Conflation of Rhetorical Traditions:
The Formation of Modern Chinese Writing Instruction

In his recent studies on classical Chinese text structures and contemporary Chinese composition textbooks, Andy Kirkpatrick claims that Mainland Chinese students are taught to write Chinese compositions in contemporary “Anglo-American” rhetorical style. This paper examines the historical formation of modern Chinese writing instruction and argues that the introduction of Western rhetoric into China in the beginning of the twentieth century did enrich modern Chinese rhetoric through, for example, Western scientific rhetoric(s); but more importantly, together with other historical forces, it helped to revitalize and retrieve the extremely rich Chinese rhetorical tradition in modern Chinese writing instruction.

Ever since Robert Kaplan published his seminal essay, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education,” in 1966, it has been a time-honored argument that traditional Chinese text structures continue to influence the written English of Chinese students. This argument reflects a fundamental conviction among contrastive rhetoricians that unique sociopolitical and cultural experiences of a nation render some distinctive features in the rhetorical practices of its people. Many contrastive rhetoricians are still entertained by simplified notions of Chinese students’ written English; for example, to accept Chinese traditional values and social norms, the students “seem to avoid free expression of personal views and feelings” (Connor 39) and “tend to ‘suggest’ or be indirect” (40).

However, recent research in Chinese rhetoric has thrown this essentialist view of Chinese rhetorical practices into doubt. Researchers such as Yamen Liu, Xing Lu, and Heping Zhao have argued that despite a different cultural context from the West, traditional Chinese rhetoric shares similar rhetorical values and practices with Western rhetoric. For example, Liu examined a popular Chinese rhetoric published in the sixteenth century and found some Western rhetorical values, such as originality, newness of expression, and directness of discourse,
pervasive in the book. Lu studied Chinese rhetoric from the fifth to third century BCE and observed that similar to Western rhetoric, rhetorical practices in ancient China equally shared ethical, epistemological, dialectical, and psychological concerns. Zhao scrutinized Wen Xin Diao Long, a fifth-century Chinese rhetoric on written discourse, and identified a detailed, systematic treatment of invention, organization, and style. This strand of studies has defied in one way or another what Liu calls “a dominant paradigm in comparative rhetoric,” which works under the assumption that “there exists an easily abstractable and consistently definable set of ‘essential’ characteristics in Chinese or any other rhetorical tradition” (322).

The essentialist perception of Chinese rhetoric is further challenged by studies that compare what was prescribed in ancient Chinese rhetorics and what was prescribed in modern ones. Andy Kirkpatrick studied traditional Chinese text structures as well as advice offered in some contemporary Chinese composition textbooks on text structures. He observed that traditional expository and persuasive writing in China show preference for inductive argument through chain reasoning and reasoning by analogy and historical examples; currently, however, Mainland Chinese students are taught to write Chinese compositions in contemporary “Anglo-American” rhetorical style. His observation profoundly underscores the historical fluidity of Chinese rhetoric.

But has Kirkpatrick also fallen into another essentialist trap and misperceived the scope of traditional Chinese rhetoric, mistaking traditional Chinese as “Anglo-American” style? Assuming he did observe some Anglo-American rhetorical features in contemporary Chinese composition textbooks, how did they make their way into modern Chinese writing instruction? This essay intends to explore the two questions or to refigure the formation of modern Chinese writing instruction in relation to Western rhetorical tradition. It will advance an argument that from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, Western rhetorical tradition was conflated with modern Chinese rhetoric and enriched the latter with Western scientific rhetoric; at the same time, more importantly, it helped to revitalize the rich Chinese rhetorical tradition in the modern Chinese writing classroom.

**Writing Instruction in Late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)**

A historical formation always involves the confluence of various forces, and could have its origin traced far ahead of its formal occurrence. Without exception, the emergence of modern Chinese writing instruction was marked by the establishment of a nationwide Western-styled school system in 1901. However, its motivating forces were dated much earlier. To unpack the confluence of these
forces, I start with offering an overview of the educational system of late Manchu Qing Dynasty from which modern Chinese writing instruction departs.

Traditional Chinese education served the political and economic arrangements of Chinese feudal society. Education in the late Qing Dynasty remained elitist as it had always been. The ultimate goal for those being educated was to join the officialdom, becoming part of the ruling class. Through competitive civil service examinations at the county, provincial, and national levels, the successful examinees were placed in various administrative posts. Those who failed would have to prepare for further attempts in the coming years.

