Over the last two decades, English writing instruction in non-English dominant countries has showed great interest in adapting Anglo-American norms of writing and writing pedagogies for the local contexts. This phenomenon has prompted L2 writing specialists to consider some important political issues in EFL writing. Kachru (1995) argues that the institutional varieties of English used in the Outer-Circle countries—such as India, Pakistan, and South Africa—have developed their own grammatical and textual forms to express their contexts of culture. Therefore the norms of writing grown out of Inner-Circle countries are no longer the standard for English writing practices in Outer-Circle contexts. In addition, Leki (2001) questions the legitimacy of the large investment required of both institutions and individuals to teach English writing in non-English-dominant contexts. She suggests the need for dialogue with EFL students about the role of writing in their lives as well as the need to make English writing enhance learner options, making it a powerful means of achieving the learners’ personal goals. Studying the daily operations of an English teaching division in a Chinese university, You (2004) has observed severe tension between institutional stipulations and classroom writing instruction. Pressured by the institutional requirements for teaching English writing, the administrators, teachers, students and academic publishers maneuvered through constraining material conditions, subverting the requirements to achieve their varying interests. Issues of rhetorical standards, legitimacy of English writing instruction, and the tension between institutional requirements and grass-root level instruction constitutes the political dimension of English writing in—
struction in non-English-dominant countries. These discussions have enlightened us not only to the unique political nature of EFL writing but also to how EFL writing professionals respond to institutional stipulations for teaching English writing.

This chapter seeks to explore the politics of teaching English writing in non-English-dominant contexts in relation to the prevailing discourse of globalization. Globalization, whether it is the reality or simply an imagination of our world, has become a rather popular term to describe how people, images, technologies, ideologies, and capital spill over traditional political boundaries and create novel “uncertain landscapes” through their complex interaction (Appadurai, 1996, p. 43). Against these new, uncertain landscapes, many countries have heightened their requirements for English education at both secondary and tertiary levels, and invariably they connect the heightened requirements with the rhetoric of globalization (Jeong, 2004; Matsuura, Fujieda & Mahoney, 2004; Peng, Zhou, & Fu, 2002). It is crucial to examine how the rhetoric of globalization underwrites English writing instruction, including how English literacy is reconceptualized in relation to globalization, how literacy should be taught, and how it is actually taught within the limits of local material conditions.

In what follows, I will examine the teaching of English writing in China, a non-English-dominant country whose history of English writing instruction can be traced all the way back to the 1860s (You, 2005). I will scrutinize an educational decree on college English teaching published by the Chinese Ministry of Education in early 2004 and investigate its ramifications on English writing instruction in two Chinese universities. As China wholeheartedly welcomes globalization, I hope this inquiry will shed light on our understanding of how globalization has shaped, and may continue to shape, English writing instruction in non-English dominant countries in general.

Redefining English Literacy

Ever since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the influences of globalization can be strongly felt in the Chinese educational sector. English is described by the Chinese mass media as an international language for global political, economic and cultural transactions. Responding to the arising demands of globalization, the Ministry of Education issued a new educational decree, “Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum,” in January 2004. The
decree lays out the goals and requirements for college English teaching, suggests major adjustments of curricular elements and teaching modes, and emphasizes well-coordinated assessment and administration.

The decree offers a good entry point for examining how English literacy is defined in the discourse of globalization. Compared with English teaching standards and syllabi published previously, “Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum” includes not only the teaching of language knowledge and language skills, but also the teaching of language learning strategies and cross-cultural communication skills. Why are cross-cultural communication skills added in the new requirements? The answer was implied in an article published right before their release, written by Zhang Yaoxue, Chair of the Department of Chinese Higher Education. Zhang (2003) defines English as a means for international communication. He says, “The world economy is increasingly globalized; our country has joined the WTO; scientific exchanges become internationalized; international communications are getting more and more frequent; all of which has made English a daily tool just like a driver’s license” (Primary Conditions Section, para. 6). The phrases, “a daily tool” and “a driver’s license,” have completely erased any ideological connotations of English that used to connect this language with English-dominant countries. With a driver’s license, someone is entitled to operate a vehicle for traveling from one locale to another. With a good command of English, someone is capable of communicating across national boundaries. The projected image of English language as a tool for international communication thus warranted the inclusion of cross-cultural communication skills in the reconceptualization of English literacy.

