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# Achieving Coherence in Persuasive Discourse: A Study of Chinese ESL Undergraduates in the United States

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ACHIEVING COHERENCE IN PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF  
CHINESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2013

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This study examines how Chinese philosophical values and rhetorical traditions that contribute to coherence differ from those prevalent in English. It attempts to discover how six Chinese ESL undergraduate participants demonstrate coherence in their persuasive writing, and how their practice of, and views toward coherence in writing change over a semester during which they are exposed to an American college writing classroom.

Three types of essays were collected for qualitative analysis in this study: a diagnostic departmental pre-test essay at the beginning of the semester, a final essay given as a post-test, and two drafts of a CATW (CUNY Assessment Test in Writing) practice essay that were written for the advanced writing course. In addition, data were also collected from a background questionnaire, a classroom observation, and two rounds of interviews during the course of a semester.

The study explored the features of coherence at both local (sentence) and global (discourse) levels. The knowledge of cohesion and coherence was employed to investigate how the Chinese learners of English achieved coherence within and beyond the paragraph level. The study discussed how the participants struggled to learn the appropriate use of explicit transitions and patterns of development to create a logical flow

of ideas, how their writing generally cohered around one controlling idea throughout the essay, and how they changed their perceptions of coherence in an American university setting. The findings suggest that the Chinese ESL learners' writing quality could be improved in the Western context through coherence-related classroom instruction, revision practice, and teacher-student writing conferences, all aimed at helping them to understand Western notions of coherence while continuing to value their own cultural traditions.

The study's goal is to help both writing instructors and students; it is hoped that the findings of the study will help instructors to design appropriate writing instruction for such students, as well as helping the students to become familiar with coherence, in the process allowing them to get the most out of their college education and their efforts to improve at writing.

To the memory of my dear mother and father,  
who would be very proud if they could see this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Good writing is usually characterized by certain grammatical and lexical features involving syntactic structure, reference, substitution, conjunction, synonymy, etc., all of which may exert a great influence on a reader's understanding of a text. Given the complexity of the linguistic system involved, it is crucial for students to have a strong command of language and an understanding of text dynamics if they aspire to become strong writers. While these can be challenging goals for any writer, they are especially complicated for second-language writers. In particular, Chinese ESL students have difficulty precisely assessing their writing errors and resolving fuzzy writing problems. When they submit their essays, grammatical, lexical, and organizational aspects are addressed by their instructors, but sometimes only in global terms. A typical example is "Your sentence construction in this essay is confusing to the reader. Please work with a tutor in the writing center." It is virtually impossible for a developing writer to translate such overall feedback into specifics that will help him/her to improve his/her writing.

It is well recognized that a readable text needs strong organization, and that linguistic forms hold the structure and support the logic of strong writing. If sentences are not woven together, and if sentences are not consistently well-controlled with effective variety in structure (CUNY Assessment Test in Writing [CATW], 2010), within a clearly organized text, the writer will not convey his/her ideas successfully.

This dissertation focuses on both the broad 'macro' and the local 'micro' features of the developing writing skills of Chinese learners; thus, much will be said about the

broad relationships between ideas in the student texts. But linguistic skills have also been found to be important in supporting textual coherence. To cite one recent proponent in a growing movement in favor of language awareness in writing, “language is, after all, one of the most complicated systems they [students] will ever learn—the rules will be useful enough to provide a framework for understanding language coherently and systematically” (Honegger, 2005, p. x). According to Honegger, many ESL instructors have found success teaching grammar in the context of ESL writing because knowledge of grammar can give ESL students insights into types of writing problems that can be hard to diagnose.

However, it is not sufficient to teach grammar as it is now taught in a typical ESL writing class, since many of the discourse-level patterns involved in writing only emerge in the context of writing extended texts. A “grammatically correct” essay judged only at the sentence level still may not always read well. When such a situation arises, many instructors know that the essay is not well written, but cannot clearly explain the reasons (Suraishkumar, 2003).

Most American classroom teachers would argue that writing a well-organized English persuasive essay is challenging for Chinese ESL students, particularly in regard to overall concerns such as coherence. Coherence plays a critical role in writing quality because it gives the text its full meaning at the semantic level (Cun, 2001). Problems in this area are a recurring issue in Chinese ESL students’ writing and constitute a major obstacle to their success in the American writing classroom. In addition to grammar issues, Chinese-speaking students often find such comments as “This essay lacks unity” and “I don’t follow your point here” indicating the instructor’s inability to understand

their writing. Unfortunately, unlike grammatical and lexical errors, which can be corrected easily, problems in overall coherence are often more challenging to handle as they involve larger sections of a text, such as a series of sentences or paragraphs. Because of the difficulty in addressing these issues, students sometimes do not get sufficient insights into how to improve the overall coherence of their writing. Also, teachers find it impractical to correct whole sections of a text (Pilus, 1996).

Experts and scholars agree in recognizing the importance of coherence in written texts. However, the notion of coherence, and the practices that support coherence, may differ considerably across languages and cultures, judging from several decades of work in contrastive rhetoric and text linguistics (Zhu, 1992). In other words, culture, to a greater or lesser extent, may have an effect on how writers write in a foreign language. In particular, research shows that Chinese ESL students structure persuasive texts differently as judged by English readers (Connor, 1996), and the way these students organize their ideas confuses English readers (Liu & Deng, 2005). According to Qiang and Wolff (2004), even students who score very high in the writing section on China's standardized nationwide College English Test can compose nothing more than "Dictionary English" texts in real communication: this phrase refers to English taught from a dictionary, which may be technically correct but without sensitivity to the cultural or environmental context of actual use. With this in mind, the purpose of this study is to explore how Chinese ESL undergraduates exemplify coherence in their writing, and how their practice of, and views about coherence in writing change over a semester during which they are exposed to an American college writing classroom.

In the present study, I will focus on persuasive discourse. Considering some culturally specific factors related to the notion of coherence, particularly from the perspective of contrastive rhetoric, I will identify features of coherence, drawing the components of my theoretical framework from a synthesis of multiple sources, including Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Bamberg, 1983; Chiu, 2004; Carrell, 1982, 1984; Connor, 1984; Connor and Kaplan, 1987; Connor and Johns, 1990; Heinrichs, 2007; Johns, 1986; Kroll, 1990; Kubota, 1998; Jin and Ban, 2006; Liu and Braine, 2005; Lee, 2002; Seidel, Rimmele, and Prenzel, 2005; Tanskanen, 2006; Watson Todd, Thienpermpool, and Keyuravong, 2004; Watson Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang, 2007; Yeh, 2004; and O'Reilly and McNamara, 2007.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, I will research the following questions:

#### 1. Western Rhetorical Values on Coherence

What are the coherence features felt to be necessary for effective persuasive writing in the English language context? What do teachers and scholars say in defining coherence, and what pedagogical practices for developing coherence are valued in the English cultural world? How have modern notions of coherence emerged from classical views, dating back to Aristotle?

#### 2. Chinese Rhetorical Values on Coherence

What rhetorical values regarding coherence have been expressed in Chinese culture? What do Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say about coherence in the Chinese cultural context? Again, how are these views of coherence rooted in

classical Chinese philosophy or rhetorical traditions? To what extent, and in what ways, do the Chinese values differ from those prevalent in English?

### 3. Chinese Students' Perceptions of Coherence

What conscious attitudes and views do advanced Chinese ESL students demonstrate regarding coherence in writing? To what extent, and in what ways, do these views seem to reflect the values prevalent in either Western or Chinese rhetorical traditions? When addressing their own writing choices, how do these students explain the choices they make in terms of organization and linguistic forms related to coherence? In what ways do their perceptions of coherence change over the course of a semester in which they receive training in coherence, in the Western tradition in an American university setting?

### 4. Chinese Students' Textual Practice Regarding Coherence

In what ways do the writings of these students demonstrate coherence? To what extent are these writings judged as coherent by professional raters? What specific elements in the writings might be traced to the two traditions (Western and Chinese)? Do these elements change in the students' writing over the course of a semester?

## **Rationale**

As we know, problems in writing can easily arise from weakness in coherence, which is an area deserving great attention (Pilus, 1996). I have undertaken the present study because of the need for Chinese ESL students to be made aware of and to understand what coherence is and how they should achieve coherence in their persuasive writing in English.

In American colleges and universities, there is an increasing number of Chinese-speaking students, in addition to many from Asian cultures that share Chinese philosophical traditions. Newly arrived Chinese ESL students bring with them cultural values and practices that can cause confusion and frustration in the American composition class. Today, it is still common for ESL writing teachers to profile Chinese ESL students for their unfamiliarity or discomfort with persuasion, and in particular with the classroom conventions and cultural expectations involved in persuasive writing (Swearingen, 2010). Writing instructors often feel that Chinese ESL students' persuasive essays lack persuasive coherence (Connor, 1996). As Johns (1986, p. 247) observes, this kind of sweeping statement represents "a feature which appears to cover a large number of perceived weaknesses" such as unawareness of audience, lack of a clear purpose, lack of personal voice, and delay of arguments. According to Bamberg (1983) and Abushihab (2008), if writing lacks coherence, it will almost certainly fail to communicate its intended message to readers.

Why are Chinese ESL students' persuasive texts seen as lacking coherence? As I approached this study, at least three reasons came to mind.

First, in China, correct form is still highly valued over well-developed thought in current English teaching and learning. One of the most important criteria cited for good writing in China is that it should be "correct in expression without significant grammatical mistakes" (You, 2004, p. 103). Even though coherence is discussed in today's scholarly work in China, the focus of teaching is still primarily on grammatically correct sentences or overt links on the textual surface, with little attention paid to more global patterns that contribute to meaning-making. The unified whole of a text at the

discourse level, therefore, is ignored to some extent as a focus, both in pedagogical practice and in scholarship. As a result, Chinese students who come to study in American colleges and universities may continue to work hard on the sentence or within the paragraph level, unaware of the overall sense of unity in an essay. As I explored Chinese rhetorical traditions in the course of this study, I found a second element that supports this local, sentence-based focus. Chinese rhetoric traditionally values beauty of expressions (idioms, figurative language, pleasing turns of phrase); this again focuses the writer on specific phrases or lexical choices, not on global organization or coherence.

I was interested, also, in a second possible factor — or rather a set of cultural factors that might be affecting Chinese ESL students' organization of written texts in the American writing classroom. One version of this more broad or global concern dates back to Kaplan's (1966) work on rhetorical patterns across cultures; although Kaplan's original claims have been widely criticized, including by the author himself, there remains a potentially valid underlying intuition: that is, the rhetorical patterns valued in Chinese culture may differ at a deep level, for culturally-based reasons, from those that students are required to follow in the English-speaking context. Kaplan claimed that the written discourse structures of each language exhibit certain culturally unique features. He suggested that ESL writers use the rhetorical conventions of their native language when writing in English, thus producing ESL texts that are judged as incoherent. Of course, Kaplan's version of this intuition may be stereotyped or oversimplified. But the underlying phenomena behind Kaplan's observations are complex; and in approaching this study, I felt that, if studied from a careful, detailed perspective, the insights that Kaplan originally suggested could be refined and elaborated. In other words, the writing

problems of Chinese learners could be the outcome of their coming from a culture with an entirely different system of rhetoric (Matalene, 1985). The area of contrastive rhetoric will be addressed in Chapter 2, which covers the review of related literature.

As a third and last source of Chinese students' writing problems, I turned to the notion of coherence itself. "Coherence" is an abstract term, and views of coherence can be diverse and controversial (Dontcheva-Navratilova & Povolna, 2009) because one's judgments regarding coherence are by nature subjective (Watson Todd, Thienpermpool, & Keyuravong, 2004). What is just as disturbing is that coherence is also challenging for teachers to conceptualize and present fruitfully in the classroom (Noguchi, 1991). ESL teachers may believe that they have a sense of what incoherence means, but they often discuss coherent writing and incoherent writing with their ESL students only in vague terms (Johns 1986; Pilus 1996). Consequently, Chinese ESL students do not have a clear understanding of the concept of coherence, and they often fall back on known territory, focusing only on errors at the sentence level, or possibly on rhetorical patterns taught to them in the Chinese context, when asked to revise their writing or that of their fellow students. Due to the elusive nature of coherence, it is obviously difficult to teach or learn the process of writing with a clear progression of ideas well linked to form a coherent whole (Chiu, 2004; Connor & Johns, 1990; Watson Todd et al., 2004). It is a widely accepted belief that students are not likely to improve coherence in writing just by being told in abstract terms that their writing lacks coherence (Lee, 2002). Added to the other linguistic and cultural difficulties that Chinese writers face, this abstractness may make their task of writing coherently in English all the more challenging.



To help Chinese ESL students develop coherence in their writing, it is essential that ESL teachers have a better understanding of what makes a text coherent (Bamberg, 1983; Lee, 2002). To refine my own understanding of coherence and the ways to teach coherent writing, and to share these insights with readers, I will first conduct a literature review on these topics, as they appear in scholarly writing on coherence in both English and Chinese. A review of the modern scholarly and pedagogical literature on coherence has the potential to provide underlying insights on insufficiently explored sources of writing problems for Chinese learners. As a valuable secondary result, this review might provide principles to guide ESL instructors in teaching the concept of coherence comprehensively, particularly to Chinese developing writers. By reviewing English and Chinese scholarly work that bears on coherence, this study first attempts to determine how far and in what way(s) views of coherence differ across the two cultures. I have then deepened the study on an empirical level by interviewing a group of Chinese ESL students enrolled in a college writing course that covers coherence, and examining their writing as it develops over the semester. The empirical portions of the study are intended to gather student perspectives on coherence, and to examine the writing of a small group of Chinese ESL undergraduates, to determine how their perceived notions of coherence, as well as their written practice, compares with the scholarly definitions given in the two cultures, and how these scholarly works illuminate the perceptions and practice of these learners.

In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature that is relevant to the present study; some of this material, on Western and Chinese rhetorical values, will be briefly revisited later in connection with the results in Chapter 8. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the

structure and design of the present study. In the subsequent chapters, I will present the results as follows:

In Chapter 4, I will look at the individual participants' personal data. Next, in Chapter 5 I will perform an analysis of the participants' textual data. I will then proceed to report the results of the interview data in Chapter 6. After that, I will examine classroom observation data in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, while summarizing the major findings of the study, I will provide a response to the research questions. Finally, in Chapter 9 I will offer some reflections on the topic of the current study, followed by a discussion of some pedagogical concerns. Then I will provide several implications for ESL learning and ESL pedagogy, and as a final point, I will make suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will first review the following areas: scholarly work within the field of composition on modern rhetorical structures in English; a basic overview of modern Chinese rhetorical values; relevant portions of the literature on contrastive rhetoric. This review actually constitutes part of the study's results, as the research questions ask for a detailed account of Western and Chinese rhetorical values.

#### **Western Rhetorical Tradition**

##### **Historical Roots**

##### **Coherence in Aristotle's Philosophical Thoughts**

As pointed out by Lloyd (1999), Aristotle's philosophy demonstrated unity and coherence. The study of coherence, therefore, can be traced back to ancient Greece. Together with Socrates and Plato, Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) is considered one of the most important founding figures in Western philosophy. Although rarely read today in the originals, it is fair to say that the methods of these philosophers set the tone for what has evolved into modern Western ideas on structuring and expressing ideas. Aristotle's writings demonstrated coherence, and they were also the first to create a comprehensive system of Western philosophy, encompassing many subjects, including morality, aesthetics, logic, rhetoric, poetics, science, politics, and metaphysics. More importantly, his work was wider-ranging and more original than that of any earlier philosopher (Lloyd, 1999).

In the book *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of His Thought*, Lloyd (1999) discusses Aristotle's thought, arguing that there is an important continuity in Aristotle's

ideas or intellectual development. This shows that coherence has its roots in this great philosopher's works. Lloyd presents an interesting account of how Aristotle used his technique to help him advance coherent arguments.

First, according to Lloyd, a common method runs through almost all the branches of Aristotle's thought. The first prominent feature of this method is that he considers it vital to discuss the opinions of what his opponents had to say on the subject before he tries to solve the problems. He usually starts with a review of previous views to help him to articulate the problems clearly and to identify the difficulties. "In the various branches of physics, for example, he regularly reviews earlier doctrines before setting out his own" (Lloyd, 1999, p. 284).

In going on to resolve the difficulties, Aristotle applies two main techniques. He first uses theoretical arguments by critiquing the theories of other writers. For example, "he frequently criticizes his opponents for inconsistencies in their arguments," or "refutes them by forcing them on to the horns of a dilemma" (Lloyd, 1999, p. 285). His second main argumentative technique is to provide concrete evidence, or what he calls the "facts." "In the *Politics*, for instance, he often refers to the evidence of actual case-histories under the heading *what takes place*" (Lloyd, 1999, p. 286). Therefore, the use of concrete evidence and particular examples is a notable feature of Aristotle's method, both in natural science and in other fields.

One important aspect to be noted is that Aristotle appreciates the value of research. When the evidence was insufficient to support or confirm his preconceived opinions, or when he could not arrive at a satisfactory solution, he was willing to conduct systematic research according to certain theoretical assumptions. As Lloyd (1999) put it, "His own

researches were conducted in the light of certain theoretical assumptions and with the object not merely of describing the phenomena, but also and more especially of establishing their causes” (p. 287).

Aristotle’s method of argument presentation contains the idea of coherence in embryonic form, and this method continues to influence today’s coherent argumentation. Aristotle is clear about who his audience is and what purpose he is going to accomplish while advancing his arguments. To achieve his purpose, he closely analyzes his opponents’ views and opinions on a subject. To support his central theme, he appeals to concrete evidence and to particular examples. To develop theoretical arguments, he critiques his opponents’ inconsistencies in their arguments. He deploys consistent arguments; that is, none of his statements conflicts with the others. Because he understands that inadequate evidence or insufficient facts do not work well, he “undertakes, where appropriate, detailed researches to ascertain the facts and to help determine the causes at work” (Lloyd, 1999, p. 289). Admittedly, the use of adequate evidence is one of the crucial factors that contribute to coherence. These are the main recurrent features of Aristotle’s method, which reveals the earliest model for presenting coherent arguments in persuasive discourse.

### **Aristotle’s Syllogism**

Aristotle's logic is important in that it introduces a formal system of thought. This formalization makes possible a new realm of thought, an ability to answer questions of logical consequence and proof. A cornerstone of Aristotle's logic is his introduction of the syllogism.

A syllogism is modernly defined as “a particular kind of argument containing three categorical propositions, two of them premises, one a conclusion” (Kahane, 1990, p. 270). In other words, this syllogism is a kind of logical argument in which one proposition (the conclusion) is inferred from two or more others (the premises); typically, the syllogism consists of two premises and a conclusion. As a general rule, the syllogism is expressed as a form of implication: We can see an example of this in Aristotle's famous “Barbara” syllogism, one of 15 patterns identified as valid forms of argumentation:

If all *A* belongs to *B*,  
and all *B* belongs to *C*,  
then all *A* belongs to *C*.

Applying this pattern, we can get the following example:

Premise 1: If all humans (*A*'s) are mortal (*B*),  
Premise 2: and all Greeks (*C*'s) are humans (*A*'s),  
Conclusion: then all Greeks (*C*'s) are mortal (*B*).

In the above sequence, if Premise 1 is accurate, and Premise 2 is accurate, a logical conclusion is derived from both statements. To prove logical arguments, we must make sure the statements on which we base the argument are valid.

By introducing the syllogism, Aristotle opened the door to a precise system of determining logical conclusions based on known facts. Therefore, Aristotle is credited with the earliest study of formal logic, his conception of which was the dominant form of Western logic until 19th century advances in mathematical logic. Aristotle's syllogism of three-part deductive reasoning continues to influence today's writers in demonstrating and proving coherent arguments.

## **Aristotle's Rhetoric**

As we know, the earliest form of Western rhetorical traditions also emerged from ancient Greece. Ancient Greeks such as Aristotle were the first Westerners to systematically write down notes for how to make speech persuasive to others (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 1997). For this reason, ancient Greece was the birthplace of rhetoric, which has played a central role in the Western tradition (Conley, 1990).

Rhetoric was viewed as a civic art by several of the ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle was one of the first to see this rhetoric in this light. His *Rhetoric*, as its name suggests, is an ancient Greek treatise on the art of persuasion, dating from the 4th century BC. The famous Roman teachers of rhetoric, such as Cicero and Quintilian, frequently used elements stemming from the Aristotelian system. Thus it can be seen that Aristotle is generally credited with developing the basics of the system of rhetoric that “thereafter served as its touchstone” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000, p. 3), influencing the development of rhetorical theory from ancient through modern times. His *Rhetoric* is regarded by most rhetoricians as “the most important single work on persuasion ever written” (Golden, Berquist, Coleman, Golden, & Sproule, 2007, p. 67).

Many contemporary practices in teaching writing have antecedents in Greek and Roman rhetoric. In particular, Aristotle's three persuasive types of audience appeal—ethos, pathos, and logos—are the basis for discussion of the writer-reader-subject relationships in contemporary composition studies (Lindemann, 1995). According to Huang (2002), “ethos” refers to the character of the speaker perceived by the audience; “pathos” is the appeal to the emotion of the audience, and “logos” means the logical appeal in a speech. Since rhetoric typically provides heuristics for understanding,

discovering, and developing coherent arguments for particular situations, today, courses such as public speaking, speech, or argumentative writing apply these three fundamental modes of persuasion, which are often used to teach students about the different ways available to not only persuade others but to analyze the way in which people persuade (McCarter, 2010). They are clear devices that students can remember. Appearing in speech and writing. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the tool by which ideas are substantiated through rhetorical conventions suggestive of coherence.

In brief, Aristotle has had an enormous influence on the development of formal logic as well as the art of rhetoric. In any current textbook discussing logical reasoning and coherence, we can find elements of Aristotelian logic and rhetoric, even if they aren't attributed to the ancient philosopher.

### **Early Modern Influences: John Locke and Alexander Bain**

In the history of modern English, two important figures, John Locke (1632-1704) and Alexander Bain (1818-1903) exerted a profound influence on modern English linguistic usage and attitudes.

**John Locke.** John Locke, an English philosopher and political thinker, is often classified as the first of the great English empiricists. The fundamental principles of Locke's philosophy are presented in his greatest work, the two monumental volumes of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which were written in 1690. The most important of his goals was to determine the limits of human knowledge. In the second volume of his book, Locke writes:

Our knowledge, as has been shown, being very narrow and we not happy enough to find certain truth in everything that we have an occasion to consider; most of



the propositions we think, reason, discourse-nay, act upon, are such as we cannot have undoubted knowledge of their truth....But there being degrees herein, from the very neighborhood of certainty and demonstration, quite down to improbability; and also degrees of assent from full assurance and confidence, quite down to conjecture, doubt and distrust. (pp. 364-365)

According to Locke, what we know is always properly understood as the relation between ideas. Locke devoted much of the *Essay* to an extended argument that all of our ideas—simple or complex—are ultimately derived from experience. In other words, we have no innate knowledge; the human mind at birth, therefore, is a blank slate on which experience writes. The consequence of this empiricist approach is that our knowledge is extremely limited in its scope and certainty. Based on Locke's epistemology in his *Essay*, when someone needs to express an opinion, he/she must choose his/her words carefully so as not to allow the words to say more than what we can rationally say we think: writers and speakers also should say that this is what I *think*, not what I *know*. In her book *English: Meaning and Culture*, Wierzbicka (2006) argues that Locke's ideas concerning degrees of probability and degrees of assent, and the need to distinguish, in rational discourse, between what one knows and what one thinks, have exercised an enormous influence on modern English discourse as well as on the English language. From a modern Anglo cultural perspective, it is always good to be careful in phrasing what one wants to say since our knowledge is severely limited.

Viewing language as an imperfect system of significations is another great theme in Locke's *Essay*. In his second volume (1690/1959), Locke argues, "It is easy to perceive what imperfection there is in language, and how the very nature of words

makes it almost unavoidable for many of them to be doubtful and uncertain in their significations” (p.104). This inherent capacity of language has its potential to create a fallacious construct of knowledge and thus could confuse the communication of observed reality. To prevent such an occurrence in real-world communication and to accurately represent and communicate truth, Locke suggests more clearly that “[w]e should cast off all the artifice and fallacy of words” (Shea, 2008, p.42). Locke’s concern over the imperfection of language is unquestionably evident here. Not only does he consider language deficient regarding precise significations, Locke also perceives language as nothing more than a fallacy and an artifice. Heavily influenced by John Locke’s philosophic beliefs, good writing in the nineteenth century was identified with the writer’s ability to gain the skills of how to properly use and place words in order to gain optimum clarity and attention (Ernst, 2000). John Locke’s pedagogical philosophy, which has contributed to the emphasis on the cautious and proper use of language, has a direct relation to attitudes about modern English writing, where the message reiterated over and again is that any communication should be coherent, convincing, and objective.

**Alexander Bain.** Modern conceptions of coherence find their roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bamberg, 1983; McCulley, 1985; Lee, 2002), with Scottish philosopher and educator Alexander Bain’s (1890) six paragraph rules in his *English Composition and Rhetoric*. This text clearly exhibits a strong instructional emphasis on learning the rules of language. Bain examines between-sentence connections that create cohesive paragraphs linked together into a larger text by transitions (Bamberg, 1983; Lee, 2002). He created six rules for effective paragraph-making: (pp. 90-134)

- (1) Indicate theme in the opening sentence to limit the scope of the paragraph.

- (2) Keep unity by avoiding digressions and irrelevant material.
- (3) Arrange related topics sequentially.
- (4) Maintain explicit reference.
- (5) Sustain parallel structure.
- (6) Use subordination.

Evidently, even the most cursory examination of today's composition textbooks shows that Bain's six rules for paragraph writing are still considered crucial for creating an effective and coherent paragraph (Arlov, 2010; Langan, 2005; Fawcett 2011; VanderMey, Meyer, Rys, Kemper, & Sebranek, 2004; Crews, 1992). In fact, Bain (1890) went so far as to call his rules "the paragraph laws," asserting that they can be applied to any composition whose purpose is description, narration, exposition, or persuasion. Bain notes, "The paragraph laws are important, not only for their own sake, but also for their bearing on an entire composition" (p. 91) because if writers "look to the paragraphs...the discourse will take care of itself" (p. 91).

In another book, *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1887), discussing persuasion, Bain contributes to our understanding of coherence. In summary, he argues that persuasive writers and speakers must

- (1) Have a clear purpose.
- (2) Have a good sense of audience
- (3) Have a thorough knowledge of the subject.
- (4) Establish clearly the point to be argued.
- (5) Work through the feelings of the audience.
- (6) Persuade by making use of example and counter-argument.

(7) Use either a deductive or an inductive approach. (pp. 212-257)

Obviously, moving beyond the sentence and paragraph level, Bain (1887) treated the coherence of a piece of persuasive writing as a whole. Even though Bain did not then proceed to exemplify how a persuasive text is organized as a unified whole, researchers even today should be able to agree that the elements elaborated in Bain's (1887, 1890) books are very important in defining the features of coherent essays, and indeed contemporary texts do reflect Bain's influence.

Although there is some controversy over Bain's work (Bamberg, 1983; Lee, 2002), Bain's original formulation of what we call cohesion and coherence is seminal and has greatly influenced today's writing instruction and composition texts. A survey of current American college writing textbooks shows that the rhetorical instruction provided dates from Bain, or in any case supports ideas closely related to those of Bain. These texts include Bailey and Denstaedt (2004), Barnet, Stubbs, and Bellanca (2000), Fawcett (2011), Goggin and Bullock (2007), McMahan, Day, and Coleman (2011), Mandell and Kirszner (2007), Nudelman and Troyka (2004), Rosa and Eschholz (2007), Skwire and Wiener (2005), and Wyrick (2011); in each of these modern expositions, we find that the rhetoric is still in line with Bain's model in relation to issues such as subject, purpose, audience, thesis statement, topic sentence, unity, support, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, transitions, reference, repetition, and parallel structure. Needless to say, all these elements are seen as necessary components of cohesive and coherent writing.

### **Twentieth Century Developments**

Little significant research on coherence has been done since Bain, particularly as it relates to second language pedagogy. Prior to the 1960s, the majority of studies dealing

with language learning concentrated on the learner's production data at the sentence level (Bamberg, 1983; Carrell, 1982; Khalil, 1989; Lee, 2002) rather than exploring the features of extended discourse at the paragraph level and beyond. Unsurprisingly, as Lee (2002) pointed out, traditional handbooks and writing textbooks also focus on elements of sentence-level grammar. Hence, many problems with overall coherence remain unaddressed (Johns, 1986) when students are taught to write using this traditional approach.

In the 1960s and 1970s, writing researchers shifted their focus of attention away from sentence structure toward discourse analysis, an analysis of texts that extends beyond the sentence level and takes into account the communicative constraints of the situation. The 1970s and 1980s saw discourse analysis embraced by many linguists, psychologists, and composition specialists around the world. Pioneers in this field include linguists Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan in England, linguist Nils Enkvist in Finland, psycholinguist Teun van Dijk in the Netherlands, and three scholars from the United States: linguist Robert de Beaugrande, applied linguist and contrastive rhetorician John Hinds, and composition expert Stephen Witte (Connor, 1996). Among these linguists, the most influential of the resulting textual analysis techniques has been those developed by Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan in *Cohesion in English* (1976), which will be discussed in the following section.

### **Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion in English**

Known as cohesion theory (Carrell, 1982), Halliday and Hasan's work has been widely cited and used as a foundation or a seminal text. For Halliday and Hasan, cohesion is a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element

that is crucial to the interpretation of the text (1976, p.8). For text to have *texture*, Halliday and Hasan's term for coherence, the text must include *ties* that link its parts together because it is these ties that form cohesive relations between sentences and elements in sentences, thus contributing to the coherence of the text (Liu & Braine, 2005). Halliday and Hasan defined such a tie as "the term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items" (1976, p.3). In other words, no single element can be cohesive by itself since grammatical and lexical devices become cohesive only when they are interpreted in relation to some other element in the text. Halliday and Hasan divided cohesion into grammatical and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion includes devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction, whereas lexical cohesion is divided into reiteration (repetition, synonymy, among others) and collocation (co-occurrence of lexical items). What follows is a concise overview of Halliday and Hasan's grammatical and lexical cohesive ties.

**Grammatical cohesion.** (1) Reference: Reference cohesion occurs when one item in a text points to another element for its interpretation. For example, there is a *pen* on the desk. Go get *it*. (2) Substitution: Substitution is a grammatical relation, and it is the replacement of one element by another, as in "My *axe* is too blunt. I must get a sharper *one*" (1976, p.89), or Who *Painted* the wall? – I *did*, or Do you think *she is married?* – Yes. I think *so*. (3) Ellipsis: If substitution replaces one element with another, "ellipsis is the omission of an item" (1976, p.89), or a deletion of a word, phrase, clause, or "something left unsaid" (1976, p.142). For example, in

- a. You think George already knows? – I think everybody *does*.
- b. Joan bought some bread, and Lily some potatoes.

(4) Conjunction: The conjunctive elements are cohesive not in themselves, but they are cohesive “by virtue of their specific meanings” (1976, p.226). See the following examples.

- a. John left his apartment *after* he ate breakfast.
- b. Jean lost a lot of weight. *Consequently*, she feels better.

**Lexical cohesion.** (1) Reiteration: Reiteration refers to the repeated use of a lexical item, or the use of a synonymous lexical item. Halliday and Hasan (1976) wrote:

I turned to the *ascent* of the peak. The *ascent/climb/task/thing* is perfectly easy.  
(p.279)

(2) Collocation: Collocation refers to the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items. It covers any instance in which there is “any pair of lexical items that stand to each other in some recognizable lexico-semantic (word meaning) relation” (1976, p.285). The follow examples illustrate this point:

You cannot smoke *inside* the building. You can smoke *outside*.

The above cohesive ties identified by Halliday and Hasan as available in the English language help to ensure cohesion in a given text. Cohesion, perceived as the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text, has been accepted as a useful tool for discourse analysis; but because coherence is about deeper-level semantic relations (Canagarajah, 2002), coherence is still quite understandably not fully understood in the same way by all linguists even today (Dontcheva-Navratilova & Povolna, 2009).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) simply treat cohesion as a linguistic property contributing to coherence (Carrell, 1982), but they do not explicitly discuss the link between cohesion and coherence. The publication of Halliday and Hasan’s *Cohesion in English* has

stimulated a lot of interest among writing and reading researchers concerned with the effect of cohesion in text (Witte & Faigley, 1981; McCulley, 1985; Tierney & Mosenthal, 1983; Connor, 1984; Carrell, 1982; Bamberg, 1984; 1986; Johns, 1986; Tanskanen, 2006).

While some researchers have been supportive, others have been openly critical of the concept of cohesion. These researchers have followed and attempted to test the usefulness of Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model and to determine how Halliday and Hasan's cohesion is related to coherence. As a result, two competing theories for the definition of coherence emerged: one that emphasizes the text itself, and another that focuses on the reader's interaction with the text (Connor, 1996; Johns, 1986). The concept of coherence, therefore, became defined primarily from these two perspectives, which will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Critiques of Halliday and Hasan, and Developments from Halliday and Hasan**

**Text-based analysis.** Witte and Faigley (1981) studied a group of ten out of ninety freshman essays that had previously been rated holistically by two readers on a four-point scale. Five of the essays were selected from those given the lowest scores by both readers while five were selected from those with the highest scores. These ten essays were analyzed according to errors and syntactic features, as well as the number of Halliday and Hasan's cohesive ties, categorized by type. Witte and Faigley found correlations between texts rated high on the holistic scale and those containing a higher percentage of reference and lexical cohesion marks. The higher rated essays had a variety of lexical collocations as opposed to those rated lower, which tended to rely on simple repetition. In addition, high-rated essays were longer and contained larger T-units (i.e.,



the shortest unit which can stand alone as a sentence), more nonrestrictive modifiers, and fewer grammatical errors. At the more general level of analysis, the high-rated essays were much denser in cohesion than the low-rated essays. The better writers used more varied cohesive ties between individual T-units than did the writers of the lower-rated essays. Witte and Faigley also reported that both the high- and low-rated essays strongly favored lexical cohesion.

The authors concluded that the writers of high-rated essays were more capable of developing and connecting their ideas than the writers of the lower-rated essays. In other words, the better writers had more high-level cognitive skills that allowed them to extend the concepts they introduced. The poorer writers, on the other hand, showed a lack of those skills, frequently repeating ideas with lexical and conceptual redundancy. The majority of the lexical ties in the low essays were simple repetitions of the same item. The writers of the low-rated essays did not have an adequate breadth and variety in the lexical items required to explore and elaborate the concepts they introduced in their essays. The researchers concluded that this significantly affected their overall writing quality. In addition to insufficient vocabulary, writers of the low-rated essays displayed a low level of ability to perceive and articulate abstract concepts with reference to particular instances.

This study, according to Witte and Faigley (1981), shows that Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model can be usefully applied in developmental studies, and their analysis reveals that cohesion, as defined by Halliday and Hasan, is an important property of writing well. While their study showed that the types and frequencies of cohesive ties affect the stylistic and organizational properties of the texts the students write, their

analysis also indicates that although cohesive ties may eventually influence writing quality in some ways, there is no evidence to indicate that any particular types of cohesive ties will positively affect writing quality. Moreover, they find that a number of questions cannot be answered by using counts of linguistic devices such as reference and repetition among others. Importantly, they claim that the quality of a text “depends a great deal on factors outside the text itself, factors which lie beyond the scope of cohesion analysis” (1981, p.199). For Witte, and Faigley, writing quality is defined, in some degree, as the “fit” of a particular text to its context, which includes the writer’s purpose, the discourse medium, and the audience’s background knowledge and expectations, etc. Cohesion defines those cohesive devices that link a text together, whereas coherence defines those underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood, a relationship unexplored by Halliday and Hasan’s model.

Witte and Faigley argue that cohesion is not the same thing as coherence, saying, “Cohesion and coherence interact to a great degree, but a cohesive text may be only minimally coherent.” For this reason, they viewed cohesion and coherence as only partially related and offered some specific reasons why Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion model does not account for coherence. They point out that a cohesion-based distinction between texts rated high and low in quality can be misleading. Besides having explicit cohesive ties within the text, the text must meet the reader’s expectations for particular types of texts, address the reader’s knowledge of the world, and establish the relationship among the ideas being developed. Halliday and Hasan’s theory only addresses cohesive ties. Just as an exclusive focus on syntax and other formal surface features by writing instructors will probably not better the overall quality of college students’ writing, neither

is it likely that a narrow emphasis on cohesion will produce significantly improved writing.

Following Witte and Faigley's analysis of cohesion, McCulley (1985) examined 493 essays on persuasive tasks written by native English-speaking high school students for the National Assessment of Education Progress. This study supports Witte and Faigley's general claim that Halliday and Hasan's framework is not a sufficient measure of textual coherence. McCulley reported that not all cohesive devices identified by Halliday and Hasan contribute to the writing quality of texts as determined by experts using holistic analysis. While his study, like that of Witte and Faigley, provides evidence strongly suggesting that cohesion and coherence are related, McCulley concluded that textual cohesion is only one sub-element of coherence. Along with Witte and Faigley, McCulley found that the lexical cohesive features of synonym, hyponym, and collocation contribute in significant ways to the measure of writing quality.

In a possibly more critical study, a low correlation was found between the number of cohesive ties and overall coherence when Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) had two classes of twelfth graders write essays after viewing filmstrips. Tierney and Mosenthal analyzed the essays for various cohesive ties and rated the essays in relation to clarity and general coherence. The instructors' rankings of textual coherence were compared to the cohesive analysis. They found no correlation between the number of cohesive ties and coherence rankings for essays written. Tierney and Mosenthal concluded that, although a count of cohesive ties helps identify cohesion in a text, a count of cohesive ties alone does not necessarily explain what makes a text coherent.

Going beyond McCulley (1985) and Tierney and Mosenthal (1983), Reinhart (1980) argued that the lexical repetition described in Halliday and Hasan's work (1976) "does not function as a cohesive device at all." What she means is that repetition is not what makes a text cohesive. Reinhart added that lexical repetition is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for text cohesion. Instead, she proposed the following condition as necessary and sufficient for cohesion:

A text is connected (cohesive) if each adjacent pair of its sentences is either referentially linked or linked by a semantic sentence connector. (1980, p.168)

That is, a referential link allows a pair of sentences to be cohesive if the topic of the second sentence or the scene-setting expression is referentially controlled by a referent in the first sentence. On the other hand, if a text fails to be referentially linked, it can still be cohesive if its sentences are connected by semantic sentence connectors, which include markers for semantic relations such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, temporal relations, exemplification, etc. According to Reinhart's condition for text cohesion, although two sentences are lexically linked by Halliday and Hasan's criteria, they do not form a cohesive unit if the linking expressions do not have the same referent. A well-known but extreme example from Enkvist's study (as cited in Reinhart, 1980) clearly demonstrates this point.

I bought a Ford. The car in which President Wilson rode down the Champs Elysees was black. Black English has been widely discussed. The discussions between the presidents ended last week. A week has seven days. Every day I feed my cat. Cats have four legs. The cat is on the mat. Mat has three letters. (p.170)

From the text, we see that “a Ford (=car) and the car in which President ...” is linked lexically but not referentially. Although Chinese EFL students may not produce a text like this, this example may be used to prove a point: “a text consisting of lexical links only will not be cohesive” (Reinhart, 1980, p.170).

As for coherence, Reinhart expanded on Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion model, asserting that for a text to be globally coherent, it must meet three conditions: connectedness (cohesion), consistency, and relevance. For Reinhart, the first is a condition of the linear concatenation of sentences in a text; this condition comes closest to Halliday and Hasan’s original formulation of cohesion. It claims that each sentence should be referentially connected to a previous sentence in the text. The second of Reinhart’s conditions, consistency, requires that each sentence should be semantically consistent with previous sentences. That is, they can be all true in the same state of affairs given our common assumption about the world, rather than being self-contradictory. The third condition, relevance, encompasses both semantic and pragmatic conditions. Unlike the second condition, the third condition restricts not only the relations between the sentences of the text but also the relations between these sentences and an underlying theme, as well as their relations with the context of the utterance. Abstracting from Reinhart’s three conditions, cohesion refers to “the label for overt linguist[ic] devices for putting sentences together” (p.163), whereas coherence is “a matter of semantic and pragmatic relations in the text” (p.163). Apparently, then, we may view cohesion as applying to sentence connectedness, while coherence focuses on semantic structure.

To sum up, text-based coherence started with Halliday and Hasan, who in 1976 introduced the concept of cohesion in *Cohesion in English*. Subsequent studies have been

conducted to test Halliday and Hasan's cohesion hypothesis and qualify their claims about the cohesion model. Researchers have investigated the relationship between the lexical cohesion of student writing and overall quality or coherence. Among these studies, Witte and Faigley's (1981) pioneering research on college students' writing demonstrated a relationship between cohesion and coherence. Corroborating Witte and Faigley's findings, McCulley (1985) concluded that cohesion is a sub-element of coherence. In contrast, Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) found no relationship between cohesion and coherence in the twelfth graders' essays. Moreover, Reinhart (1980) asserted that Halliday and Hasan's lexical repetition is not what makes a text cohesive.

Not surprisingly, issues of cohesion and coherence are still under debate. Nevertheless, the above discussions have revealed that coherence is distinct from and broader than cohesion, and that cohesion, defined in terms of a set of linguistic features, is viewed as only one of the factors that create coherence in a text. Therefore, in the construction of text, the establishment of cohesive relations is a necessary component, but it is not the whole story. Researchers have noted that cohesive texts are not necessarily also coherent texts (Connor, 1996). Since texture or coherence involves much more than merely cohesion, it deserves much more attention.

**Reader-based analysis.** The past three decades have witnessed a shift from a static, text-based descriptive approach to a more dynamic, reader-based one, and coherence is conceptualized as a context-dependent, reader-oriented and comprehension-based, interpretative notion (Bublitz, 1999). Reader-based studies claim that a text cannot be considered separately from the reader and that successful use of textual cohesion and coherence requires an interaction among the reader, the discourse, and the writer (Carrell,

1982; Abeywickrama, 2007). This reader-based approach is primarily based on the schema theory (first used by Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist and philosopher, in 1926 and later developed by Richard C. Anderson, an American educational psychologist), which places the reader's prior knowledge of the content in the forefront of discourse comprehension.

Anderson was among the leaders in developing schema theory and applying it to reading education. According to the schema theory, as pointed out by Chinn and Nguyen-Jahiel (2010), when readers read texts, they use their prior knowledge to help them make sense of these texts. Hence, reading comprehension is facilitated when readers have relevant organized knowledge packets, called *schemas*, which they can use to interpret the information. When reading a narrative of a wedding, for example, readers apply their schema of typical wedding events (prior knowledge of the processional, the vows, the reception, and so on) and fill the slots in the schema with the details of the particular wedding described in the narrative (e.g., the details of this particular processional, vow, reception, and so on). When readers lack relevant schemas, or when they fail to activate their schemas, they understand and recall less of the new material. Schema theory can help teachers understand some of the difficulties that students have when reading, and it suggests that building relevant schemas and activating them can enhance reading comprehension (Chinn and Nguyen-Jahiel, 2010).

A survey of the views closely associated with the meaningful aspect of writer-reader interaction includes Witte and Faigley, 1981; Carrell, 1982,1984; Bamberg, 1983; Connor, 1984; Matalene, 1985; Johns, 1986; Khalil, 1989; Connor and Johns, 1990; Canavan and Brandon,1990; Knott and Sanders, 1998; Campbell, 1998; Suraishkumar,

2003; Watson Todd, Thienpermpool, and Keyuravong, 2004; Seidel, Rimmele, and Prenzel, 2005; Tanskanen, 2006; O'Reilly and McNamar, 2007; Abeywickrama, 2007; Watson Todd, Khongput, and Darasawang, 2007. A selection of the views from the following individual researchers and teachers are fairly typical of a larger trend toward the reader-based approach to cohesion and coherence: Carrell (1982 & 1984), Bamberg (1983), Connor (1984, 1996), Tanskanen (2006), and O'Reilly and McNamara (2007).

Carrell (1982) openly challenged Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory as a measure of textual coherence in the light of schema-theoretical views of text reading, arguing that, "Cohesion is not coherence." To illustrate Carrell's point, I quote from Honegger (2005), who provides this example of a text:

*Grammar is important to all who use language. For example, determiners precede nouns in English. Also, spoken English includes intonational contours.*

*Finally, verbs can be identified by looking for words with verbal suffixes. (p. 196)*

The main issue with this paragraph is that the sentences are not explaining why grammar is important to all language users. Despite having cohesive ties, the text does not appear to meet the needs of any audience because the presentation of ideas in the paragraph "violates a coherence contract between writer and reader that the writer will provide only information relevant to the topic" (Carrell, 1984, p.162). According to Carrell (1984) and Fawcett (2011), a coherent paragraph should clearly develop its main topic, using relevant evidence with all sentences showing their logical relationship to one another. However, instead of arguing for why it is important to use good grammar, the supporting details drift away from the topic in the above example. Accordingly, the reader may be left clueless about grammar's importance.



From the reader-based perspective, a writer and a reader must share background knowledge of both content and form. This shared background information, in Carrell's words, is what leads to coherence. Therefore, according to Carrell (1984), without a reader's interacting with the text, and the writer's providing of textual cues that go beyond simple linguistic, cohesive ties, the text may not cohere. In other words, for anyone who does not have the appropriate background knowledge (i.e., the schema) corresponding to the text, the text may fail to cohere. Carrell's (1982) view of textual coherence may be seen in an example she provides:

The *picnic* was ruined. No one remembered to bring a *corkscrew*. (p. 484)

Although the text lacks an overt linguistic lexical cohesive tie between “*picnic*” and “*corkscrew*”, the reader's prior knowledge of *picnics and corkscrews* (i.e., schema) is activated to interpret its meaning, so he/she does not have difficulty understanding this mini-text; this pattern of interaction with the reader creates coherence. Here, Carrell has provided a good example of reader-based coherence; this factor can also explain why many Chinese ESL students often find it hard to read and understand texts that are highly coherent if they lack the background schemas to make logical connections, or lack the knowledge of cultural inferences. Therefore, in evaluating text coherence, the significance of interactions between text and reader is much in evidence.

Carrell's view of coherence echoes the interactive model of coherence of Bamberg (1983), Canavan and Brandon (1990), Connor (1984, 1996), and Tanskanen (2006). These scholars believe that cohesion and coherence interact with each other and that cohesive devices help make a text coherent. In other words, cohesion alone is not sufficient to create coherent text. Both cohesion and coherence work together to make

successful communication happen. Coherence is seen as essentially a technique of connecting ideas smoothly and logically in written communication. In a coherent piece of writing, a writer leads the reader clearly and logically from one idea to another while developing his/her thoughts. When the writer weaves ideas skillfully, the reader can see quickly the relationship of one idea to another and to the central thought of the whole, as Canavan and Brandon (1990) explained.

Echoing Carrell's views, Bamberg (1983) advanced the idea that the reader's prior knowledge or schema---both conscious and implicit---influences the understanding of a text because the schema helps readers anticipate upcoming textual information such as clearly stated topic sentences, an obvious organizational pattern, statements of topic and purpose, and headings that signify divisions of the text, hence enabling the readers to organize the text into an understandable and coherent whole. Therefore, besides all the textual cues provided by the writer, Bamberg emphasizes the interaction between text and reader and its effect on judgments about coherence, stating, "While reading, readers draw on their tacit knowledge at the level of the sentence and of the whole discourse by using a 'top-down,' 'bottom-up' strategy." To put this more simply, the process of calling on both top-down and bottom-up strategies in reading has been called the *interactive* model, which stresses both what is on the written page and what a reader brings to it. For Bamberg, cohesive ties are not sufficient to create coherent text, but are part of what makes text coherent. She concluded that both cohesion and coherence are important if writing is to be effective, but overall coherence deserves much more attention than just local coherence (i.e., cohesion). Bamberg found the following:

When we look at coherence in its broadest sense, we become aware that almost any feature---whether seen locally or over the whole discourse---has the potential to affect a reader's ability to integrate details of a text into a coherent whole. (p. 427)

Bamberg's critical view of the cohesion theory was also echoed in Tanskanen's (2006) analysis of cohesion and coherence. Like many other researchers, Tanskanen (2006) disputed Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* for ignoring context, but overall, *Cohesion in English*, she maintains, aims at examining the linguistic resources that can be used to mark cohesion, and has proved to be an indispensable tool. In a short text, coherence without cohesion is possible, but in longer texts, Tanskanen argues cohesion plays an important part, especially in real language data, even though several researchers such as Carrell (1982) and Morgan and Sellner (1980) have disputed the whole concept of cohesion and hurried to demonstrate that cohesion is not necessary at all to make a text a unified whole

Tanskanen argues that coherence "is best studied under the collaboration framework, which takes into account the writer and the reader's cooperation in creating understanding of a text." In her book *Collaborating towards Coherence* (2006), Tanskanen approaches cohesion and coherence from the perspective of interaction and collaboration. In collaborative processes, cohesive devices serve as signals of collaboration in which the writer and the reader attempt to successfully interact with each other. As Tanskanen put it, while the writer attempts to provide the necessary linkage to lead the reader toward the interpretation of the text, the reader tries to identify this linkage to arrive at an interpretation. The reader can assume that the writer is making use

of cohesive devices that enhance the reader's ability to keep up with the discourse. In this way, the writer and the reader collaborate to keep the communicative process going.

Judging from this, communication is basically a collaborative process. Through an active interplay between cohesion and coherence, effective communication is achieved; in other words, understanding takes place because the text coheres through collaboration.

O'Reilly and McNamara (2007) made a further contribution to coherence as writing quality by introducing three important factors in understanding discourse from the perspective of text comprehension. O'Reilly and McNamara regarded readers' domain knowledge, comprehension skill, and text cohesion as vital aspects in comprehending a text. In their study, 143 American college students' general and science knowledge was measured by multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The study examined how the reader's prior knowledge, the reader's comprehension skill, and the overall text cohesion affect reading comprehension. By text cohesion, O'Reilly and McNamara mean the degree to which the concepts, ideas, and relations within a text are explicit.

Surprisingly, as research indicates, one of the important reasons for students' comprehension difficulty comes from the nature of the textbooks themselves; many textbooks are difficult to understand because important background information is omitted and relations between concepts are not explicit (O'Reilly & McNamara, 2007). In an analysis of text cohesion in social studies texts, Beck, McKeown, and Gromoll, (1989) found that many texts have structures that are far from optimal in promoting comprehension or coherence. Beck et al.'s analysis showed that texts often present too much information with too little detail, contain loosely connected statements, and have

poor integration between sections. Disjointed text structures hinder comprehension so that the reader is forced to form a disconnected and superficial mental representation of the material.

O'Reilly and McNamara's (2007) study presents us with two important results. First, low-knowledge participants significantly benefited from high-cohesion texts if they were skilled readers. Comprehension skills helped to partially compensate for their knowledge deficits. High-cohesion texts helped the low-knowledge readers to understand some relations among ideas in the text, at least enough to raise their performance a little. That way, learning is improved when students read the high-cohesion text. Second, high-knowledge readers also benefited from reading the high-cohesion text. They performed better on the high-cohesion texts because the high-cohesion text makes the connections among ideas in the text more explicit. This result is congruent with the findings of Linderholm, Everson, van den Broek, Mischinski, Crittenden, and Samuels (2000) who found that cohesion particularly benefits comprehension of difficult texts. Therefore, text cohesion is a major factor in a reader's comprehension. Increasing text cohesion can improve readers' comprehension. According to the results, comprehension skill is critical for both high- and low-knowledge students to help them understand science text. Based on their findings, the authors predicted that science comprehension in the schools would be most likely to improve if efforts were made to increase text cohesion.

To conclude, the above review of modern literature has presented two models of coherence: text-based and reader-based, showing how cohesive ties and perceived coherence are manifested in written discourse. It is important to stress at this point, as indicated above in the literature review, that effective writing involves coherence at both

levels. Since cohesion is one part of the web of relations that helps to make a text comprehensible as well as coherent, attention to overall coherence precedes most concerns about local coherence.

As background for the present study, it will be necessary to provide an overview of Chinese rhetorical traditions in relation to coherence. The next section below gives a brief version of this overview

## **Chinese Rhetorical Values**

### **Historical Foundations**

China has enjoyed a rich history. Broadly speaking, of the many schools of thought, most social and philosophical values are derived from *Confucianism* that focuses on benevolence, *Taoism* that stresses living in harmony with the *Tao* signifying the fundamental nature of the universe, *Mohism* that evolved at about the same time as Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism, and that is best known for the concepts of universal love and no attack, *Legalism* that emphasizes the need for order above all other human concerns or strict obedience to the law system, and *Chinese Buddhism* that refers collectively to the various schools of Buddhism, many of which integrated the ideas of Confucianism, Taoism, and other indigenous philosophical systems so that what was initially a foreign religion came to be a natural part of Chinese civilization. In this sense, Chinese culture is highly diverse, yet harmoniously blended. Surprisingly, many of the culture and traditions of China have come down through the ages largely unchanged. Language scholars, rhetoricians, and educators recognize the interrelationship between culture and rhetoric (Liu, 2007). In this regard, modern views on writing in China today are influenced in subtle but deep and far-reaching ways by philosophical traditions with a

long history in the culture. For the purpose of the current study, the most related and important of these are Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist trends. These ancient traditional values, constantly following ideological coherence, have been explicitly consistent with the rhetorical principles of modern practice in China.

### **The Influence of Confucianism**

Confucius (551 – 479 BC) has been seen as the dominant Chinese philosopher both morally and politically, whose teachings have not only profoundly shaped Chinese culture for 2,500 years (Li, 2004) but have also heavily influenced East Asian cultures for centuries. Modern Chinese rhetoric can be traced back to the Confucian traditions of achieving harmony and showing respect for authority, which directly affected China's rhetorical conventions. As a result, Confucius established the Chinese past as an infallible model for the present.

**A people-oriented concept.** To put the nation in order, Confucius advocated the idea of putting people first (Chen, 2007). He pursued an orderly and ideal harmonious society under prescribed moral principles and cultural norms (Lu, 1998). The conventional view of Chinese history is that of alternating periods of political unity and disunity (Fairbank, Reischauer, & Craig, 1989). Since ancient times China has been involved in numerous wars and battles within the country. Bitter conflicts, serious dissent, and violent confrontations were never absent in ancient Chinese culture. For Confucius, seeking harmony is the most valuable principle (Cai, 2006); when the country is at peace, people will enjoy a good and prosperous life. In achieving harmony, Confucius placed a great emphasis on an appropriate and artistic use of language. Being keenly aware of the impact of language on human perceptions and actions, Confucius strongly believed that

the correct use of language could help society function in an orderly and moral fashion (Lu, 1998). A central value of Chinese rhetoric was thereby to achieve harmony with other human beings, and the correct and aesthetic use of language was virtually emphasized in the ancient Chinese cultural context.

**Nature and human interactions.** In addition to seeking harmony with people, ancient Chinese culture highlighted human beings' interactions with nature. Human beings are not only dwellers in nature, they also adjust nature to meet their needs while transforming it. For Confucius, to achieve harmony with nature, maintaining social order, and establishing a hierarchy of human relations is of high priority (Zhu & Hildebrandt, 2000). From here, it can be seen that ancient Chinese culture associated the principles of man's proper behavior with nature, suggesting that harmony with nature can be achieved only when all people adhere to their position in the hierarchy and conform to nature.

