

Tracing Cultures behind the Struggling Experience of a Chinese High School Student Writing Application Letters in English

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Abstract—By examining the affect, behavior and cognition (the ABCs) involved in the writing process of a Chinese high school student composing application essays in English (a foreign language) as a case study by means of ethnographic approach and under the notion of small culture, this study aims to illustrate how different cultural forces interact with one another and how they come to play in the shaping of rhetorical differences between learner's native language (L1/NL) and second or foreign language (L2/FL) writing. Data were collected and analyzed from various sources --essay drafts, interviews, personal reflections, and email exchanges. The findings show that multiple cultural forces ranging from national culture (Chinese culture, for example) to small cultures such as L1/NL and L2/EFL writing instruction and family education and the like, interact with one another and co-influence L2/EFL learner's writing practice. And the intensity of struggle in L2/EFL writing somewhat relates to the interaction between the mentioned cultures.

Index Terms—rhetorical differences, small cultures, EFL writing, L1/L2 instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of culture and writing has been widely addressed since Kaplan pioneered the contrastive rhetoric (CR) research with his 1966 seminal work (see Connor, 1996, 2002 for overviews). In this (1966) study, Kaplan maintained that rhetoric was language and culture specific, and that L2 rhetorical organization was the result of the transfer of L2 rhetorical organization. Echoing these assumptions, numerous attempts have been made to explore the influence of culture on L2 writing (see Hirose, 2003; Kadar-Fulop, 1988; Purves, 1988; Uysal, 2008, for examples), and insightful findings have been generated to inform the teaching of ESL and EFL writing.

While it has had successful application for more than forty years, CR has also invited harsh criticisms in recent years, for being too simplistic in its research methodology and conceptualization of the CR notion (Martin, 1992; Matsuda, 1997; Scollon, 1997; Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1997); for overgeneralizing and stereotyping about rhetorical conventions (Leki, 1991, 1997; Hinds, 1983); for ignoring L2 developmental variables or the difficulties of writing in a second language (Mohan & Lo, 1985); and for considering transfer from L1 as a negative influence (Kubota, 1998a; Canagarajah, 2002). Central to the criticisms is the notion of culture, as Li (2008) wrote:

In my view, many of the flaws in our research stem less from the misconceived notion of culture, a notion that is both pervasive and elusive and probably all too broad as an analytical category, than from the misguided view of culture as an omniscient explanation and the assumption that there is one cultural prototype that students from the same cultural background would all pay homage to. (pp.18-19)

Li is not alone in contending that the underdeveloped notion of culture has limited CR in explaining differences in written texts and writing practices. As early as 2002, Connor noted that the view of culture most widely assumed in accounting for textual forms and practices has been overwhelmingly a received one, leading to problems such as the conflation of cultures with national entities, the valorization of internal consistency and consensuality, and the neglect of the place of unequal power relations and the role of conflict in describing influences and processes. In addressing the critiques, Connor(2004) went further to suggest a change of the name of contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric to encapsulate broadening trends of writing across languages and cultures. To accomplish a “text”-to-“context” shift in intercultural rhetoric research, Connor called for the inclusion of ethnographic approach to language study, and a dynamic definition of culture. Atkinson’s “small culture” model (2004) was a response to this call.

II. SMALL CULTURES AS CONCEPTUALIZATION

Given the situation that previous contrastive rhetoric is limited in accounting for differences in writing texts and

writing practices for viewing culture as static national entities, Atkinson, echoing Holliday (1999), distinguished a small sense of culture (“small culture”, i.e. classroom culture, disciplinary culture, student culture, etc.) in an attempt to make the notion of culture “a more flexible analytical tool” (2004, p. 285). Drawing on the studies of Holliday (1994, 1999), which discussed the array of complex and overlapping social institutions that any truly appropriate methodology would have to take into account, Atkinson (2004) developed a modified version of Holliday’s diagram (see figure1 below), which indicates the sizes and levels of these interacting cultures and the partially overlapping relations among them. For example, student culture would have both its own unique internal norms and practices in any particular education situation, and this would overlap national cultural norms and practices, etc. The idea behind the notion of small cultures, according to Atkinson, is that “when we break our analysis down into complexly interacting small cultures, we get a much more complex notion of the interactions of different cultural forces” (2004, p. 286). Considering that

in no sense, then, could the “cultural action” taking place in any particular educational setting be accounted for solely in terms of the national culture in which that educational setting appeared to be located, as has often been done in the past. (Atkinson, 2004, p. 17)

Atkinson suggested intercultural rhetoric research need to consider the complexly interacting small cultures in any educational or other intercultural situation. Two studies listed below are cases in point.

