WRITING TO TRANSFORM - CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS' STORIES IN EPISTEMOLOGICAL LEARNING OF ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Writing to Transform - Chinese Graduate Students' Stories in Epistemological Learning of English Academic Writing

A thesis for the degree of Master of Arts by Zhaohui Meng, 1999
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Abstract

This study uses three Chinese graduate students' narratives to illustrate the interrelationship between the processes of learning English academic writing and cross-cultural transformation they have experienced in Canada. By exploration of the students' different experiences in learning to write standard English academic discourse, the thesis details how the students have dealt with difficulties and conflicts when they try to express themselves in English and what approaches they have developed to re-examine themselves and their past and present situations in order to compose better selves. After ESL composition research has made a social turn, it is argued that linguistic and cultural differences are the causes for the difficulties ESL students experience in writing English academic essays. This thesis offers a counter-argument, which believes that when we adopt a dialectical view of the differences and conflicts, we will be able to transform them into important means to acquire new knowledge about ourselves. Stories are told in the thesis about how the three Chinese students have practiced dialectics to see similarities from differences, to seek balance among conflicts, and to turn wounds into wisdom. The thesis also illustrates the process how the students have developed intersubjectivity through sharing their different experiences to help each other to conceptualize their cross-cultural learning. This study articulates a new understanding of the differences between cultures and languages. It is hoped that the study will make a methodological contribution to ESL writing research and teaching and that it will have theoretical implications for research on cross-cultural education and for teacher education in a multicultural society such as Canada.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: Searching for the Right Question

Shifting the Topic

It was my first class at OISE. After outlining the course structure and requirements, the kind-looking professor asked: “Are there any questions?” Silence fell while he was sweeping his eyes over the class. Kindly, he smiled and said: “Oh, right, you’ve got to learn to ask the right question first.” Laughter cleared the air and after a slight pause questions followed. I kept silent, forgetting the questions I had thought of but pondering on the professor’s last comment. I sensed the weight of it but was unable to decode its contextualized meaning.

I had the understanding that questioning is the avenue to learning. In Chinese the term knowledge is a compound word. The two words that make up the term mean respectively “studying” and “questioning.” Being a student in China, I was accustomed to ask questions to prove to my teachers that their teaching had led to my acquisition of knowledge. I do not recall that either the teacher or the student would distinguish between right and wrong questions. Now studying in a new context, questioning bears new meaning. Looking back, I realize that being able to ask the right question itself constitutes a critical part of my learning in this new context.

I did start my courses with a “research question” in my mind. During the summer of 1997, I talked with my academic advisor on course selection. She suggested an introductory course on educational research methodology. I contacted the professor to get her permission to enroll. She told me that the prerequisite to let me in was that I had a well-defined research question. I did my homework and submitted my research question to the professor. She let
me in. My question was: "I want to understand what role computers play in second/foreign language learning and teaching."

I considered it a very realistic and practical research question for myself at that time. I had heard of how difficult it was to find a teaching position for a minority with an MA degree in education. Almost all the Chinese people I met looked surprised when I told them that I was studying education. But still, I wanted to pursue a career in teaching. My three years' experience of being a second language teacher made me believe that teaching can bring out the best in myself. I enjoy the excitement in students' eyes when they become able to get into a wider sphere of communication with an acquired new language. The reality my Chinese friends and I perceived seemed to allow very limited possibilities for a nonnative speaker to work as a classroom teacher in Canada. However, I would not allow myself to give up unless I was sure that there was no possibility at all. Meanwhile, I believe that making adjustments on my side could create new possibilities. To be equipped with the newest technology, I considered, was a wise adjustment that I could make.

I had focused my study on computer-assisted instruction (CAI) for two straight terms (September 1997 to April 1998). I wrote three CAI related programmes and two term papers, which were titled Computer-Assisted Language Learning for Learners of English as a Foreign Language and The Internet and English as Second Language (ESL)/English as Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching – Incorporating Technology into the Language Classroom. Cognitively, I was satisfied at knowing that my knowledge about the subject matter - computer-assisted language learning and teaching - had grown significantly. Experientially, I felt that the research question I had chosen had become less and less relevant to my personal learning and therefore it turned out to lack intellectual appeal for me. I started to doubt whether I had the right question. While writing term papers in May 1998, I was
looking up references and talking to professors to help me make the decision. In early June, I finished the first draft of my MA thesis proposal. The research question I asked in the proposal was: "How do Chinese graduate students in the field of education construct their writer identities when they are writing through English academic discourse in the western university?"

It was first an intuitive decision. I decided to drop the question that I had quite thought through and to pick up the one that I was not sure whether it was viable. What prompted me was the strong feeling that inquiring into my learning of English academic writing would enable me to conceptualize the education I had received in a second culture and this education meant much more than theories and techniques. Thinking in retrospect, I find such a decision is rooted from my understanding of the term - education. As a subject of research, I viewed education as a field combining art (the humanities) and science (natural science and applied science). The humanities provide the philosophical foundation to help us recognize the end of education whereas scientific developments give us instruments to enhance the means. It was my perception that the education my home culture gave to me was mostly philosophical cultivation and as a result my knowing of education was more artistic than scientific. The primary motive for me to pursue graduate studies in Canada was to advance my knowledge of educational technology in order to become a more effective teacher. After I had finished six courses at OISE, I felt excited while reviewing the eight-month learning not because of the increase in my knowledge of new teaching techniques but because of the growth of my philosophical understanding of education. This growth established continuity from my past learning to my new learning and also defined my pursuit of future learning. I realize that understanding and developing educational philosophy is an ongoing process. Understanding evolves as much as the situations change. A sound
understanding of the philosophy is the foundation of the study of techniques to prevent them from becoming groundless or badly-focused. To inquire into the philosophical growth students like me have experienced in a new learning context is the most practical and effective way to understand and develop new educational philosophies.

**Specifying the Inquiry**

Formulating a new research question was a much longer process than finding its rationale. It can be described as a trilogy consisting of these three parts: struggling with English academic writing, researching into the literature on composition study and being introduced to critical theory.

The academic community tends to readily assume that ESL students would naturally struggle with writing academic papers because of language incompetence. I went along with this assumption. To the comments professors gave to my term papers, which said that my English writing needed improving, my reaction was to seek treatment for my language problems. I went to talk with the ESL writing tutor, attended the writing workshop offered at OISE, and read a few guidebooks on essay writing. In addition, for each piece of course reading, I wrote a detailed outline to see how the author developed his or her argument. The focus of my treatment was not on the syntactic level but on rhetoric, a very new concept to me. I became aware that to write an acceptable paper, I should follow a certain pattern. This pattern is not necessarily articulated but observed habitually in English speaking academia (Belcher and Braine, 1995). My outlining practice and reading helped me to get a handle on the patterns and to use them to standardize my writing. At the end of my second term at OISE, my papers were considered coherent and well structured according to the professors. However, when I was rereading those 'coherent' papers I began to experience contradictory
feelings. I was happy for myself because my papers read quite like the journal articles I had used as models. But the image I had of the writer was that of someone wearing a costume on the stage, reciting the lines with a voice that sounded very remote. “Am I faking?” I asked myself and felt very uncomfortable. “Words are the voice of the mind” is a normative teaching of my first culture. Should I be concerned about my mind when I suspected that I might have lost my voice in my words? My struggle became more difficult to deal with when I realized that there was something else behind my language problem. I recalled a book I had read to help me learn about the rhetoric of English academic writing.

*Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing* was written by Helen Fox (1994), a composition instructor for ESL students in a U. S. university. Based on her teaching experience, Fox notes that Chinese students tend to cite authorities extensively instead of directly expressing original thoughts. She also observes that Chinese students have difficulty in sticking to the point and performing critical analysis in their writing. Having interacted with some of the students, she concludes that underlying the difficulties is the fact that Chinese students are from a collective culture. Such a culture does not encourage individual creativity, direct discourse and critical thinking, which on the contrary are pivotal in the western value system. From this understanding, Fox suggests that teachers of academic writing for ESL students should make an effort to understand the different thinking habits of students from non-Anglo cultures and to accommodate composition evaluation and instruction to the students’ cultural habits. Urgently needing help on academic rhetoric, at that time I did not pay attention to my slight discomfort with Fox’s judgement on Chinese students and culture but took warning from her observation to guide my writing. When I sensed that my struggle might involve more than language I returned to Fox’s book. Two questions arose from my discomfort – whether Fox makes a fair judgement on Chinese
culture and what the process of accommodating actually means for ESL students and for the academic community.

While questioning her conclusion, I thank Fox for urging me to look behind the surface of my struggle with writing. In China I had learned that language is the verbal presentation of thinking. In Canada, I have learned that language is a communicative tool for information exchange (Dewey, 1897). The fact that I struggle with writing in a second language makes me feel that thinking and communication might be very much dependent on the social and cultural contexts where the thinking and communication occur. Then, what about the language? What underlies my language problems and essentially what is the nature of my struggle, or the struggle other Chinese graduate students experience while learning to write academic English?

With those questions, I started my literature research. Riazi (1995) in his dissertation offers a summary of composition studies over the last three decades. He generalizes that there has been a move of the research focus from a linguistic one to a psycholinguistic one and finally to a sociolinguistic one. More specifically, syntactic-rhetorical features was the focus before 1970, thinking and composing process during the 1970’s through the 1980’s and social aspects in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. The most recent trend is an interactive approach to integrate cognitive and social aspects of writing together with textual dimensions. Regardless of the various research foci, mainstream composition researchers seem to share one view on the relationship among the writer, the text and the community. They view the writer as the producer of the text, toward which the community holds the benchmark to judge the acceptability of the text and to confer membership on the text producer. Accordingly, they tend to believe that the nature of the writing struggle is that the producer has problems in the following three areas — the tool (the language), the process, and
the techniques for production. To me, the research that Riazi summarizes explains the struggle phenomenon from different viewpoints but does not speak to my puzzle — what is it that underlies the phenomenon?

The notion of “writer identity” brought new light to my research. The theory of “discoursal construction of writer identities” proposed by Ivanić (1994, p. 3), a linguistics professor at Lancaster University in the UK, gives a convincing explanation for what is behind the language problems that novice academic writers have in general. The cornerstone for Ivanić’s thesis is the belief that language is not neutral. Drawing from research by Halliday (1985) and Fairclough (1992a), Ivanić argues that language simultaneously conveys two types of meaning, namely “ideational meaning” and “interpersonal meaning.” Ideational meaning refers to the subject matter being communicated. Interpersonal meaning is about the people who are communicating and is further distinguished into the representation of social relations and the representation of social identities. The social identities are the identities of the writer and the reader. The writers present themselves in diverse identities in front of readers because they identify themselves simultaneously with a variety of social groups in their writing. These multiple identities are constructed through the discourse choices the writer makes to accomplish the writing. Using one of his students’ writing as an example, Ivanić shows that a young Black woman takes on the identities of a member of the academic community (or at least an apprentice member), a Black activist and a feminist. She does this through discourse choices she makes in the content, sequencing, and wording of her writing. However, in this case the multiple identities are incongruent. They imply competing values regarding interpersonal meanings and therefore the discourse choices are not made freely and what is reflected in the text is syntactic disfluency, which is usually judged as grammar mistakes by readers from the academic community.
Ivanič’s (1994) analysis explains why my struggle does not feel easier when my language has improved. Like the student in Ivanič’s study, I probably have been struggling with identity more than struggling with my language deficiency. The identity that appeared in my writing was not constructed for myself. Rather, I have been positioned by my discourse choices. In discussing what the teaching of writing can do to help student writers with their struggles, Ivanič proposes an approach based on Critical Language Awareness. He observes that “a very important aspect” of the struggle is that most student writers do not make discourse choices consciously while they are juggling the choices of being themselves or of being creditable academic members in their writing. To explicate discourse choices and to undertake a critical discussion of them is to raise “critical awareness of the way in which language positions its users” (p. 13), which will help student writers make conscious choices and construct multiple identities for themselves as they write. Near the end of his article, Ivanič includes a very encouraging and theoretically sound passage:

“Critical Language Awareness can liberate writers from the grips of socially privileged discourse, helping them to recognize that they do not have to accommodate to them. Learners are encouraged to make choices as they write which will align them with social values and beliefs to which they are committed, if necessary opposing the privileged conventions for the genre, thereby contributing to discoursal, and thus social, change” (p. 13).

Echoing Ivanič, composition instructors and researchers in North America pay increasing attention to identity issues. Zamel (1997) proposes a model of “transculturation” that argues against the “monolithic and static” view of both ESL students and academic discourse. Zamel points out that traditional composition instruction and research has served to promote a standard of academic discourse practices and has consequently failed to acknowledge that there are other dimensions of identity, other ways of being and other forms of rhetoric and genre. ESL students are viewed as less capable of certain academic skills than
their native counterparts. Such a view is drawn from the “othernesses” that ESL students present in their writing. Believing that the nature of language and culture are adaptability and inventiveness, Zamel argues for a transculturation model that recognizes ESL students’ otherness as adaptable resource for variation and innovation, which will enrich academic discourse practices and further push the development of language and culture. Belcher and Braine (1995), having reviewed the research that studies social and cultural contexts of ESL students’ learning of writing, take a position aligning them with Zamel but use a different term “transformations.” According to them, transformation is a two-way process. Through learning English academic writing, ESL writers can achieve an enlargement of their identities, which combine an insider academic status and outsider sensitivities. With the transformed new selves, ESL writers should become “critical participants in academia” (p. xvii) to bring changes to the academic discourse, of which “novelty is at the heart” (p. xxi).

