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## **Writing "Clearly": Differing Perceptions of Clarity in Chinese and American Texts**

...the only Remedy, that can be found for this *extravagance*: and that has been, a constant Resolution, to reject all amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*. They have exacted from all their members, a close naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars. (Sprat, 112-114)

Writing in a direct and explicit manner, in other words, writing clearly, is one of the skills most prized by American scholars and teachers. Lack of clarity is also one of the most frequent criticisms leveled at texts produced by Chinese students, and even occasionally at Chinese scholars. At the same time, many writing guides in China emphasize the importance of clarity, and all of the scholars I have queried agree that it should be a goal in academic writing. In spite of this seeming agreement, American notions of clarity seem to be quite different than those prevailing in China. My experience with American writing practice has led me to conclude that in America, clarity depends not so much on using a particular form, but rather on using the form expected by the reader. Thus clarity is almost entirely dependent on cultural expectations, whether these be national, or disciplinary. I originally intended to examine both American and Chinese expectations of academic writing to discover what a text would need to look like in each culture to be judged as "clear." Here though I reached the limit of scholarship in English on Chinese rhetorical practices. Realizing that American scholars had not yet gotten very far with comparative study, I began to suspect that they also had not gotten very far in communicating with colleagues in China about how academic discourse is constructed, taught and evaluated currently in the United States, much less about the cultural roots of such practices. This required a step back in the research I had envisioned, because without a good foundation, how could any useful

conclusion be reached? Thus, I focus most of this work on the American piece of this puzzle, giving a brief overview of historical and cultural roots, and talking in more detail about how American academic discourse is carried out today. Finally, I suggest possible comparisons between American and Chinese ideas about clarity with the hope that some of my Chinese colleagues can offer opinions and advice on the next steps in research.

The effects of culture on writing practice have been fairly well documented; Robert Kaplan generated considerable interest and no small controversy when he published an article in 1972 on cultural thought patterns, representing the paragraph styles common to various cultures in simple diagrams. For example, the American pattern was represented as a straight arrow pointing down the page, while the “Oriental” pattern was an inward turning spiral (Kaplan 64). While these descriptions can hardly avoid being stereotypes, they did open up what has become a fruitful discussion. Though no culture exhibits the same pattern all the time, among all members, to American eyes, the American style often looks more explicit and direct, while the Chinese style appears indirect and implicit.<sup>1</sup> For example, while words are recognized as an important tool for communication, in China they have also been *explicitly* described as inadequate to capture all aspects of thought, feeling, or experience (Xing 52, Gao and Ting-Toomey 72). On the other hand, in America students are often told that if they can't put something into words, they don't really understand it. As interactions and exchanges between America and China have increased, so has our awareness of this fundamental difference in how clarity and by extension, good writing, are defined.

Since the initiation in 1978 of the Open Door policy in China, communication and the exchange of ideas between America and China have steadily grown. At first these exchanges were formal and often required translators, but now much communication occurs between ordinary people. As contact between our countries expands, it also deepens. Many Chinese people go to America for school or work, and a growing number of Americans are traveling to China and forming long term connections here as well. These deeper relationships have revealed challenges in communicating that go beyond knowing the right word or social custom. When scholars or teachers and students are working together, communication depends not only on a shared vocabulary, but also on a shared understanding and purpose. Scholars in America are now recognizing the necessity of studying Chinese and American rhetorical practices to learn from, and not just about each other, in order to allow real communication.

Language barriers have hindered this kind of study, and left many American scholars unable to address the research of their colleagues in China; often we have not even been aware of the work being carried out. Since 1995, study of Chinese language, literature and

culture have drawn growing attention, thanks in part to the hard work of scholars who recognizing the need, have organized conferences and anthologies, and have published their own research on Chinese rhetoric. As American scholars are exposed to this work, many have come to see that ignorance about Chinese communication practices allows many misperceptions to continue, and also directly affects their interactions with students and with Chinese scholars. Because my own research is in composition and rhetoric, I have a particular interest in how a person's culture influences and is influenced by his or her writing. In the area of written composition, many scholars have remained woefully misinformed about Chinese rhetorical practices and traditions, and some still believe the old myth that there is no rhetoric in China. Further, many still define clarity, only as it is seen in America refusing to recognize that definition as culturally bound. Nearly every year at least one scholar has tried to clear up these mistaken assumptions, with some limited success.

