Expressionism, on the other hand, subscribes to an ideology to which the “ruling elites in business, industry, and government” are most likely to “nod in assent,” an ideology of individualism and personal initiative(15-8). Given Berlin’s critical observations, it would be safe to say that he understands both have their roots in classical rhetoric. Yet despite how often Berlin voiced throughout his vastly important scholarly career similar arguments about the relationship between rhetoric and ideology, and despite the immeasurable influence his work has had to lead other

scholars to share his views, there appears still to be some difficulty for rhetoric scholars to internalize the understanding that the ideological character of rhetoric means that it necessarily serves the dominant ideology. Unlike Chinese, who are born into a culture in which there is no question that the dominant rhetoric is inextricably bound up with dominant ideology, Americans are born into a culture that, with such an emphasis on individualism and freedom, perhaps makes the relationship between rhetoric and ideology more difficult to see or at least more difficult to incorporate into virtually all understandings that shape what constitutes knowledge.

Chinese rhetoric from its beginning to the present has explicitly claimed its kinship with dominating ideologies and its attempt to justify the dominant ideology. In his study of, how Chinese writing and rhetoric have served as tools for the dominant class to rule the country, Guanjun Cai examines ways in which during the third century BCE, Han Fei-zi's rhetorical theories of *fa* (law), *shu* (tactics), and *shi* (authority) were used to advise rulers like the First Chinese Emperor of Qin Dynasty how to govern the state (16). Cai uses Mao Zedong's *The Little Red Book* to demonstrate how dominant ideology determined what was discursive, what was possible, and what was acceptable. Cai even details ways in which the cultural revolution of 1966-1976 serves as a telling "example of how ideology functions as a system of rhetoric" (10). But it is not only that the theories of rhetoric serve the governing of the state that clearly reflects the ideological character of rhetoric in China. There is also far

greater “transparency” in the Chinese language itself that reveals the relationship between rhetoric and ideology. For example, the word *bian* referred to above in the expression *bian shi* is represented by a Chinese ideograph that “consists of the word *yan* (speech, language) between two *xin*, each standing for a prisoner in a yoke. When the two *xin* combined, they made up the word *bian*, originally referring to two prisoners accusing each other in court (Lu 86). Xing Lu discusses the significance of this term at length in her recent book, *Rhetoric in Ancient China Fifth to Third Century BCE: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*. Summarized briefly, the term encompasses the notion of conflict between two competing philosophies (most notably “the conflict between Confucian and Mohist” philosophies [Lu 86]); those who held sway and thereby determined the dominant philosophy were known as *bian shi* (87-88). The phrase *you shui* (“traveling rhetors”) is similarly significant in that it designates literally those rhetors who traveled from place to place to spread adherence by the people of China to the dominant philosophies/ideologies of the emperor. As these two examples suggest, given the degree to which Chinese rhetoric makes its connection to ideology explicit, it would be difficult for Chinese people to understand rhetoric in any way other than being ideologically circumscribed. In fact, it is perhaps the very fact that the dominant ideology that governs Chinese culture has such an overt, explicit role in shaping Chinese rhetoric that, from a Western perspective, China may seem not to have a rhetoric. But given the insights Berlin has given the field, it

seems naïve to think that Western rhetoric is any less ideologically circumscribed by the ruling class, no matter to what extent democracy or individualism are valued.

### **Collectivism, Individualism, and Writer Identity**

Because of the collectivist tendency of Chinese culture and ideology, Chinese rhetoric (now that there has recently been a recognition that there is Chinese rhetoric) typically gets labeled as collectivist rhetoric. Conversely, the cultural and ideological emphasis on individualism in the West leads to regarding Western rhetoric as individualist rhetoric. It is not very problematic so far until we see that Chinese rhetoric has been in numerous studies described as lacking individualism while the individualism imbedded in various Western rhetorical practices are incongruent with Chinese writing practices and so are often confusing and even embarrassing or disturbing to Chinese ESL students. The problem is that countless studies have repeatedly chosen to see Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric as binaries so that the individualism becomes inherent in Western rhetoric while collectivism is the only legacy of Chinese rhetoric. In other words, collectivism and individualism specifically, and Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric in general, are seen as mutually exclusive from each other. They cannot be coexistent in any individual writer.

For example, in their co-authored article on Chinese ESL students'

perceptions of American pedagogy, Joan G. Carson and Gayle L. Nelson state, “In the United States, a highly individualistic culture, pedagogical practices are geared to developing and maintaining individualism and individuated skills. Chinese culture, on the other hand, is highly collectivist, and pedagogical practices tend to reflect the importance of the group” (1). Similarly, in *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*, ESL scholar Robert Oliver argues that Chinese classical rhetoric suppresses individualism:

The utility which rhetoric was to serve was the maintenance of harmony. The way to this goal was through ceremony, etiquette, and methodology. There was a right way of doing things—a way that was established and accepted. When behavior conformed to this pattern of expectation, the individual's relations with his fellows would be predictable and dependable. (145)

This view of such a highly regimented rhetoric reserves virtually no space for unique creativity or expression. As LuMing Mao observes in “Individualism or Personhood: A Battle of Locution or Rhetoric,” Oliver's thesis is that Confucian rhetoric, the cornerstone of Chinese classical rhetoric, “hinges on the authority of tradition rather than on a rhetor's individual's ideas, and that “ritual action represents a peculiarly Chinese type of rhetoric of behavior, whose basic tenet is that everyone should always adhere to expected patterns of behavior or behave in a predictable and traditional manner (127).

The idea that there is a lack of individualism in Chinese rhetoric and

Chinese composition instruction is further reinforced in David Jolliffe's "Writers and Their Subjects: Ethnologic and Chinese Composition." Jolliffe argues that "a great deal of American teaching of composition assumes that the ultimate purpose of learning is for students to improve themselves as individuals, to become increasingly active and independent thinkers, learners, and writers." According to Jolliffe, this notion runs contrary to Chinese composition instruction that asks the Chinese students to become "a cooperative member of a collective, not a novel, independent individual" (268). Carolyn Matalene expresses similar views in her highly influential article "Contrastive Rhetoric: An American Writing Teacher in China." Matalene maintains that, despite "tremendous political upheavals," Chinese rhetoric in the twentieth century still functions the same way as it did since its inception as a means "to achieve social harmony and to express the views of the group by referring to tradition and relying on accepted patterns of expression" (795). Believing that the subordination of the individual to the group is inherent in Chinese dominant discourse, Matalene further perceives that a Chinese writer uses "the repetition of maxims, exempla, and analogies presented in established forms and expressed in well-know phrases" as techniques that are meant to "reveal to the audience that the speaker is a legitimate member of the group and worth listening to" (795).

The binary between individualism and collectivism has been repeated and echoed in a multitude of contrastive rhetoric studies. This binary leads

ESL teachers to believe that the lack of individualism in Chinese rhetoric, “impeding or suppressing its expression or development,” is one of the major hurdles that Chinese students must overcome if they want to write in an authentic voice. For example, in “The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition,” Fan Shen, a Chinese graduate student, writes that more than one composition instructor has told him/her that rule number one in English composition is to be yourself, a rule, according to him/her, that is based on “the principle of protecting and promoting individuality (and private property) in the United States (460). (The gender identity of Fan Shen is uncertain due to what occurs when a Chinese name is translated into English. This loss of gender identity is a topic that I will take up again later in this work.)

Fan Shen’s experience is unlike the experience of Min-zhan Lu (a well-known contemporary scholar in the field of rhetoric and composition), who states in “From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle” that she came to the United States with an identity split between a world “dominated by the ideology of the Western humanistic tradition and the world of a society dominated by Mao Tse-tung’s Marxism” (134). Fan Shen believed that he/she came to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln with a Chinese identity fully formed, a collectivist identity nourished by slogans like “ ‘Down with the word ‘I!’ ” and “Trust in masses and the Party” and by political campaigns like “Against Individualism” (459), an identity that asks him/her to hide the self, bury the self

in his/her writings, to subordinate the “I” to “We”—“be it the working class, the Party, the country, or some other collective body” (460).

The opposition of individualism and collectivism is vividly dramatized in Fan Shen’s writing process. Using identity as the key to understand the struggles in his/her writing process, he/she discovers that “to be ‘truly myself,’ which I knew was a key to my success in learning English composition, meant *not to be my Chinese self* at all” (emphasis original; 461). Shen further decides that when he/she writes in English he/she has to “wrestle with and abandon (at least temporarily) the whole system of ideology which previously defined me in myself” (461). To be more specific, Shen decides that he/she has to forget Marxist doctrines and Party lines and put aside the collectivist identity. That means that he/she will no longer “examine society and literary materials through the microscopes of Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism” (461), as obviously these doctrines promote a collectivist identity that is not suitable for nourishing individualism in his English writing.

As if transformed or reborn, Fan Shen accepts individualism and shows more eagerness to glorify his/her individuality by using as often as possible “I think,” “I believe,” and “I see” as possible and by deliberately cutting “out quotations from authorities” (460). Furthermore, Shen concludes that he/she has to accept the way a Western sees him/herself in relation to the universe and society. Though tortured by the dramatic opposition between collectivism and individualism, Fan Shen welcomes the new dimension—the dimension of

individualism—added to his/her identity. He/She has developed such a sophisticated feat in juggling the two identities that he/she believes that he/she can separate the English writer identity from his/her Chinese writer identity: Shen can put on a one-hundred percent Chinese writer identity when writing in Chinese and “slip into a new skin and let the ‘I’ behave much more aggressively and knock the topic right on the head” when writing in English (465).

Shen seems to believe that his/her two writer identities have never conflicted, challenged, overlapped with, or affected each other. Also, Shen seems to endorse that there is a unified, monolithic English identity one can just borrow for the sake of writing without causing any change to the Chinese identity. Shen does not want to look critically at either the assertive American writer identity that he/she finds to be more masculine and more aggressive or the more subtle and more submissive, harmony-seeking Chinese writer identity.

In “Individualism, Academic Writing, and ESL Writers,” published in 1999 in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, the authors Vai Ramanathan and Dwight Atkinson further reinforce an opposition between Chinese collectivism and American individualism. Having conducted a meta-analytical review of important cross-cultural studies on individualism (independence) in American writing practice and teaching and collectivism (interdependence) in Chinese writing, Ramanathan and Atkinson conclude that the conception of

self—an independent self— nourished in the American writing pedagogy runs contrary to the Chinese conception of self—an interdependent self:

In many Western cultures, there is faith in the inherent separateness of distinct persons. The normative imperative of this (i.e. U.S.) culture is to become independent from others and to discover and express one's unique attributes. Achieving the cultural goal of independence requires construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. . . . In contrast, many non-Western cultures insist . . . on the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other. A normative imperative of these cultures is to maintain this interdependence among individuals. Experiencing interdependence entails seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship.

(51)

The authors come to this conclusion based on four major principles and practices they identify of American university writing pedagogy that they

believe serve to indoctrinate individualism: voice, peer reviewing, critical thinking, and textual ownership. Based on the two scholars' interpretations of the studies they review, Ramanathan and Atkinson describe each of these four as being in opposition to Chinese practices and beliefs about writing.

From their research, Ramanathan and Atkinson determine that the concept of an "authentic voice" is problematic for Chinese writers. The Western notion of taking "the rhetorical position of an autonomous, rational mind, untroubled by the inconsistencies of the phenomenal world and equally untroubled by the push and pull of human arrangements" is the diametric opposite of the Chinese idea of writing for the "purpose of becoming integrated into a scholarly community" (Scollon 11 & 7; qtd. in Ramanathan and Atkinson 52-53). Referring to the landmark work of Xiaoming Li, whose *"Good Writing" in Cross-Cultural Context* represents the first scholarly work based on cross-cultural dialogues between writing teachers from both cultures, Ramanathan and Atkinson suggest that the problem Chinese writers have with expressive discourse stems from seeing writing as dissemination of moral tradition and as a vehicle to truth rather than a means for expressing unique understandings and feelings.

Ramanathan and Atkinson attribute the opposition of individualism and collectivism to problems Chinese ESL students have in the realm of peer reviewing as well. They explain that although peer reviewing is set up as group activities in the classroom, these activities are actually "mechanisms through

which the individual is substantially fronted” because

group members are expected to comment on why particular elements of an individual’s essay are effective or lacking and are encouraged to support these views with examples from the essay itself. By laying out what they think about a piece of writing and why, reviewers are also expected to express themselves individualistically, and so to develop their own critical writing/revising skills. The author likewise participates in the group on the assumption that she or he will take away whatever comments have been given for the purpose of individual improvement, as made clear by Elbow. (57)

However, Chinese students, Ramanathan and Atkison believe, have been socialized to put collective interest and harmony before personal interest and values and beliefs and so are reluctant to critique peers’ papers. Instead, they “may be more likely to say what they think will not threaten the positive ‘face’ of their peers than responding ‘from the heart’” (58).

Explicitly connected by Ramanathan and Atkinson to individualism, critical thinking is another component of American writing pedagogy that the scholars find to be troubling for Chinese ESL students. As they point out, critical thinking, which has been emphasized both in teacher training and

composition textbooks, involves students' abilities to "analyze the situation critically, convincingly support their opinions, anticipate and defend against counter-arguments, and judiciously weigh various kinds of evidence that may strengthen their positions" (61). The rationale is that by arguing their individual stances against others', students can develop their individual critical thinking. Such a rationale causes problems, however, to those who are reluctant to argue against others' stances or opinions. Ramanathan and Atkinson suggest that Chinese students have such reluctance because they are still performing the Confucian ritual that "each person occupy their proper place in society and behave accordingly, without disrupting the social order" (59).

Given the extent to which studies of Chinese writing in comparison with American writing reinforce the binary between collectivism and individualism, it is not surprising that Ramanathan and Atkinson conclude from their research that the very idea of authorship poses problems for Chinese ESL students. According to the two scholars, it is self evident and shared by all across the United States that texts are personal properties and therefore plagiarism is a violation of honor and morals. This emphasis on individual text ownership causes problems for Chinese ESL students with regard to the issue of plagiarism and the rules of documentation due to the fact that their home culture centralizes memorization and valorizes those who can display outstanding mastery in memorizing others' works. Ramanathan and Atkinson also note that the extent to which Chinese writers appropriate and reproduce

texts in their own writing is a stark contrast to the individualistic writing of American students.

To my mind, the contrastive study by Ramanathan and Atkinson, like the studies they review, rely on and reinforce binary thinking, in this case between collectivism and individualism. Interestingly, Ramanathan and Atkinson also reinforce a Eurocentric view of rhetoric in much the same way that scholarship that foregrounds the similarities between Western rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric do. That is, in either case of foregrounding similarities or differences, the comparisons are made based, firstly, on an assumed opposition between what constitutes collectivism and what constitutes individualism and, secondly, on looking at Chinese rhetoric and writing *vis a vis* Western rhetoric and writing. These critical observations are not meant to take away from the importance of studies such as those by Oliver, Jolliffe, Carlson and Nelson, Ramanathan and Atkinson (and the scholars whose work they review), and many others. Certainly their careful research on Chinese writing and rhetoric has provided immeasurable contributions to the field of rhetoric and the subfield of ESL. Further, the scholars have laudably aroused composition teachers' and scholars' attention to cultural differences with regard to a number of issues pertinent to English writing, and, more importantly, generously poured their sympathy to the conflicts and struggles that Chinese (or ESL) writers have to go through in order to write well in English. However, I do believe that the binary and Eurocentric thinking of some scholars prevents

them from looking at what they perceive, experience, research, and so on from a perspective that is more what I would consider to be *intercultural* rather than simply cross-cultural, a perspective that I think would better allow us to see that what is studied in any two or more cultures as neither the same nor contradictory.

### **Considering Writer Identity from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Questions for Critical Reflection**

I want to make clear that I am not seeking to challenge the details or features of Chinese rhetoric and writing that scholarly work in rhetoric and composition and ESL has so painstakingly and conscientiously brought to our attention. Clearly, there are differences and similarities between Chinese rhetoric and writing and Western (and more specifically, American) rhetoric and writing, and it is of utmost importance to identify these and seek to determine their implications. I do wish to challenge the extent to which various interpretations seem to be considered as having been settled, almost as if they are not interpretations at all. The ease with which the interpretations are offered and accepted suggests that there is a shared framework operating, one that I argue is based on Eurocentrism and binary thinking. As such, I find that the interpretations prompt us to ask several questions for us to further investigate the conflicts and oppositions of the collectivist writer identity and individualist writer identity. Is there a unitary writer identity in a given culture?

Does the writer identity in a particular culture change over history? Is writer identity fixed or ongoing? Are collectivist writer identity and individualist writer identity different or oppositional (mutually exclusive)? Are peer reviews, expressive mode of writing, documentation, and critical thinking inherently or necessarily nourishing individualism? Is individuality in China inherently subordinated to group? Does memorization in China necessarily lead to collectivism?

Reflecting critically on these questions is important because it can lead us to new and valuable understandings that would contribute to the field of rhetoric and composition. Such understandings can help us to improve ways that we teach writing English to Chinese students. In TESOL terms, we can gain better insights about how to positively and effectively help students transfer their L1 knowledge and rhetorical practices to L2 writing. Moreover, it will help Chinese students build up more self-confidence and self-esteem about their own culture and the rhetorical practices in their home culture so that they can derive more strength than tortures or worries when they are writing in English, so that the writing teachers explore new ways to offer assistance to Chinese students' writing process and find fresh perspectives to reflect on the various important pedagogical practices in their writing classrooms.

For example, it can be argued that neither the memorization of traditional texts is inherently collectivist nor the practices of critical thinking,

peer reviewing, documentation, or expressive writing are inherently individualist. Those practices are not necessarily contributing to either collectivism or individualism. They can be used otherwise. Critical thinking, for instance, as Peter Elbow points out in his response to Ramanathan and Atkinson's essay, could be used to "help students *connect* with other people and other ideas rather than hold themselves separate and insulated from them"; it could be used to develop a both/and train of thought instead of the either/or binary thinking (emphasis original; 331-32). Agreeing with Elbow, I see peer review as plausible practice for students to relate to each other and learn from each other.

With regard to "problems" Chinese students reportedly have with documentation and citation, we could read citing sources as the writer's attempt to relate one's position to other writers and to the discourse community. In "A Comparison of the Use of Citations in Chinese and English Academic Discourse," Joel Bloch and Lan Chi note,

An academic text must satisfy two basic premises: The text must exhibit "sameness" to account for what has been previously published while also exhibiting a "difference" from these same texts. The "sameness" demonstrates the connection between this chapter and what has been previously published while the "difference" demonstrates that the text has some originality.

(233-34)

The two authors find that such argument from authority to build up the writer's ethos and to open up a gap is also present in Chinese academic writing. The main difference is that Chinese writers are not, the authors find, as "contentious" as Western writers (234). The difference is that of degree, not of type or category. Examining Chinese classical and contemporary texts and educational practices, the two authors contend that though memorization of canonical texts has been an important part of educational process, there have been other practices—thinking, reflection, application—that are equally valued, especially for adult and advanced learners, unlike memorization, which is mainly for novice and young learners.

Therefore, the Chinese writers' problem with documentation and plagiarism might not necessarily be labeled with lack of individualism. According to Bloch and Chi, there might be developmental factors at play because not many Chinese writers have had much experience with academic writing in English before coming to study in the United States (232). Nor have they had much experience with research. Speaking from my own experiences, I know many Chinese students who have very limited experience with academic writing in English; the writings they did before they came to study for their graduate degree in the United States were some several-paged short essays and application letters. Even those who have majored in English do not have much training in writing academic writing. The gap between a two- to three-page essay and a twenty-page research paper is challenging to anyone,

let alone to those whose first language is not English.

As a response to the claim that individualism is ingrained in Elbow's expressivist mode, Elbow defends that he does not see an authentic voice could oppose independence against interdependence and insists that they can go together and reinforce each other (332-3): "I am trying to show in *Writing without Teachers* and other works that individualism and interdependency can work together to be consonant with each other if the conditions are right and the definitions are not too narrow" (333). Borrowing from Elbow, I suggest that authentic voice, even in its strongest sense in expressivist mode, does not have to be labeled with individualism; it is those teachers or researchers who use authentic voice as a tool to enforce individualism, for a voice that is totally void of relation to others is not only impossible but hard to achieve.