English literacy is further defined in specific terms for college English teaching, with a clear emphasis on English for academic purposes (EAP). Students with different entry levels are not expected to graduate from college with the same level of language ability. Different from previous syllabi—which define listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation at two levels with quite vague terms (see College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1985, 1999)—the new requirements set three well-articulated levels, that is, the basic, relatively high, and higher levels for these language skills. More strikingly, there is significant elevation of requirements for these language skills. Besides being expected to use English for daily communication purposes, like
students in English-dominant countries, students are also expected to use English for academic purposes. For example, at the relatively high level, students need to “comprehend English lectures in their disciplines given by foreign experts, grasping the central points and main ideas” (Teaching Requirements Section, para. 9) in terms of listening comprehension. Regarding reading comprehension, they should “be able to read and understand summative literature in their disciplines” (para. 11). As for writing, the students are expected to “be able to write English abstracts for their theses, and be able to, through consulting reference books, write disciplinary reports or papers with clear structure and rich content” (para. 12). Table 1 clearly shows the EAP-orientation of the writing requirements at both the relatively high and higher levels. The new demand for teaching EAP goes in unison with an ambitious bilingual education project currently underway in Chinese higher education. As part of this project, some high-ranking universities have been ordered by the Ministry of Education to increase the number of major courses taught in English (Zhang, 2003).

Table 1. Requirements for English Writing at Three Exit Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of writing</th>
<th>Basic Level</th>
<th>Relatively High Level</th>
<th>Higher Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical writings (such as, registration form, application form, health card, invitation, note and notice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practical writings, summaries, academic reports, and theses</td>
<td>Technical reports, and theses in one’s discipline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written competence</th>
<th>Basic Level</th>
<th>Relatively High Level</th>
<th>Higher Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be able to describe personal experiences, events, observations, and feelings.</td>
<td>Be able to write academic papers, reports, and theses in one’s discipline.</td>
<td>Be able to express one’s thoughts freely on general topics with clear structures, rich contents, and strong logicality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written competence demonstrated in assessments (within 30 minutes)</th>
<th>Basic Level</th>
<th>Relatively High Level</th>
<th>Higher Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be able to write a short passage of 120 words according to a general topic or an outline provided.</td>
<td>Be able to write a short passage of 160 words on a given topic.</td>
<td>Be able to write an expository or argumentative passage of 200 words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The Ministry of Education, 2004)
Implied but clear in the decree is that students are also expected to learn to use modern information technologies to assist their language learning. With reference to teaching modes, Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum state, “The new teaching modes should rely upon modern information technologies, particularly network technology. In the new teaching mode, English teaching should encourage individualized learning, learning without being constrained by time and place, and learning on the student’s own initiative” (Teaching Modes Section, para. 1). Students can choose the learning materials, and they can record and assess their progress. Studying English in an information technology-facilitated environment, on the one hand, the students will have the opportunity to develop individualized learning strategies vital to their academic success; on the other hand, more importantly, they will learn modern information technologies that will constitute their future workplace. Like cross-cultural communication skills, conceptualized in broader terms, computer/network literacy makes up part of English literacy.

The new definition of English literacy in Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum echoes discussions of English teaching in some other countries. For example, in a report submitted to former Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in the year 2000, the Commission on Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century claimed that the possession of global literacy skills determines whether or not a citizen would expect to enjoy a better life in the 21st century. The new literacy defined by the Commission includes the mastery of modern information technologies, such as computers and the Internet, and a good working knowledge of English that helps a person with “learning about and accessing the world” (Matsuura, Fujieda, & Mahoney, 2004, p. 471). In the Chinese context, global literacy is particularized as a good command of English language skills for both academic and cross-cultural communication, as well as familiarity with modern information technologies. However, in the thrust to redefine English literacy in the discourse of globalization, the issue of which version of the world Englishes should be promoted in the local contexts continues to be ignored at the institutional level, leaving the issue to open interpretation and consequently varying practices in teaching.

Reforming Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Besides refiguring English literacy in light of globalization discourse, Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum also strives to re-
form current English curricula, pedagogy and assessment, all of which are indispensable means for achieving the new literacy.

In terms of the English curriculum, two major shifts can be easily noted in Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum. First, it is emphasized that the English curricular system should promote computer/network-based courses. They may be comprehensive English courses, courses for each language skill, culture-based courses, or ESP courses. Second, English courses are no longer conceptualized simply as offering the students basic knowledge about the language, but rather they are the media that “allow the students to learn about science and technology and Western society and culture” (Curricular Arrangements Section, para. 4). Thus the shift towards computer/network-based courses with a clear emphasis on content-rich subject matter maps out a concrete curricular infrastructure for achieving the new literacy.