For example, Catherine McLoughlin elaborates on the typical structure of paragraph structure in an English language academic essay:

The expected thought sequence is linear in its development. In written communication in English for example, the paragraph begins with a topic statement and then proceeds to develop that statement by example and illustrations. The central idea is related to all other ideas in the whole essay and therefore a good piece of writing is considered to be unified, with no superfluous information.<sup>2</sup>

Helen Fox confirmed this assessment with her own observations of what most college teachers expect academic writing to look like:

in its simplest form an academic argument is just a clear, direct thesis ... followed by convincing reasons that support it, with either explicit or implicit attention paid to possible objections.

in addition to its "natural" structure, the argument should sound assertive and confident, that it should be short, logical and to the point, without irrelevant digressions, and that its tone should be polite and reasonable rather than strident or badgering (12).

Writing teachers easily recognize these characteristics; when we ask students to produce an academic paper, to analyze a question and present an argument, these are the characteristics we try to foster in their writing. Kaplan contended that writing teachers needed to understand that culture produces different styles of argument, rather than flawed thinking. If we are not looking for it, we may miss an unfamiliar pattern of argument just as we may miss an unfamiliar sound in a foreign language. In her book *Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing*, Fox highlights the difficulties encountered by writers from other cultures when they enter our system. She argues that in spite of efforts to make universities more accepting of cultural

diversity, most changes have “been limited for the most part to theoretical understanding, a mastery of facts and theories and major ideas, *knowledge about* difference rather than a real *feeling for* what it is to make sense of the world and communicate it in totally different ways (Fox, x).” She further points to another difficulty in teaching world majority students the style preferred in the American academy, that of creating a shared understanding of terms. For example, while Kaplan's and other descriptions of Chinese/East Asian discourse practices as inductive, indirect, and circular are generally accepted, scholars of intercultural communication generally view them as gross oversimplifications.<sup>3</sup> In fact, most Chinese scholars agree that academic discourse should be clear and direct, but their definition of what this would look like is actually often perceived as obscure by Americans (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 71-72, 83). Fox points to further confusions over what constitutes evidence, what it means for ideas to be original, or what it means to write as an individual, all of which affect how students structure arguments, offer concrete details or examples, and use source material (41, 50, 55). But when students are assumed (often rightly) to be inexperienced writers, teachers attribute any perceived obscurity in their writing to lack of experience in the thinking processes, because teachers expect clear thinking to be manifest in the Western version of clear prose.

Of course we want students to communicate successfully, and using an unfamiliar pattern of argument may bar readers from comprehension. But if we intend writing as an aid to thinking and learning, then Western linear forms are no more effective than the style used in any other culture. As teachers we must remember that while clear, effective writing of the linear type that we desire may depend on clear thinking, the lack of this clear writing does not equal a lack of clear thinking. Fox described the paragraph style of several other cultures and how they might be mistaken for writing problems when judged by the criteria of Western paragraph style:

Both of these strategies -- subtle, sensitive omission and conscientious attention to context -- produce what U.S. faculty members see as a disjointedness that is also characteristic of many of the papers written by U.S. mainstream students: papers from inexperienced writers, papers from fluent writers who aren't yet sure what they want to say, papers from writers who don't know their audience or who haven't realized they're supposed to think about audience, papers from students who suspect they are dyslexic, papers from students who have immersed themselves in their topic for so long they have lost all sense of perspective. But the indirect strategies of world majority students are not the result of inexperience or confusion, but of training and purpose, for they have been brought up to value a subtle or roundabout communication style as polite and sophisticated (14).

In the opening epigraph, Archbishop Sprat suggests that plainness and clarity will enable us get closer to our own ideas and a more "natural" way of communicating; in fact as Fox shows us, this way of using language is not natural at all, but the product of Western Culture. Gardner

further this argument with his claim that just as Fox found culture molding paragraph and essay style by valuing certain forms above others, culture molds intelligences also, by valuing some above others, and some expressions of an intelligence above other expressions as well. In particular, Gardner claims that modern Western schools value a narrow range of intelligences, mainly linguistic and logical-mathematical, and value an even narrower range of expression within these domains. The focus on verbal intelligence is generally referred to as a "verbal bias" (30).

Robert Kaplan confirmed this Western attitude in 1996, in a book that undertook a broad survey of composition theories that compared the work of seminal theorists such as Emig, Flower and Hayes, Elbow, and Britton with research in linguistics, ESL, and composition in other languages, from which composition in English has remained largely isolated (22).<sup>4</sup> Our classrooms have always been diverse, but this diversity has been largely ignored in favor of a more uniform approach. As our students grow more diverse in culture and ethnicity as well, we must finally acknowledge and appreciate the richness and variety of thinking, intelligences, and writing practices, or our ignorance risks being not only unfortunate, but discriminatory.

