Rhetoric Construction of Chinese Expository Essays: Implications for EFL Composition Instruction

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Abstract
Recent scholarship on Chinese students’ English expository essays tends to blur or mitigate the differences between English and Chinese writings. This alleged convergence of English and Chinese rhetorical norms gives rise to a view that rhetorical aspects in second language writing instruction and research in China should be de-emphasized. Drawing on data from full-score Chinese compositions of College Entrance Examination, this study examines how Chinese expository paragraphs are developed. Results show great disparities between English and Chinese expository writing at paragraph level such as non-English rhetorical mode, reliance on authorities, rhetorical paragraph, and figurative language in topic sentence. We argue that Chinese rhetorical strategies are likely to be transferred to English writing if English rhetoric is not taught and reinforced in college.

Keywords
rhetoric construction, Chinese exposition, paragraph writing, rhetoric instruction

Introduction
Kaplan’s (1966) study of cultural thought patterns and rhetoric exerted great influence on English writing instruction and research. He pointed out the effect of thought pattern in different cultures on paragraph writing. Although his idea is supported by many researchers and practitioners (Connor, 1996, 2002), it is criticized for its binary classification of rhetoric (English vs. non-English) and its deterministic view of first language transference to second language writing (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). Some of the studies on Chinese essays tend to neglect the differences between English and non-English writings (Kirkpatrick, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012; Kubota & Shi, 2005; Scollon & Scollon, 2000). They think that “the aim of the teacher of writing should not be to gut the English of the Chinese writer of local cultural and rhetorical influences” (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, even some scholars advocate diverting our attention from the difference to other aspects such as identity and voice, on the ground of economic development and cultural change in China (Qu, 2020; You, 2014). You (2012, p. 66) contends that positivist composition research focuses on the objective aspects of students’ compositions and thus fails “to recognize the fluidity of language, audience, and the rhetorical situation” and is constricted “to a static, essentialized view of English language, Anglo-American people, and their cultures.”

However, they are risking going to another extreme: They overemphasize the dynamic changing aspect of culture and economy and its influence. Garrett (2013) articulates her concern as follows: “I sensed an unspoken conviction that the Chinese cultural tradition was theirs [western scholars’ and researchers’], theirs to reinterpret, correct, or evaluate without ever thinking to ask for responses from the Chinese themselves” (p. 250). For years, many positivist studies focusing on Chinese English learners’ compositions have revealed differences between Chinese and English writings and L1 influence (Chen, 2011; D. Liu & Gan, 2019; B. Liu & Wang, 2015; Zhou & Xu, 2010). Those findings of the positivist studies cannot be devalued.

Some of the scholars who argue for the similarities between Chinese and English base their claim on Chinese textbooks. However, there are inadequacies in their studies. For example, Liao and Chen (2009) and Kubota and Shi (2005) fail to provide supporting evidence from the Chinese students’ actual texts. The “gap between the instruction and
the actual texts suggests a need for further investigation in the future” (Kubota & Shi, 2005, p. 123).

Most importantly, ideology is sure to influence practice. The opinion of convergence or divergence between English and Chinese rhetoric, as well as the focus of English composition instruction and research in China, is likely to affect the teaching beliefs, principles, and strategies of the teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in China. Our standpoint is that English rhetoric instruction and research in China is necessary. To provide sufficient arguments to support our standpoint, we focus on the actual Chinese writing, as suggested by Kubota and Shi (2005), to explore whether it is close to English rhetorical paradigm. The word Chinese in “Chinese writing,” “Chinese expository essays,” and “Chinese composition” in this article refers to the Chinese language. The English “textbooks” refer to the textbooks for composition such as those compiled by Kanar (2011) and Langan (2011). The Chinese “textbooks” mean those used for the subject of Chinese (Yu Wen) by the Chinese middle and high (junior and senior secondary) school students. There is no textbook officially designated for Chinese composition in Chinese middle schools and high schools, as the Chinese textbooks include composition instruction.