Or, we can borrow from LuMing Mao to argue that the binary between individualism and collectivism may be partly because the word *individualism* has different associations and connotations in the two cultures. Mao summarizes the three "baggages" of individualism in the Western culture: 1) there is an inherent separateness of distinct persons, and each individual is a bounded, distinctive whole set against other wholes; 2) to achieve one's distinctiveness the individual depends exclusively on one's own internal thoughts and feelings; 3) the self actualization is fundamentally progressive ( "Individualism" 128). Then Mao proceeds to argue that Chinese rhetorical

practices interpret individualism in different sense:

[E]ach existent is, ontologically, a consequence of every other, and each existent is both self-determinate and determined by every other existent. It is this symbiotic unity in Chinese ontology that conceptually informs the relationship between the individual and his or her community and that underlies Chinese rhetorical practices. (130)

Mao also offers three “baggages” of individualism, or, to use the term Mao prefers, “personhood” in Chinese culture: 1) there is no inherent mutual exclusiveness between an individual and his or her community, and Chinese personhood tends to seek a symbiotic relationship between an individual and his or her social background; 2) each individual is both self-determined and determined by others; 3) personhood stresses an ongoing, life long process of self realization that is forever not closed (131-32). Using the classical literature *The Analects*, Mao affirms that individualism does not have to be negatively linked with Chinese rhetoric not only because it is understood differently but also because it does not necessarily impede Chinese from expressing themselves.

The attempt to dichotomize individualism and collectivism is ultimately an act of dichotomizing “self” and society. As Debra Jacobs notes in “Voice in Writing,” voice has been considered both “an elusive term because of its

nebulous connections to human subjectivity” and a “contested issue” which is “configured” and couched in the center of the “major theoretical approaches taken in composition and rhetoric” (1251). After reviewing how voice is configured in the major theories, she argues that central to the discussions of voice are configurations of the relationship between the individual and the social. Drawing from Bahktin’s concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, Jacobs suggests that any utterance is filled with “plurality of voices, with aspects of individuality sharing a space in discourse with social forces” (1255). As she concludes,

*self* and *other* are thought to be coconstituted, with each placed in a reciprocal process of being. Regarding the self as dialogic thus precludes conceptions of the subject as unitary or transcendent, but it does suggest that during a particular moment of discourse, the self occupies a position in relation to all that is *other*, which makes it manifest. Voice as the metaphor for that moment of being a subject in discourse underscores the idea that *self* and *other* are dialogically constructed and invested with subjectivity, as is language itself. (Emphasis original; 1255)

This conception of self and other invites us to reconceive the almost-natural binarization between collectivism and individualism. Instead of seeing collectivism and individualism as mutually exclusive binaries, I suggest that we could conceive the tensions between collectivism and individualism present in

the writing process of every writer, Chinese or American. Such tensions, as Jacobs articulates, are present in every discourse.

Though individual writer identity is inevitably shaped and influenced by the dominant ideology and general tendency and patterns of a given culture, individual writer identity is also affected by individuals' positioning with the dominant discourse, their class, and intersection of other conflicting ideologies. Berlin reminds us that it "should be noted that ideology is always pluralistic, a given historical moment displaying a variety of competing ideologies and a given individual reflecting one or another permutation of hegemony of these conflicts, although the overall effect of these permutations tends to support the hegemony of the dominant class (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 11). Thus, we can see from the examples of Min-zhan Lu and Fan Shen how people living in the same historical moment of China have developed different writer identities.

Not only there is no unitary writer identity in one culture but also there is no fixed writer identity, for the changes of dominant ideologies, cultural practices, and social systems have all played an important role of Chinese writer identity. How one writes in Confucius's time is different from how one writes during the time of Lu Xun, and different still is how one writes today in contemporary China. Yet this simple truth is hard to be remembered and needs to be constantly reminded. Even though Confucius has been believed to still influence contemporary rhetorical practices and theories, his influence has dramatically waned. The introduction of Western thoughts and theories, along,

of course, with Marxist thoughts, demonized Confucius as the lingering ghost responsible for making China vulnerable in comparison to foreign forces, for fettering the thoughts of Chinese people, and for impeding the growth of China. So, the rituals that Oliver cites as suppressing individualism have been deconstructed through the last century.

In the cross cultural context, the writer identity of Chinese students are more likely to be constantly shaped and reshaped by multiple ideologies and rhetorical conventions that have disciplining power over them. By speaking two languages, Chinese students are making themselves malleable to at least two conflicting ideologies and two different dominant discourses, each of which providing norms for their writing behaviors. As a result of being caught between the conflicting discourses and ideologies, the writer identity of Chinese students in cross cultural contexts cross multiple boundaries and challenge to a greater degree the binaries between Western rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric, between individualism and collectivism. Though inevitably bearing the birthmark from Chinese rhetorical conventions, the dominant discourse on EFL teaching and learning, and the dominant ideologies in China, the writer identity of Chinese students in American higher education will not be composed by adding half ingredients of Chinese rhetoric and half ingredients of Western rhetoric not only because this composition is naive and impossible but also because the power relationship between the two or more discourses or ideologies is not balanced. Depending on how the Chinese students have

been positioned with both or more discourses or ideologies, depending on how Chinese students want to be repositioned with these discourses or ideologies through the practice of writing, within the group of Chinese students in the cross cultural contexts there is neither unitary writer identity nor fixed writer identity. Through writing in English Chinese students might exert their freedom to choose how to reposition themselves as writers or as learners or as teaching assistants with dominant discourses and ideologies from both cultures.

## Chapter Three

### Learning Diversity and the Subject of Educational Norms

Among the multifaceted diversities that international students bring to American higher educational settings, diversity in their rhetorical and writing conventions has been the most discussed, as we see in the previous chapter. Their diverse learning strategies, learning behaviors, and learning habits have, however, been undervalued and therefore understudied because their learning diversity is shrouded under their well-cited problem with English language. As Junko Tanaka rightly points out in “Academic Difficulties among East Asian International Graduates: Influence of Perceived English Language Proficiency and Native Educational/Socio-cultural Background,” despite the various studies examining “the academic, social, and personal problems international students have encountered at American universities,” researchers often discuss those problems adjusting to American life and education superficially, “attributing them only to the insufficient language skills of the students” (1). Without question, language proficiency is crucial to the degree of adjustment and success Chinese students have in their educational life, as well as in their life in the United States in virtually every way. But gaining proficiency has never been as simple or easy as grabbing more chances to interact with native speakers. With their student identity previously shaped by the social, economic, cultural, educational, and political systems and ideological milieu of their home

country, Chinese students find that they are suddenly plunged into a very different “world” when they arrive in the United States. Different educational philosophies, which support assumptions about what constitutes effective learning behaviors and strategies, put Chinese students into a predicament in which they do not know for sure the right way to learn or to behave as good students in American classrooms. The loss of their former student identity may enormously hinder their academic performance and leave traumatic learning experiences.

Advancing an argument similar to the one developed in the previous chapter, I contend in this chapter that observations and claims made about Chinese student learning behaviors and strategies are mostly offered without questioning the Western paradigm, the paradigm *against which* Chinese ways of writing and learning are compared. Also, the studies are discussed with the same assumption that Chinese language and culture are presenting negative transfers to Chinese students’ proficiency at learning English as a second language. This strikes me as an assumption that should be questioned. In other words, though studies have recognized diversities of Chinese students are shaped by Chinese language and culture, the same studies indicate that the rhetorical conventions and learning strategies that are produced within Chinese culture cannot be positively transferred to Chinese students’ ESL learning process. I suggest that what buttresses this theory or assumption is the binary thinking that sets English language and culture as the norm and,

consequently, Chinese language and culture as “abnormal.”

Among the scant studies that address the adjustments Chinese students need to make to American educational settings due to the diverse learning behaviors and strategies of Chinese students as compared to American students, three characteristics are most often identified as most debilitating to Chinese students: their reliance on rote learning, their deference to authority, and their reluctance to speak in class. According to the scholarship, these characteristics hinder Chinese students’ ability to “fit in” the American classroom and to perform with success academically. The studies tend to suggest that Chinese students need to discard their old learning strategies and develop more effective learning strategies—critical thinking, speaking out in class, and active participation in group work— that are used by the good (English-native-speaking) learners. Such a proposal is not problematic as long as we can assume that learning strategies of good learners are applicable to all learners and separable from the learners’ cultural background, their prior educational experience, and their positioning within the power dynamics of the classroom in particular and the power structure of the dominant discourse in general.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that such an application or separation is not only impossible and naïve but also misleading and disastrous to the adjustment process of Chinese students. Student identity of Chinese graduate students has been shaped by the educational beliefs and goals,

learning strategies, motivations, and study habits endorsed by Chinese dominant (educational) ideology, and reshaped by the educational beliefs and goals, learning strategies, motivations, and learning behaviors approved and sanctioned by American dominant (educational) ideology. The proposal that Chinese students need to hasten their adjustment to their new student identity by discarding their Chinese student identity essentializes student identity as if there were a unitary Western or Chinese student identity. It also suggests a binary way of thinking wherein Chinese student identity is constructed as “bad learner” against the “good learner” American student identity. To make this argument, I examine the three traits of Chinese students that educators have considered to be most problematic. First, I consider views of memorization and rote learning as they are held in the West and as they are held in China. Second, in the same manner, I consider views of silence. In addition to the “problem” cited of Chinese students’ reluctance to speak in class, the “problem” of Chinese students’ deference to authority is also investigated in my examination of silence. Like the previous chapter, this chapter will continue to critique how essentialism and binary thinking that are prevalent in dominant discourse have conspired to impart negative opinions of the two traits and what they are thought to indicate. By critiquing the essentialism and binary thinking that greatly influence the studies of Chinese students’ learning diversity, this chapter questions how we conceive of and construct good learner identity in the Western academic discourse.

## **Chinese Student Identity and Educational Ideologies**

Most studies, small in number still, that pay attention to the student behaviors and learning strategies of international students either lump all international students into a group, without focusing on any particular ethnic group, or put all Asian students into a group and draw generalizations about them. As a result, there is very scarce literature focusing specifically on Chinese students' learning styles, strategies, and habits. In a recent qualitative study conducted by Juan Xu for her dissertation, "Chinese Students Adaptation to Learning in an American University: A Multiple Case Study," completed at the University of Nebraska in 2002, Xu writes of this gap in the literature. Providing data that show that Chinese international students represent the largest international population at American universities, Xu goes on to state that she could find very little scholarship on the topic of Chinese students' learning strategies and how they affect their adjustment. She found no single text that treated the topic in an in-depth fashion (5-6). Three years after Xu completed her study, I find a similar gap in the literature. For this reason, the research I draw from in this chapter comes from scattered information in various types of sources, including graduate student work for MA theses and dissertations.

As a well-published scholar and well-respected researcher on ESL teaching, Ilona Leki is one of the foremost voices of the field. Yet we do not

find in her work a focused examination of Chinese students in particular. Instead, Leki tends to discuss international students in general. Leki does, however, make some observations about Chinese students' various different learning styles and behaviors and expectations specifically. For example, she notices that Chinese students may show unexpected respect to teachers by erasing the blackboard for the teachers and by standing up when the teachers enter the classroom (50). Leki tells us that, unlike American students, Chinese students have different expectations about their teachers. Leki observes that Chinese students look up to their teachers as authority figures who have the right answers and as mentors who have the responsibility to guide them closely in their moral, personal, or educational decisions (56). Overall, the submission of Chinese students to their teachers as authority strikes Leki as something unique to Chinese culture and therefore something that writing teachers in particular and teachers of ESL especially should be alert to.

In her MA thesis, "Educational Values and Academic Performance: Chinese Students in the United States" (completed in 1991 at the University of South Florida), Amy Wang provides a detailed cross cultural study on the differences between Chinese college students and American college students in their educational beliefs, learning strategies, and study habits. Wang illustrates how Chinese students' learning styles, behaviors, and motivations are constructed by their home culture, educational system, and ideologies. In her studies, she investigates how these two cultures shape the educational

beliefs and values of students, as well as their study patterns. She points out that the contemporary Chinese educational system has been greatly influenced by Chinese Confucianism, according to which the “harmony of the whole depends on the operation and cooperation of its parts” (5).

Characterizing education as having a central position in Chinese society (10), Wang informs us that “education in China has been considered the only way to the development of personal integrity, to the organization of well-established family structure, and to the construction of a well-ordered state” (10). This centrality, she further notices, has turned higher education into a privilege belonging only to elites and thus ensured scholars and teachers the highest respect and prestige in Chinese society. In Chinese culture, students are expected to respect and obey the supervision and discipline of their teachers and expect to receive guidance from their teachers. It is from this context that Wang then discusses the well-documented characteristics of Chinese learning styles and behaviors already identified (i.e., rote-learning; deference to authority, as reflected by, for example, obedience, diligent note-taking, and reluctance to ask questions; and submissive behaviors in peer work groups) (14-17).

Wang explains that in contrast to educational practices and beliefs within Chinese culture, American dominant educational ideology has been shaped by John Dewey’s progressive teaching philosophy. She argues that the concept of democracy, the theory of experience, and the emphasis on

experimental method—the three leading components of progressivism—have largely shaped the American educational system and, accordingly, students' learning styles, behaviors, and motivations. Therefore, higher education in America tries to “extend the advantages of higher education as widely as possible” by offering all kinds of higher educational opportunities, channels, and scholarships to encourage students to have access to higher education (19-20). According to Dewey's theory of experience, students' individual experiences are encouraged and emphasized in the classroom. Also, according to Dewey's theory of experiment, students are taught *how* to think, rather than *what* to think (Wang 21-24).

Leki's and Wang's works are among the best for specifying differences between Chinese students' learning strategies, practices and behaviors and those of their Anglo-American counterparts. Their work also helps to shed some light on the cultural and ideological construction of those differences. To some extent, these studies remind classroom teachers of being more sensitive to the diverse learning styles, learning behaviors, and motivations of international students in their classroom. These studies also help Chinese students understand the differences between themselves as students and American students better, an understanding that can be helpful for easing their transition from one culture to another, from one educational system to another. The scholarship may also offer a framework for Chinese students to think through the differences and make proper adjustments to fit into the new

educational system and the new culture.

However, the essentialism and binary tendencies prevalent in contrastive rhetoric studies are also present in these studies, though perhaps with greater invisibility. (Also, to the extent that these traits are present in the work of Leki and Wang, the traits are even more evident in most other comparative studies.) First, we can see that these scholars have essentialized student identity in each culture, assuming that there is a monolithic and unitary student identity unique to each culture. Admittedly, student learning strategies, learning behaviors, and study habits—the core of student identities—are shaped by the dominant educational ideology in which they are developed. The centrality of education in China, along with the core teachings that Chinese students are expected to commit to memory; the restricted access to higher education; and the respect to teacher authority ingrained in Chinese students, which is reflected by a teacher-centered pedagogy in China, lead to reasonable and valid interpretations of Chinese students as obedient, submissive, and reticent. Likewise, the value of an “open-door” access to education in the United States, along with the endorsement of the Dewian notions of experience and experiment, lead to reasonable and valid interpretations of American student identity as independent, questioning, and creative. But the underlying assumption of such interpretations is that students all subject themselves to the educational norms and construct their identities accordingly so that student identity conforms perfectly to the social,

educational, and ideological norms of their culture.

This assumption excludes other factors that might influence student learning behaviors and more importantly active agency of individual learners in developing their learning styles. The tendency of comparative studies is to describe only one, unitary, monolithic student identity carved by the particular culture and educational system in which the students are in. This monolithic identity is the dominant identity. It is not suggested in the scholarship if there are other alternative student identities existing or not. Foucault reminds us that the disciplinary power of dominant discourse on individuals does not exclude personal freedom to choose among the conflicting discourses. Since within each culture, there is no unitary educational goal or belief, there should be multiple student identities within each culture. What's more, individual student positioning within the dominant discourse also plays an important role in the formation of student identity. In translating the educational goals and beliefs of the dominant discourse into their personal education, students have space to choose what learning styles or strategies best for their academic performance. As a matter of fact, there is always a reasonable distance between what the dominant discourse wants to enforce, promote, or produce in the students and what the students want to perform and actually do perform in the educational settings.

Additionally, such an essentialist assumption does not take into consideration alternative interpretations of the same information. Could it not

be a reasonable and valid interpretation to say, for example, that Chinese students, given the “elite” place they have been awarded in China, are confident and secure? This interpretation would even offer another plausible explanation for why they do not, generally speaking, ask many questions. And could it not be a reasonable and valid interpretation to say that the American value placed, for example, on experience leads to insecurity and uncertainty? This could be the expectation because, since American experiences vary so widely, a given individual could wonder if his or her experiences are as valuable as another’s. This interpretation could be another way to account for what is deemed critical thinking.

It is important to recognize that I am not forwarding these examples as views that I hold. Rather, I am attempting to point out that essentialist, binary thinking leads to interpretations that may be forgotten to be interpretations. Such thinking also leads to views of Chinese and American student identities that are too clear-cut and simplistic to be true. What we see in an American higher educational setting is diversity, not a monolith. A quick glimpse of American college classrooms catches a vast diversity of learning styles, behaviors, and motivations among the Anglo-American students. In spite of the dominant educational philosophy and ideology, Anglo-American students display a variety of learning styles, behaviors, and motivations. Some are loud while most are quiet; some are rebellious while most like to follow rules set by the institution and the teachers; some are disrespectful and disruptive while

most are very respectful and obedient; some are individualistic while the majority are very cooperative.

Dichotomizing the differences between Chinese culture and American culture by contrasting Chinese student identity with American student identity—hard working, highly-motivated, obedient, and silent; strong-willed, assertive, creative, and anti-authoritarian—studies on learning seem to regard the two learning styles as not compatible with each other. The further implication, then, is that they cannot coexist in individual learners. Also, the binaries reinforce the idea that American students' learning strategies, classroom behaviors, and American teachers' pedagogies are normative. As one of the few texts aimed at promoting an awareness of cultural differences among writing teachers, Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers* has had a wide readership (given its particular audience). We can therefore speculate that it has been highly influential. This is what Leki has to say about the diversity of international students' learning behaviors and strategies and expectations about teachers and educational systems:

For the most part, it is the international students, outnumbered as they are, who will have to make the greater part of the adjustment to accommodate to U.S. classroom expectations. But an awareness of some of these students' expectations on the part of their U.S. instructors can certainly make the adjustment

easier for all. Anticipating some of the behaviors of culturally mixed groups can help us be more **tolerant** of them and perhaps at the same time less hesitant about pointing out, if necessary, the **inappropriateness** of some of these behaviors within the culture of the U.S. college classroom. (emphasis mine; 97)

The notion of appropriateness has to do, of course, with the degree to which something fits with what is considered “normal.” If it does not fit, it is inappropriate or, to use the word that logically follows, “abnormal.”

I definitely understand and appreciate the helpfulness Leki is attempting to offer writing teachers, and I recognize that she is being realistic and pragmatic in noting that international students are the ones who must, to a far greater extent, change to be accommodating. But I also find that there is another message that Leki puts across, and, in all fairness, it is likely one that she doesn't even realize she is conveying. That is, by uncritically endorsing American educational practices and behaviors as normal, Leki privileges them over the educational practices and behaviors of international students that do not fit or are abnormal. Thus, her advice to teachers of mixed groups is to tolerate or even seek to change what is abnormal. This advice might not seem to privilege American educational practices and behaviors as much as it does if Leki were to suggest that teachers also reflect on and question their own “normal” learning and teaching practices. But Leki does not make such suggestion.

There is no doubt that Chinese students need to be aware of the norms that shape student identities in the United States, but the need to adjust to the norms cannot lead us to conclude that they should accept these norms blindly and without questioning the norms. If the purpose of having and studying this learning diversity is to tolerate it so that both the teachers and students can proceed despite the deviate, abnormal behaviors of international students, then surely we miss the point of internationalizing higher education. There should be something more than tolerance. As James Hurst, vice president for student affairs at University of Wyoming, insightfully states, “diversity is not just to be tolerated; it is to be sought as an enhancement of the educational system” (qtd. in Constantinides 1).

Perhaps instead of seeing the conflicts of ideologies, beliefs, and cultures as something negative, deficient, or debilitating to be tolerated, to be cured, we might look at the conflicts as constructive. In “Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing,” Min-zhan Lu strongly criticizes the sympathetic and condescending tolerance of conflicts. Though her discussion focuses on basic writing, I find the points she makes in this article very useful in understanding the process of conflict and struggle of Chinese students. Arguing very differently from Mina Shaughessey, Kenneth Bruffee, and Thomas Farrell, Lu insists that we should not “treat the students’ fear of acculturation and the accompanying sense of contradiction and ambiguity as a

deficit,” or as “something to be dissolved “(32). She believes such treatment “tends to view all signs of conflict and struggle as enemies” (32). Further, Lu argues that it is not sufficient just to acknowledge the process of conflict and struggle as a source of pain; we should also see the process as constructive because “a new consciousness emerges from the creative motion of breaking down the rigid boundaries of social and linguistic paradigms” (31).

What Lu inspires us to see is that there are creative and transformative potentials residing in the very conflicts of educational ideologies and the very struggles of Chinese students in their adjustment process. Instead of expecting them to totally discard the educational beliefs, motivations, educational ideologies, learning strategies, and student behaviors shaped in their home culture, instead of urging Chinese students to fully accept the new norms in American higher education, teachers might instead expect them to become critical of both norms. Instead of seeing the conflicts between the two norms as enemies, teachers might see them as preconditions for learning. And instead of seeking out ways to “make the adjustment easier for all,” teachers might highlight areas where adjustment is difficult to foster conditions for the continued development of learner identity for all students, not just international students.