In 1995 Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wang Scollon published a book on intercultural communication in which they lay out the historical and cultural roots of American academic discourse. Then, in 1996, Yameng Liu published an article in the *Rhetoric Review* in which he took American scholars sharply to task for the way they persisted in misrepresenting Chinese rhetorical practices, in particular their neglect of the *Wenxin Dialong* which has been readily available in English since 1959. Three years later, Ramanathan and Atkinson addressed specifically the unacknowledged cultural biases found in American writing classrooms. These efforts are bearing some fruit

In the statement on professional trends issued for the year 2001, the NCTE Commission on Composition identifies an area of concern also relevant to our discussion:

Again this year, there were significant Commission concerns about the complex interactions of race, class, and language and their impacts on learning, and on the way learners are treated, evaluated, and categorized. Difference should not be seen as deficiency; native language resources should be recognized as strengths and "literacy" should not be equated with literacy in English. Assessment of the English literacy of students is an essential and proper concern for public education in the United States but such assessment should not be conducted to the exclusion of assessments of literacy in other languages (Item 2).

While writing teachers have been aware of cultural differences, in the past these were generally seen as superficial problems to be fixed, such as grammar errors. Now, however, some teacher-

scholars like Helen Fox, Xiaoming Li, and the previously mentioned Ramanathan and Atkinson, have called attention to the ethnocentrism of this attitude, and made strong arguments for recognizing other ways of writing as equally valid as those esteemed in America. For example, in her book *Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing*, Fox takes up the ways in which culture influences both teachers and students in college writing classes. She finds that not only teacher expectations and definitions of good writing are culturally determined, but also basic concepts such as “original and “direct” (46). As this work goes on, we now begin to see that many characteristics of “good” writing that were once perceived as universally true, are actually very much influenced by culture. At the same time as these attitudes are changing, a number of books have been published recently in America on Chinese rhetorical practices offering discussions of history and contemporary issues as well.

This influx of material has led to increased interest among American scholars of rhetoric and composition, creating a golden opportunity for further exchanges with our Chinese colleagues. Comparative work that places Chinese rhetorical practices into a cultural context is especially important in order to dispel some persistent misperceptions about Chinese characteristics of writing. I offer an example of this kind of comparison by considering the notion of clarity in writing as it is understood in America and China. However, this comparison cannot be made in a vacuum; in order to understand current definitions of clarity, some background is needed, so I will begin with a brief discussion of how the definition of clarity has evolved in Western, especially American discourse.

### **The Roots of Western Academic Discourse**

Current American discourse practices grew out of ideas that spawned the European Enlightenment; in 1667, European intellectuals believed that ideas or problems were best engaged by getting as close to them as possible, striving for thought unmediated and unsullied by sensory input. Text, without ornamentation of any kind, was thought to best provide this experience because language at that time was thought to exactly correspond to the objects or ideas it named. The passage quoted in the epigraph was written in the seventeenth century by Archbishop Sprat, and represents one of the earliest formulations of Western academic discourse.

As Archbishop Sprat tells us, good writing is characterized by “shortness” and “Mathematical plainness;” more than three hundred years later, writing teachers talk about good prose being lean, spare, or clear, and advise students to be parsimonious with words, to avoid

“clutter.” These are fine characteristics to aim for, if the goal is to not only prepare students for participation in a Western cultural system, but to perpetuate that system. Though most writing teachers would not agree that this is their purpose, they teach in a way that serves this purpose because the definition of good writing is historically bound up with those goals. After researching the history of Western academic discourse, Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wang Scollon argue that most textbooks or handbooks on communication promote a style in which information is “conveyed as clearly, briefly, directly, and sincerely as possible,” and that this style reflects a Utilitarian ideology that arose during the Seventeenth Century Enlightenment in Europe(94, 99).<sup>5</sup>

### **A Utilitarian Primer**

A thorough discussion of Utilitarianism and its effect on modern society requires a book of its own, but considering a few seminal concepts must suffice for this discussion. To begin with, during the seventeenth century the conception of a human being shifted from the idea that people were defined by their place in social and spiritual systems, to a notion that each person is an isolated rational being that chooses to follow the laws of society. Indeed, the original meaning of the word “individual” is “cannot be divided,” referring to one whose very existence was defined by the group. How different that is from current Western notions that valorize the unique and independent identity of each person.