### Rhetorical Paradigms of English and Chinese Exposition

Although some professional writers may not always write explicit topic sentences for paragraphs, most of the composition teachers and researchers still advocate that a paragraph should have a topic sentence that bears a claim, encapsulates the entire paragraph, and determines the unity and coherence of the paragraph as such an organization can meet the readers’ expectation (Ferris, 2014, p. 77; Johnson-Sheehan & Paine, 2013; Kanar, 2011; Langan, 2011; Lunsford, 2009). The textbooks for composition such as The College Writer compiled by Kanar (2011) and College Writing Skills With Readings (Langan, 2011) explicate how to write a topic sentence and how to develop a paragraph. For example, “the topic sentence of a paragraph has two characteristics: topic and focus” (Kanar, 2011, p. 63); the rhetorical modes to develop paragraphs include illustration, cause–effect, classification, comparison–contrast, and definition; supporting evidence “consists of anecdotes, personal experiences, facts, studies, statistics, and the opinions of experts” (Langan, 2011, p. 5). Personal experience is treated as effective supporting evidence, which diverges from Chinese writing. Moreover, the way to write a paragraph can be applied to essay writing as an essay is, in some sense, an expanded paragraph (D. Liu, 2020). Apart from that, modern English writing is clarity-oriented, emphasizing conciseness and simplicity. A beginning writer should “strive for a clearly stated main idea” (Kanar, 2011, p. 58).

Chinese textbooks, for example, those published by People’s Education Press (Ren Jiao Ban), the most widely used at present in high schools (J. Li, 2011; Q. Liu, 2014), also suggest that exposition should have a thesis statement (Kubota & Shi, 2005). But the thesis statement is not necessarily written out, which differs from English exposition. Chinese exposition can be processed by exemplification, quotation, analogy, and contrast, among which exemplification and quotation are stressed. The examples must be typical and representative; the quotations must be words uttered by famous people, or universal principles like proverbs. The Chinese textbooks never mention cause–effect, classification, and definition as rhetorical modes to develop expository essays. The most striking divergence from English exposition is quotation that is considered as an important and effective way to develop an expository essay, whereas the English textbooks for composition such as The College Writer (Kanar, 2011) and College Writing Skills with Readings (Langan, 2011) say little about quotation.

Importance laid on word- and sentence-level structures in Chinese writing constitutes another difference from English exposition (Wang, 1994). The Chinese textbooks emphasize much on word choosing and sentence writing to have aesthetic and rhetorical effects. As the Chinese textbook Chinese published by People’s Education Press (Book 1 for Grade 3 in high school) states, rhetorical devices can be largely resorted to in expository writing to reinforce such an effect. However, rhetorical devices contribute much to “style” in Aristotle’s rhetoric rather than modern English writing (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004). Take College Writing Skills With Readings (Langan, 2011) for example, only 170 pages are about words, sentences, mechanics, and punctuations, whereas 400 pages on essay writing.

In summary, Chinese writing instruction proceeds from macro level (essay) directly to micro level (words and sentences), with the middle level (paragraphs) overlooked (D. Liu, 2020). Chinese textbooks give no suggestions on how to support the topic or how to develop a paragraph. Chinese rhetorical modes in exposition display divergence from English rhetoric, with exemplification and quotation strongly recommended. Moreover, rhetorical devices are encouraged to be used in exposition.

### Studies on Chinese Students’ English Composition

The claims against the traditional contrastive rhetoric approach to Chinese students’ English essays are based on Chinese writing instruction. Without relying on adequate empirical research evidence, Kirkpatrick (1997) contends that the modern Chinese textbooks reveal more of the contemporary English rhetoric than traditional Chinese rhetoric, just because the western rhetorical modes (e.g., exposition consisting of thesis statement, evidence, and arguments) are
“reiterated in Chinese textbooks of rhetoric and composition” (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012, p. 150). This line of argument by Kirkpatrick (1997) and Kirkpatrick and Xu (2012) is echoed by Kubota and Shi (2005) and Liao and Chen (2009). Liao and Chen (2009) report that both English and Chinese composition textbooks share some strategies in writing exposition. Kubota and Shi (2005) come to a conclusion that writing instruction in English and in Chinese has more commonalities than differences because the students are taught to follow a linear pattern in exposition.