## **Rote Learning, Memorization, and Critical Thinking: Oppositions and Relationships**

One of the contrasts between Chinese and American learning that cross cultural scholarship typically cites concerns the role memorization has in learning practices and behaviors. Researchers correctly observe that memorization is a learning strategy that is highly valued and practiced in Chinese education. However, the researchers do not, typically, refer to the practice simply as “memorization,” preferring to call it “rote learning.” Rote learning has been singled out as the most predominant feature of Chinese student identity. Scholars do not seem to recognize that labeling Chinese students as rote learners imparts a negative image of a typical Chinese learner as a student who lacks creative thinking, furthering the binary thinking. Here is how “rote learning” is defined by *Merriam Webster Online*: “A) the use of memory usually with little intelligence; B) routine or repetition carried out mechanically or unthinkingly. *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines it similarly: “Mechanical practice or performance; regular procedure; mere routine.” These two Western definitions seem to confirm that rote learning is usually associated with mechanical repetition. Understood this way, rote learning has been dismissed in the West as something boring, tedious, unproductive, and time-wasting, totally against the democratic, creative thinking goal of American education.

Since creative thinking is the ultimate goal of contemporary American educational ideology, many scholars and teachers worry that Chinese students cannot fare well academically in U.S. higher education if they rely on rote learning. This concern, as well as the perception of Chinese students as rote learners who lack critical thinking skills, is not held only in the United States, either. Australian scholar Prem Ramburuth, a professor at South Wales University, has found that, regardless of their academic area, teachers in Australia are likely to characterize Asian and South East Asian students in similar ways. Ramburuth describes how they are characterized by various teachers: a Computer Science teacher says that they “rely more heavily on memorisation and less on understanding than Australian students”; a Commerce teacher notices that they are “reluctant to question/critically evaluate”; an Economics teacher observes that “they take down every blessed word you say” and “they just want me to give them the best and quickest method for reaching an answer and no wasting time” (3). Ramburuth attributes such statements about Chinese students’ memorization to perceptions based more on anecdotal experience than on rigorous, in-depth scholarship on rote learning or memorization as learning strategies. (Ramburuth rightly recognizes that these are different, though related, and that both are used by Chinese students.) As Ramburuth observes, scholars and teachers tend to consider memorizing as a kind of surface or reproductive learning that is in contrast to

the deep transformational learning and problem solving learning promoted in the West. Overall, this dichotomous view seems to suggest that memorizing is detrimental to everything that Western educational ideology and dominant discourse promotes.

Ramburuth is critical of scholarship and general perceptions that characterize memorization as a learning strategy among Asian students that is in various ways deficient when such characterizations are not based on in-depth studies—whether of the role memorization plays in learning in general or among Asian students in particular. His criticism is especially targeted at those who make hasty generalizations based on their anecdotal evidence of Asian students as “relentless rote learners, surface learners, syllabus dependent, passive and lacking in initiative, not expressive of opinions, and lacking in independence” (3).

We can see an example of the kind of anecdotal evidence Ramburuth describes in Carolyn Matalene’s account of her experiences teaching English to Chinese students in China. It is significant to note that the article Matalene wrote about these experiences was published in *College English*, a journal with one of the largest readerships in the discipline of English. Although Matalene’s article focuses primarily on contrastive rhetoric, she shares how astonished she was to find that rote learning plays such a central role in education in China. Matalene states that the “usual Chinese response to a literary text is to repeat it, not to paraphrase, analyze, or interpret it” (791). This

rote learning without understanding, according to her, is how Chinese students also learn their native language as well as any foreign language.

In fact, rote learning has been so frequently cited in the scholarship on Chinese learning that it seems that rote learning is the only learning strategy that Chinese students use to achieve academic success. Memorizing is not the only way of learning and teaching in China. Throughout Chinese history, what has been most emphasized is a deep understanding of what is read and learned. Joel Bloch and Lan Chi show that they are aware of this in their article “A Comparison of the Use of Citations in Chinese and English Academic Discourse.” As the two scholars explain, *ge wu zhi zhi*, advocated by Zhu Xi during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), is central to the learning process (267). The phrase *ge wu zhi zhi* can be understood as the way to know the truth about things through examination of them and investigation of their relationship with other things. This way of learning underscores the importance of understanding to learning and differs from “pure” memorization in that it stresses “developing an insight into and understanding of what was being read” (Bloch and Chi 267).

As a matter of fact, in Chinese teaching practices—both in ancient times and in contemporary times—the task of memorization has always been assigned to students *after* instructional time has been spent on helping them to understand what the text means. The separation of memorizing from

understanding is not what has been encouraged in the dominant discourses of China about teaching. Therefore, though memorization of canonical texts has been emphasized and rewarded, it is important that scholarly work on Chinese learning strategies and behaviors more accurately describe the fuller range of learning strategies and the relationship memorization has to other strategies.

In a recent comparative study of Chinese students and Australian students, educational researcher Barry Cooper notes that to understand Chinese learners better, we need to understand Chinese memorization properly. As he mentions, despite the increasing recent challenge in academia, “there is still a common perception among teachers of the stereotypical Chinese rote learner,” and this perception is in uncomfortable contrast with “the paradox that Chinese learners nevertheless often excel in their studies, in comparison with their Western counterparts.” Cooper’s study leads him to assert that

while surface approaches to learning can be associated with mechanical rote learning, the Chinese tradition of memorization through repetition can be used to deepen understanding and to achieve high levels of academic performance. In recognizing this phenomenon, the enigma of the Chinese learner is better understood.

Though his study compares and contrast Chinese students with Australian students, not with American students, I find his study useful in that there is a

different interpretation offered about Chinese students' memorization.

According to Cooper, Chinese memorization is linked with deep understanding.

As Cooper indicates, memorization is understood very differently in a Chinese context as compared to a Western context. The crucial difference lies in whether memorization is linked with understanding.

We can see in the designation of memorization as "rote learning" that, typically, memorization in the Western context is not thought to lead to understanding. In a Chinese context, as Ramburuth indicates, both rote learning and memorization are viewed by Chinese (Asian) people as intertwined with understanding (4). In his comparison of Chinese students and local Australian students with regard to surface learning and deep learning, Ramburuth finds that neither can be identified with one or the other; both types of learning are equally evident among both Chinese students and Australian students. In fact, it is Ramburuth's conclusion that the surface-deep binary may not be appropriate for evaluating students learning behaviors (4).

Posted on a website belonging to Phenomenography Interest Group, a group comprised of professors and graduate students at Queensland University of Technology, an entire online discussion titled "Surface and Deep Learning" appeared in 1997. Although the discussion reveals differing opinions about the value of memorizing for learning, the participants did seem to understand that memorization is part of the educational process, good or bad. One professor, David Watkins, recognizes that rote learning is used only when

there is no underlying meaning, such as memorizing a telephone number. But echoing a Chinese sentiment that the highest degree of rote learning is used by the brightest Chinese students, Watkins states that

memorising and repetition play a larger role in the way better Chinese students understand what they are learning. This we believe is a major reason why such students do so well academically but seem to their Western teachers to be 'only rote learners'. So it is very possible for memorising to be a major feature of a deep approach. ("Surface and Deep Learning")

For the same discussion, scholar and researcher Chris Cope writes that his recent research shows that memorization can be part of the deep learning approach because memorizing and understanding are intertwined. For one, there is no memory without understanding. For the other, memorizing can prompt better and deeper understanding:

For instance, I identified a learning approach whereby students initially memorise material they want to understand the meaning of. By having this material in their minds they can chew over it, thinking about its meaning over time while they seek other information which may help them find meaning in the original memorised material.

This research leads us to conclude that memorizing is not necessarily a surface learning strategy. It belongs to both surface and deep learning

strategies. And even when referred to as “rote learning,” it is acknowledged to be necessary for educational success in the United States. As David Mitchell, a professor of chemical engineering at Queensland University of Technology begrudgingly states,

I must say that I feel that I was cheated of an education. I think the system should not have encouraged and rewarded me for this style of learning to the degree that it made me a more and more efficient rote learner. I knew no better as a learner, but I think that my lecturers had no excuse for not knowing better. I think it was their responsibility (and now it is mine, now that I am an academic) to design the subject and the assessment to develop a range of skills, not only memorization. Unfortunately, with the increasing pressures on academics and increasing class sizes (at least at my uni), I suspect assessment practices are only going to get worse, rewarding memorization to an even greater degree.

Even though Mitchell thinks that rote learning is not a desirable way to learn, he makes it clear in his criticism of it that it is necessary.

A quick glimpse of any undergraduate catalogue will show that Mitchell is correct. We cannot fail to find that rote learning is an important strategy to pass numerous exams and tests. For master's and doctoral students, as long as there are comprehensive and qualifying exams that are needed to

determine whether they are qualified for their degree, memorizing and even sheer rote learning cannot be excluded from the list of useful learning strategies for graduate students even though critical thinking is what professors want to develop in graduate students. Whether surface learning strategy or deep learning strategy, students will use what curriculum demands them to use. Thus, it could be said that memorization or rote learning are rewarded in the West in much the same way as in China. Such a claim, however, has been often denied because it is contrary to the educational goal of training and producing critical thinkers.

Even though memory is one of the five ancient canons of Western rhetoric, it has not, as Debra Jacobs and other scholars notice, received much attention in modern and contemporary studies. Its pitiful neglect is probably because it is assumed that there is not much connection between memory and learning. But as I hope I have shown, rote learning and memorizing are part and parcel of any learning. However negatively viewed, rote learning and memorization are not necessarily baggage that Chinese students have to throw away, an obstacle that has to be overcome, or a strategy unique to Chinese students. Nor should learning by memorizing be viewed as detrimental to critical thinking, because without accumulating sufficient knowledge, without understanding previous studies by authorities or peers, critical thinking, if possible, can only turn out to be superficial. To borrow from Peter Elbow, though the “doubting game” is crucial for critical thinking, it can

only happen *after* learners have played “believing games” many times. As Elbow argues, “much of the intellectual sophistication of intelligent people consists of skill at believing, swallowing, and entering in” (331).

The idea of “entering in” is similar to the Chinese belief behind memorization. It is the concept of *ge wu zhi zhi*, as discussed earlier in this section. Another very similar concept is that of “indwelling,” the term philosopher Michael Polanyi uses to describe the process of interiorizing that he considers to be necessary for learning. In his article “Structure of Consciousness,” Polanyi offers the view that the entire process of learning is a process of interiorizing. According to his observation and explanation of how consciousness works during the learning process, whatever is being learned at first has to be focused on. It is not yet interiorized, but it is still a kind of knowledge, what Polanyi calls “focal knowledge.” The process of indwelling, of interiorizing parts of the whole, transforms focal knowledge into what Polanyi terms “tacit knowledge,” the kind of knowledge that forms the background that we look *from* to whatever has our focal attention. As an example, we can think of the process of learning to play the piano, a process that at first requires focal attention on where to place our hands to make certain notes and so on. If our focal attention were to remain on such matters, we would never learn to play the piano. Or, to use Polanyi’s example, we can consider a tightrope walker who cannot focally attend to the maneuvers to be made while performing them but nevertheless has the knowledge tacitly. Although these examples are

especially helpful in understanding Polanyi's ideas about learning because the examples concern physical operations, Polanyi makes it clear that all learning occurs as a process of interiorizing exterior objects into the consciousness or mind, of indwelling. Polanyi makes it clear in another article, "On Body and Mind," that we cannot recognize "the whole without interiorizing its parts so as to attend from them to a joint meaning." This process of indwelling cannot be accomplished without memorizing.

What has been discussed in this section about memorizing and rote learning could be summarized in four observations based on the critiques that I have made: 1) memorizing and rote learning is not the only learning strategy in China; 2) memorizing and rote learning do not exclude understanding and critical thinking and in fact enable them; 3) memorizing and rote learning are not rewarded in China only but also in the West; 4) there is a connection between rote learning and memorizing and all new learning. An implication of these observations is that Western teachers and educators should not continue to reinforce essentialist and binary thinking by labeling Chinese students as "rote learners" and, further, to indicate that this is something bad, negative, abnormal, something they have to abandon if they want to fit into the U.S. classroom. This is, however, not to suggest that Chinese students should rely on memorizing or rote learning only, but that Chinese students need to understand the specific educational context before they decide what learning strategy to apply. This is also not to say that rote learning and memorization

are better than critical thinking, which would be another instance of binary thinking. It is to suggest that they are not at odds; both kinds of learning are useful to Chinese students (and to American students) if they want to succeed in the U.S. higher education.

### **The Silenced Chinese Students in a Student-Centered Classroom**

Reticence of Chinese students in American classrooms is another trait educators regard as causing Chinese students problems with adjusting to their new educational environment, including their learning. In "Finding Room to Speak: A Qualitative Study of Asian-American Reticence," Amos Yew notes that "Asian-Americans are often less vocal than members of other ethnic groups" and that "this lower level of expressiveness is often (mis)interpreted as inhibition, shyness, or repression" or "as passivity or lack of assertiveness" (1). Such lack of oral participation in the classroom is oftentimes interpreted as lack of motivation, lack of interest, or lack of critical thinking at best; or it is thought to indicate a lack of linguistic competence, lack of academic preparedness, or lack of something intelligent to say at worst.

As I have argued in the preceding section, it is important for us to clarify that memorization and rote learning are not at all odds with creative thinking. It is equally important for us to consider why memorization and rote learning are interpreted as negative or debilitating learning strategies by many scholars.

One reason might be that the content that is being memorized, for example the

canonical texts and political dogmas, is usually heavily ideological and traditional. As discussed in Chapter Two, what makes Western rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric different is largely the difference that Chinese dominant discourse explicitly claims its kinship with ideologies (Confucian or Communist ideologies) while such a kinship is rather hidden in the Western dominant discourse. Because of rhetoric's overtly expressed tie with dominant discourse, Chinese dominant educational ideology explicitly utilizes memorization as a tool to discipline individuals to submit to tradition, to authority, and to dominant ideology. Such an ideological maneuver is so explicit that scholars, while astounded by Chinese students' memorization skills, are tempted to read memorization as a sign of blunt submission to authority, tradition, and dominant discourse, and submission to authority and ideology is read as passivity and lack of creativity and seriously shunned in dominant discourse in western academia.

However, to say that memorization is utilized to indoctrinate and reinforce dominant ideologies does not mean that memorization itself is not an effective strategy. The very fact that Chinese tradition has been preserved through memorization has attested to its effectiveness in learning. It is also important to make clear that memorization could also be used by other ideologies, dominant or subverted, Asian or Western.

In the same sense, the silence of Chinese students, which is a normal learning behavior, is interpreted by scholars as negative, partly because

scholars tend to associate or interpret their silence as another sign of submission to authority, tradition, and ideology, a sign going against the grain of challenging authority and subverting oppression. Such an ideological and cultural reading of silence tends to cloak the real function of silence in the learning process. Just as memorization is itself an effective learning strategy, silence is a necessary learning strategy for any critical thinking, reflection, or creativity to take place. Like the previous section where I argue that memorization is not necessarily passive and lacks understanding and creativity, this section will explain how silence is not necessarily passive, uncreative, or oppositional to good learner identity.

As a result of the emphasis on speech and articulation, despite the diverse student identities present in the American classroom, the active student identity is always encouraged and promoted. Besides, the student-centered pedagogy also lends a hand to reinforce this good learning behavior because such a pedagogy is supported by the belief that students who speak out in class are engaged in “active” learning and are showing more interest and motivation in the learning process. These “active” learners are thought to learn better than those who are “passive,” which is the kind of learner that the traditional “transmission” mode of pedagogy is thought to produce. Thus, the quiet student identity is downplayed as traditional, and, even worse, considered submissive. Or, a student who does not speak in class is thought to be uninterested in the subject matter, lacking of eloquence,

unprepared for class, or even just plain “slow” or unintelligent. Furthermore, there is a tendency in American culture to associate silence as passive and therefore feminine and speaking out as assertive (active) and therefore masculine.

The silence of Chinese students in American classroom is singled out by many professors and scholars as something negative and detrimental to their acculturation into U.S. higher education. This was brought about during a question and answering session after a 2002 Chicago CCCC panel discussion on rhetorical effect of silence in students’ writing. A Chinese male teaching English at an American university expressed his serious concern about the typical silence of Asian American students in the classroom. He believed that the silence of Asian American students as part of Asian cultural heritage distinguishes Asian American students from the rest of the class and further creates obstacle to their assimilation to American culture. What this suggests is that in order to assimilate fully into American culture, to fit better into the American classroom, to become better students, Asian American students should break their cultural habit of silence. Neither during the CCCC’s session nor in the scholarly work I have read have scholars who address silence as a trait of Chinese students questioned *whether* students should change this behavior. The assumption is that they need to do so.

By regarding silence as a deficit, scholars are missing an opportunity to consider ways in which silence could be considered beneficial to learning. In

Chinese culture, where silence is considered something positive and powerful, silence plays an important part in shaping good learner identity. May Paomay Tung, a Chinese practicing psychiatry in the United States, has conducted research on Chinese Americans and their immigrant parents. She offers a Chinese saying to explain why Chinese are more sensitive to the environment before they speak:

病从口入 (*bing cong kou ru*) : Disease enters through the mouth;

祸从口出 (*huo cong kou chu*) : Disaster comes out from the mouth.

Tung explains that Chinese people are very careful when they are speaking because they have been taught to believe that careless speech might invite troubles; they do not want to be the first to speak because they want to listen to others and avoid mistakes. She mentions that above all, Chinese people prioritize harmony before argument and discussion. Silence is also a powerful rhetorical strategy both in Chinese conversation and writing. As the saying goes, “silence is gold.” In Chinese culture, it is generally believed that it is easy to speak on one’s first instinct but hard to refrain from that instinct. In this sense, silence is understood as something obtained through effort and deliberation. Therefore, silence as a rhetorical choice is considered to be a strong rhetorical power in Chinese culture.

The rhetorical power of silence is interpreted totally differently in Western culture. As Laura Beth Carroll and Mary Joanne Farrell point respectively in their studies on silence, the rhetorical power of silence has

been completely ignored and dismissed. In “The Rhetoric of Silence,” Farrell notes that in the Western culture, binary thinking dichotomizes speech with silence, equating “speech with action, expression, and action” and silence with “absence, oppression, or passivity” (ii). In “The Rhetoric of Silence: Understanding Absence as Presence,” Carroll argues in line with Farrell that silence is often equated with absence, and therefore deemed powerless (ii). Providing further critical explication of this presence/absence dichotomy as it connected to speech, Debra Jacobs has shown how the dichotomy reinforces Western, Platonic thinking, evidence of which is found in the concept of “voice” in writing. Jacobs explains that as a metaphor for the actual presence of writer in his or her text, voice is a quality of writing that is deemed to make writing better—more lively, more assertive, more powerful. A “voiceless” text, on the other hand, is one in which the unique personality of the writer is absent, the “self” not asserted (“Voice”). Although Jacobs is critical of this view for several reasons, the one I will mention here is that the privileging of “voice” suggests that a certain manner of expression can somehow better represent the “self” than other manners of expression, a simplistic view that, as Jacobs argues, overlooks that a writer makes deliberate choices based on a given rhetorical situation. Those choices evidence not a “self” that the voice or style of writing can represent; instead, the writer represents through the choices made the understanding he or she has of the rhetorical situation, including who the writer

is, or better, how the writer is constructed in and by the rhetorical situation (“Dialogic Space”).

Jacobs’s idea about deliberate choice is important for understanding how silence can be regarded as a rhetorical strategy. Carroll writes, “Silence can function rhetorically as presence when people choose silence as a communicative act. These rhetors make meaning through silence, and because their silence has meaning, it has positive discursive value. (2)

Carroll argues that silence is a powerful discursive tool that rhetors use to align themselves with power or to resist power. Unfortunately, however, the use of silence among Chinese students is seldom considered from such a perspective. From my own observations and experiences as a Chinese student who has spent five years of doctoral study at an American university, I can relate that the most usual way I have seen the silence of Chinese students to be interpreted by American professors and students is as passivity or shyness. Also, I conducted interviews of several Chinese graduate students in various disciplines at both my own institution and at other American universities. One of the topics I asked questions about was silence. I provide the following example of Fei Zhang as illustrative of what many of the interviewees related.

During the five years that I have known her, Fei has not been shy or quiet when she interacts with Chinese students. During the interview with her, she informed me that she was a very articulate and outspoken student even

when she was in a lecture class in China. She has noticed that she has been much more quiet in her graduate classes in the United States. When asked the reasons behind the change, she said that she was vexed when the whole class—the teacher and the students—turned their heads and faces to her to look for an answer to the issue of Chinese plagiarism of intellectual properties and of Microsoft products; she was disappointed when the class discussion drifted into mindless chat or when the class online discussion soured into acrimonious personal attack or hate speech. Then she chose to be silent as a resistance to what is going in the class, to peers' discussion, and to the teacher's pedagogy.