During the same period, Jeremy Bentham coined the term “Utilitarianism” to describe his philosophy that defined goodness in terms of utility. According to this system, utility is anything that produces benefit, advantages, or happiness, or prevents the reverse. This basic definition leads to the principle that the best course of action or the best system is that which leads to the greatest happiness for the most people. At the same time under this system, happiness was linked to freedom of expression and economic freedom. Freedom of expression allowed creativity and invention to flourish, which led to wealth, another necessary component of happiness as understood at the time. The equation can be logically rewritten to say that in a free society the most creative people will naturally produce wealth, and those who produce the most wealth for the most people will also produce the most happiness, thus being of the greatest social value. Scollon and Wang Scollon point out that under this system, creativity and productivity are assigned a monetary value; thus we see how efficiency can be taken as naturally good (103).

All of this may seem far removed from the principles of academic discourse until we consider the origins of the modern university. The scientific theories and the philosophies of the Enlightenment were developed primarily in the British Royal Society and its European counterparts. Participants in these societies introduced, debated and either accepted or rejected ideas that were communicated by means of scientific papers, a format that later expanded into many other fields (Goonatilake 36). This organizational structure is still visible today at any academic conference. Utilitarian principles also show themselves in what we require of those who wish to join the system. Then, as now, belief in the importance of technological and scientific literacy for success reinforced the idea that formal, uniform education would bring the most opportunities for happiness to the most people, because it transmitted the necessary information efficiently and consistently, or so educators believed at the time. Now, in many writing programs, these values are even present on a microscopic level--the definition of proper communication is derived from this Utilitarian model in which spare, linear style and "transparent" language are valued, particularly in terms of transactional forms of writing.

In America, extensive formal training is required for nearly every high-status job; education teaches people to be productive members of society, and this is true in the academy as well as more generally. Thus, to succeed and be happy, we must be productive and we learn through education to be productive. If we wish to produce knowledge, formal education has become the only acceptable method of entering the conversation of the academy, and indeed, most other Western discourse systems as well. Placing such a high value on formal education conversely devalues other forms of learning, so that less formal methods that do not in the end confer some sort of recognized certificate or degree, are regarded as less valid. This devaluation handicaps those raised in cultures that do not follow the Western model, or those gifted in ways not typically recognized and certified in Western schools. Success in the a Western educational system requires mastery of the Utilitarian discourse system which, while containing a wide range of genres and forms, is generally marked by the following six characteristics, as summarized by Scollon and Wang Scollon (107):

1. anti-rhetorical
2. positivist-empirical
3. deductive
4. individualistic
5. egalitarian
6. public (institutionally sanctioned)

The anti-rhetorical stance is based on the idea that good writing should be transparent and free of tricks or devices, but few, if any, writing teachers would consciously entertain this idea. But when it comes to teaching students "what they need for writing in college classes," most

teachers take all but the first point as essentials. We push students to step away from their experiences and to write from a critical distance and to analyze ideas logically. We encourage them to speak only for themselves as individuals unless they offer evidence in the institutionally sanctioned manner. Repeating a familiar idea is at best criticized as clichéd. While we recognized the presence of power relations in the academy and in society, our goal is to make all relations as egalitarian as possible, assuming that this is preferable to any form of hierarchy. Doing this, we inadvertently can create the perception of a power differential, because if we assume an egalitarian stance towards students (or others) who use a deferential or hierarchical system, we may be seen as dominating. Conversely, we may perceive a member of a deferential or hierarchical system as passive or submissive, instead of claiming their own distinctive voice as we like to encourage. Further, efforts to be deferential can also affect organization structure, leading teachers to charge students with “beating around the bush.” Finally, while we all promote free speech and individual expression, most of the writing produced in our classes is considered public discourse, and as such must actually follow many guidelines. We don't tend to look kindly on students who ignore the assignment, or who adopt a tone not considered proper for academic work, such as overly sentimental, didactic, or impassioned—characteristics considered entirely appropriate even in academic discourse in some other cultures (Li, Fox).

The term “discourse” is used in a variety of ways in the academy. In one sense, it can refer to the specific rules of communication within a discipline, and suggests matters of grammar and syntax. In this sense, there would be little agreement over what constitutes proper “academic discourse;” every field has a different idea. However, “discourse “ is also used more broadly to represent the way language is used in a social context, and maybe expanded to describe a whole system of communication. In their study of intercultural communication, Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon define a discourse system as follows:

1. Members will hold a common ideological position and recognize a set of extra-discourse features which define them as a group (*ideology*).
2. Socialization is accomplished primarily through these preferred forms of discourse (*socialization*).
3. A set of preferred forms of discourse serves as banners or symbols of membership and identity (*forms of discourse*).
4. Face relationships are prescribed for discourse among members or between members and outsiders (*face systems*) (98).