Kirkpatrick and Xu (2012) characterize Chinese traditional rhetoric by Qi-Chen-Zhuan-He pattern, which means beginning the topic, continuing the topic, transferring to somewhere opposite, and wrapping up the topic. However, few Chinese people born after 1950s have learned this pattern when writing Chinese essays. Qi-Chen-Zhuan-He might be used to compose classical Chinese poems several centuries ago. It is less meaningful to compare modern Chinese writing with ancient Chinese rhetoric than with modern English rhetoric. However, it would be too hasty to conclude that modern Chinese writing instruction is consistent with English rhetorical paradigm just because the Chinese textbooks recommend the three-part framework (i.e., thesis statement, evidence, and arguments) and the linear pattern. The three parts are more like universal moves of exposition in any language.

The claim about the commonalities between Chinese and English rhetoric produces a further claim that concerns replacing rhetorical instruction with identity and voice exploration (Qu, 2020; Xu et al., 2016; You, 2014). These scholars attribute the rhetoric similarity to the economic development and the cultural change in China. You (2012, 2014) advocates that “nondiscursive” aspects—such as language-in-education policies, institutional establishments, student voice, and identity—should replace the rhetorical studies of the composition products and become the new trend. Chinese students’ rhetorical situation is in China and their target readers are Chinese teachers and peers who are all critical people in their academic studies. In summary, the above two kinds of claims have a common standpoint that the rhetorical aspects in EFL writing instruction and research are not really important in China.

However, the researchers who study EFL students’ compositions in China hold a different view. They maintain that Chinese EFL students’ compositions display many differences from the standard English rhetorical modes (Chen, 2011; D. Liu, 2020; D. Liu & Gan, 2019; B. Liu & Wang, 2015; Zhou & Xu, 2010; Zhu, 2005). It is found in these studies that although Chinese students are aware of writing topic sentences, the coherence between sentences is poor because of the influence of Chinese writing convention such as general words and loose rhetorical relations between sentences (Chen, 2011; D. Liu & Gan, 2019). Moreover, Chinese writing strategies at discoursal, syntactic, and lexical levels can also be found in students’ English writings (D. Liu & Wan, 2020; Zhou & Xu, 2010). More specifically, compared with English native speakers, Chinese students tend to use adjectives that match the Chinese collocations and meanings (B. Liu & Wang, 2015). These studies mentioned above attribute the divergence to the first language transfer and reliance on the first language writing strategies. However, both language transfer and strategy use are pertinent to the Chinese paradigm in composition, which indicates that the Chinese rhetorical norms taught to the students are different from the English rhetorical norms. These studies have clearly pointed to the importance and necessity of English rhetoric teaching and research in the Chinese EFL context. English rhetoric instruction and research may still have an important role to play in EFL education in China.

Now that it is assumed that the writing instructions in the Chinese textbooks are similar to those in the English textbooks (Kirkpatrick, 1997; Kubota & Shi, 2005; Liao & Chen, 2009), presumably the Chinese students should have the similar knowledge of Chinese exposition to that of English, and the Chinese expository essays produced on the basis of such composition knowledge should accordingly reveal the English rhetorical features. However, our hypothesis needs to be tested. In addition, research by the Chinese EFL researchers indicates that there might be more complicated paradigms in modern Chinese rhetoric, other than the three-part essay framework (D. Liu & Gan, 2019; Zhou & Xu, 2010).

In the current study, we attempt to focus on paragraphs to investigate whether Chinese expository paragraphs reflect modern English rhetoric as English writing begins with paragraph writing and English writing textbooks provide systematic instructions and theories about paragraph writing. Expository essay writing is an expansion of paragraph writing and the theories and instructions on paragraph writing can be applied to essay writing. As is discussed in “Rhetorical Paradigms of English and Chinese Exposition” section above, English exposition instruction is centered on two aspects—paragraph arrangement (topic sentence controlling its supporting sentences) and paragraph development (rhetorical mode and evidence). Chinese expository instruction emphasizes style and exemplification (quotation or allusion). All these considerations taken into account lead us to formulate the following research question: How are expository paragraphs developed in Chinese compositions?