However, her silence was not read as resistance but as “typical” Asian shyness. She did not realize the gap between her intention of silencing herself and the interpretation of her silence until the end of the semester when the teacher gave back her paper which has an “A” on it and numerous positive comments. The teacher said to her, “Your writing shows that you have learned a lot from this course, so why have you been so quiet throughout the semester? Are you a shy person?” She was astounded. She wanted to tell the teacher that for her entire life she had never been told by anybody that she was a shy person; she wanted to tell the teacher that she chose to be silence because of her resistance to the activities and discussions that she believed to be time-wasting and naïve. But she chose silence again, not wanting to be misunderstood again.

This is not an isolated example. This example and the experiences that Chinese students shared with me attest to the misunderstanding of silence of Chinese students in American classrooms. Because of its negative value in the West, silence should be used with caution when it is intended as resistance. In the story of Fei, her resistance to her is meaningful because she refused to conform to the norms prescribed by her peers and her teacher, but the misinterpretation by her teacher and possibly by her peers of her silence as shyness or incompetence produces the effect that while resisting the norms her silence is reinforcing the stereotypical image of the shy and submissive Asian (female) identity.

It is interesting to note that Fei's teacher asks her why she has not spoken more in class given that her writing shows that she has learned a lot from the course. The comment reflects a view of student silence as not having anything to say or, worse, of not understanding what is being taught. This view does not take into account that silence can be a useful learning strategy. Writing of the educational benefits of silence, Pat Belanoff acknowledges that the very notion that silence could be regarded as a learning strategy strikes some educators as astounding in a culture "fearful of silence" and a pedagogy advocating actions (400)., Pat Belanoff argues, In "Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching," Belanoff argues that that though silence has been deemed negative and disempowering both in American culture and in scholarship on pedagogy, "silence has positive outcomes" (410). According to

Belanoff, silence can be positive because silence is the precondition for voice to occur, to be heard, and to be meditated and reflected upon. Though her discussion of silence focuses on reading and writing, Belanoff believes that the reflection, meditation, and contemplation contained in silence is applicable to any learning context. As she explains, these three activities are essential to understanding, interpreting, and experiencing virtually any kind educational materials. Belanoff argues, for example, that a learner/student comes to a “full” reading of a text only within a “web” of other texts. Influenced by the poststructuralist notion of intertextuality, Belanoff explains that webs, or connections of texts to other texts, are usually constructed through reflection at a subconscious level—similar to the way we construct the syntactical patterns of our native language—but we can access these patterns through metacognitive, meditative, contemplative, reflective probings.

It is not typical to find educators who take a positive view of silence as something that might even be encouraged. More typically, it is regarded as a deficit to overcome. As has been stated, speaking out has been associated with understanding and feeling motivated to speak. This view suggests that speaking is strictly up to the individual student. But speaking in the classroom is not solely initiated by the speaker/student. It is orchestrated by all factors in the classroom: teachers, pedagogy, peers, and dominant discourse at large. As Jun Liu reports from his/her qualitative study of twenty Asian graduate students (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.) from both social and natural

sciences at a Midwestern university, there are multiple factors at play in the reticence of Asian students. Among the most cited by the Asian students were the differences they faced between the pedagogical approaches and classroom environments they had experienced in their home countries and those in the United States. The students also mentioned socio-cultural and affective factors.

Susan Parks and Patricia M. Raymond, based on a study they conducted of learning strategies used by non-native speakers in an MBA program, similarly dispel the notion that a good international student learner is someone with “high motivation to communicate, no matter where he is”; someone who will “seek out opportunities to use the language by looking for native speakers”; someone who will “initiate conversations with the teacher”; or someone who will “usually take advantage of every opportunity to speak in class” (Rubin 43-47; qtd in Parks and Raymond 375). They regard this notion as reflecting a static and essentialist view of what criteria constitute the label “good international student learner,” a view that leads to the assumption that “an understanding of the types of strategies used by good language learners will, from a pedagogical perspective, be beneficial to those learners who have been less successful” (375). Parks and Raymond note that strategies used successfully by international students from one culture cannot necessarily be used successfully by students from another culture. As they contend, seeking out opportunities to contact with native speakers and speak out in the class

has been a typical strategy for good language learner, but “recent studies involving international students in academic contexts have suggested that such initiatives may not be so easy” (376). Drawing from the experiences of eighteen Chinese graduate students with various pedagogical practices, Parks and Raymond examine how social context may constrain or facilitate Chinese students in developing effective strategies. On the one hand, as they argue, “pedagogical approaches influenced by socio-constructivist/sociocultural theory have proved much more effective in facilitating Chinese graduate students than traditional transmission modes of teaching (focused on lecturing)” (377). On the other hand, they caution that since a transmission mode of teaching is still prevalent, “Chinese students, like their mainstream counterparts, must learn to master the discursive norms implicit in such activity settings” (377). Their suggestion for teachers with such traditional pedagogy is that they could encourage students to ask more questions or skillfully design group work that draws on Confucian values of cooperation (377).

While offering practical advice to both teachers and students, Parks and Raymond have left unquestioned the student-centered pedagogy because they seem to suggest that such pedagogy can allow the marginalized Chinese graduate students to have the same legitimacy to speak as their mainstream peers. In her critical investigation of student-centered pedagogy, Evelyn Ashton-Jones discusses the reification of dominant ideology in even the seemingly egalitarian setting of a peer work group. In her dissertation,

“Collaborative Learning in Composition: Gender and Ideology,” Ashton-Jones argues that “despite its claimed opposition to the authoritarianism of the traditional presentational pedagogy, collaborative learning—implemented in group work and discussion—reproduces the status quo” (vi). She believes that writing groups, like other pedagogies, help establish and maintain the dominant ideology. Therefore, she suggests that to use collaborative or student-centered pedagogy more effectively, “teachers must be cognizant of the social dynamics of these groups” (vii).

Since the time when Ashton-Jones wrote her dissertation in 1989, there have been some studies of the dynamics of peer groups in the classroom. However, as Parks and Raymond point out, scholarship on how graduate students interact with native speakers in group work is scant. Based on what little scholarship they have been able to find, along with their own observations, they are able to suggest that the uneven power relationship between Chinese graduate students and their native speaker peers creates another difficulty for Chinese students in speaking out during the group work or class discussion (377). On the side of Chinese students, they often overestimate their American peers’ abilities in speaking, learning, and writing by assuming that their nervousness over speaking to the class and their feelings of struggling with writing are not shared by native speakers. Because of their lack of confidence in their language, Chinese students tend to position themselves as poorer learners in the group work. On the other side of the relationship, because of

the apparent language limitations of some Chinese graduate students, native speakers “consciously or not” tend to “be positioning themselves as experts, masters, or at least more senior members of a community of practice and their bilingual group mates as novices, incompetents, or apprentices” (Leki 377).

Therefore, even though Chinese graduate students may want to initiate contact or collaboration with native speakers, they may finally give up such an initiation because they feel that their American peers may not welcome them or treat them as peers.

The student-centered pedagogy can be problematic not only because it can reproduce the status quo of the imbalance of power relationship between Chinese graduate students and their English-native-speaking peers. The teachers who are exercising this pedagogy can be facilitative or debilitating depending on the teachers' positioning with Chinese students. If the teachers have stereotypes about Chinese students and are not truly interested in what Chinese students want to say, the invitation to speak out in the class issued from the teachers and their student-centered pedagogy will be automatically cancelled. If the teachers position themselves as gatekeepers or guardians of Standard English, they can only be accomplices in silencing Chinese students. If the materials that the teachers are reinforcing the dominant ideologies about race, culture, gender, and class, they would only produce more silent Chinese learners who internalize those norms and silence themselves eventually.

Understanding that “learning strategies involve an ability to monitor the learning situation and respond accordingly,” Zuhail Okan, one of the contributing authors to *Contrastive Rhetoric: Issues, Insights, and Pedagogy*, notes that most of the early studies on learning strategies were devoted to identifying learning strategies of good learners so that these strategies can be made available to less successful learners (131-32). Okan goes to argue that it is rather ironic that an active learner is not necessarily a successful learner while many successful classroom learners have been observed as silent learners (132). It is clear from the American expression “Still waters run deep” that Okan and similar scholars mentioned in this section are definitely not alone in recognizing that silence cannot by itself be taken as a sign for lack of understanding or motivation. Nor can it be dismissed as a learning strategy.

This is not to suggest that active participation is not a useful learning strategy. Speaking from experience as a Chinese graduate student at an American university, I must hasten to say that I have felt myself gain new perspectives in certain student-centered classrooms that compelled me to voice my ideas to others, but I also recognize that other factors were at play as well. Upon reflection, I believe one of the most important factors in such classrooms for me has been the teacher. As I have stated, all the ideals of active learning in a student-centered can be cancelled depending on the teacher, and likely depending on any number of other factors that need to be further investigated. Certainly it is safe to say that because such investigation

has not yet occurred, we should not dichotomize silence and active participation, dismissing silence as debilitating to learning.

This chapter has attempted to problematize the entrenched understanding about binaries concerning Chinese student identities, especially binaries that conceive Chinese students as the passive, silent, and uncreative rote learners as oppositional to the creative, active, and critical Western learners. Through problematizing the ingrained understandings about these binaries, this chapter reminds us how easy both international students and teachers of international students can make ourselves vulnerable to essentialism and binary thinking when it comes to learning. Though we are all sometimes guilty of essentialism and binary thinking, it is, however, our mission to become more vigilant of these academic sins, seeing the classroom as sites of conflicting ideologies, conflicting educational values, conflicting cultural influences. Learning from Lu in “Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing,” we need not only to tolerate these conflicts but also to see these differences as constructive toward a critical thinking toward learning and teaching, toward pedagogy and ideology, and toward a critical construction of new identity. As teachers having ESL students in their classrooms, while familiarizing ourselves with theories about the differences and similarities between Chinese students and American students, we need to remind ourselves of the fact that each ESL student is the product of negotiating with two or more conflicting ideologies or discourses. As Foucault reminds us,

while translating and submitting to the dominant ideologies, each individual is transforming or subverting dominant ideologies in his or her individual ways.

## Chapter Four

### **The Paradigm of Western Pedagogy and the Subject of Chinese International Teaching Assistants**

*The importance of the conditions of the teaching personnel is the utmost because those are also the learning conditions of the students.*  
--Karen Thompson

Unlike the learning diversity of international students that is under-discussed and under-valued in the scholarship, the issues concerning international teaching assistants (ITAs) have caught attention from a good number of scholars, researchers, and writing program administrators. Scholars have rightly pointed out that the general problems with ITAs are their linguistic deficiency, ignorance of American culture, and unfamiliarity with American (especially student-centered or critical) pedagogy. Such studies have clearly identified for ITAs and program administrators who train ITAs the directions that they need to move during ITAs' adjustment to the teaching task at American higher institutions. However, these studies have also prescribed for ITAs a unitary good teacher identity, who speaks perfect Standard English, has the cultural authority in the classroom, and uses one (which is the student-centered) pedagogy, for them to fit into. Such an essentialist view makes practical trainings of ITAs problematic not only because it is impossible for ITAs to obtain perfect linguistic proficiency, not to say within a

semester-long training session, but also because it is hard to specify what aspects of American culture and what kind of pedagogy should be taught to ITAs so that they could become more like English-native-speaking teaching assistants or professors.

Other studies trace specifically the teaching styles and problems of Chinese ITAs to their cultural and educational backgrounds to help us better understand why ITAs have these problems. While offering cultural insights into ITA problems, some studies tend to dichotomize Chinese teacher-centered pedagogy and American student-centered pedagogy, arguing that to better fit into the classroom, Chinese ITAs should discard teacher authority and downplay their power in the American classroom. Such a binary has not only dismissed teacher authority as a necessary condition for any pedagogy, either student-centered or teacher-centered, but has also set teacher-centered pedagogy in opposition to student-centered pedagogy.

Reviewing how the problems with Chinese ITAs have been perceived and approached, this chapter first argues that the well-cited problems with Chinese ITAs and the binary thinking in some studies have shrouded the lack of teacher's authority of Chinese ITAs. Believing that teacher authority is a necessary condition rather than an enemy to effective pedagogy, this chapter further argues that understanding the lack of authority of Chinese ITAs and reestablishing their teacher's authority are both important to critical pedagogy. Finally, this chapter will use first-hand experiences with a training program at

an American university tailored toward Chinese ITAs that engages both teacher's authority and critical pedagogy.

Like the previous chapters, this chapter intends to problematize essentialism and binary thinking ingrained in existing studies by arguing that there is neither unitary teacher identity nor unitary approach to critical pedagogy. It tries to argue that either empowering students or empowering teachers is another binary that misleads us to dichotomize student-centered pedagogy with teacher-centered pedagogy and consequently students and teachers as oppositional.

### **Chinese ITAs and the Lack of Teacher Authority**

Increasing reliance on graduate teaching assistants (GTA) for undergraduate instruction has dominated the U.S. university campuses for more than a decade (Luo 1) and benefited U.S. higher education while creating new problems that most higher institutions are not ready, prepared, able, or willing to solve. The use of GTAs has relieved full-time professors from being overloaded with teaching undergraduates so that they could have time for scholarship. It has also relieved graduate students from paying enormous amounts of tuition for their graduate studies. While this practical function of GTAs has helped many U.S. universities accomplish their educational missions (Luo 9), their lack of experience and training in teaching and lack of commitment to undergraduate teaching have made their teaching problematic.

This leads the “universities to face the ethical issue of providing high-quality instruction to their undergraduate students” (Coimbra 15). Though many universities have offered a two-to-five day workshop to train new GTAs in dealing with the fundamental issues in teaching undergraduate courses, such as proper teaching behaviors, institution guidelines, rubrics of grading, and plagiarism, etc, the support is not sufficient, and the guidelines are not discipline-specific enough to enable new GTAs to develop effective classroom management strategies; GTAs are “usually left on their own to ‘sink or swim’ in the complexity of college teaching” (Coimbra 15).

There are even more problems when ITAs assume the role of instructor at a college classroom when at east fifty percent of the student population is made up of English-native-speaking students. As the numerous studies on the ITA phenomenon suggest, their lack of native linguistic competence, their ineffective communication skills, their unawareness of the popular pedagogical practices in U.S., and their insensitivity to U.S. college students’ expectations have been exacerbating the GTA problem and consequently endangering the quality of undergraduate instruction.

The ever growing number of international teaching assistants has drawn attention from multiple parties—university administrators, graduate supervisors, “second and foreign language educators, undergraduate students, politicians, and the public at large” (Coimbra 16). As the percentage of Chinese ITAs has steadily climbed at U.S. higher institutions, especially at research

universities, the need to address the issues facing Chinese ITAs is inevitable, especially when Chinese ITAs have expanded their turf from natural sciences such as engineering, chemistry, physics, computer, and mathematics to social sciences including English, anthropology, education, history, communication, business, and political science where teaching is more complex and demands not only a higher level of linguistic frequency but also a higher level of sensitivity to American culture.

As Coimbra summarizes in her literature review of past studies on ITAs, there are three major focuses of these studies and accordingly of the efforts of ITA training programs: ITA pronunciation, intercultural communication, and effective teaching behavior (16-8). To screen ITAs for qualified candidates for undergraduate instruction, some state legislatures have passed laws requiring all international teaching assistants to pass English Oral Proficiency Test before they are allowed to assume teaching responsibilities in the real classroom (Constantinides 20; Coimbra 17). Therefore some programs for ITAs focus on ITAs' pronunciation and conversational skills. Some other ITAs program developers realize that raising consciousness of cultural difference is also as important as correcting ITAs' pronunciation (Coimbra 18). The third challenge for ITAs is pedagogical challenges such as "unfamiliarity with teaching approaches, misinterpretations of undergraduate student behavior, and misperceptions of undergraduate student feedback" (Coimbra 18).

These focuses have made both administrators and ITAs more aware of

the problems that need to be fixed. Yet, a semester-long training program with these focuses is still superficial because there are many deeper issues that have been hidden or camouflaged under the issues of linguistic incompetence, ineffective communication skills, and unfamiliarity with pedagogical practices of international graduate teaching assistants. Unsurprisingly, such a program can only do a lip service to those issues, believing that ITAs could act according to their prescription of teaching behaviors and communication strategies, and as a result, leaving the ITAs to struggle on their own with those deeper issues. The emphasis on the three-rung issues of ITAs has cloaked the vulnerability of the teaching condition of international graduate teaching assistants.

Most studies have based their conclusions or suggestions on undergraduate students' evaluation on ITAs, but few have questioned the validity of student evaluation. Admittedly, student evaluation has been widely used as a useful indicator of teaching performance in a number of important categories such as knowledge in the subject matter, respect for students, preparedness for class, effective communication, propriety and fairness in assigning and grading assignments, and availability of access after class. But there are a lot of factors that are not reflected on students' evaluation. For example, how good is the student-teacher relationship? Does the student like the teacher or not? Is the teacher a hard grader or an easy grader? There are a lot of subjective factors that are affecting students' evaluation, but these

factors go unnoticed. Among the factors mentioned above, a positive student-teacher relationship is a precondition for all positive evaluations of other factors such as knowledge in the subject matter, respect for students, preparedness for class, effective communication, propriety and fairness in assigning and grading assignments, and availability of access after class. A good-student relationship builds a good ethos with the students, creating a channel for the teacher's expertise or knowledge to flow from the teacher to the students. To attain a good student-teacher relationship needs, however, much effort and negotiation from both teachers and the students within the culture and even more in a cross-cultural classroom.

Even fewer studies have realized that teaching first year or second year undergraduate students is the most challenging teaching task at university settings. The challenge first comes from the fact that the first or second year students are novice learners at university communities and need a lot of adjustments both in academic life and personal life, and therefore they expect the most from the teachers on the one hand and have little discipline knowledge to collaborate with their teachers in learning on the other. Overall, they need the most guidance than undergraduates at other levels.

Numerous studies have addressed the problems with ITAs by comparing undergraduate students' evaluation of English-native-speaking GTAs with their evaluation of ITAs, without realizing that ITAs are positioned differently with the U.S. dominant discourse from English-native-speaking

GTAs, though both are in low status in the academia. Nor do researchers delve into the issue of how and why in ITAs are positioned differently with their undergraduate students from English-native-speaking GTAs.

Relying on GTAs for undergraduate instruction has also shifted the traditional educational philosophy of teaching toward research (Luo 9). The result of this shift is both a practical and symbolic separation of teaching from research. Since research has been endowed with more prestige and respect, the shift further severs the prestige and authority of the professoriate from the real classroom teaching by GTAs. Because of their lowest status as a student-teacher, a part-time, low-paying instructor, because of their minimum experience and training in teaching, GTAs are not endowed the same (sometimes very meager) prestige, respect, and authority that administrators, full time professors, undergraduate students, and society at large outside the academia give to the “normal” professors.

Teachers authority is one of the most vexing questions facing GTAs. In “The GTA Experience: Grounding, Practicing, Evaluating, and Reflecting,” Meg Morgan explains the catch-22 situation of GTA. On the one hand, “we do try to promote a student-centered classroom: We encourage group work at many levels, discourage unnecessary lecturing, encourage one-on-one teaching when possible”, but on the other hand, GTAs are very concerned about their authority in the classroom (395). So, “when first-year students challenge the

teacher or the teacher's policies, the tension between the teacher as an authority and the students as the center of the classroom often disables the teacher" (395). It is both challenging and painful to try to downplay teacher authority while being desperate to retain and grow the tenuous authority.

The issue of authority becomes even more problematic when ITAs assume the role of instructor at an American university classroom, a role used to belong to the full time professors, a role used to belong to native speakers of English, a role used to belong to white males whom they have been looking up to as their models. Because of their multi-faceted deficiency as a poor user of English language, a poor communicator of the English language, and a poor teacher who does not know the pedagogy prevalent in U.S. college classroom, the ITAs receive even less respect from undergraduate students who have been normalized and trained to believe that their ITA instructor has little or no authority in the classroom. This negative attitude often leads unsurprisingly to a lack of trust and confidence in the teacher's instruction and inevitably to student-teacher miscommunications. The overemphasis on linguistic incompetence, communication skills, and pedagogical practices has therefore dangerously cloaked the most vulnerable teaching condition of the ITAs.

What is disturbing to note is that most studies have taken an essentialist point of view in looking at U.S. college pedagogy, especially student-centered pedagogy, believing this pedagogy is the norm, more democratic than the "authoritarian" pedagogy of non-English-dominant

countries. By beckoning or assisting ITAs to become normal American teachers, these programs are essentializing pedagogy: there is a good teaching pedagogy that is effective for all disciplines, natural sciences or social sciences, and applicable for all teaching situations, whether lectures and class discussions or workshops and labs, and that produces the same effect on all kinds of students, undergraduate or graduate, men or women, quiet or loud, American or Chinese, and works equally well with all teachers, regardless of racial, cultural, linguistic backgrounds, and class and gender differences.