The high-stakes civil service examination played a gate-keeping function mainly through essay examinations. Ever since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), thousands of examinees sat in tightly secured rooms every year from dawn to dusk for days, responding to several types of writing tasks in classical Chinese (Elman). In the late Qing Dynasty, the most important type of writing tasks required in the provincial and metropolitan civil service examinations were the most renowned bagu (eight-legged) essays. A sentence or a short passage would be quoted from each of the Four Books and the Five Classics, Confucian canons compiled two thousand years ago. For each quotation the examinees would write an essay to elucidate the quotation, maneuvering through six-to-eight rhetorical moves in several hundred Chinese characters. The logical structure of bagu essays, as observed by R. Kent Guy, resembles the deductive reasoning style in the American collegiate debate format but values quite a different kind of proof when making an argument:

Rather, the form imposed on authors a logical structure of argumentation not unlike that imposed in, say, American collegiate debate format. The essayist was to begin with a brief statement of the proposition the essay itself was illustrating (known as po-t’i, “breaking of the title”); he was then to elaborate this proposition in four or five phrases (ch’eng-t’i, “receiving the title”); and finally to suggest the broad dimensions of the argument to be pursued (ch’i-chiang, or “preliminary discourse”). The meat of the essay was to be found in three passages known as comparisons (pi), written in roughly parallel form, that expressed the moral reasoning of the argument. As the burden of proof in an essay in the Western tradition would be borne by evidence, in Chinese examination essays it was borne by elegantly stated perception. Finally, a grand conclusion (ta-chieh) summarized the argument and stated its moral implications. (170)

In other words, rather than relying upon empirical evidence, the examinees in the late Qing Dynasty resorted to their “perception.” Or to be more accurate,
they had to explicate the quotations strictly following the annotations of a Song-Dynasty scholar, Zhu Xi (1130–1200). The *bagu* essays, especially those that dealt with quotations from the *Four Books*, were read with extreme care by the examiners, and frequently essays addressing the other types of writing tasks were viewed as merely confirming the initial standings of the examinees after their *bagu* essays.

The second type of writing task was an essay called *lun* (commentary), in which the examinees would be asked to comment on a certain historical figure or a historical event. The questions dealt with early dynastic histories such as *Hanshi* (*History of the Han Dynasty*) and *Shiji* (*Records of the Grant Historian*), as well as Confucius’ *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of the Five Classics but essentially a historical chronicle (Elman). This type of essay normally starts with a statement followed by an elaboration of the topic; next, the historical significance of the person or the event in question would be thoroughly discussed; finally, the essay is wrapped up by suggesting some relevance of the topic to the present.

The third type of writing task, which was undervalued in the grading process, was five policy essays called *ce* (policy-elaboration). Given concrete problems of national importance, such as famine relief, water conservation, frontier security, military provision, local order, economic development, and public education, the examinees would elaborate on the problems and discuss how to handle them properly. But as many of these issues were politically sensitive, the examiners oftentimes would write the politically correct answers into the questions. Therefore, “[i]t [the question] often was so lengthy and comprehensive that little was left for a student to do except to paraphrase, converting the question into his answer” (Chang 295).

A typical school curriculum in the Qing Dynasty before 1901 emphasized a humanistic education, with a full-time devotion to reading a rather limited number of Confucian classics and writing essays in classical Chinese used two thousand years before. In private schools at the county and township level, students started with some primers, such as *Qianziwen* (*Thousand-Character Classic*), *Sanzijing* (*Trimetrical Classic*), and *Baijiaxing* (*Hundred Names*), and then moved on to study the Confucian canons: the *Four Books* (*Analects*, *Great Learning*, *Mencius*, and *Doctrine of the Mean*) and the Five Classics (*Book of Changes*, *Book of History*, *Book of Songs*, *Book of Rites*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*). Canonized as the Confucian moral and political philosophy, these books embody the ancient Confucian thinkers’ rhetorical preference in expository and persuasive writing, including a predominant use of inductive argument through chain reasoning as well as reasoning by analogy and historical examples when addressing the ruler (Garrett; Jensen; Kirkpatrick, “Chinese Rhetoric”). In the academies at the provincial level, students continued with
the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* in addition to a few other classics selected by each individual academy. It needs to be noted that this curriculum excluded the majority of writings produced in Chinese history, including such genres as non-Confucian philosophical treaties during Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE) and Warring States (475–221) periods, Han prose, Song songs, Yuan dramas, and Ming-Qing novels.

In the private schools and academies, daily recitation was the pedagogical norm. Much like American schools before the mid-nineteenth century, recitation was valued for mental discipline (Berlin). It was also considered indispensable to the mastery of the classical writing style, which was incompatible with modern vernacular Chinese. Writing was taught in close connection with reading. There was a shared belief that students’ writing ability developed simultaneously with their reading ability. Related to the students’ writing development were book-copying and practicing a certain calligraphic style at the low level. At a higher level, students read *bagu* essay samples, most notably *Qinding Sishuwen* (*Manual of the Examination Essays on the Four Books*) edited by Fang Bao (1668–1749), studied them for both the content and structure, and composed full-length essays in the *bagu* style (Guy).