When it comes to pedagogy, there is a strong emphasis on integrating information technologies into the traditional classroom. The decree encourages the development of listening- and speaking-oriented pedagogical modes based on individual computers, local area networks, or even the Internet. Further, according to the decree, the pedagogical modes should underscore student-centered teaching, encouraging individualized and autonomous learning styles in the students. Clearly the decree sees the integration of information technology into English classrooms as an excellent opportunity to alter teacher-centered instruction and to give the students more control over how they are going to learn the language. However, there are two understated, practical reasons for promoting information technologies and student-centered pedagogical modes. Zhang (2003) points out in his article that development in network technology can help to solve two current thorny problems in college English teaching. First, “as the number of college students increases, the issue of lacking enough English teachers is becoming significant . . . Right now, the proportion of English teachers to college students has reached 1:130” (Current Situation Section, para. 2). Second, quality English teachers are stretching thin because more and more college graduates are allowed to teach English in Chinese colleges. Information technologies are considered better than traditional methods in promoting the students’ individualized learning and therefore have been hailed as the best solution to some major problems in college English teaching. Will the use of informa-
tion technologies truly encourage more individualized learning and alleviate the shortage of quality English teachers? The institutional justification for promoting information technologies in English teaching needs to be closely examined in future research.

Working towards the new literacy, the decree articulates student-centered assessment for college English teaching for the first time. Besides the traditional summative evaluation, such as midterms and finals, the decree introduces methods for process-based, student-centered evaluation. The university can observe, evaluate, and monitor the students’ progress through both in-class and extracurricular records, the students’ self-learning online records, portfolios, interviews, and teacher-student conferences. For each exit level, Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum provides benchmarks for self- and peer-evaluation of the five language skills. At the relatively high level, for example, the students can gauge their writing ability by answering “yes” or “no” to the following four statements:

- I can write a summary or an outline for a passage on a general topic, express my own opinions on a heated issue, and explain the reasons for either supporting or opposing an argument.
- I can write for daily purposes, conforming to the standard structure and expression of a particular genre.
- Based on reference materials, I can write disciplinary reports, expositions, and speech scripts with clear structure and rich content.
- Within half an hour, I can write a 160-word narrative, descriptive, expository or argumentative piece with complete content, clear structure and fluent language. (Appendix II Section, Chart II)

The introduction of process-based and student-centered evaluation has the potential to lead to student-centered teaching and learning. The process-based evaluation closely connects learning and assessment, stimulating the students throughout their entire learning process rather than having them focus on midterms and finals.

After Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum was published, the requirements were first implemented in 180 participating universities as a year-long nationwide experiment while other universities continue to practice traditional ways of teaching English (see You, 2004 for the traditional ways to teaching English writing in Chinese universities). The Ministry of Education appropriated funding
for each participating university to purchase textbooks and software programs from three Chinese publishers. At the end of this nationwide experiment, it is time to ask how the new requirements have affected college English teaching in general and writing instruction in particular in those participating universities, and what English teachers think of the new requirements. It is equally important to ask whether the new requirements have helped to solve some old issues in English writing instruction in Chinese colleges (You, 2004). Any institutional stipulation on English writing instruction has to come to terms with the local material conditions.

**New Literacy in Context: A Reality Check**

Data collection for the current research took place at two Chinese state universities. University A is a comprehensive university ranked by various Chinese educational agencies as one of the top 50 among over 1,000 Chinese universities and colleges. It participated in this nationwide experiment and was considered by peers as a model school in implementing the computer/network-assisted English teaching. It was visited several times by interested officials and English teachers from other schools during the year, as one of my informants reveals. University B is a regional teacher’s university, which did not participate in this experiment. Investigating two universities, with one not participating in the experiment, will help us understand the complexity of some issues in English writing instruction.

Through classroom observations, interviews with six English teachers from the two universities during and after the experiment, and a review of textbooks, I have identified concrete measures taken by both university administrators and English teachers responding to the newly redefined English literacy. Both universities have built networked classrooms and their traditional classrooms have been remodeled to include a computer and an LCD projector and were considered multimedia classrooms thereafter. University A invested over 120,000 U.S. dollars to build a networked classroom with about 100 desktops for English teaching. Five teachers teach six sections in the networked classroom, with a total number of 550 first-year students participating in this year-long experiment. These students were specially placed in the experimental classes because they entered the university with higher college entrance examination scores than their peers. Selecting high English-proficiency level students for the experimental teaching
needs to be taken into consideration in later discussions. In University A, audio-visual and speaking components are taught in the networked classroom for two hours every week. Reading, writing, and translation are taught in the multimedia classroom for another two hours. At the same time, students are tutored in the multimedia classroom for another two hours. University B, like many other Chinese universities, has several smaller-sized networked classrooms. However, they are not exclusively designed for English teaching and used by teachers of other subjects as well. An English teacher needs to reserve a networked classroom ahead of time. English teachers in both universities always teach in the multimedia classrooms when they do not teach in the networked classrooms.