Through examining this central question, we also want to investigate whether the Chinese expository paragraphs have the same arrangement as is instructed in the English textbooks and whether those paragraphs reveal plain style. A close scrutiny of these issues would help us to gain a better understanding of whether convergence or divergence occurs between modern Chinese and English exposition and establish our standpoint about the necessity of English rhetorical teaching and research.
The Study

Data Source

We challenge the perspectives and claims of some scholars (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1997; You, 2012) who used Chinese textbooks and model essays as major evidence to support their arguments. To refute their arguments, we only chose Chinese data. If the divergence between the actual Chinese writing and English rhetoric paradigm is proved, our standpoint (i.e., the necessity of English rhetoric instruction and research in China) can be defended.

Our data source was the full-score Chinese compositions of College Entrance Examination (Gao Kao) in the years from 2012 to 2019. The compositions before 2012 were not exposition. We chose the full-score compositions for three reasons. First, our research attempted to examine how much Chinese students have learned from Chinese composition instruction instead of how much the Chinese textbooks intended to instruct. Thus, we targeted actual Chinese expository essays written by the students instead of the exemplary texts (Ke Wen) in the textbooks. Second, we focused on modern Chinese writing. The writers of the full-score compositions are much younger than those writing Ke Wen and those full-score compositions were written in the recent years.

Those writings are contemporary and current rather than traditional. Third, full-score compositions are regarded by the Chinese teachers as model essays for other high school students who are preparing for Gao Kao. They are more influential on Chinese students’ writing and more practical than those Ke Wen written in the last century, as learners tend to follow immediate examples owing to the effect of peer pressure, that is, to keep up with more capable peer students (Ellis, 1999).

In mainland China, many provinces administer their own Chinese tests but only a few provinces share National Matriculation Chinese Test (NMCT). Each year from 2012 to 2015, there were altogether 16 versions: NMCT, Beijing, Guangdong, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Tianjin, Shanghai, Fujian, Hubei, Hunan, Chongqing, Jiangxi, Liaoning, Sichuan, and Anhui. However, there were only eight versions each year from 2016 to 2019 as more provinces share the same versions. All of the compositions were selected from “Composition Website” (http://www.zuowen.com/gaokaozw/Inkgkmf). Only one composition of each version was selected so as to avoid the repetition of topic and obtain more accurate data. We picked out exposition and excluded other genres such as narration and lyrical prose. The total number of the expository compositions was 41.

Only the paragraphs in the body part were selected for detailed analysis, with the introductory and the concluding paragraphs removed. English paragraph development mainly involves those in the body part of an essay. As we have already mentioned, English writing instruction moves from paragraph to essay and the strategies of paragraph writing can be applied to essay writing (D. Liu, 2020). Here, “paragraph” refers to that in the body part of an essay. Chinese writing paradigm might not be substantially different from English tradition in introductory and concluding paragraphs as neither the English nor the Chinese textbooks mention specific rhetorical modes in paragraph writing in the introductory and concluding sections. Finally, 238 paragraphs were selected for analysis and comparison.

Analytical Framework

Our analytical framework consists of three aspects: (a) rhetorical modes and types of evidence, (b) paragraph types, and (c) style. As mentioned in “Rhetorical Paradigms of English and Chinese Exposition” section above, English composition textbooks lay importance on topic sentence writing and paragraph developing. However, Chinese textbooks do not include detailed instructions on how to write a topic sentence or how to develop a paragraph, but emphasize using exemplification (of famous people) and well-known quotations to support the thesis statement of an exposition. Moreover, rhetorical devices are recommended to be used to achieve aesthetic effect, as discussed in our previous study (D. Liu, 2020). Considering the rhetorical requirements particular to English and those particular to Chinese exposition, our analysis of the Chinese model essays focused on these three aspects so as to find out whether the essays would reveal more English rhetorical features than Chinese ones and to answer the central research question.

First, rhetorical modes and types of evidence were considered in data analysis as English composition textbooks recommend five rhetorical modes and many types of evidence to develop paragraphs. When analyzing the types of evidence, we not only included personal experience, ordinary people’s experience, current social events, but also celebrities’ anecdotes/words, famous books/music/paintings, and so on, and even web stars’ stories, for the purpose of comparing the Chinese and English rhetoric. We had such consideration: although personal experience is encouraged to be used to support a topic sentence in English paragraph development, ample examples and quotations of famous people are recommended to be employed to develop an essay by the most widely used Chinese textbook published by People’s Education Press.