As Yu (2000) and Huang (2002) note, Chinese values largely depend on the agricultural and hierarchical nature of Chinese society. Historically, China's vast population must get its food supply from a cultivated area. Besides, China's economic life has been labor-intensive, strongly depending on human muscle-power. These basic economic features made it essential for the Chinese to closely follow the advice of elders and rely on peaceful cooperation for the irrigation and planting of crops. According to Becker (1986), people were very careful of changing to new ways of farming because many people would starve if the new technique did not work out. Thus they preferred sticking to the old ways. When an unexpected natural disaster such as flood or drought occurred, villagers would always consult those senior citizens with rich life experiences for the best practice to survive. Under the strong influence of Confucian teachings, social



consciousness, namely knowing one's place in a group and acting accordingly, has been at work for thousands of years. Through historical evolution, China gradually turned into a hierarchical society in which age was equated with a certain authority; seniority, rank, and gender (i.e., men over women and a husband over his wife) became the unquestioned distinctions of superior and inferior (Liu, 2007). The traditional respect for authority is therefore highly encouraged. In this sense, China is very much a group-oriented society. The concept of individualism does not exist in China as it does in the West (Fairbank, Reischauer, & Craig, 1989).

**The principles of *Li*, *Yi*, and *Ren*.** To help maintain social order and promote harmony, Confucius advocated a set of pragmatic rules for the daily life behavior of ordinary people. In Confucian ideals, three principles, *Li* (礼), *Yi* (义), and *Ren* (仁), are crucial to his moral philosophy and significantly shaped his rhetorical perspectives: 1) *Li* can be translated as the proprieties, the rites, or loyalty to the social tradition and respect for authority, thereby referring to all actions committed by a person to build an ideal society; 2) *Yi* was the origin of *Li*, referring to righteousness, or the moral disposition to do good. That is, rather than pursuing one's own selfish interests one should do what is right and what is moral; and 3) *Ren* can be best translated as benevolence or loving others. *Ren* is viewed as the virtue of virtues; the other virtues follow from it. Therefore, *Ren* reflects Confucius's fundamental idea of humanity; it is considered the ultimate guide to human action. These three Confucian values dictate that individuals must follow an appropriate way and respect the appropriate ritual in social interaction. In this context, power relationships (social distinctions of superior and inferior) between Chinese speakers and audience directly affected their choice of words as well as discourse

structures (Fairclough, 1989). Confucian teachings admonish followers to be cautious about their speech. Straightforwardness in communication is viewed as dangerous because it is often not regulated by the rule of appropriateness. Confucius warns that straightforwardness, without the rules of propriety, will often lead to rudeness, interpersonal conflict, and social disruption (Chen & Chung, 1994).

Consequently, as for Chinese writings, writers since Confucian times have been wary of the use of language and have regularly used well-known sayings or quotations from famous scholars or political leaders to indicate politeness and respect (Cai, 1999). Furthermore, to be seen as elegant, Chinese writing must include established maxims and citations from the work of well-known Chinese authorities (Leki, 1997). Usually, a Chinese article with well-known sayings or quotations from the authorities is highly appreciated. In this way, through the use of a large number of citations or maxims such as “One who restrains himself in order to observe the rites is benevolent,” Confucianism has increasingly dominated Chinese people’s inner world generation after generation, thus, to a great extent, resulting in their introverted disposition, and their valuing self-restraint under the pressure of provocation, and obedience to authority (Li, 2006).

**Zhongyong.** In time of conflicts arising between two or more parties, mediation is often applied. Mediation refers to a way of resolving disputes by which an intermediary assists the two opposing parties in reaching a mutually satisfactory settlement. It is a common practice in East Asia to use an intermediary to help people solve a conflict. This kind of indirect interaction is part of the formality of social life and is considered a way of avoiding an embarrassing confrontation, a way of “saving face” (Chen, & Chung, 1994; Liu, 2007). Such conflict resolution may be taken to represent the Chinese concept of

*Zhongyong* (中庸), or the Doctrine of the Mean, a core idea of Confucianism (Chen, 2007). Regarding *Zhongyong*, Zhang & Baker (2010) observe, “Chinese people advocate and encourage the art of achieving balance and harmony in life and in coexistence with nature. This art is referred to as *Zhongyong*” (p.25). When approaching an issue, *Zhongyong* guides people to avoid leaning to either side in order to be free from any bias, and this goal has been permeating into all aspects of people’s life. In following *Zhongyong*, one has to adhere to moderation in all thoughts, speeches, and activities, because this will lead to harmony in action, and eventually to a harmonious society.

### **The Influence of Taoism**

Taoism, founded by Laozi, an extraordinary thinker who flourished during the sixth century B. C. E., has exercised an enormous impact on Chinese rhetorical traditions throughout Chinese history. In Taoism, the concept of *Yin* and *Yang* is prominent.

**The concept of *Yin-Yang*.** Taoism can be summarized through the principles of *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yin*, the darker element, and *Yang*, the brighter element, are used to describe how seemingly opposite or contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world (Ma, 2009). Understood in this way, *Yin* and *Yang* are complementary, interdependent opposites, neither of which can exist without the other. Many natural dualities, such as female and male, life and death, dark and light, black and white, sky and earth, sun and moon, low and high, cold and hot, water and fire, and so on, are thought of as physical manifestations of the *Yin* and *Yang* concept.

Under the principle of *Yin* and *Yang*, everything should be in accord with nature (Huang, 2002). As Huang further explains, “Nothing should go to the extreme; otherwise, it will violate the balance in nature” (p. 142). Since the central idea of *Yin* and *Yang* is to

maintain balance and appropriateness (Lu, 1998), too much talk creates emptiness. As a result, it is better to maintain moderation (Oliver, 1971). This *Yin* and *Yang* principle echoes the Confucian idea of *Zhongyong*, the middle of the road. Evidently, both Taoism and Confucianism emphasize achieving balance to avoid extremes. In persuasive writing, the Chinese would write favorably about both sides to achieve agreement because the *Yin* and *Yang* idea subtly plays a decisive role in shaping the way people think and say things.

### **Buddhist Principles**

Buddhism initially came to China from India in 67 AD as an educational system, which focused on memorization of texts. Similar to that of Confucius, the traditional Buddhist educational system is also based on filial piety (loyalty to authority) (Reagan, 2005). Therefore, to show respect for social conventions, a system with a strong tradition of memorization has been widely practiced in school across China since ancient times. Additionally, in Chinese society, the assessment of writing based on test results has been paramount for hundreds of years. Traditionally, success could be measured by a test-taker's ability to recite appropriate passages from classics as applied to particular problems, since classics are generally regarded as quintessence of knowledge. Memorization, therefore, was established early in Chinese history and has continued to this day.

**Memorization.** In terms of learning, Chinese students since childhood have begun to memorize slogans, sayings, or texts such as these classics in the *Book of Three Hundred Tang Poems* (an anthology of poems from the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907)). However, learning in China is initiated by understanding. On the basis of understanding as a starting point, the Chinese tend to memorize what has been learned and then

internalize its meaning (Marton, Wen, & Nagle, 1996). They then adapt the knowledge to use in various circumstances. In view of the above-mentioned reasons, the Buddhist tradition of memorization or rote learning has played an enormous part in shaping the mind-set of the Chinese people. As a result, instead of developing creativity in writing, Chinese writers have always liked the idea of memorizing texts as a sign of showing respect for authority (Duan, 2003) as well as a way of demonstrating their knowledge of the language (Kohn, 1992). More importantly, learning through memorization in China is largely based on grasping the meaning of a subject as a necessary initial step rather than simply fixing information to one's memory via sheer repetition. Memorization is said to allow one to better apply and transfer knowledge gained at one time to other areas at a later time.

**Wuxing.** Culturally, in traditional Chinese thinking, great attention is paid to *Wuxing* (悟性). The Chinese notion of *Wuxing* can be approximately translated into “insight,” the capability to understand things without reasoning. It is a way of sensing the truth without explanations. The Chinese associate *Wuxing* with intuition; intuitive thinking in Chinese culture is highly valued. Historically, both Confucianism and Buddhism constantly stress *Wuxing* (Li, 2005; Lian, 2006; Yuan & Yang, 2010). Confucianism emphasizes capturing the central point of a subject as well as its internal relations by using prior knowledge and experience (Cai, 2006). As said by Confucius, if too much attention was devoted to rational thinking, the result may turn out to be just the opposite of one's wish, thus often leading to confusion (Hou, 2003). Particularly, Buddhism teaches that enlightenment (i.e., the state of understanding something clearly) is achieved through meditation, or mental concentration. This awakening can occur

gradually or in a flash of insight (Lian, 2006). According to Yun (2005), since *Wuxing* is highly personal, instead of learning from others, one can only rely on oneself to stimulate the mind and emotions to contemplate the essence of reality. Day by day, the emphasis of *Wuxing* has led to a tradition since ancient times of employing an intuitive approach in academic and real life. For Chinese writing, comprehension, therefore, is achieved via the reader's *Wuxing*.

However, unlike Western thinking, which advocates logical reasoning, Chinese intuitive thinking has an obscure nature (Qin, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Today, while Chinese thinking is considerably influenced by Western thought, which emphasizes accuracy, it is still associated with the ancient characteristic of obscure thinking (Lian, 2002, 2006).

Traditionally, in the eyes of the Chinese, if a person is intelligent, he/she must have a special natural ability to understand things. Ancient Chinese books, for example, are very difficult to understand if one lacks *Wuxing* because they are full of obscurities, consisting of implicit expressions and unconnected sentences, and even contain no punctuation.

Only by writing in this obscure way could authors demonstrate their “profound learning” (Yun, 2005). Only those among the few who had good understanding were capable of grasping the essentials. Once people came to a proper understanding of the gist, they were said to be able to win rapid promotion in their official career.

### **Purpose**

The Confucian and Buddhist traditions were reflected in the early modern Chinese writing classroom. In persuasive writing, the writer's purpose is the reason why he/she writes a passage. Unlike Western rhetoric which aims at persuasion, the central purposes or goals of Chinese writing are to express the views of the group by referring to

the tradition and relying on accepted patterns of expression, and to achieve conciliation or social harmony (Matalene, 1985; Liu, 1996). This principle has been noted by scholars outside of China, as Lu and Frank (1993) assert that “Western scholars believe that the purpose of Chinese rhetoric is to achieve harmony” (p. 455). Influenced by this tradition, to achieve harmony and use beautiful phrasing, Chinese students in the EFL writing context have been regarding the purpose of their writing as a way of showing their mastery of the English language rather than attempting to accomplish a specific communication task.

### **Audience**

Another important and interesting factor involves the notion of audience. How a writer approaches his/her subject will depend on his/her specific target audience. Therefore, keeping the writer’s audience in mind helps the writer know what information/style/vocabulary to include and what to leave out (Fawcett, 2011). Readers appreciate the writer’s presenting a paper in a way that is familiar to them; in turn, they are more likely to be open to the writer’s unique perspective. However, in the long history of the Chinese rhetorical tradition, audience analysis was of little importance; at least, it was not emphasized. In fact, the audience for writings had been implicitly or explicitly predetermined exclusively to be the authorities, including top government officials or important scholars (Duan, 2003). In this cultural context, Chinese EFL/ESL writers tend to be writer-centered rather than audience-centered.

### **Twentieth Century: Japan and Western Influence**

Early modern Chinese rhetoric began to appear in the late 1800s, when thousands of Chinese students went to Japan, where Western rhetoric was taught, for study-abroad

programs from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Through Japanese universities, the Chinese students had their first contact with the Western tradition of humanities and sciences (Wu, 2009). Japanese professors translated many Western works on rhetoric, but they conceptualized rhetoric solely as a discipline concerned with belles-lettres (writings about subjects relating to literature) and literary criticism (the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature). The Japanese translated the word *rhetoric* into the *study of beautiful prose* or *the study of the written word*, debating on whether and how Western rhetoric could be applied to issues unique to the Japanese language (Tomasi, 2004).

In the 1800s, Japanese literature was identified with tropes and figures, and it emphasized very refined linguistic and aesthetic awareness (Tomasi, 2004). Stylistic devices such as metaphor, rhyme, personification, and diction, therefore, were a top priority in writing in Japan at that time. The Japanese emphasis on the aesthetics of literary writing exerted a strong influence on Chinese students while they were studying in Japan.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many young Chinese intellectuals looked to the West for Western standards as the source for incentives that could build and improve society and culture (Mao, 2010). It is worth pointing out that in 1911, a royally decreed school called *Qinghua Xuetaang* (Qinghua Academy) was set up (Zhang, 2005) in China, in order to prepare Chinese students for studying in the United States, with the aim of training a group of Chinese leaders. Operated in an American way with English as the language of instruction (Zhang, 2005), the school gave numerous Chinese youths exposure to modern Western sciences and culture. Apart from other academic subjects, skill-based English courses were offered, including reading, composition, and grammar.



The May Fourth Movement, also called the New Culture Movement or the Chinese Literary Revolution (Mohan & Lo, 1985), had a massive impact on Chinese culture from 1919 to the 1930s. This movement was long seen as a radical intellectual break with the traditional Confucian ideas and as the seedbed of Western rhetoric and values. This period saw numerous new publications on rhetoric among its cultural, educational, and social changes. At that time, a debate arose over whether or not Chinese prose study and writing should adopt foreign theories, and whether or not foreign rhetorical theories would benefit Chinese language studies.

Despite nativists' protests, during this early part of the twentieth century, scholars returning from Japan and the United States integrated Japanese theories and Anglo-American figures of speech into Chinese writing and appropriated them into a canon of aesthetics for writing studies (Wu, 2009). Particularly, according to Tang (1923), Western rhetorical models of definition and classification were introduced with a focus on the study of figures of speech such as metaphor and diction. However, some Western notions, such as debate or persuasion, which could challenge the Confucian and Buddhist traditions, were not easily transmitted to the Chinese audience (Wu, 2009).

In the 1920s, with the efforts of the returned scholars but contextualized within China's deep-rooted Confucian tradition, the Western concept *rhetoric* was defined in its narrow sense as *the art of effective expression* and as *the study of that art* designated in Chinese by two separate terms, *xiuci* and *xiucixue* (Kao, 1993). Translated from Western sources (Wen, 2007), the Chinese term *xiuci* (rhetoric) referred to an art in modern China, and was closely associated with Chinese writing instruction. This art of rhetoric laid

special stress on figures of speech, which were emphasized as the focal points in modern writing.

### **Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric***

One typical example of applying this “rhetoric” to writing instruction can be found in Chen Wangdao’s (1932) *Xiucixue Fafan (An Introduction to Rhetoric)*; in China it is compared to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in the West. To understand modern Chinese rhetoric, it is necessary to become familiar with Chen Wangdao and his book.

Chen Wangdao was one of the Chinese students who studied in Japan between 1915 and 1920. Later, from 1949 to 1977, he served as president of China’s prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai, which has been the main center of the modern Chinese rhetorical tradition and is also one of the major centers of rhetorical study in the world (Harbsmeier, 1999). Chen was a prominent nationally recognized Chinese rhetorician in the early twentieth century. His *An Introduction to Rhetoric*, published in 1932, was the first systematic work to establish a completely new and scientific rhetorical system, and it has been widely recognized as the most important milestone of modern Chinese rhetoric. Hence, Chen is regarded as the founding father of modern Chinese rhetoric (Harbsmeier, 1999; Wu, 2009; Lam, 2002).

To a certain extent, Chen's rhetorical studies integrated ancient Chinese, Japanese, and Western rhetorical theories (Lam, 2002). Although Chen’s book was based on Japanese sources, which were in turn based on Western rhetorical concepts (Harbsmeier, 1999), his system was developed from his own teaching notes at Fudan University during the 1920s and was classroom-tested by several professors. Chen’s text examines both ancient and modern Chinese writings, covering the definition of rhetoric, features of

speech, passive and active forms of rhetoric, figures of speech, rhetorical phenomena, and styles. However, as Feng (2002) explains, Chinese scholars generally discuss nothing more than control of language from different perspectives. In exactly the same way, Chen's *An Introduction to Rhetoric* focused on language use rather than textual features such as coherence. From this perspective, Wu (2009) claims that modern Chinese rhetoric has been primarily aesthetic and poetic since it evolved out of the notion of harmony.

Specifically, instead of helping students develop convincing arguments, critical thinking skills, or a logical progression of thought in their writing that readers would be able to follow, Chen maintained that the purpose of rhetorical study is to learn models of language use; in this one important feature, he was adapting an idea from traditional Chinese culture. Chinese writers, therefore, imitate texts (Liu, 1996) and regard the purpose of their writing as a way of showing their superior mastery of Chinese classics. In order to “beautify writing” (Chen, 1932) and add more authority or persuasiveness to the writing, students often use set phrases and allusions, quote well-known sayings, and follow patterns rather than focus on making every paragraph, every sentence, and every phrase contribute to the meaning of the whole piece as judged by Western rhetoric. For the Chinese, these rhetorical practices embody great cultural values rooted in history (Peng, 1997) and can be viewed as congruent with China's Confucian and Buddhist traditions, which respect the harmony of the group over the desires of the individual. To put this more directly, as noted by Chen (2004), “While Confucianism promotes a harmonious social order, rhetoric study maintains a harmonious society” (p.90).

## **Russian Influence**

In the years following 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, the Russian pedagogical influence on China's foreign languages teaching was enormous, due to political and economic reasons. During the 1950s, most students enrolled in college were poor in English proficiency (He, 2003). In an effort to teach the students basic language skills, the former Soviet model of *Intensive Reading* was strongly promoted and was believed to be helpful for English learning in China (Wang & He, 2006). This model does not focus on teaching reading skills as its name suggests; it is really more of a language study method than a form of reading. Chinese students, therefore, were advised to analyze a text, working on sentence level, and paying attention mainly to vocabulary, usage, verb patterns, and grammar (Qian, 2009). Always, after each English lesson, about six to ten separate Chinese-to-English sentences in isolation were provided as a homework assignment for students to translate with a focus on the use of verb patterns. Chinese students may have, in a very real sense, never heard of the fancy term *coherence* during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s.

James Kohn (1992), who taught English in a Chinese university in the 1980s, claimed that "Chinese teachers of intensive reading would encourage students to reread difficult sentences until they are understood and look up definitions for all unknown words in a dictionary" (p.120), in contrast to American teachers, who might stress the importance of extracting main ideas or using background knowledge. Kohn (1992) wondered why "Americans favor top-down strategies of cognitive awareness in reading, while the Chinese are following bottom-up strategies" (p.121). Not surprisingly, this "grammar-translation" model (Liu, 2010) has been common as an English-teaching

method across China for almost 60 years since the 1950s and has played a key role in China's English education (Wang & He, 2006). With the emphasis on this *Intensive Reading* method, during the 1950s and 1970s, composition writing was not considered important, and in fact was practically ignored.

## **The Current Situation**

### **Chinese Views of Cohesion and Coherence**

Since the late 1970s, China has opened its gate to English as the unofficial second language, and English is viewed as “the gatekeeper” to higher education, employment, and social status. As Bolton & Tong (2002) indicate, English writing instruction began to carry weight in the early 1980s as China was increasing its exchanges with the outside world in many ways. As a central component of the basic language skills, effective academic writing in English as a foreign language is becoming particularly important today because Chinese EFL learners in college need to write papers, and some of them need to send applications to universities outside China for advanced studies (Liu & Braine, 2005).

As discussed earlier, with the borrowing of ideas from Western rhetoric in the early twentieth century, one might expect Chinese values associated with writing to be in agreement with those of Western scholars. Things, however, have not moved in that direction. In many areas of today's writing practices, differences and conflicts still arise. These may be rooted in the older traditions described earlier, of Confucianism and Buddhism. Additionally, the pedagogical influence of the Russian *Intensive Reading* model cannot be underestimated. Chinese students today may still pay more attention to the writing of single grammatically correct sentences rather than to the overall meaning

and the overall semantic coherence of a passage when it comes to English writing. Most important of all, a decisive factor that should be taken into consideration is the fact that culturally influenced thought (or thinking) patterns could considerably influence the way Chinese students write. In this section, before we go about exploring what Chinese EFL teachers and scholars actually say about the Western concept of coherence in writing, I will particularly focus on and explain how thought patterns, from the perspective of contrastive rhetoric, may influence practical views on writing today.

### **Cultural Thought Patterns**

The mention of thought patterns brings us back to the 1960s. The study of modern Chinese rhetoric for EFL/ESL writing purposes was first initiated by R. B. Kaplan in his well-known article, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education” (1966). In that article, Kaplan claimed that Western thought and writing are presented with a drawing of a straight arrow, whereas the Chinese language is depicted as a spiral turning in on itself. Even though Kaplan’s cultural assumption was too overgeneralized because all Chinese writers do not write all their essays in that non-linear way, there is still some truth contained in his assertion about cross-cultural differences in writing.

To understand why written discourse is culture specific, we need to consider what thought patterns are and how they might be said to affect a notion like coherence. In the past two decades in China, numerous articles have been written on cultural thought patterns, many of them highlighting Chinese culture (e.g. Wang & Liu, 2001; Lian, 2002; Li & Zhang, 2002; Qian, 2003; Guo & Wang, 2004; Liu & Zhou, 2004; Deng, 2005; Liu & Deng, 2005; Xu, 2005; Yang & Cahill, 2008). Studies in contrastive rhetoric have proposed differences between Chinese and English thought patterns.

Among the above-mentioned Chinese scholars, Lian's (2002) view of cultural thought patterns may be of typical significance in the Chinese cultural context. In his article "Modes of Thinking," he claims that thought patterns serve as a bridge linking culture and language; these patterns consist mainly of knowledge, perceptions, methods, intelligence, feelings, will, languages, and habits, which are correlated. According to Lian, East Asian (including Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese) and Western thought patterns exhibit different characteristics. For example, East Asians seek common ground, prefer to take steady steps or "compromise," and emphasize harmony, whereas Westerners seek difference, strive for making changes, and value competition. East Asians tend to believe that elements in the world are interrelated with one another, viewing any given phenomenon as non-static. In contrast, Westerners perceive most objects as independent, so the essence of an object is not affected by factors outside itself. The Chinese worship the ancient and cherish the past, sticking to traditional ways, while Westerners are open-minded, looking toward the future. In terms of writing, East Asians have a great respect for models, whereas Westerners encourage creativity and emphasize critical thinking. Also, the East and the West may have different views on directness. When the Chinese state their views, they tend to stay away from being straightforward and prefer to speak indirectly. In contrast, Americans tend to get straight to the "bottom line."

Seen this way, thought patterns and cultures are closely tied. Language and writing are cultural phenomena, and, as a direct consequence, each language has its preferred rhetorical conventions (Connor, 1996). Wilson (2010) clearly explains her view on the subtle influence of cultural thought patterns on writing:

Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity. Just because a foreign student can write a coherent essay in his native language does not mean that he can do so in English, nor does that mean that an American [who] can write a coherent essay in English can do so in another language. (p. 2)

From this point of view, coherence may not be universal, but rather is evolved out of cultural thought patterns. Thought patterns may affect our cognitive development and perception of coherence. In other words, what makes a text coherent could depend at least in part on reader perceptions or cultural expectations, and cultural thought patterns may affect how one perceives writing as coherent.

This can create problems for Chinese EFL/ESL students, whose essays have to be written in the unfamiliar (to them) rhetorical styles of the Western culture. Achieving coherence in English writing does not lie solely in learning vocabulary and grammar of the English language; however, other important factors are typically overlooked by writing instructors, as they have not been thoroughly investigated and are not as readily taught. As a result, developing writers from other cultures are left to fall back on their original intuitions when it comes to issues like coherence. Chinese students may have a coherent orientation based on their background and experience, but this orientation may be perceived to be incoherent to a reader anticipating a different culturally-constrained demonstration of coherence (Vries, 2002; Wilson, 2010).

The next section presents ten areas where cultural thought patterns may affect persuasive writing, based on the research of numerous scholars: Shen (1989), Ballard and Clanchy (1991), Yu (1993), Connor (1996), Cortazzi and Jin (1997), Duan (2003),



Timmann (2003), Guo and Wang (2004), Hu (2004), Parselle (2005), Lian (2006), Ye (2006), Dewey (2007), Jiang (2007), Mu and Carrington (2007), Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008), Blunden (2008), Kinnes (2009), Liu and Palermo (2009), Qin (2009), Zhang (2009), and Liu (2010). For Chinese ESL students, while the ten features may not represent an exhaustive list of causes for all their writing problems regarding coherence, to a significant extent, they clearly reflect issues that may affect Chinese students' writing.

### **Dialectical Thinking and Intuitive Thinking**

Zhang (2009) argues that traditional Chinese thought patterns exhibit two characteristic features: 1) dialectical thinking, and 2) intuitive thinking. Fundamentally, these two “reasoning” systems are closely related and frequently applied in the Chinese cultural context. Dialectical thinking refers to the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and arrive at the most reasonable reconciliation of seemingly contradictory information (Manzo, 1992). The dialectical approach emphasizes holistic thinking and the unity of opposites. Regarding holistic thinking, Dewey (2007) maintains that holistic thinking involves understanding a system by sensing its all-inclusive patterns and reacting to them. Viewed from the perspective of an English reader, students with holistic thinking often see a problem from all sides and tend to compose disunified paragraphs containing many different ideas, according to Dewey. If this characterization is correct, it is reasonable to assume that the traditional Chinese preference for holistic thinking may significantly affect Chinese students' English writing. In terms of the unity of opposites, this style is regarded as a way of understanding something in its entirety. As Blunden (2008) notes, each of the two seemingly opposite parts does its role to complement the other. They are constantly changing and are therefore inseparable. They are opposites, yet

they are one. Following the dialectical principle of the unity of opposites, Chinese writers may approach a topic by arguing positively about both sides when writing persuasive essays.

As can be seen from the above discussion, dialectical thinking centers on holistic strategies. Similarly, intuitive thinking, which was already noted in the earlier section entitled *Wuxing*, also emphasizes the holistic approach, and it carries much weight in Chinese culture. To deepen our understanding of the Chinese intuition, it is very helpful to contrast it with the Western logical thinking.

### **Logical Thinking vs. Intuitive Thinking**

Human thinking is guided mainly by two culturally-specific classes of cognitive strategies, that is, logical thinking and intuitive thinking. As far as Western civilization is concerned, the classical Greeks “invented” logical thinking (Parselle, 2005). Basically, logical thinking is focused, linear, rule-based, brain-centered, and analytic, dealing with one thing at a time. It can be taught in the classroom to beginners. However, in ancient China, instead of developing logical thinking like the Aristotelian formal logic, the Chinese only acquired intuitive abilities (Lian, 2006). As we may already know, intuition refers to the ability to understand things by using one’s feelings rather than by carefully considering facts, so it has contrastive qualities. Essentially, intuitive thinking, or *Wuxing*, is unfocused, nonlinear, experience-based, heart-centered, and holistic, seeing many things at once. Since intuitive thinking is experience-oriented and heart-centered, it is hard to teach in the classroom. It is commonly believed that Westerners value logical reasoning while the Chinese stress intuitive thinking or empirical belief (Qin, 2009). Not surprisingly, when intuitive thinking conflicts with logical reasoning, Chinese students

are likely to turn to an intuitive approach by using their experiential knowledge rather than applying logical reasoning.

When it comes to Chinese writing, Hu (2004) has presented us with a striking picture of the traditional Chinese intuition. He claims that Chinese intuitive thinking is unclear and full of symbolism. Consequently, Chinese writing remains obscure and highly suggestive, leading readers into reverie. According to Hu, Chinese thinking is especially good for the production of literature and philosophy rather than the development of science. To illustrate his point, Hu offers us an impressive example, explaining that most Chinese books on philosophy are imbued with bits of collective maxims, which are not written in a systematic way, even though ideas can be penetrating. Besides, as Hu proceeds to emphasize, there are few connections between the sentences. More specifically, the widely known *The Analects of Confucius* was written in the compact suggestive style, which is not easy to comprehend. Here is an example from *The Analects of Confucius*:

君	子	有	九	思:	视	思	明,	听	思	聪,
Jun	zi	you	jiu	si:	shi	si	ming,	ting	si	cong,
A	gentleman	have	nine	thinking:	see	think	clearly,	hear	think	distinctly

色	思	温,	貌	思	恭,
se	si	wen,	mao	si	gong,
Face	think	mild,	appearance	think	respectful

言	思	忠,	事	思	敬,	疑	思	问,
yan	si	zhong,	shi	si	jing,	yi	si	wen,
talk	think	sincere	work	think	dedicated	problem	think	ask

忿	思	难,	见	得	思	义。
fen	si	nan,	jian	de	si	yi.
Angry	think	consequence,	see	gains	think	righteous.

When translated into English, it might look like this (Cai, 2006):

A gentleman concentrates on the following nine things: seeing clearly when he uses his eyes; hearing acutely when he uses his ears; looking mild when it comes to facial expression; appearing sedate when it comes to demeanor; being sincere when he speaks; being conscientious when it comes to his office responsibility; seeking advice when he is in the face of difficulty; foreseeing the consequences when he gets angry; asking himself whether it is right when he wants to gain something. (p. 91)

*The Confucian Analects* is a collection of aphorisms, which is typical of intuitive thinking. The connections from idea to idea are highly suggestive. The content is by no means easy to follow. The Chinese mind developed a language which is very different from that which evolved in the West. In the above sentence, the word order is determined by the emotional content rather than by the kind of grammatical rules that dictate structure rather more rigidly in a language like English. This writing consists of many sentence fragments separated by commas. Each fragment is short, yet rich in suggestive images. Much of this imagery, however, is lost when translated into English.

Admittedly, as Zhang (2009) states, due to much attention paid to intuitive thinking, Chinese students may seriously lack analytical skills, particularly in terms of reading-response writing, such as the writing of a critical response to a written text. Likewise, with this considerable emphasis on intuitive thinking, Chinese students may apparently ignore the importance of effective argumentation, which requires highly logical reasoning. As analytic thinking involves understanding a system by breaking down its parts, explaining what they are, and thinking about how they work together to produce large-scale effects and why they do so (Dewey, 2007), a lack of analytic thinking

in writing is indeed a major defect in the traditional Chinese way of thinking (Zhang, 2009), seen through Western eyes.

### **Form-oriented vs. Meaning-oriented**

English seems to strongly stress cohesion of form. The notion of cohesion is typically defined in terms of Halliday and Hasan's grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. Skilled writers employ cohesive devices effectively to tie a text together and facilitate comprehension (Canagarajah, 2002). Likewise, as stated by Connor (1996), connectives work as aids to help readers make connections between what has already been stated and what is forthcoming. Zamel (1983) echoes Connor in claiming that these linking ties help make a text appear unified and allow readers to piece together ideas into a logically coherent whole. As a result, English readers are said to expect those ties to help achieve coherence as they read. In a sense, meaning, therefore, is achieved through form, that is, through cohesive ties.

In contrast, Chinese writing would consider surface links optional. Chinese tends to heavily emphasize coherence of meaning. As Xing, Wang, & Spencer (2008) claim,

Chinese writing places the emphasis more on the whole: it is more synthetic, more changeable, and there is no clear-cut separation between the parts. Also, Chinese rhetorical style is not very strict about the need for coherent links between parts. It relies more heavily on the reader's interpretation. (P.74)

From this view, Chinese appears to be a reader-responsible language (Hinds, 1987). That is, it is the reader's responsibility that decides the relationship between any one part of an essay and the essay as a whole. In this sense, Chinese is postulated as meaning-oriented (Huang, 2002). Chinese writers and readers assume that the logical relationship of related

ideas between sentences and paragraphs is understood from context. This does not mean that there are no cohesive ties in Chinese. It is only to say that transition expressions may be more subtle and require a more active role for the audience. Just because of this trait, a noticeable feature in Chinese writing is that phrases or sentences may be linked by only a comma, rather than an explicit transitional or linking term. Instead of saying “English is very important, *so* we must learn it well,” Chinese EFL/ESL students, especially those at a developmental stage, would say “English is very important, we must learn English well” (Wang, 2008). The reader is then left to supply the cause-effect relationship.

As connectives are optional in Chinese, when Chinese students transfer their Chinese patterns into English, the resulting text without appropriate connections between ideas may typically not make much sense to an English reader; at least, such a choppy text would not be pleasing to read for an English reader. And the English reader would probably be too annoyed by such an unconnected text to bother working out the connections. According to Parks, Levernier, & Hollowell (1981), an essential element of coherence will be missing if a paragraph lacks any sentence connection. In other words, the closely related ideas in short, choppy sentences may be better understood when they are well connected into one longer sentence that makes the logical relationship clear. Not surprisingly, EFL teachers often find that a text written by their Chinese students frequently consists of a collection of unconnected short sentences, so they conclude that Chinese students may seriously lack basic transitional skills in their English writing (Dong, 1999; Guo & Wang, 2004; Yeh, 2004; Jin & Ban, 2006; Zhou, 2007; Wu & He, 2010). These transitional skills refer to the appropriate use of cohesive ties or

connectives. To illustrate this property of Chinese, it will be very helpful to have a closer look at the paratactic feature of the Chinese language.

### **Paratactic vs. Hypotactic**

Putting the above point into Chinese terms, basically, Chinese is content with *yihe* [notional coherence], which is strongly influenced by Chinese intuitive thinking, whereas Western languages like English highlight *xinghe* [formal cohesion]. To clarify the relationship of ideas within paragraphs or beyond paragraphs, as noted above, English more often resorts to overt cohesion, frequently using various cohesive ties. On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing again that Chinese texts are characterized by a lack of such function words as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, and other forms. In the final analysis, Chinese is a *paratactic* language, in which clauses are presented independently without linking forms. This can be distinguished from a *hypotactic* language like English (Yu, 1993; Jiang, 2007), which makes rich use of coordinating or subordinating words to show the semantic or pragmatic relationships between clauses. In Chinese, such relationships are often implied rather than expressed lexically when they are understood from context.

Historically, Chinese writing rarely employed connectives, and this trait can be traced back only to about the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that point, a great number of Western documents were translated into Chinese; as a result, Chinese underwent a process of language change called “Westernization.” One consequence of this was that the use of sentence connectives in Chinese increased greatly. Despite all the changes caused by Westernization, however, modern Chinese still preserves the features of a paratactic language. Even now, in contrast to their English equivalents, the use of the Chinese

cohesive devices such as *or, but, and, so, because, if, after, although, though, even though, even if, when, with regard to, therefore, conversely*, etc. may or may not be needed, depending on the specific context.

Jiang (2007) provides the following example:

姊妹三个, 从小 没娘, 彼此提挈, 感情很好,  
Zi mei san ge, cong xiao mei nian, bi ci ti qie, gan qing hen hao,  
Sisters three, from childhood no mother, help each other, feelings very good,  
一家人 都很 勤快。  
yi jia ren du hen qin kuai.  
whole family all very hard-working .

The three sisters have lost their mother since they were young, so they help and love each other. To survive, the family works hard together.

Grammatically, this is a typical one-clause Chinese sentence with a very loose structure. The phrases within the sentence are separated by commas. When translated into English, the Chinese version turns into two distinct English clauses. In fact, since English requires more explicitness in spelling out the logical connections, there could be different interpretations of the Chinese sentence. Instead of the connective *so*, for instance, the sentence could be read with the conjunction *and* in place of *so*. In the translation, we can see that many elements not expressed in the Chinese sentence are all found overtly in the English sentences, such as the underlined pronoun *they*, the possessive adjective *their*, the conjunction *since*, and the coordinative conjunction *so*. In addition, for the purpose of cohesion between the English sentences, the transitional phrase *to survive* is added, though there is no equivalent in the Chinese version. However, the use of “they” and “their” involves grammatical rules (e.g. a subject is required overtly in English), whereas the other words “since”, “so”, and “to survive” are about connectives in discourse, thus clarifying relationships between ideas. The two phenomena are quite different.



From the analysis of the example above, we see that the Chinese paratactic sentence structure mainly includes sentence fragments, comma splices, and a lack of connective words or transitions. Paratactic and hypotactic languages structure sentences in radically different ways (Binnick, 2009); the difference is great enough to be striking, and to have potentially serious consequences for achieving coherence in writing for developing Chinese EFL/ESL writers.

### **Topic-first vs. Topic-delayed**

In Western society, students who are in developmental English in writing are very often advised and encouraged to write with a topic-first pattern to set a clear focus for the rest of the writing, even though this may not always be the case for more advanced students. In addition to this, most American writing textbooks usually introduce the main idea at the beginning of a paragraph, and then follow it with major and minor supporting details. With the recent borrowing of Western ideas, while this organization may be valued by some Chinese writers, in essence, as contended by Chu, Swaffar, and Charney (2002), “The practice of putting the main thesis of a text before supporting ideas violates a Chinese reader’s expectation” (p.515). The Chinese rhetorical style prefers indirectness in writing. To maintain a very polite and humble tone, Chinese writers at various levels often follow a “topic-delayed” structure (Qian, 2003), which means that Chinese writers tend to hide their real intent until the last minute (Chen, 2004); they are reluctant to state their purpose at the outset, since it is an important cultural value for them to avoid being straightforward. Straightforward language, according to Wang (2008), often intensifies contradictions and increases tension. When it comes to persuasion in the Chinese context, Wang (2008) has provided us with a clear explanation of this pattern:

Persuasion means to smooth out disagreement or to offer advice. While convincing somebody, we should pay particular attention to language and approach a subject in an indirect way, giving him/her a mild hint. Coming straight to the point may not convince anyone to adopt our views. On the contrary, he/she would develop an aversion to us. Therefore, in doing persuasion, we must pay close attention to ways and means, leading him/her on gradually with patient and painstaking efforts so that he/she will come to understand little by little. (p. 37)

In Chinese culture, such a topic-delayed, gentle “persuasion” as stated above works well. Jumping to a conclusion in the beginning is therefore viewed as aggressiveness because it disrupts harmonious relationships between readers and writers. Historically, direct assertion even invites disaster. Based on the recorded history of the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE), Gao Ying, a loyal minister of Sui, was beheaded by Emperor Yang of Sui as a warning to others for having voiced his critical opinions straightforwardly. Gao Ying’s frank “criticism” was taken as a serious offence against the Emperor. This example gives striking historical support for the notion that the Chinese style of communication is highly suggestive rather than straightforward.

An important structural rule in Chinese writing is to proceed from the surface to the core (Qin, 2009), suggesting that the writer should come to the point little by little. To exemplify this point, Shen (1989) figuratively points out that Chinese writers habitually clear the surrounding bushes before attacking the real target. He then persuasively argues, “the logic of Chinese composition...is like the peeling of an onion: layer after layer is removed until the reader finally arrives at the central point, the core” (p.463). Evidently, according to Shen (1989), Chinese writing is like a leisurely paced rural life; people

“relax” and take their time to chew and taste a topic slowly. Many Chinese writers prefer to present background information and evidence first and then come up with a final conclusion as the main claim (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Ye, 2006). In fact, even more important, they may never reveal their point of view or state the conclusion at all, leaving it to the reader (Jensen, 1998; Wang & Liu, 2001; Liu & Zhou, 2004). For the Chinese, this “topic-delayed” style of written communication may be highly acceptable; the Chinese find it perfectly reasonable for a writer to reach his/her topic gradually rather than abruptly (Shen, 1989); consequently, Chinese readers are able to follow this thought development comfortably. In contrast, when many English L1 readers encounter this layer-after-layer “onion peeling” approach, it may seem to them more like “beating about the bush” than the “bush-clearing” that Shen talks about (Vries, 2002).

### **Differences in Paragraph Unity and Structure**

Good English writing may be characterized by unity that contributes to coherence. American college writing textbooks, almost without exception, emphatically state that an effective paragraph makes one main point only and then sticks to that point, developing it in a variety of ways. This can be related to the “linear” pattern of Western thinking that shows up in schematic form in Kaplan’s (1966) heavily criticized diagramming of cultural types. In fact, Kaplan’s (1966) ideas may have been expressing some truth about Oriental writing after all (Shen, 1989), a truth which has been ignored in much work done later. Assuming the validity of the “linear pattern” concept for Western idea development, Chinese writing does not follow this “linear” pattern; a Chinese writer may deliberately make an effort to discuss “different” ideas in a single paragraph, rather than keeping to a single subject. As pointed out by Xing, Wang, and Spencer (2008), more often than not, a

paragraph in Chinese writing does not focus on one main point; many “different” ideas can be mentioned within one paragraph.

There is some relatively recent support for this contrast. In discussing the Chinese philosophy of life, Dong (2009) states, “The linear approach to a problem does not work [in China]. It is only a spiral way of conducting oneself in society that leads to success” (p.230). Ji, Peng, and Nisbett, (2000); Ji, Nisbett, and Su (2001); and Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) add that linear thinking is more acceptable to Westerners partly because of an analytic thinking style that is prevalent in Western rhetoric. Western writers focus on a relatively narrow range of objects and environmental factors and build simple, explicit causal models, while the Chinese prefer a nonlinear thinking approach because traditional Chinese philosophy lays great emphasis on “holistic” strategies (Zhao, 1999; Li, 2005; Zhang, 2009), where things are considered in their totality. According to Choi, Koo, and Choi (2007) and Hong (2009), in the holistic style of Chinese people, attention tends to be oriented toward the relationships between objects. In a visual display, the Chinese may synthesize diverse elements into a unit which emphasizes the “whole.” In contrast, the analytic style of Westerners tends to focus attention more on a central object in the display, factoring out background elements. Moreover, since holistic thinking leads to the use of a nonlinear approach when talking or writing, Chinese thought patterns might in fact be properly represented as a zigzagged line, reminiscent of the kind of diagrams originally used by Kaplan (Wang & Liu, 2001; Li & Zhang, 2002; Guo & Wang, 2004; Liu & Zhou, 2004; Li, 2005). The Chinese believe that in reality, life may not follow a linear style because of the complex pattern of interactions among its many elements. Rather, it is intricate and complex, full of

contradictions and struggle; so they look for a broad range of factors related to any given topic, and as a result are more inclined to assume contradiction, change, and nonlinear development of ideas (Ji, Peng, & Nisbett, 2000; Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). This culturally based psychological trend is well reflected in Chinese writing.

As noted above, the Chinese tradition particularly values a “discursive” writing style and regards such a style as necessary (Erbaugh, 1990; Liu & Zhou, 2004). Accordingly, when dealing with the gamut of pre-existing information to write a paragraph, Chinese students may try to combine different ideas by providing background information, listing facts, explaining specific reasons, and offering evidence (Li, 2005); however, not all of the supporting material may directly relate to the topic. In other words, as a cultural trend, many of the Chinese prefer to first provide an elaborate context that is not superficially directly tied to the main theme they will later develop; readers have to infer the message and make a connection on their own (Mao, 2005); This “divergence from a unified topic” can come across as very confusing to a Western reader. Expressed in metaphorical terms, the Chinese are said to often approach a subject by way of “making a noise in the east while attacking in the west.” Superficially, the writer seems to talk about something that is not the main subject. In effect, he/she simply approaches the subject by using implicit or more roundabout persuasive strategies (Liu, 2007), which are considered typical of the rhetorical pattern of Chinese persuasive discourse. To a Western reader who is used to direct forms of communication, such an orientation of thought development transferred to English writing may be seen as digressive and incoherent (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Connor, 1996; Timmann, 2003). This is strikingly illustrated

in the following example taken from a Chinese EFL student's sample composition (Li & Zhang, 2002).

Topic: Widespread Use of Computers

We are now living in high developing world, and, great changes have taken place.

The computer was born in 1946 in America and was named ENIAC by researchers.

Its development is very quick. Especially it has made greater progress recently

and plays a more and more important role in our society. (p.46)

The above writing is not focused on the stated topic or title. Instead of getting straight to the point, the writer seems to try to cover a range of ideas, including the historical note on the computer; but this writer only provides peripheral information that appears to be more or less irrelevant to the topic. To state this more clearly, the writer has not developed the topic because no supporting details of how computers have become widespread throughout the world have been offered. According to Schneider and Honeyman (2006), if a writer says things in a digressing manner, making it difficult for readers to understand what he/she means, the writer is seen as 'beating about the bush'; this can come across as quite challenging to an English reader, since within the Western context, coherent writing must be "well organized, making it easy for the reader to grasp the main idea and follow the logic of the writer's points" (Smalzer, 2010, p.126).

### **Zhongyong vs. Formal Logic**

Culturally specific thought patterns influence writing enormously. In the West, the paragraph discussed above, containing several different ideas, would be completely undesirable. Likewise, if a writer does not take a clear position on an issue, and instead agrees with both sides of the issue while applying reason, the resulting "ambivalence"

could certainly lead to confusion in the English context and bring about a serious perceived lack of coherence. However, these patterns are perfectly acceptable in Chinese writing. Thus, the reasons for these phenomena in ESL/EFL writing can be attributed to Chinese cultural and rhetorical influences.

Qin (2009) asserts that Westerners excel at formal logic while East Asians do well in *Zhongyong* (the “middle way”), a concept mentioned in the earlier section entitled *Confucian Influence*. Since the ancient Greeks, there has been a long Western tradition of favoring formal logic, which is concerned with the forms that yield valid inference from valid premises to a conclusion. However, such a tradition has never been common in China (Nisbet, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Research in the ESL field in China suggests that many Chinese EFL students may not follow the claim-justification-conclusion pattern while composing English persuasive writing. Instead of reasoning in one direction, the Chinese *Zhongyong* approach tends to combine the two seemingly opposing views. This can be traced back to the Chinese *Yin-Yang* concept discussed in the earlier section, which can be found in many branches of classical Chinese philosophy. A further explanation of the *Yin-Yang* theory will deepen our understanding of the Chinese notion of *Zhongyong*.

As Ma (2009) claims, in traditional Chinese philosophy, everything in the natural world is made up of two opposing aspects, *Yin* and *Yang*. In a broad sense, *Yang* is taken to represent positives, whereas *Yin* symbolizes “good” negatives. *Yin* and *Yang* can be regarded as opposing yet complementary forces that blend and unite in order to create balance (Osgood & Richards, 1973; Nisbet, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). To put it another way, although *Yin* and *Yang* are opposites, they complement each other. At the

same time, they are interchangeable. *Yin* turns into *Yang*, and *Yang* turns into *Yin*, causing a new *Yin-Yang* situation to emerge. The concept behind *Yin* and *Yang*, therefore, embodies the Chinese perspective of balance of opposites and continual change (Ma, 2009). It is believed that when *Yin* and *Yang* are both equally present, all is calm. When one is outweighed by the other, there is confusion and disorder.

Working with these ideas, ancient Chinese people recognized that practically all things could have *Yin* and *Yang* qualities. As time went by, the *Yin* and *Yang* “logic” was developed into a system of thought that was applied to numerous areas, in an attempt to explain complicated phenomena in the universe. Judging from this, the concept of *Yin* and *Yang* is opposed at its roots to the Western formal logic tradition. In the West, people tend to look at things as black or white, right or wrong. There is separation in the Western perspective. In contrast, the Chinese view opposites as evolving and cycling. It is thus clear that the *Yin-Yang* theory contains rich dialectical thinking, which is heavily emphasized in the Chinese context. Like the dialectical approach, the *Yin-Yang* theory holds that different components are interconnected with one another and with the whole; hence, the Chinese would avoid taking a one-sided view of an issue and prefer *Zhongyong* or the middle way between two extremes when applying reason (Wu, 2001)

As stated in the section *Confucian Influence*, Chinese people have been profoundly influenced by the Chinese values of *Ren* (loving others) and harmony; they typically prefer negotiation via a “middle man” to help the two parties involved to settle a conflict privately rather than resort to impersonal courts of law (Liu & Palermo, 2009). The middle man must treat each party fairly. To support one side between the two is usually considered ‘going to extremes’ (Guo & Wang, 2004). This practice can find roots



in the Confucian idea of *Zhongyong*. In Chinese society, the *Zhongyong* approach advocated by Confucius represents calling for moderation of one's behavior and maintaining balance and social harmony (Kinnes, 2009; Liu & Palermo, 2009). Although the Confucian philosophy may contain serious limitations, the current practice suggests that the central idea of *Zhongyong* from two thousand years ago is still clearly reflected in our modern rhetorical principles. In a very real sense, Chinese people are more comfortable applying their common-sense rules from their tradition and accepting a decision that is consistent with their feelings (Liu & Palermo, 2009).

Commenting on this, Liu (2010) says that “the Chinese often follow the principle of *Zhongyong* when writing persuasive essays” (p.3). This does not mean that the Chinese prefer to reach a compromise or to take a neutral stand when conflicts occur. A common belief in Chinese culture holds that everything has its good and bad sides. Nothing in the world is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; therefore, one should not go to extremes in judging between good and bad. As for which stand to take on an issue, the writer may not advance his/her point of view. It is up to the reader to decide which side to follow because “Chinese narrative essays stress intricacy with many twists and turns, whereas persuasive essays emphasize *Wuxing*, the capability to understand things very clearly and completely” (Liu & Zhou, 2004, p.110). In the Chinese context, this is perfectly fine. As discussed earlier, Confucianism and Buddhism stress the importance of *Wuxing* and assume that readers must be able “to read between the lines.” In Chinese writing, as Guo and Wang (2004) claim, “Chinese people are prone to approach a topic from the perspective of both sides, closely following *Zhongyong* to avoid leaning to either side” (p.14). Specifically, when commendation is given to someone or something,

a writer should always remember to refer to the limitations; similarly, when criticism against someone or something is offered, the writer should never forget to bring up some possible merits. In following these cultural principles, Chinese writers tend to avoid a black-and-white perspective (Qin, 2009). With these Chinese values in mind, when it comes to the writing of an English persuasive essay, the Chinese may possibly transfer these values to the English context. Hence, the essay may not just contain arguments that support the main premise; it could also include arguments that oppose the main premise. The writer would very often leave the conclusion up to the reader.

In connection with this point, it is important to emphasize is that when writing opposing arguments, the Chinese EFL writer may successively support or defend conflicting positions, rather than merely demonstrating that he/she is just aware of both sides of the issue, as Western rhetoric usually proposes. In other words, instead of having anticipated the opposing arguments and wishing to criticize them, the Chinese writer tends to write favorably about both sides.

It is also acceptable for the writer to simply cite the opposing beliefs, however. Consider, for example, the following sample student paper. It was written for a nationwide basic college English writing test in China (Liu, 2010). Instead of taking a black-or-white approach, the writer has provided us with a typical example of following “the Doctrine of the Mean” from the perspective of agreeing with both sides.

Essay title: Do “Lucky Numbers” Really Bring Good Luck?

*Some people think that certian [certain] numbers will bring good luck to them. Numbers such as six, eight, sixteen and eighteen are regarded as lucky numbers. There are also people who think that their success is related to certain numbers.*

*However, some other people think numbers have nothing to do with their luck.*

*They believe in their own rather than “lucky numbers”. They don't do things according to certain numbers.*

*As far as I am concerned, I think it is a person's own business whether he believes in a certain number or not. The most important thing is that he has done the work by himself and has done it quite well. As to the belief in numbers, it is their [his] personal choice. (p.1)*

This sample essay received a score of 14 out of a total writing assessment score of 15 reflecting the three evaluative domains of the analytic rubric (expressions of ideas, passage organization, and language use). The essay received a nearly full score on the test; therefore, the Writing Test Committee that designed the test distributed this sample essay across China as a writing assessment scoring model (Liu, 2010). If we look at the title of the essay, it should be clear enough that the purpose of the writing is to persuade the audience that a certain view is correct. However, the writer was arguing positively about both sides.

In the essay, the writer points out that some people believe certain numbers to be auspicious while others do not regard these beliefs as right. By presenting conflicting opinions on lucky numbers from both sides in an impartial manner, the writer seems to imply that each side has its good points and then simply leaves the conclusion to the reader rather than taking a stand on the issue. With the aim of not offending anyone, or not imposing one's views on others, this “reader-responsible” approach appears to be much in evidence in the Chinese context. It may be inferred that the Chinese writer is inclined to agree with both sides, since she does not overtly state a preference. To be more precise, according to the writer, since both views make sense, either way works,

depending on personal choices in terms of beliefs in numbers. For the Chinese, based on the Chinese EFL writing assessment criteria stated above, it is not surprising that the essay is highly valued.

As pointed out, this traditional Chinese approach to persuasion may be fairly well received in the Chinese writing context on account of the Chinese philosophical and rhetorical conventions; Chinese people would find this “middle of the road” approach desirable, since this idea has inspired Chinese culture for centuries. Under the subtle influence of the Confucian *Zhongyong*, keeping “balance” to save others’ face seems more important than anything else. This practice, however, is in sharp contrast with Western rhetorical values. An English writer is expected to take a clear position on an issue he/she supports and stick to the same position throughout the essay. Therefore, in reasoning, the reader is typically presented ideas that might seek to support an opposing viewpoint, but only to refute these ideas or to minimize their importance. In Western rhetoric, agreeing with both sides instead of selecting one is seen as vague, and the writer who uses such an approach is viewed as easily swayed, because to “flip-flop” or switch one’s opinion as perceived by Western rhetoric violates the English reader’s expectations. Put differently, such an approach may not be seen as having a clear purpose, seen through Western values. Carrell (1984) argues that “without a clear purpose, it [the text] lacks coherence” (p.162). The Chinese idea (“since there is truth on both sides, leave the conclusion to the reader”) may not lead to an essay that “fits together” well enough for the essay’s unity and purpose to be fully understandable to the English reader (Parks, Levernier, & Hollowell, 2001). This would definitely cause confusion, which, in turn, would inevitably result in a perceived lack of coherence.

## **Persuasion vs. Harmony**

In the framework of Western rhetoric, the purpose of writing must be established: to explain the writer's subject, for instance, or to argue a point. With a clear purpose in mind, it is believed that the writer will write more effectively. As the title of a text by Lunsford, Ruskiewicz, and Walters (2007) puts it, "Everything is an argument." In the West, the purpose of rhetoric draws on the Aristotelian dictum, "State your case and prove it" (Liu, 1996); in this framework, the purpose of writing is typically to persuade someone that a particular point of view is the correct one; in contrast, the aim of rhetoric or the purpose of writing in China is to achieve social, ecological, and political harmony (Lu & Frank, 1993), particularly as sanctioned by the ruling class. Contextualized in the Chinese cultural setting, to "persuade" is to maintain such harmony. Huang (2002) contends that "harmony appeared more important than anything else, because inequality and injustice in a hierarchical society might be potential forces to create chaos" (p. 95). The strong emphasis on harmony is likely to affect the rhetorical patterns of Chinese argumentative discourse. For example, in a context where social harmony is critical, self-expression is typically not acceptable. In such a context, the instinct to survive and prosper constantly reminds one to inhibit expressing divergent opinions. One's career could be destroyed if his/her writing defies current norms (Erbaugh, 1990). At the other extreme from innovative, personal experience, Chinese writers try to promote harmonious relationships by consistently referring back to the sayings of established authority as a major form of reasoning.

Jensen (1992) points out that "To preserve social harmony, one must learn how to save face for another person, how to present uncomfortable truths in an unthreatening

way or how to be appropriately ambiguous” (P. 155). The idea of saving face for another person is a good strategy for maintaining social stability. Apparently, Western rhetoric stresses directness with respect to persuasion; in contrast, Chinese rhetoric encourages a degree of indirectness to avoid unnecessary conflicts, with the goal of achieving harmony (Liu, 2007).