I would not have been able to come to terms with Zamel or other transformation advocates if I had not been introduced to critical educational theory by the course Critical Pedagogy, Language and Minority Students. Like the term critical thinking, critical pedagogy was a very new concept for me. I was unclear about what “critical” exactly meant and wondered whether critical thinking and critical pedagogy were connected with each other when I started reading articles by critical educators such as Paulo Friere (1970, 1985). They interpret literacy and education from the point of view of power relationships among cultural groups within society, see traditional schools as institutions working for the dominant cultural group to preserve its political oppression over minority groups. They advocate for radical education that aims at empowering the dominated groups to bring about social transformations. Critical theory opened up a window for my inquiry by awaking me from dwelling on my own struggle and by raising my eyes to look into a wider scenario. I had
been searching for what I struggled with but I had never asked why I struggled. I had taken the reason for granted - "as an ESL student, surely I should struggle because I have problems such as language deficiency and cultural shock." I was too ready to adapt myself to the new surrounding without questioning whether the changes were justified. I had not realized that as an individual in social relations (Dewey, 1897), examining and adapting myself is only one side of my responsibilities. As a learner and educator, I am also obliged to question the social existence that I am interacting with and to articulate my different perspectives, negotiating for different ways of viewing and knowing. To inform the community about different modes of existence and to challenge the unexamined assumptions held by it are what I can do so as to contribute to its betterment. Theoretically, I have turned my struggle with writing into a critical inquiry. Experientially, I still could not perceive how I, who see a very limited opportunity of getting accepted by the academic community with a foreign accent, would be able to challenge "the privileged conventions" (Ivanić, 1994, p. 13) and to make changes to the community. To me, the privileged conventions are erected in front of me like "glass walls" (Zerubavel, 1981 cited in Bell, 1995), making it very difficult for me to become a member of the English academic community. In her narrative dissertation, Bell (1995), borrowing Zerubavel's notion of "glass walls", points out that it is not in our nature as human beings to "question our knowledge or the world around us" (p. 147). On the contrary, "we take our knowledge constructs so much for granted that we are not even conscious of their presence, until we are jarred... or bumping into the glass walls" (p. 147). While learning in a second culture and writing in a second language, I constantly bumped into my personal glass walls. New understanding kept challenging my assumptions and helping me break walls. But the walls surrounding the English academic community appeared too repelling for me, who was still an outsider.
In seeking more concrete accounts of how people, who have struggled with writing in English, achieve their enlarged identities (Belcher and Braine, 1995) and what they bring back to the community, I read some personal narratives by published minority writers in the academia (Rodriguez, 1982, Anzaldua, 1987, Shen 1989, Lu 1987, 1992, He, 1998, Li, 1998). While the revelations of those authors’ inner experiences are all touching, the stories told by Lu, Shen, He and Li, who share with me the same cultural background, directly address to my research question.

Fan Shen (1989), who studied Chinese literature in China and who is now studying English literature in the USA, contends that he has experienced identity conflict and reconciliation along the way he learns English academic writing. In addition to his ideological wrestling, which confirms Fox’s observation, Shen also finds that the logic of Chinese ways of approaching topic and analysis would be considered ‘illogical’ or ‘alogical’, from the perspective of English composing rules. To resolve this conflict, Shen creates a new identity, an “English self” (p. 462), which enables him to “obey all the general rules of English composing” (p. 465) when writing in English. Shen claims that he welcomes the change for it has added a new dimension for him and for his view of the world. Shen sees his Chinese identity and English identity separate from each other but co-existing peacefully. By “slipping in and out” alternatively, Shen is able to write both “authentic Chinese” (p. 466) and good English.

I admired Shen’s sensitivity towards both Chinese and English written discourses. I also appreciated his love for Chinese language and culture and his effort to help the western academia understand it – he includes a detailed illustration of the critical approach in Chinese literature although he had to call it “alogical” (p. 462). However, I doubted that I was able to create an English identity and to keep it separate from my Chinese identity. I would not feel
comfortable to answer the question "Who am I in my academic writing?" by "My English self" which is an opposite of my "Chinese self." I also wondered what else personal transformation could mean in addition to achieving insider academic status with outsider sensitivities (Belcher and Braine, 1995).

Min-zhan Lu (1987, 1992) experienced identity conflict differently while writing across languages and cultures and reflected differently. Lu encountered the conflict when she was very young. When she found the discourse she acquired at home interfered with the language she acquired at school in her writing, her first reaction was to keep the two discourses from interacting. When she failed to do so she started to silence one of them. What was silenced was the home discourse that represents originality. Lu considers that the silencing was a result of her view of language, which believed that language was a tool of seeking alliance with the dominant group and thus of surviving the whirlpool of cultural currents that grounded them. Now, as a basic writing instructor in a US college, Lu realizes that discourse should be viewed as a negotiating tool for the writer to construct his or her own textual identity. Instead of struggling with the feeling of being marginalized, students who reside in the borderland should take the advantage of such a position where they can re-read their experiences from alternative perspectives. The enlarged perspective enables the writer to make better judgements towards both the conflicting discourses, therefore to identify and execute necessary changes.

Different from the dual identity that Shen claims to have, Lu promotes a hybrid identity. However, while reading her articles that are written in perfect academic English, I sensed the dilemma Lu might encounter. Would she encourage her students in basic writing classes to release their conflicted selves in their writing, to be innovative and to care less
about the conventions when she is aware that the academic community at large is preserving them?

This question was lingering in my mind when I read Ming Fang He’s doctoral thesis (1998). Having obtained a master degree in English literature and working on her Ph.D. in education, He states that her writings are greatly influenced by her Chinese ways of thinking and by Chinese discourse patterns. She is aware of the reality that the professors would not excuse her for her ‘Chinese English.’ Meanwhile she is afraid of losing her Chinese accent in writing because it means losing the meaning in her culture. What is unique in her experience is that He studies in a community where her Canadian professors and colleagues make an effort to help her write acceptable academic essays without losing her Chinese voice and signature in her writing. The thesis is a wonderful fruit of such communications and negotiations between languages and cultures. However, probably because they are not very relevant to her topic He does not include details to describe how the negotiations have been conducted and what effects the negotiations have on the North American academic community.

The different personal accounts interest me as well as perplex me. My struggle does not fit into any of the ones they describe. However, I share emotional experience with all of them. Their stories reveal to me many ends of different threads that I can follow up. They weave a dynamic network for me resembling the complexity of writing activity, of which multiple aspects are intertwined. Many threads are still hidden because the stories are not told continuously. To make the threads apparent, more stories should be told and more writers should be involved in the telling. I decided how I would pursue my question. I chose ethnography as my research methodology and my Chinese peers’ writing stories occurring in
English academia as my research data, from which I anticipated that themes surrounding the issues of writer identity and cultural conflict would emerge.

**Wording the Question**

My struggle with writing stimulated my research interest. The literature of composition researches done in a conventional manner helped me understand the rules and enabled me to play according to the rules of academic writing but did not help me to search below the surface for the meaning of my struggle. Critical theories convinced me that difficulty in writing for student writers in academia could be a manifestation of identity conflict. However, the theories did not offer 'how-to' - how the academic community can effectively help student writers with their conflicts, how student writers can critically deal with their struggles and how they can really become the authors of their writing. Some 'minority' writers' personal accounts pointed out to me that the answers would lie in the stories told by people who had experienced the struggles. After I have finished my literature research and arrived at the above conclusions, I found myself having a hard time putting my research questions into words when I was writing the first draft of my proposal. I assumed that the research question should be drawn from the literature review and should be very academic looking. Being 'academic looking', as I understood it, was to use complex terminology and abstract language. Finally, I worked out the following three sub-questions, which I believed were a logical outcome of my literature review, based on the general question I stated in the earlier part of this chapter:

a) How do Chinese students perceive their writer identities in the context that they are writing and/or learning writing in English academic discourse? How do they relate their writer identities to their writing?
b) How do Chinese students perceive conflicts, if there are any, during their writing and learning? How do they relate conflicts to their writing performance?

c) In what way do Chinese student writers think they can possibly bring about changes in the discourse communities they are participating in and have participated in?