Therefore, with a fairly constricted reading list and intense preparations for the civil service examinations, students in the late Qing were exposed to the rhetorical styles of the Confucian classics and the civil service examination essays in school settings, which constitute merely part of the Chinese rhetorical tradition. The students became particularly familiar with expository (*yi, shuo*) and argumentative (*lun, shui*) styles through deliberating upon and exposing questions concerning moral philosophy, classical studies, and history, although in most cases they were not expected to express their own views when answering these questions. This *bagu-ce-lun* pedagogical system dominated the scene of Chinese writing instruction until the end of the Qing Dynasty.

The reading- and writing-centered humanities education was developed primarily to select qualified feudal loyalists and feed them to the gigantic bureaucratic machine. However, this monolithic educational project was not unanimously appreciated by all Qing officials and scholars. Two rather deviant educational camps arose in the late nineteenth century that attached new meanings to writing instruction. One of them was led by Woren, the Mongol Neo-Confucian moralist and the head of the *Hanlingyuan* (Imperial Research Institute). He held that instead of producing future officials, the humanities education should set its primary goal on *xiushen*, or self-cultivation, to cultivate in the students the desired virtues. Traditional virtues such as benevolence and filial piety could be developed through reading classics, reflecting upon one’s daily behaviors, and recording one’s thoughts every day. Some academies adopted this
neoclassicist model in building their curricula. Students studied classical works beyond the neo-Confucian canons, such as philology from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), belle letters and composition from the Tongcheng literary school, history, mathematics, and astronomy. Instead of emphasizing recitation, the teacher often analyzed the readings at the vocabulary level through lectures, believing that philology would help to clarify the meanings of the classics. In those academies students wrote monthly bagu essays and kept a diary reflecting upon their daily readings and behaviors (Keenan). Reading and writing in those academies thus exposed the students to more diversified Chinese rhetorical styles and opened up an unprecedented space to the students for developing their own thoughts and communicating them with other intellectuals.

The second educational camp was led by Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong, the enthusiastic Western affair reformers. After China had lost two opium wars to the Western powers (1842 and 1860), these reformers clearly saw the inadequacy of the traditional humanities education for salvaging the country out of a national crisis. Turning to the West for possible solutions, they founded foreign affair schools (yangwu xuetang) in several port cities, such as Guanzhou, Fuzhou, Shanghai, and Tianjing. In those schools students studied not only the Chinese classics but more importantly a variety of Western subjects, including foreign languages, physics, chemistry, engineering, communication technology, and ship-building. As many textbooks were imported from abroad, students in those schools had the first contact with Western rhetoric, particularly scientific rhetoric(s), which was a continuation of classical Western rhetoric in the sense of scientific rhetoric’s modes of inquiry and its political and ethical concerns (Zappen, “Scientific Rhetoric”). Scientific rhetoric as manifested in the science textbooks was featured by the wide use of syllogistic and inductive logic, and a plain style with the Aristotelian ideals of clarity, brevity, and appropriateness applied to report objective observations and experiments. As Zappen argues, this style, advocated by Francis Bacon, is extremely “suitable for the general participation in a particular kind of democratic science” (“Francis Bacon” 75), in which average persons are invited to learn about and respect nature and make use of nature for the benefit of human life. As for traditional rhetorical practices in China, exercised by a rather small number of social elites, they were mainly concerned about deliberating philosophical, political, ethical, and emotional topics rather than exploring natural phenomena or technology. The intellectuals embraced the notion of looking inward rather than outward for true knowledge; they had despised the Moist tradition in scientific investigation and formal logics ever since Confucianism was established as the intellectual orthodoxy (Jensen). For the majority of Chinese who received little education, philosophical, political, and ethical topics, often addressed in an archaic language unintelligible to
them, were far beyond their daily concerns. Different from the canonized Chinese classics, the Western subjects, in many cases through translated textbooks, introduced natural science and technology to quite a sizeable population of Chinese students in a more familiar, objective, and descriptive style.

Although in the end none of the two educational trends stemmed the tide of China’s continuous exploitation by the Western powers, they did shake loose the classical humanities education in the country. In 1898, after repeated petitions from government officials and enlightened intellectuals, the Qing government started to add more practical subjects to the civil service examination, including domestic politics, foreign affairs, business management, military science, natural sciences, and engineering. In 1901 it elevated lun and ce essays to primary importance in the examinations by requiring four more lun essays, and downplayed the bagu essays by reducing them from eight to three essays in total (Elman).