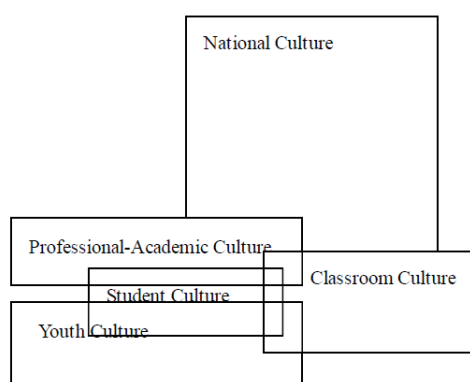


Fig.1. Complexly interacting small cultures in an educational setting

Petric’s 2005 study is an attempt to incorporate the notion of “small culture” into exploring the role of contrastive rhetoric in writing pedagogy in the context of a monolingual class, where a group of students from the Russian Federation studied at an English medium university in Central Europe. The study compared students’ argumentative essays written before and after a short writing course, which aimed to address cultural differences in writing in a non-prescriptive, exploratory, manner. The comparison focused on a culturally based textual element: the thesis statement. The analysis revealed that the essays written after the course display higher occurrence of thesis statements, more uniformity in the position of the thesis statements and less variation in the thesis statement sentence structure and lexical choices.

Uysal (2008) made another attempt to explore rhetorical patterns and bidirectional transfer in L1 and L2 essays of Turkish writers with reference to the notion of “small culture”. The study examined whether writers from shared cultural backgrounds displayed common writing patterns in their texts and whether these patterns differ while writing in L1 versus L2. The study explored the presence and bidirectional transfer of rhetorical patterns in eighteen Turkish participants’ writing in relation to previous writing instructional context defined as “small culture.” Participants were first given a survey about their writing instruction history. Then, each participant wrote two argumentative essays in Turkish and English. These texts were analyzed and stimulated recall interviews were given to discover the reasoning behind certain rhetorical patterns and their transfer. The results revealed some rhetorical preferences and their bidirectional transfer. However, although most rhetorical patterns could be traced to the educational context, various other influences, such as L2 level, topic, and audience were also found to account for these patterns and their transfer.

Diversified as they are in subject matter, the aforementioned two studies all agree that the small culture of the writing classroom, with its specific characteristics, should be the basis for decisions about the implications of CR findings for a particular group of students.

The current study, in a similar vein, adopts a “small culture” approach to the rhetorical differences emerging in the process a Chinese high school student went through in writing application letters in English. But different from Patric and Uysal, which pinpoint the “small culture” to the writing classroom, and seek relevance between CR findings and the teaching situation, this research attends to the interactional dimension of different levels of cultures, and their influence on L2 writing.

III. THE STUDY

A. Purpose

The study reported here aimed to investigate how different levels of cultures interact with one another and

co-influence L2/ELF writing by examining the process a Chinese high school student went through in writing application letters in English, the findings of which were interpreted in the notion of “small cultures”.

B. Method

The method used in this study was, broadly speaking, ethnographic, with a single case study format. In order to achieve an element of triangulation, data from several sources were collected for the study. The focal point of analysis and point of orientation of the other sources were the drafts (with detailed comments from an English writing expert) and the final version of a writing task in the UW (University of Washington) application. The author of the application letters was a 12-grade Chinese senior high school student, referred to here as Tony (a pseudonym), who planned to pursue graduate study abroad. Other sources include: our in-depth interviews with Tony; email exchanges between Tony and Prof. X (a pseudonym), the writing expert; Tony's blogs; teaching reflections by some of Tony's teachers (a Chinese language teacher and an English writing teacher) on the web, and field notes.

C. The Participant

1. English education background

The time when he decided to study abroad, Tony was 12th grade student of a foreign languages school attached to a local normal university, who had talents in informatics (first award winner in the National Olympiad in Informatics). At the same time, Tony was a good Chinese writer, whose articles were always read to the class, and some of them, won awards in writing competitions of different levels.