Dr. Patrick Allen was helping me at that critical stage when I was even more awkward at both doing research and writing my thoughts. After he had read my proposal he particularly commented on the questions. In his email of July 12, he wrote:

"I am not sure that the research questions have the right kind of focus. It seems to me that the concepts of writer identity and of cultural conflict in writing are not easy to define and your subjects may have difficulty in understanding what you are asking them to do. Also we don't know whether your subjects have actually experienced these conflicts, and therefore it is difficult to know in advance whether you have a viable research topic.

For these reasons, I suggest that your research questions should be more broadly focused so that there is no doubt you will have clear and well defined issues to talk about in your interviews. The more abstract issues concerned with identity and biculturalism could then be allowed to emerge during the course of the interviews. In other words, I think it would be good idea to start with more concrete issues, and then move on to more abstract issues" (Email message, Dr. Allen, July, 1998).

Dr. Allen’s comments turned my attention from theorizing my research to the actual doing of it. I had anticipated the results instead of investigating the questions! With the keen insight of a very experienced scholar, Dr. Allen rightly detected the weakest point of my research and offered appropriate strategy to tighten it up. (He also questioned my methodology and pointed out for me the direction to narrative inquiry. I will tell this story with more details in the next chapter.)

Following his suggestion I conducted a pilot study, during which I asked some questions with my potential research participants. The questions were drawn from the list Dr. Allen proposed in his email note and they worked very well. The most valuable experience I learned from the pilot study was that questioning in qualitative research is a very important
skill. A bad question could squeeze both your participant and your research into a corner whereas a good question could open up many new routes to further your research. I should have asked myself the questions I prepared for my participants.

While being kept open, the research question should also be well focused. A focused question ensures manageability of the entire research and usability of collected stories. The final research questions I have been working with are:

a) What difficulties were experienced by Chinese students as they struggled to express themselves in English?

b) How did their personal approach to writing evolve during their graduate studies in Canada?

Those two questions were also Dr. Allen’s suggestion. During the process of my research they triggered the telling of many remarkable stories which led to further questioning and telling.

To conclude my searching for the right questions, I recall a Chinese proverb I learned at a very young age: a great journey is started by the very first step. The right question for research is the first step to ensure an interesting and fulfilling intellectual journey. Questioning is a tool for creativity (Schank, 1990). A right question should prompt us to listening carefully to ourselves as well as to our surroundings to collect new ideas, to look for new angles on old concepts, to compare and contrast past experiences with new ones and to explore new avenues toward the future. At the same time, a right question has to be practically manageable.
Chapter Two: Negotiating the Schools of Methodology

**Knowing the Different Schools**

The term methodology was a difficult term for me when I just started at OISE. Its contextualized meaning was too thick to be apprehended immediately. In my previous experience methodology was always mentioned together with ideology because it meant in a Chinese context "the way humans observe and know the world" (The Dictionary of Modern Chinese, 1988), which Marx categorized into dialectics and metaphysics.

In my Chinese experience, the term method dealt with mostly empirical issues. The educational research in China had focused on reflecting teachers’ classroom experiences to generalize effective teaching methods that teachers had improvised in praxis. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that Chinese educational researchers do not follow strict patterns of research methods. A theory about methods? Do we need it?

I came to understand why we need a theory of methods to do educational research in North America when I was doing the first piece of reading for my course work. It was an assignment for the course “Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning.” Tsech (1990) in her book *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools* introduces twenty-six different kinds of approaches to qualitative research. According to Tsech, in addition to the very large numbers of approaches, “their boundaries blur or overlap” (p. 59). So I assume that a theory is indeed needed to provide guidelines for practice.

This article felt the hardest among all the readings I have done at OISE. The intention of the author is to give readers an overview of qualitative research methods. However, I was too overwhelmed by the terminology to grasp the whole picture. I spend tremendous time and mental energy to apprehend the literal meanings of the terms and felt helpless to decode
their embedded meanings. To provide an overview, the author gives the definition of each of
the twenty-six approaches, followed by a brief description of actual doing of data analysis
and an indication of which field the approach is usually applied in. However, the approaches
did not make much sense to me because they seemed to mean more or less the same but
stated in different words. I felt like floating around on the surface of the water without being
aware of the undercurrents and wondering where I was led.

I had not yet arrived at an understanding of the “unending variety” (Tsech 1990, p. 71) of qualitative research methods when the battle between qualitative and quantitative
research traditions hit me. According to Walker and Evers (1997), the major point on which
quantitative researchers attack qualitative research is that qualitative research lacks
objectivity and cannot provide adequate tests for validity and reliability. Qualitative
researchers’ counterattack is that “knowledge of human affairs is irreducibly subjective and it
must grasp the meanings of actions, the uniqueness of events, and the individuality of
persons” (p. 24). I tended to agree with both statements but I felt it hard to trust either of the
methodologies for my research. When I saw the key argument between the epistemological
paradigms underlying the research traditions, things became clear. The key argument is
whether reality shapes theorizing or the other way around. With a belief in dialectics I saw
the shaping between reality and theorizing flows reciprocally from one to the other to form
an endless circle (please see Figure 1 on the next page). This mutual-shaping circle explains
why after human beings have lived for millions of years, the reality and the understanding of
it are still growing. Therefore, the statements that reality shapes theorizing and that
theorizing shapes reality do not establish an argument but complete a holistic epistemological
perception. Accordingly, quantitative inquiry and qualitative inquiry are complementary
rather than oppositional. They both can be used for one research study if both are needed and applicable.

Figure 1. The dialectics of reality and theorizing

From this realization, I continued my efforts to understand the diversity of qualitative methods. Although I believe that human knowledge has an impact on reality, I see reality being larger than the ordinary capacity of human perception. Also I believe that reality has no boundary but human beings have the tendency to compartmentalize reality in order to make apprehension easier. Compartmentalization is necessary, but we should constantly remind ourselves that reality is a wholeness in which multiple facets are interrelated. While studying one particular aspect, we sometimes need to step backward to see the subject blend into the big picture and sometimes step sideways to other related sides. The reason why I failed to see the qualitative methodology holistically was that I got too close to the details of individual research methods. I was like the four blind men beside the giant elephant who could only "see" the fan, the pillar, the wall and the rope. I forgot the big picture was that theories are for actions and actions can re-invent theories. Boundaries are set for the convenience of cognitive perception but in actions boundaries become fluid. Thus Tesch's (1990) metaphor of "painter's palette" became understandable. Tesch compares the diversity of research
methods to a painter's palette, on which several basic colors "can be mixed to form an unending variety of shades" (p. 71). As a researcher, you can do a study of a unique shade as far as "you can persuade others that you have indeed made a credible discovery worth paying attention to" (p. 71).

I was aware that I wear holistic and dialectical lenses to view reality, so I aligned my research methodology with naturalistic inquiry. I had decided to use stories as research data and to collect stories I would need to do interviews. Therefore, I further defined my methodology to be an ethnographic approach, which is naturalistic in nature and in which interviewing has become a well-developed technique for data collection. For the method of data analysis, I borrowed from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), although I was not sure about how to categorize the stories and how to constantly compare the stories to code the properties of the categories until "they have taken on an abstract form" (Tesch, 1990, p.86).