The second aspect was paragraph arrangement embodied in paragraphs with a topic sentence, and in paragraphs without a topic sentence which were further divided into “typical Chinese paragraphs” and “rhetorical paragraphs.” Due to the neglect of topic sentence in Chinese writing, we termed those paragraphs with only supporting sentences but without a topic sentence as “typical Chinese paragraphs.” Apart from that, there are many extremely short paragraphs in Chinese articles. Such paragraphs consist only of one or two sentences, without any supporting sentence. We call these paragraphs
“rhetorical paragraphs” as the major function is emphasizing and calling attention of the readers (D. Liu & Gan, 2019). A case in point is Example 1 that highlights the previous paragraph not only by the clause after the colon (in English translation by *that-clause*) but also by the discourse markers “由此 (hence)” and “得出结论 (draw a conclusion).” Such a one-sentence paragraph attracts the readers. In this article, all the excerpts from the full-score Chinese compositions (i.e., Examples 1–4), which are quoted for illustrative purpose, are translated by the authors:

**Example 1**

由此，我们得出一个结论：一个人害怕与否，其能力的高低是关键因素。 *Hence, we draw a conclusion that one's capability is a crucial factor affecting the degree of his fear.* (23rd essay—2013 Jiangxi: Mutual Promotion between Difficulty and Ease and Between Fear and Courage)

The third aspect involved style that could be realized by rhetorical devices. Chinese expository writing emphasizes rhetorical devices because they can produce aesthetic and rhetorical effects. We predicted according to our previous writing experience that several kinds of rhetorical devices might be used in the topic sentences. In this study, we centered on topic sentence to analyze style because topic sentence is of primary importance in English writing. A good topic sentence must be explicit in meaning and simple in style (Kanar, 2011). With reference to Corbett and Connors (1999), we defined below the kinds of rhetorical devices frequently used both in Chinese and in English, that is, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, and rhetorical question.

Metaphor: an implicit comparison between two things that have something in common;  
Simile: an explicit comparison between two similar things with such expressions as *like, as, as if*;  
Personification: investing inanimate objects with human qualities;  
Hyperbole: exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis; and  
Rhetorical question: asking a question not to elicit an answer but to deny or assert something obliquely.

To make a comparison, *plain topic sentence* (i.e., without using any figure of speech) and *meta-discourse* in topic sentence were also included in our data. Meta-discourse in this study refers to a topic sentence which only expresses a topic or indicates a speech act, more specifically, a textual act which shows what the writer will do in the following paragraph (see Example 4 in “Results” section).

This study conducted content analysis of the sampled full-score Chinese compositions. Both researchers analyzed the data set independently and compared the results of analysis. In this process, some items were easier to identify, such as types of evidence, clearly stated topic sentences, rhetorical paragraphs, rhetorical questions, simile, and personification. Other items required more attention and qualitative analysis. Problematic cases were discussed and cross-checked, and decisions were reached finally by consensus (Huang, 2005; Huang et al., 2019).

### Results

#### Rhetorical Modes and Types of Evidence

We have identified 187 regular natural paragraphs, in addition to 51 rhetorical paragraphs. Considering their emphatic function and irregular arrangement—without developing sentences—we excluded these rhetorical paragraphs when analyzing the rhetorical modes and types of evidence. All the five rhetorical modes have been found in the regular natural paragraphs (see Table 1). However, the obvious preference is illustration that corresponds to exemplification in Chinese textbooks. The other four modes are of much lower frequency. Furthermore, none of the five rhetorical modes were used in 49 paragraphs. It means that the Chinese expository paragraphs can be developed in other ways rather than the five rhetorical modes.