In the same year, a new school system, modeled on the West, was ordered by the emperor to be erected nationwide. The new system consisted of primary schools, middle schools, technical schools, normal schools, and universities. Shortly, school enrollment witnessed a sharp increase, particularly in primary and middle schools; women were for the first time officially allowed to enroll in schools. In 1905 the civil service examination system was entirely abandoned. However, the specter of reading Confucian classics and writing civil service examination-styled essays lingered in the new school system.

**Writing Instruction in the Early Twentieth Century**

The establishment of the new school system in 1901 led to the widespread familiarity of scientific rhetoric. The new system allocated reading and writing to a curricular space narrower than before. In the new school system, required courses in the lower primary school included self-cultivation, reading classics, national language, mathematics, and physical education. In both the higher primary school and the middle school, more courses were added, such as foreign language, physics, chemistry, and biology. The drastic expansion of school subjects thus trampled the reading- and writing-centered traditional humanities education and popularized Western scientific rhetoric over the rhetoric of Confucian classics.

The educational reforms, however, did not save the Qing regime. Inspired by capitalist development in the industrial countries, the emerging bourgeois radicals in China were determined to terminate the feudal social formation and to establish a republican state. After battles on the political, cultural, and military fronts, the Republic of China (1912–1949) was founded. In Republican
China education no longer intended to serve the feudal political and social structure. Instead of producing social elites and government officials, education was defined as providing basic education to its citizens for the new nation-state. More specifically, for both the primary and middle schools, the new educational order set the goals as “to cultivate [in the students] the moral basis for citizenship, and provide the knowledge and skills necessary in life” (qtd. in Chen Qitian 224).

Under the new educational order, reading and writing instruction, still representing the humanistic tradition, underwent significant departure from the classical education. After several years of national debate, “Reading Classics” was no longer required in either the primary or middle school. Some Confucian classics together with noncanonic classics were incorporated into the “National Language” course, more for their linguistic and rhetorical merits than for their moral and ethical messages.

During the 1910s and the 1920s, several striking features of writing instruction in primary and middle schools surfaced, signifying the formal conception of modern Chinese writing instruction. These features include teaching Chinese for both oral and written production, adoption of the modes of written discourse from Anglo-American rhetoric, theoretical efforts in reformulating composition instruction, and reading and writing in modern vernacular Chinese.

The most prominent feature for literacy education during this period was a conscious effort to promote oral production and to connect it with written production. In prior centuries recitation of classics was the primary form of oral practice. It helped students with reading aloud and decoding the ancient texts but neglected training the students in how to express themselves orally. The emerging trend in the 1910s was an emphasis on the teacher-student discursive interactions in the classroom. The teacher, still in a dominant position, would ask the students questions related to the course readings, and the students would be expected to answer in both correct content and appropriate forms. The students were often asked to retell in front of the class stories that they had read. After class they were also encouraged to participate in some debate teams (Yi). Practice in oral production thus paved the way for students’ written production in the vernacular style.

The pedagogical shift from recitation and writing based on sample bagu essays to an emphasis on the students’ oral production was stimulated by the introduction of educational psychology and language pedagogy from the West through translated Japanese works. After the Meiji Restoration (1867), Japanese scholars started translating large numbers of Western works in the sciences, hoping to catch up with the Western powers in science and technology. In the late Qing years, over ten thousand Chinese students went to study in Japan, and they
translated a large number of Japanese works into Chinese including both natural and social science topics.

Besides language pedagogy, theories of Western scientific rhetoric were also introduced into the country through Japanese rhetorical works. Several Chinese rhetorics, such as Chen Jiebai’s Xin Zhu Xiucixue (New Rhetoric), Long Baichun’s Wenzì Fafan (An Introduction to Language), and Wang Yi’s Xiucixue (Rhetoric) appeared in the first three decades of the twentieth century, trying to employ Western rhetorical theories to study the Chinese language. In one way or another, they were indebted to two Japanese rhetorical treatises, Shin Bijigaku (New Rhetoric) and Shujigaku (Rhetoric) (Yuan and Zong). Shin Bijigaku, written by Hogetsu Shimamura, was published in 1902. The author claimed that he had studied Western rhetoric (particularly Adam S. Hill), grammar, aesthetics, ethics, and psychology when writing the book (“Preface”). The book first defines rhetoric as “the study of the principles for achieving aesthetic effects [in written texts], that is, a type of study on written composition” (1). Next, it discusses four subdefinitions of rhetoric, the evolution of both Western and Chinese rhetoric, elements of rhetoric, diction, figures of speech, style, and the psychological, ethical, and scientific aspects of aesthetics. Shujigaku was written by Hogoromo Takeshima (1908). In the “Preface” the author lists four books that he had referenced: Genung’s Practical Rhetoric, Hill’s Foundation of Rhetoric and Principles of Rhetoric, and Wendel’s English Composition. The book first defines rhetoric as “a field of study aiming at teaching people how to express their thoughts and feelings most effectively through language” (1). Focused on the rhetoric of written texts, the book is divided into two parts: style (rhetorical styles, elements of a text, and figures of speech) and organization (description, narration, exposition, and argumentation). Apparently, the two Japanese rhetorics offered quite a comprehensive representation of Anglo-American rhetoric at that time: Rhetorical studies since Hugh Blair and George Campbell were increasingly informed by new developments in psychology, logic, and aesthetics. In addition, the scientistic approach to rhetoric gave rise to current-traditional rhetoric in American composition classrooms, in which writing was taught more for the purpose of learning and free inquiry, with special attention paid to style and arrangement of written texts (Berlin; Brereton). Modeling on Shin Bijigaku or Shujigaku, the aforementioned three Chinese rhetorics all framed their discussion of the definition of rhetoric, figures of speech, and modes of discourse from the perspective of psychology and aesthetics.