### **Awareness of Audience vs. Negligence of Audience**

As stated in the earlier section *Audience*, Western rhetorical conventions stress that the way a writer approaches his/her subject depends on his/her audience. In this framework, audience awareness is a fundamental characteristic of good persuasive writing (Connor, 1990). To keep the audience in mind makes a difference in what the writer says and how he/she says it. In contrast, audience analysis has not been an important issue in China’s rhetorical tradition (Duan, 2003). In Chinese academic writing, and consequently in the minds of Chinese students, the audience for most serious writing is usually considered to consist of authorities—politically and socially important people since societal harmony is the final goal that the ancient Chinese tried to achieve (Huang, 2002). Yang (2008) claims that for high school students in China today, audience analysis is seriously ignored in Chinese writing instruction; this trend may well be linked to the traditional assumptions about audience cited above and earlier.

### **Topic-prominent vs. Subject-prominent**

All languages may prefer the order of old-new information in structuring sentences. But they have different means of accompanying this. Languages like English typically use word order to indicate grammatical relationships, so in English, there is relatively little freedom in word order. English follows the subject-verb phrase structure

to make a complete sentence. Unlike a subject-prominent language such as English, Chinese is a “topic-prominent” language (Li & Thompson, 1981) and often follows the topic-comment sentence pattern. This refers to any grammatical configuration consisting of two parts: the topic, meaning what the speaker or writer is going to talk about, which invariably occurs first, and then the comment, a clause which follows the topic and says something about it (Xu & Langendoen, 1985; Shi, 2000). Semantically, the topic sets a framework in naming what the sentence is about (Yeh, 2004). The topic is related to the comment semantically, and may or may not be grammatically related (Chen, 2009). Any structure such as a word, a phrase, or a sentence can be used as a topic in a topic comment sentence; this Chinese structure works very productively.

The following sentence provides a sample example (LaPolla, 2009).

她 死 了 一 匹 马 ， 便 哭 个 不 停 。

Ta si le yipi ma, bian kuge bu ting.

She die a horse, then cry without stopping. (literal translation)

The above Chinese sentence means that a horse died for some reason. Therefore, she was seriously affected by the death of the horse. In the sentence, “she” is the topic, the center of thought, and is followed by the comment, with the whole being equivalent to “Because a horse died, she cried without stopping.” Clearly, *she* has no control over the horse dying; the topic *she* is not the doer of any action, nor is she the ‘theme,’ i.e. the entity experiencing death. Chinese EFL/ESL students would confuse the subject with the topic if they translate the idea literally from Chinese when writing in English. Coherence problems often have to do with logical relationships among ideas; however, they can sometimes stem from sentence structure and grammar as well. As indicated by the above example, the idea of going from one culture to another is complicated enough to confuse an English reader simply because a writer may translate directly from his/her first

language (topic-comment) pattern, resulting in a sentence that is grammatically incoherent in English.

The Chinese language is characterized by this meaning-oriented topic-comment structure, as compared with the grammar-oriented subject position in English. This topic-comment construction is argued to be the basic structure in Chinese discourse (Yeh, 2004). The role that the Chinese topic-comment structure plays is very important when it comes to Chinese EFL/ESL students' Interlanguage (developing English) grammar.

In summary, cultural thought patterns are just the way one organizes ideas; they may be considered as providing a form of underlying structures for knowledge. Chinese students may possibly lack awareness of the patterns that are expected in Western culture. I have thus far discussed the divergences in cultural patterns of thinking, namely the rhetorical value assumptions held by Westerners and the Chinese. I will now turn to an analysis of how these values are reflected in cohesion and coherence within the framework of the Chinese context.

### **Confusion about the Western Concept of Coherence**

In recent years, with writing as one of the most important communicative skills, the notion of coherence seems to have been drawing increasing attention in EFL teaching in China as a result of the Western influence (Wang & Sui, 2006). The past two decades have witnessed a great number of publications related to Chinese-speaking ESL/EFL students' writing (Tang & Ng, 1995; Kuo, 1995; Dong, 1999; Li, 2000; Zhang, 2000; Lee, 2002; Chen & Zhang, 2004; Guo & Wang, 2004; Yeh, 2004; Fang & Wang, 2005; Liu & Braine, 2005; Jin & Ban, 2006; Zhang, 2006; Gao, Zhou, & Wang, 2007; Zhou, 2007; Gao, 2008; Wang, 2008; Wu & He, 2010; Sui and Chen, 2010). What follows is a brief



account of some of the latest developments in the studies of coherence in the Chinese cultural context. Chinese EFL teachers and scholars' views of coherence point to the following three salient features, which emerged from a survey of the publications listed above; these will be discussed in turn below.

**Research on coherence still in its infancy.** Basically, studies have found that research on coherence has remained on the level of introducing and expounding on Western theories related to text coherence such as those presented in Van Dijk's *Text and Context* (1977), Widdowson's *Teaching Language as Communication* (1978), Danes's *Functional Sentences Perspective and the Organization of the Text* (1974), Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (1976) and *Language, Context and Text* (1985), and Brown and Yule's *Discourse Analysis* (1983). In fact, hardly any serious attempts have been made to test the notions of the current Western theories on coherence and create new theories or approaches that can be applied to Chinese EFL writing classroom settings.

**Coherence: A fuzzy concept.** Many Chinese EFL teachers have limited experience of Western styles of writing. They may have been taught how to write without reference to coherence. For this reason, Chinese EFL teachers may not clearly understand what coherence actually signifies in the West, even though they are trying to borrow the idea of coherence in writing from the West. In fact, coherence is a fuzzy and vague concept to many of them. As Jin and Ban (2006) state, for many Chinese scholars and educators, the notion of coherence is not clear enough. Zhang (2006) reflects the theme of widespread uncertainty when he claims that "no one can exactly tell what makes a text cohere" (P.13). Chen and Zhang (2004) underscore the same point: "Although coherence is the heart of discourse analysis, no one can explain the term in a systematic way due to

the complex nature of coherence” (p. 420). In short, in the Chinese EFL writing context, coherence as a concept in China remains an abstract topic (Zhang, 2000), and scholars who discuss coherence seem to merely scratch the surface.

**Cohesion mistaken for coherence.** A great number of Chinese scholars tend to view coherence as one of the most prominent features of good writing (e.g., Kuo, 1995; Dong, 1999; Li, 2000; Lee, 2002; Chen, 2003; Gao, 2008). Serious problems, however, occur with the content and clarity of these discussions. Some scholars have used the two concepts cohesion and coherence interchangeably (Wang & Sui, 2006), thus confusing the issue(s) they are presenting. Others begin by discussing coherence, and then shift to a focus on cohesion at the sentence level.

In addition to the above confusion, Chinese scholars tend to believe that when cohesion is achieved, a text will be coherent. Therefore, they are inclined to advocate the importance of teaching cohesion (Li, 2000; Shi, 2004; Zhou, 2007) within a paragraph, holding the conception that the use of cohesive devices can achieve coherence (Sui & Chen, 2010) in writing for all levels of Chinese EFL learners. In fact, coherence above the paragraph level is seriously ignored. As Wang and Sui (2006) clearly put it, “textual cohesion should be employed more in actual teaching practice as an illustration of how important it is for students to be able to connect sentences smoothly and logically and, consequently, create better coherence.” The statements of several other researchers further confirm this: “Coherence... is fundamentally based on semantic ties, i.e., the use of cohesive ties” (Li, 2000); and “On most occasions, realization of coherence relies on cohesion” (Jin & Ban, 2006).

Because of the reasons cited above, the Chinese favor a strict linguistic approach

to the text, unaware of both overall content structure and factors outside the text itself, such as the writer's purpose as well as the reader's background knowledge and expectations. This observation helps to explain Connor's (1984) view that there is much to be desired in the quality of coherence in ESL/EFL writing. In the West, attention to overall coherence must come before cohesion at the sentence level, as was suggested in some of the early critiques and responses to Halliday and Hasan's system (Bamberg, 1983).

As can be seen from the above summary, considerable efforts have been made by Chinese scholars to mainly focus on cohesion, to the exclusion of other factors that ground and influence coherence. For that reason, coherence in more global terms tends to be basically overlooked in classroom instruction. What the Chinese are doing and saying seems to actually go along a different direction from that of the Westerners, at least in terms of coherence in writing. The following section will discuss rhetorical approaches to English writing instruction in China.

### **English Writing Instruction in China**

English writing in China does not focus closely on coherence. To refine our understanding of how Chinese rhetorical preferences and pedagogical practice have exerted an impact on English writing instruction in China, this study will begin with a short overview of English instruction. After that, English writing pedagogy in China, which is associated with grammar accuracy and memorization, will be briefly discussed. A later section will explore the test-oriented College English Program and its consequences. Finally, a controlled three-paragraph sample test will be carefully reviewed.

## **Over-emphasis on Grammatical Accuracy**

In China's English instruction, grammatical accuracy has been heavily stressed. The Chinese way of focusing on form rather than content has its significant cause rooted in classical Chinese philosophy, rhetorical traditions, and predominant pedagogical practice. The reasons are mainly threefold. First, as discussed in the earlier section "*Differences in Paragraph Unity and Structure*," a set of culturally-based values concerning rhetoric play a role. For instance, with avoiding interpersonal conflicts in mind and promoting harmony as the goal, Chinese EFL writers are inclined to "play around with words" and intentionally "beat about the bush" as perceived by an English reader. On a related point, Chinese communicators prefer to be "appropriately ambiguous" in ideas; therefore, this naturally leads them to focus more on correct form than on clarity of message. In fact, the separate desire to enhance "the beauty of language" may also contribute to this emphasis on grammatical accuracy. These rhetorical strategies, which could be deemed as "digressive" development or topic delay in Western rhetoric, may show up in writings by Chinese writers, since these patterns are valued in their own first language traditions.

Second, due to the linguistic features of Chinese syntax, Chinese may structure sentences differently from English. Because their first language features a topic-oriented grammar and favors paratactic constructions (as covered elsewhere in the section entitled "*Paratactic vs. Hypotactic*," Chinese students often find it challenging to demonstrate their ability to get the message across in writing. Of course, as language learners, these writers also struggle with other issues of grammar and lexicon: "When they do write, they find themselves confused with word choice, correct grammatical use..." Gao (2007,

p.18). For this reason, Chinese educators are constantly busy helping students work at the sentence level, which is primarily, though not solely, built on accuracy (Wu & He, 2010). Concern for grammar is necessary for developing writers, and most Chinese EFL writing instructors would not hold that content should carry more weight than form; at least this is the case with developing Chinese EFL writers. It is unquestionable that a Chinese EFL student would be considered a good EFL writer if he/she shows a strong command of language. To many Chinese students within the Chinese EFL writing context, terms like “coherence,” “take a stand,” “logical progression of thought,” “beating around the bush,” “purpose,” “audience,” or “reader expectations” may seem like just so many fancy words, terms they may not understand well and are not able to translate into specific practices in their English writing.

Finally, as pointed out earlier, the former Soviet *Intensive Reading* model of foreign language teaching has exerted a far-reaching influence on China’s English instruction over a long period of time (Wang & He, 2006). Since that long-standing model deals with language instruction mostly at lexical and syntactical level, teachers who were educated and grew up in the Chinese EFL context tend to believe that vocabulary and sentence control are more important than content for Chinese EFL students’ English writing. In truth, over the past 30 years, as demonstrated by research on ESL/EFL writing, Chinese EFL teachers have maintained a common view that linguistic accuracy is of the utmost importance in teaching writing in China (Connor & Johns, 1990; Silva, 1997; Wang & Liu, 2001; Panetta, 2001; Wen & Clement, 2003; Qian, 2003; Guo & Wang, 2004; Qiang & Wolff, 2004; You, 2004; Gu & Liu, 2005; Liu & Deng, 2005; Bao & Sun, 2010).

## **Impact on English Writing Instruction**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in order for Chinese students to demonstrate correct usage and write “elegantly,” memorization of texts plays a central role in writing instruction. There is a strong belief in China that the path to good writing lies in internalizing others’ styles (Carson, 1992); this practice is believed by both ESL instructors and students to be an excellent way to demonstrate one’s knowledge of the language. Additionally, Chinese students would never feel satisfied with their English writing until “correct” forms are provided. They are keenly interested in exact words, discrete grammatical points, and specific syntactic constructions. At the end of each semester, students’ writing is mainly evaluated by their grammar and vocabulary related test scores (Gao, 2010). Consequently, little attention is paid to coherence in writing. English writing instruction is therefore seriously impaired.

Since form is overly emphasized, a question arises: Is coherent writing as a unified whole deliberately ignored in China? In fact, the situation is more complex than that statement would imply. Surprisingly, a relatively recent official document entitled “College English Curriculum Requirements” [CECR] (2007) issued by Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China requires college students to write a short composition, which should be “complete in content, clear in position, well-organized in presentation, and coherent in text” (p.12). This requirement is listed in the latest version of English curriculum requirements. Compared with earlier official statements that focused on correct form, the current requirements have brought about significant improvements in providing Chinese universities with new guidelines for English writing instruction. Attention is now expected to be explicitly given to coherence.

However, to specify such goals is one thing, while to put them into practice is quite another. Recently, Bao and Sun (2010) designed a questionnaire concerning problems existing in English instruction. The questionnaire was completed by college freshmen in a Chinese university as well as the EFL faculty who teach these students. The results show that 89% of the students and 90% of the faculty agreed that these EFL educators strongly emphasized vocabulary, syntax, and grammar teaching in the writing classroom. This is only a small sample, but to some extent, it amply illustrates that coherence in the writing classroom is still not greatly valued even today. A possible explanation of this mismatch could be that it is in bitter conflict with social and political ideas that are deeply rooted in the Chinese culture. Rather than a deliberate negligence regarding coherence, these students and instructors are simply continuing in patterns that are deeply entrenched in their experience.

As writing instruction in China is practically inseparable from the College English Program, a brief look at this program is vital to a better understanding of how coherence is generally overlooked.

### **College English Program in China**

In China, English writing instruction at the college level is directly related to what is called “College English,” which is a nationwide, college-level English language program covering such areas as grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, writing, and translation. When students complete their courses in their program sequence in college, they need to eventually take an exit exam better known as the College English Test (CET), a large-scale nationwide standardized examination administered by the National College English Testing Committee; this exam is sponsored by the Higher Education

Department, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. The purpose of the CET is to examine the English proficiency of undergraduate students in China and ensure that Chinese undergraduates reach the required English levels specified in the above-mentioned CECR (2007). Scores from this test have generally been accepted throughout the nation as the standard evaluation of students' English proficiency level (Gu & Liu, 2005). Since passing the CET is believed to lead to social and financial success, this has become the final goal of the College English Program (You, 2004). It stands to reason that the writing task of the College English Program is "naturally" oriented toward test-taking rather than meaning exploration or development of creative thought. For this reason, in preparation for the CET, EFL teachers in this examination system are predominately concerned about the teaching of grammatically correct English rather than coherence (You, 2004; Guo & Wang, 2004; Gao, 2007; Wu & He, 2010).

Many contrastive and other studies have been done on student outcomes in writing among Chinese students (Tang & Ng, 1995; Dong, 1999; Li, 2000; Guo & Wang, 2004; Chen & Zhang, 2004; Yeh, 2004; Li, 2005; Liu & Braine, 2005; Liu & Deng, 2005; Tao, 2006; Jin & Ban, 2006; Gao, Zhou, & Wang, 2007; Zhou, 2007; Wang, 2008; Wu & He, 2010). These studies tend to reveal that Chinese students from the College English Program cannot adequately express their ideas in writing. Prevalent is a common view that Chinese students' English writing features a lack of connectives as well as a high frequency of repetition for one single sentence pattern. These sentences tend to be isolated and not logically connected, arguably as a result of negative transfer of the meaning-oriented, paratactic nature of the Chinese language. As further pointed out by Qiang and Wolff (2004), even students who score very high in vocabulary and grammar



on the national exam CET can often compose nothing more than “Dictionary English” in real communication (English writing taught from a dictionary); this results in written forms which may be technically correct in isolation but do not effectively contribute to the meaning of the whole piece.

### **Controlled Three-paragraph CET Writing**

As we can see, English writing instruction is adversely affected as a direct consequence of the form-oriented training and test-oriented College English Program. The following example of controlled three-paragraph CET writing will additionally help provide a better insight into students’ academic performance in writing. In the CET, students are required to write a three-paragraph essay with an opening paragraph, a body paragraph, and a concluding paragraph. Due to Chinese students’ low English proficiency in writing as perceived by Chinese EFL professors, the essay topic is usually provided with three topic sentences already written either in Chinese or English. Selected for the *China Education Digest* (2007), the following example was written by a CET test taker.

An example test

Prompts for student writing often feature a set of three topic sentences, as provided here; the student is expected to build a three paragraph essay, using one of these sentences to introduce each paragraph. These topic sentences are reproduced here, followed by a sample writing response from a student:

Essay title: Women in the Modern World

Writing Prompt: Topic Sentences

(1). Women are playing an increasing part in society today. \_\_\_\_\_

(2). With the changes in their social roles, women's position in the family has been improved as well. \_\_\_\_\_

(3). In spite of these changes, the liberation of women has not been completely realized. \_\_\_\_\_

Student Response:

Women are playing an increasingly important part in society today. *Long ago* [ago], *women only did something in the kitchen or at home. Now many of them have serious jobs to serve for people. What men can do so can women.*

With the changes in their social role, women's position in the family has been improved as well. *Today in the family, the wife often lets [lets] her husband to do something at home [,] but [but] ago, only women did something. Men are fonded [fond] of doing something at home.*

In spite of these changes, the liberation of women has not been completely realized. *Sometimes, the matter, the husband hitting his [his] wif [wife], often happened. In the factory the women [women] to [do] as much as the men, but they are paid less than the men. Some people have not completely realized the liberation of women.*

The above "essay" was completed within 30 minutes as required, but the result reveals that such rigidly prescribed writing suffers from serious drawbacks, again seen in a rigidly Western perspective. Chinese learners, of course, face numerous difficulties on many levels as they learn to write in English. Many of these are rooted in the language learning process. In addition to confusing spelling and grammatical errors, more importantly, this writing presents a series of similar sentence structures full of simple forms which do not seem to be smoothly connected; this style will be perceived by an

English reader as monotonous. As we know, the significance of teaching cohesion in EFL writing has been stressed in Chinese scholarly work, as mentioned earlier. However, contrary to a possible assumption that simple and obvious transitions could be appropriately used to convey relationships among ideas, empirical evidence shows that transitional expressions are rarely used by developing Chinese EFL writers, so relationships among their ideas are often not clear in their English writing. Such writers may seriously lack the transitional skills that are so important in English. However, the patterns they follow are fairly characteristic of the Chinese paratactic construction.

Turning to broader issues of content, there is a minimal development of ideas in this controlled piece. Many general statements provided by the student are not really persuasive. Also, not all the sentences are directly related to the topic. Since the topic sentences for each paragraph are already there, the structure is hard to judge in such a brief essay. Perhaps even more important from a pedagogical point of view, the student has not been expected to learn to structure the paragraph progression himself/herself. The connections between the ideas in the paragraphs cannot be judged either. Moreover, the whole essay is generally supposed to follow a rigid pattern (e.g. the three paragraphs), so the writer has no experience in organizing the content of his/her essay, not to speak of achieving overall coherence. Although this example cannot be expanded to present a full-scale exposition of the problems of Chinese-speaking writers, it is illustrative of the way several problems may add up to the perceived incoherence that is the subject of the present dissertation study.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, judging by the official curricular policy and scholarly opinions in China, high value seems to be placed on coherent writing, particularly focusing on cohesion at the sentence level. However, most Chinese English teachers still seem to focus on usage and grammar. College level English writing instruction in China still typically emphasizes correct language form more than global issues such as purpose, audience, a writer's stand on an issue, paragraph unity, and smooth and logical progression of ideas, all of which contribute to coherence (Lee, 2002). The reason for this mismatch between what is being said and what is being done is complicated, at least in part due to the cultural roots of the practices involved. In order to gain a full picture and arrive at insights on this situation, researchers would need to look at the current problems that exist, what teachers actually teach, what students do in the writing classroom, and how students perform on the CET. They also need to be aware of culturally influenced thought patterns, traditional Chinese rhetorical values, some unique characteristics of the Chinese language, and the elusive nature of the notion of coherence. Western scholars contend that Chinese culture, Chinese rhetorical traditions, and Chinese text structures influence the English writing of Chinese speaking students and cause it to lack coherence (Kirkpatrick, 2004). It is hoped that the present study will shed some light on the problems faced by Chinese ESL/EFL writers, drawing on the specific issues highlighted in this review.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Approach**

The present study attempted to obtain information about achieving coherence in persuasive discourse from a variety of data using a combination of analysis methods. Because qualitative research methodology was especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations (Willis, 2008), this study was primarily qualitative with a moderate use of descriptive statistics. Data were collected from the following sources: 1) background questionnaire; 2) written texts from a departmental pre-test (i.e., a diagnostic essay), a post-test (i.e., an essay submitted with students' final exam); 3) other written texts as assignments completed for a composition course; 4) classroom observation; and 5) two rounds of semi-structured interviews.

As a starting point, background questionnaire (shown in Appendix D) was significant because it provided me with a brief insight into the participants' academic needs and their attitudes in terms of their writing in the English language. The survey included questions concerning biographical data, EFL study in their native country, years of ESL college-level study in the United States, past schooling, and their interests and attitudes regarding the writing of English.

As for the participants' written pieces, I used the first set of data, the departmental "pre- and post-tests" to look for any ways in which patterns in Chinese ESL students' writing changed regarding coherence over a semester as a result of exposure to instructions on achieving coherence in persuasive writing. The second source of student

writing, consisting of regular writing assignments, provided a very helpful addendum to the two writing “tests,” allowing me to have a more thorough sense of the participants’ writing, particularly during its developmental stages (e.g. in drafts). Through the analysis of all these written texts, I was able to closely examine how the students exemplified persuasive coherence in their writing tasks. In analyzing their writing, I identified the ways in which their essays may have demonstrated elements that could be related to the English view of coherence, or the Chinese view, or both.

The third source of data, classroom observation, was of interest in determining the nature of the instruction the students received on coherence, as well as how students responded to their teacher’s instructions on coherence. In a real sense, classroom observation provided me with an opportunity to get an idea of whether and how the instructor covered issues related to coherence. Finally, two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted during the course of a semester when the participants were enrolled in a composition course that covered issues of cohesion and coherence. The goal of these interviews was to obtain rich data on the students’ own views of their writing practice and their ideas of coherence. I approached the students to find out whether and how they adapted as they learned to structure their essays, particularly in areas where the concepts from the two cultures (Chinese and Western) clashed in terms of coherent persuasive writing. I also explored how they felt about coherence training, what they actually said about coherence as a cultural phenomenon, how they fostered sensitivity to cohesion and coherence features in discourse, and how their views on these topics evolved after receiving instruction related to coherence in their writing class.

Observation and interviews can be particularly powerful when they work together. Just as Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) put it, “The interviews provide leads for the researcher’s observations. Observation suggests probes for interviews. The interaction of the two sources of data not only enriches them both, but also provides a basis for analysis that would be impossible with only one source” (p.99).

For convenience, the main research questions for this study, previously stated in Chapter One, are again listed here:

1. Western Rhetorical Values on Coherence

What are the coherence features felt to be necessary for effective persuasive writing in the English language context? What do teachers and scholars say in defining coherence, and what pedagogical practices for developing coherence are valued in the English cultural world? How have modern notions of coherence emerged from classical views, dating back to Aristotle?

2. Chinese Rhetorical Values on Coherence

What rhetorical values regarding coherence have been expressed in Chinese culture? What do Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say about coherence in the Chinese cultural context? Again, how are these views of coherence rooted in classical Chinese philosophy or rhetorical traditions? To what extent, and in what ways, do the Chinese values differ from those prevalent in English?

3. Chinese Students’ Perceptions of Coherence

What conscious attitudes and views do advanced Chinese ESL students demonstrate regarding coherence in writing? To what extent, and in what ways, do these views seem to reflect the values prevalent in either Western or Chinese

rhetorical traditions? When addressing their own choices, how do these students explain the choices they make in terms of organization and linguistic forms related to coherence? In what ways do their perceptions of coherence change over the course of a semester in which they receive training in coherence in the Western tradition in an American university setting?

#### 4. Chinese Students' Textual Practice Regarding Coherence

In what ways do the writings of these students demonstrate coherence? To what extent are these writings judged as coherent by independent professional raters? What specific elements in the writings might be traced to the two traditions (Western and Chinese)? Do these elements change in the students' writing over the course of a semester?

All these questions were specifically answered in Chapter 8. As shown in Chapter 2, the first two questions encompassed an extensive review of available literature on both Western and Chinese rhetorical values, including the historical roots of each tradition. To answer the first set of research questions, an in-depth review of the Western classical tradition and its developments was presented to examine what coherence features were highly valued in English rhetorical conventions. To answer the second set of research questions, Chinese classical philosophy, rhetorical traditions, and pedagogical practices were explored to determine what rhetorical patterns concerning coherence had been appreciated in Chinese writing, how the Chinese viewed coherence in relation to Chinese cultural values, and how Chinese rhetorical traditions shaped Chinese views on coherence. While exploring traditional Chinese cultural and rhetorical values, I contrasted the English and Chinese traditions, attempting to demonstrate how they affected the Chinese-



speaking participants' writing today in the two cultures. These results were presented in Chapter 2; however, they were revised again later in Chapter 8 in connection with a review of the research questions.

The third and fourth questions involved empirical data, which were obtained via an initial survey, student texts, interviews, and a classroom observation. To answer question 4, a 5-point holistic cohesion and coherence scoring scale (ranging from 0 to 4) was used to assess the level of coherence in the students' writing as perceived by experienced professional raters. Also, individual elements related to coherence were analyzed in a qualitative examination of the written pieces submitted. To answer question 3, which addressed student perceptions of coherence, semi-structured interviews were used to analyze how Chinese ESL students felt that they structured their persuasive coherent writing, to discuss how they looked at coherence, and to explore how their coherence features might be related to cultural influences. A first round of interviews assessed the students' general views on issues like good writing (including coherence), while the second deepened that topic, as well as addressing the way the participants viewed specific choices that they made in their own writing. To further deepen understandings related to both the third and fourth research questions, a classroom observation was conducted, in order to help put the students' perspectives into context with the instruction they received in the course of the semester.

In what follows, this chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section will mainly introduce the setting and population. Next, the chapter will discuss the primary data collection methods used in this study. Other materials to be used in the study will also be described. Third, the chapter will detail the procedures to be followed

in carrying out the study. The last section of the chapter will be centered on data analysis, including the scoring method by which the written texts were rated. Regarding the written work, to identify features that contributed to coherence, an analysis was made following the frameworks of CUNY Assessment Test in Writing [CATW] (2010), Abeywickrama's (2007) textual cohesion and coherence in ESL learners, and Halliday & Hasan's (1976) work on cohesion theory. As for qualitative coding for interview results and observation data, I used The University of Texas at Austin's [UT] (2010) evaluating programs, Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman, & Beauchamp's (2001) system for analyzing interview data, Atkinson's (1998) methods for interpreting interviews, Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) notions regarding qualitative research for education, Berkowitz's (1997) instructions for analyzing qualitative data, and Erlandson et al.'s (1993) observational data analysis procedures.

### **Research Setting and Research Population**

This section will describe the setting for the study and the participants involved in the study, explaining their role as participants.

#### **Research Setting**

With permission and cooperation of the administration and several faculty members, the study was conducted in a department of a large urban community college in the Northeastern United States.

#### **Sunshine Community College**

Operating within the framework of the urban community college and accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Sunshine Community College (SCC) offers post-secondary associate degrees and certificate programs that prepare

students for careers and for transfer to four-year institutions of higher learning. The College includes seventeen academic departments offering the Associate in Arts (A.A.), the Associate in Science (A.S.), and the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees. Close to half of the SCC students were born in another country, and 47% speak a language other than English at home. Nearly 15,000 students are currently enrolled in associate degree or certificate programs, and another 10,000 students of all ages attend continuing education programs on campus. Students graduating with an associate degree will meet requirements for successful transfer into the upper division of baccalaureate programs. Ultimately, their goal is to be able to demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and tools required for entry into or advancement in the job market in their field, and to be able to communicate effectively through reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

### **Placement for New Students**

The College Assessment Tests are given to incoming freshmen and non-transfer students to assess their readiness for college-level course work at the college. Testing consists of three sections: writing, reading, and mathematics. The assessment test in writing is a one-hour paper and pencil exam that requires examinees to write a short essay in response to a prompt. All assessment tests are to be taken prior to registration for the first semester at the college. The results of these tests are used for purposes of placement. Based on these test scores, students who need preparatory classes are placed in a level of remediation.

## **Language Immersion Program**

The goal of the *Language Immersion Program* is to provide intensive, full-time instruction (25 hours a week) in the English language to learners of English as a second language who are at a very low proficiency level based on their College Assessment Tests in reading and writing. These are ESL students whose scores are too low for proper placement in the College's remedial courses. The purpose for attending the *Language Immersion Program*, therefore, is to bring their proficiency up to the level of the College's remedial program students.

## **English Department**

The participants of this study were enrolled in the English Department. This department focuses on English reading and writing remediation programs designed for both ESL and native English speakers. Entering students need to complete college preparatory courses prior to their entrance into many credit-bearing courses, including such foundation courses as English and mathematics. Placement into these remedial or developmental courses is based upon native English speaking status and ESL student performance on the College Assessment Tests in reading, writing, and mathematics mentioned above. For ESL purposes, the remedial courses offered by the English Department cover such areas as reading, study skills, and composition. They are designed primarily for ESL students who must raise their level of competence to the standard requirement for admission to college level courses. They are also open to all students who wish to improve their reading comprehension, their study skills, and their ability to write clearly. As for ESL writing, remedial courses are taken in the following sequences:

*Beginning Composition for ESL Students*→ *Intermediate Composition for ESL Students*→ *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*. Based on the results of standard placement tests, one or more of these courses may be required by the English Department before a student takes regular college credit courses. Students must pass exams for the “Exit from Remediation” in order to take college-level courses.

### **Beginning Composition for ESL Students**

*Beginning Composition for ESL Students* is the first course of the writing skills sequence described above. The objective is to provide the student with a sound foundation in the basic structure of English through intensive instruction and drill in the relationship between spoken and written English and in the fundamentals of grammar, usage, sentence structure, and paragraph development. Students who complete *Beginning Composition for ESL Students* successfully will be informed by their instructors whether to register for *Intermediate Composition for ESL Students* or *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*.

### **Intermediate Composition for ESL Students**

*Intermediate Composition for ESL Students* is intended for students who are judged to need additional preparation before taking *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*, based on the results of the departmental examination administered in *Beginning Composition for ESL Students*. Emphasis is on intermediate grammar, paragraph development, and writing short compositions. Students must demonstrate competence in writing a short composition by passing a departmental examination which includes a writing sample before taking *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*.

## **Advanced Composition for ESL Students**

*Advanced Composition for ESL Students* is designed for ESL students who have had some experience in English composition, but who still require remedial work before taking content area courses. It is also the final course of the sequence for ESL students with serious writing deficiencies. Emphasis is on advanced grammar, organizing, coherent progression of ideas, and writing a five-paragraph essay. ESL students who are enrolled in *Advanced Composition for ESL Students* may come from four sources. First, some exit from *Intermediate Composition for ESL Students* after passing the departmental examination at the end of the previous semester. Second, some are placed directly in this advanced composition course based on the performance on the College Assessment Tests. Third, a few could come from the *Language Immersion Program* when their proficiency reaches the entry level of advanced composition. Finally, some students who do not pass the required *exit from remediation test* known as the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) will retake this advanced composition course. When ESL students complete this final remedial writing course, they are then scheduled to take the Exit from Remediation Test.

For the purposes of the present study, priority was given to students enrolled in *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*. In other words, this study focused on the final course of the sequence for ESL students, that is, *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*.

## **Departmental Learning Center**

The Learning Center affiliated to the English Department provides support services to all students enrolled in the remedial courses. For those participants involved in the current study, the Center was playing an important role in helping facilitate their

acquisition of English as a second language. If students are found to write at a relatively low level, they may often be referred to the Center for tutoring on a one-on-one basis while writing or revising their essays. Staffed by tutors trained in the Constructivist learning model, the Center can assist the participants to gain proficiency in writing skills, English grammar usage, and critical thinking skills, including reading comprehension. The participants may also regularly go to the Center's lab to use online writing programs to enhance their writing skills, since its wide range of interactive networked software programs and access to Internet sites enables all students with diverse learning styles to acquire and improve their technological skills while developing and enhancing their reading, writing, communication, and critical thinking skills.

### **Research Population**

The current study involved six Chinese (Mandarin)-speaking students above 18 years of age, who were considered to be speakers of English as a Second Language. The participants come from Mainland China and Taiwan. Among the six participants, two received elementary and secondary education in their own country. The other four received secondary education in New York. All were enrolled in the English Department, more specifically, in the summer session *Advanced Composition Course for ESL Students*.

At the time of the research, due to the limited number of Chinese ESL students enrolled in that advanced ESL writing course, random selection of participants was not possible. The participants, therefore, were chosen through volunteer sampling and purposive sampling (Lohr, 1999). In other words, there were altogether seven Chinese-speaking students in this class, but only six were willing to participate when asked or in response to a letter I wrote addressed to "potential participants." Both male and female

participants were involved in the study; no attempt was made to control for gender or age. These students had varying language backgrounds and academic fields. They also varied in age and differed in the amount of time spent learning English as their preparation for living and studying in an English speaking country. Some participants have lived in the United States for as long as eight to ten years, and others have just arrived and have never visited an English speaking country before. These student participants will be more fully introduced in the next chapter.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In addition to the questionnaire mentioned earlier which enabled me to have some background information about the participants, again, data were mainly gathered from four sources: 1) essay writing, both from a departmental pre-test at the beginning of the semester, as well as a final exam essay writing as a post-test; 2) two drafts of a CATW practice essay that were written as a writing assignment for the course; 3) classroom observation; and 4) two rounds of interviews, during the course of a semester when the participants were enrolled in a section of *Advanced Composition for ESL Students* that covered issues of coherence and cohesion. I had planned to collect a total of 24 essays (pre-test, post-test, and two drafts of a CATW practice essay as regular composition course writing). However, one participant did not revise his first essay and failed to submit his second draft for unknown personal reasons. Therefore, in addition to interview data and classroom observation data that were collected for qualitative analysis, a total of twenty-three essays were actually gathered during the semester from the participants; these essays were analyzed and assessed for the specifics of coherence-related features. Enkvist (1990) argues, “We must understand a text, that is, build up a world picture



around it, to say that the text is coherent. Conversely, a text strikes us as incoherent if we cannot build up a plausible scenario around it” (p.13). For this reason, an analysis of the participants’ written texts was crucial to the present study. It allowed me, with the help of expert assessors, to decide whether the texts produced by the participants “make sense,” judging from the English view of coherence. The written texts also revealed how the participants incorporated coherent features into their writing and how these patterns regarding coherence in their writing possibly changed during a semester as a result of the Western rhetorical influence. Aside from the use of the essays, interviews with the participants were an integral part of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson et al. (1993) describe interviews as valuable in qualitative data gathering and analysis. Interviews allow the researcher and participant to move back and forth in time, thereby reconstructing the past, interpreting the present, and predicting the future. Obviously, the interviews made it possible to provide an illuminating insight into what conscious attitudes and views the participants held about coherence, how their attitudes and views about coherence developed, and how the participants viewed the relevant choices they made in their own writing. Atkinson (1998) points out that an interview approach can help draw out the interviewees’ feelings about their experience as well as their deep, reflective thoughts on their learning experiences. In what follows, I will discuss the three types of essays as well as the interviews.

### **Diagnostic Essays**

For the purpose of the present study, I used a set of diagnostic essays, as a starting point, to check any coherence features identified in the participants’ writing as they began

the period of the study. These participants' essays were graded following the criteria on 0-4 composition rating scales, as shown in Appendix B and C.

During the first class meeting at the beginning of each semester, ESL students routinely write a diagnostic essay (see Appendix E). Viewed from the Department's perspective, the purpose of this diagnostic essay writing is twofold: first, if a student is found to be misplaced, the student will be moved from one level to another, or even out of ESL classes; second, this "test" is supposed to measure the extent to which the prerequisite courses have covered material relevant to the course.

For the current study, the diagnostic essay was written in response to a prompt that included brief instructions and a choice of two writing topics. The prompt was provided by the English Department (see Appendix E). Both of the topics asked students to compare or contrast two very different opinions. The prompt mentioned either a school-based issue or a community-based issue, and it described a situation in which students had a choice between two alternatives. The topics should be familiar to all examinees, and should be stimulating, fresh, and nonbiased (Brossell, 1983). The participants chose one alternative, stated their position on the issue defined in the prompt, and then tried to persuade their audience why their choice was the best one; they had two class hours in which to write their response to this prompt.

### **Final Exam Essays**

I used the participants' final exam essays to examine possible new coherence features demonstrated in their writing over a semester of coherent writing training. The participants' essays were rated based on the 0-4 composition rating scales (see Appendix

B and C); however, the texts were also examined for evidence of coherence-related strategies.

The final exam essay format and content were similar to that of the CATW exam, which will be explained in the following section “*CATW Practice Essays*.” In the English Department, a student who was ready to pass the advanced composition course should be able to demonstrate facility in writing analytic, expository, and/or persuasive reading-response essays of multiple paragraphs (approximately 500 words) that introduce, develop, and conclude the discussion of an essay’s topic with unified, logical, and coherent focus in two class hours. Therefore, the final exam essay measured the student’s writing skills in 1) critical response to the reading passage (at 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level) of 250-300 words, 2) development of the writer’s ideas, 3) structure of the response, 4) sentence and word choice, and 5) grammar/mechanics (CATW, 2010).

### **CATW Practice Essays**

I used CATW practice essays to examine how the participants exemplified coherence in writing, so it is important to know what CATW means. According to the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) Student Handbook (2010), CATW is a university-wide standardized reading-response writing test that measures a student’s ability to do college-level writing in English. As a “standardized test,” it is given to all test takers in the same manner and under the same condition; it is scored by trained readers using standard criteria. Entering first-year students (both native English speakers and ESL students) in all colleges in the CUNY system take the test to determine their placement into English composition, ESL, or developmental courses. The CATW exam,

in turn, is used to determine when students are ready to exit from developmental writing courses and move on to college-level courses.

The CATW topics are meant to be familiar and interesting to American high school graduates. They will come from general knowledge areas like sociology, technology, and popular culture. Therefore, theoretically, these topics do not require special knowledge and are suited to the characteristics of test takers (Brossell & Ash, 1984). In the test, students are asked to identify key ideas in the reading passage, write a summary of the key ideas in the reading, demonstrate critical thinking in response to these key ideas, write a well-organized essay and show connections between ideas, support ideas with sufficient, relevant details, demonstrate competence in sentence construction, sentence variety, and word choice, and demonstrate correct usage, grammar and mechanics. The CATW exam takes 90 minutes and is given toward the end of the semester.

Now let's return to the topic of how this CATW relates to the current study. Aside from the emphasis on advanced grammar and organizing and writing a five-paragraph essay, one of the course objectives of this course *Advanced Composition for ESL Students* was to help ESL students to pass the CATW exam so that they would be able to exit from this remedial course. The students enrolled in this advanced composition course received training in developing their reading and writing skills; these learning skills taught during the semester were reflected in the CATW. To prepare students for the CATW exam, the writing instructor regularly assigned CATW practice essays to students as homework writing for the course. For this reason, during the course of the semester, the participants wrote a number of CATW practice essays in response to a 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade reading-level

passage they were given. A sample prompt was given regarding critical response to writing task and the text (see Appendix F).

Since the logical progression of ideas that supported the writer's central focus and the clarity of ideas throughout his/her writing was one of the key elements emphasized in the CATW, the Chinese ESL students' written response to a reading passage provided me with direct insight into their "coherence patterns." I used the participants' CATW practice essays as their regular writing assignments for the course to investigate how they demonstrated coherence features in their writing, in addition to the evaluation of the pre-test and post-test samples of the participants' writing. All their essays were scored using the 0-4 composition rating scales (see Appendix B and C), and again, specific features that were related to coherence were explored in these essays.

### **Classroom Observation**

The goal of conducting classroom observations was to define the nature of the training the students received on coherence, as well as how the participants acted in response to their teacher' training on coherence. To successfully accomplish this purpose, I determined when the instructor specifically gave students training related to coherence. In order to make sure what the instructor's objectives for the lesson to be observed were, I asked for ideas on what to observe and how to focus my observation. Before conducting the classroom observation, I established a positive climate and a feeling of trust between myself as the observer and the instructor. After holding a half-an-hour pre-observation conference with the instructor to establish lesson content and instructional objectives, I scheduled the observation at a mutually agreed upon date and time, and showed the instructor how I intended to record data.

My primary job during the observation period was to collect evidence (documentation and verbal statements describing behaviors and events that occurred during the observation) and notes (information recorded about the setting, activities, materials, and context), and make the documentation of them as objective and specific as possible. While spending about three hours observing the class, I kept my eyes, ears, and mind on the task. Specifically, I started with a narrative of the physical classroom environment, the activity in progress, the teaching style, and student characteristics, simply describing what I saw in concrete terms without making judgments. As academic and social success requires a basic level of compliance, I objectively wrote down events and behaviors related to the participants regarding compliance to teacher requests, including quotes of what the instructor and the participants said. I used quotation marks when not paraphrasing what was being said. I constantly kept these questions in mind while observing and taking notes: Do the participants understand the coherence-related concepts? Are they motivated in learning coherence in writing? Do they feel confused about what they are learning? Are they showing any learning anxiety? What is particularly effective in the coherence-related instruction? And what specific suggestions would I make concerning how coherence-related instruction could be improved? Moreover, I took detailed notes of how the instructor covered issues related to coherence, as well as how the instructor helped the students develop the ability to organize ideas into a coherent essay.

With the instructor's permission, I scheduled a post-observation meeting with her shortly after the observation. After the observation, I asked her to help me analyze the information. I was interested in asking the instructor these questions: Did the students

learn what you wanted them to? How do you know if the students have learned what you intended them to learn? What strategies do you think you have used to help the students improve coherence? Were the choices of teaching methods or strategies effective? How do you know? Were the materials related to coherence you used helpful? How do you know? What special characteristics of the Chinese ESL students in your class are you aware of? During the post-observation conference with the instructor, I took notes which were used to answer the above questions so that I was able to use them in the study.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

In addition to the written texts discussed above to be collected as data, two rounds of interviews with the participants were conducted. These took the form of semi-structured interviews, which combines a certain degree of control with a certain amount of freedom to develop the interview (Erlandson et al., 1993). The interviews were used to gather descriptive data in the participants' own words, so that I could develop insights on how the participants viewed their writing, including how they thought about or interpreted elements that related to the issue of coherence in their writing.

After the participants had been contacted and agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled the first interview. While conducting the interviews, I mainly used English to communicate with the participants; however, they were encouraged to use Chinese whenever this helped them to feel comfortable. I occasionally used Chinese and English interchangeably for data collection. When quoting the participants, I translated some of their comments if Chinese was used.

Basically, the two rounds of interviews were conducted, at the beginning and toward the end of the semester. The first interview took place after I had collected and

read the participants' initial diagnostic essays, and the second interview took place at a point when other writings were available, which allowed me to discuss specific choices made by the participants in their writing.

Each interview session lasted about forty-five minutes. I met individually with each participant in an empty classroom on campus. To protect the participants' confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Before the interview began, I sought the participant's permission to use a Sony Digital Voice Recorder to record the interview for later transcription and analysis, so that accuracy could be obtained. I assured the participant that the sound recording would be used by me only. At the same time, as the interview moved on, I listened carefully and attentively, with the participant's permission, taking as many notes as possible to make sure the interview was on the right track. In other words, I was an attentive and reactive listener on the one hand and an extensive note-taker on the other. Taking copious notes in addition to recording proved to greatly enhance the subsequent tasks of transcribing and interpreting the recorded data (Erlandson et al., 1993).

The semi-structured interviews were guided by basic open-ended questions and issues to be explored. I had the participant's written texts on hand for reference while conducting each interview, in order to be able to learn the student's own views regarding coherence in his or her writing. Before terminating each interview, I summarized the major parts for any possible clarification from the participant.

### **Procedure**

For the present study, I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the Liberal Arts College of Western



Pennsylvania where my doctoral degree was granted, and then proceeded to seek permission from the Sunshine Community College (where the human subject research was conducted) Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects from Research Risks.

In gathering data, I followed these nine steps.

1. With permission from the chairperson of the English Department, obtained the contact information of the instructor who taught *Advanced Composition for ESL Students*
2. Asked permission of the instructor to pay a brief visit to her class at the start of the semester to invite participants in the study
3. Collected the diagnostic essays
4. Started the first round of interviews
5. Conducted classroom observation
6. Collected the CATW in-class essays
7. Collected the second draft of the CATW in-class essay
8. Carried out the second round of interviews
9. Collected the final exam essays

To start, I first went to the chairperson of the English Department for contact information of the instructor who taught *Advanced Composition for ESL Students* at the time of the study. After meeting with the instructor in the Department, I gave her “A Letter to the Instructor of the Advanced Composition for ESL Students” and talked to her in the office. I concisely introduced the purpose of my study, explaining that the findings of the study would help the instructor to design appropriate writing instruction for

Chinese ESL students, as well as helping the students to become familiar with coherence in writing, in the process allowing them to get the most out of their college education and their efforts to improve at writing. With her permission, I scheduled a class visit with the instructor.

About fifteen minutes before dismissal, I visited the class briefly and spoke to the whole class. At this point, for the sake of anonymity I made sure that the instructor did not know which students decided to participate. While I was speaking to the class about the purpose of the study, the instructor left the classroom. After a brief self-introduction in class, I gave each of the students “A Letter to Potential Participants” written in both English and Chinese to ask for participation, explaining the nature and significance of this study as well as confidentiality for research participants. Since the current study focused on Chinese-speaking participants, students from other ethnic groups left the room. Altogether six Chinese learners of English stayed behind and showed interest in the study. Then I went on to briefly clarify that this study would allow the participants to compare and contrast two different rhetorical traditions. It would give them the opportunity to better understand what cultural factors might impede their progress in writing and how different rhetorical values would profoundly influence writing in their own way. As a result, the participants would learn how to adjust to the American way of writing in order to meet English readers’ expectations.

I emphasized to each of the potential participants that his/her participation in this study was voluntary. After the six Chinese ESL students claimed that they tended to participate in the study, I asked them to leave their name, email address, and phone number for further contact.

After each participant had been further contacted and agreed to participate in the study, I asked each of them to fill out the background questionnaire. To protect anonymity, I provided each participant with a pseudonym that was located on the top of the survey. In line with this design, there was no space provided on the questionnaire for the names of the participants. They were instructed not to write their name anywhere on the survey.

At the same time they filled out the questionnaire, the participants also completed the Informed Consent Form. I brought with me two copies of the Informed Consent Form prepared in advance, which was signed by both me and the participant. One copy was returned to me, and the other was kept by the participant for his/her personal records. This ethical release form assured the subjects of complete and permanent anonymity and guaranteed that neither their current nor future status as the College ESL students would in any way be affected by their participation in this study. The Informed Consent Form also stated that the results of this study were used for academic purposes only. If a student chose to participate, his or her real name, address, or place of work would not appear in any publication or presentation about the study. The data obtained from the participants such as the questionnaire, essays, interviews, and classroom observation notes were stored in a locked file cabinet for three years before they would be destroyed for confidentiality. To protect the participants' confidentiality, I used their pseudonyms in their essays, classroom observations, and interviews throughout the study.

Finally, I clearly stated that they were free to refuse to answer any question in the interviews, and were free to withdraw at any time by notifying me. Upon a participant's request to withdraw, all information about him or her would be destroyed, and the

withdrawal would neither affect his/her college status nor the relationship between him/her and me.

When it comes to the collection of the participants' written pieces, I collected four essays from each participant throughout the semester, including a diagnostic essay that all students enrolled in the advanced composition course wrote as a departmental pre-test during the first class meeting of the semester, a final exam essay as a post-test toward the end of the semester, a CATW in-class essay as regular writing assignments for the course, and a second draft based on the revision of the CATW in-class exercise. As a rule, it is common practice that students' diagnostic essays and final exam essays are not returned to students; during the semester instructors keep all diagnostic and final exam essays after grading. After the semester ends, these essays are kept on file in the English Department. Only CATW practice essays are returned to students as soon as they are graded.

For this reason, at the third stage, I contacted the instructor for a copy of each of the participants' diagnostic essays. I asked the instructor to leave all the essays on her desk. To protect anonymity, I then asked a [CUNY] CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) certified professor to select the participants' diagnostic essays for me without the knowledge of the instructor. As soon as I made a copy of each participant's diagnostic essay, I returned all the essays to the instructor's desk. Of course, I erased the participants' names on the duplicates of their essays and wrote down their respective pseudonyms instead.

After having collected the diagnostic essays, an analysis of the written work was performed by two professional raters with the aim of having a rating of the participants'

writing, which gave some indication of the level of coherence they had achieved in their writing. These essays were also analyzed for individual elements related to coherence. Then, at the fourth stage, based on the findings in the participants' essays, I spoke to the participants and started a first round of the semi-structured interviews. As a general rule, by using clear language I avoided any biased questions and always asked questions that encouraged the respondents to explain and elaborate on what we were discussing. I realized that writing good questions was vital to accomplish the interview objectives and obtain valid responses (UT, 2010). Since questions addressing some concepts may confuse the participants, I was cautious about word choice. It is possible that the Chinese ESL students had little knowledge about certain concepts such as paragraph unity, the purpose of writing, coherence, and cohesion, so I used simple and easy words and phrases to facilitate their understanding of the questions. Basically, questions for the first round interview were more general compared with those used for the second round interview. The following questions were used for the first-round interview.

1. Did you ever have a teacher that helped you a lot with your writing? If so, can you talk a bit more about this experience?
2. What are the most important elements in Chinese persuasive writing in your opinion? What have you learned about organizing an essay (for instance, introduction, body, and conclusion, etc.)? Do you remember your classes in your home country teaching about this? If so, what were you taught about "good writing"?
3. How did you learn English writing in your own country? Please describe your early English writing experience in school. What features were you taught that

a good English persuasive essay must have? Again, what ideas have you learned about “good writing” in English?

4. What did you think about before writing an essay, either in English or in Chinese, in your country? Do you feel there was a difference in the way you wrote in English, as compared with how you wrote in Chinese?
5. When you learned to write in your country, did you think about who would be reading the essay? Did your teachers encourage you to think of a reason you might want to write an essay, even if it was a class assignment?
6. Did you learn about coherence in writing in your country? What did your classes talk about in terms of organizing information, for instance, in a paragraph? Were you encouraged to draw relationships between ideas in your writing? If so, in what way?
7. Can you tell me a bit more about your writing about the diagnostic essay that you wrote in your first class meeting? Did you enjoy it? What came easiest for you, and what gave you most problems?

The interview started with very general questions here. I just began with some conversation about their previous English learning experiences related to EFL/ESL writing that I could use for the study. At the fifth stage, I carried out the classroom observation which allowed me to obtain in-depth data on how the instructor in her class helped ESL students achieve coherence, as well as how the participants responded to American classroom training concerning coherence. Toward the mid-term at the sixth stage, I started collecting the CATW practice essays from the participants by contacting them for a hard copy when they submitted their essays to the instructor. Following that at

the seventh stage, before the participants took the final, I contacted the participants for a second round of interviews aiming at deepening the questions raised in the first round interview. In this second interview, I asked the participants about their experience in their English class. The specific questions about the participants' pieces of writing for the second interview are as follows.

1. Tell me a little about your advanced English writing class. What kinds of things do you feel you are learning in the class?
2. How do you feel (comfortable, confused, or resistant) when you are instructed to write the American way? Do you feel that this is different from writing in Chinese? If so, in what ways?
3. Are you perfectly able to apply your classroom learning to your writing? Why or why not? (If not, what problems do you have in trying to do this?)
4. How do you understand the idea of a "thesis statement?" When you write, do you try to put such a statement into your essay? If so, where do you place it? Can you comment on the essay we have here from your practice in class? Does it have a thesis statement? How did you support your central focus?
5. Has your writing class emphasized the idea of "coherence?" If so, how would you explain what that term, coherence, means?
6. Can you tell me a bit more about your writing of this essay that I have brought with me? Did you enjoy writing? What did you find easiest and hardest about your writing? Do you think you used advice drawn from your writing course when you wrote this? If so, in what way? Can you talk about that in a bit more detail?

7. How did your professor react to this essay? Were you able to make changes on the basis of what he/she said or wrote as feedback for you? Generally, how do you regard written comments on your writing? What kind of feedback do you think helps you best in making your writing better?
8. What do you think the strongest point in this essay is?
9. What strategies do you think you should use to improve your English writing skills related to coherence in persuasive discourse?

The final stage took place during the last week of classes, which included final exams. To obtain the participants' final exam essays after they completed the post-test at the end of the semester, I repeated the same procedure as I did when asking the instructor for the participants' diagnostic essays. By examining the participants' essays written in the final exam, I again identified specific elements contributing to coherence had developed over the course of the semester. Again, a central focus was on determining how these elements were traced to the English and Chinese views of coherence. Finally, implications regarding how American writing instructors may help Chinese ESL undergraduates achieve coherence in persuasive discourse were offered.

### **Scoring**

The participants' diagnostic essays and the final exam essays were rated following a set of holistic rating scales (see Appendix B and C: *Knowledge of cohesion* and *Knowledge of coherence*) developed by Abeywickrama (2007). While *Knowledge of cohesion* measured the surface linguistic features that signaled the relationships among the ideas, *Knowledge of coherence* evaluated the overall structure of the text. These rating scales were designed based on criteria that have been found significant in previous



studies in assessing coherence and cohesion (Abeywickrama, 2007). The scales ranged from 0-4 with 0 being *No evidence of the ability*, with 4 being *Complete evidence of the ability*. The ability level was assessed from two perspectives: range and accuracy. For example, as for *Knowledge of cohesion* (see Appendix B), the range of cohesive features was assessed. A full score would be 8, reflecting a 4 on both *Knowledge of cohesion* and *Knowledge of coherence*.

In conjunction with the rating scales, a list of features of coherence and cohesion, another separate scoring rubric, was provided (see Appendix A). Adapted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Bamberg (1983); McCulley (1985); Lee (2002); Abeywickrama, 2007; and CATW (2010), this scoring rubric was developed following the criteria created by Goodrich (1996) and Allen (2003); it served as an analytic scoring guide used to assess the effectiveness of the participants' writing samples, which focused on cohesion and coherence. I will return to this point later in the section *Qualitative Coding for Written Texts*.

As mentioned above, to avoid scoring bias, I used two raters. There was at least adjacency if not complete agreement between Rater 1 and Rater 2's scoring. Where there was a discrepancy of two score levels or more between raters, I would use a third rater to rescore an essay. To ensure that the participants' outcome would not be influenced by the interlanguage that might be produced by a non-native English-speaking professor who scored the pre- and post-tests, I invited a native-English speaking professor to rate the participants' essays. Therefore, the scores of the participants' diagnostic essays and the final exam essays were given by both a native-English speaking writing professor and me, an ESL writing professor in the English Department at Sunshine Community College. In

other words, two trained raters evaluated the coherence of the participants' essays according to a set of criteria provided.