Take the 26th essay below for example. The writer commented on the behaviors of a series of people mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The paragraph has no topic sentence and none of the five rhetorical modes is used. It consists of three parallel sentences beginning with “即使 (even if).” The language is florid and full of similes and metaphors:

**Example 2**

这些人即使在缤纷花瓣过，依旧掸衣故清辉，如清露晨流，新桐初引；即使在乱世纷纭中，依旧立着清朗的心，如明月松间，菩提微暖；即使在举世欲举时，依旧立着修华意，如阳光清风，和光同尘。 *Even if these people had experienced ups and downs in their life just as once colorful petals wither away, they still looked refreshed by keeping their dress clean and tidy just like fresh morning dew and newly sprouting paulownia tree. Even if they lived in troubled times and disorderly world, they still had clear and bright mind just like the bright moon among the pine trees and a wise man getting wisdom under the Bodhi tree.*

### Table 1. Rhetorical Modes.

| Rhetorical modes | Cause–effect | Illustration | Contrast | Division | Definition | None | Total |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|----------|----------|------------|------|-------|
| Frequency        | 21           | 103          | 11       | 2        | 1          | 49   | 187   |
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to revolt, they still kept mind calm just as natural as sunshine, wind and dust. (The 26th essay—2014 Sichuan: The World Applauding Those Who Set Their Heart)

Generally speaking, the Chinese expository paragraphs are developed mainly by illustration but are not restricted to the five rhetorical modes. In illustration, many types of evidence are employed. The total number of pieces of evidence is 202 (see Table 2). More than one example on average is used in each regular natural paragraph. The students preferred to use as evidence the words or stories of famous people, famous books, or music and they used least personal experiences and current social events, which reveals more Chinese strategies, as suggested in the Chinese textbook published by People’s Education Press.

Paragraph Arrangement

Table 3 shows that the paragraphs without topic sentences (65.13%: 43.70% + 21.43%) dominate in number, with rhetorical paragraphs occupying 21.43% and typical Chinese paragraphs 43.7%. Table 3 also displays that only 83 paragraphs (34.87%) have topic sentences. Of all of the paragraph types, typical Chinese paragraph is preferred.

Rhetorical Devices in Topic Sentences

Table 4 shows that the topic sentences carry five kinds of rhetorical devices: metaphor, simile, quotation, hyperbole, and rhetorical question. Figurative language was used in 51.8% of the topic sentences. Such figurative language in the topic sentences cannot show clearly the topic and the focus. The connection between the topic sentence and the other sentences can only be inferred by means of analogy or association.

The topic sentence of Example 3 below has a metaphor and a hyperbole: Planting flowers in their hearts implies that these people cherish beauty and love and they are tender-hearted; they are broad-minded and tolerant because they can “accommodate the sky and the earth.” The topic sentence cannot summarize the whole paragraph and its rhetorical relation to the subsequent text is more like “comment” than “summarization.” The supporting sentences in the paragraph also have metaphors that suggest that these kind people cultivate, foster, and protect their benevolence in a graceful way. The metaphors in the whole paragraph are all about planting flowers. The supporting sentences describe these kind people in detail but do not explain how they “accommodate the sky and the earth.” To put it in another way, only the topic in the topic sentence is closely related to the supporting sentences so the focus can only serve as a comment to these kind people. Generally speaking, the relationship between the topic sentences and the supporting sentences is inferred by association:

Example 3

心里种着花草的平凡人，必然也拥怀天地。我总这样想，这样的人，不焦不躁，不疾不徐，将他拥有的所有善意坦露出来，从容美好。也必有人怀着满腔的善意，为他的一方天地洒水锄苗锄虫，全呈现出愈益成熟美好的姿态来。

(Some ordinary people who plant flowers in their hearts are surely able to accommodate the sky and the earth. I always think like this: such people are never anxious or restless; nor are they too fast or too slow to show their benevolence gracefully. These people full of kindness irrigate their plants, hoe weeds and kill pests, presenting more and more mature and gracious manner.

(The 12th essay—2012 Zhejiang: Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining)

Only 38.55% of the topic sentences used plain language, with the topic and focus identified easily. In addition, 9.64% of the topic sentences were in fact meta-discourses that showed a textual act in a paragraph but did not predict the coming information because of the lack of “focus.” Sentences with meta-discourse are not typical English topic sentences. In Example 4 below, the topic sentence only indicates the topic of the paragraph “白芳礼 (Bai Fangli)” but the focus is unknown. The rest of the sentences in the paragraph narrate, describe, and comment on his good deed:
Example 4