In terms of composition instruction, the greatest impact from Anglo-American rhetoric was the modes of written discourse, the hallmark of current-traditional rhetoric. Traditionally, Chinese scholars followed a discursive typology that associates a piece of writing with a particular occasion or a purpose, such as yuefu (musical poetry), fu (narrative poetry), meng (oath of agreement), zhen
(exhortation), lei (elegy), xi (war proclamation), and gengshan (sacrifice to spirits). A similar way of labeling written discourse was also found in rhetorical books published in the pre-Civil War United States. The five most common bellettristic forms in those books, according to Robert Connors, were letters, treaties, essays, biographies, and fiction. The modes of discourse that started to dominate composition instruction in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, that is, description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and persuasion, had never been a prominent categorization of written discourse in traditional Chinese rhetoric (Yuan and Zong). They started to become conspicuous in Chinese composition instruction in 1910. For example, in his 1915 treatise, “Composition Pedagogy for Primary School Students,” Yao Enming divided composition into two general categories: general composition and composition for practical purposes. The former includes narration (xushiwen), description (jishiwen), exposition (shuomingwen), and expository argumentation (yilunwen). The latter consists of letters, telegrams, invitations, government documents, contracts, advertisements, and so on. As the new modes of written discourse began to dominate writing instruction in schools, the bagu-ce-lun pedagogical system soon came to an end.

Pedagogically, bagu, ce, and lun as genres were no longer the structuring elements in the writing classroom, but their influences persisted. By the 1920s, although the system of these new modes of discourse had been well established in writing instruction, not every mode was equally treated. In middle schools the mode that was most emphasized was the mode that was closest to the old examination essays, that is, the expository argumentation (yilunwen) type. Liang Qichao, a renowned Chinese scholar, criticized that

[n]ow middle schools only teach how to write expository argumentation essays because they have suffered from the trailing vices of the bagu, ce, and lun essays [. . .]. During the one thousand and several hundred years, how many people have suffered from the civil service examination-oriented teaching! Unfortunately now the schools are practicing the same thing. Although the form has been slightly altered, the spirit remains unchanged. They only change some Four Books topics into those of fashionable, modern subjects. For example, a topic for bagu essays used to be “Reviewing what one has studied, isn’t that a pleasant thing?” But now it has been changed to “The pleasure of study” [. . .]. An old topic for ce essays, “On border security,” has been changed into “On national humiliation.” And some topics for lun essays, such as “On Guanzhong,” or “On Fanzheng,” have been changed to “On [George] Washington,” or “On [Vladimir] Lenin.” (“Weishenme” 81)
Liang believed that exclusive focus on teaching expository argumentation essays in middle schools had some serious problems for the students’ intellectual and moral growth. In his view, as the students are still cognitively and intellectually immature, most of those topics would encourage them to repeat what the textbooks or the teachers have said. Without doing extensive research on those topics, the students can only contrive unrealistic ideas in their writings in order to please the teacher. Therefore, they develop the bad habit of playing with words in their writing without verified substance. Liang thus strongly suggested that narrative and descriptive writings should be emphasized in middle schools to counterbalance the expository argumentation type of writing. Through writing narrative and descriptive essays, the students would focus on concrete, objective matters and develop skills in observing life, collecting data, and organizing the data. Through the empirical process of data-gathering, they foster the desire to seek scientific truth and develop ability in analyzing and synthesizing information. Liang’s emphasis on the mode of narration and description coincided with the prevalence of Western scientific rhetoric in many school subjects, highlighting the inadequacy of the rhetorical tradition of Confucian classics in the development of students’ intellectual and moral well-being in the modern time.