We read every essay, and each rater gave a score independently, without knowledge of the other's rating. As stated above, if the two of us were more than two numbers apart, a third native English-speaking expert rater would be called to examine the content of the essay again for grading consistency, focusing on the features of cohesion and coherence. Prior to rating the essays, I ran a norming session to determine inter-rater reliability that referred to the steps taken to ensure that different faculty raters assigned the same score for performance on the same assignments (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). We read a set of sample papers, assigned a score, and then discussed precisely why we had given our scores. To be specific, I used two essays as guides that reflected the criteria and corresponding score (0-4) in the rating scales. The other rater was given the rating scales as well as the scoring rubric. Before we scored the essays, we reviewed the scoring rubric for assessing specific features of coherence and cohesion that may occur in the participants' text structure of writing. After we silently read the first essay, we individually rated it using the rating scale criteria. When this was completed, we compared the scores that each of us had given for cohesion and coherence, and specifically discussed the ratings with each other. If the same score or adjacent level score was given, we moved on to rate the second essay. In a nutshell, we followed this procedure while scoring the participants' essays.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Qualitative Coding for Interview Data**

#### **Transcribing the Interviews**

After the first round interview was completed, I transcribed the data quickly, so I could resolve ambiguities while the interview was still fresh. With the six participants, I labeled each interviewee's data with a number starting from 1 to 6 so as not to mix up "who is who" and transcribed the recorded data under each specific interview question. In order to focus on content, words like "um" or "er" or "well" were omitted. To make the interviews more authentic, I occasionally encouraged the participants to use their first language to carry out the task when necessary, but I translated for overall meaning, not word for word. The transcription only included complete thoughts and useful information. While transcribing, I deleted extraneous or redundant expressions and used standard spelling for words spoken, but did not change the interviewee's usage or the meaning. I transcribed their words and sentences without including my comments to keep the flow of the interviewee's own thoughts, but I shifted some sections of the interview, thereby keeping similar content together. I transcribed all interviews after going back and re-listening to the recorded data. I planned the second round interview based on the initial interview. In other words, I reviewed the first round interview transcripts to refine my questions when necessary. Also, I noticed and followed up any unexpected data, making sure to explore further any interview extreme cases-participants who had reported very positive or very negative experiences.

## **Developing Coding Categories**

Coding refers to using labels to classify and assign meaning to pieces of information. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), after data collection a crucial step in data analysis is to develop a list of coding categories. Marshall and Rossman (1989) explain that “data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p.112). To organize data, I coded it into meaningful categories by looking for topics and patterns that the data covered, and then used words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. For a better understanding of the collected information, I carefully read all the data several times. Following the guidelines provided by UT (2010), I developed coding categories in two steps.

In the first step, I generated numerous category codes while reading through responses, labeling data that were related without concern for the variety of categories. I wrote notes to myself, listing ideas or diagramming relationships I noticed, and watched for special vocabulary that the interviewees used because such forms might indicate an important topic. In the next step, I used focused coding to eliminate less useful codes, combined smaller categories, or if a large number of responses had been assigned the same code, subdivided that category. And I tried to identify repeating ideas expressed by different respondents and organized codes into larger themes.

Berkowitz (1997) has helpfully suggested the following six questions to consider when coding interview data:

1. What common themes emerge in responses about specific topics? How do these patterns (or lack thereof) help to illuminate the broader study question(s)?
2. Are there deviations from these patterns? If so, are there any factors that might

explain these deviations?

3. How are participants' environments or past experiences related to their behavior and attitudes?
4. What interesting stories emerge from the responses? How do they help illuminate the central study question(s)?
5. Do any of these patterns suggest that additional data may be needed? Do any of the central study questions need to be revised?
6. Are the patterns that emerge similar to the findings of other studies on the same topic? If not, what might explain these discrepancies?

These questions helped with coding interview data, enabling me to identify themes and organize codes.

### **Qualitative Coding for Classroom Observation Data**

#### **Developing Coding Categories**

Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.97). Hence, observation helps a researcher to gain a better insight into the here-and-now interworking of the learning environment via the use of the five human senses. Much was to be gained by looking, listening, feeling, and smelling rather than talking. At this stage, since the goal was to explore what specific training in coherence the participants received and how the participants responded to their teacher’s instructions on coherence, I kept a detailed descriptive record of everything related to training in coherence that occurred during the period of classroom observation, but it was impossible to observe and record everything that occurred in the class.

I began with some common types of coding categories. Following the ideas from Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Merriam (1988), I used some of their key elements with the following checklist of coding categories.

1. Setting/Context codes provide background information on the setting. What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behavior does the setting promote or prevent?
2. Participant codes describe who are in the scene, how many students, and why they are there.
3. Activity and interaction codes identify how the participants respond to the teacher's instruction on coherence. What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities related to coherence? How do the participants interact with the instructor? How do the participants interact with the activity? How are the participants and activities connected or interrelated?
4. Strategy codes relate to ways the instructor covers issues related to coherence, including how the instructor maintains students' attention and involves students in learning coherent writing during his/her lecture.

UT (2010) points out that a major step in analyzing observational data is coding the data into meaningful categories. Bogdan and Biklen suggest first ordering narrative logs chronologically. To develop coding categories, in much the same way as analyzing interview data, I first read all the collected data carefully a couple of times and then employed similar methods to analyze observation results, such as conducting initial coding and focused coding.

## Qualitative Coding for Written Texts

Research has shown that while writing English, Chinese speaking ESL students use certain writing strategies and rhetorical features that are different from those commonly used in English (Dunkelblau, 1990). To further understand this area and avoid the danger of stereotyping that comes with any attempt to describe Chinese speaking ESL writers in terms of their cultural background, I closely examined a total of four essays written by each of the six participants for the study, thus conducting an in-depth investigation of these four pieces.

Previous research indicates that coherence problems in writing require attention at the level of both the whole discourse and the word or sentence. According to Bamberg (1983), “When we look at coherence in its broad sense, we become aware that almost any feature—whether seen locally or over the whole discourse—has the potential to affect a reader’s ability to integrate details of a text into a coherent whole” (p.427). Therefore, I used a set of rubrics that assessed coherence at both global (discourse) and local (or sentence) levels. The rubrics asked raters to focus on all the features listed there to assign a holistic score for an entire essay. First, we explored in what ways the Chinese speakers’ writings demonstrated coherence as perceived by English readers. Next, we investigated whether cohesive devices characteristic of English writing appeared in these Chinese students’ writings throughout their texts, and if so, which ones appeared. Traditionally, as cohesive devices are optional and do not necessarily occur in Chinese writings, or do so infrequently because meaning structures are often understood from context, it is possible that essays written by Chinese ESL students may convey the sense that their English writing, to some degree, lacks transitions, a conclusion drawn by researchers such as

Dong (1999), Guo and Wang (2004), Yeh (2004), Jin and Ban (2006), Zhou (2007), and Wu and He (2010).

In the above section *Scoring*, I briefly introduced the scoring method. In the following sections, I will again discuss the method of scoring the participants' writings for presence of cohesion and coherence. To measure the level of cohesion and coherence, both composition rating scales and features of cohesion and coherence were employed.

### **The Level of Coherence**

Drawing upon the holistic Composition Rating Scales (see Appendix C) designed by Abeywickrama (2007), I identified the level of coherence as one of the following in terms of accuracy: (4) completely accurate, showing a complete range of explicit organizational devices; (3) highly accurate with only occasional problems in organization, showing a wide range of explicit organizational devices at both paragraph and whole discourse levels; (2) organization clear but could be more explicitly marked, showing a moderate range of explicit rhetorical organizational devices; (1) organization confusing or irrelevant to the topic, showing little evidence of deliberate textual coherence; and (0) not relevant, showing no evidence of knowledge of textual coherence.

### **Method of Scoring Coherence in the Chinese Students' Writing**

In addition to the rating scales mentioned above, the current study also drew upon Abeywickrama' (2007) rubric of scoring ESL writing for the presence of coherence features, but expanded his list of coherent features to include those elements observed by Bamberg (1983), McCulley (1985), Lee (2002), and CATW (2010) that emerged in their data analysis. The eleven categories were judged valid measures of coherence features since they had been used and tested by educators and scholars in the field. In connection



with the use of the holistic Composition Rating Scales measuring the level of coherence mentioned above, the following is the list of eleven coherence features that were used in the study.

1. The opening paragraph is effective in introducing the reader to the subject or the central idea that the writer will develop throughout the essay
2. All the paragraphs support the central focus and do not digress
3. The writer's overall point of view is clear
4. Paragraphs are divided in terms of content relevance
5. Transition is smooth between paragraphs
6. The writer organizes paragraph details according to a discernible plan (e.g., time order, addition order, order of importance, order of cause and effect, order of comparison-contrast) that is well-designed with a smooth and logical progression of thoughts; therefore, the ideas relate to one another
7. The writer does not shift topics, and the ideas in each paragraph are all relevant to the topic
8. Ideas mentioned are elaborated
9. No repetition of ideas
10. The writer fully develops paragraphs, effectively using reasons and specific details and examples from his/her reading and experience to develop ideas
11. The last paragraph gives the reader a definite sense of closure

### **Analysis of Cohesive Devices**

It has been proposed by scholars and educators that Chinese speaking students seriously lack transitional skills when writing in English, thereby resulting in composition

texts lacking coherence. Research and theory in discourse analysis now look at cohesive devices as part of what makes a text coherent (Bamberg, 1983). Therefore, in addition to forming smaller discourse units, I examined the extent to which a participant's text appropriately bound together larger chunks of discourse, with an appropriate use of cohesive devices to connect his/her ideas, supporting details, and examples.

### **The Level of Cohesion**

Following Abeywickrama's (2007) holistic Composition Rating Scales (see Appendix B), I ascertained the level of cohesion as one of the following in terms of accuracy: (4) completely accurate, showing a complete range of explicit cohesive devices; (3) highly accurate with only occasional problems in cohesion, showing a wide range of explicit cohesive devices, including complex subordination; (2) relations between sentences generally clear but could be more explicitly marked, showing a moderate range of explicit cohesive devices; (1) relationships between sentences often confusing, with few markers of textual cohesion; and (0) not relevant, showing no evidence of knowledge of textual cohesion.

### **Method of Scoring Cohesion in the Chinese Students' Writing**

To determine what specific cohesive elements in the Chinese students' writing might be traced to the two rhetorical traditions (Western and Chinese), the present study expanded Abeywickrama's rubric of cohesive devices to include those elements observed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), which have been judged as valid features of cohesive devices because numerous researchers and educators have used this instrument in the composition field for over three decades. The following rubric was used with the above-mentioned Composition Rating Scales for measuring the level of cohesion.

1. Pronouns of reference are used accurately
2. Conjunctions are used accurately
3. Ellipsis and substitution are used when needed
4. Lexical repetition is used appropriately
5. Synonymous words and phrases when used are used appropriately
6. Transition words are used judiciously and accurately to link sentences and/or paragraphs together to convey relationships through the essay
7. Each sentence follows logically from the previous one

Descriptive statistics and results were used to report the findings of all the coherence features identified in the participants' written texts.

## CHAPTER 4

### INTRODUCTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

#### **The Participants**

In May 2011, the participants of this study were enrolled in *BE205 Advanced Composition for ESL Students*. Since the *Advanced Composition Course for ESL Students* is the final course of the sequence (Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced), students are placed in this level based on their previous performance in either the prerequisite courses or the College placement tests. Throughout the semester, students enrolled in this course receive strict training in reading and writing. When students successfully complete this *Advanced Composition Course for ESL Students* by the end of the semester, they will be required to take the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing known as CATW to exit from remedial writing courses; anyone who fails to pass the CATW exam will repeat this advanced composition course.

As I said earlier in Chapter 3, among those who were taking the *Advanced Composition Course for ESL Students* at the time of the study, only six Chinese-speaking students showed interest and volunteered to participate in the study. Information regarding the demographic and linguistic dynamics relevant to this study was gathered via a background questionnaire (shown in Appendix D), and some details were added to the introduction of the participants later on through an interview. These two research instruments provided basic information about the participants in several areas: age, gender, length of EFL/ESL study, time of last taking an ESL course, number of times of taking the *Advanced Composition Course for ESL Students*, year of arrival in the United States, any preliminary remedial ESL writing courses taken, location of high school

attended, year of high school graduation, any previous college education received, attitude toward writing in English, self-description as an ESL writer, geographical area, and first language spoken. I will cover each of these areas in the paragraphs that follow.

### **Age**

The age of the participants ranges from twenty to thirty. In this study, the majority were just under twenty-four. This age similarity indicates some common experience in the participants' academic life. Put another way, many of them recently graduated from high school and could be viewed as traditional undergraduates. However, there is an exception for the 30-year-old participant, Xiaohui, who was notably older than the rest of the participants; this participant could be considered a nontraditional student, and this is worth noting here, since age and culture are issues that could affect the motivation to learn.

### **Gender**

Both male and female participants were welcome to join the study; however, due to the enrollment pattern for this section, there was only one female participant in this study.

### **Length of EFL/ESL Study**

The participants' length of formal EFL/ESL learning ranged from seven years of study to a total of 12 years, including the years of study spent both in and outside the United States. The response on this item revealed two patterns for the participants: (1) those who studied English both in and outside the United States, even though the length of EFL study outside the United States was very different from person to person; and (2)

those who studied English only in the United States after immigrating to this country with their parents when they were young.

Table 1

*Length of EFL/ESL Study for the Six Participants*

Name	Length of Study outside United States	Length of Study in the United States	Total Years of English Study
Lili Sun	11 years	1 year	12 years
Weishan Qian	1 year	6 years	7 years
Yiman Zhao	2 years	5 years	7 years
Xiaohui Wang	6 years	1 year	7 years
Gaofeng Wu	Never	8 years	8 years
Hong Lin	Never	10 years	10 years

As shown in the table above, two participants had studied English in the United States for just one year, whereas the rest had studied English in this country for more than five years. However, the length of EFL/ESL study in and outside the United States did not reflect the participants' English proficiency level. I will return to this point when going through the interview.

**Time of Last ESL Course**

As reported in the questionnaire, all the participants without exception last took an ESL course in spring 2011 at the college where they were studying. They had been studying English hard and saw ESL courses as a critical step toward their eventual success in mainstream college classes with native speakers. They had been encouraged to

take the English courses in consecutive terms, on the grounds that continuous learning without interruption accelerates progress, since academic writing poses many challenges to nonnative speakers in their college studies.

### **Number of Times of Taking the Advanced Composition Course**

Five of the participants were taking this course for the first time, but one participant, Yiman, reported that this was the third time he was taking the course because he had failed the CATW writing test twice. Since CATW is a difficult writing test for nonnative speakers, it is not uncommon for ESL students to repeat this advanced writing course.

### **Year of Arrival in the United States**

The participants reported the year when they arrived in the United States. Most had begun formal ESL instruction shortly after they arrived, with the exception of one participant, Xiaohui, who had lived in the United States for six years before he began studying English in 2010.

Table 2

*Year of Arrival in the United States*

Name	Year of Arrival in the United States
Lili Sun	2010
Weishan Qian	2005
Yiman Zhao	2005
Xiaohui Wang	2005
Gaofeng Wu	2003
Hong Lin	2001

Table 2 demonstrates the year of the participants' arrival in the United States. There was no direct relationship between English proficiency and length of residency in the United States.

### **Preliminary Remedial ESL Writing Courses Taken**

As indicated in the questionnaire, all the participants had taken the prerequisite remedial ESL courses *Beginning Composition for ESL Students* and *Intermediate Composition for ESL Students*. This information is important because the participants' preliminary experience in the writing courses tells us that they were not considered novice writers. At least we might assume that they had acquired some familiarity with coherent writing in their previous writing courses.

### **Location of High School Attended and Year of High School Graduation**

The participants' high school experiences were quite disparate. One participant went to high school in Taiwan, one in Mainland China, and the rest in New York. This diversity in education may indicate a different level of English proficiency and would also provide us with varied written data in terms of textual analysis. Since the high school graduation year of the average participant ranges widely from 2000 to 2010, there is a considerable diversity in experience in terms of time as well.



Table 3

*Location of High School Attended and Year of High School Graduation*

Name	Location of High School	Year of Graduation
Lili Sun	Taiwan	2005
Weishan Qian	New York	2005
Yiman Zhao	New York	2009
Xiaohui Wang	Mainland China	2000
Gaofeng Wu	New York	2010
Hong Lin	New York	2009

**Previous College Education**

Among the six participants, only Lili had completed a four-year college education in Taiwan from 2005 to 2009; all others were high school graduates.

**Attitude toward Writing in English**

Lili was the only one who claimed in the questionnaire that she liked English writing, even though she maintained that she did not enjoy writing. She reported that she often wrote in English, but only in connection with class assignments. In other words, she wrote only when she was asked to, though she could do well when asked. That does not necessarily mean that she enjoyed private story writing or keeping a journal. It could be assumed that the reason she had a positive attitude toward writing for class assignments may directly relate to her writing experience in her previous college education in Taiwan. Interestingly enough, the rest of the participants reported that they did not like to write in English. In fact, they tried to avoid writing because they disliked it. These attitudes

toward writing recall a familiar pattern: those who like writing do well because they practice often, and they practice because they do well. In contrast, those who dislike writing often avoid opportunities to improve. However, the next figure reveals one exception to this pattern, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Self-description as an ESL Writer**

Table 4

*Self-Description as an ESL Writer*

Name	Self-description as an ESL writer
Lili Sun	Inexperienced, nervous
Weishan Qian	Inexperienced
Yiman Zhao	Have fears about writing
Xiaohui Wang	Hate to write
Gaofeng Wu	Confident, advanced
Hong Lin	Inexperienced, nervous, have fears about writing, hate to write

Table 4 indicates that the participants identified themselves as ESL writers in varied ways. Lili has been in the United States for only one year, so she described herself as an inexperienced and nervous writer, although, as noted earlier, she reported that she liked English writing. This is understandable because students with positive attitudes toward writing may also experience negative feelings such as uncertainly, nervousness, and a lack of ideas when engaged in actual writing tasks. Weishan simply asserted that he was inexperienced in writing. As we know, inexperienced writers often move abruptly from point to point, using conversation strategies in an attempt to connect ideas. They even go off topic, assuming readers know what they are thinking. At this point, his six-year ESL learning experience throughout his junior high and high school in New York still did not seem to have equipped him with necessary writing skills that could help him

become a confident writer. Like some other ESL students who graduated from American high school, Yiman did not treat writing as fun and expressed his fears about writing. His fears reveal that he still did not know how to write an essay due to a lack of basic writing skills. Xiaohui finished his high school in 2000 in China, and in 2005 he came to the United States. It has been noted that he had only one year of formal English education in the United States during his seven years of stay in the country, even though he had six years of formal EFL study back in China. Since Xiaohui had limited writing experience in the Western context, it is not surprising that he hated to write. If a student has negative attitudes toward writing, it may interfere with his/her success, at least in completing a writing assignment. No doubt the skill of creating an effective piece of writing is God-given, but it also requires a lot of motivation, practice, effort, and attention to the subject.

In contrast with the others, Gaofeng expressed his confidence in writing and identified himself as an advanced writer. He came to the United States in 2003 at the age of thirteen. Eight years of formal writing practice could have possibly made him a good writer. However, as reported earlier, he despised the idea of writing. In fact, how students feel about writing can both affect and reflect how well they can write. Contrary to what he had claimed, Gaofeng had serious writing problems, which were later identified in his writing assignments. Finally, when looking at Hong, we find that he considered himself an inexperienced and nervous writer. Also, he had fears about writing and even hated to write. While he came to the United States at ten, he still expressed a negative attitude in relation to writing after studying ESL for ten years in the United States. Writing is an instrument of reflection. It can be taken as a tool that promotes awareness of the relationship that students have with other people. Accordingly, we might expect this

student to have difficulty producing, developing, or organizing ideas. Of course, motivational and emotional factors are also closely relevant to good writing. Effective ESL writers feel at home in the English language and/or are keen to learn the writing skills required for effective writing.

### **Geographical Area and First Language Spoken**

As expected from the above information presented, one participant comes from Taiwan, and all the others are from Mainland China. Everybody in this group uses Mandarin Chinese as their first language. Even though Taiwan and Mainland China share similar Chinese cultures and values, they differ in socio-economic backgrounds as well as in formal educational practice, including EFL instruction.

### **Common Themes**

The above description presents a brief account of the basic individual participants' personal data. As a result, some common themes have been identified. To gain a clearer picture of what leads to the participants' limited basic English skills, I will carry out a brief in-depth analysis of the following issues regarding their attitudes toward ESL writing, their English literacy background, and their family culture.

### **Negative Attitude toward Writing**

As clearly presented in this chapter, a conspicuous theme that appeared early was that the participants did not like writing in English. Although their attitude toward writing does not directly relate to coherence in writing, it provides some insight into why they wrote the way they wrote. This can be further verified in the next chapter when textual analysis is performed. In terms of English writing, as they wrote in the questionnaire, they felt nervous, panicky, and even angry. This seems to suggest that, for these Chinese-

speaking students, when Chinese culture and Western culture met in the American cultural context, according to the evidence based on the Background Questionnaire, the two cultural worlds may have collided, leading not to understanding, but to confusion and conflict. Why did it happen this way? A closer look at how the participants were educated could help us better understand why things happened the way they did.

### **Limited Literacy Skills**

For one thing, the majority of these participants had low literacy skills in their own country. As described earlier, only Lili and Xiaohui were an exception. Since Lili had had eleven years' experience of English study in Taiwan, she transferred her learning skills when she studied English in the American writing classroom, even though she asserted that she was nervous about English writing. In Xiaohui's case, his earlier six-year formal English education in China prepared him for his current academic learning, but he seemed to be constantly struggling between the two cultures after he came to the United States. Since the focus in English writing back in China was mainly placed on translation of isolated sentences, Xiaohui felt overwhelmed while taking the advanced composition course.

Weishan, Yiman, Gaofeng, and Hong had limited formal schooling in China, but all had experiences in American middle or high school education. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that these students had mastered English skills during their experiences in American schools. While living in New York, their home language was Chinese only, and their circle of friends was also Chinese only. In fact, these linguistically and culturally different Chinese students had not even achieved basic English proficiency in reading and writing, possibly as a result of combined factors, such as their lack of

exposure to American culture, their limited social circle, their low social self-efficacy, their introverted personality, their unfamiliarity with the North American culture, their lack of appropriate study skills or strategies, and their academic learning anxiety. For example, both Gaofeng and Hong loved to read Chinese classical novels, as they later claimed during the interviews. As they put it, Chinese novels had a great impact on their way of thinking when they wrote in English.

### **The Influence of Family Culture**

Moreover, I soon realized that most of the six participants were from low-income families. One thing that is worth noting is that these students were neither highly motivated in learning writing, nor did they seem to worry about that. Their parents themselves did not know English when they came to the United States, and they probably had no idea how they could help their children with their English studies. Their parents were struggling to keep their families going, so they did not have time to push their children to do homework at home. Because of the influence of this family culture, many of the participants belonged to a population of young people who were not really interested in earning an American college degree. They wanted to improve their survival English skills and to start their own business later on.

Gradually, the Chinese students became tired of their possibly confusing or ineffective study in American high schools. As Hong put it, “I cut classes and dozed off in class if I had to go. I never paid attention to the teacher.” Consequently, these students seriously lacked study skills. They did not know how to learn to write, but they all blamed their poor writing skills on their lack of vocabulary and their limited knowledge of English grammar, as a result of their Chinese misperception about English learning.

According to the instructor, Dr. Fawcett, with whom I had classroom observation conferences with, “these Chinese students don’t know how to learn because they didn’t get it in the first language. If they didn’t get it, it doesn’t transfer. Lili transfers [she had high school and college experiences in her first language in Taiwan]. If they don’t have the ability in the first language, that’s an issue, not vocabulary.” Dr. Fawcett means that learning skills transfer, and that these students may not have had the necessary experiences in their L1, or not have managed to transfer the learning from these experiences. Like many other American teachers who educate Chinese-speaking ESL students, Dr. Fawcett is keenly aware where the trouble lies when these Chinese students do not follow her instructions in her class.

Clearly, these Chinese participants did not like English writing, partly for practical reasons, because they could survive and make money in numerous Chinese-operated supermarkets, restaurants, or companies in New York, and partly for more pedagogically oriented reasons, because most of them had limited literacy skills in both cultures and faced academic challenges. Since the participants described themselves as nervous and panicky ESL writers, it must be emphasized that in addition to teaching learning skills and writing skills, it is important to teach students to take a positive attitude toward writing and its value. These students need to understand that a positive attitude often leads them to use a variety of learning strategies that can facilitate writing skill development in language learning. Next, I will analyze the participants’ written texts.

## CHAPTER 5

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

#### **Analysis of Textual Data**

In this chapter, I will perform a selective textual analysis of the participants' writings. I will determine how effectively a writer presents his/her ideas by examining the techniques the writer uses, offering comments on which ones seem to work or not work and why. To do this, I will first think about how these techniques may affect the writer's intended audience and how they may help to communicate with the author's intended goals. Before proceeding, it is important to remind the reader that the idea of presenting ideas "effectively," as evaluated here, is very much a Western notion, and not an absolute set of values. Also, only one particularly narrow genre of persuasive writing is being examined here, which further narrows the criteria being used to analyze these written student essays.

As introduced in Chapter 3, three types of essays were collected for a qualitative analysis in this study: 1) a diagnostic essay written as the first class writing assignment at the beginning of the semester; 2) essays written as in-class practice during the semester, including a first and second draft; and 3) a final essay written as the final exam toward the end of the semester.

I analyzed a total of 23 essays written by the participants, that is, I analyzed four essays by each participant (with only one exception, when one student did not provide one essay): the diagnostic essay, the final essay, and two drafts of an essay written during the semester. Of these, the diagnostic essays and final exam essays were rated by two trained raters; it was felt that a comparison of these two types of essays might help us see



a clearer and more dramatic picture of the students' growth over the term in the coherence of their writing. I kept the following goals in mind as I worked with these texts: to identify the ways in which the writings of these participants demonstrated coherence; to determine the extent to which the two sets of writings just mentioned were judged as coherent by professional raters; to explore what specific elements in the writings might be traced to Western or Chinese traditions; and to discover whether these elements changed in the participants' writings over the course of a semester,

### **Scoring Cohesion in the Participants' Writings**

Essays were rated on a set of criteria for knowledge of cohesion on the Composition Rating Scales ranging from 0-4 (see Appendix B and the section *Qualitative Coding for Written Texts* in Chapter 3). Essays rated 4 (Complete) showed complete knowledge of cohesion, as well as a complete range of explicit cohesive devices, and a completely accurate use of cohesive devices; essays that were rated 3 (Extensive) showed extensive knowledge of textual cohesion, as well as a wide range of explicit cohesive devices, including complex subordination, and were highly accurate with only occasional problems in cohesion; essays rated 2 (Moderate) showed moderate knowledge of textual cohesion, a moderate range of explicit cohesive devices, and generally clear relationships between sentences, but could be more explicitly marked; essays rated 1 (Limited) showed limited knowledge of textual cohesion, only a few markers of textual cohesion, and often confusing relationships between sentences; and essays marked 0 (Zero) showed no evidence of any knowledge of textual cohesion, as well as no relevancy as far as accuracy is concerned.

## Scoring Coherence in the Participants' Writings

For scoring coherence, in much the same way, essays were rated on a set of criteria for knowledge of coherence on the Composition Rating Scales ranging from 0-4 (see Appendix C and the section *Qualitative Coding for Written Texts* in Chapter 3). Essays rated 4 (Complete) showed evidence of complete knowledge of coherence, as well as a complete use of accuracy and a complete range of explicit organizational devices; essays that were rated 3 (Extensive) showed extensive knowledge of coherence, as well as a wide range of explicit organizational devices at both paragraph and whole discourse levels, and were highly accurate with only occasional problems in organization; essays rated 2 (Moderate) showed moderate knowledge of coherence, a moderate range of explicit rhetorical organizational devices, and clear organization, but could be more explicitly marked; essays rated 1 (Limited) showed limited knowledge of coherence, little evidence of deliberate textual coherence, as well as a confusing organization or material that was irrelevant to the topic; and essays marked 0 (Zero) showed no evidence of any knowledge of textual coherence, as well as no relevancy as far as accuracy is concerned.

Before we proceed to discuss the participants' writing performance, it should be noted that the diagnostic essay and the final essay are slightly different in requirement. The participants' attitude toward the two essays could also be different. As introduced in the section *Materials of Data Collection* in Chapter 3, for the diagnostic essay, students have two class hours in which to write their responses to a prompt. The prompt provided briefly describes a topic that contains a choice between the two alternatives. Students' writing is evaluated for its ability to 1) address the issue and take a clear position on the specific proposal he/she supports, 2) organization, 3) development of ideas, 4)

competency in basic English sentence structure and word choice, and 5) grammar/mechanics. In sum, his/her response should conform to the conventions of standard written American English.

As for the final, it is a reading-response essay. Like the diagnostic essay, the final takes two class hours and is given toward the end of the term. Students need to read a passage at 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade level and appropriate to high school graduates, decide the key ideas, write and paraphrase a summary of the passage, and develop the essay by selecting one key idea from the passage, so the final is a critical response in the form of an essay. Students' writing will be evaluated in five specific domains: 1) critical response to the passage, 2) development of ideas, 3) organization of the response, 4) sentence construction and word choice, and 4) grammar/mechanics.

As shown above, the final exam draws more effort from the participants, relatively. At the very least, the diagnostic and the final differ in the importance the students must have placed on them. For the diagnostic essay, it is possible that not every single participant paid enough attention to the first class writing. Previous experience tells us that many ESL students in the class were not even ready for this short summer course. Especially, for the Chinese students, cultural conflicts and anxiety about their writing could be some of the factors leading to demotivation, so some participants may be still in the dark on this demanding and writing-intensive BE205 Advanced Writing for ESL Students. Technically speaking, the final could be more demanding to some participants because they had to show their ability to understand a passage through a summary and an analysis of the passage, in addition to demonstrating competency in writing. For the Chinese students, writing a coherent and a critical reading-response essay

is very difficult because of their cultural intuitive thinking habits discussed in the section *Logical Thinking vs. Intuitive Thinking* in Chapter 2. In particular, for those who received previous Chinese English education, there was no such thing as critical analysis of a passage. As discussed in the section *Over-emphasis on Grammatical Accuracy* in Chapter 2, the instruction focus was predominantly on grammar. However, for the final exam, after struggling days and nights throughout the semester, the participants had to take it seriously when reading a passage and writing an organized and a well-developed final essay in response to the passage in two class hours. All the factors mentioned above could directly or indirectly affect the students' scores received on the two essays they wrote.

The following table illustrates the two raters' judgment regarding the participants' performance.

Table 5

*The Rating of the Participants' Essays*

Name	Diagnostic essays	Knowledge of cohesion		Knowledge of coherence		Final exam essays	Knowledge of cohesion		Knowledge of coherence	
		Rater One	Rater Two	Rater One	Rater Two		Rater One	Rater Two	Rater One	Rater Two
Lili Sun		2	1	2	1		3	3	3	3
Weishan Qian		2	1	2	1		2	2	2	2
Yiman Zhao		1	1	1	1		2	1	2	1
Xiaohui Wang		2	1	2	1		3	3	3	3
Gaofeng Wu		2	1	1	1		3	2	3	2
Hong Lin		1	1	1	1		2	2	2	2

Table 5 shows the rating of the participants' essays. By scoring cohesion and coherence in the participants' first class essays and final exam essays judged by two raters with at least five years of experience teaching writing at the college level, we can get a general sense of how much of their writings is coherent, although the two raters' judgments differed slightly. In the diagnostic essays, almost all the essays were rated either 1 or 2, indicating that those essays were deemed more or less incoherent. Apparently, the writers were seen as lacking basic command of both cohesion and coherence in their writing. For instance, these writers may have assumed that their readers share context with them, and they may have provided no orientation or little discernible plan, so that relationships among ideas were unclear. In these first essays, ideas were seldom elaborated; as a result, the development of ideas was often very weak; the writers presented multiple ideas within one paragraph; therefore, the main focus for any paragraph was not clear; few, if any, transitions were correctly used to convey relationships among ideas; the writers shifted topics or digressed from the topic; the writers used few cohesive ties such as reference, repetition, etc. to link sentences and/or paragraphs together. Further complicating the matter, the writers made numerous mechanical and/or grammatical errors, resulting in interruption of the reading process and an uneven discourse flow.

In contrast, in the final exam writing, as can be seen in Figure 5 above, most of the participants' essays were rated as better written after they had received training related to coherent writing, but their writing skills were not conspicuously enhanced as a whole. In other words, there was still much room for improvement in the areas of central focus, organization, development of ideas, use of reference, accurate use of transitions,

etc. Only two among the six participants stand out as getting consistent “3” ratings. To be more specific, Lili and Xiaohui demonstrated a relatively wide range of explicit organizational devices at both paragraph and whole discourse levels that could help readers to make some integration of the text into a coherent whole; an organizational structure was evident and competently supported the writers’ central focus and the clarity of ideas. These two writers also showed competent control in most sentences to support the clarity of ideas; effective cohesive devices such as sentence adverbs and conjunctions were usually used to convey relationships among ideas. At the other extreme, the least successful participants still used a basic or uneven organizational structure that only sometimes supported their central focus. These writers obviously needed more work in creating a well-designed organizational plan, improving skills for idea development, as well as providing sufficient evidence that can clearly support the topic. For these students, areas such as the logical progression of ideas, appropriate use of transitions, as well as pronouns of reference, still needed reinforcement if they are to feel comfortable with Western expectations in this area. To them, this may suggest that arduous is the path to rewire their brains to learn. The participants’ writings will be discussed in some detail in the following section.

### **Case Study on Writing Analysis: Summary and Short Discussion**

In this section, I present an account of what happened to each of the six participant’s writings over the course of the semester. In the first part of the analysis, I made a summary of each text the participant wrote to provide an overview; I then worked out some ideas about the student’s problems related to coherent writing, including the change of strategies or forms in the participant’s writing over the term. Finally, I

analyzed the elements in the writings that might be traced specifically to either Western or Chinese rhetorical traditions.

Before we move further, to have a clear idea of what the students were required to write during the semester, as I explained in the section *Qualitative Coding for Written Texts* in Chapter 3, again I will present a brief introduction to the three types of essays the participants wrote.

### **The Diagnostic Essay**

The diagnostic essay was written in the first day of the class meeting was an in-class pre-test that measured students' ability to write a college-level essay. Students were given a community-based question, which described a situation involving a choice between two alternatives (see Appendix E). The prompt asked the student to choose one alternative and try to persuade the reader why his/her choice was the best one.

### **The In-class Exercise/The CATW Practice Essay**

The in-class exercise is a 90-minute timed essay, aiming at writing CATW practice essays introduced in Chapter 3. Put differently, the students had to complete the in-class essay in 90 minutes responding to the ideas a passage presented. The CATW basically consists of three writing tasks: 1) summarize the passage students were given by stating the author's most important ideas; 2) choose a significant idea from the passage as a central focus of the entire essay; and 3) support the significant idea with evidence or examples drawn from the student's reading, schoolwork, or personal experience. Using exercises such as this during the semester, the instructor was training students to write a college-level essay while preparing them for the CATW exam that occurred at the end of the semester.

Following the writing assessment analytic scoring rubric illustrated in the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing: Student Handbook (2010), in evaluating students' essays, the instructor focused on six elements of their writing: 1) critical response to writing task and the text; 2) development of writer's ideas; 3) structure of the response; 4) language use: sentence forms and word choices; and 5) language use (grammar, usage, and mechanics). To improve students' skills in those five domains, the instructor had students write multiple CATW practice essays in response to different reading passages.

For the purpose of this study, I collected one timed essay completed in class from each participant, including a revised essay based on the 90-minute timed essay. The revised one was completed at home without time limit. It is necessary to mention that unlike the in-class timed essay in which the students wrote under pressure, when students are writing essays as regular homework assignments or revising their drafts, like many other fellow students, the participants may get help from tutoring at the Departmental Learning Center introduced in Chapter 3. Especially, for students who still struggle with basic writing skills, tutors will assist them to improve English proficiency, including grammar, critical thinking skills, and even reading comprehension.

The participants wrote this particular in-class CATW practice essay within 90 minutes in response to a reading passage entitled "Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash" (see Appendix G). In particular, in preparing for the CATW exam, the instructor asked her students to follow her guidelines (see Appendix G), indicating that students should be careful to write

- (1) an introduction that contains a summary and a thesis;
- (2) two body paragraphs, each of which:



- a. begins with a topic sentence, which contains the thesis and one point the student plans to discuss in the paragraph;
  - b. contains approximate 8-10 sentences of supporting details that must a) directly relate to the thesis and the point the student is making, b) refer back to the article about three times, and c) use appropriate transition words and vocabulary;
- (3) a conclusion that summarizes what the student write in one or two sentences;
- (4) Students' vocabulary and grammar must also be accurate.

### **The Final Exam Essay**

The final exam essay asked students to show their competency in the five CATW assessment categories mentioned above. The skills taught throughout the semester were reflected in the final exam, which asked students to write an essay in response to a reading passage they chose, including “Achieving a Healthful Digital Diet” (see Appendix H), “Is Multitasking Productive?” (see Appendix I), and “No Junk Food in Schools! (see Appendix J).

In what follows, I conducted the participants' writing analysis using *Features of Cohesion and Coherence* (see Appendix A) in the following order: Lili, Weishan, Yiman, Xiaohui, Gaofeng, and Hong. A total of four essays from each participant were analyzed: the diagnostic essay, two drafts of the in-class exercise, and the final exam essay. Each essay consists of two parts: Part One: Overview; Part Two: A Brief Discussion. I first presented an overview of each essay, and then I conducted a brief discussion of the essay. Finally, I addressed the in-class timed essay as presenting some problems.

## **Lili Sun**

### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

For the diagnostic essay written in the first class meeting, Lili chose the topic of “Not to Have Children or Have One Child Only vs. To Have a Large Family” (see Appendix E). In her introductory paragraph, Lili claimed that she “would prefer to have a larger family rather than having only one child or none.” Then she proceeded to support her point by saying that children in a bigger family would have more siblings, so they would not feel lonely. She went on to explain in the second body paragraph that children with siblings could learn how to share things with brothers or sisters, thereby also learning how to cope with disputes.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

While the essay took a position on the issue defined in the prompt, and each of the two body paragraphs contained a topic sentence that appeared to provide the reader with direction, it demonstrated significant problems in several areas, making Lili’s ideas often hard to follow. In the introductory paragraph below, Lili wrote

The age of the population in the world nowadays, is getting more older than past twenty years. With the medical technology is developed rapidly, there are much more elders can survive in this era. However, there is another reason that causes this problem, which is more people choose to have only one child or even not have children. Because they think they are too busy building a career or having an education to take care for a family. As my aspect, I would prefer to have a larger family rather than having only one child or more.

This introduction did not seem to provide relevant background information on the topic: “to have only one child or to have a large family,” even though Lili attempted to present an overview. There was hardly any logical connection drawn between the survival of elders and the preference of having only one child. This reminds us that as a cultural trend, many Chinese writers prefer to first provide an elaborate context that is not related to the theme (Mao, 2005). This is clearly a pattern found in many Chinese writings, but one that is seen as lack of paragraph unity in English (Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008). In the introduction, Lili also failed to introduce the two sides of the issue clearly presented in the prompt while presenting background information, thus leaving the reader in the dark on this topic.

Moreover, looking at the later sections of the essay, although simple transition words such as “First of all,” “Furthermore,” and “In conclusion” were used to connect each paragraph, the relationships among ideas were unclear later, as they were in the introduction. Finally, while the essay had an introduction, a body, and a conclusion that could be traced to Western rhetoric, support was minimal, especially in the second body paragraph. Lili failed to offer enough evidence or detailed examples to explain her point, that children with siblings could learn how to share things with brothers or sisters. In addition, a pattern of errors in usage and sentence structure significantly interfered with understanding the writer’s ideas. For example, toward the end of the paragraph, when she stated “As my aspect,” it seemed to be an ungrammatical transition, which was intended as a cohesive device but was hard to follow and could trip up a reader. Generally, when the development of ideas is inadequate and unclear, an essay will not be judged coherent.

Of course, all of the problems discussed above resulted in writing that was seen as incoherent.

## 2. The In-class Exercise

### *a) The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

In response to the passage “Going on a diet? Start Paying in Cash” (see Appendix G), Lili first summarized the key ideas found in the reading passage, and then she identified one significant idea from the article in the end of the summary paragraph, saying that “paying with credit or debit cards lead people to be more likely making impulsive, vice food purchases than paying with cash.” After that, Lili explained why she felt that idea she had chosen was so significant. As she indicated in the first body paragraph, when using credit card or debit cards, it was easier to make impulsive, unhealthy food purchases than using cash because there was usually no limit while paying with credit or debit cards. Toward the end of the body paragraph, Lili used a transition word “Clearly” to briefly summarize the paragraph. When moving to the second body paragraph, Lili pointed out that “paying with credit or debit cards will lead buyers to be impulsive, and spend more money on unhealthy food products easily because the ‘pain of payment’ keeps bills much lower when paying with cash.” She supported both her body paragraphs with examples. However, because Lili ran out of time, the second body paragraph was left unfinished, and the essay, as a result, did not have a concluding paragraph. In considering this, coherence is flawed by the unfinished essay because the reader may view an unfinished essay as pointless.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

As explained earlier, the diagnostic essay was the first essay students wrote on their own at the very beginning of the semester. During the term, after the diagnostic essay, while writing CATW practice essays, Lili followed the writing directions or writing tips provided by the instructor (see Appendix G): an introduction containing a summary and a thesis at the end of the introduction, followed by two body paragraphs beginning with a topic sentence that contains the thesis and the one point the writer plans to discuss in the paragraph; followed by supporting details directly relating to the thesis and the point the writer is making, and a conclusion summarizing what was written.

For the in-class practice essays, the instructor briefly wrote her comments and suggestions about each piece of writing. In the first in-class draft, Lili demonstrated a good understanding of the main ideas in the reading passage by discussing the advantages of using cash instead of credit cards to control shopping behaviors and to stop buying unnecessary items. She also drew upon a variety of personal resources to evaluate and extend the argument in the article. For instance, she spoke of her personal shopping experience in exercising impulse control at a Target store by paying in cash, in comparison with her cousin's failure to control impulsive purchases when paying with credit. She provided additional evidence, citing her mom's experiences curbing impulsive urges in a supermarket by paying in cash. Therefore, the development of Lili's ideas was detailed and relevant to the central focus of the essay. In a well-designed progression, Lili moved from a summary of the drawbacks to paying with credit or debit cards, to more extensive ideas with her discussion of personal experiences and observations. Transitions such as "furthermore," "therefore," "however," "clearly,"

“secondly, consequently,” etc. used in Lili’s essay clearly conveyed relationships among ideas throughout the essay, as, for example, the transition from the introductory paragraph to the second and to the third paragraph.

Granted that we see the use of many above-mentioned elements contributing to coherence as a consequence of receiving training in the American writing classroom, Lili still showed some weaknesses in smooth connections between sentences. For example, in the first body paragraph, Lili said,

“Although the cash she [my cousin] had couldn’t afford [cover] what she bought, she had a credit card that could pay [paid] for all the stuff. [However,] [w]hen we got home, she felt regret[ful], and had no idea why she bought so many unnecessary things.”

In the example above, Lili missed the conjunctive adverb “However,” though this could be the only place in her essay in which a necessary transition was found missing.

However, recall that such transitions are often seen as superfluous in Chinese writing, where readers are expected to understand meaning connections from context (Xing, Wang, & Spencer, 2008; Hinds, 1987) without the use of the conjunctive adverbs like “however” to follow a concession. In contrast, English writers are more likely to use such links to provide explicit information about the relationship between the two sentences. An important Western idea about coherence emphasizes such overt sentence connections as is a reflection of logical progression of ideas.

Besides, as we can see in the following example taken from Lili’s second body paragraph, she used a comma rather than a cohesive tie when two independent clauses were joined.

However, when she [my mom] walked to the cashier, she saw the total was higher than she expected. [Since] [m]My mom didn't bring any card with her, she had to pay with cash.

As a grammar rule in English writing, a comma cannot be used to join two independent clauses. To clarify the relationship between ideas, two clauses can be joined with a certain cohesive tie that best expresses the relationship between the two clauses in a sentence. When a cohesive tie “since” is added to the sentence *Since my mom didn't bring any card with her, she had to pay with cash*, the two clauses clearly relate to each other in a cause-effect relationship between ideas, and the meaning is therefore fully expressed.

In Chinese writing, sentence pairs can often be simply separated by commas; relationships are often implied rather than expressed lexically when they are understood from context, a concept that may not make much sense to an English reader (Wang, 2008). This characteristic can be traced to the fact that Chinese is a *paratactic* language, which considers surface linking forms optional, in contrast to a *hypotactic* language like English (Yu, 1993; Jiang, 2007), which makes rich use of cohesive ties to show relationships between clauses. Since cohesive ties are optional in Chinese, it seems that Lili simply transfers her Chinese pattern into English. However, as she develops more writing skills, she will use cohesive ties more effectively to tie a text together and facilitate comprehension (Canagarajah, 2002).

#### b) *The Second Draft*

As Lili felt she had done a good job in writing her first draft, she only made a few minor revisions regarding word choice, tense, and usage when composing the second

draft. In her revision, she completed the second body paragraph as well as the concluding paragraph. It is worth pointing out that, as in the first body paragraph, Lili finished her second body paragraph with a conclusion introduced by the word “Consequently.” In the concluding paragraph, she briefly summarized what had been discussed and brought the essay back to the central image of the passage, thus making the writing unified and allowing the reader to piece together ideas into a logically coherent whole.

### 3. The Final Exam Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

This is the last essay Lili wrote as her final exam for the semester. She chose the passage “Achieving a Healthful Digital Diet” (see Appendix H) as her topic. Pointing out that people should not consume too many empty digital calories, Lili summarized several major details found in the passage. At the end of the summary Lili stated that “it was crucial that younger children should not be entertained with screens provided by their parents.” To create smooth transitions, Lili used “First of all” and “Another reason...” to introduce a topic sentence for each body paragraph. She then proceeded to offer detailed personal examples to back up her claims advanced in the topic sentences. While explaining her reasons and supporting her discussion, Lili also paraphrased or quoted the author’s short sentences that supported her thesis. She finished each of her two body paragraphs with a summary sentence, which was again introduced by a transition word such as “Clearly” and “Therefore.” After developing her ideas, she restated her thesis and highlighted the two reasons she explained in the body paragraphs, leading in with the transition “In conclusion” at the beginning of the concluding paragraph.



*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Consistent with what Lili had done since the beginning of the semester, the final exam essay continued to follow the professor's writing guidelines shown in Appendix G. However, because of the absence of background information, Lili's entire introduction was confusing at best:

According to the author of the "Achieving a Healthful Digital Diet," people should limit their time consuming too much empty digital calories. Moreover, especially children must be supervised by their parents to see if a website or game had clear educational value. Also, limiting multitasking and entertainment while studying is important. Therefore, some experts suggested to focus on the example set by parents. In my opinion, I think it is crucial that younger children should not be entertained with screens provided by their parents.

Instead of orienting the reader to the situation by expressing people's concern about constant dependence on the Internet and other digital technology that detract from our time with family and friends in the real world, the introduction failed to explain the intricacies that were clarified in the reading passage's introduction, so a lack of basic background information left the reader wondering what the writer was specifically trying to say. To put it more bluntly, one cannot start off writing an essay before telling the reader what makes the writer write this essay. This significant phase motivates the reader to read the essay further. Compared with Lili's first day diagnostic essay, which had also failed to include background information, her final exam essay once again did not provide the reader with the necessary introductory information which could properly acquaint the reader with the topic. Even though there is no need to add facts, examples, or

graphs in the introduction, this orienting move is necessary to lead a reader into the writer's topic. Since it is essential in English to keep in mind the expectations of the reader, background information in the introduction is part of what makes a text coherent. According to Bamberg (1983), good writers are able to take the reader's perspective from the beginning and produce coherent essays.

In addition, the transition words such as "moreover" and "also" within the introduction were unclearly used because they were not used accurately to convey relationships among ideas. While Lili made the new sentence relate to the previous one in a superficial way, the statements she made in the introduction were not judiciously connected. Lili might take it for granted that as long as she added transition words such as *moreover* and *also*, she would be able to create a smooth connection from one written idea to the next. To understand the difficulty of achieving coherence in writing, it is helpful to know that this kind of problem is common for English-speaking students as well, and they also have difficulties with coherence and cohesive ties. Seen this way, inclusion of transition words without paying attention to the logical progression of ideas is not sufficient to make the text coherent (Bamberg, 1983; Connor, 1984; Connor & Johns, 1990).

Additionally, once again language difficulties lead to potential lapses in perceived coherence. For instance, pronouns of reference were not accurately used in several places. As shown in Lili's first body paragraph, for example, "Parents should not give their children the media *devices* for entertainment, because *it* will restrict their interaction with other people." In the sentence, *devices* is the antecedent *it*. Since *devices* is plural, the pronoun referring to *devices* must also be plural. Hence, the pronoun *it* in the sentence

does not agree with its antecedent in number. Such problems with local-level coherence interfere with the reader's attempt to integrate details into a coherent whole. Likewise, lexical problems could be found; for instance, it is not clear what it would mean for children to be "entertained with screens" provided by parents. Additionally, the unclear transition words "As my aspect" could have the opposite effect. During subsequent interviews, Lili clarified what the expression "As my aspect" meant. In her own words, "It [As in my aspect] means in my opinion." Therefore, while the ungrammatical transition is intended as a cohesion device, in this case it is hard to follow and can trip up a reader.

Later in the essay, Lili produced two strong body paragraphs in terms of coherence. The personal examples Lili gave not only described a situation and drew a background picture as to what was taking place, but also related directly to the reasons Lili was discussing in each body paragraph. Since divergent details were not found, Lili's overall point of view (younger children should not be entertained with digital technology devices by their parents) was easily identifiable and clear. It is also worth noticing that, while using combined patterns such as summary, cause/effect, contrast, example, addition, and concession, Lili applied obvious and correct transitional devices in the body paragraphs that assisted the reader to process the information and helped the reader follow the flow of her ideas. Finally, while the conclusion was somewhat brief, it was clear and appropriate.

As seen from above, while using transition words to help the reader understand the relationships of ideas, Lili sometimes used them appropriately, but sometimes could not use them correctly (judged from the standards set in this course) as reflected in her

introductory paragraph, which reveals that Lili still lacks strong basic skills for using transition words.

## **Weishan Qian**

### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

In his diagnostic essay, Weishan selected the topic of “Not to Have Children or Have One Child Only vs. To Have a Large Family.” As he first stated in the introduction, many people did not want to have children or to just have one child. He took a stand at the end of the introduction, saying that “there are many reasons that people don’t want a child. He supported his position by giving an example in the first body paragraph, stating that young college students were too busy studying to have any children. Following that, he proceeded to give another example in the second body paragraph illustrating that a bus driver in a travel company was working so hard that he/she simply didn’t have time to have a child. He began his third very short body paragraph by claiming that “although many people are choosing not to have children, some of them like to have many kids in their family, because they think nothing is important family.” In his conclusion, he restated some of the essay’s contents.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

While Weishan was asked to think about both sides of an issue (i.e. one child only or a large family) presented in the prompt and then choose one side he agreed with, he did not state the two sides of the issue as expected, thereby failing to include enough background information to make the context clear for the reader. Furthermore, no

transition words were used in the introduction to help the reader identify the relationships among ideas.

To back up his thesis “there are many reasons that people don’t want a child” stated in the introduction, Weishan began his first body paragraph by saying “First, for example, the students in college.” With Weishan’s thesis in mind, the reader expect that the supporting paragraph is likely to offer a strong reason to support the thesis and clarify development for the thesis. Unexpectedly, instead of stating a reason, Weishan began the supporting paragraph with “for example” in a form of a sentence fragment, which was quite distracting to the reader. In most cases, the phrase “for example” can be used to begin a sentence once the topic under discussion has already been sufficiently identified. Therefore, “for example” usually follows a point raised and provides further clarification or proof. Secondly, since the reader generally looks to the first few sentences in a paragraph to determine the subject and perspective of the paragraph, with the absence of a topic sentence in the paragraph, the reader may not have clear expectations about what will follow. Moreover, the entire paragraph was comprised of random sentences, and obviously, there was not a clear focus in the paragraph.

Likewise, in an attempt to explain why people don’t want children, Weishan began his second body paragraph with another fragment, an example of a bus driver. As he wrote, “second, another example for a businessman who work in a travel company, and he is a bus driver.” Again, Weishan did not have a topic sentence for his new paragraph. Additionally, ideas in this four-sentence paragraph were not adequately explained and supported through convincing evidence.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese rhetoric views the topic-first structure as aggressive, so placing the main idea before supporting details violates a Chinese reader's expectation (Chu, Swaffar, and Charney, 2002). According to the Background Questionnaire, Weishan attended junior high and high school in New York; however, he was brought up and nurtured in Chinese culture. In particular, Chinese values from his Chinese family environment have arguably exerted a subtle but considerable impact on him. Since it is an important cultural value for Chinese people to avoid being straightforward, it is not surprising to see that he has written a paragraph without a topic sentence. It is possible that deep down, Weishan was not even aware of the need to write a topic sentence to reveal the main point of a paragraph and to show the relationship of the paragraph to his essay's thesis. Obviously, Weishan's style of writing is pretty much writer-based, which is not uncommon in Chinese culture. In contrast, English readers generally look to the first few sentences in a paragraph to determine the subject and perspective of the paragraph. In Western views, the writer needs to take into consideration the reader's expectations, which is an essential part of what makes a text coherent (Bamberg, 1983). Admittedly, topic sentences are particularly useful for a developmental writer like Weishan who has difficulty developing focused, unified paragraphs.

The third body paragraph was under-developed, containing three sentences at most, including fragments and a comma splice. While trying to develop his ideas by providing the reader with more evidence, Weishan actually created contradictory statements:

Although many people are choosing not to have children, some of them like to have many kids in their family. Because they think nothing is important than family. They enjoy to have a lot of kids and when they grow up they can get rewards from their kids.

According to Western rhetorical traditions, since Weishan chose to support a family with one child only, or even no children at all, his idea should be consistent with that position throughout the entire essay. However, Weishan went against what he stated previously and changed his ideas. He claimed that some people also enjoyed having many children because their children could take care of them when they grew old. Clearly, an English reader may view this as an off-topic claim. In Western rhetoric, digressive or contradictory statements in an argumentative paragraph should be avoided in order to achieve unity and create coherence in writing. In contrast, coherence in Chinese ideas goes the other way around. Under the influence of Chinese culture and rhetoric, this combination of two seemingly opposing views is acceptable. Understood this way, it is quite clear that Weishan agreed with both sides of the issue. This practice can be traced back to the Confucian philosophy of *Zhongyong* and the *Yin-Yang* theory discussed in Chapter 2, which advise people not to go to extremes in judging between good and bad. Accordingly, it is up to the reader to decide which side to follow; it is not the writer's responsibility to take a clear, strong position.

Finally, Weishan seemed to struggle with the production of words, phrases, and sentences. Quite a few fragments and usage errors in the essay did affect the understanding of the essay and gave the reader no help in integrating them into a coherent

whole; even though grammatical errors were not usually considered in theoretical discussions of coherence, they surfaced repeatedly in the data from the present study.