I did such a mix of shades for the methodology part in the first draft of my proposal. A mismatched spot was caught by Dr. Allen. In his feedback Dr. Allen wrote that there was a tension in my proposal between a broadly ethnographic approach and a more narrowly defined text analysis approach. He suggested I research further into ethnographic methodology and consider a narrative approach. I did and then I realized that my understanding of those major methodologies was neither precise nor adequate. A methodology such as ethnography, which has become the dominant mode in educational research, usually carries a set of prescribed and specific protocols of doing the research. I was not fully aware of the protocols prior to choosing the approaches. Only when the painter understands the basics well can the new color he or she creates look beautiful.
Knowing Narrative Inquiry

I finally decided to give up ethnography after I had read Ming Fang He’s (1998) doctoral thesis. He also had chosen ethnography for her study but found herself in a dilemma when she read the golden rule of ethnographers which is “try not to study your own group.” This rule determines that between the researcher and the participants is the detached outsider to insider relationship. He’s thesis focus on studying the enculturation and acculturation experiences of Chinese women teachers who study in Canada. He is one of the women teachers so she legitimately plays both the roles of an insider and an outsider. She has not only observed but experienced what her participants have experienced so the study shall be collaboration instead of a one-sided involvement. He’s account reminded me that my research question was originated in my own struggling experience and my purpose was to work with some other Chinese students as a group to search for the answers to our puzzles. In other words, I was to study my own group, and the golden rule also prevented me from adopting a truly ethnographic approach.

He’s thesis was also the starting point for me to know about narrative inquiry. My impression of narrative work was that the writing is very different from the academic works I had been reading. I must have adopted a stereotyped view of academic work and I was surprised to find that academic writing could be so interesting to read. Also I could not come to terms with the seemingly familiar words such as narrative, stories, experiences, knowledge and learning. They all seemed to imply new meanings in narrative inquiry. To search for the meanings, I came to Dr. Michael Connelly’s course – “Foundations of Curriculum” - with its focus on narrative inquiry and teacher development. While taking this course, I told stories of
myself and heard stories of my classmates. Through telling and reflecting on stories, I came to understand narrative inquiry.

The first major assignment Dr. Connelly gave was to write a personal chronicle. I felt curious and skeptical about this assignment. I laughed and agreed when I was reading a comic Dr. Connelly included in the reading materials, in which the character says: "You are not famous enough to have your memoirs." In the meantime, I felt interested. I had been too busy to think back and think about myself since I started my graduate study. Now here was the opportunity.

Along a temporal line (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) starting from my earliest memory, I was searching for the events that had "marked my life" (Denzin, 1995, p. 58). I was surprised to find how much I could remember. I remembered not only those 'major events' such as going to university or becoming a teacher, but also many incidents that seemed insignificant and took place long time ago. The temporal line was not single and straight any more but became a spreading web - events were connected one to another by multiple threads. What was more surprising was that I could remember not only what had happened but also how I had thought about - reflected on the events. From later reading I learned that the external movements (what happened) and internal movements (how I felt) constitute the key elements of stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). While reconstructing those stories, I re-evaluated some of them. Preparing the chronicle was a long process although the actual writing was rather short. During the process of preparing I felt as if I were watching a movie, in which I saw myself growing into today's me.

In Dr. Connelly's class, telling stories about ourselves and interpreting those stories centered the course activities. The nine students in the class were from seven different cultural origins. The stories we shared were so rich in differences that they often left me
amazed by the dynamics of human lives. And to the same stories we heard, we offered different interpretations, bringing the wisdom we drew from our different experiences and cultural traditions into the learning community. Every round of sharing made me re-think about my own stories, re-evaluate them and learn something new about them. My stories evolved as such, my understanding of education grew. So did my understanding of narrative inquiry.

The unique point about narrative inquiry is that it connects storytelling with learning. Narrativists believe that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 2). Why is it so? Dr. Schank (1990), a leading scientist in artificial intelligence, explains:

“Learning from one’s own experiences depends upon being able to communicate our experiences as stories to others” (p. 12).

“Knowledge, then, is experiences and stories, and intelligence is the apt use of experience and the creation and telling of stories” (p. 15).

Through the practice we did in Dr. Connelly’s course, we learned much about ourselves while creating and telling stories. The telling and retelling crystallized our personal beliefs and philosophies and also brought us face to face with the myths and puzzles that we could not recognize until we told stories of our experiences to others. The telling helped us to look at ourselves with new lenses and to re-discover who we were. I had a feeling that narrative approach dealt particularly well with the issue of identity conflict. This feeling was confirmed when I wrote the paper The Narrative of a Cross-cultural Meeting for Dr. Connelly’s course.

When I was thinking about the final assignment for Dr. Connelly’s course, which was to write a personal narrative, I found myself thinking about the two questions "Who am I" and "Who do I want to be?" A simple answer to the first question was that "I am Chinese."
But what does "I am Chinese" mean to me when I am studying in the west? What does it mean to my western peers and professors? Does it mean that I should fit into the particular image of Chinese students held in the west otherwise I would be considered "non-Chinese?"

While I am studying a second language in a second culture, whose underlying value system is believed to be in conflict with the Chinese value system, how should I deal with changes brought by the new learning? Should I resist changes to preserve my Chineseness or give up my Chineseness to let myself be "westernized?" Pondering on those questions, I realized that the answer to "Who am I" was ambiguous and there was a dilemma concerning who I wanted to be. I turned the writing of my personal narrative into an inquiry into the ambiguity and the dilemma of my identity. The writing finally brought my struggling experience with English academic writing, my questions that arose from my literature research for my thesis and my search for the right methodology all together. And they were all threaded by my identity dilemma.

The process of writing this inquiry was a unique experience too. While I was writing my narrative, I felt that my creativity and intuition were stimulated and worked well with the English language. I was able to effectively and aptly use a second language to express myself. In the process of writing I felt I was struggling less than I was in my earlier experience of writing term papers. An important factor that made me comfortable with the writing was my awareness of Dr. Connelly - the potential evaluator's special perspective of 'language errors.' He views language errors as potentially creative uses of language that may imply different ways of meaning making. Such a perspective had given me a precious space, in which I could put conflicting meanings together, look at them dialectically and play with them intuitively.
The comfort I felt with writing led to the freedom of my thinking. I surprised myself by the meaning I finally worked out through reconstructing my past experience and through connecting it with my current situations. I became able to see my identity beyond the either-Chinese-or-western relationship. I imagined myself as a cultural negotiator whose position was in the middle ground between the Chinese culture and the western culture - a place where I could have a better understanding of both cultures and therefore I could help the communication between them. This image aligned me with the group of "border residents" some cross-cultural writers and educators claim to be. Lu (1992) has defined the border residents as people who, having struggled with conflicted identities, invent a new identity that is greater than the sum of the severed ones - an enlarged identity (Belcher and Braine, 1995). I also came to understand what the enlarged identity could mean in addition to an outsider's sensitivity. The enlarged identity possesses the flexibility to reposition self according to situations.