About the rules of this broader system of discourse, there is implicit agreement within the academy that closely parallels beliefs of Western capitalist culture. Some evidence of this agreement is easily visible in the documented rules of discourse we teach to students. Consider this excerpt from the syllabus used in a large university writing program:

**Exploratory draft.** The goal here is to open up your thinking, to explore possibilities, and to get down lots of writing that you can go on to work with. Don't be concerned with organization or how the draft will work for readers. You can try out different approaches--even in the same paper.

**Mid-process draft.** Now is the time to try to pull things together and figure out a strong coherent line of thinking and a coherent shape. Now is the time to try to clarify your purpose and start thinking about the needs of readers. You'll be adding, cutting, and reorganizing. But even a mid-process draft can benefit from remaining still a bit unsettled--from having a bit too much in it--so that when you do your concluding revision, you will still have some choice of direction or emphasis. (De Vries, teaching records)

As an essay develops, students are to “pull things together and figure out a strong coherent line of thinking and a coherent shape.” These spatial metaphors suggest Western preferences, and are coupled with more explicit instructions in writing handbooks and reinforced by individual teachers' response to student writing. Further, though a teacher may have the goal of valuing a multiplicity of discursive practices, most teachers also try to prepare students to manage the discourse of the academy, which is tightly bound up with the Utilitarian discourse system. Most college writing teachers recognize the above assumptions and behaviors—but they are hard to shake off, even when we consciously try. Even the most open-minded American teacher reflects and reinforces the values of American culture in a way that tends to devalue or exclude other ways of experiencing the world, and if we want to change this we may have to make more radical and perhaps unpopular changes.

As American scholars wrestle with these issues, scholars in non-Western countries, in particular China, have been looking with increasing skepticism at the universal truth-claims implied in many Western discussions of discourse, both oral and written. I have referred to some of these scholars in my own work; unfortunately, many others have not yet been translated to English and American scholars have been slow to respond to those that have with their own research. As recently as June 2001, Ringo Ma argued that:

...Communication has to be studied in the cultural context in which it occurs. Otherwise, answers to the “what” and “how” questions can be distorted, while the “why” question is simply ignored.

A comparison between the U.S. and Chinese Cultures should be made based not only on persuasion strategies identified in the U.S. Society, but also those recognized in the Chinese culture (276).

Ma's argument suggests that comparative studies in the U.S. have been one-sided, and unfortunately this appears to be true for the most part. But if we are to address this problem, let us look at what work has been done, in order to direct our efforts most effectively. Research in America on Chinese rhetoric has mainly focused either on the experiences of students

coming from China to American universities, or occasionally on ancient Chinese practices, with little connection between these two categories. Because most American scholars have little knowledge of Chinese rhetorical history, or of current practice, they tend to repeat stereotypes in their own work, or fail to understand the proper context when reading the work of Chinese scholars.

For example, in 1989, Howard Gardner, an influential voice in American educational theory, published a book about numerous trips he had taken to China in the early 1980s to study educational practices. While Gardner has been vocal about respecting the educational values of other cultures, he also perpetuated some myths about China. In one typical passage he says that:

In our country and, to a lesser extent, in other parts of the West, it is expected that a person will have his or her own, sometimes idiosyncratic, opinions about a topic—the weather, a recent book, a rock star, the current political figure or scandal—and will not hesitate to enunciate it (and to assume, often erroneously, that others share it). In socialist China, and possibly, in China of an earlier era, the situation is quite the opposite. One is expected not to have personal views and, if one does have them, certainly not to volunteer them in casual conversation (130).

At this time Gardner was meeting scholars not long after the open door policy was initiated, and so in retrospect it seems unlikely anyone would have offered casual opinions during these rather formal academic meetings, regardless of what they might have thought or normally said.<sup>6</sup> Later in the book he says in many places that he felt the educational system for older students was too focused on memorization and not enough on creativity and individual expression. Most troubling about Gardner's comments is not whether or not these are fair criticisms, but that he seems to be basing this assessment on a rather shallow understanding of Chinese culture, and that even at points where he acknowledges he may be missing something, Gardner does not appear to have made any effort to find out more. Later on, he begins to realize that some of his earlier generalizations were too simplistic, but Gardner seems to then assume that those practices more similar to the West must be the result of Western influence, rather than another aspect of Chinese practices. This pattern of assumptions is subsequently repeated by several scholars, even those who aim to break away from false perceptions about China.