Given the nature of the school, Tony had more exposure to English than his peers in non-English-oriented middle schools. “We have two more English lessons per week than other schools. And we study two textbooks, while only one is taught in other schools.” (Interview: Tony, January 30, 2011)

He also mentioned that various kinds of English activities such as a 10-minute daily speech at the beginning of each English class, debates, English drama night, etc, were organized to improve students' skills. Speaking of the English performance of the students in his school, Tony could not conceal his pride: “Students in our school always far exceed other students in English tests. We can easily finish a test of two hours within 40 minutes, and score high.” (Interview: Tony, January 30, 2011). When asked about the focal point of the English training, Tony quickly referred to grammar, vocabulary and oral English. Although they did have English writing class every two weeks in the final year of the senior high school studies, regular and systematic writing practices have never occurred to them due to the heavy workload of the writing teacher (who has more than 10 classes to attend to, and each class has more than 50 students!), the priority on grammar and vocabulary over writing, and the requirement and style of test on writing in college entrance examination which, in Tony's words, “is a piece of translation or description work of no more than 120 words” (Interview, Tony, January 30, 2011). Tony further stated that concepts such as “thesis statement”, “topic sentence”, and “five-paragraph writing pattern” were mentioned in the writing class, but soon forgotten and failed to get developed into skill due to lack of practice, and due to their unawareness of the importance these concepts mean to English writing.

It was clear from Tony's account of his English learning experience in high school that in comparison to grammar, vocabulary, and oral English, writing, especially, whole composition writing, receives far less attention. While students in the school can score high in English tests due to their larger repertoire of vocabulary and solid grammatical knowledge, and can express themselves much better in interviews, they cannot, nonetheless, easily produce English essays that meet western writing norms. This observation was confirmed by L (a pseudonym), an English writing teacher in Tony's school, who wrote in a reflection journal:

Driven by the college entrance examination, the (English) composition training has been simplified. Students hardly have any opportunity to practice writing systematically. Given this situation, a majority of them (the students) resort to the memorization of model essays. (Personal reflection: L, May, 2010)

To gain an edge in English writing, which was crucial to academic success in the States, Tony joined a short-term SAT training program (staffed by native speakers) in Shanghai (a metropolitan in east China) during the 2010 summer vacation, with an emphasis on essay writing.

We were expected to complete an essay within 20 minutes. In order to be reader-friendly, we were taught to position the thesis in the opening paragraph, use examples to support the thesis in the body paragraph, and reiterate it in the concluding paragraph. (Interview: Tony, January 30, 2011)

The Shanghai experience, if not producing an overall effect on Tony as an effective writer due to its shortness in time, made Tony realize that English writing was not a simple translation of thoughts. The fact that he could write good Chinese articles did not necessarily mean that he could make an efficient English writer.

When I started learning TOEFL writing (in the SAT training program), my articles were below standard, but my Chinese writing often got high scores. I was so confused. (Personal reflection: Tony, November 8, 2010)

But Tony's real challenge in making an effective English writer began with the writing of application letters, the success of which would decide whether he would be accepted by the target universities.

2. Tony's struggle in writing application letters

Taking into account of his academic strength and interest, and financial situation, Tony decided to apply for undergraduate programs at two universities in the US. One is University of Washington (UW), the other, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Following the decision was the writing of application letters. But Tony felt somewhat

uncertain about his writing ability, though the one-week intensive training in Shanghai did offer him insight into writing as a second language learner. Tony then turned to Prof. X, the writing expert, for help.

From December 9th-15th, 2010, Tony stayed in close contact with Prof. X via emails, wherein timely and detailed feedbacks on the draft application letters were offered. A total of 46 pieces of comment (all written in Chinese) were made over 10 drafts on 5 writing tasks. Problems mentioned in the comments are summarized and translated into English as follows:

TABLE1:
WRITING PROBLEMS IN TONY'S FIRST DRAFTS OF THE FIVE TASKS (LISTED IN THE ORDER OF OCCURRENCE)

	Problems	
	Types	Categories
1	Vague reference and expressions (<i>expressions without elaboration</i>)	Local
2	Assertion (<i>claims without support, statements without hedges</i>)	
3	Repetition (<i>overlapping expressions</i>)	
4	Improper word usage (<i>Chinglish, wrong word</i>)	
5	Redundancy (<i>wordy expressions</i>)	
6	Improper use of rhetorical devices (<i>overuse of rhetorical devices</i>)	
7	Improper citation (<i>quotation without giving source</i>)	
8	Irrelevance (<i>ideas off point</i>)	Global
9	Lack of voice	
10	Jumping logic (<i>Ideas not developed in a linear order</i>)	

As suggested in the table, 10 writing problem types were identified among the 46 pieces of feedback from the expert, roughly divided into two categories (global and local). At the global level, Tony's essays were considered ineffective for the lack of the author's own voice and jumping logic, while at the local level, problems related to language use (vague expressions, assertion, repetition, redundancy) and coherence (irrelevance) were observed. For the convenience of discussion, "improper citation" was included in the local problems.