As the bagu-ce-lun pedagogical system was gradually replaced by the new writing pedagogy nationwide, new theoretical treatises on writing pedagogy and modern writing appeared. The earliest discussion on writing pedagogy was Yao Enming’s “Composition Pedagogy for Primary School Students” (1915). The most influential theoretical works on written composition were published in the early 1920s, such as Chen Wangdao’s Zuowen Fa Jiangyi (Lectures on Written Composition) (1922), Liang Qichao’s “Zuowen Jiaoxue Fa” (“Composition Pedagogy”) (1923), and Ye Shaojun’s Zuowen Lun (On Written Composition) (1924). Invariably, the authors were all Chinese language reform advocates and educationalists influential at that time. Their composition theories reached grass-root level teachers through their teaching, edited Chinese language textbooks, and nationwide travels and lectures. All three works were preeminently structured according to the new modes of written discourse. Chen followed the Anglo-American typology the most closely—description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and persuasion. Liang used three modes: description and narration (jizai), exposition and argumentation (lunbian), and expression of feelings (qinggan). Ye followed Liang, but separated description and narration into two different modes. Even more markedly, all three authors selected examples from both classical and modern Chinese works to illustrate their discussions of the modes.

The elaboration of each mode reveals great resemblance to how the modes were treated in Anglo-American composition textbooks of the same period. For
example, for argumentative writing, all three Chinese authors included similar suggestions, with Chen’s suggestions being the most encompassing. Chen first emphasized that the thesis of an argumentative essay should be formulated in concrete and assertive terms. Then he instructed that the structure of an argumentative essay consists of three parts: thesis statement, proof, and conclusion. For the thesis statement, the writer can discuss the origin of the topic, define the argument, draw up the common ground of both sides of the argument, expose their disagreements, and then state the main argument of the essay. He warned that the thesis statement part should not run too long to avoid possible aversion from the readers. Next, for the section of proof, the writer needs to collect both direct and indirect evidence of various kinds and to follow inductive, deductive, or analogical reasoning in presenting the evidence and making the argument. To conclude the essay, the writer should restate the main argument and round up this part to make the whole essay unified. In Chen’s discussion of argumentative writing, although the structural prescriptions do not mark any significant deviation from the logical structures found in bagu essays and Chinese classics, the emphasis that the writer seeks proof by collecting empirical evidence was uncommon in the Confucian tradition, particularly in the bagu-ce-lun pedagogical system. Almost the same suggestions on argumentative writing could be found in some popular composition textbooks used in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century, such as Genung and Hanson’s Outlines of Composition and Rhetoric and Gardiner, Kittredge and Arnold’s The Mother Tongue (Book III): Elements of English Composition. These textbooks were also widely used in English writing classes in Chinese colleges at that time. Introducing the modes of discourse in Western terms thus enriched Chinese composition instruction by revitalizing narrative and descriptive writings that students hardly practiced in the bagu-ce-lun pedagogical system. The elaboration on each mode in those treaties also provided a theoretical foundation and a practical guide for average writing teachers who themselves had learnt how to write through practicing bagu, ce, and lun essays.

Equally important for the formation of modern Chinese writing instruction was the vernacular language movement as part of the New Cultural Movement (1915–1923) in the Chinese intellectual circle. In the early years of the Republic of China, a handful of conservative politicians and intellectuals backtracked to celebrating the moral and ethical superiority of Confucianism. To counter this conservative trend, some enlightened intellectuals launched a cultural revolution by advocating for science and democracy in defending the new republic. Intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Cheng Duxiu endorsed the opinion that modern Chinese writers should use modern vernacular Chinese to express their thoughts. Their call for writing in the vernacular was received warmly by many Chinese
intellectuals. Seeking new forms of expression, some looked to the West and wrote essays, novels, short stories, poems, and news reports imitating Western language styles to disrupt the lexical-syntactic patterns of classic Chinese. The stylistic innovations with vernacular Chinese include parenthetical clauses and interjections, elaborate embedding of attributives and transposition of clauses, fragmentation and disjunction, and even pseudo-parallelism (Gunn). By 1920 the vernacular language movement was so successful in the country that many works were produced in the vernacular, and the government had to order teaching vernacular reading and writing in primary and middle schools. With modern works in the vernacular added to the Chinese language curriculum, students started to be exposed to both classical and vernacular Chinese works, with the latter manifesting clear Western stylistic features.