Around the same time, Carolyn Matalene published an account of her experiences teaching writing in China in *College English*, one of the largest and most important national journals for college English teachers. Matalene takes the admirable position of urging other teachers in America to realize that our own brands of logic and rhetoric have no more claim as universal truths than any other traditions. But, as Yameng Liu points out eleven years later:

The Chinese rhetorical tradition she seeks to “unravel” in the article appears to be based on values so opposed to what has been cherished dearly in the Western rhetorical tradition that a sympathetic acceptance of the former without seriously compromising our commitment to the latter appears hardly possible (318).

Liu goes on to show that while Matalene's intentions are good, she recreates the usual stereotypes about Chinese rhetoric—that group harmony is valued over individual welfare, reproducing accepted patterns over originality or logic, indirection over clarity. Like Kaplan and many others, she seems to assume that the “eight-legged essay” was and still is typical of good writing, and also continues the pattern of ignoring the handbooks, anthologies and other scholarly work published in China about writing and rhetoric (325). Though he starts with Matalene, Liu goes on to make a sharp critique of his fellow rhetoricians in America for their neglect of many important texts such as the *Wenxin Diaolong*, and *Wenzhang Zhinan*. From these and from some later works, Liu makes an ironclad case for Chinese rhetoric and also topples the stereotypes Matalene and others have maintained.

Now I return to my original question about “clarity.” Liu argues that clarity is as highly valued in Chinese rhetorical traditions as in the West, and there are many examples demonstrating this. But then, why would American teachers and scholars so often find the work of Chinese students, and sometimes, scholars, so unclear? From my work in teaching technical writing, I believe the answer lies not with the writers, but with the readers. Let me explain: American technical writing is of all academic forms the most explicit, linear, and to some degree formulaic of all American academic discourse. The idea is that readers should be able, to check the argument presented to see if they reach the same conclusion, and also that they should not have to spend much time figuring out the author's point—it should be perfectly “clear.”<sup>7</sup> What this turns out to mean primarily is that technical writing should match reader expectations as closely as possible in terms of justification, organization, tone, level of detail, reference to other sources, and even visual design. Reader expectations can vary quite a bit from discipline to discipline, so we can imagine that across cultures they would differ even further. Thus though both Americans and Chinese value clarity, what they expect clear writing to look like may be very different.

Exploring and understanding these expectations is important for two reasons. First, as is probably clear from this discussion, Chinese students often have real difficulties in American writing classes and these could be avoided or dealt with more effectively if teachers had a better understanding of Chinese rhetoric. Second, communication between American and Chinese scholars is also affected. When American scholars read a paper that has been rewritten to suit the Western or American academy, we may get the ideas, but we lose the way that writer

thought about them and understood them, and in the same way, papers rewritten and translated from English to Chinese may lose much of their original style. If we value each other's thoughts cultures, we should should not require that they pass through such a finely meshed cultural filter. For the sake of our students and our own as well, we must reconsider what we may be missing, what richness and complexity, and insight, when we screen out culturally specific ways of thinking.

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- 1 Gao and Ting-Toomey, Xing, Fox, Ma, and Guan are some of the scholars who have most recently commented on this stylistic difference.
  - 2 Quoted from the online version of *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Teaching Learning Forum*, Edith Cowan University, Perth, AU: February 1995. <http://cleo.murdoch.edu.au/asu/pubs/tlf/tlf95/mclou165.html>
  - 3 Xing, Gao, Scollon and Wong Scollon, and Gao and Ting-Toomey all argue convincingly that this view has as much to do with Orientalism and ignorance of Chinese culture as with actual Chinese discursive practice.
  - 4 This isolation is unfortunately not restricted to composition theory. In communication studies as well, foreign scholars lament the lack of knowledge American scholars suffer regarding the work of non-Western researchers.
- 5 They are not the first to make this claim. Richard Lanham argued this point vigorously in *Style: An Anti-Textbook* back in 1973, but this claim got little attention until Western academic traditions began to encounter the traditions of other countries on a wide scale as they have done with China.
- 6 Gardner notes that some of the most talented and advanced scholars he met were from the East China Normal University.
  - 7 The responsibility for these matters lies entirely with the reader who, as a properly productive member of society should not take readers valuable time more than is absolutely necessary.