To better illustrate the occurrence of the above-listed problems, Tony's efforts in dealing with them, and more importantly, the cultural elements that contribute to Tony's struggle, one of the writing experiences was reported below in a chronological order of the revision process. The task involved is one to articulate how the work of a poet is similar to that of a scientist in no more than 300 words.

In Draft 1, under the title "The similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist", Tony produced a five-paragraph essay of 546 words, while the word limit was "no more than 300 words". The structure of the essay was a typically linear, deductive one, with thesis statement "there are some similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist" in the beginning paragraph, and topic sentences "Both the scientist and the poet need to consider the things from the essence", "Scientists need to see the world from both a macro view and a micro view, so is the poet", and "The work of a scientist is creative, as well as that of a poet" as topic sentence for each of the body paragraph, and a summative sentence as the conclusion. Moreover, one or two examples were provided in each body paragraph to help illustrate the point. It seems that Tony, at the moment of writing the application letter, was already familiar with the English rhetorical pattern.

Soon Tony received a response from Prof. X, which read

The essay has a neat structure, but it appears lengthy for redundancy—the inclusion of irrelevant information, and the use of imprecise expressions; the thesis is more a common knowledge than an individualized point of view; the argument sounds weak and superficial because it is too general. (Email exchange: Prof. X, December 10, 2010)

In addition to this holistic evaluation, pieces of revision directions (in Chinese) were offered for the underlined parts as indicated in the appendix. Here are two examples (For convenience's sake, the problems identified by the expert are underlined and the revision prompts presented in the footnotes).

1. Poetry and science are often considered as two different things with little connection, for one uses words to describe the world and thoughts, while the other uses principles^①. But in fact, there are some similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist, for example, the way they consider about things, the perspective from which they see the world^②, and the creativity needed in their work.

2. These two different scales also can be found in poems. In TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND^③, it reads:

*"To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour."*

Tony was quite ready at the feedbacks received. "Quite normal", was Tony's response to the writing problems and the feedbacks (Interview: Tony, February 25, 2011). As a novice writer, he never expected his first draft free of problems. That is why he sent to Prof. X every piece of his effort for comment.

^①Vague reference (expression).

^② Repetition.

^③ Where is it from? Give the source of the citation. Otherwise, plagiarism.

When asked about the source of the textual knowledge displayed in the essay, Tony mentioned the SAT training program, Prof. X, and the faint memory of the English writing course.

I would have placed the thesis statement at the end of the essay, like what we usually do in writing Chinese compositions, if not informed by the SAT training and Prof. X. Anyway, Flexible organization of ideas has always been highlighted by our Chinese writing teachers since primary school. A delayed thesis is an exhibition of this flexibility. (Interview: Tony, February 25, 2011)

But Tony also admitted that the general-specific-general organization proposed in Chinese writing somewhat facilitated his English writing, as both need to break down a general idea into specific ones and gather data to support them.

In Draft 2, the revised version was also in a 5-paragraph-essay pattern, but reduced to 350 words, much shorter than draft1 (546 words). To achieve this brevity, Tony nearly recomposed the essay. Besides an attention to accurate use of words and the inclusion of necessary information, Tony rewrote the controlling idea of the thesis, cutting three areas of discussion (“the way they consider about things, the perspective from which they see the world, and the creativity needed in their work”) into a single one—“they are both to make a better world”. And new examples were gathered to support the rewritten thesis. With these efforts, Tony expected to achieve a vigorous argument.