Some cross cultural studies tend to bring out the differences in the two countries in educational system and pedagogy, but it is unsettling to see that while emphasizing the differences between the two cultures, these studies have created binaries about the differences between U.S. and China (and other countries as well) in educational system and pedagogy, stereotyping Chinese pedagogy as authoritarian and teacher-centered and American pedagogy as liberatory and student-centered.

The essentialism and binaries have not only reinforced the superiority of U.S. pedagogy but also misrepresented the differences between the two cultures in educational systems and beliefs and pedagogies. As a result, these essentialist ideas and binaries eventually mislead Chinese ITAs in the process of transforming into a good teacher in the U.S. undergraduate classroom. The superiority of American pedagogy and educational system has further aggravated the inferiority mentality of Chinese ITAs, making their tenuous

authority more vulnerable to the negative attitudes from undergraduate students and colleagues.

ITAs have not only changed the diversity of teaching profession but also challenged our assumption about teacher authority. Consequently, in a trend to decenter teacher authority both in research and pedagogical practices in U.S. higher education, the issue of teacher authority of ITAs further complicates our understanding about empowering students. In the cross-cultural context of the class taught by ITAs, the power distribution between teacher and student is not the same as with U.S. graduate teaching assistants or with full time professors. International teaching assistants' vulnerable positioning with the dominant discourse and with undergraduate students they are teaching has further challenged the prevalent assumption that power is something that teachers possess and can be transferred to the students. It also demystifies the either-or dilemma of the current research and pedagogy: either teacher-centered or student-centered, either empowering teachers or empowering students.

In this chapter, I will use ITAs teaching English composition as a perspective to look into the issue of teacher authority. Teaching English to native speakers of English, ITAs have met the most daunting teaching task—challenging the impossible. Their struggles and successes hold significant implications for understanding the problems with ITAs at large and for understanding teaching freshmen composition as well.

## **Teacher Identity, Educational Ideology, and Pedagogy**

To most teachers, teaching is not just a profession that they have expertise in, a career that they work hard for, a position that they are paid for; it is an essential part of their identity and a state of being. Being a teacher, as Jane Danielewicz defines in *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education*, is “engagement with identity, the way individuals conceive of themselves so that teaching is a state of being, not merely ways to acting or behaving” (3). For GTAs who have little or no training in teaching undergraduate students, learning to teach is not just learning how to make a syllabus, how to begin and end a class effectively, how to set up groups, how to give assignments, how to grade papers, how to hold conferences or office hours with students, how to dress properly, how to handle student’s questions, how to use technology. To be a good teacher is not enough just to act as a good teacher in those teaching contexts. It is also a learning to be a teacher, to come to terms with an identity, to know what it means to be a teacher. To be a good teacher is to construct a professional identity that is both accepted by the dominant discourse, by the students, and more importantly by teachers themselves.

For ITAs, it is not just to learn to speak Standard English, act properly, and utilize proper methods to organize a class like “typical” American

university teachers. It is not just to learn how to act or behave like 'typical' American teaching assistants or professors. It is, more importantly, coming to terms with a new identity as a teacher, an unfamiliar identity as a Chinese teaching English writing to U.S. undergraduate students, more than half of which are native speakers of English. To be a teacher is to gain a new consciousness, a new way of being, a new way of thinking.

Teacher identity cannot be constructed single-handedly by individual teachers though the consciousness of the being as a teacher has to be realized by individuals. Drawing on sociologist Richard Jenkins, Danielewicz reminds us that identity development is not an individual act, and it depends on social interaction through engagement in multiple discourses" because of the nature of the discourses that construct our identities:

Discourses are powerfully constructive of identities because they are inherently ideological. Many discourses are multiple and simultaneous; at one time an individual can be involved in many different discourses. Discourses are not only various; they are also hierarchical. Sometimes participation in one discourse conflicts with or counteracts membership in another. In some instances, individuals have the opportunity to choose between competing discourses. These choices have significant ramifications in terms of identity. In addition, some discourses carry greater social value and prestige compared with others.

Thus, identity development depends on social interaction through engagement in multiple discourses. (11)

There are multiple discourses at play during the construction of writing teacher identity: educational ideology, dominant composition pedagogy, and dominant discourse about race, gender, student-teacher relationship, etc. On the one hand, these various discourses have served as normalizing forces that shape writing teacher identity, and on the other hand individual teachers have their opportunities to choose their positioning with the dominant discourse, how to negotiate the competing discourses.

Teacher identity as an engagement or negotiation with multiple discourses is not fixed. It is a process during which individuals come to realize the normalizing forces of the various discourses and finally to negotiate with those discourses. Seeing it as a process invites individual teachers to challenge the identity or status that has been prescribed by the discursive discourses and eventually to re-construct their teacher identity.

It can be assumed that ITAs' understanding and beliefs about higher education and teaching are influenced by the educational beliefs and pedagogies in the two cultures, so it is of relevance to review the cross-cultural studies. In comparison to American teaching, Chinese teacher has always been singled out as authoritarian. The Chinese teacher is identified as an authority figure in Ilona Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers*. According to her, Chinese "teachers are highly respected but also are expected to behave like

mentors, to involve themselves in the students' lives, to know about them as people, and to guide them closely in moral, personal, or educational decisions" (56).

This parent-mentor-authority role of Chinese teachers is given more details by Amy Wang in her comparative studies, "Educational Beliefs and Academic Performance: Chinese Students in the United States." In her study, she believes that the contemporary Chinese educational ideology is still influenced by the same ideology of Confucianism of two thousand years, especially by its ideology of moral cultivation. Enjoying the matchless centrality in Chinese society, Chinese education has been believed to be essential to the "development of personal moral integrity, the organization of a well-established family structure, and the construction of a well-ordered state" (Wang 10). Because of the ideology of moral cultivation, education in China is reserved for the social elite who can provide moral compass for the public. Therefore, the Chinese have very high expectations for intellectuals and restrict access only to elite intellectual positions. Therefore, though education, especially higher education, becomes the only way to success, only most competent students can access higher education. Owe to the centrality of education and restricted access to higher education, the high status of intellectuals persist and continue to influence the social status of today's Chinese teachers. Teachers in China today still receive special social status of respect and prestige, though they are not necessarily well paid.

Wang believes that Chinese teachers assume the role of parents:

In Chinese society, parents are the authoritative figures at home; at school, teachers represent parents and become the authoritative figure. Teachers have the authority to discipline and supervise students, while students are obliged to respect and obey their teachers. (14)

Teacher authority is not just in the abstract; it is embodied in the classroom when the students stand up to greet and salute the teachers when the teachers enter the classroom (Wang 14). As a salute might indicate, Chinese teachers have a tremendous amount of authority in the Chinese classroom.

Here is what Wang says of this authority:

The teacher pronounces, the students unconditionally accepts; The teacher lectures, the students take notes, believing “what the teachers says” is the “orthodox knowledge.” . . . Teachers do not encourage students to ask questions or to talk in class; teachers do not require the students to explain what they learned; teachers ask students to only memorize the lectures and to repeat the materials they read. (15)

As Juan Xu observes in her dissertation, “Chinese Students’ Adaptation to Learning in an American University,” Chinese instruction can be considered highly teacher-centered in that the instructional process is typically “one-way and teacher-controlled” (3).

In contrast to the teacher-centered Chinese classroom, the American (graduate) classroom is rather student-centered. Xu's first impression about such a class was that the class seemed like "an informal meeting," the coordinator of which is hard to find. It seemed to her that the teacher did not occupy a dominant position in the class. Xu came to regard this class as highly democratic, not only because everyone had an equal chance to present to the class but also because everyone shared equally the learning opportunities during the group work. Finally, Xu shares that the class discussions enabled her to see multiple perspectives and to share her personal experiences (2-3).

Such a democratic and liberal pedagogy is based on American concept of democracy and Dewey's theory of experience and progressivism. With the democratic ideal, U.S. educational system is to provide equal opportunities for each individual (Wang 19). This equal access to higher education is in contrast to Chinese competitive college entrance exam, according to Wang. At the same time, under influence of Dewey's theory of experience, American education "emphasizes the significance of individuals' experience in the educational process" (Wang 22). So contrary to the lecturing of Chinese teachers, American teachers will encourage students to participate in the learning process (23).

Though her comparison focuses on the two different educational systems and pedagogy, Wang concludes with observations that further support the dichotomizing of Chinese teacher identity as authoritarian and American

teacher identity as liberal and democratic:

In Chinese education, teachers are authoritative figures. The knowledge they impart is considered to be absolute. But in the American system, teachers are seen as facilitators and guides; they motivate students to explore and to experience, without transmitting them any indisputable knowledge. Therefore, compared to their Chinese counterparts, American teachers are less authoritarian in the learning process. (24)

The issue of teacher authority is further present in another binary in the existing studies and scholarship on the difference between Chinese writing pedagogy and American writing pedagogy. The writing instruction in China, according to Matalene, is that of imitation. As she writes, all her students in China tell her that the traditional method of Chinese (writing) instruction is to offer students “good models and make them follow them” (794). This imitation pedagogy is further closely observed by Xiaoye You in “‘The Choice Made from No Choice’: English Writing Instruction in a Chinese University.” As he notices, the current-traditional approach has influenced English writing instruction in China since the early years of the 1900s. With its focus on correct forms, current-traditionalism is still the dominant writing pedagogy in English writing instruction in China, despite the introduction and influence of process pedagogies in China. Observing a typical English writing class for non-English majors at a major university in China, You affirms that writing instruction is

“taught under the guidance of a nationally unified syllabus and examination system.” Teachers, You relates, are “predominantly concerned about the teaching of correct form and test-taking skills” and do not have either the time or incentive to go through pre-writing and revising activities (97).

This current traditional approach can be found both in the general syllabus designed by the College English Test Committee and in the real classroom teaching. The mandatory writing test designed for non-English majors in college has a clear focus on correct form: “the writing needs to be correct in expression, coherent, and without significant grammatical mistakes” (103). With this parameter in mind, writing teachers set the correct form for the students and teach the form by giving them models to follow.

The contrast between Chinese current-traditional writing pedagogy and American process (especially expressivist) pedagogy is more clearly drawn in Xiaoming Li’s *“Good Writing” in Cross Cultural Contexts*. After examining carefully the theories and conceptions about writing and rhetoric of the two Chinese writing teachers and two American writing teachers, Li comes to an conclusion that the two Chinese teachers “offer clear guidance when students stray from the right track; they are eager to demonstrate the right way” to the students (96). In contrast, the two American teachers encourage the students to “Be yourself, be different”; they “may raise questions, urge the students to probe other possibilities”; they “refrain from feeding students answers and solutions” (96). The conclusion to be drawn from Li’s examination is that

Chinese teachers clearly claim their authority while the American teachers tend to downplay their authority in the writing process.

### **Teacher Authority and Critical Pedagogy**

If the binaries so far constructed for Chinese teachers and American teachers both in general and in the specific field of writing are true, then Chinese ITAs will have a real dilemma to deal with. On the one hand, coming from a culture where teachers enjoy respect and authority both in the classroom and outside, Chinese ITAs are likely to demand the same respect and authority from their undergraduate students in American college classroom. But on the other hand, the trend in American higher education is to decenter the teacher authority and to empower students. As Julia Ferganchick notices in her article “Contrapower Harassment in Program Administration: Establishing Teacher Authority,” to “decenter teacher authority in the composition classroom” and to empower students has become the trend in the field of rhetoric and composition and “affects teachers of writing at every level” (331). This “questioning of teacher authority,” as she further points out, has touched every aspect of our scholarship, changing the way we theorize about, research, and practice the teaching of writing” (331).

In the last three decades since the publication in 1969 of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, scholars have tended to believe that radical pedagogy or feminist pedagogy can free students from the oppression of

teacher authority and have power in the classroom. As Gary Olson notices, “scholars in literacy studies and in rhetoric and composition have recognized that traditional power arrangements in the classroom are counterproductive and that learning is much more likely to occur when students are active participants in their own education—that is, when a significant portion of the teacher’s ‘authority’ is transferred to the students themselves” (Vii). Diminishing the teacher’s classroom authority, as Olson reminds us, has recently become the focal of scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition (Gale vii).

Therefore, Chinese ITAs have a real catch 22 to face. It seems that to fit better into the dominant trend of critical pedagogy they should without doubt decenter their authority in the classroom, but a precondition for such a decentering to happen is that they as teachers have adequate authority to relinquish. As discussed in the first section, as non-native speakers they obviously do not have the “natural” teacher’s authority, so what should they do? Could it also lead us to say that their lack of authority will disallow them to engage critical pedagogy? Such questions will be discussed by examining teacher authority and its relation to critical pedagogy.

The issue of teacher authority is brought “to the limelight of the composition arena” (1) when the writing instruction is moving away from a teacher-centered pedagogy to a student-centered pedagogy, as Xin Liu Gale rightly points out in her book *Teachers, Discourses, and Teacher Authority in*

*the Postmodern Composition Classroom*. Gale examines how the current composition theories and pedagogies treat the issue of teacher authority problematically. As she argues, in spite of the attempts of the current four major pedagogies—cognitivist, expressivist, social constructionist, and critical—to challenge, critique, and abandon teacher authority, this authority is a necessary condition for any teaching to be possible. Borrowing from Bourdieu and Passerson, she believes that any teaching requires institutional authority as a precondition for any pedagogical communication to take place (37). In other words, teaching demands and depends on the existence of institution and its authority as well. Though countless studies have called our attention to downplay institutional authority so that we could empower students in our classroom, we need to be always reminded that classroom writing instruction is impossible without the support of the existence and authority of the institution.

As Gale goes on to articulate, whether a theory or pedagogy is traditional or radical, teacher authority or expertise cannot be legitimized by teachers and scholars themselves. The teachers can change its pedagogical orientation, but they could not change the fact that “it is the institution’s acknowledgement of the teacher’s knowledge as legitimate that gives the teacher the authority of expertise” (Gale 48). Whether the teacher uses current-traditional or process pedagogy, a teacher’s authority does not solely come from his or her own expertise in theories and pedagogies. Teacher

authority is therefore a composite of the institutional authority, the authority of expertise, and personal authority, as Gale concludes (57).

In constructing a new teacher identity, Chinese ITAs may actually find that the dilemma about authority is actually constructed by the cross cultural studies that serve different educational and ideological interests. Whether a teacher identity is authoritarian or liberatory, authority is always not only present but also necessary. The reason why Chinese teachers are singled out as authoritarian is perhaps that the Chinese culture has made institutional authority and teacher authority visible in the dominant discourse and persistently and openly acclaimed the existence of such authority. On the other hand, teacher authority has always been downplayed in the West partly because authority (power) has always been condemned in the Western as something oppressive, something negative, and something as a hurdle to the goal of democracy. Whether condemned or acclaimed, teacher authority is a necessary condition for all teachings. Therefore, it is important that both ITA program developers and ITAs themselves realize that teacher authority is essential to their training.

However, it is not enough for them to recognize the importance of teacher authority in the training process; it is equally important for them to understand how authority is not endowed upon Chinese ITAs and how such a deprivation of authority is related with critical pedagogy.

Though a teacher's authority demands and depends on institutional

authority, Gale seems to fail to underscore that not all teachers are given the same authority or power by the institution, the dominant discourse, and culture. Because they are positioned differently within the dominant discourse, some teachers dominate the center while others are marginalized. In other words teachers at different rank or from different cultural backgrounds have different levels of authority or power. Positioned at one of the lowest rungs on the ladder of teaching professionals, GTAs certainly do not have the same authority as full-time or tenured professors even when they have the same authority of expertise. To say that the authority of all teaches has the same power is, therefore, to essentialize teacher authority and consequently teacher identity and to write off the different social and cultural positions of teachers.

To challenge this tendency to essentialize teacher authority, we then find Ferganchick's discussion of authority and gender very useful:

Although teacher authority has been at the center of our discussions in teacher training, work-shops, conventions, and publications, little attention has been paid to the difference social and cultural positions of men and women. As a community, we have taken for granted a stable and single definition of teacher authority that does not account for gender, racial, cultural, or other differences. I am certainly not arguing here that these various movements to alter our conceptions of teacher authority are invalid, but I do think that we have missed a crucial aspect of

this conversation. Particularly in a field where the majority of practitioners are women, we should be taking these differences into account when we discuss issues of teacher authority. (331)

Because male teachers and female teachers are positioned differently within the academic discourse, women teachers are many times in a more vulnerable positions than men teachers and are usually not given the same authority or power by the institution, dominant discourse, culture, and society.

Ferganchick further points out that liberatory pedagogy may be difficult for female teachers and put them into a very vulnerable situation. Drawing upon the results of a survey on nine hundred female teachers of college composition teachers across the United States, she finds that women's attempts to use liberatory approaches in their classrooms are often met with aggressive student response. Student-to-teacher aggression, which she termed as "contrapower harassment", has become one of the major contributors that are endangering and frustrating female teachers who are trying to implement liberatory composition pedagogies.

Teacher authority is gendered, and it leads to a contradiction between feminist pedagogy and classroom practice of female teachers. In "Revisiting Liberatory Pedagogies: Questioning Assumptions," Velvet Pearson and Anne Thorpe contends that even though numerous articles have been published on *Writing Instructor* to share teachers' experience in sharing power with their students, even though student-centered pedagogy has been declared

imperative, there is a danger for us to neglect to “interrogate the assumptions that student-centered pedagogy can often be quite difficult to put into practice” (3). Whether students can be really powered or not, we cannot assume that the same pedagogy—student-centered pedagogy—will produce the same pedagogical effect regardless of the gender, cultural, and racial background of the teacher. Whether student-centered pedagogy is good pedagogy or not, the same (or good) pedagogy does not work the same way with all teachers in all teaching situations. Though liberatory as has been theorized, feminist pedagogy will not necessarily lead to the liberation of the students.

Teacher authority is also racialized. Teachers of different racial background are positioned differently with the dominant discourse and within the social and cultural contexts. The often-marginalized positioning of minority teachers and teachers who are nonnative speakers of English decides that their teacher authority is invisibly but severely diminished by the very institutional authority and dominant discourse through their expertise is legitimized. Their skin color, cultural difference, their accent in speaking English, their “foreign” names, and their not-so-aggressive behaviors partially if not completely cancel out the expertise that they have worked so hard for so many years to gain.

This marginalization of nonnative speaker teachers both within and without the teaching profession makes Jacinta Thomas lament that nonnative speakers are not only strangers in the academia but also strangers on the periphery (5). Even though she knows that she can openly respond to

the challenging questions of her students, “Yes, this IS an ENGLISH class and I AM the teacher,” she is fully and annoyingly aware that nonnative speakers “often find ourselves in situations where we have to establish our credibility” as teachers of English “before we proceed to be taken seriously as professionals” (5). Evoking colleagues like her, she says that “I sometimes feel that I have to do twice as well to be accepted” (5). Her accent, as well as her skin color, has cancelled her credibility and competence as a teacher of English. Though linguistic competence is a problem to many nonnative speakers of English, Thomas argues that this problem is constructed on the fallacy that there is only one kind of English, the English spoken by inner circle (7) of the English speaking worlds, and that other varieties of English are not standard, and therefore are accents that have to be reduced or eliminated if nonnative speakers want to teach in the United States.

Sheila Minn Hwang explains how feminist pedagogy or liberatory pedagogy works differently and oftentimes against the teacher who is marginalized and helps us understand how important and necessary it is for teachers of color to claim their authority as teachers when that authority is threatened or deprived. In “At the limits of My Feminism: Race, Gender, Class, and the Execution of a Feminist Pedagogy,” she recounts how she is first fascinated by feminist pedagogy, then how her authority as a female graduate teaching assistant of color is threatened to a degree that teaching is almost impossible, how finally how she has decided to assert her authority as a

teacher as a necessary act to enable her teaching.

At the beginning of her class, being fascinated by the radical pedagogy, she rejects “the premise that instructors traditionally wield unquestioned power and authority over their students”:

As an instructor, I must attempt to readjust the balance of power in the classroom through strategies that lessen the degree to which students are force-fed truths universally acknowledged. Although many students demand that instructors digest the material and give them the right answer, liberal instructors struggle to help students learn to think in a critical fashion. For people interested in feminist pedagogy, there is no such thing as a right answer in interpreting literature. (Hwang155)

Determined to empower her students by encouraging them to challenge her interpretations, she experiments with strategies that are meant to help students develop critical thinking:

Common teaching strategies include having students search for faults in instructors’ arguments and having instructors play the devil’s advocate so that the students learn to work ideas out through debate. Feminist pedagogy involves asking many open-ended questions without settling on “correct” reading of a text, thereby allowing students to voice their own thoughts.