This essay reminds me of an old man named Bai Fangli. In order to support the poor children to receive schooling, Mr. Bai Fangli labored by his tricycle and donated 350,000 yuan during the past ten years to cover the tuition and life expense of more than 300 college students. Every coin he donated was earned by his feet—pedaling his tricycle laboriously. Every coin he donated was earned by his sweating in scorching sun. He worked day and night, despite wind and rain. How hard for an old man to save such a sum of money! Usually, a senior man at his age does not need to do anything for other people, but to get fully cared for by other people. On the contrary, he was not attended to by other people. Instead, he lighted the rest of his candle of life and made it flame so brightly and so splendidly. (The 2nd essay—2012 Beijing: Gentlemen Should Have Virtue and Social Commitment)

Discussion

Divergence Between Chinese Expository Paragraphs and Modern English Rhetoric

The results of this study reveal great divergence in paragraph writing between Chinese and English. English paragraph writing is a key area that determines the rhetorical differences between English and Chinese exposition. The major feature of Chinese paragraph writing found in this study is the way to support the thesis—illustration by resorting to the stories and words of famous people, famous music, or books. Those famous things help to establish the writer’s ethos and make the writing persuasive as ethos is characterized by reliability or trustworthiness (Miller, 2004). Resorting to authorities/allusions is considered as a rhetorical strategy in English writing as in Chinese, but Chinese writers seem to rely more heavily on this strategy in advancing their arguments. L. Wu (2014) considers it as the first important rhetorical strategy in Chinese writing. Many famous writers in Chinese history such as Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu excelled in using this strategy. It not only promotes the trustworthiness of the writer but also moderates the tone and conveys the writer’s voice less directly, so that the speech or writing is more acceptable and persuasive.

Table 4. Rhetorical Devices in Topic Sentences.

| Types        | Metaphor | Simile | Quotation | Hyperbole | RQ  | MD   | Plain |
|--------------|----------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----|------|-------|
| Number       | 29       | 5      | 5         | 2         | 2   | 8    | 32    |
| %            | 34.94    | 6.02   | 6.02      | 2.41      | 2.41| 9.64 | 38.55 |
| Total        | 43       | 51.80% |           |           |     |      |       |

Note. MD = meta-discourse; RQ = rhetorical question; Plain = plain topic sentence.
writing. Although one- or two-sentence paragraphs performing the function of transition or emphasis also exist in English writing, they are not common and even devalued by rhetoricians. Professional or mature writers “generally write longer paragraphs than unpracticed writers do. Many of the one- and two-sentence paragraphs that students write have no rhetorical justification whatever. Such short paragraphs simply reveal that the students have not developed their thoughts adequately” (Corbett, 1990, p. 415). English writing textbooks even consider avoiding one- or two-sentence paragraphs as a general rule. For example, Dietsch (2000) advocates adjusting paragraph length. “A paragraph should be long enough to adequately cover the central idea”; otherwise, the one- and two-sentence paragraphs “will give the writing a choppy, careless appearance” (p. 94).

Modern English rhetoric considers writing as a way to convey information and hence emphasizes the logical element of rhetoric. According to Garrett (1993), the emotive dimensions are slighted in modern English rhetoric. On the contrary, in Chinese essays what the figurative language expresses may not be facts or evidence but the writers’ imagination or emotion. Hence, it seems to lack logic and objectivity according to modern English rhetoric. Actually, figurative language by which the writers appeal to pathos is a feature particular to and popular in Chinese writing. Chinese expository and even argumentative essays are not clearly separated from lyrical prose. Writers are encouraged to make the exposition exert literature effect so as to inspire and convince the audience. While “Western rhetoric is primarily practical without much emphasis on aesthetics, which is the task of literary criticism and poetics, modern Chinese rhetoric is and has always been primarily aesthetic and poetic, but its principles are applicable in writing instruction” (H. Wu, 2009, p. 164). When learning writing, the students are required to “describe scenes vividly, articulate thoughts and emotions accurately . . . This rhetorical strategy is an honored tradition in classic Chinese literature, and it is still cherished today” (Sullivan et al., 2012, p. 323).

In summary, paragraph development, together with paragraph arrangement and florid style, contributes to the differences between Chinese and English rhetoric in expository writing.