However, to Tony’s surprise, the revised essay invited even more serious criticisms from Prof. X:

Lack of voice. Frequent appearance of vague/general expressions and assertive statements make you speak like an official, a religious leader, or a representative of the human being, whereas your own voice has been shadowed. And it is hard to tell whether the thesis is a common knowledge, a truth, or your viewpoint. Subjective. Your essay sound less objective by using opinions instead of facts as evidence. A mixture of styles. The later part of the essay was in a typical style of Chinese prose, which is inconsistent with the linear structure of the essay as a whole. (Email exchange: Prof. X, December 12, 2010)

In an interview recalling his response to the feedback, Tony admitted that he was rather difficult at the result. In deed, compared with draft1, draft2 did see obvious improvement in essay length, brevity, word choice, and coherence. For example, problems such as repetition, redundancy, and improper choice of words rarely appeared, and the word number was cut to 3/5 of the 1st draft. However, as the quote revealed, when it came to concepts related to “voice”, “objectivity”, and “specification”, which are crucial to Western writing yet not receiving equal attention in its Chinese counterpart, Tony exhibited difficulty in dealing with them. This could find full evidence in the fact that although Tony almost recomposed the essay, the problems of “lack of voice” and “being general” still existed. “I was confused to find that I received similar comments on the 2nd draft”, said Tony (Interview: February 25, 2011). On retrospection, Tony realized there being something other than language that prevented him from writing effectively. In a personal reflection, Tony wrote:

...I realized it was because of cultural differences in writing. In Chinese argumentation essays, the emotional and the ethical appeals are preferable to logical appeal. Sometimes the imprecision in logic can be hidden under the flowery language. On the contrary, in western culture, logic, critical thinking and organization are the most important thing... (Personal reflection: Tony, December 12, 2010)

In an email exchange with Prof. X, Tony further mentioned that the Chinese composition instruction in high school had a strong bearing in his writing problems.

...upon entry into the final year of the senior high school, the **practice of Chinese gaokaozuowen** received great attention, which considerably enhanced the **rhetorical features** of this type of writing. At the same time, we lacked of systematic training in English writing...it is difficult to change our writing style. (Personal reflection: Tony, December 13, 2010)

When asked for elaboration, Tony said some of the problems such as “being general”, “being assertive”, “flowery language”, and “lack of logic”, to some extent, could be traced to his Chinese literacy practices. From elementary school to high school, “*sanwen*” (prose), characterized by its expressive language, was a dominant genre for both reading and writing. Students were encouraged to memorize and use beautiful words and expressions to channel feelings, to express concerns, or to display morality. “*shuqing*” (being emotional), “*youmei*” (being poetic), “*linghuo*” (being flexible), and “*daqì*” (being powerful) are basics to make a good writing.

Language in this type of writing, you know, is always poetic, general, assertive, and fluid, as its major function is not to inform or persuade, but to express feelings. It has little to do with logic. (Interview: Tony, February 25, 2011)

Tony went on to tell that argumentative writing had been introduced to them since junior high school, but limited attention had been directed to it. “Yilunxing sanwen”, a combination of argumentative elements and a prose style, was a preferred genre. Most of the high/full-score model essays fell into this style of writing, and got replicated by students who imitated it. Speaking of the writing instruction in senior high school, Tony commented that their writing practices were largely examination-oriented.

We finish up all our courses by the end of the 4th semester so that we had enough time to prepare for the college entrance examination in the final year. Our Chinese teacher did not teach us genre knowledge, for gaokaozuowen (composition in Chinese language test in the college entrance examination) does not prescribe a certain genre to write with. We learned to write by following the model essays (full-score **gaokaozuowen**) provided and commented by our teacher. And we were encouraged to write with *wencai* (a long-celebrated feature of good writing, realized by a mastery

of rhetoric). As raters have barely 30 seconds to score a composition, articles with *wencai* (grand tone, wild quotations, and beautiful language) would easily attract their attention, and win high scores, though logic problems might exist. Given this situation, it is important to learn to use rhetorical devices (parallelism, personification, metaphor, etc), poems, and quotation of classics to please them. (Interview: Tony, February 25, 2011)

Regarding the problem “lack of voice”, and the related comment “speak like an official, a religious leader, and spokesman of the human being”, Tony mentioned the social context.

We learned how to voice our opinion through imitation. TV news, newspapers, books, even articles included in the textbooks, which are so close to us, are mainly delivered in a grand tone, with general expressions, and in an assertive way. It seems people around all speak in that way. So do I. It is part of our culture. We don’t even feel it. (Interview: Tony, February 25, 2011)

However, Tony denied that he was a follow-man. He said, heavily influenced by his father, a History teacher in a university, he learned to view things from a critical perspective, and to think independently from childhood. This self-evaluation could find evidence in a couple of his Chinese compositions that challenged mainstream thoughts and common wisdom, and in his blogs, wherein he conveyed an authentic voice as a talented and strong-minded middle school student (cf. an official, a religious leader, and a spokesman of human being).