## 2. The In-class Exercise

### *a) The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Weishan wrote his in-class essay in response to the passage “Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash.” In his opening paragraph, Weishan “summarized” several key points discussed in the passage. He first stated that people wasted more money and bought more junk food while using credit cards or debit cards. He then moved on to say that researchers had learned that people spent more money when they used credit cards or debit cards. After that, he added that according to research, people were likely to purchase unhealthy food when they used credit cards or debit cards. He continued to point out that since paying with cash created the pain of payment, it could reduce the chance of purchasing junk food. In the end, he identified one important idea from the passage as the thesis of the essay, asserting that paying with cash could control people’s impulsive purchases and keep them from wasting money.

Weishan then went on to explain why that idea was significant, saying that “paying with cash can control the impulse of purchasing [impulsive food purchases] instead of wasting money because people can experience the pain of payment.” To support the topic sentence, he used an example of how his brother saved five hundred dollars toward the end of the week by paying with cash. Weishan is exaggerating here. It could make more sense if he would say “saved fifty dollars.” In his second body paragraph, he further stated that “paying with cash can control the impulse of purchasing



instead of wasting money because they [customers] have to think twice before they act.” To provide evidence, this time he used an example of how his sister avoided wasting money on unhealthy food while using cash.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Due to the training Weishan had received in the writing classroom, he began to use stated topic sentences for his body paragraphs as shown above. Compared with the relative dearth of connectives in his diagnostic essay, Weishan had also learned to use more cohesive ties to show the relationships among ideas in his in-class essay; these included “in addition,” “also,” “furthermore,” “in fact,” “as a result,” “according to,” “in contrast,” and “in conclusion.” While this may be true, he still had some difficulty using transitions judiciously and accurately. For example, he wrote in the first body paragraph,

After a week, he realized that he had save[d] five hundreds dollar[s] in a week compare[d] to when he had a credit card on hand. *On the other hand* [According to the passage], paying with cash can save [a] huge amount of money because they are experiencing the pain when they are paying with dollar bills.

Weishan had been discussing how paying cash could help people avoid over-shopping. As shown above, the transitional phrase *on the other hand* should be used to introduce an opposite idea. But here, rather than contrasting ideas, Weishan was actually restating the idea exemplified in his example: “paying with cash can save [a] huge amount of money.” From the context, “According to the passage” was just the right fit. Therefore, the transition *on the other hand* functioned as a misleading cue.

In addition to the inaccurate use of transition words, Weishan confused the cause and effect relationship identified in the following:

Paying with cash can control the impulsive of purchasing instead of wasting money *because they have to think twice before they act*. According to article, researchers showed people are more likely to purchase unhealthy foods when they are using a credit or debit card. For example, my sister purchased a lot of snacks without consideration when she paid with credit card. In contrast, when she purchased snacks with cash, she had to worry so much such as, health problems, calories and the expire date. As a result, she can purchase the foods that she is need when she is using cash instead of wasting money on vice products.

According to Weishan, cash purchases are preferable “*because [shoppers] have to think twice before they act*.” In the sentence, the *because clause* creates an unclear reason that does not explain why or how paying with cash could control impulsive and unhealthy food purchases. The causal conclusion was drawn without adequate justification.

Weishan confused the cause with the effect, thereby failing to provide a strong or valid reason for his second body paragraph.

Moreover, this essay contained a great deal of repetition. In particular, Weishan did a poor summary because he circled around and around talking about the same thing, providing a “summary” that only contained the main idea of the reading passage. Again, in the second body paragraph Weishan used almost the same exact example as in body 1, except it was his sister who served as an example this time, instead of his brother.

Engaging in a pattern of repetition would not help the reader organize a text into a coherent whole.

## b) *The Second Draft*

Writing is about rewriting. Revision allows a student to go back and retool his/her essay, adjusting it for clarity as well as coherence. As Bamberg (1983) notes, students in their first drafting cannot always take the reader's perspective, but they can revise their initial drafts into coherent essays.

As pointed out by the instructor on the first draft, "Body 2 does not give a reason. It provides a fact which is a supporting detail. Then your details in body 2 are almost identical to body 1." With the help of the instructor, Weishan made significant revisions so as to meet the needs of readers. In addition to a change of the reason previously written in body 2, he also rewrote the example in body 2 to avoid repetition, including some other revisions made on words and sentence structures. Consequently, Weishan used this specific instructor's feedback to turn his essay into a more coherent piece.

## 3. The Final Exam Essay

### *Part One: An Overview*

Weishan chose the passage "Is Multitasking Productive?" (see Appendix I) to write his response in his final exam essay. Pointing out that people could not perform well when they did many activities at the same time, Weishan used a couple of connectives to join several major points found in the passage and briefly summarized the passage. He then took a position, contending that humans could not handle multitasking perfectly.

The first reason why humans could not handle multitasking perfectly was that, according to Weishan, humans could not concentrate on more than one activity at the same time, which was illustrated by an example of his fellow ESL student who failed to

complete his homework assignments while listening to music at the same time. Another reason he used in body 2 for supporting the thesis, which was a bit too close to the first reason, was that doing many activities at the same time would overwhelm the brain. By showing why Peter failed two final exams in math and accounting during the same day, he attempted to prove how the pressure from the two tasks, which occurred one after another, caused Peter's brain to malfunction.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

While the opening paragraph provided a satisfactory introduction, the weak use of transitions such as "in addition" and "also" within the introduction served to weaken the entire introduction because the writing did not move reasonably or logically from one idea to the other.

Overall, the organization of this piece was generally clear enough, and the essay could be read without difficulty. Weishan also showed an attempt to create a central focus and to put the related ideas together, but support for the central focus was a bit weak as a consequence of more or less similar supporting reasons, which not only confused the reader but also weakened the essay.

Another point to stress is that, again, Weishan had difficulty choosing pronouns that linked clearly with their antecedents, as shown in the following example: "humans cannot concentrate on more than one activity, because *it* with [will] create a conflict between activities." It was unclear what the pronoun *it* referred to. Other examples of misuse of pronouns of reference were identified in several places.

Looking back, from the time when he first took the diagnostic essay exam to in-class practice and finally the writing of the final exam essay, Weishan's writing skills,

undoubtedly, improved, even though his writing still shows many problems related to coherence. At the beginning, he displayed such problems as relative lack of transitions, absence of topic sentences, contradictory statements and shift in focus, thin development, numerous fragments, repetition of information, and overlapping of supporting materials. After one semester's training, he began to use the following in his essay writing: a thesis statement, stated topic sentences, and an obvious organizational pattern, as well as the use of transitions. These are all cues that can help the reader organize the details into a coherent whole, even though Weishan still has much room for improvement in his use of these elements.

### **Yiman Zhao**

#### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

##### *Part One: An Overview*

Addressing the prompt, "Not to Have Children or Have One Child Only vs. To Have a Large Family," Yiman preferred the idea of having more children; at the end of the opening paragraph he claimed that "To have a big family is a good way to have happiness. He then analyzed the disadvantages of having no children in the first body paragraph. The second body paragraph discussed the drawbacks of the one child family. The third body paragraph focused on the benefits of a big family, since "The big family is the best choice," according to Yiman. The concluding paragraph was left unfinished because he ran out of time.

##### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

This essay showed a failed attempt to engage the issue defined in the prompt. Unclear connectedness in ideas, lack of unity in the whole piece, misuse of transitions,

and problems in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure were so severe as to make Yiman's ideas very difficult to follow. Specifically, the introduction gave no overview. While relevant background information and clear context were absent, Yiman did take a position in the end of the introduction by arguing, "To have a big family is a good way to have happiness."

However, instead of giving evidence to back up the central focus he just advanced, Yiman made an off-topic claim in his first body paragraph. He stated that "If they [parents] don't have a child, they will not learn how to take a good care of children." This claim had unclear logical relationship to the topic of *happiness of a big family* as stated by Yiman, and was therefore straying from the point. The reader may also ask: why would anyone need child-raising skills if they do not have children or do not plan to have them? It is not hard to discern, from the perspective of Chinese dialectical thinking discussed in the section *Dialectical Thinking* in Chapter 2, that Yiman thought holistically and applied his Chinese strategy of approaching the topic from multiple perspectives.

The third body paragraph tried to make a valid point; that is, a large family is more interesting; but again, multiple ideas were identified, as shown in the following:

Finally, The big family is the best choice. Families come together will be very happy. The family can take themselves things in pass weeks. The more people in a family make more exciting. For example. My aunt has a big family. She has three son and two grand children. Every time we come to a couple's wedding, they get enough people sit in a ten people's table. That is so meaningful. The

marriage family will thing my aunt take more serious than other people do. Also, her son are good education, because the have positive compare with each other.

In the paragraph, there were three ideas, but only one supported the thesis:

- a) Big family is interesting (good)
- b) Aunt has enough family to fill a large table (not good, example is not touted for the positive feature cited)
- c) Cousins have good education (not good, irrelevant)

While the sentences were written in paragraph form, they did not seem to connect well with one another. They lacked unity because each sentence discussed a different idea. They also lacked coherence because the sentences did not follow logically into one another. The example of Yiman's writing containing multiple ideas in one paragraph is again reminiscent of the Chinese "holistic" thinking strategies (Zhao, 1999; Li, 2005; Zhang, 2009) analyzed in the section *Dialectical Thinking* in Chapter 2, in contrast to the Western linear approach to a problem, as claimed in Kaplan's early work (Kaplan, 1966). Since the Chinese are used to synthesizing diverse elements into a unit while emphasizing the whole, many different ideas can be mentioned within one paragraph (Xing, Wang, & Spencer (2008). Yiman's practice would fit solidly into the Chinese rhetorical tradition, while it may lead to confusing writing in English.

## 2. The In-class Exercise

### a) *The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

In response to the passage "Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash," Yiman created a satisfactory summary by first stating the main idea "Consumers who are paying

with credit or debit cards, [are] more likely to purchases an unhealthy food.” He then proceeded to state the key points presented in the passage. Finally, Yiman identified one idea in the passage that he felt significant and claimed that “I think the most important point is paying with credit or debit cards can cause consumers purchase and eat more unhealthy products.”

To explain its significance, Yiman began with a topic sentence “Paying with credit or debit cards can cause consumers [to] purchase more unhealthy products because those products are not as expensive as a TV.” He supported his claim by using an example of his mother who purchased a lot of junk food while paying with credit. After that, he moved on to the second body paragraph, indicating that “Paying with credit or debit cards can cause consumers [to] to eat more unhealthy food...” Owing to time limit, he had to stop writing, so his essay was not completed.

### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

In his first draft completed in class, incoherence was identified in the following areas:

a) Yiman repeated the thesis “Paying with credit or debit cards can cause consumers eat more unhealthy food” throughout his unfinished 275-word essay in almost exactly the same words five times. Repetition of thesis over and over again can be very distracting and even irritating to an English reader.

b) Transition words were incorrectly used. For example,

“...paying with credit cards can allow people to spend a big amount of money because consumers feel that the hardship comes from handing cash over to pay



[for] it. *However* [Moreover], consumers are most likely to purchase on junk food or unhealthy products with credit or debit cards...”

Instead of using “moreover” or “in addition” to introduce an additional idea, Yiman confused the reader by incorrectly using “however.” He could not identify the logical relationship from sentence to sentence. He was confused about when he should use a transition to add a similar idea and when he should use a transition to show contrast between ideas. Clearly, Yiman had difficulty creating coherence through a judicious use of “however” to signify the logical connection between these two sentences.

c) Off-topic claims repeatedly occurred. Consider the following examples:

1. As mentioned in the topic sentence, his assertion “Paying with credit...because those products are not as expensive as a TV” was off topic because this statement did not have much to do with the thesis *paying with credit can cause consumers to purchase more unhealthy foods*.
2. “In the article, the author finds that consumers who shopped with larger baskets are also [also make] purchase of unhealthy products.” This was another example to show his off-topic claim because the idea of *shopping with larger baskets is likely to make impulsive purchase of vice products* was not thematically related to the topic.

The above digressive claims can be very incoherent to a Western reader (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Connor, 1996; Timmann, 2003). Interestingly, as the Chinese tradition allows a “discursive” writing style (Erbaugh, 1990; Liu & Zhou, 2004), where readers are expected to infer the connections on their own (Mao, 2005), such diversity is fairly acceptable in Chinese writing.

b) *The Second Draft*

*Part One: An Overview*

Following the instructor's concise comments on his off-topic claims, Yiman revised his in-class writing. Generally, this second draft was much better than the first one in terms of sophisticated word choice and sentence structure, possibly due to help given to him, even though the organizational structure remained the same.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Compared with that of the first draft, Yiman changed his thesis a little bit, noting that "I think the most important point is paying with credit or debit cards not only can cause consumers to spend more money, but also purchase more unhealthy products." This thesis suggested an obvious path for development, and two following paragraphs would logically discuss 1) spend more money, 2) purchase more unhealthy products. Yiman, however, by starting with "purchase more unhealthy products" and then going on to discuss "spend more money," switched the order of his points while developing the paragraphs, which violated an English reader's expectations..

Unlike the irrelevant anecdotes presented in his previous writing, the anecdote of his mom's shopping experience, which he used in the second draft, showed that his sense of anecdote relevance improved because this detail supported the claim made in the topic sentence, and the paragraph "hangs together" in a way that was easy for the reader to understand.

When Yiman developed the second body paragraph from the topic sentence "Paying with cards usually lead to more spending than in paying in cash because of the

absence of the psychological effect---pain of payment,” he slipped back into the “old” way of creating multiple ideas in one paragraph. Here is the evidence for other claims:

1. Useless things—“No one likes to give away and squander their money so easily on *something useless* or never use again.”
2. Things that people cannot afford--- “[Paying with credit] not only trick people to buy more useless and extra things than they need, but also allows people to purchase *things that they cannot afford* at the moment.”

As can be seen in the above examples, like many other Chinese writers, Yiman continued to seek a broad range of factors not directly tied to the immediate paragraph topic and adopted an approach to nonlinear development of ideas (Ji, Peng, & Nisbett, 2000; Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

Regarding logical progression of ideas, the second draft revealed a clear plan with some smooth progression of ideas. Transitions like “moreover,” “as a result,” “as expected,” “according to,” and “however” were accurately used as a result of the training Yiman was receiving in his writing course, and perhaps because of tutoring if he sought help with his revision in the Departmental Learning Center.

### 3. The Final Exam Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Yiman used the article “No Junk Food in Schools!” (see Appendix J) for his final exam. While summarizing the key points from the reading passage, he pointed out that legislation had been proposed to prohibit junk food from being served in school. As a result, he believed that children should have better and healthier food choices at school.

He went on to claim in the supporting paragraph that when children had better and

healthier food choices at school, they would avoid the risk of disease. In another paragraph, he also maintained that “children should have better and healthier food choices because children and their parents do not have knowledge about the bad effect from junk food.” He concluded the essay by briefly restating what had been discussed in the essay.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

As required in the Writing Directions (see Appendix G), when summarizing the passage, students were to just state the author’s most important ideas rather than adding their own opinions. In considering this, Yiman did not provide a satisfactory summary for the following reasons:

1. Yiman included some information the article did not say, which was deemed off-topic.
2. The entire introduction lacked clarity. Word choice was often unclear and often obscured meaning. For example, as Yiman contended, “The law proposes to prohibit junk food from being serves in school.” Here, “The law proposes...” was vague and damaged the effect of a meaningful introduction. Another example is “...the law believes a healthy eating habit can reduce children’s obesity.” Again, the meaning was obscure because a law cannot believe something, though one can say “lawmakers believe...”

Also, in the first supporting paragraph, sentence structures were confusing to the reader because subordinating conjunctions were absent. For example,

1. “[When] Children have better and healthy [healthier] food choices [at school, they] will get away from the risk of [developing] diseases.”
2. “[If] Schools ban unhealthy food [, children] will reduce children [‘s] obesity.”

For one thing, Yiman’s first sentence simply followed the typical Chinese topic-comment sentence structure discussed in the section *Topic-prominent vs. Subject-prominent* in Chapter 2. Mandarin Chinese is a language in which the subject is not a structurally definable notion and is often hidden as long as the meaning is clear to the Chinese reader. The topic-comment sentence is a very productive structure in Chinese. Again, consider Yiman’s sentence:

Children have better and healthy food choices will get away from the risk of diseases.

Topic	comment
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In the sentence, “Children have better and healthy food choices” functions as a topic, not as the subject of the sentence. “will get away from the risk of diseases” is seen as the comment. In the topic-comment structure, the topic is related to the comment semantically, but not necessarily grammatically. Yiman seemed to have literally translated the sentence from Chinese into English.

By the same token, Yiman’s second sentence shown below was another example of following the Chinese topic-comment sentence structure:

Schools ban unhealthy food will reduce children obesity.

Topic	comment
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In addition, since each of the above two sentences was constructed in a typical one-clause Chinese sentence, the relationship among the ideas was implied. The two sentences lacked overt conjunctions such as “when” and “if” to show the logical connections between ideas. Other interpretations are also possible. Due to its Chinese paratactic nature, the Chinese language is content with notional coherence and features a

lack of function words, whereas the English language frequently uses transitional words to show the semantic or pragmatic relationships between clauses.

Moreover, in the second supporting paragraph, according to Yiman, “Children should have better and healthy food choices because children and their parents do not have knowledge about bad effect from junk food.” First, Yiman had trouble with cause-effect. The relationship indicated by the conjunction “because” was confusing or did not exist, so the use of “because” did not make much sense here. Having no knowledge was not the reason why children should have healthy food in school. The relationship could be much stronger if we change the *because clause* to something like “because nutritious lunches will make children healthier.” Then, in developing the paragraph, Yiman contradicted what he had just said about parents, claiming that “Parents try [to] provide more food to their children because they think school lunches are not good enough to the children.” Clearly, this statement disagreed with the topic sentence stated above. Furthermore, the anecdote Yiman provided was off topic. As described by Yiman, “My mother cooks and food for me every day and forces me to eat, after school.” This description, obviously enough, strayed off the point he was trying to make.

All the evidence shown above suggests that Yiman still has many problems with coherent writing, especially paragraph unity, which is important because it aids the reader in following along with the writer's ideas. To achieve coherence, then, a writer should show how all of the ideas contained in a paragraph are relevant to the main topic. In terms of transitions, overall, Yiman is doing a better job because some simple and obvious transitions are used in the second draft to join ideas, although effective use of transitions throughout the essay still needs improvement.

## **Xiaohui Wang**

### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Xiaohui chose the topic “Mass Transit vs. Cars” (see Appendix E) in the diagnostic essay. He created a title for his essay: “The Benefits of Mass Transit.” After briefly mentioning two opposing opinions about the use of cars, Xiaohui took a stance that he supported the idea of using mass transit in the city. The first two body paragraphs focused on the disadvantages of using cars. The last body paragraph briefly explained the convenience of using mass transit.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Under the title of “The Benefits of Mass Transit,” Xiaohui was supposed to present an overview about the two sides of the issue: the use of mass transit vs. the consequence of banning cars in Manhattan. However, Xiaohui began by simply mentioning the benefits of using cars very briefly, rather than introducing the two different issues presented in the prompt to provide a bridge to help readers make a transition between their own world and the issue Xiaohui would be writing about. Xiaohui then proceeded to state that “but some people argued that cars have so many negative influence to our city.” Immediately following this, Xiaohui jumped to the conclusion, “I prefer to use mass transit in our city.”

Since nothing about mass transition was introduced in Xiaohui’s opening paragraph, readers may wonder why the writer decided to use mass transit all of a sudden. Without helping readers get into the mass transit topic, a vague and unclear introduction like that would probably create a negative impression of Xiaohui’s argument. Generally,

an introduction is an important road map for the rest of the paper. Since Xiaohui did not get his readers to see why his topic mattered and how he planned to proceed his discussion, readers may not care much about what he was saying. An abrupt conclusion at the end of the introductory paragraph may not make much sense to English readers. For this reason, with insufficient contextual information provided, Xiaohui's introduction had a serious problem with logical progression in the ideas presented.

In addition, since Xiaohui took the position that he preferred to use mass transit in the city, the reader expects an explanation related to the benefits of mass transit. However, in the first and the second supporting paragraphs, Xiaohui shifted his focus, explaining exclusively how expensive it was to use a car in the city and what problems the use of cars could cause. In the first supporting paragraph, Xiaohui only mentioned one detail related to mass transit; that is, mass transit cost \$2.25 per ride. Readers did not even know which city Xiaohui was referring to. Only when Xiaohui moved to the third supporting paragraph, did he start to explain the convenience of using mass transit, but this was just a three-sentence-long supporting paragraph. In his one-sentence concluding paragraph, Xiaohui restated the thesis, noting that, "To sum up, using mass transit is good for our city and having more convenience for us."

Obviously, the central focus seemed to be the disadvantages of using cars rather than the benefits of mass transit. Since Xiaohui did not fully examine the central issue of the essay, evidence that supported the thesis was scarce. In considering this, Xiaohui did not do a great job engaging his readers with an elaboration on the subject matter, even though the essay contained a thesis, a topic sentence for each paragraph, and a conclusion.



## 2. The In-class Exercise

### *a) The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

While summarizing the passage “Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash,” Xiaohui indicated that when people paid with credit, they tended to make unnecessary and unhealthy food purchases. After stating several key points presented in the passage, he voiced his opinion that using credit or debit cards to make impulsive purchases could lead to financial debt and health problems for customers.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Compared with the diagnostic essay, Xiaohui improved his introductory paragraph; he now created a context for the reader to follow his ideas, even though the overview was short. In addition, the body paragraphs presented more reasons and specific details from Xiaohui’s own experience to develop ideas, but the off-topic issue still showed up in this in-class practice essay.

Specifically, to support his central claim, Xiaohui first explained that “using the credit cards to make impulsive purchases causes the problem to customers because it causes the financial problem.” He used an anecdote of his uncle to illustrate that his uncle eventually went bankrupt due to his inability to pay off his credit card debt. This example possibly drifted off the topic of overspending in supermarkets because Xiaohui just discussed overspending rather than keeping the topic on junk food purchases. In other words, we do not know what the source of the uncle’s debt was, so we cannot judge whether the example is relevant.

In his second body paragraph, Xiaohui claimed that using credit to make impulsive junk food purchases caused health problems for consumers. He gave an example, illustrating that “my friend Paul who likes to use cards for shopping, and every time he shopping, he only buys the junk food instead of healthy food.” Here, Xiaohui intended to emphasize how paying with credit made it more likely for consumers to spend more money on unhealthy food that eventually led to health problems. However, he failed to demonstrate what specific junk food his friend bought that resulted in being overweight for his young age of thirty; “junk food” was a very general, vague, and abstract term that did not give the reader concrete imagery. Therefore, the example Xiaohui used was nothing more than repetition of what was stated earlier.

b) *The Second Draft*

In the revision, Xiaohui improved the overall structure by focusing more on the central claim. In particular, he tied his uncle’s example to the impulsive purchases of grocery and unhealthy food, which brought about his serious financial problems. Moreover, to avoid repetition, he clearly indicated what kind of specific junk food his friend Paul purchased that led to his being overweight as well as having high blood pressure. In addition to these revisions, Xiaohui also used more transitions in different places to convey relationships among ideas throughout the second draft.

Evidently, the focus on the central claim, logical progression of ideas, and the use of transitions were still challenging for him, perhaps because he had been through many years of education outside the United States. Although he may be good in other subjects, his English proficiency was not very strong. Through revision, he could not only be better

helped to understand why his writing was incoherent or incomprehensible but also be made to see that writing was more than just grammar.

### 3. The Final Exam Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Xiaohui decided on the passage “Is Multitasking Productive?” for his final essay topic. In his summary of the passage, he first noted that people were not good at multitasking, and that doing multiple things at once decreased productivity. He then added that multitasking also exerted a negative effect on learning. Therefore, he concluded that multitasking negatively impacted humans.

First of all, according to Xiaohui, multitasking reduced productivity. His personal example of cooking while taking care of a crying baby illustrated that trying to perform two tasks at the same time resulted in a clash between the two. Also, in his other example of writing an email to his wife while attending a class, he further demonstrated that multitasking did have a negative impact on learning.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

In Xiaohui’s final essay, most ideas were competently developed. Also, reasons and specific details were appropriately used to support and convey his ideas. As compared to the diagnostic and in-class practice essays, the final essay was better written because, unlike his previous writings, the final essay exemplified an obvious overall coherence. For example, the reasons Xiaohui gave directly tied into the topic and point being made (i.e. multitasking negatively impacts humans). An organizational structure was evident. As shown in the essay, Xiaohui adequately explained why and how the details supported his claim “multitasking reduces productivity and negatively impacts

learning.” Thus, the argument was arranged in a way that made sense to the reader. Though simple and obvious, transitional words and phrases were usually used to show logical relationships between sentences. Finally, and especially relevant here, the final essay generally cohered around one controlling idea. Apparently, Xiaohui has improved his writing, in that he is now able to integrate the text into a coherent whole as a result of his semester-long course, which featured training in the notions of Western rhetoric.

## **Gaofeng Wu**

### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Gaofeng chose the topic of “Not Banning Cars from Manhattan” (see Appendix E) for his diagnostic essay. He first presented an overview by introducing the two sides of the issue at the beginning of the opening paragraph. Then he took a position, arguing that “I am agree with not banning the cars in Manhattan, and reasonly details will be explained as following.”

He began his support by claiming that banning all the cars in Manhattan would create much inconvenience for those who work and study within the area. He continued to claim that the pollution worsening was a ridiculous reason for prohibiting all the cars in Manhattan. He finally concluded that it was not a good idea to ban cars in the city.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

The opening paragraph was ineffective due to excessive copying of the assignment question. Successive paragraphs lacked proper development and were also weak in their focus on the topic. While Gaofeng’s point of view was obvious, it was never fully developed. He often made blanket generalizations. For example, “It [banning

cars in Manhattan] might create hardships for them reaching their destinations...” No further elaboration or explanation was presented. Additionally, no knowledge of Gaofeng’s personal experience or no references to reading material was displayed. Moreover, when developing the first supporting paragraph, Gaofeng made the following other claims:

1. It [banning cars in Manhattan] might create hardships for them reaching their destinations and *more pressures upon the excessively [busy] public transportation.*” In the sentence, “more pressures upon the excessively public transportation” wandered off the topic because it did not support the specific point Gaofeng stated in his topic sentence “banning all the cars in Manhattan would create much inconvenience for those [who] work and study within the area.”
2. “*Even though gas prices is rising and parking spots are getting more difficult to find, but these are the problems for those individual who drives to decide.*” Here Gaofeng switched to the other side of the issue. Rather than staying on the topic to explain why and how banning cars inconvenienced New Yorkers, he drifted off to discuss other issues.

This reminds us of the non-linear pattern of Chinese thinking for Chinese idea development as proposed by Kaplan (1966). Although Kaplan’s ideas have been largely challenged, it seems that at least some of what he observed in Chinese writing is able to stand the test of time.

In addition to the digressing issue identified in Gaofeng’s first supporting paragraph, his second supporting paragraph was not well developed with the kind of

relevant details expected in this persuasive genre. To back up his point stated in his topic sentence “pollution worsening is another ridiculous point for prohibiting all the cars in Manhattan,” Gaofeng just made one general statement without elaborating on it, “Because decreasing the traffic really doesn’t help decreasing the amount of pollution in an effective way.” Therefore, he did not successfully provide the reader with adequate supporting details necessary to explain why pollution worsening was ridiculous, and no personal examples were offered to enhance his point, thus resulting in weak arguments.

Interestingly, Gaofeng came to the United States in 2003 at the age of thirteen. It is true that he was born and raised in China, but he has been long enough through American formal education. While he claims in the background questionnaire (see Appendix D) that he hates writing, he identifies himself as a confident and advanced writer. Logically, an advanced writer should know how to write a simple essay that stays on topic and how to elaborate on his/her points. However, Gaofeng’s basic writing skills need to be further enhanced, especially in the above-mentioned two areas.

Admittedly, going off topic and thin development in writing are very complicated issues, so we cannot simply assign the writing problems of learners to either Chinese or Western traditions. To be more precise, going off topic in essay writing is not a culture specific issue; it can happen to both Chinese EFL/ESL students and American students. However, since the Chinese emphasize holistic thinking, they tend to approach an issue from different perspectives. In Western rhetoric, an effective paragraph should give the reader a clear sense of what is being argued or demonstrated without straying off topic.

The concluding paragraph, while providing the reader with a sense of closure, digressed from an overall sense of the writer summing up the essay and misused transitions:

To sum up, if the purpose is to improve the ongoing terrible traffic conditions in Manhattan, then banning all the cars within the area is definitely not a good idea. However, people should have focused on the root of the problem, and come with a solution that can prevent all the masses in the first place.

Generally, the concluding paragraph represents the writer's last chance to say something important to the reader. Although conclusions can take many forms, depending on how the writer wishes to complete the essay (Fawcett, 2011), it is a good idea to restate the main point of the essay "banning cars is wrong," and recapitulate why it is wrong to ban cars in Manhattan, because, in doing so, it would give the essay a sense of unity.

However, instead of briefly summarizing the two reasons he discussed in the body paragraphs, Gaofeng argued that people should focus on the more urgent root problem. Much to the surprise of the reader, in the entire essay he never mentioned what the root problem was about, so the reader may easily fail to catch what he means. Next, the transition words Gaofeng used could be improved here. For example, "If" should be "even if," because the expression *even if* maybe more clearly fits the context and could make more sense to the reader, and the transition "However" sounds confusing and could be misused, because *however* acts like a bridge to an idea in the previous sentence; the correct use of *however* in a sentence would suggest that the sentence disagrees in a sense with the preceding idea.

## 2. The In-class Exercise

### *a) The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

In the passage “Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash” (see Appendix G), Gaofeng summarized the main point by stating that paying with credit or debit cards makes people more likely to impulsively buy junk foods. After presenting the author’s most important ideas, he said that he agreed with the author when the author asserted that paying with credit made people more likely to be impetuous and rashly purchase unhealthy food.

The first reason Gaofeng used to support the thesis was that paying with credit encouraged people to purchase unhealthy food because it created more pleasure than paying with cash. He explained that customers experienced “pain of payment” when physically handing over cash, thus reducing the joy of shopping. His personal example of shopping at the supermarket showed that paying with credit stimulated him to purchase unnecessary food for his daily life while shopping with cash made him aware of his economic status, thereby reducing the pleasure of consumption.

Gaofeng also pointed out that people’s shopping habits had a great impact on their purchasing decisions. As his personal experience indicated, he had the habit of carrying credit cards with him rather than cash, so like many other people he preferred to use credit for shopping, which often triggered impulsive decisions to buy additional products.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Gaofeng got off the topic when developing the second body paragraph. He only made a general reference when discussing how shopping habits influenced purchasing



decisions. His anecdote referred to purchasing decisions in general, not to impulsive purchases of unhealthy food in particular, which was the controlling idea of the entire essay. Also, while ideas in body 1 were well-developed and provided related details about how paying with credit stimulated customers to waste money on junk food, the presentation of ideas in body 2 was unclear and limited by Gaofeng's shift in focus between shopping habits and purchase of unnecessary products

An overall structure was apparent. The essay used some transitions to convey relationships; however, coherence was somewhat flawed by Gaofeng's wandering off topic.

b) *The Second Draft*

In the revision, while most of the writing remained essentially unchanged, Gaofeng revised the reason presented in the second body paragraph, stating that paying with credit encouraged people to purchase unhealthy food because eating habits stimulated them to make such impetuous decisions. But elaboration or explanation was still scarce, and Gaofeng did not seem to clarify what eating habits exactly meant or extend his ideas to help the reader clearly understand his point. However, to support his claim, Gaofeng eventually drew an example from his friend who had an unhealthy eating habit and was addicted to snacks and cakes. Therefore, his friend was totally seduced by those unhealthy foods when going to the supermarket with a credit card. This example illustrated how a bad eating habit encouraged people to waste money on purchase of junk food when a credit card was used.

Compared with the first draft, the second one is more unified and coherent. While there is little elaboration of ideas in his second body paragraph, such as adding comments,

opinions, explanations, and the writer's viewpoint regarding what the author says, the example of his friend's eating habit stays on topic and helps the reader interpret Gaofeng's point.

The revision also reflects competence in the use of complex sentence structure to show relationships among ideas within a sentence. Obvious transitional words are correctly used so that Gaofeng's ideas generally stick together. These features assist the reader to understand the logic of how the writer's ideas fit together.

### 3. The Final Exam Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

In his summary of the passage "Is Multitasking Productive?" Gaofeng remarked that humans were not skilled at multitasking and further claimed, toward the end of the summary, that he agreed with the author on this point because the human brain structure was not built to perform two tasks simultaneously. While trying to explain why the brain structure was not developed to multitask at once, he offered his personal experience of his failure to effectively have a phone conversation with a friend while chatting with another friend online at the same time. Another reason Gaofeng presented to support the central theme is that multitasking negatively impacted people's learning ability. Since multitasking distracted the learning process of memory consolidation, his personal example of watching a movie while studying for a psychology test showed the ineffectiveness of learning in multitasking, which resulted in time wasted due to insufficient attention as well as frequent "context switching."

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

The opening paragraph was deemed ineffective because most of the summary was exactly copied from the article rather than paraphrased. As indicated in the thesis “In my opinion, the most significant idea is that humans are not skilled at multitasking,” Gaofeng’s opinion did nothing to enrich the introduction. This use of exact wording in most parts of his introduction reminds us of the writer’s copying in his diagnostic essay; in a like manner, he continued this pattern in his final essay by presenting the author’s words as his own. Deliberate plagiarism was in no way helping to create coherent writing. It only served the purpose of cheating as well as showing the writer’s failure to understand the reading passage and present its content in his own words.

Moreover, as anticipated, Gaofeng still had a problem with staying on topic. As we can see in his first body paragraph, he did not give a clear explanation of why the brain failed to multitask when he said,

Humans are not skilled at multitasking, because our brain structure is not built to perform two tasks simultaneously. When people attempt to perform an action, their brain works like a factory that produces so-called neurotransmitter, which is a messenger [message] sent throughout the body that commands each of your body parts what to do. As a result, when people are trying to perform multiple actions at once, their brain will produce more than one kind of output, which may result in an interference between activities.

Although this text contained lexical ties---conjunctions of “because” and “when” as well as a transition of “As a result,” the reader would not consider the text as a whole to be coherent. Gaofeng explained the process that the brain went through to perform a task,

but did not relate these supporting details back to the reason provided in the topic sentence. In other words, the elaboration did not present any reason why Gaofeng claimed the human brain was not developed to multitask.

## **Hong Lin**

### 1. The Diagnostic Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

Hong chose the topic of “Prohibiting Cars from Manhattan” when he wrote his first essay. While presenting an overview by stating two strikingly different views of banning cars in the city, he argued that the city should prohibit cars because he thought using mass transit was more efficient than using cars in Manhattan as a result of gas prices rising, parking problems, pollution worsening, and global warming on the part of the cars. By way of responding to the opposition, Hong used a counterargument to begin his second body paragraph, claiming that some people preferred the idea of using cars because it was more convenient for them to travel to the destinations; however, he strongly believed that using cars would create undue hardships for those people because of the traffic and parking problems.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

Hong’s diagnostic essay was not considered an effective one. First of all, a great deal of information in the opening paragraph was copied from the question itself. After a brief introduction of the topic, Hong did not state his point of view on the topic in the opening paragraph until he moved to the first body paragraph shown below:

I believe that the city should prohibits cars in Manhattan. In my view, using mass transit are more efficient than using cars in Manhattan. Because of the gas prices

rising and parking problems, people who taking the mass transit would not worry about these issues. Nowadays, pollution are getting worsening and global warming. We have the responsibilities to protect our planet by limiting the use of cars. I recommend people using the bicycles for travelling. It is beneficial for both humanities and natures.

Some issues related to the above paragraph are identified as follows:

1. Since Hong clearly stated the reason for banning cars in Manhattan and advocated the use of mass transit, the reader was likely to expect the benefits of using mass transit. While it was acceptable to say that gas prices rising, parking problems, and pollution worsening were the major concerns that may lead to people's preference of using mass transit, it would be much more effectively focused and unified if Hong also explained how efficient it was to use mass transit, thus directly relating the supporting details to the proposal being presented.

2. Hong wrote on the topic of using mass transit, but an English reader may perceive it as going off topic when Hong said, "I recommend people using the bicycles for travelling," because this claim "the use of bicycles for travelling" was not directly tied to the proposal Hong was supporting. This could be another example of how Chinese EFL/ESL writers deliberately endeavor to discuss "different" ideas in a paragraph, a practice that is in line with holistic thinking, instead of staying on a single subject (Zhao, 1999; Li, 2005; Zhang, 2009).

3. Hong made general statements only, because no specific details related to the elaboration of gas prices rising, parking problems, and pollution worsening helped Hong clarify the main idea in the first body paragraph. Opinions are great, but provided

examples can make the argument much stronger. From the perspective of the audience, the paragraph clearly needs specific and relevant examples from Hong's general knowledge of the subject matter to give readers more of an idea for why they should believe the writer's claim "using mass transit are more efficient than using cars in Manhattan" in his persuasive writing.

In addition to the above issues, again, Hong failed to adequately support the main point in the second body paragraph. Consider the following example from Hong's writing:

Some people favors using the cars in Manhattan because they think it is more convenient for them to travel to their destinations. I totally disagree with them. I believe using cars will create undue hardships for them because of the traffic and parking in Manhattan. Finding a parking spot is like the chance of winning a lottery. It will take forever for them to find a parking space.

To support his claim "*using cars will create undue hardships for them because of the traffic and parking in Manhattan,*" surprisingly, Hong provided the reader with the same reason "traffic and parking in Manhattan" mentioned in his first body paragraph, rather than presenting a new one. Hong, therefore, engaged in a pattern of repetition and circular thought processes. Moreover, support was minimal; development of ideas was very weak. There was little use of relevant approaches to development. Apart from all this, throughout the entire essay, transitions were rarely used between and within his paragraphs to establish relationships between ideas and to create a logical progression of those ideas.

Finally, the concluding paragraph showed redundancy, as it copied or repeated a great deal of the opening paragraph. With so much repetitive information contained, the writing could be perceived as boring by the reader.

## 2. The In-class Exercise

### *a) The first draft*

#### *Part One: An Overview*

While summarizing the passage “Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash,” Hong maintained that people seemed to spend more money on junk food with credit or debit cards. After paraphrasing a couple of key points identified in the article, Hong identified one significant idea from the passage to be developed in the rest of the essay, and he argued that “I believe paying in cash can limit consumers from spending on vice products.”

To explain why the idea mattered in the supporting paragraph, Hong began by asserting his claim “Paying in cash can limit consumers from spending [on] vice products because people don’t feel pain when they using credit or debit cards.” An example from his friend Jorge shopping at the grocery store revealed that people tended to use more money to buy “vice” products when paying with credit, whereas they felt the “pain” of payment when paying in cash, which led to their buying less junk food.

To further expound the significant idea, Hong proceeded to make another claim “Paying in cash can limit consumers from spending [on] vice products because paying with credit or debit cards are more convenient than paying in cash. By using his mom’s example at the grocery store this time, Hong was trying to stress that credit or debit cards were the reason people spent more money on unhealthy products.

*Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

While Hong began with a summary, moved to the significant idea, developed the central focus with reasons and evidence, ended with an example, and concluded with referring back to the significant idea, the essay was still seen incoherent, mainly in two ways.

First, compared with the diagnostic essay in which Hong hardly applied any transitions, this in-class essay used more transitions, such as “in addition,” “however,” “also,” “because,” “therefore,” and “when,” to convey relationships among ideas. On the surface of it, a logical progression of ideas seemed to be created. However, the meaning was obscure when Hong said,

1. Paying in cash can limit consumers from spending [on] vice products because people don't feel pain when they [are] using credit or debit cards.

Taking a closer look at the *because clause*, the reader cannot quite make it out. Hong used the above statement as a topic sentence for his first body paragraph, but this sentence does not work as a topic sentence as is. Hong was confusing two ideas:

- a). *Paying with credit or debit cards encourages spending.*
- b). *Paying in cash inhibits buying unhealthy products.*

To get the message across to the reader, we may rewrite the sentence. Possibly, the connection *while* could be made to show the contrast between the two ideas:

*Paying with credit or debit cards encourages spending, while paying in cash inhibits buying vice products.*



2. In contrast, consumers seem to have concerns when they paying in cash because it eliminates the pleasure of shopping when consumers handing over their money.

Again, this sentence is confusing. The confusion stems from a lexical choice — i.e. the word “concerns.” In fact, it is not a “concern” that people have when they pay with cash; what is at issue here is an experience, or a consequence of using cash. We may rewrite the sentence as follows:

- a) *In contrast, paying in cash takes away the pleasure of shopping because buyers feel the “pain of payment” when handing over cash. Alternately:*
- b) *In contrast, paying in cash eliminates pleasure because buyers are then made conscious of the real cost of the items.*

Apparently, both of the sentences from Hong’s writing were trying to establish relationships, but both garbled the essential meaning. Either a confused cause/effect (paying in cash/pay with credit) or a cause/effect coupled with a combination of multiple time relationships (concerns/pay/eliminates/hand over) leaves the reader unclear about the causal relationship of the two to each other. If students do not use subordination for clear transitions between ideas, the point of the sentence will get lost, thereby damaging coherence as a whole.

Secondly, the reason, evidence, or examples were not relevant to the central focus.

Consider the following examples:

1. Paying in cash can limit consumers from spending vice products because paying with credit or debit cards are more convenient than paying in cash. Nowadays credit cards are global and generalized. People are more likely

purchasing with cards. Also they enjoy the experience in card payments because bills are sent to home and they can finish their payment until the end of the month. As a result, people are having less cash and more money in the bank. Therefore, consumers are having concerns and making decision when paying in cash.

It seems that Hong was making off topic claims here when he noted “paying with credit or debit cards are more convenient than paying in cash;” “they enjoy the experience in card payments...;” and the rather confusing, “...people are having less cash and more money in the bank.” Hong was clearly digressing from the central focus he was trying to support.

2. For instance, when mom goes to the grocery store, her shopping cart were filled with the vice products, by the time when she was at the check out, she found out she left her card at home. As a result, she only bought a few dairies with her cash because she was addicted to credit cards payment and she doesn't have enough cash. This indicates, credit and debit cards are the reason that people spending money on vice products.

The above anecdote was not relevant to the thesis because accidently leaving the credit card at home and carrying insufficient cash did not help to prove the point that paying by cash inhibited the impulsive purchase of vice products. A persistent problem that Hong was struggling with seems to be his perceived habit of digressing.

#### b) *The Second Draft*

As stated earlier in Chapter 3, for some personal reason, Hong did not revise his first draft and therefore missed submitting a second draft.

### 3. The Final Exam Essay

#### *Part One: An Overview*

By focusing on a couple of main points of the passage “Is Multitasking Productive?” (see Appendix I) Hong briefly created his summary. He first stated that humans could not concentrate on two activities at the same time, and multitasking also impoverished learning. He then claimed that the most significant idea in the passage was that humans were not skilled at multitasking, which became the central focus of his essay.

To develop this idea, he asserted that “people cannot multitask because humans cannot focus on more than one activity at a time.” He elaborated his point by describing a car accident of his friend Jorge who lost focus while talking on his cell phone and driving. After that, he made another claim “People cannot multitask because it distracts us between different tasks,” which was supported by his personal example of dropping out of the advanced class in middle school as a result of playing games on his phone while studying in class.

#### *Part Two: A Brief Discussion*

To support the thesis statement “*humans are not skilled at multitasking,*” what Hong needed to do was to provide valid reasons and evidence to prove why “*humans are not skilled at multitasking.*” However, he was creating circular reasoning when he said “People cannot multitask because *humans cannot focus on more than one activity at a time*” The reason given in the topic sentence, in fact, simply repeated the thesis statement in different terms rather than explaining why people were incapable of multitasking. Since circular reasoning involves repetition of concepts while writers explain them, it is a special case of lack of coherence.

Hong repeated the same problem of creating circular reasoning in his second body paragraph when he stated “People cannot multitask because *it distracts us between different tasks.*” While the pronouns *it* and *us* were vague because of lacking antecedents, Hong was trying to say that multitasking distracted them from effectively completing one task. Like the circular thought processes that occurred in the first topic sentence, the reason provided in the second topic sentence was again problematic because it involved forming a vicious circle of words or concepts which had the same meaning.

As shown in the background questionnaire (see Appendix D), Hong identifies himself as an inexperienced and nervous writer. He is afraid of writing and hates writing. All this may account for his limited writing skills, even though he arrived in the United States at the age of ten.

To put it briefly, after having been trained for a semester, Hong, to a certain degree, gradually improved his performance in terms of transitions and staying on topic. However, Hong still engages in a pattern of repetition, which could happen to any students regardless of their cultural and educational backgrounds.

### **The 90-minute Timed Essay**

Before we complete Chapter 5, a few comments on the required timed essay may be necessary, since the writing process cannot fully unfold in a timed essay. As described earlier, the in-class essay is a timed essay. The participants had to complete their essays within 90 minutes. As the CATW exam is a 90-minute written essay, which determines exit from developmental writing courses and students’ readiness for college-level writing and discipline content courses, the advanced composition course instructor has to train ESL students to complete a reading-response CATW practice essay within 90 minutes.

For the 90-minute essay, the participants had to read, reflect upon, organize information, and respond to the complexities of the reading passage in ways that were thoughtful, insightful, and articulate. This created many problems for the participants. Lili did not complete the in-class essay because she ran out of time. For those who struggle with timed essays, they commonly have difficulty starting and then as a result they struggle to finish. To help the students write a coherent reading-response essay, the instructor, therefore, trained the students to plan the time wisely, answer the right question, collect their thoughts, and even leave time to revise. However, the participants did not do a satisfactory job for the first timed essay because they wrote the in-class essay under pressure. That is why Dr. Fawcett commented that most of her students did the in-class writing poorly, especially in the areas of central focus, transitions, development of ideas, staying focused, logical arguments, and repetition of ideas or arguments identified in the in-class writing discussed in Chapter 5. Compared with the revised essay based on this timed essay, most participants clearly improved coherence in these areas regarding the overall essay structure, relevance, topic sentences, transitions, and supporting details because they did their writings without time pressure. Therefore, there is a big difference between a timed essay and an essay without time limit.

Writing a coherent timed essay is an important skill college students need to master. The same writing skills that are applied in a prepared essay are applied in a timed essay. The difference is that the writer needs to use these skills in a prescribed amount of time.

## **Conclusion**

As has been indicated, an analysis of textual data from the participants' diagnostic essays, in-class practice essays, and final exam essays reveals that elements contributing to coherence changed in their writings over the course of a semester. As a whole, the students improved their coherence in writing, but as a cultural issue, problems such as off-topic claims, misuse of transitions, and repetition still remain in their writings. Therefore, Chinese ESL students need constant reinforcement so as to firmly establish good writing habits. To help the reader see the picture more clearly, I will briefly highlight and analyze several themes that emerged in Chapter 5.

### **Off-topic Claims**

In contrast to the notion of paragraph unity, in which one paragraph is about only one main topic, multiple ideas were identified in one paragraph in the participants' writings. Their essays are seen strayed off the point to varying degrees, according to Western rhetoric. Undeniably, it is very challenging to Chinese learners of English to stay "focused" while writing. However, it must be noted that during the interviews to be discussed in Chapter 6, these students argued that they stayed on topic, even though their professor claimed that their writing was off the point. To them, even if an idea was only related to the main point or tied to the point in a devious way, it would be acceptable, presumably drawing on ideas from the Chinese context.

### **Logical Connections between Ideas**

Another important common theme that emerged was the participants' inability to provide what an experienced English reader would see as logical connections between ideas. In analyzing the participants' writings, the most troublesome ones that caught my

attention were actually linguistic and involved the use of reference pronouns and conjunctions, which challenged the participants most as they tried to link the ideas in their texts.

- 1). *Problems with Reference Pronouns*
- 2). *Absence of Explicit Transitions As a Result of Paratactic Structure*
- 3). *Misuse or Overuse of Transitional Forms*
- 4). *Absence of Overt Transitions As a Result of Topic-comment Structure*

### **Failure to Make a “Valid” Argument**

Solid progression, as defined in the English cultural context, makes an essay easy to understand. To an English reader, point A should naturally follow point B and so forth on at many levels. Some patterns were determined in the participants’ writings, where this naturally progression is disturbed or does not exist. In this sense, some of their writings failed to make an argument judged as valid in the persuasive genre being considered.

**Confusing cause and effect.** According to the CATW writing directions, students are required to develop the essay by identifying one significant idea in the reading passage and then explain in the body paragraphs why the idea selected is significant. As discussed in the above textual data analysis, the causal reasoning, however, is quite difficult for the participants. To many participants, what happens just happens, so the logical fallacy judged by Western standard is likely to be committed when they assume that one event must cause another just because the events occur together. Additionally, the participants confused the actual cause with the effect. They had trouble determining the actual cause and the actual effect, so they provided unclear or

invalid reasons for their claims. Typically, Chinese writing does not have to explicitly apply the cause-effect pattern for argumentation, which seems truly challenging to the Chinese, judging from the essays analyzed in the present study.

**Repetition.** Repetition of ideas was identified from time to time in the participants' writings. Without providing more supporting details to bolster their claims, they simply repeated by turning around variants of the same point without making any forward movement. When the reader feels that he/she is being told the same thing again and again, or the same point is being made twice, bad repetition occurs. The reasons for repetition could be posited as being primarily twofold. Even though my coverage of Chinese rhetoric does not discuss valuing repetition, repetition, as a cultural issue, could be first linked to the Chinese way of non-linear or circular thinking. To better understand why the Chinese prefer repetition (Liu & Zhang, 2012), it is helpful to revisit the Chinese culture again.

As discussed in *Cultural Thought Patterns* in Chapter 2, Chinese culture is featured with a non-linear or circular thinking pattern, which significantly affects everyday life. Very interestingly, for the Chinese, quite a lot of concepts have a circular nature. One typical example is the Chinese *Yin-Yang* fish symbol in the shape of a circle, the heart of Chinese culture. The circle gives a sense of non-stop continual movement: *Yin* constantly changes into *Yang* and back into *Yin* again. The black and white swirls represent how everything works in nature, suggesting that the same things happen over and over again. The idea of doing something for somebody else in exchange of nothing is less common in China than in the West. The reason behind it is that the favor is circular,



and it has to come back to the person who did it, which echoes the Western idea of “one good turn deserves another.”

Writing reflects one’s thinking, and thinking in circles tends to result in verbosity and repetition (repetition for rhetorical purposes is not discussed here). Chinese students have problems repeating themselves in essay writing. As L1 transfer occurs in second language acquisition, repetition is unavoidably reflected in Chinese EFL/ESL writing. According to Liu and Zhang (2012), most Chinese learners of English tend to repeat ideas on either sentence or paragraph level. When repetition occurs, miscommunication in the cross-cultural context follows.

Secondly, Chinese students are rote learners discussed in *Memorization* in Chapter 2. Rote learning is based on repetition. The usual Chinese response to a text is to repeat it rather than analyze it. Since Chinese rhetoric relies on repeated assertions rather than logical proofs, follows patterns, and discourages originality (Matalene, 1985), Chinese students are very good at repeating ideas. Nevertheless, that is not the case when writing in English. What counts is the message a writer conveys. If the writer does not provide any new information, the sentences or the paragraphs lack any coherence meaning.

In English persuasive writing, repetition of ideas is considered the kiss of death, and students who keep repeating will receive a failing grade. Teachers see repetition as evidence of either poor organization or insufficient knowledge, a way of filling a page when the writer does not have enough to say. The emphasis here is that repetition creates circular reasoning, so the arguments in such essays risk being flawed. Apparently, when repetition occurs in persuasive essay writing, coherence is damaged, if not destroyed.

To sum up, the Chinese participants have trouble with many writing issues. In the real situation, these themes are not so bounded, but relate to the participants' overall situation. The above discussion presents the frequently recurrent coherence-related writing problems encountered by the participants.

## CHAPTER 6

### INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

#### **Interview Data**

This chapter deals with the results of interview data. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews with six participants were conducted in July 2011 in a classroom of the College's English Department convenient to the participants. Each participant was interviewed individually twice, using both English and Chinese depending on the participants' choice. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded and some notes were taken during the interviews.

The first round of interviews, which I have broken down into two parts (labeled Part 1 and Part 2 below), was conducted at the beginning of the semester. Part 1 confirms and discusses a few responses from the participant background questionnaire (see Appendix D). Part 2 deals with participant responses to open-ended questions about how the participants interpret components related to coherent writing. Toward the end of the semester, the second round of interviews was conducted. In what follows, the results of the two rounds of interviews are presented. The questions are presented in italics and the participant responses have been summarized for each question.

#### **An Initial Brief Interview Based on Background Questionnaire**

In the first part of the first interview, I asked a few questions to confirm key information given by the participants from the questionnaire, particularly in terms of their attitudes about English writing and their assessment of their abilities as writers. The detailed information is presented in the following sections. Preliminary

1. *Do you like to write in English?*

Lili said that she liked to write in English, but her writing was only related to homework assignments. Apart from homework, she said that she did not write anything else. Among the four English skills, she claimed, “My weakness is writing.” Weishan and Yiman both said that they did not like English. They thought that besides grammar problems, their vocabulary was limited, but Yiman added that “Chinese and English are different.” He described his problems with writing: “I wrote something, but the teacher don’t [didn’t] understand the meaning because [of] the sentence structure.” Likewise, both Xiaohui and Hong said they disliked the idea of writing in English because they did not know “what to write and how to write.” On a similar note, Gaofeng said that he did not like writing because “I don’t know where to start and how to express myself.”

2. *How would you describe yourself as an ESL writer?*

When writing in English, Lili said that she was “nervous.” While she had earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology back in Taiwan, she had never written an English paragraph. What she had written as homework assignments had only been separate sentences, for instance translation from Chinese to English. In fact, she had not started to write English essays until she had come to the United States one year earlier. As a result, as she claimed in the questionnaire, she described herself as “an inexperienced ESL writer.” Weishan also claimed that he was “an inexperienced ESL writer” and expressed a sense that “English writing is different from Chinese writing.” He said that he did not understand what English writing was about, and he attributed his confusion to English grammar. Yiman said that he had fears about English writing in addition to a lack of experience in writing. Before coming to the US, he had two years of English study in

China, but only learned some very basic grammar and simple words like “apple.” While learning English in junior high in China, he said “I am [was] not a good student,” “I did not pay enough attention” because he felt that grammar confused him. Since coming to this college, he had taken this advanced writing course three times. When asked why he was repeating three times, he said “I failed twice because I did not pay attention in class.” He emphasized his difficulty with grammar again, saying, “I don’t know how to write a sentence” because adjectives and nouns were confusing.

Xiaohui said that he hated to write because he didn’t know how to write. Although he had studied English in China for six years, he had focused on grammar only and had never written an essay. Therefore, he had no idea what to write or how to approach essay writing. Gaofeng described himself as a confident and advanced ESL writer, explaining, “I’m not worried about writing an essay. I’m good at organizing ideas. I had ideas in my head. Since he identified himself as a confident and advanced writer, I asked him why he said in the questionnaire that he did not like English writing, since this answer seems to contradict his claim to be confident and able as a writer. He responded, “Because it is difficult. When I write an essay, it’s a mess.” Since he confessed that his essay writing was a mess, he could not be a confident or an advanced writer. Hong described himself as an inexperienced and nervous ESL writer. Also, he said that he was scared of writing and even hated to write. He proceeded to explain that he had been a high school dropout in New York “cause I have [had] too many absences. I barely go [went] to classes.” He had failed his writing section when he took the GED (General Equivalency Diploma) test. When it comes to writing, he said, “I struggle about writing. My mind is blank. I cannot think of anything.”