The substitution of the bagu-ce-lun paradigm by the new writing instruction system was finally institutionalized by the drafting of the new school curriculum standards starting from 1922 and its nationwide implementation in 1928. According to the new standards, one of the goals for Chinese education in both junior and senior middle schools was “to develop the ability of using the vernacular Chinese to articulate matters and express feelings freely” rather than the ability of using classical Chinese and parallel prose style (yunwen) (qtd. in Li and Gu 127). The reading list for both junior and senior middle schools as prepared by Hu Shi included both classical and modern works, consisting of such genres as prose, novels, short stories, dramas, songs, and poems. The readings for junior middle schools were organized in such a way that they matched the types of writing practice that the students did. For example, the first-year course was focused on readings in narration (xushuwen) and expression of feelings (shuqingwen), the second year on exposition (shuomingwen) and expression of feelings, and the third year on expository argumentation (yilunwen) and practical writings (yingyongwen) (“The Curriculum Committee”). Therefore, the pedagogical emphasis on an extended reading list and vernacular-styled writing further severed the connection between the new pedagogical system and the bagu-ce-lun system. The new curriculum standards institutionalized a modern paradigm of Chinese literacy education wedded with Western scientific rhetoric.

Writing Instruction in Colleges

Not only was writing taught in primary and secondary schools, but also writing courses were commonly provided in universities in the early decades of the twentieth century. As in primary and secondary schools, writing instruction in colleges also witnessed the conflicts between classical and modern Chinese education and the intersection of Chinese and Western rhetorical traditions. To
assess the role played by Western rhetoric in this historical process, writing instruction in two foreign mission colleges will be traced in this section. The earliest mission colleges were established in the late nineteenth century and controlled by foreign mission organizations. Before their integration into the state university system in the early 1950s, they enrolled fifteen to twenty percent of the college student population (Caldwell). Most of them offered Chinese language courses while placing great emphasis on Western subjects. Tengchow College (est. 1864) was renowned among the mission colleges for its strong emphasis on Chinese classical education in the late Qing Dynasty. Shanghai College (est. 1918) represents the norm of the majority mission colleges in the 1920s in that it provided both Chinese classics and English education. A study of writing instruction in the two colleges, therefore, can be a point of departure for investigating the historical role of Western rhetorical tradition in relation to Chinese writing instruction in colleges.

The typical form of classical Chinese language education as represented in Tengchow College in late Qing consisted of two strands of study. First, students studied the Chinese classics, such as the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, through recitation and the teacher’s lectures. Second, students wrote essays on themes chosen from those classics that they had studied. In 1891 the second strand was structured as follows:

- First year: Composition—Literary Essays, weekly; Four-line Odes.
- Second year: Composition—Literary Essays, weekly; Six-line Odes.
- Third year: Composition—Literary Essays, weekly.
- Fourth year: Literary Essays and Odes, weekly.
- Fifth year: Literary Essays and Odes, weekly.
- Six year: Literary Essays, semi-weekly. (1–2)

So students spent six years in college practicing writing *bagu* essays, parallel prose (*fu*), and poems while studying Chinese classics, sciences, and Christian courses. The college justified this seemingly tedious type of composition training by pointing to the social and educational demands for an educated man at the end of the Qing Dynasty:

Beginning with the last year of the preparatory course each student is required to write one, and during the senior year two essays weekly. These essays are carefully criticized and revised. Emphasis is laid upon the writing of these essays, because they are required in the government examinations for degrees, and because public opinion demands proficiency in them as essential to respectable scholarship. (4)
Similar curricula for Chinese education are continually seen in school catalogues and announcements of other colleges, both state and mission colleges, until the early 1900s. During these years, a seemingly static curriculum evolved with subtle changes as time went by. For example, although Chinese composition was strongly emphasized by mission colleges at the turn of the twentieth century, the bagu essays were often supplemented by expository writings on current affairs in the Chinese language class. John Ferguson, a missionary educator, articulated the importance of this curricular shift at the first triennial meeting of the Educational Association of China in 1893:5

Would it not be better to teach them to compose “yu” (superior or senior’s instructions), which will fit them for the practical duties of a writer on current subjects [. . .]. We can surpass them [the native schools] in turning out pupils who will be able to write in a clear and forcible style on subjects which are of greatest interest to the advancement of the country. (20)

The addition of expository essays on current affairs in mission colleges foreboded the coming change in the civil service examinations, that is, the bagu essays would be surpassed by ce and lun essays in importance in 1901.

Soon the writing section of the Chinese curriculum gradually came to resemble that of the college English curriculum with the types of required writing. Students were no longer asked to write expository arguments on themes from the Chinese classics only; they also practiced two other modes of written discourse, that is, description and narration, by modeling on both classical and modern Chinese writings. The expansion of the writing curriculum could be noted by comparing the 1921 and 1924 course descriptions for the Chinese department at Shanghai College. In 1921, “Rhetoric and Composition” was offered in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors:

- Freshman: Study of model writings from the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties [618–1911] as well as the contemporary period. Composition modeling those writings once every two weeks.
- Sophomore: The same as the freshman year.
- Junior: Study of model writings from the Zhou, Qin, Han, Wei, and six minor dynasties [1100 BCE–618 CE]. (53)

In this curriculum there was a strong emphasis on studying models from different dynasties, moving far beyond the Confucian classics. Nevertheless, this linkage to traditional classics was slightly weakened in the 1924 curriculum with an
addition of clear Western scientific rhetoric. In 1924 freshmen and sophomores were required to take “Chinese Prose” with the following specifications:

- **Freshman**: A careful study of selections of Chinese Prose with special emphasis on narration and description. In addition, each student is required to write an essay once every two weeks.
- **Sophomore**: A careful study of selections of Chinese Prose with special emphasis on exposition and argumentation. In addition, each student is required to write an essay once every two weeks.