Both universities use the same textbook, *New Horizon College English* series (Zheng, Zhou, & Tong, 2002), compiled specifically for teaching English in a networked environment. The series were published in three different media—traditional textbook, CD-ROM, and an online version (http://nhce.fjnu.edu.cn/). The three versions were designed to match three different contexts for students learning English—the multimedia classroom, the networked classroom, and the student’s dorm. A test bank is integrated into the CD-ROM, so the students can evaluate their language skills at any time. There are two books for each level (four levels in total designed for four semesters): *Listening and Speaking Manual*, and *Reading and Writing Manual*. The *Reading and Writing Manual* has 10 theme-based units in which students study three passages, vocabulary, structure, writing, and translation. The readings cover topics of a truly international nature, such as cultural shock, marriage across nations, environmental protection, and studying abroad. However, they touch little upon Chinese society. The writing sections are structured in a progression—from constructing paragraphs to composing texts. The writing tasks do reflect the student’s everyday life, such as “college life” and “from a hero to a nobody” (referring to some freshmen facing the transition from high school to college).

Teaching in networked classrooms, all six teachers agree that their students have effectively improved their listening and speaking ability, which was hard to achieve in traditional classrooms or multimedia classrooms. In the networked classroom, students can watch and listen to conversations and repeat after correct pronunciations as many times as they want.
As for writing, the six English teachers all emphasize English writing as an indispensable skill in its own right in worldwide business and communication instead of as a handmaid to the development of other language skills. However, compared with instruction in other language skills—such as listening, speaking, and reading—much less attention has been devoted to writing. At University A, a network-based software program was used to teach writing. The software can conduct spell check and preliminary evaluation of the student’s writing. But according to Ms. Wang, who teaches in the networked classroom at University A, preliminary evaluation shows rather low reliability. The students benefited the most from reading and commenting on each other’s writings through online forums. After talking to the six teachers, I have identified four major obstacles to writing instruction across the two universities throughout the entire experiment period.

First, having to teach different language skills in large classes leaves little time for writing instruction. Ms Wang says, “Having to teach reading, listening, speaking, and translation all in the same class, there is simply no time to take care of writing.” She assigns students four short-essay tasks in one semester. She says, “There are more than 80 students in my class, I don’t have time to read so many essays.” Mr. Li teaches five classes with a total of 250 students at University B. He assigns two to three writing tasks a semester. How does he deal with 500 or 750 essays a semester? He says, “I don’t read those that are written in bad handwriting; I don’t read those that have a disorganized structure; for the rest, I only read their topic sentences.” Hoping to teach five language skills all in one class thus reduces the time devoted to teaching English writing.

Second, writing instruction continues to be confined by the rather traditional conceptualization of education in the country, that is, educational means to acquire transferable knowledge. The teacher and the students are positioned at the two ends of the knowledge pipeline; one end is the supplier and the other end the receiver. Some teachers take lecturing about the techne of writing as their legitimate responsibility rather than organizing systematic, procedured writing tasks for the students to practice the techne. Talking about tapping the potential of the traditional classroom instruction, Zhang (2003) says, “The [traditional] classroom continues to play an important role in the new teaching modes. The teacher can lecture on grammar, reading comprehension, writing, and translation skills, which can be conducted in
a large lecture hall” (Aims and Measures Section, para. 8). To lecture on writing, both Ms. Wang and Mr. Li assign a writing task, select a few student sample papers, prepare some handouts or copy them on the blackboard, and discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of the papers in the class.

Third, Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum encourages placing students of different entry levels in different classes and allows them to move up and down. This practice is causing detrimental effects on some students’ motivation for learning English, as Ms. Zhang at University A suggests. Most college students were achievers in high school. When they are placed in English classes according to their English proficiency levels, those placed in the middle- or low-level classes feel a diminished sense of self-esteem. Studying together with other low-level students, they feel like a loser and perform poorly in process-based assessments. For example, according to Mr. Li, while 76 percent of sophomore students in his Class A passed the national College English Test, only 20 percent in his Class B and a few in Class C did so. For students who are cherished as little emperors or little empresses in their families and praised as good students in high schools, their motivation to learn is shaken loose by the placement system. However, Ms. Wang has observed a somewhat different picture among the high proficiency-level students studying in the networked classroom. Due to such extrinsic motivations as studying abroad, going to graduate schools, or seeking jobs, the students in the experimental classes are highly motivated by the opportunities offered by the networked English course. Many students showed great initiative in learning English in their spare time. Apparently the placement system works differently with high-proficiency and low proficiency students.