## Summary

The participants' responses to the two questions stated in the questionnaire indicate that among the six participants, only one student liked to write in English, whereas the rest of them did not like English writing. The reasons why the majority of the participants did not like writing seemed to be varied, but one thing is for sure: they are nervous about their writing skills, thereby lacking confidence in writing. Their concerns ran the full range of issues, ranging from grammar all the way to broader concerns such as topic choice and organization, though they seemed somewhat more aware of the sentence-level issues that had, for many of them, been the main focus in their learning of English.

### **The First Round of Interviews: Participants' Responses to Open-ended Questions**

As discussed above, the first part of the first interview confirmed and elaborated on responses from two key questions from the questionnaire. This section will deal with the results of the second part of the first interview. The results will be presented under headings that consist of the main interview questions involved; topics to be covered here largely focus on the participants' early learning experiences, their knowledge about persuasive writing in their first language, their views of writing in both Chinese and English, their awareness of audience and purpose in their writing, their awareness of coherence in writing, and their comments on the diagnostic essay they wrote in the first class meeting.

1. *Did you ever have a teacher that helped you a lot with your writing? If so, can you talk a bit more about this experience?*

All the six participants responded that none of them received much help from their previous writing teachers. Of the six Chinese students, Lili, Xiaohui, Weishan had

similar English learning experiences. They said that they did not get much help with their English writing from their English teachers. According to Lili, she was a college graduate in Taiwan with a major in psychology, but she did not have any previous English essay writing experiences in Taiwan. As for Xiaohui, he was a high school graduate in China and had received formal English education for six years before he came to the United States. He claimed that his English teachers were only interested in grammar instruction. Weishan highlighted that even teachers in this college focused on his language use and grammar. Therefore, Lili, Xiaohui, and Weishan were all impressed by their teachers' emphasis on sentence structure and grammar.

To be more specific, Lili said "I haven't met a teacher who taught me a lot in writing." She also claimed that she had written only sentences, including sentence translations, and had very rarely written a whole paragraph in her memory, so she felt her writing was very weak. Xiaohui shared similar views of grammar learning experiences. He recalled that "In China, we don't write essays. We write a short paragraph, not an essay. We focus only on grammar. They [his English teachers] don't care the paragraph makes sense or don't make sense. They don't care. They care only about grammar." Similarly, Weishan said that he did not meet a teacher in China who could give him help in writing. He went on to emphasize that in the past he did not learn much either while taking the intermediate composition course and the advanced composition course. At the college level, Weishan claimed that the writing teachers "only fixed grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, but didn't explain well." In contrast, he praised his current class: "the teacher teaching me now helps me a lot," because "the teacher told us to use transition words"

Weishan makes a good point here. Teaching transitional words is important to Chinese learners of English because they tend to misuse transitions or simply omit them. They have a lot of trouble identifying relationships among ideas. Teaching them earlier in their learning stages to use simple transitions such as “for this reason” and “however” could help them provide logical organization and improve the connections between thoughts.

Obviously, Lili, Xiaohui, and Weishan did not have a teacher who helped them a lot with their writing, according to them. What they had learned seems to have been primarily about grammar and sentence structure.

In contrast, Yiman’s case differed considerably from the above three participants. Based on the information he provided in the background questionnaire, he has been repeating this course for three times, even though he had been through high school in New York. He said that he had fears about writing. However, he claimed that both his high school and college teachers helped him a lot with his writing. “They fixed my sentence;” “They give me the better vocabulary to use in the sentence;” and “They showed me the structure to write an essay.” He continued to explain that a professor in this college forced him to write essays. “When she asked you to write an essay, you need[ed] to write well. Otherwise, she wouldn’t accept it. She wouldn’t even read and return to me right away. You must follow her structure. If not, she won’t accept.” Yiman means that his current professor was strict and had rules for the class to follow to ensure that the students were learning. From this perspective, he felt that his professor was helping him a lot with his writing.



Since Yiman has received so much help from American teachers both in high school and in college, one might ask, “why does Yiman keep repeating the course and is still unable to exit from the remedial/ESL writing course? The reasons are complicated. In this matter, Gaofeng and Hong have similar circumstances.

Both Gaofeng and Hong had come to the US when they were elementary school students. Surprisingly, their experiences did not seem richer or more varied than the participants who had learned English in China, in spite of the fact that they had spent the better part of a decade in the U.S. Gaofeng said that he had learned some basic communication skills in an ESL class when he was a middle school student. While in high school, he had learned grammar and vocabulary but did not remember anything in relation to essay organization, so he said that he did not get much help from writing teachers. Even worse was Hong who said that he did not learn anything about writing because he did not like writing. Hence, he completely forgot what writing teachers had taught him. This result is puzzling, since one would expect the extra time in English-speaking society to have given these students an advantage. However, their academic performance is not that promising. According to Huang and Brown (2009), “Confucianism meets Constructivism in North American universities and our classrooms are failing to meet the educational expectations of Chinese students”(p. 643). It seems that the ESL middle and high school education may have some drawbacks or may not be focused on helping students to succeed in American classrooms.

2. *What are the most important elements in Chinese persuasive writing? What have you learned about organizing an essay (for instance, introduction, body, and conclusion, etc.)? Do you remember your classes in your home country teaching about this? If so, what were you taught about “good writing?”*

Both Lili and Xiaohui stated that evidence was important in Chinese persuasive writing, but neither of them mentioned logical arguments. First, Lili said “I think you have to give evidence, supporting details. We use contrast and comparison. Actually, I think both Chinese and English are the same thing. Introduction, and then you got the body, which means, the supporting details, then, finally the conclusion. For introduction, our teacher [in Taiwan] says that we can use the *kai-men-jian-shan* (i.e., come straight to the point) method. Another way is ask a question. You can answer the question in the body. In the second body paragraph, you discuss about the topic, and the following paragraph like the third paragraph you will provide some example. One body could be your view, and another body would be example. There is another way too. One point in a paragraph, and another point in another paragraph.” For Lili, what was considered “good writing” in Taiwan was that “First of all, you have to attract the reader’s attention.” She was taught to focus on *cuo ci* (i.e., diction/choice of words). In terms of good writing, she said that the most important thing was “I think, *xiu-ci-ji-qiao* (i.e., rhetorical devices) and the word use, such as *bi-yu* (i.e., metaphor/simile), and *kua-zhang* (i.e., hyperbole).”

In terms of essay organization, what Lili described seems to be what is valued in Western rhetorical traditions, so she transferred much of what she learned in Chinese to English. Writers like her are struggling with language competency issues, the use of transitions, and understanding reader expectations. However, when it comes to good writing in persuasive discourse, there is a big difference between Chinese and English. By “attract the reader’s attention,” Lili suggests that good Chinese writing depends heavily on figures of speech as well as the use of maxims, proverbs, idioms, etc. to make

the writing “beautiful” and attractive. Of course, coherence and logical arguments do not seem to be the focus in the Chinese context.

Xiaohui’s response differs slightly from Lili’s, but it is similar in many ways. Unlike the multiple body paragraphs described by Lili, Xiaohui said that a Chinese teacher taught him to follow a three-paragraph structure introduction, one body, and one conclusion when he wrote a Chinese persuasive essay. In particular, he added that he learned what was called *zong-fen-zong* (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion). “*Zong*,” according to Xiaohui, means that the author introduces the topic in the introduction; “*Fen*” refers to an explanation in the body; and finally *Zong* is the conclusion. Like Lili’s description, Xiaohui presented a basic persuasive essay structure that basically follows the pattern of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Xiaohui emphasized that “using idioms” was considered good writing because “idioms were powerful and they could seize the reader’s attention.” This response is consistent with Lili’s description of good writing. The use of “beautiful” language seems to be the focus of persuasive writing for both of these participants.

Weishan, in contrast, stated that “I forgot how to write Chinese essays.” As mentioned earlier, he did not finish elementary school in China before moving to the United States. Likewise, Yiman claimed that he did not remember what he learned in middle school, saying that “I did not remember we have learned that [persuasive writing]. It [persuasive writing] was beyond my ability. In junior high school [in China], we just wrote very simple writing.” However, he does hint at having developed an early awareness of cultural differences: “In my memory, my teachers did not teach me the way Americans are doing here like introduction, body... My teachers in China did not teach

that way. They taught us to catch the key point, and then develop focusing on this key point.” I learned that [organization] in the after-school class. They taught in the same way what to write in the first paragraph, what in the second paragraph, and then summarize. Quite similar.” Judging from this, Weishan and Yiman may have acquired most of their persuasive writing skills in the United States, since they did not remember what they learned in China.

Gaofeng and Hong both reported that since they came to the United States when they were still elementary school students, they had no school experience of Chinese persuasive writing, so they did not have ideas about what good Chinese writing was about. Gaofeng did say that he kept a journal when he was younger, though he had not felt the need for guidance with such informal writing: “That’s just like free writing.” Hong explained that he had learned some Chinese history and poems at the college when taking a Chinese class. Like Gaofeng, Hong did not remember anything about Chinese writing, not to mention what was considered “good Chinese writing.”

3. *How did you learn English writing in your own country? Please describe your early writing experience in school. What features were you taught that a good English persuasive essay must have?*

None of the six participants reported any learning experience with English persuasive writing back in their own country. Lili said that unlike Chinese writing, English learning in Taiwan was only involved in “sentence translation, or maybe a mini-paragraph.” “They provide a topic and a short paragraph in Chinese. Then you translate it. It’s not like we need to have an introduction, the body and conclusion. We just need to write a very short paragraph. I think 120 words.” She further explained that students had to take an English writing test in Taiwan when going to college. The one- hundred-and-

twenty-word paragraph was required by the college entrance exam. When asked what was emphasized in writing a good English paragraph, she said that they focused on “grammar thing, word usage, sentence structure, tense.” However, in addition to grammar, she explained that one of her teachers, unlike the others, had taught her transition words too; transition words were not often taught in Taiwan. In a similar vein, Xiaohui said that when he learned English in China, he only paid attention to grammar and vocabulary.

In contrast to what Lili and Xiaohui had learned about English writing, Weishan’s experience was much more minimal. He said that he had only learned the twenty-six English letters of the alphabet. “I just studied ABC in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.” Likewise, Gaofeng and Hong had no relevant memories about writing in English, since they were too young to learn English essay writing in China. Gaofeng mentioned that he learned some basic vocabulary as well as the basic structure of a sentence, such as “How are you?” and “My name is...,” whereas Hong indicated that he had totally forgotten what he had learned in China.

Yiman’s English learning experience in China, however, was different. In addition to learning some basic vocabulary, he said that during his two years of study in junior high, “the teacher gave you a picture with questions such as ‘what do you think he is doing?’ and you write like five sentences, a little paragraph. Yiman then gave an example of what he wrote, saying that “Sunday morning, Xiaoming or something is walking on the street...” Given Yiman’s earlier claims, however, it is safe to conclude that these simple exercises in description did not include instruction on relationships between ideas, or on paragraph organization.

4. *What did you think about before writing an essay, either in English or in Chinese, in your country? Do you feel there was difference in the way you wrote in English, as compared with how you wrote in Chinese?*

As stated before, nobody in the group had written any English essays. What they had written in English had only consisted of sentences or sometimes a short paragraph. Weishan, Gaofeng, and Hong all said that they had not experienced any essay writing in either their first or second language back in China. They had even forgotten what they had done in Chinese writing if there had been any, so they had nothing to report and compare with when asked about their writing in the two languages.

When it comes to Chinese essay writing, only Lili, Yiman, and Xiaohui could offer some writing experience. Lili said that before writing Chinese essays, “I have to think how I start my introduction, the topic, how I can develop the topic, how I develop my body paragraph, and how to connect the bodies. In terms of the difference in the way she wrote between Chinese and English writing, Lili said that she focused more on essay organization as well as rhetorical devices in Chinese writing, while in English writing grammar and word usage were more important than anything else.

Yiman offered more extensive comments, which suggested (in a different way) that language issues were blocking his ability to think of essay organization in English, or to apply the principles he had learned in Chinese writing when writing in English. In his opinion, Chinese and English writing were “totally different in several ways.” First, in Chinese writing, he said that he “think of some examples related to the topic before writing,” and “nothing more.” When he wrote in English, he said that because he had a lot of difficulty with grammar and vocabulary, he had a hard time thinking. As a result, he said, “I did not think” and wrote whatever he could when he wrote in English, but he

mostly wrote separate sentences. Second, he said that “in Chinese writing, we use a lot of idioms” to refine the writing style because the teachers love that. Finally, Chinese sentence structure was different from that of English because English sentences had inverted order which made it hard for him to write.

Xiaohui spoke in similar terms, which made it feel as if the form of English instruction had actually undermined his ability to utilize what he had learned in Chinese about writing. Before writing a Chinese essay, Xiaohui explained that, like Yiman, he thought about “how to organize a paragraph. “I need to decide which direction I should go to before I go to details. That’s why it is called *zong-fen-zong* (introduction, body, and conclusion). I need to know where to go first and how to end.” In English writing, in contrast, Xiaohui said that the teacher did not care about how to organize the writing because grammar was most important. In junior high, he stated that he learned to do multiple choice questions and never wrote any English till he moved to high school, where he began to write some English sentences, but still focused on grammar and did not move on to study paragraph or essay organization.

5. *When you learned to write in your country, did you think about who would be reading the essay? Did your teachers encourage you to think of a reason you might want to write an essay, even if it was a class assignment?*

To answer these questions, Weishan, Gaofeng, and Hong did not report much, since they moved to the United States at a younger age, as noted earlier. Among the three participants, only Weishan identified a reader, and minimally, he said that in his memory the teacher was the only reader when he wrote. In much the same way, Lili, Yiman, and Xiaohui expressed similar ideas, and they all said that only the teacher would be the reader, and especially for a final test or a college entrance exam, only teachers would

read what they wrote. Yiman even said that he did not care who would be reading his writing. Xiaohui pointed out that his teachers had never explained to students who would be the reader.

Aside from those views about who would be the reader, participants also briefly touched on other notions, such as the reason or goal for writing. Lili said that while she did occasionally write Chinese persuasive essays in Taiwan, teachers did not encourage students to think of a reason for an essay topic. In any case, they had done more descriptive and narrative writing rather than persuasive writing. Yiman added he did not remember if the teacher ever encouraged him to think of a reason for a topic. Then Xiaohui commented that the teacher did not care about reasons; once again, he felt that the only thing the English teachers cared about was grammar.

6. *Did you learn about coherence in writing in your country? What did your classes talk about in terms of organizing information, for instance, in a paragraph? Were you encouraged to draw relationships between ideas in your writing? If so, in what way?*

In answering this question, the participants were split into two groups. Lili, Yiman, and Xiaohui claimed that they knew something about what coherence was, whereas Weishan, Gaofeng, and Hong were absolutely ignorant of it. Lili said that she learned about coherence and reiterated some of what she had earlier said about patterns. For instance, she described how she was taught *qi-chen-zhuan-he* (meaning introduction-development-turn-conclusion) in Chinese writing. “I think that’s coherence,” said Lili. Interestingly, she emphasized one important difference, as she commented on the third part of this pattern. In doing so, she showed a sophisticated understanding of one difference between Chinese and English rhetorical patterns. “We use ‘*zhuan*’ (turn), which is usually the ‘opposite’ way, to highlight the point. We use contrast.” She



continued: “Americans don’t understand us. They think it’s irrelevant, but it’s a common practice in Chinese writing.” That is a good point. In the Chinese context, it is common to further support one’s views by turning to the reverse side of the argument, hence winning over readers. However, this “turn” step may suggest a non-linear pattern as perceived by an English reader, thus possibly failing to contribute to coherence.

Lili went on to show that she was aware of the relative lack of transition words expected in Chinese, and of the fact that the English notion of ‘coherence’ did not seem to be stressed in Taiwan. “In Chinese, we don’t need to make connections between sentences, but my teacher, only [one] teacher, taught us to use transitions to connect ideas in English writing.” In addition, she continued, she realized that in English, “You cannot talk too much and get off topic.” Lili’s response implies that Chinese and English rhetorical values seem to be in subtle conflict, and that the differences are likely to confuse Chinese learners of English.

Both Yiman and Xiaohui said that they had learned about coherence in Chinese writing. For example, Yiman said, “I remember, the teacher told us about *chen-shang-qi-xia*” [i.e., a connecting link among ideas between the preceding and the following], but he added that he did not know much beyond that. *Cheng-shang-qi-xia* literally means “continue from the above and introduce the following.” This Chinese concept echoes the notion of coherence in the English context. Most Chinese-speaking students should know this concept because it is a common Chinese expression, especially in the writing area. It often reminds people of the connections between ideas. Paradoxically, how to demonstrate these connections in Chinese writing may not be explicitly taught or emphasized in the writing classrooms in China, again possibly as a result of Chinese

intuitive thinking. Therefore, most Chinese students do not have these writing skills.

Yiman may have an obscure sense of making connections among ideas in writing, but *cheng-shang-qi-xia* is an elusive concept to him, so he does not know how to clarify this point, not to mention applying this writing skill.

Xiaohui seemed to know more about coherence than Yiman. He first spoke about chronological order, which can be important in narrative: “I remember the time order or something like what I did in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening. In time order, you must start with the morning, and then go to the evening.” In terms of organizing information, he said that you could use “*zong-fen-zong*” (introduction, body, and conclusion) as discussed above. Like Lili, he was aware of a cultural difference in the idea of going “off topic”: “In Chinese writing,” he proceeded to say, “completely digressing was not allowed, but digressing a little bit was ok.” However, when it comes to English writing, he did not complete the analogy. Instead, he reverted to the theme that organization did not seem to matter in his early English writing. He said, “I really don’t remember how to organize information in a paragraph. I just remember we translated sentences from Chinese into English.”

Finally, when asked if they learned about coherence in writing in China, Weishan, Gaofeng, and Hong all said that they did not know anything about it.

7. *Can you tell me a bit more about your writing of the diagnostic essay that you wrote in your first class meeting? Did you enjoy writing it? What came easiest for you, and what gave you most problems?*

When talking about what Lili wrote in the diagnostic essay, she felt like she was not good at writing. Especially, she explained that she was not sure about the word usage in that piece of writing. Actually, what could really bother a reader of her essay was not

simply her problems with word usage and some confusing sentence structures she created, but the unclear relationships between ideas as well as a problem with the main idea focus as a result of the lack of paragraph unity and her inaccurate use of transitions discussed in Chapter 5. She did not mention any of these organizational issues in her concerns about her writing ability. Like Chinese learners of English, she felt that grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary are more important than anything else.

Weishan said that the topic for the diagnostic essay was pretty easy, so he did not have a hard time writing the essay, but he felt that grammar was the most challenging part, such as the past perfect tense and missing of an “s” in a plural form. He was not aware of more serious issues until I asked about his contradictory statement and other off-topic claims. He explained that he had never learned how to organize a paragraph or an essay. He did not realize that his claims were off topic; he simply wrote on and on once he began to write in English.

In a similar way, Yiman said that although nothing seemed easiest for him, he found it okay to write this essay because he thought he had chosen an easy topic. When I asked him what gave him the most problems, he replied, “When I write, I don’t have confidence in sentence, grammar. I have difficulty with building sentences.” In fact, his writing had many serious problems such as unclear central focus, inaccurate use of transitions, and digression; but he mistakenly thought that his main problems were just grammar issues. Once again, the theme from the previous section re-emerges; as the participants reflect on their writing, they again feel that, to become effective writers in English, they need only master the sentence-level grammatical forms that they had been taught to focus on as English learners.

Xiaohui felt that he did quite a satisfactory job in his first essay; like the previous participants he was unaware of major problems in his writing. In his mind, “as long as grammar is ok, it [writing] is alright.” He actually made many general statements with little elaboration in his essay, and he was not able to use transitions to connect ideas between sentences, but he did not realize that he had problems in these areas, or generally with logical progression of ideas.

In contrast to other participants, Gaofeng did offer comments about the essay content. He said that he had used brainstorming to organize information, so he thought organizing his ideas was quite easy for him, whereas finding details to support his point was the hardest part. Indeed, his essay was not well developed. In addition, his writing involved many issues related to incoherence, such as inaccurate use of transitions, unclear central focus, and digression. At this point, like other participants, he was not aware of these serious issues in writing. Finally, he did not realize that he had excessively copied the information from the prompt.

Hong also went beyond sentence grammar, but in a negative statement. He said that he did not know how to construct an essay because he had “no idea about the essay structure,” which was the hardest area for him. He also said that “I struggled how to start the essay. The starting part is difficult. Once I start writing, I can free write.” Because he preferred to “free write,” he felt that the body paragraphs were easy. Owing to his difficulty starting the essay, he had copied a lot of information from the prompt.

In our conversation, I mentioned that constant free writing without a clear plan of organization would result in digression. “Who cares?” he responded, “as long as it focuses on the main idea.” When asked why he failed to give examples from his general

knowledge, his reading, or personal experience to support his claim as required by the writing directions, he replied quite simply, “I don’t like giving examples.” Also, the thesis statement was absent in his writing, so he did not even follow the prompt to take a position he decided to support. What was worse, there were different ideas included in his paragraph that made it difficult for the reader to follow. In his own words, when asked about this, he again showed little concern, replying simply again, “That’s because I free write.”

To sum up, what has been stated above is taken from the first round interview. Next, the second round interview data will be presented.

### **The Second Round of Interviews: Participants’ Responses to Open-ended Questions**

The second round interview was conducted when the class moved to the second half of the semester; the aim was to have a closer look at how the participants were feeling, what they were experiencing in the American writing classroom, and how they were progressing with regard to improving coherence in their writing. As previously, the data presented here will be organized under the main questions covered in the interview.

1. *Tell me a little about your advanced English writing class. What kinds of things do you feel you are learning in the class?*

A common theme about what the participants learned from this writing class was identified. Lili, Weishan, Xiaohui, Gaofeng, and Hong all claimed that they learned how to use transition words to help idea organization in their essay writing. Besides, Yiman and Gaofeng said they learned how to keep a paragraph focused as they wrote. More specifically, Lili responded that the most important thing she learned in the writing class was the essay structure. Although she learned about the introduction, body paragraphs,

and conclusion before in a lower level writing class, her professor now strongly emphasized structure, including idea organization, the writing of the topic sentences, and the details needed to support the main idea. Lili added that ideas in her earlier writings might have been too general; other teachers had said that some parts in her writing were weak and more details were needed to support the topic sentences. She admitted that this was a problem for her. While taking this course, she felt like she had improved a little, but not as much as she needed, because she still could not elaborate on her ideas.

What impressed Weishan most was the experience of writing a summary in response to others' texts. He felt like he was learning how to use his own words to write a summary step by step. He was also learning to use transition words to organize ideas while doing the summary. In addition, he mentioned that in the introduction, he learned to state the thesis statement, and in the body paragraphs, he needed to give reasons and examples to support the key ideas. Yiman said that the most important thing he learned in the class was that when he wrote a body paragraph, he would state the main idea and then support it without going off topic. He went on to explain that before he took this course, he never thought there was a problem with being off topic. Now he understood that the reader would feel frustrated if his writing was off topic. To help him stay on the topic, he now believed that writing a topic sentence was very helpful. To focus on the topic, he needed to use related details.

According to Xiaohui, he had gained a better understanding of how to organize an essay after taking this writing class. To illustrate his point, he said that he had learned how to use transition words to help his ideas flow naturally. He proceeded to state that he

had learned about transitions before, but had never included them in his writing. “So they are [were] useless; but now I am clear they are important,” he said.

Gaofeng claimed that he had learned a lot from the writing class. “My grammar was improved. I learned how to write an essay smoothly.” Expanding on the phrase, “write an essay smoothly,” he pointed out that he “learned to use transition words.” He also learned “how to focus on the main idea,” saying, “You have to demonstrate your idea clearly.” As for Hong, he cited a broader range of new learning, asserting as a summary statement that he learned “how to pass the writing test.” In particular, to pass the test, he had to learn many different things in the class, in areas including sentence structure, transition words, grammar, topic sentences, and the thesis statement.

Undoubtedly, the participants have more or less improved their writing in different ways, including focus and unity. Especially, they have come to understand the importance of using transitional expressions for coherent writing.

2. *How do you feel (comfortable, confused, or resistant) when you are instructed to write the American way? Do you feel that this is different from writing in Chinese? If so, in what way?*

As for how the participants feel about writing the American way, their responses were quite different. First, Both Lili and Weishan were of the same mind, maintaining that they loved to write the American way.

Lili was a motivated student. She explained that “I feel comfortable because I can learn something new. However, if the topic is hard, I feel confused. Once I get through it, I will feel good.” The stark difference between Chinese writing and American writing, in Lili’s view, was the writing of the topic sentence for a body paragraph. “For American way,” Lili continued, “each body paragraph needs a topic sentence. But in Chinese way,

rather than use a topic sentence to begin a paragraph, we sometimes use an example to start the body paragraph. At least [we] don't emphasize writing a topic sentence." In terms of a paragraph structure, Lili noted that in American writing, each body paragraph presents one main idea. In addition to a topic sentence, Lili indicated that at the end of the paragraph, a mini-conclusion summarizing the paragraph was necessary. In contrast, Lili claimed that in Chinese paragraph writing, there was no need for a topic sentence. There could be several ideas included in the paragraph because the Chinese consider the topic in its totality. Therefore, "The writer may provide several different ideas in one paragraph," and it is the task of the reader to determine how these ideas relate to each other or to the guiding overall theme. When it comes to essay writing, Lili explained that Chinese writing usually followed the traditional *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* (*qi* for introduction, *cheng* for development, *zhuan* for transition, and *he* for conclusion) model to organize an essay. At first sight, considering the phrases in translation, this looks like an acceptable format for a Western essay. However, Lili elaborated, in a way that showed the difference in the two approaches. When moving to the third part of the essay, Chinese writers are encouraged to change to another way of developing their ideas. To make her point clear, Lili offered an example of how the Chinese describe an apple in writing:

In the development paragraph, you may say an apple, how good that is. But in the transition paragraph, you may say, you may use another fruit to compare with the apple, to show what is better. This is just one of the methods that I can think of right now. The teacher will suggest at the beginning, but not everyone follows these rules.



Lili's illustrations reveal that Chinese writers prefer to use the strategy of divergent thinking to generate "different" ideas about a topic, which is apparently culture specific, since the English/Western strategy favors staying on the path toward one main point of view.

Weishan expressed the same opinion as Lili's about how he felt when instructed to follow the American writing pattern, reporting that "I like to write in the American way, but it's difficult for me." Basically, he was saying that he was doing ok in writing, except for his serious grammar issues, because his professor had pointed out that his grammar was terrible. His point was that his poor grammar skills in areas such as tense agreement and the use of pronouns inhibited him from expressing his ideas freely, even though he may not be aware that he had many other more serious writing issues related to the American way of writing. As for the difference between English writing and Chinese writing, he did not offer much; since he moved to the United States in his early teens, he did not feel able to comment on differences, even if they had affected his writing through his cultural upbringing.

When asked about how the other four participants felt while learning to write the American way, Yiman, Xiaohui, Gaofeng, and Hong held identical views that they all felt confused, to varying degrees, about the American way of writing. Although Yiman did not remember what Chinese writing was exactly about, he spoke of his confusion about the Western idea of being "specific." As he was accustomed to the use of general vocabulary words (possibly as a result of his stress on intuitive thinking), his professor often failed to understand what he exactly meant. As Yiman explained in his example, "I wrote on the Face book. I say on Facebook, the distance between countries can disappear.

The teacher then said I should explain why the distance disappears and how it disappears.” Here, Yiman means that what he wrote made sense to him; however, it would be obscure to an American audience. Yiman took it for granted that his reader would certainly understand his point when he wrote “the distance between countries can disappear.” It was not quite necessary for him to present everything explicitly; it was up to the reader to figure out what his message implied. He wrote this only from a writer-focused perspective. Quite possibly, he may have never thought about developing an audience-focused perspective in writing. Clearly, nurtured in the Chinese culture of intuitive thinking, the idea of being specific confused him. Consequently, he had difficulty providing enough statements of appropriate depth and specificity to convey his ideas in the way expected for persuasive writing in this course. Since his family lives in the Chinese community, he is comfortable with Chinese thought only, which departs so greatly from the American way of thinking.

Xiaohui also claimed that he was confused about the American way of writing on similar grounds, saying “the logical thinking style confused me. We only do emotional thinking.” In his mind, only the traditional Chinese way of intuitive thinking works. According to Xiaohui, his unfamiliarity with logical thinking made his writing unclear to an English reader. He further explained that in English writing he had to use linking terms that were unfamiliar to him: “because” to show cause and effect; “when” or “after” to establish time relationships; “if” to indicate a conditional situation. But this was difficult for him in actual writing. “In Chinese writing,” he continued, “we don’t have to do that kind of [linking]. If we do it, we do it differently.” What Xiaohui means is that English writing uses these transitions of logic to show logical relationships within and

between paragraphs. In contrast, since Chinese writing is reader responsible, it does not have to use transition words to signal a reason, concession, or time. The reader is expected to figure out the relationships among ideas, often with the help of the context. In his example, Xiaohui said,

In Chinese we may choose whether to use the transition words or not, but in English, they emphasize using them. When I plan to write something, I need to think about the Chinese sentences first. Then I translate them into English. It makes sense to me, but I found that the professor[s] don't understand what I exactly mean.

Here, since the use of transition words in Chinese writing is optional, Xiaohui presented his insight into Chinese students' inability to use transitional terms to convey logical relationships among ideas, as a result of the traditional Chinese tendency toward intuitive thinking.

In terms of the differences between Chinese and English essay organization, Xiaohui expressed another interesting insight as to the cultural differences he was struggling with:

Although Chinese writing has an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion, the content and sentence structures are different. For example, Chinese writing also has an introduction, but that introduction may not relate to what you're going to say. The author provides information that has nothing to do with the theme. An American essay only uses a few sentences to bring the reader into the context and then gets straight to the point without talking rubbish. In contrast, Chinese writing likes to beat about the bush.

Xiaohui is saying that, in contrast to the American way of being concise and to the point, Chinese writing, even in the writing of the introductory paragraph, allows diverse elements that appear to be more or less irrelevant to the topic. This reminds us of the Chinese way of holistic thinking discussed in the section *Dialectical Thinking and Intuitive Thinking* in Chapter 2, which allows one to approach a subject by trying to provide peripheral information, rather than focusing directly on one's main point.

Gaofeng said that "I feel comfortable but a little bit confused about how to present my ideas." Gaofeng's point is that he was confused when what made sense to him did not make sense to his professor. In his own words, "When we talk about something like 'trust,' Americans don't get it." Gaofeng did not go further to offer a detailed example of what the cultural difference was in this case, but I can tell he was a little frustrated when his professor did not understand the message he tried to get across. Evidently, culture plays a significant role in people's way of thinking. Since Gaofeng said that he loved to read classical Chinese literature and watch Chinese movies while residing in the United States, the non-linear cultural thought patterns common in traditional Chinese culture may continue to subtly influence how he thinks and writes. He was not even aware that he was "beating about the bush" in ways that could be perplexing to an American reader.

In Hong's case, he was not only confused but also resistant to the American way of writing. He said that he was confused because Americans were confused about his writing. In clarifying his point, he explained,

[The professor thinks] I'm always off the topic. I thought I am on the topic because this is the way Chinese literature is. I don't like the American way 'cause

they (Americans) don't like the way I write. In American way it is direct. I like the Chinese way because it is more interesting. It makes you think more.

Hong was still having a hard time acculturating himself to the American way of writing, even though he moved to the United States when he was very young. It seems that he still does not quite understand the rhetorical values that are different from his own.

As indicated above, half of the participants feel comfortable about their learning in the new culture although they have some difficulty in different ways. The other half feels confused about writing the American linear way. As some of them claimed, unlike the American structure that is featured with the linear "introduction-body-conclusion" pattern, the Chinese way of ordering claims and information is likely to follow the "turn" step in another direction, which deliberately makes the reader think deeper. Cultural literacy experiences challenge students studying in a different academic milieu, even if they have absorbed another milieu only quite early in life. The Chinese-speaking participants' perceptions of differing literacy practices reveal how the differing values in different cultures have impacted their English academic writing.

3. *Are you perfectly able to apply your classroom learning to your writing? Why or why not? (If not, what problems do you have in trying to do this?)*

Among the six participants, only Hong said no to this question, contending, "I am lazy, so I didn't learn much. Since I didn't learn much, I didn't have enough writing skills. I didn't have much to apply." All other participants provided more nuanced answers to this question. Lili, Weishan, Yiman, Xiaohui, and Gaofeng thought they could apply what they learned to their writing, although none of them felt perfectly able to do so.

To begin with, Lili claimed, "I think I can apply what I am learning because I have learned the American way of writing, but I'm not sure if I'm perfectly able to apply

what I have learned to my writing.” According to Lili, the reason why she was not sure was because sometimes she was felt to be off topic in Western terms. Weishan stated that “I understand 80% of what the professor said, so I apply 80% of what I learned to the writing.” However, he still felt he had a problem that could not be solved in his English writing, namely the problem of repeating: “When the professor said I am repeating, I don’t understand what is considered repeating.” In some sense, his way of thinking is so unconsciously influenced by Chinese culture that he was not even aware of repeating the same point recurrently.

Yiman thought that he could apply everything the professor taught him, although he felt somewhat under pressure to conform to notions that he felt were at odds with his own views. He said,

If you don’t follow the way she [the professor] wants, she doesn’t accept [your essay]. So I write what she wants. When I wrote my essay on Facebook, I wanted to write two ideas, but she said you could only have one idea, so I included only one idea. I have no choice.

Yiman’s response seems to suggest that he follows the American way of writing simply because he is forced to, rather than that he is working hard to adapt his writing style to the mainstream academic discourse patterns in his new culture. Apparently, like many of the participants, Yiman is still not really aware of what Western rhetorical values are.

Xiaohui hints at a similar theme of coercion, combined with confusion over what is expected of him:

Basically, I could apply what the professor taught us to my writing, but I have some other problems which persecute me. I thought I did quite well, but my professor said no. I have difficulty referring back to the thesis statement.

Xiaohui's point is that, although he could present his ideas following the professor's instructions in some way, he was in no way perfectly able to apply his classroom learning to his writing. In particular, he found it hard to keep his paper focused, judging from his further remarks about feedback from his instructor.

Gaofeng, too, expressed a similar ambivalence to that of the other participants. He believed, on a general level, that he could do as he was instructed in his writing; but at the same time, he had problems, including the very understandable problem of identifying the boundary between one main idea and another:

I understand the concept, so I just follow the steps. But I'm sometimes confused when I write a topic sentence because I couldn't find a good reason for a different paragraph. Sometimes the reason in one paragraph overlaps with another paragraph. The two reasons are close.

Gaofeng felt that he was able to apply what he learned. However, like many of his fellow classmates, the topics he offered in different paragraphs were close to each other, which led to the problems of repetition and overlap. In strong persuasive writing in the English/Western mode, every paragraph needs to present a unique reason supporting the position being taken; therefore, circular, repetitive, or overlapping reasons can be a serious issue contributing to incoherent writing.

Evidently, aside from Hong who seemed to be rather negative in terms of applying his classroom learning to his writing, the rest of the participants all claimed that

they could use, if not everything, some of their classroom learning to improve their writing skills. At the same time, Lili, Yiman, Xiaohui, and Gaofeng were also aware that they still had difficulty staying focused on writing. In Weishan's case, he was struggling when it comes to repetition.

4. *How do you understand the idea of a "thesis statement?" When you write, do you try to put such a statement into your essay? If so, where do you place it? Can you comment on the essay we have here from your practice in class? Does it have a thesis statement? How did you support your central focus?*

In answering this question, only Xiaohui was confused, in particular about the difference between a thesis statement and a topic sentence. The other participants were all quite sure that the thesis statement refers to the main idea of the entire essay, an idea that is supported with textual evidence, and an idea that is preferably placed at the end of the introductory paragraph. As Yiman put it, "The thesis statement is what you're going to write for the whole essay." After showing where they placed the thesis statement, rather than going into details, they all briefly explained in much the same way how they supported the thesis statement, pointing out that the body paragraphs came after the introduction, and each body paragraph began with a topic sentence with one reason in support of the thesis statement. They then connected the reasons, descriptions, explanations, and examples to the thesis statement. As Hong vividly described it, "The thesis statement is like the head, and paragraphs are like the body. I have two body [parts] to explain the thesis. Each body [part] appl[ies] one reason." Weishan added another point: in the body you write a topic sentence and give one reason to explain why the thesis statement is true."

Obviously, judging by what they responded, we see that as developmental writers, all the participants would have a thesis statement preferably placed at the end of the



introductory paragraph. We also see that most participants do not seem to have much difficulty understanding the notion of a thesis statement that serves as the central focus, or a summary of the argument they will present in the rest of the paper. However, they only demonstrated a superficial understanding, particularly in their writing practice. As for establishing such a clear focus before they start to write, it can be very hard for these Chinese students. Then supporting this central focus with reasons and evidence, or crafting their writing into a coherent, unified whole, is even more challenging to them. In fact, they did not explain clearly how they would support their central focus. As identified in their writing, they often shifted their focus when they wrote.

5. *Has your writing class emphasized the idea of “coherence?” If so, how would you explain what that term, coherence, means?*

None of the participants seemed to know what the term “coherence” referred to; but their answers clearly suggested that the idea of coherence had been emphasized to some extent throughout the course, though without the overall term “coherence” having stuck in the students’ minds. From different perspectives, they indicated that coherence refers to the overall sense of unity and logical relationships among ideas, even though nobody mentioned other important elements such as cohesion, which refers to the specific linguistic forms that contribute to coherence in a text as experienced by a reader. As explained in Lili’s response, the instruction they were receiving in this course was aimed at helping them develop coherent writing, even if the technical term “coherence” was not used or did not stay in the students’ minds: “The professor didn’t give the definition of coherence, but I know what she said is related to coherence. Coherence means that in your essay you follow only one topic and support it. You’re not off topic. You use transitions to make the connection smooth.”

It should be noted that through the instructor's emphasis on coherent writing, most participants had enhanced their awareness of coherence, which was reflected in their writing, including using transitions to improve logical progression of ideas, avoiding irrelevant details, and cohering around one controlling idea in an essay, even though they still have many problems with coherence in their essays.

6. *Can you tell me a bit more about your writing of this essay that I have brought with me? Did you enjoy writing it? What did you find easiest and hardest about your writing? Do you think you used advice drawn from your writing course when you wrote this? If so, in what way? Can you talk about that in a bit more detail?*

Except Gaofeng, who did not seem to have much trouble in developing body paragraphs, providing supporting detail for body paragraph development challenged most participants. Most participants responded in some detail to this question.

Lili said that she enjoyed her writing and found the conclusion easiest, but writing the summary of a reading passage took much painstaking effort and time because she had to state the author's most important ideas in summarizing the passage rather than reporting minor details. She had much difficulty summarizing the author's key ideas. Also, in developing the body paragraphs, what seriously challenged her was to provide sufficient and relevant supporting detail. She was aware that the development she was able to provide was thin and weak.

Weishan stated that he also enjoyed his writing because he thought the topic "Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash" was easy. The easiest part for him was the thesis statement. What he means is that the writing of the thesis statement took him least effort, compared with the writing of the other parts of the essay. In contrast, the hardest tasks for him were the writing of the summary and the supplying of supporting details. "I spent a lot of time to write the summary and to think about examples in the body paragraphs."

Weishan also claimed that his professor's lectures were helpful, regarding writing the thesis statement, writing strong topic sentences, using transition words, achieving paragraph unity, and giving an example to help support the controlling idea. But he emphasized that he had not been clear about all these issues before taking this class. Therefore, when writing his essay, he did his best to follow what his professor taught in class.

Yiman thought that the first body paragraph was the easiest to write because he was able to come up with a good reason to explain why the idea he identified in the reading passage was especially significant. However, he found it very difficult to provide a distinctly different reason and distinctly different supporting details for his second body paragraph to support his claim. In fact, in addition to his sense that he had to repeat his supporting arguments, he also had serious problems with off-topic details and logical progression of ideas.

There was considerable variation in the responses to this item. Xiaohui found the summary was the easiest part to write, whereas the hardest parts were the writing of the thesis statement and the supporting details. In contrast, Gaofeng believed that writing supporting details to explain the main idea was the easiest task for him. He did not have trouble "pulling ideas together." According to him, the hardest part was sentence structure and grammar, returning to a point that featured prominently in responses to earlier questions in the interview process.

Like many of his fellow students, Hong noted that he did not enjoy his essay writing; he stated this emphatically in his assertion, "I hate writing." Still, he was able to identify different levels of difficulty in the writing process. What he claimed came

easiest for him was the beginning of the first sentence in the introduction, since he just followed the template created by the professor as in the example of “According to the article ‘.....,’ author X .....” The conclusion was also very easy for him because he said (not entirely clearly), “It is basically restating the thesis statement because one or two sentences are okay for the CATW test.” He continued to identify “the body” as the “hardest part” in the writing process. Hong then explained what was the hardest for him in more detail:

First, I had difficulty finding appropriate reasons for the body paragraphs, and then developing paragraphs with supporting details was another big challenge. Especially, if I’m not familiar with the topic, it is hard to give reasons. I can’t write well. I have the problem of connecting ideas. I use poor sentence structures. They are confusing to the professor. That is why she sometimes gave comments such as “nonsense” or “not clear” while grading my paper.

While writing his essay, Hong cited the professor’s advice as he understood it:

First, he said, ‘start with according to,’ and then summarize the reading passage and state the thesis in the end of the introduction. In the two different body paragraphs, you give one reason to each body and then support it. Give examples. The first sentence of each body states the reason. Then you talk about it. Write twelve sentences at least.

As for the use of the professor’s advice drawn from the writing course, every participant had a slightly different perception, but all of them claimed that while composing their essays, they tried to follow the professor’s instructions in the following important ways:

- Stating the author's most important ideas in their own words while practicing summarizing strategies
- Writing a thesis statement by identifying one key idea in the reading passage they intend to discuss in the body paragraphs
- Writing an effective topic sentence for each body paragraph by giving one strong reason that explains why the idea they have chosen is so significant.
- Using appropriate transitions that convey the correct meaning to make smooth connections among ideas
- Providing each supporting detail that is directly related to the key idea they are discussing and the specific point they stated in the topic sentence
- Writing multiple drafts for each assignment

As can be seen from the above, when discussing their essay writing about how they followed the writing instructions drawn from this writing course, most participants contended that the one that challenged them most was to write sufficient and relevant supporting details. The reasons for their inability to adequately develop their ideas are manifold, involving logically connecting ideas, providing distinctively different reasons and sufficient details for different paragraphs, offering relevant examples, avoiding off-topic claims and repetition, etc. Just as Xiaohui put it, writing an effective essay is demanding, and it does not happen in one or two days.

7. *How did your professor react to the essay? Were you able to make changes on the basis of what she said or wrote as feedback? Generally, how do you regard written comments on your writing? What kind of feedback do you think helps you best in making your writing better?*

In considering feedback, a brief discussion will focus on the following three aspects: what feedback the participants received, how they responded to the feedback, and what kind of feedback the participants thought could help them most.

In Lili's in-class essay, her professor commented that "You ran out of time because your introduction was too long. Don't write more than 4 key ideas. Otherwise this was good." What the professor means is that Lili's essay did not have a concluding paragraph as a result of a lengthy summary that took too much of her time. Therefore, Lili received a failing grade "R" for this in-class essay.

While revising what she wrote, according to Lili, she followed the professor's requirements and revised the introduction, the body, and the conclusion separately. When she finished revising the introduction, she submitted it; after she got the feedback from the professor, she revised it again. She then began to revise the body in the same way as she did with the introduction, based on a set of comments from the professor. Finally, she wrote the conclusion and again revised it following the professor's advice. When all was done, she put everything together and made what she deemed to be the necessary changes. After that, she submitted the entire essay, and once again revised it when the professor returned it with comments. By doing so, she followed the professor's advice to make all the necessary changes during the whole revision process. When her final draft was submitted, the professor checked and rated it again. Lili finally received a satisfactory score for this essay. However, revising her writing at each stage was a painstaking process. Lili described her own perspective on the process:

I thought I followed the professor's instructions when I wrote the summary, but the professor's comments on my summary said the main idea was not there. I felt

confused and kept reading her comments and the original passage again and again and can't [couldn't] get what the professor wanted. It almost drove me crazy because I thought I did summarize the main idea. Then [I wondered,] what part was the main idea of the passage? I tried to follow her advice and use my own understanding to change it. I had difficulty to get the main idea of the passage. I was also confused about key ideas and less significant ideas. I put much detail in the summary, so the introduction was longer than the body. When the professor pointed out that specific details are [were] not necessary, I removed them. I changed my summary several times. The professor said I needed to add more details and examples to the body. So I followed the professor's advice to develop the body paragraph more thoroughly by giving facts and examples. The professor want[ed] me to use transitions, so I used more transitions when revising to signal the reader what I am [was] going to say to make the paragraph more convincing. Finally, I was able to follow the professor's comments. I feel [felt] comfortable eventually.

Two sets of considerations are relevant here. First is the perspective of the writer, Lili's own viewpoint. When asked about her view of the professor's written comments, Lili said that she was confused at the beginning, but she accepted her professor's reaction, saying "I accept it. Just accept it. I mean I will think about what she wrote and what she said. I want to improve my weaknesses in writing. My English is not very well. She is a professor. I think I will follow her comments." As for what kind of feedback helped her best in making her writing better, Lili's own words are to be noted: "I think the best one

is to give more detailed comments and offer examples rather than comments like ‘unclear’.”

Lili prefers detailed comments from her professor to assist her in making her writing better. However, when she composed her essays, she was writer-centered rather than reader-centered. In other words, Lili did not provide sufficient detailed information in the supporting paragraphs to help the reader follow her point. For this reason, her professor advised her to revise her writing to be more reader friendly. As a plain truth, writing is incoherent if it lacks facts, anecdotes, or examples. Incoherent writing is inconsiderate to the reader. From the reader’s point of view, strong writing should be reader-centered and easy to follow.

Lili is not alone in having problems with a serious lack of supporting details that explain, describe, analyze, or otherwise help the reader. To varying degrees, other participants also wrote limited details while supporting the topic. They seem to favor writing that is not specific. However, when the participants are given feedback that is not specific (that is ‘writer-centered’ and not ‘reader-centered’), they realize that non-specific feedback creates problems for them. In the final analysis, these Chinese students did not keep readers in mind when they wrote essays.

After taking this writing course, Lili seemed to have a better understanding of why details and examples are so important. She commented:

In Chinese writing, we want to talk about things vaguely, such as poems in China’s Tang Dynasty. In America, you have to be very specific. But in Chinese essays, we can be vague, and we can imagine what the writer is talking about. But in America, we have to assume the reader knows nothing about what you are



writing. So you have to provide the reader more details to make the reader understand you.

In responding to Weishan's essay, his professor wrote these comments: "Body 2 does not give a reason. It provides a fact which is a supporting detail. Then your details in body 2 are almost identical to body 1." The professor was saying that when Weishan wrote in his topic sentence "Paying with cash can control impulsive food purchase because consumers have to think twice before they act," he treated a fact "consumers have to think twice before they act" as a reason. In other words, a reason should be a persuasive piece of evidence rather than a fact. Also, he used the same exact example as body 1 except the fact that it was his sister instead of his brother. Weishan received a failing grade "R" for his in-class essay, but he stated that he agreed with the professor and then exactly followed what the professor told him, saying,

When she told me what should be included in the summary, what should be in the body, I just write what she told me. That helps. What she told me was important because before she told me, I didn't know how to write the summary and what should be included in the body such as topic sentence, details, and examples, and a summary sentence for the body paragraph.

Yiman received written feedback from the professor containing a number of negative phrases, such as "repetition of thesis" in the summary, "wrong use of transition," "This is an absurd statement and it is off topic," "anecdote not relevant," "off topic claim, and "ideas not connected" throughout the essay. As a result, this essay also received an "R" grade as unsatisfactory. I discussed the professor's written comments with Yiman and asked him if he could make changes following the professor's feedback. He said yes,

though his further comment addressed consequences, rather than the helpfulness of the feedback. "...because I will get a B if I don't follow her advice. She said that if you don't follow this [the feedback], you won't [be given the invitation to] take the [CATW] test." This kind of motivation works effectively for students who are not highly motivated intrinsically. Although he did not finish the second body paragraph for his in-class exercise, he made changes based on what the professor said to him.

For example, while his first body paragraph discussed why paying with credit or debit cards could cause customers to purchase more unhealthy food, his second body paragraph also talked about why paying with credit or debit cards could cause customers to eat unhealthy products. The ideas in the two paragraphs are repetitious, as his professor pointed out. To follow the professor's advice, he first rewrote the thesis statement as follows: "I think the most important point is paying with credit or debit cards not only cause consumers to spend more money, but also purchase more unhealthy products." After that, he accordingly revised the topic sentences. Therefore, the point made in each body paragraphs was clear and unique rather than repetitious. He admitted that he benefited from the professor's comments. In terms of what kind of feedback helped him most, he said "more details," meaning that the more detailed comments were the most helpful. He added, "She gave me examples of how to connect sentences. She wrote sentences for me. She used 'on the other hand' to show me how to connect ideas. She also revised my sentences."

As for Xiaohui, the feedback he received included "In body 1 your example drifts off the topic of overspending in supermarkets and just discusses overspending on credit cards. This is wrong. Body 2 is repetitive and too short." The professor meant that

Xiaohui should keep to the topic of grocery and food purchases in the supermarket rather than discuss job loss and failure to pay off the credit card debt. Other comments included “Repetition. Tell me specifically what junk food he buys but don’t repeat.” The professor crossed out ideas that were repeated. Xiaohui, too, received a failing grade for his in-class essay. To improve his writing, Xiaohui tried to follow whatever the professor asked him to do:

Sometimes, if the details did not relate to the topic, I followed the professor’s advice and revised the details. If she said ‘Need more details here,’ I then provided more details. If she said ‘Nonsense,’ I crossed the sentence out and changed the sentence.

However, sometimes Xiaohui was confused about the professor’s comments and unsure of how to follow her directions. He continued, still talking about his professor’s feedback:

But sometimes I have no idea how to change. I know something is wrong, but I don’t know what’s wrong. For example, when the professor said ‘You need to refer back to the author,’ I understand I now need to refer back, but I don’t know how to refer back. I know that one sentence must be connected with another sentence, but when the professor asked me to join the ideas, I just cannot. Nobody taught me those things before. It’s not the kind of writing you can improve in one day or two.

Xiaohui remarked that the comments that could help him best were “when the professor directly pointed out my mistake such as comma splices and provided the right transition words to make two sentences less choppy, I can do better next time.”

Gaofeng was the only one who did not receive an “R” grade for his essay. On his essay, unlike that of the other participants, the professor did not provide much feedback. The only advice for this essay focused on word choice, usage, and a few grammar issues. In his revision, according to Gaofeng, he not only polished his essay structure, he also used the professor’s advice on improving his sentence structure and grammatical problems such as pronoun forms and subject-verb agreement. He felt comfortable in using the professor’s advice. He said what worked best for him were the comments that could help him make sure the details wouldn’t go off topic, as well as some of the grammar corrections.

With regard to Hong’s essay to which the professor gave an “R” grade, two places were marked “unclear”: one in the introduction and one in the body paragraph. The professor also crossed out almost half of the body paragraph because they were “off-topic claims.” In the example Hong provided, the professor again wrote “not relevant to the thesis. Like Yiman, Hong explained that he revised his writing by following the professor’s suggestions because he wanted to pass the CATW test. He found the professor’s comments useful, so “I changed the way she wants it.” As for what feedback helped him best, he remarked,

Any kind of feedback as long as it helps, such as grammar mistakes. Because she already corrected them, I don’t have to change the way she corrected. Feedback like giving more details and examples are good. Feedback that includes specific transitions like giving ‘in contrast, in comparison’ can make stronger sentences. I like specific examples ‘cause in that way I can understand easily.

Clearly, the participants were willing to revise their essays the way the professor suggested. Everybody read the comments carefully and did their best to make changes following the professor's feedback, even though they could get confused at the beginning. For all practical purposes, most of the participants considered the professor's comments helpful rather than questioning the usefulness of teacher commentary. As for which type of feedback they found most helpful regarding coherence in writing, it is most helpful when the students understand what is wrong, why it is wrong, and how they should fix the problems. Therefore, specific examples of how to connect ideas, specific directions of how to improve off-topic claims, specific comments about topic sentences, content problems, and development or depth of ideas would help most. Finally, as a suggestion, it might be a good idea to give both positive and negative feedback rather than just focusing on the negative.

8. *What do you think the strongest point in this essay is?*

Based on what the participants said, their opinions about their own strong points were quite different. Of the six participants, Lili, Gaofeng, and Yiman seem to be quite confident about what they have written.

Lili claimed that the strongest point for her essay was that "the overall structure is clear." When asked what her clear overall structure was, she very briefly explained her understanding:

The first paragraph is the introduction. The second paragraph gives one reason to support my thesis statement; the third paragraph uses another reason for that central focus. The last paragraph is the conclusion. All this makes the reader easy to understand my essay.

While Lili did not clarify how she ordered her claims and information, in her mind each of her individual paragraphs did what it was supposed to do. Although her in-class essay was not well written in terms of structuring her ideas, like her other classmates she kept revising until her professor was happy. At this point, her final draft was considered satisfactory regarding structural and organizational aspects. In similar fashion, Gaofeng was also quite confident about what he wrote, although he was unaware of his off-topic issue when he developed his second body paragraph. He believed that “The body paragraphs are clearly written ‘cause I know I focused on the main idea. I convinced myself as I read it. Yiman simply said that the strongest point for his essay was the fact that his essay was “well organized” because “I have an introduction, the body, and a conclusion.”

In contrast, other participants found it difficult to elaborate on the organization of their essays. Weishan was not quite sure about what his strongest point in his essay was; however, he made a claim that “I gave a good example in my body paragraph.” He was referring to his first body paragraph example of how his brother saved money by using limited dollar bills to purchase food instead of paying for his food with a credit card. When asked why he thought that example was well chosen and presented, he replied in a very vague way, “I just guess,” unable to elaborate further. To him, the example he used in his first body paragraph helped him support the specific claim he stated in his topic sentence (i.e., Paying with cash can control impulsive purchases because people can experience the pain of payment). For that reason, he even copied the same exact example when he wrote another reason for his second body paragraph.

In the same vein, like Weishan, Hong also claimed that the example given in the body paragraph was the strongest point in his essay. His reason was that “Cause it’s self-experience. So it’s stronger.” Actually, the example he provided in the second body paragraph was “not relevant to the thesis,” as his professor commented. To back up the thesis (i.e., Paying with cash reduces the purchase of unhealthy food products since physically handling over a dollar bill increases the pain of payment), he cited an example that his mom bought fewer vice products at the grocery store as a result of insufficient cash with her because she happened to leave her credit card at home. Hong took it for granted that his mother’s example related to the thesis he was discussing. In Hong’s view, as long as the example was drawn from personal experience, it would certainly work well. He may have never seriously doubted that it must be directly tied to the thesis he was supporting

Xiaohui commented that his strongest point was the thesis statement, but he continued, expressing some frustration at that very aspect of his writing and admitting that he had felt obligated to copy another student’s thesis statement, unable to come up with his own phrasing:

I actually don’t like this essay. The professor said that I’m totally out of topic. I fixed it several times, but she still said it was off topic. I just don’t get how I improve my writing. The teacher put on the board a thesis statement of another student and said ‘This is a perfect thesis.’ And I used the guy’s thesis statement.