Compared with his receptive attitude towards Prof.X’s feedbacks on the first draft, Tony was more involved in the second round of revision. The somewhat unexpected sharp criticisms on the second draft aroused a mixed feeling in him (first frustrated, then confused), and compelled him to think. Following serious reflections on the “why” issue, as revealed in the foregoing account, Tony said he came to a deeper and better understanding of the writing problems and the rhetorical differences.

In the final version, with a renewed understanding of English writing, Tony set out to work on the draft again. In response to “lack of voice”, Tony used the phrase “in my opinion” to introduce the thesis. Weighing the points mentioned in draft1 and draft2, he finally located the focal point of discussion on the illustration of “scientists and poets are creative people”. To be more specific, he further limited the discussion of “creativity” to both scientists and poets “conceptualizing the complicated world and express it in simple ways”. In the body part of the essay, Tony carefully chose 6 examples (all concerning famous figures) to support the argument, following a point-by-point style of comparison. To avoid vagueness, Tony replaced general words with specific ones. With these efforts, Tony put an end to the writing task, strugglingly but rewardingly.

To get a bird’s-eye view of Tony’s recurring writing process, the introductory part of each draft is extracted as below:

Draft1: Poetry and science are often considered as two different things with little connection, for one uses words to describe the world and thoughts, while the other uses principles. But in fact, there are some similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist, for example, the way they consider about things, the perspective from which they see the world, and the creativity needed in their work.

Draft 2: Poetry and science are often considered as two different things with little connection, for one uses words to describe the world and thoughts, while the other uses formulas. But in fact, there are some similarities between the work of a poet and a scientist, for example, they are both to make a better world.

Final version: In my opinion, scientists and poets are creative people who conceptualize the complicated world and express it in simple ways; scientists describe in simple formulas the complex material world with so many objects, and poets express in several lines the meaning of life and complex feelings of the mental world.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This ethnographic investigation of the writing process of a Chinese high school student writing application letters in English illustrates how different cultural forces come to play in the shaping of rhetorical differences, and how they interact with each other. The study identified 10 types of problems occurring in Tony’s writing, including lack of the author’s voice, jumping logic, vague expressions, repetition, redundancy, improper citation, irrelevance, etc, though not all of them got fully discussed. A close examination of the formulating process of one of Tony’s application essay writing tasks has revealed that Chinese culture was not the only source for the writing problems, other cultural forces, such as Chinese vs. English writing instruction and family education, known as small cultures (Holliday, 1994, 1997; Atkinson, 2004), also had a bearing in affecting Tony’s English writing practice.

The study has also indicated that Tony’s struggle in the recurring revision process, in a certain sense, was a result of the interaction among different levels of cultures. A case in point was the interaction between Chinese composition instruction and that of the English. The Chinese composition instruction taught Tony to write with *wencai*, *shuqing*, and *daqi*, features of good writing that emphasized expressive function. On the other hand, the SAT training program and the instruction from an English writing expert informed Tony that “objectivity”, “specification”, “logic”, and “voice” were crucial to English writing. Further, while Chinese composition practice received great attention in high school, as it constituted a big part of the Chinese language test in the entrance examination, English writing training was hardly systematic due to various reasons. Given the rhetorical differences and the imbalanced effort directed to two types of writing, it was possible that Tony grappled with the strong influence of Chinese in the process of composing English essays.

Also noteworthy is the interaction between family education, Chinese literacy practice, and national culture. As

revealed in the ethnographic account, Tony was strong-minded and had a strong sense of self identity due to liberal family education. Yet “lack of voice” made an enduring and big problem for him. Unfamiliarity with the strategies to express voice in English was one reason. The Chinese literacy that directed Tony to communicate in a/an “official, religious leader, and spokesman of human being” way was another, which was further related to the Chinese culture characterized by high power distance and collectivism. In all, situated in a context that favors a collective voice, even Tony had a critical mindset, when English rhetoric was not familiar to him, his voice went suppressed.

To survive the daunting revisions, Tony’s prior knowledge of English writing from SAT training program and the writing expert came to his help. His willingness to cooperate with the English writing expert and accept radical cutting and rewriting also worked in his favor. Moreover, instead of following them passively, Tony adopted a critical and reflexive attitude toward the editing advices, digging out the rational behind them, which gained him a deeper understanding of the rhetorical differences between the two languages. Although it is hard to say to what extent Tony’s difficulties were specific to his situation as a second language writer, it is true that high school students who are not so critical like Tony seem likely to experience most. In view of this situation, Tony’s strategies to overcome the difficulties were illuminating.