Inviting students to doubt their instructor’s interpretations begins

the process of student empowerment. (155)

As she passionately plays the devil's advocate to implement a feminist pedagogy in the literature class she is teaching to undergraduate students, she encounters challenges that are not described in the scholarship advocating feminist pedagogy. An unstated assumption that radical or liberatory pedagogies are based on is that teachers naturally and automatically have authority—so much so that it oppresses students and impedes their learning process. However, we cannot make the same assumption about authority when it comes to a Chinese American woman who teaches English Literature as a graduate teaching assistant like Hwang.

The challenges that she encounters in her attempts to downplay her teacher's authority and to empower students are not just the usual indifference and resistance from the students; the problems facing Hwang are not what she has expected: "The practical problems I have encountered with my pedagogical ideals is that they have the potential to erode my already tenuous authority" (156). At the beginning of the semester, she assumes that students would give her the same authority as any other teacher. It is not until the moment when she tries to undercut her teacher's authority does she realize sadly that the students from the beginning have not bestowed upon her the same amount of power as they would with "traditional" (normal) teachers of English. It is not until this moment that she realizes that as a graduate teaching assistant and as a young female Chinese American woman, she has incredibly

meager authority and little respect from her undergraduate students.

Hwang is not given “natural” authority as a “normal” teacher because her “subject position” as an “Asian American woman in the academy is not easily identifiable” with her field of expertise as a teacher of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century British literature; she does not match the normal picture of white, middle-aged, male English literature (160). Besides her ethnic background and gender, her position as a graduate teaching assistant is another player in diminishing her authority:

Our illegitimate authority is not only falsely imagined to be illegitimate on the basis of readings of gender and race; unfortunately our authority is “illegitimate” given the structure of the university. In the university’s hierarchy, graduate students stand awkwardly positioned in the both powerful and powerless place accorded to the teaching assistant. (Hwang 162)

When Hwang realizes she is not entitled to the “natural” authority as a teacher traditional teachers are given, she is appalled to see that the lack of authority and respect—the very thing she is generously and passionately “giving away”— is disabling her pedagogy: “When students fail to accord respect to their instructors, feminist pedagogy cannot only be ineffective but also be misread as ineptitude, weakness, or inexperience” (157).

To secure enough authority to enable her to implement feminist pedagogy, she has to learn to gingerly balance claiming authority and refusing

authority at the same time. To enable her feminist pedagogy, she oftentimes has to resort to the traditional pedagogy to claim authority:

Forced to the limits of my feminist pedagogy, I willingly assume authority by acting as an attendance cop, taking roll, giving quizzes, being very strict with due dates, and allowing students to believe that I am rather inflexible about my course policies. Sometimes I must use an aggressively Socratic method of teaching, and occasionally I lecture in discussion sections. (160)

Meanwhile, she limits her use of feminist pedagogy to “one-on-one meetings with students” (162). Though liberating in theory, feminist pedagogy Hwang finally realizes cannot be applied equally to every teaching situation. Indeed, it is not just feminist pedagogy that cannot be applied to any teaching situation. To extend it a little broader, any pedagogy, traditional or liberatory, engenders different pedagogical effects in different teaching contexts. The formats of classroom activities, the topics, the discipline, the students—all matter. There are always limits to any pedagogy. What matters more is the practitioner of the pedagogy—the teacher. To be more exact, what matters is how the teacher is positioned culturally, socially, and academically with the dominant discourse.

The examples of Jacinta Thomas and Sheila Minn Hwang are not isolated examples in academia. Their lack of credibility, authority, and respect from the students is unfortunately widely shared by a dozen of Chinese ITAs

that I interviewed who shared vignettes of their teaching experiences. Among them, two female Chinese ITAs of English Composition, Hua Zhang and Lan Liu, expressed their serious concerns about how students challenge their language ability, their grading of students' papers, and their ability to offer assistance and guidance to students who are native speakers. The stories of these two Chinese ITAs suggest to me that a teacher's lack of authority can prevent him or her from constructing an effective teacher identity.

### **Teacher and Student Positioning and the Exercise of Power**

Since, as argued before, teacher authority is the mandatory condition for all teachings or pedagogies to happen, one is hardly able to resist the temptation to say that teachers should be empowered before they are able to empower students. If the teacher is oppressed, probably we need to liberate the teacher first before we liberate the students. If empowering students mean that teachers share with students their power, then does it mean that to empower teachers we should ask students to share their power with their teacher? The example of Hwang seems to suggest that in a given teaching situation, a pedagogy has the ability to empower either the teacher or the students.

Such a view seems to me to endorse the assumption that power is a possession. This assumption is famously critiqued by Foucault, who sees power not as repressive but as productive. This notion reinforces the idea that

teacher's authority is not necessarily repressive; a certain amount of authority is not only necessary but also enabling and productive. Foucault also sees power not as "a domination of one group over the other" (*The History of Sexuality* 92). This helps us come to see teacher authority not as domination of teachers over students. More importantly, Foucault insists that

power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations. (95)

This notion of power is also stressed in *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault contends that power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated" (26).

The either/or view of authority and power also dichotomizes students as outsiders to normal discourse and teachers as insiders. This dichotomous view leads us to conclude that a pedagogy cannot empower both the students and the teacher at the same time. Consequently, the dichotomy leads us to oppose student-centered pedagogy against teacher-centered pedagogy.

Arguing that we need to develop a new concept to look at the student-teacher relationship, Gale maintains that either the teacher nor the students can reject the normal discourse because she insists that we see

normal discourse as a connecting point between student's discourse and the teacher's discourse. Totally dismissing the traditional binary between "student discourse" and "teacher discourse," she contends that interactions with normal discourse are the primary conditions for teaching. Furthermore, she innovatively describes how this new student-teacher relationship functions at two levels. At a primary level, the teacher interacts with the students through normal discourse; at a secondary level, the teacher interacts with the students through abnormal discourse in order to develop critical thinking and resistance to the normal discourse. She stresses that the first level is primary because the interaction with normal discourse is the very condition of teaching. The second level is secondary because it is impossible without the intervention of normal discourse (89-90). As she cautions, the secondary interaction cannot become the primary interaction in the classroom because if it did, it would "deprive students of opportunities to experience and interact with normal discourse" and therefore "leave a gap in students' education" (90-91).

So far the new concept works well if the teachers that are discussed at the two-level interaction are close enough to the normal discourse to interact with the students. As we have come to see, ITAs are positioned differently with the normal discourse than other teachers. Though they are institutionally assigned the role of instructors with authority, neither the students nor the ITAs themselves position the ITAs as belonging to the center of normal discourse. Rather, ITAs are marginalized in the normal discourse as abnormal, strangers

in the academia, and intruders of the academic discourse. If teachers are not positioned close enough to normal discourse, how could they interact at the primary level as unproblematized by Gale?

What we see is that there is a distance between ITAs as teachers and normal discourse, yet this distance is not the critical distance that radical teachers attempt to create in order to resist normal discourse. This distance in other words is imposed on the teachers rather than a careful choice of the teachers. Therefore, we are able to say that the primary level of interaction is problematic for ITAs, but it does not mean that their teaching at the primary level is impossible; it means that their primary level interaction will be different from the “normal” interaction described by Gale.

Or a new framework is needed in order to fully understand this different kind of interaction. In order for ITAs to attain authority to enable them to conduct successful classroom teaching, they need first to challenge the oppressive, abnormal, and stereotyped positions assigned by the normal discourse. They need to resist those stereotypes of themselves as teachers who lack the qualifications, credibility, and expertise assigned by the normal discourse and reposition themselves in relation to the normal discourse. Of course this conscious repositioning needs to be recognized by the students or this repositioning cannot be accomplished. By recognizing the nonnative speaker teachers' repositioning, the students are developing critical thinking about dominant discourse as well. In accordance to the teacher's repositioning,

students are repositioning themselves with the normal discourse and with ITAs as well. This kind of interaction combines Gale's two levels of interaction. In other words, the primary level and secondary level interactions for ITAs' classrooms may take place at the same time when both the teachers and students are trying to get closer to the normal discourse and at the same time when both are reinventing their own discourse.

Rather than seeing a lack of teacher authority as an enemy, ITAs as well as ITA training programs should develop it productively into exciting teaching moments that will eventually reposition both the teachers and the students with the normal discourse. As Hwang finally comes to see through her struggles, "our profession, the teaching profession, is a profession of constant positioning, adjusting, and repositioning" (162). This repositioning is not only necessary for ITAs but also useful for any minority teacher. It is not only for nonnative speaker teachers, but also for native speaker teachers. In fact, the field of rhetoric and composition asks writing teachers to constantly adjust their positioning with the normal discourse as well with the students. Because not all students are positioned the same with normal discourse, teachers need to adjust their positions when dealing with each individual student.

### **Incorporating Critical Pedagogy into Chinese ITAs' Training Programs**

I use discussions of teacher authority and pedagogy to advance an argument that Chinese ITA training should engage both teacher authority and

critical pedagogy as equally important and complementary to each other. More importantly, ITAs could use critical pedagogy to accomplish their repositioning with the students and with the dominant discourse so that they will be able to change their lack of the necessary authority. This is, however, not to say that this repositioning can be achieved easily and by ITAs single-handedly. It needs not only more efforts and time from both ITAs and ITA program developers but also a carefully-designed program that helps ITAs attain both theoretical knowledge and practical and transferable strategies about pedagogy. In other words, ITAs need a program that both familiarizes them with the American college classroom cultures and predominant pedagogies and leads them to understand and critique how these pedagogies are constructed and used.

In this final section of the chapter, I would like to discuss my experience as a Chinese ITA of English Composition with a training program geared toward an incorporation of teacher authority and critical pedagogy. Unlike other ITA training programs that last one semester and rely on problem-solving workshops or seminars, this program is designed under the directorship of Dr. Debra Jacobs specifically for Chinese ITAs for several semesters and utilized various effective training formats such as the semester-long practicum for all GTAs, the training program for all ITAs across discipline, co-teaching with American GTAs, workshops, qualitative studies, and panel discussion.

This program was designed with multiple goals in mind: 1) to familiarize ITAs with pedagogies, classroom procedures, syllabus, policies, etc, by

participating the general practicum for GTAs; 2) to encourage ITAs to experience and practice the pedagogies by doing assignments they are going to assign for their students; 3) to gain real classroom experience with pedagogies and American students by co-teaching; 4) to invite ITAs to reflect on the issues involved in their co-teaching by participating in workshops and discussions with American GTAs and with the program director and by engaging these issues in their writing and conference presentations; 5) to give ITAs chances to internalize these pedagogies through independent teaching and by participating in another practicum for all GTAs.

Reflecting on my personal experience with this program, I realize that in order for me to gain the necessary authority and engage critical pedagogy, I need not only to gain expertise in writing theories and pedagogies but also to develop a metadiscourse to analyze and critique those theories and pedagogies. It was through my co-teaching of a first-year composition class with a peer mentor that I learned to negotiate with my English-native-speaking students my teacher authority in a way that was both similar to and different from my mentor's. Through discussions with my peer mentor and with my director about cultural issues and the teacher's role in a cross-cultural classroom, and also from my own reflections, I realized that I was in the process of developing strategies to engage the critical pedagogy in the writing classroom.

Such training enabled me to walk into the classroom with more

confidence, expertise, and concrete strategies by which to negotiate my authority with my students. By challenging my students' accepted conceptions about (Chinese) ITAs, I invited them to reposition their relationship with me. While allowing me to gain the necessary teacher authority, such a repositioning also creates a learning moment for the students to critique their stereotypes and reposition themselves with the normal discourse while learning to write academic writing. To achieve such a goal, I find the critical pedagogy that I learned and practiced during the training very useful. I have determined ways for utilizing my expertise in writing theories and composition pedagogies, my Chinese cultural background, and my perspective in critiquing both American culture and Chinese to engage students in using writing projects as ways to investigate how their relationships, their opinions, and their academic goals and goals in life are, immersed in ideology, constructed and reconstructed. I have found that the students' critical investigations have led many to regard writing as offering meaningful opportunities to explore ways to reposition themselves with the dominant discourse. Overall, my training enabled me to develop strategies and a framework for me to transform a perceived lack of authority into a critical learning moment for both my students and me, into a new teacher identity that both my students and I feel comfortable with and liberating.

As mentioned in the epigraph of this chapter, by transforming the teaching conditions, we are transforming the students' learning conditions.

Teaching and learning are therefore bound together as complementarities rather than binaries. Instead of agonizing over whether to empower students or to empower teachers, we need to develop a new framework that allows us to create moments to empower both. This should be the ultimate goal of critical pedagogy.

## Chapter Five

### Lost in Translation: Chinese Gender Identity and the

#### Feminization of Chinese Identities

*Rather, it is a vigilance, call it ethical, that keeps us on our guard not to project onto the women of China thoughts which they may evoke but which, in fact, are the products of western experience and concern alone. It is easy to ascribe innumerable reflections on the 'war between the sexes', the 'virgins of the word', 'timelessness' or 'suicide' to the silences that will occur throughout this journey in China and especially in the interviews at the end: it will be a western vision. Nothing is less certain than 'the truth' about China according to some Viennese professor, or anyone else here in the West.*

*Refusing, therefore, to know more than they do; and refusing, as well, to endow them with a knowledge that would hold the answer to our own problems—let us first try to question a tradition that has defined here for at least two thousand years. A quick sketch, a questionnaire, left open-ended.*

*--Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women**

Underwriting the binary thinking and essentialism imbedded in studies concerning Chinese students' writer identities, student identities, and teaching identities as have been discussed in the previous chapters is the binary thinking and essentialism entrenched in these studies concerning their gender identities. This is not only because gender plays an important role in shaping identities and intersects with writing, learning, and teaching but also because gender identity, especially in the Western ideology and discourse, is more

prominent and penetrating than other identities of individuals—for example, professional identity, writer identity, and student identity. Compared to other identities, gender identity has been more persistently and forcefully insinuated by a ubiquitous gender consciousness. Given that I would argue that the identity of a Chinese individual as male or female is not something that is generally discussed or noticed at all in the studies of Chinese students in America, it may seem contradictory that I would find gender to be a concern in the ways Chinese identities are interpreted, constructed, or transformed. As I will explain, however, the very fact that gender is overlooked, seldom addressed explicitly, attests to the strength of gender assumptions that are not even questioned.

When Chinese students come to the United States, their various identities—as student, teaching assistant, and research assistant— are translated into a new culture. Among the new identities they achieve through this translation process, most of them lose their gender identity.

When Chinese names are translated into English by following the pinyin system, which uses English alphabets to record the sound of Chinese words, the gender confusion is erased to such a degree that many Chinese names are longer able to show the gender identity of the person. Generally the gender of an American name is very obvious and almost self-evident, at least to native speakers of English, although the increasing multiculturalism in America is making it more difficult to assume such transparency of gender identity in

Western names. But there is little to no transparency in Chinese names. Take for example some of the Chinese names that have been mentioned in the previous chapters: Min-zhan Lu, Heping Zhao, Xiaoyie You, Xiaoming Li, and Fan Shen. To native speakers of English, these names do not convey whether the person is male or female. What may be surprising is that to native speakers of Chinese, these names no longer have any gender identity. They could be names for males as well as for females. This genderlessness causes practical problems for English language users. As it is known, English pronouns assign gender to persons referred to, like *he/his/him* and *she/her/hers*. This is not to say that Chinese language does not have pronouns like *he/she*. As a matter of fact, Chinese language does have those pronouns, but the gender is shown only written language, the Chinese characters. For example, the English *he* equals *ta* in Chinese pinyin, and the sound of *ta* corresponds to a Chinese character, 他 (the male). The English *she* is also equivalent to *ta* in Chinese pinyin, but the sound of *ta* could also correspond to another Chinese character, 她 (the female). Because the pinyin is not able to show gender identity of a person's name, when translated, a name loses its linguistic and cultural ability to indicate gender identity.

The loss of gender identity is also a historical product within the Chinese culture. Gender identity as shown in Chinese names used to be very obvious before Mao's time. During Mao's time, women were liberated and expected and encouraged to enjoy and perform the same as men in every

aspect of life. In a zealous movement to create a classless and genderless utopia in China, parents could give their daughters names that used to belong to men, wishing for their daughters a future and a personality as successful as those of men. Although after China opened to the outside world since 1979 there has been a massive backlash of gender discrimination, there is still some gender ambiguity arising from Chinese names. Names such as Wei (伟), Fei (飞), and Qing (青), for example, are names for both males and females.

In the cross cultural context, the gender identity of Chinese men and women is ignored both in everyday interaction and in academic research because of the predominant visibility of their racial identity. In everyday conversation and interaction, Chinese men and women are recognized as and referred to as Chinese. For example, on the first day of the class, students in my writing classes will recognize me first as a Chinese, a racial identity differentiating me from other races such as white, black, and Hispanic. They will first judge me as a nonnative speaker of English, not as a Chinese woman. In scholarship on nonnative speakers of English, gender identity seems to be of little concern or important to the topics discussed. As Machiko Matsui rightly points out, most studies “treat foreign students as ‘genderless’: Women are often excluded from their subjects; if included, the findings are seldom differentiated by gender” (vii).

A genderless existence has been the utopian goal of many feminists. In this sense, the gender ambiguity of Chinese people in American culture should

be the ideal way of existence. However, Chinese men and women cannot escape the projections of a Western gender binary. In English writing, no one can avoid the gender difference of pronouns, so an individual in English writing has to be given a gender value, either male or female, so that it is logically and grammatically legitimate within the linguistic system. Though the gender of Chinese is ambiguous in the cross cultural linguistic context, the English language does not accept this gender ambiguity; therefore, Western writing systems require gender to be assigned. This either-or linguistic binary echoes a prevalent binary thinking about femininity and masculinity. According to this binary thinking, femininity and masculinity are mutually exclusive; they cannot coexist in an individual—at least not without the individual categorized as abnormal or perverted. This binary thinking also ascribes to masculinity a superior, more desirable and more authoritative status than femininity.

Take Fan Shen from Chapter Two as an example. A number of studies have mentioned Fan Shen, but the gender of Fan Shen remains unclear. In Xiaoming Li's *Good Writing*, Fan Shen is a male. This is a quote from Li:

To write to different standards, according to Fan Shen, is to do more than switch linguistic codes: it is a process of acculturation.

**He** learned from **his** experience as a Chinese graduate student in an American university that when **his** American writing professors told **him** to “be yourself,” what they really want was not to be **his** Chinese self, but that **he** “had to create an English

self and be that self,” that **he** had to shed **his** “timid, humble, modest Chinese I.” (emphasis mine;127)

In the original text of Fan Shen, there is no clear declaration or indication of the writer’s gender. Obviously, Li reads Fan Shen as male and refers to the gender as male seven times in one sentence.

In Vai Ramanathan and Dwight Atkinson’s “Individualism, Academic Writing, and ESL Writers,” Fan Shen is also cited. This is how Fan Shen is cited:

Fan Shen, a PRC immigrant to the U.S., for example, tells of **his** struggles with English composition on arriving in this country—struggles which eventually necessitated **his** “creating a new self,” as **he** puts it. (emphasis mine; 55)

Like Li, the authors read Fan Shen as male and refer to the gender three times in one sentence.

Fan Shen, however, becomes female in Lizbeth A. Bryant’s “A Textbook’s Theory: Current Composition Theory in Argument Textbooks.” Bryant uses the example of Fan Shen to explain how a foreign student struggles to adapt to the discourse patterns of American academics. Here is how she refers to Fan Shen:

In “The Classroom and the Wider Culture,” Fan Shen, also an academic, writes about **her** struggle to deal with “clashes between **[her]** Chinese background and the requirements of

English composition” (459)...In **her** first-year writing class, Shen discovers a rule of U.S. academic discourse. . . . Another element that Shen discusses in **her** struggle to deal with the clash between **her** Chinese cultural blueprint and the U.S. cultural is authorial presence: downplaying the individual—the “I”—in favor of the group. Shen repeats the number one rule that **she** learned English composition. (emphasis added; 116-17)

Without any hesitation or doubt, Bryant assigns a female gender identity to a Chinese like Fan Shen.

Whether Fan Shen is male or female is not of primary concern in our discussion here; what concerns me most is that different writers assign different gender identity to Fan Shen. What shows across the three readings of Fan Shen’s gender identity is that Fan Shen’s gender identity is not decided by Fan Shen but by the writers’ different gender notions.

### **A Framework Based on Misreadings of Chinese Gender Identity**

Misreading gender seems innocent because of the fact that it is really hard to know the gender of people from a different culture. In this sense misreading of gender is inevitable. However, I would suggest that the misreading can be viewed as a concrete instance of a wider and more abstract, ideological force. That is, the imperative that requires us to make gender assignments—and that thereby result in inevitable misreadings—can be

viewed as a mirror that reflects essentialist, binary thinking. I would also go further to suggest that because essentialist, binary thinking is so enmeshed in ideology, reiterated and echoed in the dominant discourse, that even the very feminist Western discourse that intends to challenge essentialism and gender discrimination reflects such thinking.