Had I completed the dialectic of my identity with this image of cultural negotiator? This question did not come upon me until I read Dr. Connelly's comment to my narrative. To my summative statement - "we have to adapt ourselves accordingly to the situations after we have analyzed our conditions and examined the possible consequences of our ideas and actions", Dr. Connelly commented: "It is true but this is only half of the picture, one end of the dialectic. The other part is that we - humans - change our world, our conditions. We are not only responsive, we are effective. This is the basic educational notion in Dewey and in what we are trying to work with in narrative" (Letter, Dr. Connelly, August 1998). Dr. Connelly's comment reminded me of a question I had while reading critical theories - "How can I challenge and bring about changes to the privileged conventions of academic discourse when they appear intimidating to me?" I kept wishing that we - student writers - could truly
interact with instead of merely reacting to the situations surrounding us and I wondered how. This question has not been addressed in a concrete and pragmatic manner in the literature. I suspected that the answer is deeply embedded in the stories that ESL writers live while learning to write academic English.

The experience of writing my personal narrative made me believe that narrative inquiry has a particular strength in dealing with issues of identity. I recalled a contrast I noticed while doing literature research for my thesis. Composition studies that are done by conventional methods (e.g. quantified experiments, text analysis, structured interview, etc.) usually do not deal with the issue of writer identity but focus on the production of standard academic texts. The literature discussing issues of writer identity is usually based on or involves bilingual writers' personal narratives. I think the reason for this contrast, speaking from my experience, is that the stories told in personal narratives are able to represent the complexity and to capture the subtlety of the writing activity whereas other research 'data' are unable to do so. Writing is a dynamic network of the people, the language, the process and the socio-cultural context. The writer is situated at the very centre of the network, with multiple identities corresponding to the multiple aspects of writing. Every shiver of the writer's internal movement is vibrating the strings of the network. In the meantime, affects of external conditions are constantly transmitted from every direction of the net's periphery to the centre. Conventional composition research studies the multiple aspects separately but narrative inquiry can bring them together. The stories that writers tell about their experiences reveal their internal conditions - their emotions, values and intentions at particular moments, and their external conditions - the socio-cultural contexts, the environment and people they are interacting with - in an interweaving way and therefore present the writers as real people.
in the writing. Having realized this quality of narrative, I decided that I had found the right methodology for my thesis research.

**Doing Narrative Inquiry**

During the summer while I was taking Dr. Connelly's course, I was collaborating with Joan, one of my potential research participants, on a project for another course. I met Joan in the spring when we both were taking a course on critical pedagogy. After I had decided my thesis topic and started to recruit participants, I expressed to Joan my interest in working with her. I felt very grateful when Joan showed interest and willingness to participate. We did not start to meet for my thesis research until September because I had not settled on my research methodology and I had not formulated my research question. But when we met for discussing course project or just for chats, we would talk about our writing assignments and things connected with writing. We were exchanging stories on how we got around to do our papers, what difficulties we had and how we interacted with our professors and colleagues to deal with our difficulties. I chewed on those stories and made associations with the stories I came across in my literature research. Several Chinese writers in the western academia (e.g. He, 1998; Li, 1998; Lu, 1987; Shen, 1989) have published episodic accounts of their different experiences in learning English academic writing and have also given different interpretations of the relationships among cultures, languages and identities. They also position themselves differently while facing conflicts. Similarly, stories that Joan told were different from mine and we could not always agree with each other on what lessons we should learn from our stories. Those differences interested me and made me want to listen to more stories. The differences were challenging my assumptions, revealing more perspectives to interpret my experience and also brought me more puzzles.
Through sharing stories with Joan, I got the idea that the differences between us might be the force that pushed the evolution of our stories and the deepening of our interpretations. I changed my original plan to recruit several participants in the same department at OISE but decided to have a participant who was studying in a different field. Joan suggested Helen. Joan and Helen got to know each other by attending the same TOEFL preparation class when they both just got settled down in Toronto. They kept in touch thereafter and now Helen was also studying for her master's degree at the University of Toronto, but in a different department. The three of us had a meeting at Joan's place on a Saturday evening. I found Helen very articulate and found that she fitted perfectly into my expectations for participants - I have expected my participants to be sharing the same cultural background with me, to be seeking academic advancement in Canada, to be often involved in writing in English and to be studying in a different field. I explained my research intention with Helen and she simply and directly expressed her willingness to participate. By the end of our meeting, we were all ready to start our collaboration.

Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) personal experience methods have provided the methodological framework for my narrative research. Three steps constitute the doing of the personal experience method: working in the field, progressing from field to field texts, and from field texts to research texts. There are a variety of methods of collecting narrative field texts (see more details in Connelly and Clandinin, 1994). In practice, I combined autobiographical writing and tape-recorded conversations as the major methods to collect field texts. More specifically, I wrote an autobiography, focusing on my experience of learning to write both in China and in Canada. In this autobiography, I recorded the internal changes that I experienced corresponding to the external conditions along the way I learned writing. I also reflected on my reactions to those changes. Concurrently, I had topic-centered
conversations with my participants. I chose the conversation method because “conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow group participants to establish the form and topics important to their inquiry” (Connelly and Clandinin 1994, p. 429). In conversations, my questions and stories were triggers to start my participants' telling of their particular experiences and we led the conversations alternatively. The equity that was felt by every speaker balanced the dynamics of the conversations. Alternatively, we performed the roles of storyteller, empathic listener and intersubjective critic (Clandinin, 1987) for the told stories. Through conversations, my participants and I developed an interdependent relationship in the field. The construction of field texts was also a collaborative process because my participants' telling and interpretations were shaping my telling and interpretation just the same as the other way around. We valued this collaborative relationship and developed trusting feelings through the process. Such a feeling optimized the authenticity of the field texts. Beside conversations, our term papers served as additional field texts being looked at with the intention of substantiating our struggles and transformations through the textual presentations.

In my narrative inquiry, the three steps (working in the field, from field to field texts, and from field texts to research texts) were done in a cyclic rather than sequential manner. I taped our conversations, which were mostly in our first language - the language that allowed us to express ourselves freely. After every conversation, I would transcribe it and simultaneously translate it into English to construct field texts. To translate the dialogues, I focused on conveying the speakers' original meanings as accurately as I could and the rich contextual information helped me to do so. However, it was impossible to make the translation free of my - the researcher's - subjective interpretations of those meanings. While transcribing and translating, I would write research memos to record my reactions to the
stories and also to plan for the next meeting. Constructing field texts influenced the writing of my autobiography and my telling at the next time when I got back into the field and consequently influenced the telling of my participants. Our stories evolved with the mutual shaping of our meaning-making back and forth between the field and the field texts and the stories continued to develop through my constructing of research text.

In the final writing of my research text, I will first give a narrative sketch (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) for everyone of my characters so that my readers can have an overall image of every individual appearing in later stories (chapter three). In the main body of my construction of research text (chapters four, five, six), I will let the selections of my own writing stories, my participants’ stories, and our conversational excerpts intersect one another, with my interpretations and our interpretations in between. In doing so, I hope that I will be able to capture the complexity of our writing experiences. In my reconstruction of our stories, I will give as many details as possible in the internal conditions of the characters and in the external conditions at particular moments, along with the explanation of the events. For readers, it is the particular that triggers emotion and evokes a response (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). By giving details in the particulars, I will invite my readers to see what my characters and I have experienced. At the same time, my readers will be encouraged not to take my interpretation as absolute answers but to question further, to arouse their own sensitivity, to associate our experiences with their own and to inquire into them.

The main body of my thesis will be multi-vocal - my participants' voices and my voice will be heard alternately. To make the presentation of my participants' voices as original as possible, I will use extended quotations from our conversations, through which I hope the different features of the characters' speeches would be evident. To help my readers
navigate in the multi-vocal text I will use different graphic organizations, which other narrativists (e.g. Clandinin, 1986; He, 1998) have used in their works.