Implication for Rhetoric Instruction in EFL Composition Class

The differences found in the Chinese writers’ expository essays imply that first language transfer might be unavoidable in English writing. Chinese rhetorical strategies are likely to be transferred to English writing if English rhetoric is not taught and reinforced in college. Although a black-and-white classification might be simplistic to differentiate English writing norms from Chinese ones, it is still helpful to keep in mind the possible impact of cultural or rhetorical traditions on individuals as such differences “can be deeply entrenched in one’s linguistic habitus” (Gao & Wen, 2009, p. 701).

Teachers and students at least need to be familiar with the rhetorical norms and strategies to construct the target language texts (Casanave, 2004). For the purpose of rhetorical awareness building, it is necessary for teachers to design their syllabus and even conduct research in English rhetoric and composition to benefit their English and Chinese composition teaching. In addition, students majoring in English in China are future teachers, translators, and researchers in English language and literature. Their students as well as themselves are likely to address the audience of English native speakers and the audience greatly influenced by English rhetoric and culture. If the present students are not fully aware of the rhetorical differences between the two languages, their future students will not, either. The rhetorical divergence between English and Chinese will be increased.

It is not feasible to ask every reader to learn Chinese rhetoric and culture before reading the articles written by native Chinese writers. International communication must be based on a common platform and English is the lingua franca more influential than other languages to serve as a common platform. Audience consideration in rhetorical context constitutes a legitimate reason to study the rhetorical differences between English and Chinese and adjust the writing to different audiences. Even if Chinese becomes a lingua franca in the world, such studies as rhetorical differences between languages are still necessary. Identity in composition (e.g., second language writing) may become a current and urgent issue for the Chinese students studying abroad. But it is not an urgent issue for the vast majority of the Chinese students studying in mainland China. In this case, it is necessary to teach Chinese students English rhetoric so as to raise their awareness of the rhetorical differences between their first language (Chinese) and second language (English).

Conclusion

By analyzing the expository essays written in Chinese, we have found that Chinese paragraph writing is not as close to modern English rhetorical paradigm as claimed by some second language writing researchers. There are great disparities between English and Chinese expository writing at paragraph level such as non-English rhetorical mode, reliance on authorities, rhetorical paragraph, and figurative language. This finding thus contradicts the view held by scholars such as Kirkpatrick and Xu (2012) and Kubota and Shi (2005), but supports X. Li’s (2005) study which was carried out more than one decade ago. X. Li (2005) did not find that Chinese writing classes were indistinguishable from their Western counterparts, but that “even a culture as receptive to changes as China’s has not lost its distinctive cultural identity” (p. 128). The students’ cultural aspects such as thinking pattern, rhetoric, logic, and writing convention might be even harder to change unconsciously in the
EFL context. Explicit teaching and conscious learning are conducive for the Chinese students to understand English rhetoric.

To conclude this article, we would like to highlight our major findings as follows. First, the five rhetorical modes in English exposition (illustration, cause–effect, classification, comparison–contrast, and definition) are not necessarily essential in Chinese exposition, that is, a Chinese expository paragraph can be developed in its own way. Furthermore, when using illustration, the stories and words of famous people are the most popular type of evidence. Second, typical Chinese paragraphs without topic sentences still dominate in number in the model essays while rhetorical paragraph is another feature in arrangement particular to Chinese writing. Finally, plain style characterizing modern English writing is not preferred in Chinese expository paragraphs. A distinctive feature is figurative language in the topic sentences. Based on these findings, we argue that it is necessary to teach Chinese students English rhetoric and to explore, through research, the possible impact of English rhetoric instruction on Chinese students’ EFL writing. The finding of this article is applicable in the writing of other genres, for example, argumentation and letter of application that include expository paragraphs.

Second language writing involves more and more different disciplines and is becoming translingular, or even transdisciplinary as it encounters “shifts in disciplinary reconfiguration” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 440), so does second language writing research. Second language writing can be studied from different perspectives and even different disciplines. An advocacy of shifting our research attention to emerging issues such as identity, voice, teachers’ conditions, and education policies does not mean we should play down our reconfiguration” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 440), so does second language writing. The finding of this article is applicable in the writing of other genres, for example, argumentation and letter of application that include expository paragraphs.

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