The current study sheds light on developing an appropriate pedagogy for second language writing by urging L2 instructors taking into consideration the complexity of the writing backgrounds of the writer. As revealed in Tony’s case, the ESL writing process is influenced by multiple cultural forces ranging from national culture (Chinese culture) to small cultures (L1 and L2 literacy, family education). And the intensity of struggle in ESL writing somewhat relates to the interaction. Knowing what kind of cultural forces function behind the writer, and which is the most influential one (Matsuda, 1997) will help the ESL researchers design the course accordingly.

The ethnographic inquiry into Tony’s writing experience provides far richer issues related to L2 writing than what has been discussed here, such as the L2 writer’s perception of the problems (linguistic, educational, cultural), and of the cultural forces that work on him (identities, power, hegemony). It is also interesting to document the change of the L2 writer’s attitude towards feedbacks received at different revision stages (receptive-skeptical-retrospective) and its effect on writing. However, due to limits of time, energy, and space, only the aspect of culture, specifically, the coexistence and interaction of different levels of culture behind L2 writing are discussed. Even within such a reduced scope of discussion, there is room for further and fuller study, if variables such as language proficiency, writer identity, etc., and perspectives such as comparative study, critical discourse analysis, etc, are considered. Given the tentative nature of the study, all those areas uncovered in this paper can be treated as directions for future study.

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APPENDIX 1: DRAFT 1

The similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist

Poetry and science are often considered as two different things with little connection, for one uses words to describe the world and thoughts, while the other uses principles (指代不明). But in fact, there are some similarities between the work of a poet and that of a scientist, for example, the way they consider about things, the perspective from which they see the world(一个意思), and the creativity needed in their work.

Both the scientist and the poet need to consider the things from the essence. In physics, when describing the movement of a falling object, regardless its shape or color, scientists often consider it as a mass point, ignoring other characters, which have no effect on movement. Similarly, poets do the same thing. Imagoes (Imaginary?) are often used to allude other things, and readers can understand the metaphor because there are several inner similarities between the imago and the thing. For instance, in ODE TO THE WEST WIND, the imago West Wind represents the force of people who are changing the world. Wind is powerful that can blow away decaying leaves, which stands for the force of evil. So is the force of people.(混乱不清。)Therefore, the work of poets and scientists needs to abstract the similarities from specific stuffs, and then make a conclusion or connection.

Scientists need to see the world from both a macro view and a micro view, so is (does)the poet. Albert Einstein is the most famous scientist whose work was to think about the world. He had put forward two well known theories: Quantum Light Theory and The Theory of Relativity. The former is in scale of photon and the latter is in the scale of universe. These two different scales also can be found in poems. In TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND,(哪里来的, 要引述出处, 否则是剽窃) it reads:

*“To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.”*

World, Heaven, Infinity and Eternity are things in a macro scale, while Sand, Flower, Hand and Hour are in micro scale.

The work of a scientist is creative, as well as that of a poet. In scientific research, making hypothesis is the most important, even more important than proving it. Many discoveries were made due to the creativity of scientists. In the history of chemistry, scientist had been confused about the law between particles and the numbers of their protons until Mendeleyev creatively put forward Periodic Table. There are many other examples: the discovery of DNA structure, Benzene structure, and the invention of aircraft. Looking back to the history of poetry, every revolution was made by creative poets. In the ancient times, people use poet to describe their life. Then, to make it easy to remember, poets created rhythm. Later, metaphors were added into poems, making them richer in content. Gradually, the poems become what it is today, and the poets are still creating. They try to produce more complex rhetoric and new imagoes(这种相同没有区别意义, 什么都可以说). Without creativity, the science would stop developing and the poems would be simple and dull.

Above all, the work of a scientist is similar to that of a poet.