Fourth, the decree encourages individualized styles of learning, which poses a new challenge to some students. The Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum advises that “in the new teaching mode, English teaching should encourage individualized learning, learning without being constrained by time and place, and learning on the student’s own initiative” (Teaching Modes Section, para. 1). In reality, individualized learning style is difficult to foster in many students. They were guided closely by their teachers in high school and tended as precious pearls by their parents. Once they enter college, with little attention from the teachers and with their parents living far
away, they easily get lost, disoriented in the mounting coursework and the unprecedented amount of freedom. Ms. Tang, a teacher in University A who does not teach the experimental classes, says, “With little experience of individualized learning style in high schools, the students are very unsatisfied with their English teachers, feeling they are not learning anything.” However, Ms. Wang has a different observation. Thanks to the computers, the network, and the self-evaluation system, her high proficient students have showed self-discipline in their studies and developed individualized learning styles. Her observation suggests that proficiency level and educational technologies do play important roles in forging individualized styles of learning.

In terms of the teachers’ attitudes towards the new requirements, there are mixed feelings. Some teachers are pleased that the networked teaching stimulates both the teacher and the students by injecting something new into the enterprise of college English teaching. Ms. Wang says, “Educational reforms like this one stimulate the teachers, enhance intercollegiate exchanges, and eventually improve the teachers’ quality.” Some teachers have expressed doubts or disappointments. Ms. Tang comments sharply on the reorientation of Chinese higher education. She says, “Education has become the training camp for employment; it is a product for sale. We teach simply for teaching’s sake. Without much face-to-face interactions between the teacher and the students, humanized teaching is lost in the large-size classroom and networked computers.” Apparently disagreements have occurred over where the educational decree is leading college English teaching.

**New Literacy as an Institutional Imagination**

Conceivably, there is a clear gap between institutional stipulations and actual classroom instruction. In light of the investigation at two universities, the new requirements appear to be working effectively with teaching listening and oral skills, but not with writing instruction in any substantial manner, if not making it worse by cramming many students into large lecture halls. Old issues—such as large class size, heavy teaching loads, a traditional concept of education as knowledge-cramming, and unmotivated students (see You, 2004)—continue to affect writing instruction in the new wave of college English reform. This study has clearly shown the limits of an institutional imagination consisting of both the new definition of English literacy and the suggested teaching practices.
However, more importantly, this study has revealed the power of institutional imagination. The new requirements and the nationwide experiment initiated discussions of what English literacy means and how to achieve it in a non-English-dominant country in the backdrop of globalization. The idea of English as an international language (EIL) has taken a deep root among university teachers and students. They understand the growing importance of the language, although still disagreeing on what new English literacy means exactly for average Chinese college students. The new requirements prompt them to think about the issue of new English literacy and to imagine how they should teach it. Ms. Wang says, “Although the experiment only took place in a few classes, it stimulates every teacher to consider what aspects of the experiment can be adapted into his or her own classes.” The teachers’ traditional view of language teaching has been apparently shaken loose by the experiment. English teaching means more than cramming knowledge about different language skills into the students. It also means skillful management of information technologies to facilitate effective learning. The new requirements and the experiment have clearly motivated serious discussion of college English teaching in China.

Finally, I want to suggest, as English becomes an international language, English writing instruction in EIL contexts is taking a historical turn. English writing skills are considered a more and more practical tool, like a driver’s license or a personal computer. What type of English writing should be taught in colleges? Why does it matter in the student’s life? How can it be taught effectively so that students are able to write in English for international communication? What resources are available to both the teachers and the students? These are old questions waiting for new answers. At the same time, EIL writing is already confronted with many local issues, resulting from the conflicts caused by institutional requirements imposed from the top and classroom constraints at the grass-roots level. L2 writing specialists need to understand both the educational goals set by policy makers as well as the local constraints. They should participate in the institutional imagination by answering those seemingly old questions and working closely with local professionals to turn their imagination into reality.
Globalization and the Politics of Teaching EFL Writing

Notes

1 I would like to thank Xu Xiaoyu and Chen Ping for their help in this research. I also benefited from constructive comments from Yichun Liu, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, and David Blakesley.

2 The names of the English teachers used in this chapter are aliases.

References