In his email feedback to my thesis proposal, Dr. Allen asked what difference the narrative inquiry would make to my research focused on writing. I have to say that I cannot answer this question until I eventually finish writing the inquiry because the writing itself constitutes an important part of the inquiry.
Chapter Three: Sketching my Research Participants

There will be three characters in my stories – my two research participants and me. Here I will give a sketch for each of us in order to provide a holistic image. There will be more colors to be added to the sketches to turn them into vivid and full portraits in the stories to be told in the later chapters.

The pattern for introducing a person seems universal – to tell others what the person’s name is and what the person does. Let me follow this pattern.

My name is Zhaohui. In Chinese it means dawn-light. I was given an English name Joyce when I arrived in the English speaking world. I accepted it and referred to myself by it thereafter until the summer of 1998, when Dr. Michael Connelly asked my Chinese name and learned to say it. I became Zhaohui again and felt truthfully happy. Here, Zhaohui will be the name of one of the characters in my thesis.

Like me, my two research participants have their Chinese names and English names. For ethical protection, I will use the pseudonyms Joan and Helen as character names. Joan’s Chinese name means “good.” She gave herself an English name when she started her study in Canada. Helen’s Chinese name means “intelligent” and she renamed herself in English when she started to look for employment in Toronto.

Now, I will say what we do, or more accurately, what we did in the past, and what we are doing in the present.

I finished my BA in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in Beijing in the early 1990’s. I studied two majors – Chinese and English for my undergraduate study. Then I worked as a Chinese instructor for foreign adult students in Beijing Foreign Studies University for three years. In that position I had a very valuable learning experience through communicating with people of different cultural and educational backgrounds. I immigrated

Joan had a bachelor degree in Chinese Language and Literature. In the early 1990’s, after her graduation from her undergraduate university in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan province in southwest China, which is known for its multi-ethnic population, she became an editor for the campus newspaper for a major medical school in the same city. She was responsible for the literature section of the newspaper and she herself was a poet. She immigrated to Canada slightly earlier than I did and started her M.Ed. in curriculum at OISE in January 1998. Although she enrolled in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Joan has a keen interest in applied psychology and its application in education.

Helen gained a master's degree in engineering in China. After her bachelor's study and before her master's study she worked for a couple of years as a university teacher of mechanics in Zhengzhou, a city in central China. In the middle 1990’s, Helen went to Shenzhen, the vanguard city for China’s economic reform, and found herself a position as sales representative with an import and export company, which is the Shenzhen subsidiary of the Trading Ministry of China. She started from scratch and soon became an efficient handler of multiple tasks. In the fall of 1996, Helen immigrated to Canada. She was interested in the MBA program but missed the GMAT for admission in January. She decided not to wait but enrolled in engineering at the University of Toronto and meanwhile took courses in information technology and business management, which promise more employment opportunities and also connect closer to her personal experiences.

Looked at together, we are all China’s daughters in a new landscape (He, 1998). We share the same macro social and cultural backgrounds. We grew up in the 1970’s and heard about more than experienced the Cultural Revolution directly so it does not heavily shadow
our personal lives. In our case, what marks the growing process is the confrontation with the conflicts between the old and the new, the East and the West. After China was been opened to the world, Western thoughts rushed into and clashed in various aspects with the Chinese cultural traditions, which were embedded in our daily living, and the communist ideology, which we have more or less acquired through formal school education. Maybe those clashes led to the growth of opportunities so that we could achieve what we strove for in China and then come abroad to seek further development, intellectually and economically.

However, behind the label of 'China's daughters', you will find from the stories to be told that the personae carry more differences than commonality. We have experienced various sub-cultures in China and in Canada. Accordingly the social relationships we have been in vary and we reflect the relationships in different ways. Particularly our relationships with languages and writing are diverse. Those differences will allow me to explore the multiple manifestations of the struggle we encountered when writing in academic English and the dynamics of the identities we constructed through cross-cultural learning.

Speaking in narrative terms, you will hear multiple voices in the stories told in the following chapters. In adopting Lillis' (1997) notion of voice I understand the term from two points of view – "voice-as-experience" and "voice-as-language." Through the events we reconstruct in later chapters, you will see both the commonality and the "individual’s specific configuration" (p. 184) of learning experiences being highlighted. Through the language we use for telling these events, you may be able to link the linguistic features of our discourse with the social meanings we are trying to make. The voices will sometimes sing in chorus and sometimes demonstrate their own registers and tone qualities.

Following is a list of the papers we have written during our graduate studies at the University of Toronto. We will talk about them in our stories. The listing here is provided for
ease of reference. Joan has finished eight papers and one M.Ed. research proposal. Six are listed here because these are mentioned in our stories:

1. **Analysis of Emotions’ Function: Exploring of Variation in Educational Achievement among Cultural Groups** (April 1998). This is Joan’s first term paper written in the manner of a research proposal. It was written for the course “Methods of Inquiry in Adult Education” (course number: 1103SL0101). Joan planned to combine ethnography, qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the factors contributing to the variation from sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives.

2. **Extended Pedagogy of Caring: The Implementation of Reversing Minority Student Negative Adaptative Pattern** (April 1998). It was written for the course “Foundations of Curriculum” (course number: 1300SL0103) with a focus on caring pedagogy. In this paper Joan argued for her belief that the major difficulty minority students encounter is identity confusion and conflict and caring pedagogy is the strongest in the way that it confirms minority students' conflicted identity, responses to their emotional fluctuations and provides individualized help.

3. **A Complement for Ogbu’s Explanation of Variation among Cultural Groups in Educational Achievement: No Alternative for the Chinese Notion of Highest Success** (May 1998). It was written for the course “Critical Pedagogy, Language and Minority Students” (course number: 1334SL0101). While conforming to Ogbu’s theory to explain the variation of academic achievement from the point of view of the power relationship between minority and mainstream cultural groups, Joan proposed that other factors, such as minority groups’ collective cultural characteristics should not be overlooked.

4. **The Facilitation of Knowledge Acquisition and Collaborative Interaction in a Computer-Mediated Communication Environment** (August 1998) is a reflective journal Joan wrote
for the course "Introduction to Computer Applications in Education" (course number: CTL1602SL0101) Joan recorded the major incidents that occurred while she learned computer-mediated communication (CMC) techniques through actually using some CMC systems. She also articulated her reflections upon constructivist educational theory and how those reflections reshaped her understanding of the learner, the teacher, the subject matter and the milieu (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988).

5. **How Prosody and Other Characteristics of ID-speech Function in the Process of Children's Language Acquisition** (August 1998). Joan wrote this paper for the course "Child and Adolescent Development" (course number: HDAP1201SL0101) which was her first course in the Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development. Joan reviewed researchers in different fields of study on the various functions of Infant Directed (ID) Speech and argued that ID-speech functions in the emotional, attentional and linguistic facets intertwined, interacting in supporting the behavioral, cognitive and language developmental progress of the child.

6. **A Family-based Intervention Design: Reversing the Negative Coping of Attachment Disorder** (December 1998). It is a report for an empirical project that Joan did for the course "Foundations of Human Development and Education" (course number: HDP1200FL0102). Joan designed a family-based intervention program for her subject, a five-year-old Chinese girl who was found to have attachment disorder syndromes, recorded the process and analyzed her findings in the report, which was written in the manner of a clinical report.