So this is actually not my word. I didn’t like this essay.

From here, we can see that Xiaohui was so frustrated that he even felt resistant to his professor’s comments. Because he had never been informed in his previous education

about off-topic writing, he just could not understand what on earth “to stay on topic” meant. Given this frustration, it was not hard to understand why he started to feel negative about everything he wrote.

As discussed above, according to Lili, Gaofeng, and Yiman, provided that an essay has a clear beginning-middle-ending, it has achieved a good organizational structure. However, in their essays, they do have problems identified related to logical presentation of ideas. They may not be fully aware of the importance of focus, logical connections from sentence to sentence, and presentation of ideas when they said that their essays were well organized. On the other hand, Weishan, Hong, and Xiaohui were not sure about their strengths. While Weishan and Hong claimed that they had presented good examples, they were not aware of the real issues behind their own claims. Problems like off-topic writing, irrelevant examples, and repetitious presentation of ideas will seriously affect the logical development of ideas, thus significantly weakening the arguments.

9. *What strategies do you think you should use to improve your English writing skills related to coherence in persuasive discourse?*

The six participants’ responses more or less reflect their understanding of the abstract concept of coherence at different levels.

Lili explained her goals in general terms, citing both essay organization and language-related improvement, specifically mentioning the strategy of reading her writing aloud:

I will include a good introduction, body and a conclusion. Forming a clear, good thesis statement, using transition words, using correct grammar are all important skills that will make my essay coherent. After you finish each paragraph, you should reread it to see if it is smooth and makes sense. A strategy the professor



told us is you can read out loud. Because sometimes when you are writing, you won't notice that it is weird. But after you read it out loud, because you're listening too, you can find that a point is weird. It doesn't make sense. I think this is my strategies.

To improve coherence in English writing, Weishan simply indicated that he would practice more. He would include a lot of details in his writing and use transition words to make everything connected.

Yiman mentioned that he would "find more transition words and more vocabulary words to use in his essay writing in the future. Also, he said that he had to think clearly, using good examples and strong explanations. Xiaohui still seemed to be struggling in understanding the notion of coherence. He asserted that he would use time order and spatial order as well as transitional words as his writing strategies. Gaofeng stated that he would practice more, and get used to the American way of writing by going straight to the point. He would try to link all ideas together by using transition words. Lin Hong noted that he would state the thesis clearly and give strong reasons and strong examples to support his claims. He emphasized one reason for one paragraph only and would not include two different reasons in the same paragraph. What was most important, as he pointed out, was that "I will stay on topic."

In brief, the second round interview has provided us with an in-depth investigation of how the participants' perceptions of coherence changed as a result of receiving training related to coherence in the Western rhetorical tradition.

## CHAPTER 7

### CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

#### **Observation Data**

##### **The Goal of Conducting the Classroom Observation**

The purpose of conducting the classroom observation was to define the nature of the training that the students received on coherence, as well as to gain some insight into how the participants acted in response to their teacher's explanations of coherence. Since there was only one advanced composition writing class for ESL students enrolled for the summer session, only one classroom observation was conducted. Prior to the observation, I contacted the instructor to schedule a specific date and time for the classroom observation. The classroom observation was completed after the first round of interviews was conducted. In addition, I participated in pre- and post-observation conferences with the instructor.

##### **Pre-observation Conference**

To determine the instructor's instructional objectives regarding coherence in writing, I engaged in a brief pre-observation conference with the instructor before the classroom observation started. The instructor was an associate professor of developmental reading and writing. Her pseudonym was Karin Fawcett. She earned her Doctorate in Education and her MS in TESOL. She has authored a number of research articles and developmental reading and writing textbooks based on her classroom teaching experience. As explained by Dr. Fawcett, the purpose of this course was to assist her students in reading, understanding, evaluating, critiquing, and writing at the college level. She indicated that the students had done an in-class writing the day before, but

most of them had performed inadequately. First, the students did not present a good understanding of the main idea in the reading passage. Second, the supporting details provided in their writing strayed off the topic. Many of their ideas were unclear.

Transitions were either not clear or redundant. She explained that few students followed her instructions, but that this was a common experience. Some asked her questions in class and even sent many emails requesting help. However, many other students did not have the learning skills, and some were just not working at improving their writing. She said, “These kids’ parents are struggling in restaurants or nail stores seven days a week, so the kids don’t have parents at home to help them develop responsible attitudes. If their parents [were] home and [were] saying: ‘go to school,’ ‘do your homework,’ the young kids [would] do better.” Since most students did not follow her instructions, during this class, she was asking her students to complete the following exercises.

- a) The first was to recall the topic of the reading passage: using credit to grocery shop in supermarkets.
- b) The next was to practice including the topic in the paragraph and to add transitions.
- c) The third was to discuss and evaluate a sample defective body paragraph in which a learner disregarded what she taught in class by providing a list of reasons for using cash in shopping

### **Classroom Environment**

Located on the third floor of the College’s campus classroom building, the classroom was well-lit and equipped with air-conditioning. It was a fine day that morning. With big windows facing the south, the classroom was spacious enough to hold up to

forty-five students. In the classroom there were about forty desks and chairs. Twenty-one ESL students with different languages and cultural backgrounds were comfortably seated in the classroom facing the long white chalkboard. However, the physical layout was casual; students could sit anywhere. The teacher's desk was in front of the students.

### **Student Characteristics**

Twenty-one ESL students enrolled in this advanced composition class. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 35. There were nine male students and twelve female students. About twelve students seemed to come from Asian countries, but only seven students were Chinese speaking. The reason why they were taking this course was clear: they wanted to learn to write a well-organized persuasive essay so that they could pass the difficult CATW exit exam. I noticed that the six Chinese-speaking participants were paying close attention to the instructor's lecture. I understand that they faced many cultural changes and challenges as they attempted to master college-level writing in an American writing classroom. With the instructor's words still ringing in my ears, I was aware that they did not follow what the instructor had taught in class. Most of the participants were struggling, even though they had experiences in American high schools.

### **Classroom Activities**

The summer session was intensive, and it ended very quickly. Since the CATW exam was challenging, Dr. Fawcett had strict rules for this class. She demanded that her students write in certain specific ways to make sure they were on track. However, she admitted earlier in the pre-observation conference that although a few students knew what they were doing, most of them did not know how to learn to write. To help them enhance their writing skills, Dr. Fawcett created some classroom learning activities

closely related to the students' in-class reading-response essays, aiming to draw attention to some serious writing issues in her students' writing.

Among the activities, three were directly related to training in coherence. These activities include addressing off-topic issues, teaching transitions, and using transition words.

In the first place, Dr. Fawcett began by talking about off-topic material in her student essays. After briefly going over the importance of identifying the topic of a reading passage, Dr. Fawcett asked the whole class to recall what the topic was: "First everyone, what is the topic of the article that you read, '*Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash?*'"

"Using credit or debit cards," a couple of students responded.

"Using credit cards for shopping," added a student.

"Using credit cards for what kind of shopping?" Dr. Fawcett asked.

"Using credit cards for grocery shopping," some students answered.

"Right, *using credit cards for grocery shopping in supermarkets* is the topic of the reading passage," Dr. Fawcett confirmed the answer.

"However," Dr. Fawcett continued, "some of you wrote about saving money. Is that the topic?"

"No," the students almost answered in concert.

"Ok," Dr. Fawcett said, "some of you wrote about using credit instead of cash but did not talk about junk food purchase. Is that the topic?"

"No," the students replied.

When this activity was completed, Dr. Fawcett indicated that a student wrote a thesis statement by claiming, "When consumers pay with a credit or debit card, they are

more likely to purchase unhealthy products.” According to Dr. Fawcett, writing this idea gave the student his central focus, which he should support with reasons and evidence in the rest of his response. As Dr. Fawcett emphasized, “The thesis clearly defines what the essay is about, so the student needs to explain why using a credit card can encourage customers to spend more money on unhealthy products in supermarkets.” “However, instead of developing the central focus in his supporting paragraph, the student did not follow Dr. Fawcett’s instructions and wandered off the subject. To help the class better understand how a body paragraph should have a topic sentence that provides a supporting idea for the thesis and indicates to the reader what the paragraph will discuss, Dr. Fawcett distributed the following student paragraph in class:

There are several advantages of using cash for shopping. People feel uncomfortable when they have to take money out of their wallets in public because of the pain of payment. Second, when people carry less cash, they won’t overspend on unnecessary items. Third, paying in cash doesn’t result in interest payments, and it saves consumers money. Fourth, many stores require a minimum amount purchase when credit cards are used. If people use cash, they don’t have a minimum. Fifth, some stores only accept cash, and when customers pay with cash, they sometimes get a discount. Therefore, paying by cash is better than paying by credit.

After reading the paragraph with the class, Dr. Fawcett asked the students to determine the topic sentence, which was placed at the beginning of the paragraph. Rather than relating the topic sentence to the thesis that could help strengthen the coherence of the essay, Dr. Fawcett pointed out that the student wrote a list of reasons for using cash when

doing shopping. Obviously, the student did not address the issue or answer the question. The topic sentence “*there are several advantages of using cash for shopping*” does not provide a reason or insight directly related to the thesis of the essay, so the connection between the topic sentence and the thesis is weak. Moreover, as the topic sentence controls the paragraph, each supporting detail addressed the advantages of using cash, and failed to explain why customers made impulsive purchases of unhealthy foods when using a credit card, thus digressing from the central idea and resulting in incoherent writing.

While Dr. Fawcett was explaining this concept, the six participants listened attentively without asking any questions. To most of them, the notion of staying on topic was challenging because of complicated cultural issues. Rather than ignoring what Dr. Fawcett taught in class, they seem more to be having trouble understanding what the instructions mean and how they can apply the ‘rules’ being presented in class. Thus, this training was helpful to the Chinese students. However, it must be noted that it takes time to rewire their brains in the fundamental techniques needed to revise the ways that they see relationships between a claim and supporting details. After all this clarification, Dr. Fawcett asked the students to explain what was done incorrectly in this body paragraph.

It is obvious that many students came to understand that the topic sentence provided in the above sample paragraph failed to relate back to the central focus of the paper. Dr. Fawcett emphasized that “some people say that Asian students mainly need vocabulary and grammar, but that’s not the issue. Many students don’t know how to learn.” What she suggests is that many Chinese ESL students especially struggle with essay topics or questions that are given on tests. They don’t follow the instructor’s

directions, thus falling off topic - at times they do not even respond to the question being asked, which exactly happened to Lin Hong, Yiman, and Xiaohui when they wrote their in-class essays.

After addressing the off-topic issue, Dr. Fawcett proceeded to discuss transitions. To make sure the students understood why transition words were necessary and what transitions should be used to connect sentences, the instructor asked the class to complete a transition word exercise by responding to the multiple-choice questions about transition words. Under each question, the students were asked to select a letter a, b, c, d, e, or f that corresponded with the correct answer. Dr. Fawcett explained the common transition words and their purposes in writing when she elicited responses from the students. As I walked around the classroom while the students were performing the exercise, I found this type of exercise did not seem to be challenging to the six participants. To highly motivate students, to substantially enhance connections between thoughts, and to considerably improve logical organization, it would be a good idea if instructors teach transition words in context using authentic material.

After the activity, Dr. Fawcett distributed another handout to each student, asking them to complete a paragraph with appropriate transitions or vocabulary corrections (See Appendix K). She stated that this paragraph was taken from a student's essay. The class was divided into different groups, so the students could work with one another. Dr. Fawcett first read the text to the class and then said: "Now you can add transition words." Although the Chinese students were familiar with the content, to insert an appropriate transitional word or a phrase from idea to idea to indicate a shift in direction was still quite challenging because they did not completely comprehend how ideas were logically



related to each other due to the influence of the Chinese paratactic structure. If the previous exercise was just reciting things they had learned, here they had to apply the principles, which is harder. This exercise was thought-provoking and helpful. Dr. Fawcett circulated around the classroom to help individual students in need.

Not surprisingly, most of the Chinese students, I discovered, were confused as to what transition words should be used. Especially, they could not quickly identify the relationships among the ideas of cause and effect, addition, or contrast. These Chinese students clearly lacked previous experiences in contextualized coherence-related learning activities. They had difficulty providing the right word or a phrase to link the sentences together to move the text along. This reveals that it may not be challenging to complete a transition exercise in isolation; however, when the Chinese students were challenged to provide transitions in authentic contextualized communication, they found it hard to accurately use transition words to help create coherence. Recall again that such links in Chinese written discourse are often obscure or simply missing, and the reader is expected to supply the relationships without using such signposts. By performing this exercise, the participants acquired a better understanding of how transition words and other minor vocabulary revisions made the paragraph clearer because they had to carefully ponder the logical relationship among ideas. As pointed out by Dr. Fawcett after the class, “These transitions allowed my students to connect one thought to the next, so that the paragraph was easy to read and understand.”

### **Teacher-student Writing Conferences**

When the classroom activities were completed, all the students were instructed to revise their in-class essays based on the comments and suggestions provided by their

professor. While the students were revising their essays, Dr. Fawcett called every student up to her desk in turn, so that she closely worked with each student on a one-on-one basis. When I approached Dr. Fawcett's desk, I found that the professor-student writing conference was necessary. Such a conference was an opportunity to establish better communication between the professor and each individual Chinese participant. The conference focused on the revision of the in-class essay, including a discussion of ideas presented in the essay, clarification of the confusing points, grammar errors, and mechanics. While the participants explained the choices they made regarding digression, connections between sentences and ideas, and other writing issues, Dr. Fawcett learned what they thought about. They interacted closely with each other. Obviously, the participants were actively involved in the discussion with the professor.

### **Post-observation Conference**

Right after the observation, I had a post-observation meeting with Dr. Fawcett. To help analyze the information, I asked her five questions, and she responded accordingly. The following brief sections present my main questions and the instructor's response.

*1. Did the students learn what you want them to? How do you know?*

Dr. Fawcett said, "Some did. Some didn't." She frequently examined the students' writing. According to the instructor, if the students employed basic sentence structures and basic grammar, basic organization, topic sentences, and relevant supporting details identified in their writing, they basically understood and learned what she wanted them to.

2. *What strategies do you think you have used to help the students improve coherence?*

Dr. Fawcett said that she tried to emphasize to the students that their writing had to flow logically from idea to idea. She compared it to listening to music that was chopped up and disconnected because of a defective CD or record. She emphasized how they must employ transitions and use them correctly, not just throw one in. A lot of students struggled with using the transition that had the best meaning. For example, if they used “however” when they were expressing a result or consequence, she explained to her students that “however” signaled a contrast, so they needed a different type of transition. Thus she had attempted to help them reconsider their choices to figure out what type of word they needed, and then to select the correct word.

She also tried to show the students how the use of adverbial clauses could create transitions by doing the following activities. For instance, “I feel sick and have a sore throat. I go to my doctor’s for a strep test.” She would model the transition for her students by adding the subordinate conjunction “when” at the beginning of the sentence:

“*When* I feel sick and have a sore throat, I go to my doctor’s for a strep test.”

“I wake up. I make my bed. I go downstairs. I make my coffee and breakfast.” She would do the same to the following sentence by adding connectives that would clarify the relationship between the ideas expressed:

“*As soon as* I wake up, I make my bed. *Then* I go downstairs, and make my breakfast.”

She explained that students frequently neglected to realize how every thought had to relate directly to their thesis and topic sentences and that one thought must gracefully connect to the next, so she reminded her students that “the key to this learning was to

only discuss your thesis and topic sentence, nothing else, and to use transitions and adverbial clauses.”

3. *Were the choices of your teaching strategies effective? How do you know?*

Dr. Fawcett found that if she simply taught her students about transitions and adverbial clauses and then just pointed out how they could use them to enhance their writing, they did not initially transfer this learning. So instead, she highlighted texts that needed these techniques and asked the students to correct them. Little by little, she began to see her students use these techniques. She said that the more advanced students actually became graceful writers, which, she thought, was evident in their writing, and they became proud of their ability too. She indicated that it not only showed in their writing but on their faces when they sat with her and reviewed their papers individually.

4. *Were the materials related to coherence you used helpful? How do you know?*

Dr. Fawcett claimed that it was helpful to use authentic students’ sentences or paragraphs related to coherence as an example in classroom discussion because the students could come to understand why they were wrong and learn how to improve them. She also explained that although she taught her students these techniques by using her CATW book exercises and her grammar textbook activities and lessons, what really made the difference was when she corrected their writing and got them to become aware of the need to make their writing cohesive. It should be noted that this instructor had written a CATW guidebook and a grammar book to help students improve their writing. In particular, her CATW book provided many guidelines for coherence in writing such as transitions and logical layout of an essay. “Books and materials developed the concept,”

she added, “but teachers had to get the students to transfer this knowledge into their everyday writing.”

5. *What special characteristics of the Chinese ESL students in your class are you aware of?*

Dr. Fawcett indicated that the Chinese students often mixed up the passive with the active voice and made errors in the use of articles and subject-verb agreement, but she did not worry too much about those things. She stressed that they had trouble with cause and effect like “When one event happens, it results in another.” Dr. Fawcett means that the Chinese students are confused about or are not used to the American English cause-effect rhetorical pattern or conventions. To the mind of a Chinese writer, what happens just happens. Sentences like “Wang Ping failed to pass the CATW exit exam. She did not work hard enough” are perfectly acceptable in the Chinese context. The Chinese writer puts a lot of responsibility on the reader to figure out this connection. Under many circumstances, Chinese students may have difficulty composing a clearly indicated cause-effect pattern as a result of intuitive thinking. The relationship in Chinese writing from sentence to sentence is not as clear as what an English speaker takes for granted. As discussed earlier, Chinese writing is relatively obscure and reader responsible; given this cultural background and the cognitive habits it nurtures, it is easy to see why the Chinese ESL students just may not bother to go out of the way to think about what the cause is and what the effect is. Many of the basic rhetorical patterns an English speaker may take for granted can be challenging or even confusing to a Chinese-speaking student. They are simply a matter of convention. It is a habit of mind.

Moreover, Dr. Fawcett maintained that the Chinese students overused or misused transitions, indicating, “The Chinese rely on transitions, even though they are inaccurate.” She believed that transitions were overused in her students’ writing, which indeed is a valid point. Since transitions in Chinese thinking are purely optional, Chinese students are likely to run into the extreme of overusing them when they are taught to use transitions in English writing. They excessively bring transitions into their essays, without fully understanding their function, on the mistaken assumption that peppering their writing with these transitions can help strengthen their writing. In fact, many Chinese students may not realize that overuse of transitional words and phrases can weaken the writing and even become annoying to the reader. An important point to highlight here is that the problem is twofold. The Chinese students may not really comprehend the meaning each transition conveys; but at the same time, they may place undue reliance on transitions, assuming that frequent use of these forms is a hallmark of good writing in English. Consequently, they fail to organize transitions according to the kinds of relationships they convey; or they may resist expressing these relationships overtly, as this is strongly disfavored in Chinese writing. On a deeper level, as a cultural issue, Chinese students may prefer not to even carefully figure out the logical connections between sentences and ideas when they write in Chinese, a habit they transfer into their English writing practice. Thus, they end up applying transitions even when the relationship between words and ideas is not clear or does not exist. Hence, they seriously misuse transitions, possibly as a result of a complex interplay of factors. To make things worse, when they often misuse the transitions, this misapplication can lead to misunderstandings. For example, in his in-class exercise, Weishan used the phrase “on

the other hand” to express the idea of “in addition” rather than introduce a different point of view. While it is challenging for English-speaking novice writers to learn to use transitional words and phrases effectively, the Chinese student’s situation is greatly complicated by both linguistic and cultural issues.

Another striking characteristic the professor noted was that the Chinese students did not focus. “They are writing about kids getting into trouble using credit cards, but they soon started to tell me about their father. The father is their [example of a] “kid.” They don’t have connections. This sort of thing particularly happens to the Chinese students.” Her analysis really hit home. In Chinese culture, people tend most often to think and write in ways that are nonlinear. They creatively link A and B together to prolong their writing without providing a sense of continuity. Most Chinese would think this non-linearity deserves careful pondering, thus making the reading a playful experience. Without exaggerating, experience with Chinese reading tells us that the more eloquently a writer can “digress,” from the perspective of holistic thinking, the more respect is given to his/her writing. To a Western reader, this is basically nonsensical, because *continuity* is the key to coherence, which is in turn highly valued. As Dr. Fawcett indicated, “In America, time is money, so we get right to the point.” In fact, the Western system of logic condemns irrelevance. As we know, English speakers admire writing that “gets to the point.” They do not want to be thrown for a loop. In other words, they do not want to be confused by the writer who has “gone off the track.” As a result, since the Chinese students have to acquire literacy practices in English that are not familiar to them, their learning load is double compared to that of a non-literate person learning in his/her

first language. This task in ESL learning is not easy, but it is our job to explain to ESL students why we do things the way we do.

The above discussed features of Chinese student writing, presented by their instructor, certainly don't cover all the bases, but they do touch on some of the major coherence issues cropping up in Chinese students' papers.



## CHAPTER 8

### RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study has explored critical aspects of both Western and Chinese rhetorical values on coherence that might exert a substantial impact on Chinese learners of English. This section will provide a response to the research questions. To give effective answers, I will briefly summarize the results of the study.

#### **The First Research Question**

The first research question is stated as follows:

#### **Western Rhetorical Values on Coherence**

*What are the coherence features felt to be necessary for effective persuasive writing in the English language context? What do teachers and scholars say in defining coherence, and what pedagogical practices for developing coherence are valued in the English cultural world? How have modern notions of coherence emerged from classical views, dating back to Aristotle?*

To begin with, to provide an appropriate response to this research question, it is necessary to briefly go over what I presented earlier in literature review. I will first address the last part of the question, and will then gradually move back up to the first part of the question. I would like to explore the reasons first before I answer the rest of the smaller questions. Therefore, I will first again summarize the enormous influence of Aristotle, John Locke, and Alexander Bain and how they have exercised a great impact on today's notion of coherence. Next, I will briefly review two models of coherence which started from Halliday and Hasan's text-based model of (1976) *Cohesion in English* and developed in the context of recent reader-based approaches. After that, I will address

pedagogical practices for developing coherence in today's writing classroom. When this is completed, I will provide a definition of cohesion and coherence. Finally, I will present the coherence features necessary for effective persuasive writing in the English context

**The influence of Aristotle.** Coherence has its roots in Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) whose philosophy serves as a strong early example of unity and coherence (Lloyd, 1999). As Lloyd asserts, Aristotle's philosophical thoughts demonstrate an important continuity. Since he has a clear sense of subject, audience, purpose, consistency, and the use of concrete evidence when advancing his arguments, his way of argument presentation proposes the earliest model for presenting coherent arguments in persuasive discourse, which continues to have a significant impact on today's coherent writing (Lloyd, 1999). In addition, Aristotle's logic, especially his theory of the syllogism, has had an unparalleled influence on the history of Western thought. In particular, today's attempts to comprehend the features of persuasive writing continue to rely on Aristotle's three modes of persuasion in any given situation: *ethos* (the argument depends on the character of the speaker and influence the perception of the audience), *pathos* (the emotion of the audience is appealed to), and *logos* (reason itself is what persuades the audience). In fact, in the American writing classroom, students today learn about the different types of appeals that give power to weaker arguments.

**The influence of John Locke.** Aside from Aristotle's enormous influence on today's notion of coherence, John Locke (1632-1740) has also exercised significant influence on coherence in modern persuasive discourse. In writings such as the widely read *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke emphasized the cautious and proper use of language and believed that because of the limits of human knowledge,

when we voice our opinions, we must choose our words carefully and never allow the words to say more than what we can rationally say. According to Ernst (2000), in the nineteenth century, John Locke's pedagogical philosophy heavily influenced how a writer should appropriately structure ideas to gain persuasion, coherence, clarity, and attention (Ernst, 2000).

**The influence of Alexander Bain.** Under the influence of Aristotle and John Locke, Alexander Bain (1818-1930) is another important figure in the history of modern English; Bain plays a decisive role in further developing the conception of coherence (Bamberg, 1983; McCulley, 1985; Lee, 2002). As introduced in the section *Early Influences: John Locke and Alexander Bain* in Chapter 2, Bain's (1887, 1890) early model of coherence in persuasive discourse, discussed in his two-volume seminal book *English Composition and Rhetoric*, covers issues such as subject, purpose, audience, transitions, statements, topic sentences, unity, support, inductive and deductive reasoning, transitions, reference, repetition, and parallel structure. Scholars today continue to apply these important elements elaborated in Bain's books to define the features of coherence in English. Our contemporary composition textbooks clearly reflect Bain's notion of coherence.

Based on Bain's model of coherence, the developments in the twentieth century have set the tone for refining the concept of coherence. A review of modern literature has presented two models of coherence: text-based and reader-based, with the former focused on the text itself and the latter on the reader's interaction with the text.

**The influence of Halliday and Hasan's text-based model.** Text-based coherence started with Halliday and Hasan, who in 1976 presented the cohesion model in

*Cohesion in English*. Halliday and Hasan divided cohesion into grammatical and lexical cohesive ties, arguing that these ties form a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element crucial to the interpretation of the text, thereby contributing to coherence, as discussed in the section entitled *Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion in English* in Chapter 2.

Since then, cohesion, the linking of sentences together using surface ties (Connor, 1984), had been accepted as a useful tool for discourse analysis. However, scholars find that this model does not clearly illustrate the link between cohesion and coherence. Subsequent research has been conducted to test the usefulness of Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model. Consequently, studies report that Halliday and Hasan's model of cohesion is not a sufficient measure of coherence. In other words, these cohesive ties alone do not necessarily make a text coherent (Witte and Faigley, 1981; McCulley, 1985; Tierney and Mosenthal, 1983); there is now broad agreement among composition researchers that overall coherence involves much more than cohesion.

**Reader-based approach.** For a text to be globally coherent, researchers have examined the relationship between the lexical cohesion of student writing and overall coherence. As a result, in the past thirty years a more dynamic and reader-based approach has emerged. Researchers who are supportive of this reader-based approach to cohesion and coherence include Carrell (1982 & 1984), Bamberg (1983), Connor (1984, 1996), Tanskanen (2006), and O'Reilly and McNamara (2007), to name a few. According to these researchers, for anyone who does not have the relevant background knowledge corresponding to the text, the text may fail to cohere; so a writer and a reader must share background knowledge of both content and form for coherence to be achieved. The

shared background information is what leads to coherence. To put it another way, a text cannot be considered separately from the reader; the successful use of textual cohesion and coherence requires an interaction among the reader, the discourse, and the writer.

Although the recent focus has been placed on the interaction between reader and text, Carrell (1984), Johns (1986), Bamberg (1983), Canavan and Brandon (1990), Connor (1984, 1996), and Tanskanen (2006) agree that since cohesion and coherence interact with each other, both cohesion and coherence work together to create a text as a coherent whole. Some scholars even use the term “local coherence” to replace the concept of cohesion (Bamberg, 1983). As Bamberg (1983) claims, in considering coherence in its broader sense, almost any feature, including cohesive ties and overall perceptions of coherence, can affect a reader’s ability to integrate details of a text into a coherent whole. In practice, the following will briefly address what writing instructors are actually doing in the English writing classroom.

**Pedagogical practices for developing coherence.** To help students develop coherence, pedagogical practices lay emphasis on teaching students to achieve coherence through order, through controlled patterns in forms, such as repetition of words and pronouns, synonyms and substitutions, and transitions, and to become aware of concepts such as unity, organizational structure, audience, purpose, thesis statement, topic sentence, and supporting sentences (Fawcett, 2011; Arlov, 2010) because these elements of coherence are highly valued in the English cultural world. However, as pointed out by Johns (1986), numerous ESL writing textbooks, as well as non-ESL textbooks, today present sentence-level grammar in a discourse context and teach students to write topic sentences and thesis statements and to provide supporting details without teaching or

emphasizing the multitude of coherence features discussed in recent literature. English writing textbook writers do not realize what students really need, in terms of coherence. For example, most of the current writing textbooks lack the needed breadth and depth of coherence coverage.

Additionally, writing instructors jump around too much when teaching writing, without being aware that they need to repeat the emphasis on coherence in writing, and that students need to continuously go over and over to strengthen coherence in their writing. Consequently, students can hardly identify the logical relationships between sentences, which lead them to misuse transitions. Because today's textbooks fail to provide sufficient introduction to the depth and variety of coherence elements necessary for effective persuasive writing (John, 1986), students often engage in a pattern of repetition without being aware of why. Also, students frequently make off-topic claims without realizing that this is not the way to write in the English cultural world. Considering this, pedagogical practices for developing coherence must be enhanced. Then an important issue arises: what is coherence all about, and what do teachers and scholars say in defining coherence? The following section will answer this question.

**Definition of cohesion and coherence.** This review of literature indicates that the definition of coherence varies. There are at least two competing orientations: one that focuses on the text itself and one that stresses the reader's interaction with the text (Connor & Johns, 1990). For the purpose of this study, drawing upon the definition provided by Abeywickrama (2007), this study defines cohesion and coherence as follows:

- *Cohesion*: the intersentential property of texts, the surface-structure linguistic features that signal connections between sentences and tie together the semantic relations in a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; van Dijk, 1980).
- *Coherence*: The organization of discourse with all elements present and fitting together logically (Hinkel, 2004); ideas sticking together, the overall discourse level unity, the linking together of meanings in texts or how well the text hangs together to provide the global quality of text structure (Bamberg, 1984); when a writer leads the reader clearly and logically from one idea to another while developing his/her thoughts, the reader can see quickly the relationship of one idea to another and to the central thought of the whole (Canavan & Brandon, 1990).

The above views of cohesion and coherence provide a general picture of what makes a text a unified whole. The important point to be noted again is that although effective writing involves coherence at both levels, attention to overall coherence must precede most concerns about cohesion (Bamberg, 1983). Finally, in the English context, the following coherence features are deemed as necessary for effective persuasive writing.

**Coherence features necessary for effective persuasive writing.** Sources from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Bamberg (1983), McCulley (1985), Lee (2002), Abeywickrama, 2007, and CATW (2010) identify the following features as leading to overall coherence:

- *Cohesion*
  - (a) Pronouns of reference are used accurately
  - (b) Conjunctions are used accurately

- (c) Ellipsis and substitution are used when needed
  - (d) Lexical repetition is used appropriately
  - (e) Synonymous words/phrases when used are used appropriately
  - (f) Transition words are used judiciously and accurately to link sentences and/or paragraphs together to convey relationships throughout the essay
  - (g) Each sentence follows logically from the previous one
- *Coherence*
    - (a) The opening paragraph is effective in introducing the reader to the subject or the central idea that the writer will develop throughout the essay
    - (b) All the paragraphs support the central focus and do not digress
    - (c) The writer's overall point of view is clear
    - (d) Paragraphs are divided in terms of content relevance
    - (e) Transition is smooth between paragraphs
    - (f) The writer organizes paragraph details according to a discernible plan (e.g., time order, addition order, order of importance, order of cause and effect, order of comparison-contrast) that is well-designed with a smooth and logical progression of thoughts; therefore, the ideas relate to one another
    - (g) The writer does not shift topics, and the ideas in each paragraph are all relevant to the topic
    - (h) Ideas mentioned are elaborated
    - (i) There is no repetition of ideas
    - (j) The writer fully develops paragraphs, effectively using reasons and specific details and examples from his/her reading and experience to develop ideas



(k) The last paragraph gives the reader a definite sense of closure

With a review of literature, the above findings have provided answers to the first research question. In what follows, I will address the second research question.

### **The Second Research Question**

The second research question is stated as follows:

#### **Chinese Rhetorical Values on Coherence**

*What rhetorical values regarding coherence have been expressed in Chinese culture? What do Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say about coherence in the Chinese cultural context? Again, how are these views of coherence rooted in classical Chinese philosophy or rhetorical traditions? To what extent, and in what ways, do the Chinese values differ from those prevalent in English?*

To answer the second question, the influences of the Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism will be first again summarized in order, following a similar organization of the same topics in Chapter 2. Next, I will summarize the influence of Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric* in the Chinese cultural context. Then current English instruction in China will be briefly discussed. All the above mentioned influences have been addressed in Chapter 2. Having reviewed this material, I will address each part of the second question in order.

Modern rhetorical principles regarding Chinese writing can be traced back to ancient Chinese philosophical traditions. Chinese rhetorical values emerged mainly from three traditions: the Confucian tradition of filial piety and loyalty to the social tradition and to authority, the Taoist tradition of *Yin* and *Yang*, and the Buddhist tradition of rote

learning. The central idea of the three pillars of Chinese thought is characterized by the notion of harmony.

**The influence of the Confucian tradition.** Since ancient times, China has been involved in numerous battles. Serious dissent and violent confrontations were never absent in ancient Chinese culture. To achieve harmony, Confucius, the dominant ancient Chinese philosopher, ideally promoted an appropriate and artistic use of language. When conflicts arise, Confucianism advocates *Zhongyong*, the middle of the road, discussed *Chinese Rhetorical Values* in Chapter 2. The goal of *Zhongyong* is to maintain balance and harmony. The guiding principle, therefore, is that one should never act in excess. As a result, the Confucian tradition can be said to have influenced the Chinese rhetorical values in the following important ways:

- Straightforwardness in communication is not encouraged.
- Chinese writers use indirect, even irrelevant, sentences to support their topics in their writings (Duan, 2003)
- To maintain a very polite and humble tone, Chinese writers at various levels often follow a “topic-delayed” structure (Qian, 2003).
- Chinese writers may never reveal their point of view or state the conclusion at all, leaving it to the reader.
- In the Chinese cultural context, persuasion means to smooth out disagreement and achieve harmony (Wang, 2008).
- In persuasive writing, following the principle of *Zhongyong*, Chinese writers try to show no partiality to either side, avoiding taking one-sided view of an issue.

- Since the Chinese rarely consider writing as a means of persuading others, audience analysis is not a central issue in the Chinese rhetorical tradition.
- For the Chinese, the purpose of their writing is often to demonstrate the beauty of the language and eulogize the ruling class.

**The influence of the Taoist tradition.** The central principle of the Taoist tradition focuses on *Yin* and *Yang* discussed in *Chinese Rhetorical Values* in Chapter 2. The Taoist visual *Yin* (black) and *Yang* (white) shape represents the interaction of two energies as well as the balance of opposites in the universe. *Yin* and *Yang* cause everything to happen. If one of them dominates, the other is negatively impacted and vice versa. They are never at rest, but constantly changing and complementing each other. The influence of the *Yin* and *Yang* idea over the Chinese rhetorical tradition can be summarized as follows:

- Originating from the *Yin* and *Yang* concept, Chinese culture is featured with a non-linear or circular thinking pattern. Chinese circularity manifests itself in the prevailing viewpoint of combining the two opposites and enclosing them (Zuo, 2001). When approaching an essay topic, the Chinese would prefer to talk around it in circle-like discussions until a mutually agreeable solution is found.
- In persuasive writing, much like the Confucian idea of *Zhongyong*, the Chinese like to balance the *Yin* and *Yang*, avoiding stark contrasts. As a general rhetorical approach, while writing persuasive essays, the Chinese value a strategy that supports both sides or argues positively about both sides to seek common ground in order to be free from any bias (Wu, 2001).

- Chinese students especially struggle when it comes to repetition. As might be expected, the more they write, the more they repeat themselves. The study reports that the participants repeated the same point over and over again using different wording. The tendency toward repetition is closely related to Chinese thinking in circles as well as rote learning, which is, in turn, based on repetition.
- The Chinese thought patterns are typical of dialectical thinking, emphasizing holistic strategies (see Chapter 2).
- Holistic strategies allow the Chinese to view issues from multiple perspectives (Zhao, 1999; Li, 2005; Zhang, 2009). Consequently, Chinese writers often see a topic from all sides and tend to compose dis-unified paragraphs containing many different ideas. Such a spiral way of idea presentation or a “discursive” writing style is well accepted in the Chinese context (Erbaugh, 1990; Liu & Zhou, 2004; Dewey, 2007; Dong, 2009).

**The influence of the Buddhist tradition.** Throughout the ages, Buddhism, originally from Central Asia, has gradually become an important part of the Chinese culture. In fact, it has exerted a great influence on Chinese philosophical ideas. In particular, the Buddhist tradition of memorization has played a powerful role in shaping the mind-set of the Chinese people. As a result, the Chinese memorize texts as a sign of showing respect for the authority (Duan, 2003) as well as a way of demonstrating their knowledge of the language (Kohn, 1992). Additionally, one major characteristic of the Buddhist tradition centers on the idea of *Wuxing* or intuitive thinking (see Chapter 2). It is worth noting that both Confucianism and Buddhism highlight intuitive thinking. As claimed by Confucius, if too much attention was devoted to rational thinking, the result

may turn out to be just the opposite of one's wish, thus often leading to confusion (Hou, 2003). In contrast to the Western logical reasoning, traditional Chinese culture highly values intuition. Chinese people understand or look at things by using feelings rather than by carefully considering facts. The emphasis on intuitive thinking has led to a tradition since ancient times of employing intuitive approaches in academic and real life. For Chinese writing, comprehension, therefore, is achieved via the reader's intuition. To put it briefly, the results of the influences of the Buddhist tradition are summarized as follows:

- As a result of memorizing texts, Chinese students' writings may be filled with somebody else's ideas, so Chinese students seldom express their own voices in their writings.
- Since Chinese students are used to the way they memorize texts, they do not know how to break down an abstract idea into elements for critical analysis. The result of this presents considerable challenges to the Chinese learners of English when they compose reading-response essays in the American writing classroom.
- Because intuitive thinking is overemphasized, Chinese students tend to do what they feel or think is right, so they seriously lack critical or analytical thinking (Zhang, 2009).
- Chinese writing is writer-centered and highly suggestive. Chinese students would creatively link A and B together to prolong their writing without providing a sense of continuity.
- When writing, Chinese students often make broad generalizations and skip over details that could be very important to the English reader. Therefore, Chinese writing is not audience-focused; it is reader-responsible, leaving readers to

construct meaning rather than expecting the writer to have done so and expressed the result in the language of the text.

- Chinese is more paratactic (see Chapter 2) and is postulated as meaning-oriented (Huang, 2002).
- Traditional Chinese intuitive thinking may be strongly related to the paratactic nature of the Chinese language. Just as the Chinese paratactic sentence structure is loose and flexible, the logical relationship of related ideas between sentences and paragraphs is understood from the context. Readers are then left to make their own connections by the Chinese paratactic syntax.
- Chinese writing considers surface linguistic features, particularly transitions and overt discourse markers, optional and relies heavily on the reader's interpretation.
- Under the heavy influence of intuition, Chinese writers do not have to bother themselves to think about the logical relationships from sentence to sentence and from idea to idea. This creates a lot of difficulty for Chinese learners of English because they have difficulty *establishing* the relationship between two sentences, such as the relationship of the subordinate clause with the main clause in a sentence. In particular, for instance, a cause and effect relationship challenges Chinese EFL/ESL students (see Conclusion in Chapter 5).
- Chinese students clearly lack transitional skills in their English writing and frequently misuse transitions.

**The influence of Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric*.** Chen Wangdao (1891-1977) is regarded as the founding father of modern Chinese rhetoric (Harbsmeier, 1999; Wu, 2009; Lam, 2002). It is believed that modern Chinese rhetoric started with

Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric* (see Chapter 2). The book was the first systematic account of rhetoric and was published in 1932. Chen's *An Introduction to Rhetoric* focused on language use rather than organization, unity, and logical progression of ideas. His book explores both ancient and modern Chinese writings, covering the definition of rhetoric, passive and active forms of rhetoric, figures of speech, rhetorical phenomena, and styles. According to Chen (1932), the purpose of rhetorical study is to learn models of language use and beautify writing. Therefore, Chen has mainly adapted ideas from traditional Chinese culture. As Wu (2009) explains, modern Chinese rhetoric has been primarily aesthetic and poetic since it evolved out of the notion of harmony.

Under the dominant influence of Chen's *An Introduction to Rhetoric*, Chinese writers regard the purpose of their writing as a way of showing their superior mastery of Chinese classics and frequently use set phrases and maxims, quote well-known sayings, and imitate texts. As noted by Chen (2004), "While Confucianism promotes a harmonious social order, rhetoric study maintains a harmonious society" (p. 90).

**Current English instruction in China.** Rooted in Chinese culture and influenced by the former Soviet *Intensive Reading* model of foreign language teaching (see Chapter 2), English instruction centers on analyzing a text, working on sentence level forms, and paying attention mainly to vocabulary, usage, verb patterns, and grammatical accuracy (Qian, 2009). In order for Chinese students to demonstrate correct usage and write "elegantly," memorization of texts plays a central role in writing instruction. At the end of each semester, students' writing is mainly evaluated by their grammar and vocabulary related test scores (Gao, 2010). Consequently, little attention is paid to coherence in writing.

**Answering the research question.** I now return to answer the second research question.

a) *What rhetorical values regarding coherence have been expressed in Chinese culture?*

In terms of the rhetorical values regarding coherence that have been expressed in Chinese culture, the above summary of the Chinese rhetorical values and practice demonstrates that very few rhetorical values regarding coherence in Chinese culture have been found, since Chinese culture and actual classroom practice heavily focus on the sentence-level control of language, and coherence in English writing does not seem to be the main focus. Indeed, some cognitive factors valued in Chinese society even mitigate against coherence in the Western sense. Evidently, coherence in the Chinese English-instruction classroom is not greatly valued. It should be noted that although the *College English Curriculum Requirements* [CECR] (2007) issued by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (see Chapter 2) require that short essay writing should be “complete in content, clear in position, well-organized in presentation, and coherent in text” (p.12), this phrasing seems to be a mere formality on the practical level in many educational institutions in China. To specify such goals is one thing, while to put them into practice is quite another. According to Bao and Sun (2010), a questionnaire distributed in China's large university clearly indicates that English instructors put a heavy emphasis on vocabulary, syntax, and grammar when teaching writing. Of course, such linguistic elements do have their place in the second language learning context. But combined with and tempered by social and political ideas deeply rooted in the old



traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, they lead to the current mismatch between official pronouncements and actual classroom practice.

b) *What do Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say about coherence in the Chinese cultural context? Again, how are these views of coherence rooted in classical Chinese philosophy or rhetorical traditions?*

Since few Western rhetorical values regarding coherence have been found in the history of Chinese writing practice, a question arises: do Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say anything about coherence in the Chinese cultural context? The following summary reveals what they do and say. In fact, as one might expect, the Chinese EFL teachers and scholars' views of coherence can be seen as firmly rooted in the classical Chinese philosophical tradition summarized above. Although this topic has been addressed in the section *Chinese Views of Coherence and Cohesion* in Chapter 2, it must be revisited here in order to answer this question.

1) Research on coherence in China has remained on the level of introducing and explaining Western theories related to text-based coherence such as those presented in Van Dijk's *Text and Context* (1977) and Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English*. In fact, no serious attempts have been made to test the notions of the current Western theories on coherence as a unified whole and create new theories or approaches that can be applied to Chinese EFL writing classroom settings. This pattern recalls the official government statement cited above, and leaves the impression that attention to coherence has remained as a superficial level, rather than being incorporated deeply into Chinese ideas on writing.

2) Many Chinese scholars seem to be aware that coherence is one of the most prominent features of good writing (e.g., Kuo, 1995; Dong, 1999; Li, 2000; Lee, 2002; Chen, 2003; Gao, 2008), but their perceptions of the notion of coherence are unclear. Some scholars have used the two concepts coherence and cohesion interchangeably (Wang & Sui, 2006), thus confusing the issue(s) they are presenting. Others begin by discussing coherence, and then shift to a focus on cohesion at the sentence level. In short, coherence as a concept in China remains an abstract topic (Zhang, 2000), and scholars who discuss coherence seem to merely scratch the surface.

3) Many Chinese EFL teachers have limited experience of Western styles of writing. They may have been taught how to write without any thought for coherence. For this reason, many Chinese ESL teachers may not understand what coherence actually signifies in the West, even though they are trying to borrow the idea of coherence from the West. In fact, coherence is a fuzzy and somewhat vague concept to many of the Chinese scholars, and this is made even more problematic by the essential complexity of the concept to begin with. As Jin and Ban (2006) state, “the notion of coherence is not clear enough.” Zhang (2006) reflects the theme of widespread uncertainty when he claims that, “no one can exactly tell what makes a text cohere” (P.13). Chen & Zhang (2004) underscore the same point, “Although coherence is the heart of discourse analysis, no one can explain the term in a systematic way due to the complex nature of coherence” (p. 420).

4) In addition to the confusion cited above, or perhaps as a way of coping with it, Chinese scholars have tended to take a kind of default position, that when cohesion is achieved, a text will be coherent. Therefore, they are inclined to advocate the importance

of teaching cohesion (Li, 2000; Shi, 2004; Zhou, 2007) within a paragraph, holding the belief that the use of cohesive devices can create coherence in writing for all levels of Chinese EFL learners. As Wang & Sui (2006) clearly put it, “textual cohesion should be employed more in actual teaching practice as an illustration of how important it is for students to be able to connect sentences smoothly and logically and, consequently, create better coherence.” The statements of several other researchers further confirm this: “Coherence... is fundamentally based on semantic ties, i.e., the use of cohesive ties” (Li, 2000); and “On most occasions, realization of coherence relies on cohesion” (Jin & Ban, 2006). What the Chinese EFL teachers and scholars say about coherence tends to remain at the level of cohesion. Therefore, the discussion of coherence above the paragraph level in the Chinese cultural context is seriously ignored; an important underpinning of cohesion is also missing in a pedagogy that looks too closely at cohesive ties, ignoring the deeper organization that these ties are supposed to support or express. In fact, what the EFL teachers focus on in the actual classroom is often still mainly sentence-level grammar, sentence translation, and vocabulary. They are not even teaching cohesion, let alone coherence. Because of this, the Chinese favor a strict linguistic approach to the text, unaware of both overall content structure and factors outside the text itself, such as the writer’s purpose as well as the reader’s background knowledge and expectations. This observation helps to explain Connor’s (1984) view that there is much to be desired in the quality of coherence in ESL/EFL writing. In the West, it is now accepted that attention to overall coherence must come before cohesion at the sentence level, as was suggested in some of the early critiques and responses to Halliday and Hasan’s system (Bamberg, 1983).

As can be seen from the above discussions, Chinese scholars mainly focus on the discussion of cohesion, and Chinese EFL teachers in the memorization and test-oriented education system are predominantly concerned about the teaching of grammatically correct English rather than either cohesion or overall coherence (You, 2004; Guo & Wang, 2004; Gao, 2007; Wu & He, 2010). Consequently, when writing persuasive essays, Chinese students under this system cannot adequately organize and express related ideas in writing. Apparently, the Chinese way of focusing on form rather than coherence has its roots in the classical Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism discussed above. In the Chinese cultural context, harmony has been emphasized over coherence. Once again, the three pillars of Chinese thought are centered on the value of harmony. This point cannot be overemphasized. Since Chinese rhetorical traditions have evolved out of the notion of harmony, Chinese rhetoric has primarily focused on control of language and beautifying writing.

*c) To what extent, and in what ways, do the Chinese values differ from those prevalent in English?*

What the Chinese EFL teachers and scholars are doing and saying seems to actually go along a different direction from that of the Westerners in terms of philosophical values contributing to coherence. The following shows the Chinese values and the Western values differ greatly in important ways.

- While Westerners value linear thinking, the Chinese prefer intuitive thinking and circular thinking. Instead of developing logical thinking as in Aristotelian formal logic, the Chinese have only acquired dialectical thinking abilities and highly value the *Yin* and *Yang* idea.

- English stresses cohesion of form, but Chinese is meaning-oriented. As we know, English resorts to overt cohesion, frequently using various cohesive ties to establish the logical relationship from idea to idea; however, the Chinese paratactic sentence structure and topic-comment sentence patterns downplay cohesion of form and consider surface links optional or even unnecessary, so Chinese writing remains obscure and highly suggestive when assessed in the light of Western values.
- English favors a topic-first pattern for the overall organization of a paragraph or essay, but the practice of putting the main idea of a text before supporting ideas violates a Chinese reader's expectation (Chu, Swaffar, & Charney, 2002). Straightforwardness in the Chinese cultural context is discouraged. Chinese rhetoric values indirectness in writing. The real intent of the writing can (or even should) be implied or simply left to the reader.
- Strong writing in English culture emphasizes unity that contributes to coherence. In contrast, Chinese writing prefers a discursive style and may deliberately make an effort to discuss "different" ideas in a single paragraph (Erbaugh, 1990; Liu & Zhou, 2004; Xing, Wang, & Spencer 2008; Dong, 2009), rather than keeping to a single subject; this can be seen as a result of, or at least as related to, Chinese holistic thinking.
- In the West, people excel at formal logic while Chinese do well in *Yin* and *Yang* or *Zhongyong*, the "middle way." The Chinese do not follow the Western claim-justification-conclusion pattern when writing "persuasive" essays. Chinese

writing is more likely to favorably support both sides of a topic, seeking common ground, keeping balance, and achieving harmony.

- Western rhetorical values emphasize that audience awareness is a central characteristic of strong persuasive writing, but audience analysis is ignored in Chinese writing instruction, since the audience has traditionally been seen as made up of politically and socially important people (Huang, 2002; Duan, 2003). For Chinese writers, with the Confucian idea of respect for authority in mind, people in power are somehow the people worth writing for, and societal harmony is the final goal that the Chinese try to achieve.

Taking all these different rhetorical values into consideration, the Chinese view of coherence is quite different from that of Westerners. The above discussion has answered the second question. Now I will move to the third research question.

### **The Third Research Question**

The third research question is stated as follows:

#### **Chinese Students' Perceptions of Coherence**

*What conscious attitudes and views do advanced Chinese ESL students demonstrate regarding coherence in writing? To what extent, and in what ways, do these views seem to reflect the values prevalent in either Western or Chinese rhetorical traditions? When addressing their own writing choices, how do these students explain the choices they make in terms of organization and linguistic forms related to coherence? In what ways do their perceptions of coherence change over the course of a semester in which they receive training in coherence, in the Western tradition in an American university setting?*

a) *What conscious attitudes and views do advanced Chinese ESL students demonstrate regarding coherence in writing? To what extent, and in what ways, do these views seem to reflect the values prevalent in either Western or Chinese rhetorical traditions?*

As for the participants' perceptions of coherence in writing, their initial responses during the first round interview and their subsequent answers during the second round interview differ noticeably. Therefore, I will address these separately.

**Unawareness of coherence in writing.** To begin with, during the first round interview, when asked about coherence in writing, nobody seemed to be clear on what the term *coherence* specifically referred to, for the simple reason that coherence in writing had not been emphasized in their experience in the Chinese language context or in their earlier English studies. When the participants had begun to learn English as a foreign language, the instructional emphasis had always been on control of the English language and grammatical accuracy rather than on coherence such as focus and organization. Of the six participants, only three of them knew something about coherence (see Chapter 6).

**The basic Chinese essay structure.** Both Lili and Xiaohui explained their understanding of coherence in terms of organizing information, and referring to concepts they learned in the Chinese context. Lili discussed the Chinese *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure (*qi* for introduction, *cheng* for development, *zhuan* for turn, and *he* for conclusion), and Xiaohui pointed out the *zong-fen-zong* persuasive essay structure (see Chapter 6). Much like what Lili described in the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure, the *zong-fen-zong* structure consists of an introduction, several body paragraphs (not just one paragraph as Xiaohui claimed in the interviews), and a conclusion. Both patterns follow

variants of an introduction-body-conclusion structure. The difference between the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure and the *zong-fen-zong* structure is that the latter does not have the “turn” step. Here we may find that the basic Chinese essay structure resembles an English essay format used in the English cultural context. For the past decades, Western ideas have been introduced into the Chinese context. Not surprisingly, the Chinese are adopting Western style writing to some extent.

It is true that as one of the commonly used pedagogical strategies both in Taiwan and Mainland China, high school students are trained to compose their expository essays by following this *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* four-part structure. Especially, this four-part structure serves as a guideline for the national unified college entrance examination essays, even though it may not be the only structure. In fact, *zong-fen-zong* is another Chinese argumentative essay structure especially used by Chinese high school students for preparing for the national college entrance examination.

**The Chinese way of achieving “coherence”—the *turn* step.** At first sight, comparing both Chinese and English academic writing patterns, Chinese rhetoric seems to share similar rhetorical values and practices with Western rhetoric, yet Cahill (2003) reports that Western scholars argue that the third step, *zhuan*, of the four-part Chinese *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* represents a “turn,” which exemplifies the nonlinearity and indirectness of Chinese rhetoric. It is this kind of structure that might have inspired Kaplan’s (1966) idea of the flow of Chinese (“Oriental”) discourse as a spiral. As Cahill (2003) further claims, his investigation into Chinese rhetoric on this structure shows that the “turn” is not a rhetorical move of circularity or digression as commonly assumed in the English-



language scholarship, but rather serves as the occasion to further develop an essay by alternative means.

In 2004, Junjing Zhao and Yingkui Liu published a book *Sixty Brilliant Ideas for a Perfect Score on the College Entrance Examination Essay* intended for China's high school graduates preparing for the college entrance examination. In their book, they explain that the common text structure for an expository essay is the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* pattern.

Westerners might have difficulty understanding the “turn” step in the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure. This “turn” may suggest a non-linear pattern as perceived by an English reader, thus failing to contribute to coherence. In Chinese rhetoric, however, in order to add more persuasion to the point, it is common to further support one's views by changing the direction of the argument or turning to the reverse side of the argument, hence winning over readers. Probably, this is the Chinese way of achieving “coherence” in the Chinese language context.

Since this “turn” step is so strongly advocated in the Chinese context, students exposed to it are likely to transfer this Chinese writing style into the English context. The Chinese learners of English in this study were puzzled when their first-class diagnostic essays were judged to be incoherent. Many of the participants take it for granted that what they wrote makes sense to them.

**Notional coherence in texts.** In addition to Lili's view about coherence, Yiman and Xiaohui also expressed their perceptions of coherence when they recalled their past learning experiences in China. Both claimed that they had learned about coherence in Chinese writing. When asked about how much they know about the notion of coherence,

Yiman said, “I remember, the teacher told us about *cheng-shang-qi-xia*.” Literarily, *cheng-shang* means “continue from the above,” and *qi-xia* means “introduce the following.” This is all what Yiman knew about coherence when he was in China leaning Chinese writing. *Cheng-shang-qi-xia* is a Chinese idiom representing a writing skill which is especially applied to Chinese writing, emphasizing the connection between two parts of a piece of writing. While studying in middle school in China, Yiman learned both Chinese and English; however, he may not have a strong literacy background for his lack of interest in school. Therefore, he indicated that he could not explain more beyond that point. In his memory, Yiman knows that coherence may mean something like transitions, but he definitely lacks this writing skill and is unable to apply it to his writing.

Both Chinese and English cultures appreciate connections from idea to idea; however, the idea of *cheng-shang-qi-xia* in the Chinese cultural context does not exactly reflect the kind of connection that is valued in the English language context. In Chinese writing, *cheng-shang-qi-xia* may only refer to implicit connections among ideas. As for how sentences or paragraphs should be joined, it still remains a relatively vague idea; at least Chinese writing skills do not clearly emphasize this point as a result of notional coherence or intuitive thinking.