APPENDIX2: DRAFT2

The similarities between the work of a poet and a scientist

Poetry and science are often considered as two different things with little connection, for one uses words to describe the world and thoughts, while the other uses formulas. But in fact, there are some similarities between the work of a poet and a scientist, for example, they are both to make a better world.(不够深度, 基本没意义)

Many people might be hit by falling apples, but seldom did they noticed(语法错)the reason why they were falling downward instead of upward. The scientist, Newton, was the first person to think about it,(谁是许多人? 谁在说话? 前面两句话也是同样没有主人。怀疑挑剔的读者会认为你在替人民说话, 是扮演自我任命的国家, 民族, 宗教, 的领袖。也代表他们, 他们作为个人主义的人, 会非常反感如此的被代表。)and then, he discovered the law of gravity, which showed the world can be understood and described accurately. With this discovery, human had stepped into a new century(是吗? 谁认为如此? 反科学的宗教人士? 包括反对现代物理的其他科学家? 你如何能够证明?). Soon after, more laws were concluded, and human started to find the beauty and the usage of knowledge:(同理? 你不可以说你无法证明的话! 也不可以代替他人顺便认为)

machines were built to improve the productivity, which reduced starvation and improved the living conditions.(是吗? 其他人, 包括蒸汽机的发明者, 电的发明者, 等等, 会认同你的如此极端排他的观点吗? 科学史是这样教你的吗? 饥荒只与牛顿有关? 自然呢? 其他的各种因素呢? 比如战争呢? 经济呢? 你的因果关系这么容易得出?)The world has been changed by several simple but beautiful formulas.(读者能猜到是哪几个? 一定要猜? 不可以有其他的可能? 不可以有认为科学造就丑恶的观点?)

Poets' work is to discover the beauty of the world, express them, and ask people to notice them(是吗? 谁说的? 那本书会如此简单定义? 不可以相反?). Images in the poems are common, such as leaves, winds, the sun, and they often represent things like time, life and happiness that are precious in life. Reading poems, readers can learn to(一定吗? 只能吗? 一般现在时的意义是非如此不行, 是你的意思吗?)discover and treasure the beauty in life. For example, Dante's poem, Divine Comedy shows the beauty of freedom, equality, which aroused people's yearning and begun the Renaissance. The revolution had brought freedom and equality to the world, making it much better.

In my life, I have experienced the great changes of my country, both in technology and ideology(与主题无关: 科学不是技术! 意识形态也不是诗歌!). Ten years ago, many fathers sent their kids to school by bike, but nowadays, by private cars or motorbikes. Because of the influence of western life-style shown in poems, people have pay(是吗? 如何证明?)more attention to enjoying life, rather than working all the time: many people choose to travel during vacation as my family do, instead of earning more money.(与题无关, 跳跃到宇宙去啦!)

This is how(如果真是如此, 没有任何学校会接受你入学的, 小牙!)the scientists and poets make our world better.

总评:

没有证据! 因为作者个人的主观认识是不可以当成证据来支持作者自己的观点的。

也没有观点! 因为没有说是你的个人观点, 还是你认为的常识, 真理, 产权不清。

笼统得不能再笼统了! 无法看到你个人的真正想法因为不是你的体验和认识!

绝对得不能再绝对了 – 任何没有程度等限制的真理是不存在的!

逻辑太一相情愿了, 彻底忘了你的怀疑的西方读者的阅读前提!

后面已经变成典型的中文散文了.....

APPENDIX 3: THE FINAL VERSION

The similarities between the work of a scientist and a poet

In my opinion, scientists and poets are creative people who conceptualize the complicated world and express it in simple ways; scientists describe in simple formulas the complex material world with so many objects, and poets express

in several lines the meaning of life and complex feelings of the mental world.

Albert Einstein created the three-character equation $E=mc^2$ to indicate a mass-energy theory. Similarly, the laws of motion and gravitation by Newton presented the calculation of the huge orbit of stars in only three basic formulas. The same is true of poems. For example, Gabriela Mistral, a Nobel Prize winner in 1945, used only 14 lines in the third sonnets of her SONNETS OF DEATH to describe her complex feelings for her friend's death and her comprehension of it.

To deal with such challenging jobs, both scientists and poets need creativity. One of the 2010 winners of Nobel Prize in Physics, Andre Geim, once won the Ig Nobel Prize in 2000 for his creative use of magnetic field to make a frog float in the air as if it could fly. He was awarded the 2010 Nobel Prize also for his simple but creative use of a pencil and a scotch tape to get one of the most solid materials, Graphene.

Writing poems is also a creative job. A case in point is that Tagore, a Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, used "summer flowers" and "autumn leaves" to describe the life in his mind—full of passion when alive, and calm before death—as in the sentence "Let life be beautiful like summer flowers and deaths like autumn leaves" in STARY BIRDS. More examples of creative use of images can be seen in poems by Bai Li (the most famous Chinese poet in history), Zhimo Xu (a good friend of Tagore).

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