Misreading because of linguistic difference is more forgivable than the essentialism in feminist discourse that reduces all women—regardless of culture, race, class—into one woman and then projects western feminist agenda onto them regardless of their historical, cultural, economic, political contexts. In *Feminism without Border*, Chandra Mohanty vigorously criticizes Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Global* for treating women as a "singular," "ahistorical," and "monolithic subject" (17), for assuming that "women are unified by their shared perspective (for example, opposition to war), shared goals (betterment of human beings), and shared experience of oppression" (112), for basing her homogeneous global sisterhood "on an ahistorical notion of the sameness of their oppression and, consequently, the sameness of their struggles" (112). Mohanty's critique underscores an important argument that sameness in oppression does not lead to the automatic sameness and global solidarity in women's struggles and movements.

Essentialist views about women and feminisms support the idea that living in the U.S. will empower Chinese women because Chinese women will be freed from Chinese patriarchy. Such thinking does not consider that the

cross cultural context could actually make Chinese women more vulnerable to both Chinese patriarchy and Western patriarchy. Also, the empowerment view does acknowledge the centrality of Chinese women both in ancient China and modern China or take into account that Chinese women (especially students and scholars) have achieved enviable gender equality with their male counterparts. A glimpse into the women's movement in the last century in China reveals that women's liberation has achieved a semiotic and interdependent relationship with the national liberation and development of China. By foregrounding women's liberation on the national liberation agenda in the first half of the twentieth century, by fiercely enforcing gender equality in Mao's time, by using gender equality to promote one-child policy critical to the economic development of the nation, China, quite contrary to the views of some Westerners, has allowed Chinese women more freedom and equality than Chinese women themselves and Westerners have come to realize.

Some Western feminists also project an essentialist, binary thinking onto their understanding of Chinese gender identity. This is attributable to the extent to which binary thinking has been dominant in Western thought, so much so that it often goes unnoticed or is considered "natural." In their article "Male is to Female As \_\_\_\_\_ is to \_\_\_\_\_": A Guided Tour of Five Feminist Frameworks for Communication Studies," Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Culkanz observe that either/or thinking, the "central organizing principle for much of Western thought," has created a lot of "oppositional dualisms." They further

argue that certain dualisms serve as frameworks for different kinds of feminisms: masculinity/femininity, reason/emotion, subject/object, public/private, and mind/body. Cirksena and Culkanz indicate that what underscores these binary assumptions is a hierarchical relationship between the two terms in each pair (20). Accordingly, one term, the first term, is valued and valorized while the other is devalued and subordinated; the empowerment of one leads necessarily to the disempowerment of the other. In other words, masculinity is superior to femininity; mind to body; and so on. It follows, then, that the way to change the subordination of women is to disempower men. For some feminists, the answer to patriarchy is matriarchy.

It should also be observed and recognized that many feminists have questioned the naturalness of femininity and masculinity, though not many have been able to completely resist or reject the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity. It often happens that the very feminist scholarships intended as critiques of the gender binary oftentimes fall into the gender binary trap, not so much because these scholars are determined to do so as because such a binary between femininity and masculinity has been so deeply ingrained in discourse that it takes more vigilance and effort to resist it.

Because of this need to be vigilant, I find it is time for me to make several clarifications so that my discussions of this binary will not, against my intention and argument, reinforce it. First, I need to make it clear that such terms as “femininity,” “masculinity,” “feminization,” and “masculinization” which

I am going to use in my discussions are understood within the Western binary paradigm about gender. Then, I want to hasten to add that such an understanding of gender is problematic and tends to read the various features and qualities of Chinese students' writer identities, student identities, teacher identities, and gender identities as feminine, as lacking of power, and therefore, weak and negative. Again, this is the interpretation within the binary paradigm. It is my intention to demonstrate how Chinese students' various identities are feminized in a binary way as oppositional to the various masculine identities of Americans. By demonstrating how Chinese students are feminized from the binary thinking that imposes a negative (i.e., weak) femininity upon them, I am challenging the negative feminization of Chinese students and eventually offering a new framework from which femininity and masculinity can be reconceptualized.

However, this is not to say that the substantial gains that have been made due to the varying theoretical endeavors many feminists have made to offer feminist interpretations of femininity as something positive, nonpartisan, egalitarian, something uniting body and mind, reasons and emotions, should hastily dismissed. Quite contrary, it should be understood as an attempt to resist a binary reading of Chinese students and further to explore a more proper reading of the various so-called feminine qualities and features of Chinese students.

Within this binary framework of masculinity/femininity, Chinese women

are viewed in opposition to Chinese men. However, as presented both in Chinese American literature and in American culture, there is general tendency already to characterize Chinese men as feminine and disempowered, partly because as compared to their counterparts in the U.S, Chinese men in the U.S. have less upward social mobility, and partly because compared to American men, Chinese men are viewed as less physically masculine. Interpreting Chinese men as more feminine than American men does not reflect a view of Chinese men as powerful. It would stand to reason, then, that according to the idea that disempowering Chinese men will empower Chinese women, Chinese women have benefited from this view. Actually, it only further disempowers them, as Chinese women are seen as even more feminine than their male counterparts.

The feminization of Chinese, male and female, is reflected in the dominant discourse, which characterizes Chinese students as feminine writers, learners, and teachers. Underlying the binaries discussed in the previous chapters about Chinese students' writer identities, student identities, and teacher identities is the deeply rooted Western binary of masculinity and femininity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, gender identity is a prominent dimension of an individual's identity. This prominence of gender identity, the persistence of essentialism in Western gender notions, and the prevalence of binary thinking come together to affect the ways we interpret, understand, and conceive of how Chinese students write, learn, and teach in ways different

from Western or American students. The confluence of binary thinking, essentialism, and dominant notions about gender asserts such a forceful disciplinary power that scholars are likely oftentimes not even aware it, even when it functions as a framework within which they arrive at their insights and advance their ideas and conclusions.

In this chapter, I argue that a masculinity/femininity binary serves as a framework that informs the way differences are interpreted between Chinese students and American students that have already been discussed—the . differences between Chinese rhetoric and American rhetoric, between Chinese students' rote learning and silence and American students' active participation and critical thinking, and the differences in ideas about authority that influence the identity of Chinese teachers and American teachers. Further, I suggest that a multi-dimensional feminization of Chinese students is so powerful and pervasive that scholars, teachers, and students, both Chinese and American, tend to internalize the feminizations as objective observations, consequently making it even more difficult to recognize that such reading and interpretation of Chinese students is problematic and rendering more difficult attempts to challenge (mis)readings and (mis)interpretations. In the rest of the chapter, I will discuss how feminization of Chinese students' writer identity, student identity, and teacher identity has been constructed with the hope that such a discussion will help us deconstruct such forceful feminization of Chinese students' various identities.

## **Feminization of Chinese Writer Identity**

As discussed in Chapter Two, numerous studies contrast Chinese rhetoric against Western rhetoric, leading to interpretations of Chinese writer identity that I suggest are based on oppositions assumed between individualism and collectivism. In this chapter, I further suggest that what can be glimpsed in the way Chinese writers are consequently characterized as less assertive reflects an even more pervasive opposition between masculinity and femininity. Projecting both binary thinking and gender notions onto their studies, scholars construct a feminine writer identity by consistently describing and interpreting Chinese students as feminine writers—writers who are less assertive because they are more indirect, more illogical, and more prone to use *pathos* and *ethos* instead of *logos*.

Chinese rhetoric has been singled out for its lack of assertiveness mostly because Chinese rhetoric is believed to deviate from Western rhetoric in several ways. First, unlike Western rhetoric that relies heavily on rational appeals for persuasion, Chinese rhetoric is said not to use logical reasoning for persuasion. Second, Chinese reasoning, to the extent it is recognized, is said to be inductive rather than deductive, the usual way argument or persuasion proceeds in Western rhetoric. Third, Chinese rhetoric is thought to rely on and highly value *pathos* and *ethos* over *logos*. The lack of assertiveness that results from these differences, like the differences

themselves, belies a view of Chinese rhetoric as a weaker, more feminine rhetoric than the more assertive, masculine Western rhetoric.

One of the many reasons why Chinese rhetoric has been singled out for its lack of assertiveness and indirection is that Chinese rhetoric is said to lack logical appeals. In Matalene's analysis of her Chinese students' writing in English and the English version of *China Daily*, the persuasive technique that she believes is used in those writings is "characteristically Chinese," because "Chinese discourse, as we have seen, depends upon appeals to history, to tradition, and to authority, but not to our notion of logic, that is arguing from logical consistency" (800). In other words, she believes that Chinese writers are, as she terms it, "unfettered" from the use of logical consistency. How do Chinese writers argue or persuade? According to Matalene and many other scholars, Chinese writers do not write argument in the Western sense; they offer "assertions rather than proofs" according to a standard pattern that Matalene deduced: "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" (800). Matalene attributes this lack of logical consistency or lack of logic to the legacy of Chinese traditional "eight-legged essay" (801), which she believes epitomizes Eastern rhetoric that "announces truth" in contrast to Western rhetoric that "combats for Truth" (801).

Because of this popular belief about the lack of logical appeals in

Chinese rhetoric, Fan Shen believes that in order to learn to write better English, he has “to wrestle with a logical system very different from the blueprint logic” in Chinese rhetoric. Shen relates that by “English rules,” the “Chinese way of thinking I used to approach my theme or topic in written discourse” is “illogical,” and the “Chinese critical/logical way to develop a theme or topic” is alogical (non-logical), for it mainly uses mental pictures instead of words as a critical vehicle (462).

It is worth repeating, though discussed earlier in the section on whether China has rhetoric or not, that Chinese rhetoric has and has studied all three rhetorical appeals—logos, pathos, and ethos and even more-- both in classical China and contemporary. The fact that Chinese appeals to history, authority, and tradition does not mean that Chinese rhetoric does not use logos—in the Western sense—for persuasion. What makes Chinese rhetorical persuasion different is not because it does not use logic. Rather, logical reasoning is used differently in Chinese rhetoric.

How does Chinese logical reasoning from Western logical reasoning? In “Enthymeme Examined from the Chinese Value System,” Hiu Wu argues that Chinese rhetoric does indeed use logical reasoning—rational appeals, syllogisms and enthymemes. A difference between the logical reasoning of Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric is that the reasoning conventions vary in each culture (119). This should come as no surprise because the enthymeme, after all, has investigated at length by many scholars in terms of

the significance of its cultural specificity. Wu states,

Since the substance of rhetoric, enthymematic demonstration of proofs, involves not only logical reasoning but all rational reasoning, the reasoning process is quasi-logical. The logic in the enthymeme is a chain of inference based on the beliefs of the human being that vary in different social milieu. This is why Chinese argumentation appears so puzzling and even illogical to many Westerners. (121)

Wu's explanation can also apply to the notion expressed by Matalene that Chinese rhetoric "announces" truth. Because the probable premise is built on the values agreed by the given culture, a probable premise that is "true" in Western culture may not be "true" in Chinese culture; therefore, the conclusion based on the premise will be different. Because unstated values or enthymematic demonstration of proofs vary from culture to culture, Chinese students' appeal to history, authority, and tradition may appear to be "dead wood" to an American teacher (Wu 120-21), or to any Western reader, for that matter, such as Matalene.

Another reason studies of Chinese rhetoric have concluded that Chinese writing is not assertive is based on what the researchers describe as an indirect and illogical approach to making assertions. Finding that direct reasoning is the dominant way (and suggesting it is also the ideal way) to argue in the West, researchers believe that there is an unmistakable tendency

of Chinese writers to use inductive reasoning. The deductive/inductive opposition again reflects an opposition between masculinity and femininity, the former seen as a more confident and aggressive approach and the latter regarded as a gentler, less combative approach.

The interpretation of Chinese rhetoric and writing as indirect has been prevalent ever since Robert Kaplan, who can be credited with having initiated contrastive rhetoric, wrote his highly influential essay, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," in 1966. Kaplan, for example, argues that "Anglo-European expository essays follow a linear development . . . and that Oriental languages prefer an indirect approach and come to the point at the end" (Connor 5).

However, Kaplan bases his interpretations of "thought patterns" on the writing of ESL students in Taiwan, a weakness in the study not pointed out until 1992 when Chaobao Wang wrote his dissertation "Paragraph Organization in English and Chinese Academic Prose: A Comparative Study." Wang declares Kaplan's findings, and the finding of many other researchers following Kaplan, problematic "because ESL data may not accurately reflect the rhetorical conventions of the source language, and also because student written assignments may not be mature writing, such studies could hardly be expected to yield dependable information about Chinese rhetoric" (Wang 2). What is more, few studies have pointed out that there is a gap between paragraph organization and development and the organization of an entire

essay. The differences between the two is not so much because the former is local while the later is global as because they do not necessarily share the same rhetorical conventions, patterns, or practices.

What has been referred to as the “eight-legged essay” of China could be described as very much like the deductive reasoning format used in American collegial debates, as Xiaoye You notes in “Conflation of Rhetorical Traditions: The Formation of Modern Chinese Writing Instruction” (152). As You explains, in the eight-legged essay, the beginning (known as *po ti*, “breaking the title”), is “a brief statement of the proposition the essay itself was illustrating,” which is not very different from the thesis statement in American writing; then, the next part (*ch’eng ti*, “receiving the title”) explains the title; the next several parallel paragraphs offer reasoning; finally, there is a conclusion (*to-chieh*) summarizing the argument and stating its moral implications (152).

Chaobao Wang also is able to offer data that counters Kaplan’s conclusion about indirectness using paragraph organization as the basis for study. To investigate the notion that Chinese paragraph development is indirect in comparison to that of English writers, Wang conducted a comparative analysis of Chinese and English academic writing. With a database consisting “of 578 English and 536 Chinese paragraphs in 20 English and an equal number of Chinese articles taken from academic journals published in the U.S.A and the P.R.C.,” Wang concludes that “Chinese and English academic writing are not unlike in terms of the basic methods used for paragraph

development” (iv). According to the findings of his studies, Wang observes that there are “noticeable differences” between the two, but the difference is not in that Chinese paragraph uses inductive reasoning while the English prefers deductive. The difference is rather “in the frequency with which each particular method (namely, each of inductive or deductive) is employed:

Specifically, English writing exhibits an unmistakable tendency to favor deductive organization, whereas Chinese writing in general is more or less evenly divided between deductive, inductive, and mixed (i.e. a combination of the two) organizations. . . . While English writing shows considerable stylistic consistency across writers, Chinese writing appears inconsistent in that some writers follow a predominantly deductive style similar to that of English, whereas others use proportionally much fewer deductive and much more inductive and mixed paragraphs. (v)

The careful analysis by Wang provides two significant insights. First, Chinese paragraph development uses both inductive and deductive reasoning. Second, although it cannot be generalized that either inductive or deductive reasoning is the dominant development style in China, deductive reasoning is the dominant mode in English.

The fact that both cultures have used correlative thinking makes us more confident in saying that indirectness and directness are not necessarily contrary to each other, and that they exist in both cultures. But it does raise a

different kind of question. What has led researchers to formulate such different conclusions ? Two possible explanations have been offered, neither of which is complimentary, but one even less so than the other. LuMing Mao has suggested that misconceptions are common when correlatives are viewed as binaries. He argues that “correlatives like ‘day’ and ‘night,’ ‘heaven’ and ‘earth,’ and ‘action’ and ‘inaction’” should not be characterized, as too often is the case, as opposites that conflict, but as complementarities, such as Yin and Yang, “always conceptually interdependent, and . . . always in the process of becoming in relation to one or more other pairings” (“Rhetorical Borderlands” 469). However, as Mao observes, setting up and arguing from “easily attained opposition” is methodologically convenient and appealing. Further, it readily lends “plausibility and persuasiveness to . . . a contrastive study” (“Individualism” 129). What Mao attributes to what could be summed up as efficiency, David Cahill characterizes from a more skeptical perspective. In his dissertation “Contrastive Rhetoric, Orientalism, and the Chinese Second Language Writer,” Cahill declares that the binaries that set Western rhetoric apart from and superior to Chinese rhetoric have been initiated and reinforced by the field’s tendency to oppositionalize the conventions of the two rhetorics by “selectively and arbitrarily reducing the rhetorical repertoires of counterposed languages to discrete contrasting instances, while evidence of rhetorical structures that do not fit the contrast is downplayed or ignored” (xi). In other words, Cahill suggests that oppositions have been deliberately

established even when it has meant deliberately overlooking evidence that would contradict the oppositions.

To argue that Chinese rhetoric is not as indirect or inductive as it has been characterized, or to argue that Chinese rhetoric has shared many rhetorical patterns with Western rhetoric, is not the same as to argue that Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric are the same. As some scholars tend to believe, even if Chinese rhetoric has all three rhetorical appeals—*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, Chinese rhetoric depends more on *ethos* and *pathos* than on *logos* for persuasion. As the argument goes, Chinese rhetoric does not argue from hard evidence as much as from history, tradition, authority, and appeals to morality. In other words, Chinese rhetoric has allowed *ethos* and *pathos* much more rhetorical or persuasive value than Western rhetoric, or more specifically the dominant rhetoric of the U.S., which values *logos* over *ethos* and *pathos*, though *ethos* some would say is as valued as *logos*. Nevertheless, *pathos* in the Western view comes last, and this can be attributed to a mind/body opposition that differs greatly from the Chinese holistic view of mind and body.

The promotion of rational appeals and downplay of *pathos* display the Western split between mind and body. This mind-body split is in sharp contrast to the Chinese holistic philosophy that sees body and mind coupled in each other. The Chinese word for thinking is 想 (Xiang). This character is formed with a heart radical (心) under a word (相), meaning “to ponder, to deliberate,” as is pointed out by a Chinese psychologist in the United States May Paomay

Tung (70). In other words, “thinking is a joint function of intellect and affect, a type of intuitive synthesis. It is not purely cerebral, linear logic. In this one word, the Chinese cut through the body-mind dichotomy so basic to western thinking” (May Paomay Tung 70). Tung also observes that Chinese people believe that body is capable of thinking, feeling, and experiencing (70). Similarly, Ning Yu, a Chinese linguist studying and teaching in the U.S. relates that in Chinese philosophy, culture, and medicine heart is conceptualized as “the center for both affective and cognitive activities”:

In Chinese, the word *xin* that primarily denotes the heart organ means both “heart” and “mind” as understood in English, and by metonymic association it also can mean “thoughts; ideas; emotions; feelings.” In ancient Chinese philosophy, the heart is regarded as the thinking and reasoning organ. (1)

Considering the Chinese holistic view of mind and body in the context of rhetoric and writing, Xiaoming Li articulates that in Chinese writing, emotions and reasoning reside in one another. *Qing*, Li relates, means “feelings, sentiments, passion, and love.” Even though Li recognizes that in Western rhetoric, *pathos*, or, emotional appeals, is understood in part in a negative way as sentimental or manipulative, Li declares that *qing* is closest to *pathos* (if *pathos* is understood in its own light without the negative associations). Li observes that Chinese rhetoric allows *qing* “great persuasive powers” (55), because “genuine emotions have the power to affect readers” (56). But at the

same time, just as it is not reason alone that persuades, neither is it pathos alone, and both reside in each other. To use Li's words, "*Li* (reason) is inseparable from *qing*: *qing* is couched in *li*, and *li* is couched in *qing* (55).

Examining the differences between Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric according to the extent to one prefers pathos and the other prefers logos does not lead to the conclusion that a difference in degree creates a binary. For it is simply a matter of degree, when it is even that. This is to say that according to the perspective I have just detailed, thinking and feeling co-occur. There was a time when this was even suggested in Western culture. As Ning Yu discovers from his careful comparative study of the conception of "heart" in both cultures, the concept of heart as the center for cognitive and affective activities is not unique to Chinese culture. As a matter of fact, he examines the evolution of the concept of heart in Western culture and finds that "the Chinese conception of heart is in fact quite similar to that was found in the Early and Middle English periods, when the English *heart* was also conceptualized as the seat of both feeling and thought" (1). However, as Yu goes on to examine, later development in the West led to the "separation of the mind from the heart" (17). This examination leads him to conclude that the concept of heart as capable of affective and cognitive activities is not inherent or unique to Chinese culture.