A dramatic difference regarding coherence between the two rhetorical traditions lies in the perception about what is considered logical progression of ideas. As Chinese is meaning-oriented (Huang, 2002), Chinese writing seldom emphasizes the use of transitions to convey relationships among ideas. The logical relationship of related ideas between sentences and paragraphs is understood from the context. Western rhetorical tradition and Chinese rhetorical tradition each understand “clarity” or the “logical

progression” in their own ways. In the English context, a well-designed essay organization clearly demonstrates a logical progression of ideas from paragraph to paragraph and from sentence to sentence that coheres around the writer’s central focus throughout the essay, thus contributing to coherence. To demonstrate coherence to help the reader follow the writer’s ideas, the writer ties all the relevant information in his/her writing so that connections the writer has made in his/her own mind are obvious to the reader. For the Chinese, and specifically for the six Chinese participants, in contrast, they do not have a specific audience in the mind. What they know is a simple and general essay structure. Under the overwhelming influence of intuitive thinking, ideas may be seen as ‘connected’ without conscious motivation, and explicit transitions are optional. It is the reader’s responsibility to figure out the connections among the ideas. Consequently, they certainly do not know transitions well and therefore lack transitional skills.

*b) When addressing their own writing choices, how do these students explain the choices they make in terms of organization and linguistic forms related to coherence?*

Interestingly enough, when asked about why they made their choices in terms of organization and linguistic forms related to coherence, most of the Chinese participants attributed their frequent off-topic claims, their lack of transitional skills, and other writing problems to poor English grammar skills.

**Misconceptions about coherence and grammar.** In discussing the diagnostic essay with Lili, when asked about her problems with main idea focus, paragraph unity, misuse of transitions identified in her essay, she touched on these issues lightly, saying that multiple ideas in one paragraph and repetition of ideas are culture specific. Instead of

fully explaining why these problems occurred in her writing, she emphasized that unlike Chinese writing in which she focused on essay organization, in English writing she had to think more about sentence structures and vocabulary because grammar and word usage were more urgent to her.

Weishan stated that since he had never written an essay nor learned paragraph organization, he simply kept on writing, unaware that he wandered from the subject. However, he thought that grammatical form was the most challenging part when he wrote his essay, citing problems with the past perfect tense. Weishan added that even in New York, his previous writing teachers “only fixed grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling.”

Yiman had serious problems with unclear central focus, digression, and inaccurate use of transitions, but he downplayed these problems. According to Yiman, the reason why he wrote like that was all because of his grammar issues. He believed that the grammar gave him the most problems, saying, “When I write, I don’t have confidence in sentence, grammar. I have difficulty with building sentences.”

Xiaohui was frustrated when talking about his failure to indicate the logical relationship between sentences, elaborate on many of his general statements, and keep focused on the topic. However, he did not realize that he had so many serious problems in these areas. He mistakenly believed that he did a good job in his diagnostic essay except for his grammar, so he claimed that as long as English grammar was ok, writing would be all right. However, when I pointed out his writing problems identified in his writing, he changed his tone, explaining that he was impressed by his English teacher’s emphasis on sentence structure and grammar in China. He remembers that he focused on grammar

when he learned English in China. He had only learned to do multiple choice questions, sentence translation, and short paragraph writing, so he said that he knew nothing about how to organize ideas. “The teacher did not care about how to organize the writing because grammar was most important,” Xiaohui explained.

As for Gaofeng, his writing had many problems with inappropriate use of transitions, unclear central focus, and digression, but he was not aware of these serious issues in writing. He insisted that essay organization was easy for him since he kept reading Chinese classical novels. He noted that he should focus more on sentence structures and grammar such as subject verb agreement.

It seems that Hong’s case was an exception regarding his writing problems. Rather than attributing his serious digression to poor grammar skills, he simply does not care about his writing. Clearly, he has an attitude problem. In high school, he learned free-writing; therefore, he just continued to free-write even after he attended college. He was proud of his free-writing when we discussed his diagnostic essay. Because he preferred free writing, he was ignorant of his serious off-topic issues and unclear idea organization. He definitely hates any serious academic writing, arguing, “I have no idea about the essay structure.” When asked about why he made so many off-topic claims, he snickered, “Who cares?” His indifferent attitude toward writing may account for his weak writing skills. Obviously, he does not have academic writing skills because he does not want to learn writing. And his frustrating encounter with very different criteria that he feels he cannot understand have further lessened his interest in developing as a writer.

The above discussion reveals that as the Chinese students reflect on their writing, most of them attribute their confusion about coherence in English writing to grammar and

vocabulary. Since coherence and logical arguments are not seen as an important focus in the Chinese context, they think that, to become strong writers in English, they only need English sentence-level grammar skills and vocabulary. Like the official government statement cited above, and like the Chinese scholars, they speak of coherence; but they have never been led to explore that notion on a deep level in their own writing. For many of them, grammar, word choice, and sentence structure had been the main focus in their learning of English. At this advanced ESL writing level, though their instructor emphasized organization and coherence-related factors, they still hold on to the idea that sentence structure, word usage, and grammar are more important than anything else; therefore, in their mind, issues of language usage are blocking their ability to think of essay organization and logical arguments.

*c) In what ways do their perceptions of coherence change over the course of a semester in which they receive training in coherence, in the Western tradition in an American university setting?*

**Ideas flowing and fitting together well.** Finally, before addressing this sub-question, I will return to complete the first part of the third research question, that is, the participants' perceptions of coherence in writing. During the second round interview, when asked again about how much they know about coherence in writing, the six participants all agreed that coherence is something that makes the writing "flow" so that the reader can follow the writer's ideas easily. After receiving some training in writing, the participants' responses to coherence in writing can be briefly summarized as follows: a) one clear central focus for the entire essay, b) well-organized paragraphs, c) the use of

transitions to connect sentences, d) and no off-topic claims, all of which contribute to the type of coherence that is highly valued in the Western rhetorical traditions.

**Growing awareness of coherence in writing.** Compared with their initial responses during the first round interview, the participants' perceptions of coherence had changed considerably over the course of a semester. Before they received training in coherence, half of the participants had never heard of the term, let alone using the concept to inform their ability to produce coherent essays. Although Lili, Yiman, and Xiaohui stated that they learned something about coherence in the Chinese cultural context, their knowledge of coherence was incomplete; their understanding of coherence was shallow. Only one participant had learned a little bit about transition words in Taiwan. Their ideas of essay structure and organization were very basic and not clear enough. What they knew about coherence only remained at the superficial level, nothing more than coherence through chronological order in a narrative, a basic essay structure of the introduction-body-conclusion pattern, and a little knowledge of simple transitions. After being exposed to the training in coherence in the American writing classroom, all the participants' awareness of coherence had increased. To them, coherence now means that everything in their writing should be logically laid out and connected, and an effective essay should generally cohere around one central focus, well-organized paragraphs with strong topic sentences and sufficient supporting details, and no discursive claims, even though some of them, like Yiman, still viewed grammar and vocabulary as more important than other things in practice.

After a discussion of the participants' attitudes and views regarding coherence, the third research question has been answered. At this point, I will address the final research question.

### **The Fourth Research Question**

The fourth research question is stated as follows:

#### **Chinese Students' Textual Practice Regarding Coherence**

*In what ways do the writings of these students demonstrate coherence? To what extent are these writings judged as coherent by professional raters? What specific elements in the writings might be traced to the two traditions (Western and Chinese)? Do these elements change in the students' writing over the course of a semester?*

a) *In what ways do the writings of these students demonstrate coherence?*

To answer this question, I will revisit Chapter 5 in which I discuss coherence issues as identified in the participants' writings. From these, I will first go into more detail about coherence as demonstrated in the participants' writings.

After being exposed to training in the Western rhetorical tradition, the writings of many of the participants revealed the following coherence features:

- Pronouns--yes
- conjunctions—yes
- Simple transition words between sentences and paragraphs—yes
- Thesis statement—yes
- Topic sentence—yes
- Concluding sentence---yes



- Paragraph organization---yes
- Basic overall structure: introduction-body-conclusion—yes
- Purpose--yes

The findings of this study show that the basic cohesion and coherence features listed above are identified in the participants' writings, although many other cohesion and coherence elements are not developed in their writing, such as ellipsis and substitution, lexical repetition, and synonymous words/phrases. Moreover, broad evidence of attention to reader orientation (overall coherence and ease of understanding), unity, and continuity in writing are weaker in these writings. In what follows, I will briefly discuss each coherence feature identified in the participants' writings.

**Pronouns.** As Halliday and Hasan (1976) note, reference cohesion occurs when one item in a text points to another element for its interpretation. The participants did use pronouns to take the place of nouns to help ensure cohesion in a given text. Since the use of pronouns to refer to nouns in previous sentences was not so noticeable when the participants took the diagnostic test at the beginning of the semester, after one-semester training, at least their awareness of using pronouns to help achieve coherence were developed. However, it must be pointed out that while using pronouns, many of the participants used them incorrectly (as discussed in Chapter 5), so that the noun-pronoun relationships were sometimes unclear. For example, Lili and Hong produced sentences that used pronouns without clear noun antecedents, thus creating faulty or vague pronoun reference problems. Therefore, the Chinese students should use pronouns such as *it*, *they*, *you*, and *us* more carefully when using them.

**Conjunctions.** Likewise, the participants also used conjunctions as cohesive ties to reflect various types of syntactic cohesion. In their writings, conjunctions such as *when*, *after*, *before*, *since*, *because*, and *although* were often used to help basic clauses and sentences “hold together,” for instance, clarifying the relationship of a subordinate clause to a main clause in a complex sentence, thus relating the ideas expressed in clear ways.

**Other simple transition words.** Sentence-level transitions are also identified, which help a reader understand the relationship between main clauses in the text. Transitional words and phrases such as *however*, *second*, *third*, *another*, *therefore*, *clearly*, *furthermore*, *in addition*, and *as a result* discussed in Chapter 2 were frequently used to make a paragraph or a larger unit of text more organized and comprehensible, even though the participants sometimes overused or misused the transitions.

**Presence of the thesis statement, the topic sentence, and the concluding sentence.** In addition to the use of the above three elements contributing to coherence, the thesis statement, the topic sentence, and the concluding sentence at the end of a paragraph were also included in the participants’ writing. Their instructor, Dr. Fawcett, constantly reminded the students to include these components in their persuasive writing. By writing a specific thesis statement, a significant idea the participants were required by the CATW *Writing Directions* to locate in the reading passage, the participants developed their response by focusing on the significant idea, thereby giving themselves and the reader a clear idea of what persuasive evidence would follow. The topic sentences in their persuasive paragraphs were basically connected with the thesis, and each supporting detail and any information the participants provided roughly, if not very directly, related to the significant idea and the specific point they stated in their topic

sentences. Before ending the paragraph, the participants wrote a concluding sentence to close the paragraph so that the reader was not left expecting more. They have become aware that paragraphs that stand alone often have a concluding sentence at the end.

**Paragraph organization.** Some discernible plans regarding paragraph organization were identified. For example, while developing a paragraph, the participants presented paragraph organizational patterns or combined patterns to organize ideas by using *furthermore...*, *because...*, *although...*, *on the other hand*, *to sum up*, etc. It is clear that organizational patterns of summary, importance, addition, cause and effect, comparison-contrast, example, and description were often used to support and convey the participants' ideas throughout the paragraph.

**Overall structure.** A basic overall structure was also clearly identified in the participants' writings; it signified the clarity of division into introduction, justification, and conclusion. As required by the CATW instructions, in the introductory paragraph, the participants used their own words to craft a summary of the author's main points identified in the reading passage. The introduction then ended with a significant idea chosen from the passage that provided a claim to be developed in the body. The body paragraphs then followed the plan set up in the introduction. Finally, a conclusion signaled the end of the essay by referring back to the significant idea and indicating why this idea was important. Although most of the participants' concluding paragraphs were short, they left the reader with a final thought.

**Purpose.** Basically, the purpose of the writing was relatively clear. In the introduction, the participants introduced their summary of the author's key ideas in the reading passage and established the central focus of the discussion by preparing the

reader for the significant idea. Then in the body paragraphs, by persuading the reader why that idea mattered, they offered reasons and evidence.

Evidently, the above results show that some of the cohesion and coherence features are identified in the participants' writing after a semester's training in the American writing classroom. Although the list of possible features was incomplete, and the coherence strategies were imperfectly applied, there was strong evidence of progress over the course of a single semester.

*b) To what extent are these writings judged as coherent by professional raters?*

As discussed in Chapter 5, two trained raters with at least five years of experience teaching writing classes at the college level rated the participants' diagnostic essays written in the first class meeting and final exam essays at the end of the semester. In the diagnostic essays, almost all the essays were considered incoherent.

In contrast, as seen in Figure 5 in Chapter 5, compared with the diagnostic essays, most of the participants' final exam essays were judged as better written and more or less coherent, even though many of the participants still had serious problems with coherence in writing. The trained raters evaluated the coherence of the Chinese students' essays based on a set of criteria; the same score or adjacent level score was given. It must be noted again that if there were differences of more than two points for the two raters, it was agreed that a third professional native English-speaking rater would be called to rescore an essay. Overall, the participants' progress in achieving coherence was fairly noticeable. However, only Lili and Xiaohui among the six participants stand out as getting consistent "3" ratings. The rest of the participants' writings, to a considerable

degree, were still rated as incoherent. The following features were identified in the writing of the two participants whose texts were judged as relatively coherent.

- Introduction—the writings began with a good summary of the author’s key ideas in their own words and then smoothly moved to the thesis, the significant idea they identified in the reading passage.
- Thesis statement—the two participants introduced their main response to the author’s significant idea (the thesis) in one sentence at the end of the introduction, so that the thesis became the controlling idea for the entire essay.
- Topic sentence—each of the supporting paragraphs began with the topic sentence that supported the thesis statement by providing concrete supporting evidence or examples.
- Concluding sentence—the two participants ended each of their supporting paragraphs with a restatement of the topic sentence, in different words, which provided a neat way to give the paragraph a closure, and reminded the reader of the main point.
- Paragraph development—paragraphs were divided in terms of content relevance. The two participants provided distinctly different reasons for paragraphs that proved why the key idea chosen was significant. No repetition was found.
- Unity—the details such as facts and examples provided throughout the supporting paragraphs supported the thesis statement. No off-topic claims were identified.
- Patterns of organization—the writings took different rhetorical patterns such as patterns of cause-effect, addition, example, importance, or a mixture of patterns.

- Transitions—transitional words and phrases such as sentence adverbs and conjunctions were frequently used to convey relationships within paragraphs and between paragraphs.
- Conclusion—a short conclusion was added in the end by referring back to the thesis statement. The main points discussed in the supporting paragraphs were briefly restated.

Generally, both raters judged these elements as prominent features contributing to coherence (see *Features of Cohesion and Coherence* in Appendix A). According to Bamberg (1983), McCulley (1985), Lee (2002), Abeywickrama (2007), and CATW (2010), these features can provide an important predictor of quality writing. With the presence of all these coherent features, the reader will find it easy to follow the writers' ideas. Compared with the other four participants, Lili and Xiaohui displayed more coherence features in their writings; however, we can conclude that only two out of the six participants had developed enough coherence in writing to have their texts seen as overall coherent and comprehensible from the reader's point of view. Many of the other participants seem to need more work in the area of coherent writing.

c) *What specific elements in the writings might be traced back to the two traditions (Western and Chinese)?*

Due to the substantial difference between the two cultures, hardly any elements presented above could be traced back to both the Chinese and the Western rhetorical traditions, even though Chinese writing also values a general sense of “unity,” and advocates an introduction-body-conclusion structure, both of which are reminiscent of English writing practice. However, the Chinese and the Westerners understand unity and

structure in quite different ways. In other words, almost exclusively, the above elements are associated with Western writing. As a result of the influences of China's Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the Chinese view of coherence is seen radically different from those valued in the West. When writing in English, the Chinese overemphasize grammatical accuracy so as to achieve "beautiful writing," whereas Westerners stress unity, consistency, and logical progression of ideas to enhance persuasion. The participant's tendency to go "off topic" (viewed through Western eyes) can be said to be rooted in the Chinese idea of the "turn," in which a writer deliberately veers away from his/her original focus for the sake of emphasis, breadth, and inclusiveness. However, more generally, there seem to be differences in what counts as a "connection" between ideas, and this was almost certainly at the root of some cases where the participants' writing seemed to digress when judged in the light of the Western need for specific logical connections.

It must be pointed out that in stark contrast to what Chinese teachers of English do in the Chinese cultural context, Dr. Fawcett, the instructor of the advanced composition course, focused on the big picture rather than grammar throughout the semester while teaching. She believes that Chinese students' major writing problems are not grammar, not vocabulary. She feels that many Chinese students lack the appropriate learning skills important for coherent writing. As she argues, the Chinese students do not know how to learn writing. They attribute their writing problems to grammar and vocabulary. To help her students learn writing skills, she emphasized coherence in writing. At the same time, she also pointed out or sometimes even corrected grammar errors in her students' writing because she understands that linguistic mastery plays a role

in strong writing. Following her instructions, the Chinese participants had been gradually shifting their focus from grammar to coherent writing over the course of the term; meanwhile, they also improved grammar skills.

*d) Do these elements change in the students' writings over the course of a semester?*

After being exposed to training in coherence in the American writing classroom, elements related to coherence changed considerably over the course of the semester. The improvement of the elements contributing to coherence was verified by examining the participants' diagnostic essays, timed in-class and revised essays, and final exam essays.

1) The diagnostic essay

First, in the diagnostic essays, all the participants' writings were regarded as incoherent because few elements related to cohesion and coherence were identified. Confusing pronoun reference occurred frequently. The participants often misused transitions or rarely used them to provide a connection between sentences or to indicate a shift in ideas. Therefore, the relationship among the ideas was confusing to the reader. Body paragraphs did not directly relate to the thesis advanced in the introduction; thin development, repetition of ideas, and off-topic claims were often identified.

2) Timed in-class and revised essays

However, as the semester moved on, the participants' writing improved gradually. As analyzed earlier in Chapter 5, the participants did not do a satisfactory job for their timed in-class essays. Their instructor, Dr. Fawcett, asked them to revise their writing in the areas of development of ideas, repetition of ideas, transitions, off-topic claims, central focus, etc. Following the instructor's comments on the essays, the participants carefully reviewed their writing. After their revisions, their essays improved. For example, in her



in-class essay, Lili failed to elaborate on the idea of the “pain of payment” caused by the use of cash. Therefore, she added more details to further develop her argument in her revision. In Weishan’s in-class exercise, he recycled his brother’s credit card shopping example when writing his second supporting paragraph. To avoid repetition, Weishan rewrote the example to enhance persuasion. Yiman had many problems with logical progression of ideas in his in-class essay. To provide continuity of his ideas, he used transitions to make logical connections from idea to idea. In Xiaohui’s in-class writing, his uncle’s anecdote of going bankrupt digressed from the topic. To stay focused, Xiaohui revised the anecdote and tied it to grocery and food purchases to improve its relevance. Similarly, in his in-class essay, Hong’s whole second supporting paragraph wandered off the thesis “paying in cash can limit consumers from spending on vice products,” so he rewrote the paragraph to make it relevant to the central focus.

### 3) The final exam essay

Finally, in much the same way, the participants improved coherence in varying degrees in their final timed essays, particularly in the areas of central focus, the writing of strong topic sentences, elaboration on ideas, relevance, non-repetition of ideas, transitions between paragraphs and sentences, and overall essay structure, all of which contribute to coherence, even though many of the participants are still struggling in these areas. This suggests that they need constant reinforcement in these areas. For the Chinese learners of English, this is an ongoing process. Clearly, the participants improved coherence in writing after they received training throughout the course of a semester.

All in all, this study has examined four areas: Western rhetorical values on coherence; Chinese rhetorical values on coherence; the Chinese students’ perceptions of

coherence; and the Chinese students' practice regarding textual coherence. The findings confirm that the concept of coherence is a vast and complicated one. While the Westerners focus on coherence in writing, the Chinese overemphasize English grammatical accuracy. The Western and the Chinese views of coherence differ enormously as a result of political reasons as well as different rhetorical traditions. Under the heavy influence of Chinese culture, the Chinese participants in this study were struggling in the American writing classroom. To achieve coherence in writing, they have to rewire their brains to adapt themselves to the American writing styles. Despite all the difficulties they face, a welcome change has taken place. After one semester's training in coherence, although the Chinese participants still face many challenges in the way they write, they have improved coherence in their writing.

## CHAPTER 9

### REFLECTIONS, PEDOGOGICASL CONCERNS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the participants' Chinese rhetorical perspectives seemed to radically affect their organization of writing. In many cases, however, the situation is not nearly so clear cut. For this reason, it is quite necessary to go beyond the study to reflect some of the critical issues. With this starting point in mind, in this chapter, I will offer some additional reflections on topics that are critically important to the current study. Some of these involve factors in the present study itself, while others involve pedagogical issues. I will then discuss some implications for ESL learning and ESL pedagogy. Following that, I will conclude the chapter by providing several suggestions for future research.

#### **Reflections on the Current Study**

It is important, in thinking back on the present study, to realize that the categories defined here are not nearly as hard-and-fast as they may seem, judging from the text.

#### **Chinese versus American/Anglo (and Other) Writers**

As members of my dissertation committee pointed out quite emphatically, many of the issues found in developing Chinese writers are identical to those faced by English-speaking students. Indeed, problems with global coherence are quite universal, and are likely to affect developing writers regardless of their first language. While this was noted in passing several times in the present text, it is worth underscoring again here. The cultural differences highlighted in my research, and offered in relation to the writing challenges faced by Chinese ESL writers, are clearly only a part of the overall picture.

However, I strongly believe that they are a valid part of the picture, that they may well be further complicating the picture for Chinese ESL students, and that they should be taken into account by those who design writing programs for Chinese-speaking learners.

### **Chinese versus Western Rhetorical Views: Too Rigid a Dichotomy?**

Chinese and Western rhetorical views such as circularity and linearity were presented in the current study, for the sake of clarity, as if the two traditions contained little or no overlap. This is not always the case. Since nothing in the world is absolute, rhetorical values, in the final analysis, are no exception. While there are clearly distinctive aspects of cultural traits as exemplified in the study, there exist similarities between the two rhetorical conventions. As Gu (2008) so rightly points out, “Rhetorical difference, no matter how great it is, however, is only one side of the coin. Rhetoric, as a separate branch of learning, has many things in common in Chinese and Western traditions” (p. 44). In reality, even within either of these cultural contexts, there is considerable variation. There are Chinese writers who stake out clear positions and link them to evidence. From a historical perspective, according to Lu (1998), Chinese writers adopted the Western style of persuasion when needed or when they were prepared to take a calculated risk. Likewise, there are English-speaking persuasive writers who may choose to present both sides of an issue, or to think intuitively, or to delay presenting their point of view.

One can cite specific cases where the seemingly widely different Chinese and Western cultures share common beliefs and rhetorical values. In particular, some current Western-based pedagogical approaches to critical thinking and writing seem to incorporate the kinds of values that our study has associated with traditional Chinese

thinking. For instance, Kiefer (2012) advocates the view that arguments don't always have to assume that readers make a yes/no decision; instead, many arguments should build toward consensus. This approach to argumentation is also well defined within the Western tradition in a style called Rogerian argument, which is introduced to students in *The Aims of Argument: A Text and Reader* (Crusius & Channell, 2010) and *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide* (Kirsznner & Mandell, 2007). Rogerian argument refers to a conflict resolution technique based on finding common ground rather than a polarizing debate, which can result in "frequent ill will and hostility" (Kirsznner & Mandell, 2007, p. 562). Instead of aggressively refuting opposing viewpoints, Rogerian argument emphasizes points of agreement and develops along quite different lines than traditional strategies of argument often do. A slightly closer look reveals that the Chinese *Zhongyong* model and the American Rogerian model substantially contribute to the same end—both seek common ground. At this point, convincing arguments would largely depend on what assessment tools we use when we assess students' writing skills. Therefore, with the growth of globalized economy, the ease of modern communication, and the influence of mass media (Zuo, 2001), I would argue that an increase in universality and a reduction in discrepancy between the Chinese and Western rhetorical strategies could be an inevitable trend.

Moreover, if one goes beyond the narrow area of one particular academic version of persuasive writing, one can find even more similarities between the cultures. This study has excluded many genres in which there may well be closer agreement between writers from the two cultures as to what 'good writing' entails. These other genres may range widely, from scientific writing, where a similar range of tight constraints surely

holds in both cultures, to creative writing and poetry, where indirect expression, figurative language and intuitive thinking surely prevail in both cultures. Logical connections are not the exclusive “property” of the West, nor is appreciation for beautiful linguistic expression limited to Chinese or non-Western writers. This dissertation has focused narrowly on one particular genre, because mastery of this persuasive genre is viewed as important to achieving academic success in English cultural contexts.

It is also true that informal spoken English, unlike formal written academic English, often involves the kind of content that repeats and wanders ‘off topic,’ and is often intuitive or feeling-oriented, not just logical and linear by a long way. A whole research tradition focusing on conversational styles and strategies shows that, in the spoken realm at least, virtually all communication in English follows the kind of organization we have here identified as typically Chinese.

### **Pedagogical Concerns**

The present study raises vital issues on which it will be valuable for me to reflect, and help instructors become attentive to matters of motivation and attitudes toward learning as well as teaching to the test involved in teaching and learning.

### **Motivation and Attitudes toward Learning**

One of the first, and most consistent, sets of findings in the present study involved emotional issues, rather than cognitive understandings. As pointed out immediately in the original questionnaire given to the participants, most of the students disliked, feared, or even hated writing. They later expressed other emotions: anger at feeling they were “forced” to use methods that felt intuitively uncomfortable to them; frustration at not understanding teacher feedback; confusion when they had trouble understanding notions

like “wandering off topic.” A striking and unexpected finding was that years spent in American education, far from helping students, seems to have contributed to their alienation and discouraged them from learning.

Long experience with education, especially in the last half century, has shown how important motivation is in the learning process. Given this, it is worth looking again closely at the root situation in which these students find themselves, since understanding that situation may lead us to understand (and be better able to solve) the problems of these students.

Over the past 30 decades, many Chinese immigrants, who hardly know any English, have flocked to New York in search for new beginnings and better lives. Following their parents, most children in these families are often ill-prepared for school. Their parents maintain strong family connections to China and adhere to a traditional Chinese way of life. These Chinese children face difficult barriers and immense pressure getting accustomed to the new land. In many cases, rather than adapting to the new culture, many of them attend American schools with the hopes of learning survival English, primarily to start their own business in future; since they do not see the value of learning about their new situation, they show little interest in learning more about the West. Naturally, this will lead them to feel unmotivated to learn about the unfamiliar new ideas involved in being seen as an effective writer in English. Most of the Chinese participants in the current study were brought up in this family environment, where they may have felt isolated from the surrounding Anglo culture and unmotivated to learn more about it.

Not so long ago, Danling Fu wrote a book *An Island of English: Teaching ESL in Chinatown*, which is an account of her work as a literary consultant in a middle school in New York City's Chinatown. In her book, Fu (2003) claims that teachers and administrators need to respect Chinese children's home culture and language; further, this respect should help them enter the new culture, further their education, and forge their new identity in this new world, rather than simply allowing them to maintain their unique culture and language. The author makes a valid point, because these Chinese children's goals (business, succeeding in life, learning, etc.) will be better met if they know what to expect in the new environment, and if they are able to be open to the new ways of thinking and acting in the new culture.

After all, the Chinese children's sense of responsibility for learning is also an important determiner of school success. Here as elsewhere in education, the old saying holds: we can lead a horse to water, but we cannot make it drink. Unfortunately, the "water" needed in this case may not even be readily available: writing instructions in New York City high schools do not focus on the teaching of coherence. Our secondary education systems are not equipped to handle and address the needs identified in this study. High schools tend to focus only on free-style writing, development of oneself, and creativity. As long as students can express their ideas and communicate effectively, they are good to go. As a result, many Chinese-speaking New York City high school graduates, who cannot connect with these pedagogical messages, are not ready for college-level coherent writing once they complete their high school requirements. These young people need to avail themselves of tutoring and other extra help, joining special clubs focused on reading and writing.



Since many Chinese learners of English cannot write coherent essays upon entering college, it is of great importance to increase learner motivation and create a classroom setting in which Chinese ESL students understand that coherence is an important attribute of overall essay quality in the Western context; instructors must employ constructive pedagogical ideas to teach their students to find ways to achieve coherence so that the reader can follow along with their argument.

### **Comments on Test-driven Education**

This study examined the advanced writing class for ESL students. This class has as its goal to teach to a particular kind of very narrow test—one that actually asks for only one narrow kind of writing, and requires that students read, think, and write an essay responding to a passage while following a set of instructions in a one-time, limited period to measure their ability to do college-level writing in English. Few strong writers ever produce a text in this pressured way, in one timed sitting. Instead, they use a whole range of useful strategies for writing, including brainstorming, collaboration, revising and editing. They can also take the time to consult references where needed, so as to have at hand the kind of evidence that they wish to use as support for any given point—evidence that one does not typically have in memory, to support decisions about public transit policy or public shopping habits. Finally, they use feedback from peers or colleagues as guides in revising their work.

It is impossible to apply these skills properly in the context of a 90-minute timed ‘test’ situation. Quite often, presented with an unfamiliar topic, or asked to summarize an article whose main idea is not very clear, it is likely to lead to failure for many ESL students. Most ESL students have problems with time management; but in addition, they

are being asked to perform a writing task under conditions that are very poorly conducive to good writing. Given these factors, it is perhaps no surprise that the CUNY-wide CATW test has a low passing rate for ESL students, based on the data released in 2011.

This reflection points to a limitation of the present study; it is not clear how a semester's experience with a more process-oriented class might yield very different results, and might lead to more focused insights on the value of the different activities and strategies involved in learning to write.

In a broader sense, this also raises questions about the best way to evaluate writing: whether educators should consider alternatives to tests like the CATW—for instance, a writing portfolio—as evidence of developing writing skills. Many writing instructors, at various levels and in a range of contexts, use such portfolios, and the advantages of this choice are many. Students have a chance to reflect on themselves as writers, to take control of their own production, to evaluate their work and present their best writing, and more, depending on the structure of the portfolio design. The title of a chapter by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, in the collection called *Situating Portfolios*, published in 1997, refers to the growth in portfolio use as an *explosion*, already in the 1990s. As we head farther into the twenty-first century, and as educators realize how deeply evaluation procedures influence both pedagogy and student learning, it is worth considering a wide variety of evaluation (and thus pedagogical) methods for ESL students such as those in the present study.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

In the following section, I will provide several implications for ESL learning and ESL pedagogy.

### **The Goal: Is There a “Right” Way to Write?**

Much of this dissertation has focused on the needs of a group of participants who intend to lead their lives in America; thus, the assumption has been that they need to adopt Western notions about coherence and good writing. However, many Chinese and other international students educated in the United States actually go back to their home country to take on professional lives there. For Chinese writers who return to China, it may be counter-productive to have absorbed a view of writing that sees Western rhetorical values as “right” and Chinese ones as “wrong.” Rather, such writers may need to be able to write with their Chinese readers’ preferences in mind, for balance, indirect expression, and a certain degree of reader-responsible organization. To best serve the needs of all students, this must be kept in mind; in the next two sections below, I will elaborate further on how the right balance might be sought. At the very least, it would seem that a moderate approach would be called for, in which the students are encouraged to be open to Western practice, without imposing that practice as the only possible “correct” choice. At best, it would be wise to emphasize to developing writers that they may be called to write in different contexts, both Eastern and Western, and that the best approach would be a flexible one, taking into account the needs of each context in which they may write in the future.

### **Language and Identity: Treating Students Respectfully**

A considerable body of research, by researchers such as Bonny Norton (2000), to mention only one, has led to a growing sense that one’s language very closely defines who one is, or how one sees one’s identity. This tradition goes back to John Gumperz’s seminal text, *Language and Social Identity* (1983). In the decades that followed the

Gumperz's text, increasing attention has been paid to the treatment of non-standard English varieties and their speakers in the classroom. In this context, it has become clear to many that students learn best, and adapt forms of the standard variety best, if their own "home" language is respected for its value in their lives. A recent attention-getting title, Lisa Delpit's *The Skin That We Speak* (2003), points to the political importance of respecting varieties of language other than the main "standard" forms traditionally recognized in the classroom. A serious review of language and identity is well beyond the scope of the present study. However, it is clear that insights by Norton and dozens of others on the development of identity in second-language learners are relevant in reflecting on the present study and its results.

In today's globalizing and multilingual world, English has become a language far more used by multilinguals than native English speakers. Even if the goal is clearly to get Chinese students to be open to Western ways of thinking and writing, they do not have to be told that their way is 'wrong' or faulty in some deeply universal way. Again, the analogy to non-standard English varieties could be made here: when educators teach students whose "home" language is non-standard, there has been a shift in how these home languages are treated: where these forms used to be simply labeled as 'wrong' or full of errors, they are often now accepted. Students are taught that their original language is fine for the contexts where it should be used (home, social events, etc.); they do not have to give up the language that has supported their sense of who they are....they just have to learn another language, the one that is expected in formal academic writing.

A similar approach could go a long way toward reducing Chinese students' resistance and confusion. That is, Western thought patterns could be presented in a way

similar to how the standard is often now presented to non-standard speakers: namely as something new for them to add to what they already know—not as something ‘better’ to replace the “wrong” ways of thinking and writing that they bring to the writing/English class. This raises the whole area of what it means to be multi-lingual, able to function well in more than one cultural context. It is important for people to see writing as a matter of making choices between different opinions, not seeing only one option as always ‘right.’ Danling Fu’s book, discussed earlier in the section on motivation, is highly relevant here.

### **Accepting Both Traditions in the Classroom**

As a line extends and a circle rotates (Zuo, 2001), generally speaking, there is a contrast between Chinese and Western cultures, especially in this one area of formal CATW persuasive writing. So how should it be viewed? In particular, given my comments in the previous sections, it is clear that a writing instructor teaching Chinese ESL students must make practical choices. Could the two rhetorical notions be integrated somehow? A common belief in Chinese culture holds that the moon of the West is not rounder, and the sun of the East has its spots as well (Zuo, 2001). A most recent eye-catching title, *Connecting Rather Than Colliding: When American and Chinese Rhetorical Styles Meet in the University Classroom* by Karen Shea (2011), indicates a trend toward a shift of teaching and learning styles in the cross-cultural classroom, which may satisfy the best interest of both the students and their professors. As Shea maintains in her article,

“Misunderstandings may form a rift between the students, who write according to their own Eastern rhetorical upbringing, and the professors, who assign and assess

the writing based on their Western rhetorical tradition. As a result, many professors are looking for ways to bridge the gap; having a mutual understanding of the rhetorical traditions behind the American and Chinese styles of writing is a step in the right direction” (p. 1).

Shea seems to suggest that, in a multicultural world, one needs to stand in the other side’s position more, actively promoting cultural awareness and diversity. To say the least, the linearity-versus-circularity difference between Western and Chinese cultures, for instance, is just a matter of degree; each has its own merits, and best of all, they complement each other. Chinese learners of English bring with them to their English writing splendid Chinese culture and its rich rhetorical traditions with a history of several thousand years. Therefore, to more effectively communicate in this cross cultural context, while Chinese learners of English continue to sharpen their understanding of Western rhetorical patterns and particularly increase audience awareness, it would be a creative approach for instructors to “embed others’ wisdoms into one’s own culture without alienating them” (Gao, 2012, p. 251) and accept both traditions in the classroom as part of a rich world where many genres and ways of thinking are valid, which will certainly contribute to coherence in writing in a ground-breaking way.

To avoid slipping to a black or white perspective, I argue that, based on the idea of collaborative learning (Shea, 2011), appreciating the Chinese and Western rhetorical notions would require writing instructors to have some knowledge of Chinese rhetorical practices. By getting familiar with Chinese rhetorical styles, ESL and mainstream educators should view the cultural and rhetorical differences as rich resources for Chinese students, and not as sources of deficits; in fact, teachers in a “mixed” classroom can

compare and contrast the Western and Chinese rhetorical notions, potentially enriching the experience of both Chinese and Western students. Again, to compare the two traditions is not to judge which one is superior but to promote a clear understanding of how the two writing styles change, develop, and mutually benefit each other. By honoring both rhetorical strategies and critically analyzing a variety of arguments about the two cultures, students, rather than creating confusion, will eventually develop the ability to clearly articulate their own views, to logically appraise the arguments of others, and to produce innovative and effective texts so that an English reader would find it easy to follow. On a practical level, if American students are asked to write (as practice) an essay in the Chinese rhetorical style, they will enrich their knowledge, gain new perspectives on writing, and learn to respect this other tradition; at the same time, the Chinese students in such a class will feel valued, and will feel that their background is respected. In addition, the students may well have fun, and become better friends as a by-product of such exercises. One of my doctoral faculty members shared with me a story about a classroom experience she had, where inner-city non-standard and mainstream students were both enrolled. An African-American student in the class not only shared aspects of his culture, talking about the cultural history and value of rap music; he also led the mainstream students (and the professor) in a step-by-step exercise on how to write their own rap lyrics. As she notes, the hands-on experience changed the tone of the class, and deeper mutual understandings between the two groups developed.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Much work could still be done on the linguistic and logical forms that were the focus of the present study. For instance, this study did not look at varieties of textual

organization. One way to achieve logical flow from idea to idea is to use cohesive devices appropriately. However, strong writers are also able to reinforce a logical progression of ideas without using transition words and phrases. Becoming familiar with such patterns is even more challenging to all developing writers, particularly ESL students. A way of further exploring this possibility would be to investigate how sentences establish implicit logical connections that could help the reader follow the way the explanation/description/discussion/analysis/argument is going on (Santa Rosa Junior College, 2007). In tandem with this basic research, it would follow that classroom research could be done on how to best make students aware of these “unmarked” connections, and how to help them learn to integrate the relevant strategies in their own writing.

A recurrent theme in this study was that students had little or no training in coherent writing, either in China or earlier in the United States. I have suggested that training in cohesive ties and logical relations could be introduced early in a learner’s experience with English. Much further study is needed here, to examine how such suggestions might be implemented, as well as whether, and in what ways, the overall situation is developing for writing instruction both in China and in the United States. ESL/EFL teacher training programs might be examined, for instance, along with a number of other possibilities (such as qualitative study of many kinds of classroom situations).

On the broader cultural level, the present study raises many questions. In particular, the results presented here suggest directions for future research. On the one hand, scholars could conduct large-scale studies of students from different backgrounds



to confirm or deepen my sense that coherence problems are common for people, regardless of factors such as their cultural backgrounds and years of English learning. On the other hand, studies of other ethnic groups could be done, to identify similarities and differences in writing problems and support my claims that elements of culture must play a role in learning how to write in a new language. With the dozens of cultures involved, many such studies would be needed before a broader understanding of cultural influence emerges; ultimately, it might become possible to tease apart the ‘universal’ problems that all students face, as compared with the cultural factors that either help to alleviate, or worsen the challenges involved in learning to write effectively. The global situation of English today, and the widespread need for writing skills in English across cultures, provides an excellent laboratory setting for both types of study.

My earlier remarks on the study’s context also lead to suggestions for further research. The mode of instruction has played a large part in the current study, and studies in different contexts are needed. For instance, as noted above, it is doubtful that preparing students to write timed in-class essays under pressure could provide a fair and accurate assessment of writing development. Therefore, one area that needs further research would be to look more closely at the effects of teaching-to-this kind of pressured test, as compared with a more fluid situation where writers engage in a full set of activities to prepare an essay. Likewise, studies should be done similar to this one, but in a situation where process or post-process pedagogy is used. A separate study might assess more closely the use of portfolios, which was suggested above; at what level of language learning should these be introduced? Can they be used in some form even with

beginning writers? What effect(s) would they have on the writing development of students such as the participants in this study?

The present study's disturbing results on the participants' experiences in American high schools call for further examination. Why do high schools seem to be failing students like the participants in this study? Would light be shed on this question through qualitative research on high school cultures, teacher and student attitudes, and similar topics? Could K-12 ESL programs be studied for their efficacy, their goals, and for the kinds of experience that international students seem to be having in these programs? Could pilot programs be established, for instance with Chinese-speaking counselors, to help Chinese students make the adjustment to the American school system and expectations, and could these be studied?

Of course, a related question arises with regard to the family context. I have speculated that these students' parents may be absorbed with the family's financial needs, their own work, and their own cultural and linguistic challenges, and that these may not leave them the time or opportunity to help their children adapt to the American culture or the American school situation. Qualitative study is needed, to examine this situation more closely: to learn what family situations are like for students like my participants, and perhaps to study the possibility of having volunteer outreach programs to help families feel more connected to their children's school experience.

In short, there is still much to be done. I hope to be part of the effort, as I join with both colleagues and my future students in a continued effort to provide them with the best learning experience possible.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Features of Cohesion and Coherence

##### Cohesion

1. Pronouns of reference are used accurately
2. Conjunctions are used accurately
3. Ellipsis and substitution are used when needed
4. Lexical repetition is used appropriately
5. Synonymous words/phrases when used are used appropriately
6. Transition words are used judiciously and accurately to link sentences and/or paragraphs together to convey relationships throughout the essay
7. Each sentence follows logically from the previous one

##### Coherence

1. The opening paragraph is effective in introducing the reader to the subject or the central idea that the writer will develop throughout the essay
2. All the paragraphs support the central focus and do not digress
3. The writer's overall point of view is clear
4. Paragraphs are divided in terms of content relevance
5. Transition is smooth between paragraphs
6. The writer organizes paragraph details according to a discernible plan (e.g., time order, addition order, order of importance, order of cause and effect, order of comparison-contrast) that is well-designed with a smooth and logical progression of thoughts; therefore, the ideas relate to one another

7. The writer does not shift topics, and the ideas in each paragraph are all relevant to the topic
8. Ideas mentioned are elaborated
9. There is no repetition of ideas
10. The writer fully develops paragraphs, effectively using reasons and specific details and examples from his/her reading and experience to develop ideas
11. The last paragraph gives the reader a definite sense of closure

## Appendix B

### Composition Rating Scales—Cohesion

#### Knowledge of Cohesion

Level of ability	Description
0 Zero	No evidence of knowledge of textual cohesion Range: zero Accuracy: not relevant
1 Limited	Limited knowledge of textual cohesion Range: few markers of textual cohesion used Accuracy: relationships between sentences often confusing
2 Moderate	Moderate knowledge of textual cohesion Range: moderate range of explicit cohesive devices used Accuracy: relationships between sentences generally clear but could be more explicitly marked
3 Extensive	Extensive knowledge of textual cohesion Range: wide range of explicit cohesive devices including complex subordination used Accuracy: highly accurate with only occasional problems in cohesion
4 Complete	Evidence of complete knowledge of cohesion Range: complete range of explicit cohesive devices used Accuracy: completely accurate use of cohesive devices

## Appendix C

### Composition Rating Scales—Coherence

#### Knowledge of Coherence

Level of ability	Description
0 Zero	No evidence of knowledge of textual coherence Range: zero Accuracy: not relevant
1 Limited	Limited knowledge of coherence Range: little evidence of deliberate textual coherence Accuracy: organization confusing or irrelevant to topic
2 Moderate	Moderate knowledge of coherence Range: moderate range of explicit rhetorical organizational devices Accuracy: organization clear but could be more explicitly marked
3 Extensive	Extensive knowledge of coherence Range: wide range of explicit organizational devices at both paragraph and whole discourse levels Accuracy: highly accurate with only occasional problems in organization
4 Complete	Evidence of complete knowledge of coherence Range: complete range of explicit organizational devices Accuracy: completely accurate use

## Appendix D: Background Questionnaire

All information collected for this study will be kept confidential and used only by the researcher. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to fill out this form or to give consent for the information to be used in this dissertation research.

### Part One

Please complete the following part.

- 1 Today's Date: Day \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Your Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

### Part two

- 3 Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 How many years have you studied English as second language (ESL)?  
# \_\_\_\_\_ years in my native country    # \_\_\_\_\_ years in the United States
- 5 When was the last time you took an ESL course?  
Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 How many times have you taken this advanced composition course?  
\_\_\_\_ first time I'm taking the course  
\_\_\_\_ second time I'm taking the course  
\_\_\_\_ third time I'm taking the course
- 7 What year did you come to the United States?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8 What writing courses have you taken in the past?  
\_\_\_\_ (beginning)    \_\_\_\_ (intermediate)    \_\_\_\_ (advanced)
- 9 Where did you go to high school?  
\_\_\_\_\_

10 What year did you graduate from high school? \_\_\_\_\_

11 Have you had any college education before coming to this college?

\_\_\_No \_\_\_Yes:

If yes, please give the dates of attendance

12 Do you like to write in English?

\_\_\_No \_\_\_Yes

If yes, how much writing do you do in English? What kinds of writing do you do?

(a) \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy writing in English, and I sometimes write private stories or paragraphs;

(b) \_\_\_\_\_ I often write in English, but only in connection with class assignments;

(c)\_\_\_\_\_ I keep a journal and write something about everything.

13 How would you describe yourself as an ESL writer?

Check all that apply:

\_\_\_Confident \_\_\_Advanced \_\_\_Inexperienced \_\_\_Nervous

\_\_\_Have fears about writing \_\_\_Hate to write

### Part Three

Please write the answers to the following questions:

14 What city/town/village do you come from?

\_\_\_\_\_

15 What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for your time and your cooperation!

## Appendix E: Departmental Diagnostic Sample Test

### Diagnostic Essay Topics

Choose ONE of the following topics and write a complete essay expressing and supporting your opinion.

- A. With gas prices rising, traffic increasing, pollution worsening and parking getting more difficult, some New Yorkers are demanding that the city prohibit cars in Manhattan. They want all commuters to use mass transit: subways, buses, taxis, ferries, or bicycles. Others feel that banning cars would create undue hardships for people traveling to work, medical appointments, daycare centers and other destinations, especially at night and in bad weather.

What is your opinion? Write an essay expressing your view and supporting it with examples from your general knowledge, your reading, information you have gained from the media, and your personal experiences or those of others.

- B. Nowadays, many people choose not to have children or to have only one child. They say they are too busy getting an education and building a career to take time for a family. Other people want larger families. For them, a career cannot replace the lifetime rewards of family relationships.

What is your opinion? Write an essay expressing your view and supporting it with examples from your general knowledge, your reading, information you have gained from the media, and your personal experiences or those of others.

## Appendix F: CATW Sample Writing Assignment

### Is Music a Good Tool for Health?

#### Prompt

Research has shown that music has a profound effect on your body and mind. In fact, there's a growing field of health care known as music therapy, which uses music to heal. Those who practice music therapy are finding a benefit in using music to help cancer patients, children with attention problems, and others. Hospitals are beginning to use music therapy to help with pain management, depression, to promote movement, to calm patients, to ease muscle tension, and other benefits. This is not surprising, as music affects the body and mind in many powerful ways.

For example, research has shown that music with a strong beat can stimulate brainwaves to synchronize with the beat. Faster beats bring sharper concentration and more alert thinking. Slower beats promote a calm, meditative state. Even after you've stopped listening, the change in brainwave activity that music causes can continue, which means that music can bring lasting benefits to your state of mind.

In another example, research shows that breathing and heart rate may be affected by the changes music can bring. This may mean slower breathing, slower heart rate, and an activation of the relaxation response, among other things. This is why music and music therapy can help prevent the damaging effects of chronic stress, thereby aiding not only relaxation, but also health. Music can also be used to bring a more positive state of mind, helping to keep depression and anxiety under control.

With these and other benefits, it's no surprise that music therapy is growing in popularity.

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Adapted from "*How and Why Is Music a Good Tool for Health?*" by Elizabeth Scott, M.S. About.com Guide. Updated November 22, 2009.  
[http://stress.about.com/od/tensionamers/a/music\\_therapy.htm](http://stress.about.com/od/tensionamers/a/music_therapy.htm).

#### Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced. Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that will help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.



## Appendix G: In-class Writing/CATW Practice Writing

### Going on a Diet? Start Paying in Cash

#### Prompt

Paying with credit or debit cards makes people more likely to make impulsive, unhealthy food purchases, according to a new study in *The Journal of Consumer Research*.

Previous research has found that paying with credit can encourage people to spend more money because physically handing over a dollar bill increases the so-called “pain of payment,” which takes away from the pleasure of consumption.

There is a piggy joke to be made here somewhere. It turns out paying with a card can also make consumers likely to spend more money on “bad” things in particular, like junk food.

“When consumers encounter vice products — such as cookies, cakes and pies — the emotive imagery and associated desire trigger impulsive purchase decisions,” the authors write. But “pain of payment can curb the impulsive responses and thus reduce the purchase of such vice products.”

In part of their study, the authors looked at the shopping behavior of a random sample of 1,000 single-member households who normally shop at chain stores. The authors looked at what these households purchased over a six-month period on each visit to the store, and how they paid for their items. Most of the households switched between card and cash payments on different trips (but the researchers did not randomly assign one form of payment versus another, so there may be some other lurking variables at play).

In this analysis, consumers were significantly more likely to purchase unhealthy foods like cakes and cookies when using a credit or debit card. Interestingly, consumers who shopped with larger baskets were also “more susceptible to impulsive purchase of unhealthy products,” the authors found. The date of the shopping trip also made a difference:

Consumers shopping on weekends are less likely to be impulsive. This could be because of the shopping list effect: weekend shopping trips tend to be based on shopping lists, and therefore purchases on such trips are less susceptible to impulsive urges.

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Adapted from *The New York Times*, October 19, 2012 by Catherine Rampell  
<http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/going-on-a-diet-start-paying-in-cash/?pagewanted=print>

## Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced. Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that will help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

Be careful to write

- 1 an introduction that contains a summary and your thesis.
- 2 **two** body paragraphs and each:
  - a. begins with a topic sentence, which contains the thesis and the one point you plan to discuss in the paragraph.
  - b. has approximately 8-10 sentences of supporting details that a.) must DIRECTLY relate to the thesis and the point you are making, b.) refer back to the article about three times, and c.) use appropriate transition words and vocabulary.
- 3 a conclusion that summarizes what you wrote in one or two sentences.
- 4 Your vocabulary and grammar must also be accurate.

## Appendix H: Essays Written on the Final Exam

### Achieving a Healthful Digital Diet

#### Prompt

Think of the Internet and other digital technology as food. Limit the intake of empty digital calories, and do not consume too much over all. That is the advice of experts who study children's use of media and who have some tips for parents and children on how to use technology in more healthful ways.

Michael Levine, executive director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, which studies media and learning, said parents should take the time to assess whether a Web site or game had clear educational value. Then, he suggested, tip the balance so that 50 percent of a child's computer time is spent on activities that teach. "The primary use of technology by young people is for entertainment," he said. "There needs to be a more balanced diet."

Vicky Rideout, a researcher who has overseen studies on media and health for the Kaiser Family Foundation, said it was crucial to limit multitasking and entertainment while studying. "Don't have the instant-messaging function open. Don't have Facebook open," she said. "Put that challenge out to the kids."

Some of the expert advice focuses on the example set by parents. "What kind of role model are you?" asked Liz Perle, editor in chief of Common Sense Media, which helps families navigate a media-saturated world. "Are you constantly on your BlackBerry, play online games regularly — are you addicted to Facebook, too?"

Ms. Perle urged parents of younger children not to constantly entertain them with screens, like giving them the iPhone to quiet them in a restaurant. And older children should be given basic phones for talking and texting, not smartphones that can be loaded with applications. Eventually, Ms. Perle said, older children must take responsibility. She suggested they ask questions like those asked by people with addictions: "Who is in control? Me, or the technology? Is the game calling the shots?"

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From *The New York Times*, November 21, 2010 by Matt Richtel  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brainside.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brainside.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print)

## Appendix I: Essays Written on the Final Exam

### Is Multitasking Productive?

#### Prompt

New research has indicated that humans are not skilled at multitasking. Multitasking refers to the simultaneous use of several different media, such as watching television, surfing the Internet, playing video games, text messaging, and reading or writing e-mails at the same time. Thus, multitasking requires people to switch their attention from task to task rapidly. However, scientists contend that the human brain is not wired to perform two tasks simultaneously. According to Earl Miller, a professor of neuroscience at MIT, humans cannot focus on more than one activity at a time because when the brain attempts to process two tasks at once, this demand creates a conflict that causes interference between the two activities. For instance, if a person is speaking on the telephone and answering an email, these two activities require verbal communication and written words, but trying to produce both types of output at the same time results in a clash between the two.

To test this theory, Daniel Weissman and other researchers at the University of Michigan used an MRI scanner to photograph multitaskers' brains as they performed different activities concurrently. The researchers discovered that even simple tasks could overwhelm that brain if a subject tries to perform more than one at a time. For instance, if a woman is looking for two cars, one red and the other black, she must continually switch between the two colors in her mind. However, after she performs this task many times, she will become confused, overwhelmed and unproductive. In fact, recent studies indicated that multitasking reduces productivity by 20 to 40 percent.

Moreover, Russell Poldrack, a psychology professor at the University of California, has determined that multitasking negatively impacts learning. If a person learns while multitasking, that learning is less flexible and more difficult to retrieve. As a result, when students send text messages while they are in a classroom, they reduce their ability to learn.

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From *The Keys to the CATW*, Second Edition, 2011 by Regina A. Rochford

## Appendix J: Essays Written on the Final Exam

### No Junk Food in Schools!

#### Prompt

In an attempt to reduce childhood obesity, legislation has been proposed to forbid junk food from being served in schools. These new regulations would ban sugary and fried foods from school cafeterias and vending machines nationwide. As a result, schools will only serve nutritious foods so that children can make healthy choices. Several cities and states have already passed laws to remove certain drinks and snacks from schools' vending machines, and they are proposing modifications to school lunch menus, too.

Presently, most school lunches are quite unhealthy. They consist of hot dogs, pepperoni pizza, cheeseburgers, French fries, and sugary flavored milks. Many of these meals contain more than half a day's worth of sodium and fat. However, this new law would require schools to offer more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milks. It is hoped that the introduction of nutritious, plant-based foods at a young age will establish healthy eating habits and reduce the children's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, cancer, strokes, and heart disease.

Although the National Parent Teachers Association and other health groups support this law, others are unenthusiastic. Civil rights activities believe these new laws interfere with parental rights because what a child eats is a private family matter. In addition, the American Beverage Association contends that this law is ineffective in managing weight problems because obesity is a complex issue that results from lack of exercise, excessive calories, fast food, and heredity. Moreover, many parents object to this legislation because they believe overeating is rooted in patterns established at home, not school. Therefore, they claim that serving healthy food at school will not prevent children obesity.

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From *The Keys to the CATW*, Second Edition, 2011 by Regina A. Rochford

## Appendix K: CATW Paragraph Editing

Complete the Paragraph with the Appropriate Transitions or Vocabulary Corrections.

Using credit or debit cards to make impulsive purchases on \_\_\_\_\_ can cause serious financial issues for consumers. According to the article, paying with a credit card can encourage people to spend more money in \_\_\_\_\_. The article says overspending occurs because consumers \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ because consumers don't have to worry about how much money is in their wallets, they will buy items they don't even need. Then when the bill arrives, they only pay the minimum amount due. \_\_\_\_\_, credit card users gradually build up more and more debt until they cannot afford to pay it off and have major financial problems. For instance, my uncle loves to shop in \_\_\_\_\_ with his credit cards. \_\_\_\_\_, he accumulated more than \$20,000 in debt just by purchasing \_\_\_\_\_ he recently lost his job, \_\_\_\_\_ he cannot even make the minimum payments each month. \_\_\_\_\_ using credit cards to make impulsive \_\_\_\_\_ purchases can result in financial problems, \_\_\_\_\_ consumers should use cash when they shop.