While the model writings that the students actually read in the class were little changed from those in the 1921 curriculum, the models were conceived and organized more from a rhetorical perspective. The chronological method of selecting model writings for students’ careful study and imitation was replaced by the four modes of written discourse, the staple of current-traditional rhetoric in the English writing class at Shanghai College as well as in many other Chinese colleges at that time. Similar curricular shifts in Chinese writing instruction were also found in the course descriptions of other colleges and universities in the 1920s and 1930s, such as National Wuhan University, National Peking University, the University of Nanking, and Yenching University.

The impact of this nationwide curricular shift can be noted in the Chinese writing tasks as required in college entrance examinations written by college professors. For example, the writing tasks for students intending to enter National Peking University were all expository argumentation type before 1921, such as “On common sense as the foundation of academic research” (1918), “Knowledge ought to be derived from empirical studies” (1919), and “On the benefits and drawbacks of civil service examinations” (1920). Into the late 1920s and the 1930s, the writing tasks for students applying to this university expanded to include narrative and descriptive types of writing, valuing the individual’s unique life experience and voice, such as “To describe a most memorable event in your life (It must be a true experience, whether it is the happiest, the saddest, or the most interesting event)” (1935) and “To describe an unforgettable moment in your childhood” (1942). Therefore, through writing assessment, scientific rhetoric further permeated Chinese writing instruction in both middle schools and colleges.

**Conclusion**

It is no exaggeration to say that the formation of modern Chinese writing instruction was a multidimensional educational project, conceived in the conflation of Chinese and Western rhetorical traditions. Reading-writing centered
humanities education was one of the more contested sites in late Qing politics. When Western subjects fluxed into the new school system at the end of the Qing government, they unsettled the classical humanities curriculum and brought a fast-growing student population into direct contact with Western scientific rhetoric. For writing instruction, the civil service examination-styled writings, embodying merely part of Chinese rhetorical tradition, were severely attacked and replaced by general writing practice structured according to the new modes of written discourse. Together with an expanded reading list consisting of both classical and modern, domestic and translated materials, composition instruction not only enlarged the repertoire of the rhetorical styles that the students practiced in the classroom but also infused in the students an empiricist attitude toward writing and reality.

Kirkpatrick claims that contemporary Chinese textbooks on composition no longer advise the students to use qi-cheng-zhuan-he nor bagu text structures but suggest a direct approach to the opening and closing of a text, clear arrangement of ideas, and the linear structure of both deductive and inductive reasoning; therefore, “English writing of such students will be similarly influenced by Western rather than by traditional Chinese styles” (242). A historical survey of the formation of modern Chinese writing instruction provides a rather different assertion about what is mainly taught in the Chinese writing classroom. It is not that traditional Chinese rhetoric lacks these particular “Western rhetorical styles” or values that Kirkpatrick pinpoints, so the students must be writing in Western rhetorical styles when their essays exhibit the above rhetorical traces. In fact, traditional Chinese rhetoric does possess these rhetorical values (see Liu; Zhang and Liu; Zhao). The introduction of Western rhetoric into China enriched modern Chinese rhetoric through Western scientific rhetoric, but more importantly, together with other historical forces, it helped to revitalize and retrieve the extremely rich Chinese rhetorical tradition in modern Chinese writing instruction. Therefore, when considering modern Chinese rhetoric and Mainland Chinese students’ written English, historical conflation of Chinese and Western rhetorical traditions in connection to modern Chinese writing instruction should always be importantly factored in.

Notes

1My thanks to Mary Garrett and LuMing Mao (RR peer reviewers), and Dwight Atkinson for their supportive and insightful comments.
2See four sample bagu essays in English translation in Lo.
3See a sample lun essay written by a successful candidate Shang Yanying in the 1903 metropolitan examination in Shang (269–70).
4All English translations of Chinese and Japanese source materials in this article are mine.
The Educational Association of China was founded in 1890 by foreign mission educators to coordinate mission schools and textbook publishing in China. Because of its foreign and evangelic nature, the organization changed its name to the Christian Educational Association of China in 1915.

Works Cited


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