Borrowing Yu's findings, I think that what makes contemporary Western rhetoric separate logos from pathos, reasoning and thinking from heart, is not

that Chinese rhetoric is inherently prone to pathos and Western rhetoric to logos. What makes contemporary Chinese culture and contemporary Western culture conceive of *heart* differently is that Chinese culture has shown strong consistency in the concept of heart as the center of affective and cognitive activities while such consistency is missing from western culture. In the same sense, relying on emotions to appeal to readers is not unique to Chinese rhetoric. In spite of the negative conceptualization of and lower value of emotions, and in spite of, even worse, the total rejection of emotional appeal, Western rhetoric still appeals to emotions and feelings of the readers. That its value has not been fully or consistently recognized does not mean that it does not have the same value as logos and ethos. What makes emotional appeals different in the two cultures is that the emotions are also culturally specific and shaped and defined by the specific historical, cultural, social, political, and ideological contexts in which the writer is normalized. Thus, the argument that emotional appeals are important to both Chinese rhetoric and Western does not lead to the argument that Chinese writers and Western writers appeal to the same emotions or the argument that Chinese readers' emotions are the same as Western emotions. Admittedly some emotions are universal, but most emotions are culturally, historically, and ideologically constructed. Put otherwise, what is shameful in one culture may not be so in another culture.

Differentiating Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric on the basis of the use or non-use of *logos* or *pathos* buys into a binary way of thinking based on

a masculinity/femininity binary. The idea that Western rhetoric relies mostly on rational appeals supports the notion that Western writers are more assertive than their Chinese counterparts, assertiveness an attribute that has been associated with masculinity. The emphasis in Western rhetoric on a clear, linear, direct, and logical argument is itself an action to assert truths, to exclude alternative ways. This assertiveness is characteristic of the scientific discourse which has been persistently masculine and dominates the academic discourse. The masculinity assigned to Western rhetoric leads many scholars to associate (whether consciously due to ease or due to more disdainful motives; or whether unconsciously, due to the ubiquity of ideology) almost automatically Chinese rhetoric and Chinese writer identity with femininity because of all the binaries so far reviewed.

For example, Linda W. L. Young argues that the need of Chinese rhetoric to be indirect and collectivist “bears a striking similarity to some of the goals pursued by American women when conversing with American men” because both Chinese rhetoric and American women engaged in such conversation are, unlike the masculine, individualistic, and direct Western rhetoric, interested “in seeing themselves functioning within a network of relationships” (59-60; qtd. in Mao, “Rhetorical” 445).

The feminization of Chinese rhetoric makes visible the power imbalance in the contrastive studies of discourse that see masculine Western rhetoric as the norm. This kind of feminization is well-intended and offers us a fresh

perspective to reevaluate the binaries between Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric. LuMing offers this warning from Mary Garrett:

“such comparison can become part of this recurring effort to associate Chinese culture—Chinese indirection being an important part of it—with a ‘valorized feminine’ that ‘hardly squares with the overtly patriarchal nature of the Chinese family, state, and culture” (59; qtd. in Mao, 445).

In other words, the feminization of Chinese rhetoric does not empower Chinese rhetoric at all; it instead disempowers it. According to Mao, though the binaries of Chinese rhetoric and Western rhetoric are as harmful as they are, such binaries make Chinese rhetoric visible in the dominant Western rhetoric, but such a feminization will make the visible Chinese rhetoric into the “less visible” (446).

On the other hand, there have been consistent endeavors to introduce alternative discourses to balance the masculine and assertive Western rhetoric. Nonetheless, as Gary A. Olson mentions in “Toward a Post-Process Composition: Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion,” to abandon the rhetoric of assertion demands much more efforts than expected because

despite our attempts to introduce alternative genres, to help students become more dialogic and less monologic, more sophistic and less Aristotelian, more exploratory and less argumentative, more personal and less academic, the Western,

rationalist tradition of assertion and support is so entrenched in our epistemology and ways of understanding what "good" writing and "good" thinking are that this tradition, along with its concomitant assumptions, defies even our most concerted efforts to subvert it.

It is important to note that recognizing the challenge does not lead Olson to argue that such a challenge is futile but that "our efforts to subvert such a tradition may well be worth sustaining."

### **Feminization of Chinese Student Identity**

A masculinity/femininity binary also informs the oppositional characterizations of Chinese student identity in relation to their Western peers as discussed in Chapter Three. Since silence is typically read and constructed as feminine in the masculine Western discourse, the identification of silence among Chinese students and the characterization of this silence as a sign of their submissiveness represent a kind of feminizing of Chinese student identity. Whether male or female, Chinese students, due to their silence, are interpreted as submissive, feminine learners who are deprived of voice and "self" in the American classroom, especially a classroom that emphasizes student-centered pedagogy.

As discussed in Chapter Three, learning is not an individual effort but a collaborative process that involves the learners themselves, other learners,

teachers, and the discursive practices that govern the dynamics of the relationships between learners and learners, between teachers and learners, between learners from different cultures, and between learners and teachers who are from different cultures. Because there has been no classroom collaboration to construct silence as a valid learning behavior or activity, silence remains static in its interpretation as a non-assertive, feminine, debilitating quality of Chinese student identity. It is not even considered that silence, as we see in Chapter Three, could be interpreted as a behavior that Chinese students display to the Western eyes and as a strategy to resist the dominant discourse in the classroom and beyond. In the dominant discourse where silence is considered in opposition to active student learning and self assertion, silence is interpreted to be a negative trait that is not conducive to learning well.

Without doubt, student-centered pedagogies invite students to participate in the learning process; however, even though teachers claim that they are willing to relinquish their authority in the classroom so that students could learn better, this invitation does not declare the death of dominant discourse or ideologies, nor does it recognize how such an invitation could oftentimes further marginalize the students that the pedagogy intends to bring to the center of the classroom or pedagogy. In "Collaborative Learning in Composition: Gender and Ideology," Evelyn Ashton-Jones critiques collaborative learning, which has been hailed as just this kind of

student-centered pedagogy, arguing that despite the effort of many theorists and composition teachers to enforce a student-empowering way of learning, collaborative learning reproduces the gender ideology of the dominant discourse. Ashton-Jones states, “Because we are all conditioned to interact according to gender-based notion roles, group participants unconsciously reproduce these roles in writing group conversations.” As she relates, extensive “research on conversational interaction demonstrates that conversation is inscribed by gender differences connected to ideological notions about men and women” (iv). Though composition teachers aware of the gender issues in group work have used mixed-gender groups, such a mixture may further reinforce the gender ideology against the wish of the teachers. As Ashton-Jones insightfully points out,

group participants, already conditioned to interact according to gender-based roles, will unconsciously reproduce those roles—men subtly encouraging women to adopt the “feminine” postures and display the “nurturing” behaviors that society assigns them; women, in turn, encouraging men to adopt “masculine,” more directive behaviors. Paradoxically, such gender-based behaviors have the potential to reinforce (for some) and subvert (for others) the goals of collaborative learning; that is, men may receive the full advantage of learning to negotiate in an open, supportive, non-directive, non-threatening setting, while

women may simply learn to “take advice.” (2)

According to Ashton-Jones, the reproduction of gender ideology, of binary thinking, and of the essentialism prevalent in the dominant discourse reinforces the notions about identity already held.

Although I may be pointing out what is obvious, the message here is that is practices that reproduce oppressive notions about gender make the notions even *stronger*. It has been said that “practice makes perfect.” But it has also been recognized that “practice makes permanent.” Continuing to promote classroom practices that have been determined to reproduce oppression without intervening and critiquing those practices puts teachers in the role of accomplice. The persistent feminization of Chinese students or Chinese people in general is reproduced in the student-centered pedagogical practices. In the American culture that emphasizes masculine learner identity, the silence of Chinese students that leads to interpretations of Chinese student identity as meek, submissive, and passive, is a result of disempowerment derived from the binary thinking that is ensconced in dominant ideology and discourse. Despite a teacher’s efforts to mix Chinese students with English-native-speaking students when assigning group or peer work, such peer work or group discussion continues to reinforce the factors that are silencing Chinese students from participating as equal partners in the conversation.

### **Feminization of Chinese Teacher Identity**

If a masculinity/femininity binary informs views of Chinese students, it stands to reason that it also informs views of Chinese teachers, or more specifically, Chinese graduate student TAs. There is an interesting twist to the theme of the feminization of Chinese identities that I have been developing, however, when it comes to teacher identity. Chapter Four has shown that a stereotypical view of Chinese teachers as authoritative is more aligned with masculinity than with femininity. But it is a masculinity that is greatly diminished in the context of a student-centered pedagogy, a pedagogy that Chinese TAs have extremely little experience with as students and no experience with as teachers. This creates a vulnerability that is exacerbated by language issues, such as accent or idiomatic expressions, which from the outset make Chinese TAs suspect in the eyes of their students. Furthermore, it is a masculinity that a student-centered pedagogy is meant to diminish, to level out.

Thus, there is still the impulse to feminize Chinese identity—in this case Chinese teacher identity. The “twist” to the theme is that with teacher identity, it is not a case of reading as feminine characteristics or behaviors of Chinese in comparison to their American counterparts. Instead, it is feminizing a teacher identity that is read as masculine. But I would argue that this is a difference without a distinction. That is, the interpretation of Chinese teacher identity as masculine is informed by the same binary thinking that leads to interpretations of Chinese student silence, for example, as submissive, as feminine. In fact, the entire educational system in China, based as it is on a fierce

competitiveness that rewards the few while marginalizing the many, could be read as masculine according to a masculine/feminine binary. Conversely, the American educational system, based on egalitarian ideals and promoting a liberal, student-centered approach to teaching, could be considered to the same degree feminine.

Because Chinese students come from a culture that stresses teacher authority, maintains teacher-centered pedagogy, and promotes masculine teacher identity, one would expect that Chinese graduate teaching assistants would automatically exercise teacher-centered pedagogy without any problems. However, the exercise of such a pedagogy is not favored by the American academia on the one hand and is frustrated on the other hand by the very fact that they lack the “natural” teacher authority of English-native-speaking teachers. As discussed in Chapter Four, their lack of authority is caused by factors both in the classroom and beyond. Therefore, to empower teachers who are feminized and marginalized is also feminist. However, the either-or gender binary will lead some to say that maybe we should masculinize the feminized Chinese teacher identity. Dichotomizing as though they did not exist along the same continuum practices that empower students and practices that empower teachers does not help us to understand teacher authority. The either-masculinity-or-femininity binary does not offer us a proper framework to understand and conceive the conflicts between student empowerment and teacher authority.

## **Toward a Complementarity: Yin and Yang as a Theoretical Framework**

Very different from the fixedness and mutual exclusivity of Western gender notion of masculinity and femininity, the gender flexibility revealed in David Henry Hwang's *Madame Butterfly* offers us a very useful framework for us to deconstruct gender identities, and consequently other identities as well. Mesmerized by his own fantasizing about the geishi girl who has been betrayed by an American officer in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, French diplomat Rene Gallimard is bewitched by a Chinese opera singer Song Liling, whom Gallimard believes to be the perfect woman. It wasn't until after twenty years of their love, when Gallimard was imprisoned because of his love affair with this Chinese woman, a spy, that the real gender of Song Liling is revealed. By revealing the shocking story of how a Westerner has fantasized Asian (Japanese and Chinese in this case) people as "inscrutable, feminine, submissive, and agreeable," Hwang ironically displays, as Karen Alenier comments in her review in *Arena Stage*, how Westerners are deceived by the very assumptions or lies that they fabricate for themselves. The stereotypes about Chinese femininity have been so fixed that the Westerner ignores the masculinity of the geisha girl who actually is a man.

What this play has revealed to our discussion of gender is multiple. First of all, it dramatizes how Chinese gender (or Japanese gender) has been misunderstood totally from the Western paradigm that differentiates itself from

China and any other non-Western culture, especially with regard to views of masculinity and femininity, which are themselves understood in the West in opposition to one another. The western lies fabricated by Westerners themselves, such as Puccini and Gallimard, about Asian gender and Song's collaboration with Gallimard to construct femininity with his male body have all worked together to shock readers into the very truth that femininity and masculinity are socially, culturally, and subjectively constructed rather than natural. In addition, the play also challenges the mutual exclusivity of femininity and masculinity in the Western paradigm and exposes to us how femininity and masculinity can be complementarily co-existent in the same person (Song Liling), stressing a complementarity of gender that Gallimard the Westerner has not been able to imagine and is not prepared to accept. It is his Western tendency to feminize Chinese men and women that misleads him into a trap that is, in final analysis, not the prison but his Western gender binary notions.

It is this same Western binary notion about gender that interprets the well-cited Chinese Yin/Yang as a binary. In Chinese culture, Yin, the female, and Yang, the male, are conceived as a flexible, even fluid, complementarity. As is well discussed in Suki Colegrave's *Uniting Heaven and Earth*, the theory of Yin and Yang makes Chinese culture different from Western culture not only with regard to gender notions but also with regard to epistemology in general. Colegrave understands Western consciousness as having begun with a "polarized vision of the world," a view that finds expression in Western

mythology, which Colegrave describes as representing as a consistently recurring theme a battle between two polarized positions as a battle between male and female, thereby causing consciousness to be associated with either male or female (50). In other words, the gender binary is the primary source of all other thinking, reinscribing binary thinking in all that constitutes Western epistemology.

However, since binary thinking has been ingrained in Western epistemology since the beginning of Western history, people, especially Westerners, tend to forget that binary thinking is a theoretical framework on which Western thoughts and scholarships are developed. In the same sense, the Chinese Yin and Yang has been so inherent in Asian, especially Chinese, culture that it is easy for people to dismiss it as a useful theoretical framework. In addition to this hasty dismissal, the Chinese Yin and Yang has been popularized in the Western culture as something exotic or as something that stems from ancient Chinese myth, which could make it even harder to recognize that it has something to offer for us in our conception of theoretical issues of rhetoric, learning, pedagogy, and gender.

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, binary thinking as a theoretical framework has served as the foundation of many of the studies and ways of understanding that have been discussed. In this section, I will discuss how the concept of Yin and Yang that has served as the epistemological foundation of Chinese thoughts and philosophy could serve as a new

theoretical framework for us to conceive the issues of rhetoric, learning, pedagogy, and gender.

As Colegrave sees it, the Chinese Yin and Yang theory “offers us a more productive way of understanding femininity and masculinity and their relation to individual development” because it “lies at the foundation of all existence, cosmic and human, biological and psychological, organic and inorganic”(51). Yin and Yang is used in Chinese culture not just to describe gender; Yin and Yang are present in everything in the purview of human consciousness. For example, the Yin might be the dark while the Yang might be the light; the Yang might be day while the Yin might be the night; the Yang might be the teacher while the Yin might be the student; the Yang could be the outer human body while the Yin could be the inner human body. This pair of Yin and Yang could be used to describe the relationship between the organs inside human body. As Sukie summarizes, what the Yin and Yang theory teaches to the Chinese culture (and to us as well) is that “everything is the product of two forces” (53). More importantly, the theory teaches us that the

intersection of these two forces generates the Five elements, *wu xing (wu-hsing)* (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), which, in various combinations, constitute the foundations of the cosmos in all its forms. . . . Yin and Yang are the polar manifestations of the Supreme Ultimate, the Dao, which by definition defies

description. The process of generation is conceived of as cyclical, an endless beginning into its polar opposite. (53-4)

What the theory of Yin and Yang has taught us leads us further to see many pairs of Yin and Yang in our discussions of Chinese writer identity, student identity, teacher identity, and gender identity. In rhetoric, we can see that Yin and Yang positioning could be that between the reader and writer, pathos and logos, inductive and deductive, body and mind. In students' learning strategies and behaviors, we see Yin and Yang in the pairs between students and teachers, between rote learning and critical thinking, between Chinese students and English-native speaking students, between silence and speech. As the positioning of Yin and Yang is not fixed but in constant change, we see how Chinese graduate teaching assistants are positioned first as Yin in relationship with the English-native-speaking students, and how this teacher-student (Yin and Yang) relationship is later, as Chinese graduate teaching assistants gain more cultural and pedagogical authority in the classroom, developed into a new teacher-student relationship (Yang and Yin). Also, the theory of Yin and Yang does not lead us to conclude that the feminization of Chinese men in the United States will necessarily lead to the empowerment of Chinese women in the United States because the Yin and Yang positioning between Chinese men and Chinese women undergoes changes after they come to the United States as they are trying to reposition

themselves with American men and women. It is possible that in this new repositioning, both Chinese men and women are positioned as Yin while American men and women are positioned as Yang, and in specific context, Chinese men may change this positioning in their relationship with American women, and so it is with Chinese women and American men. Even further, Yin and Yang could also be used to describe the positioning between Chinese women and American women.

Again, the Yin and Yang theory does not suggest only a complementary relationship but also a relationship that is in constant change and needs constant repositioning so that the Yin and Yang in a specific context can be balanced. Relevant to our discussion of Chinese students' overall struggles between the host culture (American culture) and the home culture (Chinese), between two or more ideologies, between two or more educational beliefs, between two different or more pedagogies, the flexibility of Yin and Yang is such that it can lead us to see, and thus assist us in, the importance of balancing the above-mentioned polars.

In the dominant discourse of the United States, the positioning between the home culture and host culture is not a well-balanced Yin and Yang relationship because most of the times Chinese students' writer identity, learner identity, teacher identity, and gender identity have to be expressed in the host language, and approved by the host dominant discourse so that the individuals can get recognition.

We also need to be reminded that a complementarity does not mean harmony, or at least not harmony alone without concomitant conflicts and struggles, which provide the potential for change. Mao articulates this thought in “Rhetorical Borderlands: Chinese American Rhetoric in the Making,” his recent 2005 article in *College Composition and Communication*:

What must be emphasized at this point is that Chinese American rhetoric should not be idealized as simply an example of “harmonious fusion or synthesis” (Ang 195) of two rhetorical traditions. In other words, we should resist any move to romanticize Chinese American rhetoric as liberating, empowering, or equalizing. At rhetorical borderlands where there is more than one language, more than one culture, and more than one rhetorical tradition, if nothing else the basic question of communication never goes away of who has the floor, who secures the uptake, and who gets listened to. To draw upon Ang again, the making of Chinese American rhetoric is “not only about fusion and synthesis, but also about friction and tension, about ambivalence and incommensurability, about the contestation and interrogations that go hand in hand with the heterogeneity, diversity and multiplicity we have to deal with as we live together-in-difference. (200)

Although Mao is not referring to the theory of Yin and Yang, what he describes is in keeping with its principles. Those principles need not be shied away from because they seem too ephemeral or exotic. Upon reflection, the principles of Yin and Yang are not much different from the ideas Foucault expresses about power or the ideas of Bakhtin about the centripetal and centrifugal forces of discourse. Both recognize a duality that exerts forces that interpenetrate one another. Without such a duality, there could be no interaction between ideology and everyday lived experiences; there could be no change.

### **Self Critique of My Critiques of Binary Thinking and Essentialism**

At the place where there should an ending or conclusion, I see a beginning, a beginning of self critique of my critiques of binary thinking and essentialism imbedded in the discussions I have offered. Such a critique is not only important to the discussion of issues in this project but also essential to my positioning as Chinese graduate teaching assistant of English composition with my readers, my students, my English-native speaking peers and professors within the dominant discourse in the U.S.

As Julia Kristeva warns us in the epigraph with which I begin this chapter, it is inevitable for Westerners to project Western lens to their interpretations of Chinese women, but she continues to say, it does not mean Westerners can never understand Chinese women but that Westerners need to develop a keen vigilance to constantly adjust their Western lens when

interpreting Chinese women. She reminds me that I very possibly have brought my lens—subjective and limited as Kristiva’s Western lens—to the very site where the Western lens is critiqued. In other others, the perspectives that I take—as a Chinese graduate student who has written English, studied English, taught English in both cultures, who is greatly influenced by paradigms of both cultures in rhetorical and composition and pedagogical theories—are just as empowering as limiting as any of the perspectives that have been critiqued in my project. Yet, this is not to say that my critique is meaningless but that we need to develop a conscious vigilance to critique the binary thinking and essentialism that haunt us every moment in the history of our epistemology. Though I offer the balanced Yin and Yang positioning as an productive framework for us to conceive various identities, I am not suggesting that I have been able—now or ever—to position myself fully or consistently within such a framework.

Whether we will be able to achieve the balanced Yin and Yang positioning is beyond the scope of this project. I can at least call this kind of positioning as our ultimate goal, whether attainable generally to those who are involved in these identities and specifically to me as I continue to teach, write, learn, and live in the United States, and I will use this goal as a constant reminder of a self critique.

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## **About the Author**

Peiling Zhao was born on June 29, 1969, to a rural family of four children in Henan Province, China. In 1988, she went to Central China Normal University in Wuhan, Hubei Province, from where she graduated with both her B.A. in English Language and Literature and her master's degree in American Literature. In 1993, she was married to Renzhang Jin, a journalist at Hubei Daily. In 1995 she started teaching English language, literature, and translation courses to English majors at Hubei University in the same city. In 2000, she began to pursue her doctoral degree in English at University of South Florida, where she also taught English Composition, Technical Writing, and Professional Writing. At the time of writing, she is appointed as Assistant Professor of English at Millikin University in Illinois.