We have talked about four of Helen’s term papers:
1. **New Products Launching Report.** For a course in Business Management, Helen analyzed the feasibility of launching a new product with the aim of convincing people to invest.

2. **Software Reliability Modeling.** For a course in Information Technology, Helen used several different models with which she learned to assess the reliability of certain software.

3. **Information System Integration in Mergers and Acquisitions - A Normative Model.** Using a series of models and real cases, Helen proposed a set of strategies to facilitate the integration of different information systems post mergers and acquisitions activity.

4. **Analyzing Information System for the Dialysis Unit in X Hospital.** Helen investigated the paper-based information system currently used in the dialysis unit, provided a detailed analysis of the system and proposed a computer-based system.

I have written six term papers and one thesis proposal.

1. **A Journal of Knowledge Building in Computer-Mediated Communication Environment** (December 1997). For the course "Introduction to Computer Applications in Education" (course number: 1503FL0101) I wrote my reflections on how the theory of knowledge building is connected with the computer-mediated learning environment.

2. **Computer-Assisted Language Learning for Learners of English as a Foreign Language** (January 1998). It was a report on my qualitative research practice for the course "Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning" (course number: 1304FL6338). I interviewed two EFL learners with the intention to examine whether computer-assisted instruction is effective and then reported the research process and discussed my findings in the report.
3. **The Internet and ESL/EFL Teaching - Incorporating Technology into Language Classroom** (May 1998). Incorporating the linguistic theories I learned on the course "Current Issues in ESL/EFL Teaching" (course number: 1331SL0101) and my knowledge about the Internet, I argued that the Internet could be an acquisition-rich English learning environment. I also proposed guidelines for designing English classes with the help of the Internet.

4. **Let the Tree of Heritage Language Education Grow** (May 1998). The paper was written for the course "Critical Pedagogy, Language and Minority Students" (course number: 1334SL0101). Based on a literature review and a case study, I analyzed the reasons why the Heritage Language Program has not led to the expected educational effects in the province of Ontario.

5. **The Narrative of a Cross-cultural Meeting** (July 1998). Being encouraged by Professor Michael Connelly, who was the instructor for the Course "Foundations of Curriculum" (course number: CTL1000SL0103), I wrote a fictional account of a meeting between Confucius and John Dewey. Through comparing Confucius' and Dewey's philosophies, I was trying to find continuity between my past and present learning as well as building an image of myself as a negotiator between the East and the West.

6. **Growing with Stories - an Autobiography about Writing** (January 1999). For the course "Language, Culture and Identity: Using Literacy Text in Teacher Development" (course number: CTL4007FL0101), I wrote a historical account about how I developed my love for stories and what role stories have played in my learning in the present and in the past.
Chapter Four: Initiation into the English Academic Discourse Community

The collaboration among my two research participants and me started from September 1998 and went on till March 1999. I did the first round of conversations with them in late September 1998. By that time all of us had finished over half of our courses at the University of Toronto. Joan had finished five term papers, Helen three and I seven plus a thesis proposal.

During our first round of conversations, we concentrated our telling about the difficulties we encountered while writing our first three papers. Before the conversations I had done some reading on contrastive rhetoric, which has been a dominating research methodology for studying how Chinese students learn English academic writing. Rhetoric is defined as "a way of thinking about the relationships that exist among speaker, subject matter, purpose and audience" (Matalene, 1985, p. 789). Early contrastive rhetoric researchers have been criticized for basing their assumptions of Chinese cultural thought patterns on examining paragraphs written by Chinese-speaking students in North American educational institutions (Bloch and Chi, 1995). The more recent approach is to examine a variety of discourse strategies in actual cultural contexts (Matalene, 1985). Although they are differently based, the conclusion of contrastive rhetoric researches seems to be one, which is that English language and Chinese language are competing discourses because the relationships defined by the two cultures are oppositions. Matalene contrasts them in this way:

“Our Western sense of rhetoric, as an exploratory technique for approaching the truth, as an arena for combatants, as a means of acting upon an audience to inspire action and change, as an avenue for the individual to achieve control by saying something new in a new way, is only a Western sense of rhetoric and its emphasis on originality and individuality is post-Romantic... For the Chinese, then, the primary function of rhetoric is to preserve the general harmony and to promote social
cohesion; and therefore, its appeal is always to history and to tradition and to the
authority of the past; its technique always the repetition of maxims, exempla, and
analogies presented in established forms and expressed in well-known phrases (p.
795).”

Some Chinese writers in the West have published accounts testifying to the fact that
cultural conflict underlies Chinese students' struggle with writing in English. However to me
it is still an open question whether or not it is our culture making our learning of English
academic writing difficult. Joan's confidence in her writing capability, expressed in our first
meeting makes me think the answer tends to be 'No':

Joan: Recently, one of my Canadian friends told me that my English has improved a lot.
Then he questioned me whether my Chinese was very good. I told him that my quick
improvement in English has been achieved on the foundation of my literacy level in
mother tongue. I am a pretty good Chinese writer. I believe that I will be a good
English writer too - when I become a mature researcher. I've liked writing since an
early age. I feel comfortable with writing. I enjoy putting down my thoughts and my
reactions to the environment onto paper. I like to express myself through writing. I
used to write poems and fictions – imaginative and creative stuff. But no matter what
type of writing, I can handle well. I am a person with affinity to writing.

Joan's confession reminds me of my own love for writing. That was a long time ago,
back to my elementary years, when composition class was my favorite. Probably because of
my addictive reading of literature books, I enjoyed creative writing very much and I was
good at it. In our weekly composition classes, the teacher would improvise titles according to
the situations. If we got snow in February, the teacher would write down "Spring Snow" on
the blackboard as the title and let us write whatever we could think of. In October, the title
would be "The Fall." Or sometimes, a sentence such as "Tell me two or three stories about
your dearest person" could always ensure my pleasure in writing. Quite often the teacher would make me read aloud my compositions to the class because I was "good at describing things and making them alive on the paper." However, such pleasure had gone since I went to secondary school, where writing became much more regulated.

In secondary school, we concentrated on learning essay writing to get prepared for China’s National Examination to Higher Education. A writing test was part of the exam – within forty minutes or less we had to write an essay under a given title or theme. Students were expected to argue for certain moral attitudes or social events that could serve political propaganda. Students were usually well prepared before the exam and aware of what points the examiners wanted to see in their essays. If they could cover all the necessary points, the students would pass. If they could argue beautifully and creatively, they would get high marks. I always felt that my creativity for writing drained away when I was made to write in a fixed frame. I stopped enjoying writing and considered myself an incompetent essay writer in Chinese. I felt that my writing was deprived of originality because of the regulations. I have the same feeling when I write my term papers. But Joan always seems to be able to “speak up” in her writing.

Joan: I always want to come out with the best inspiration in my sentences, which would be able to fully represent my thoughts toward particular issues. I feel that if there were one sentence in each of my passages representing my ingenuity, my inspiration, triggering my readers’ thinking, then I would say my paper is successful. I don’t want to copy references. I value my own ideas. When I am talking with you, I have this clear orientation that “I want to tell you an idea.” This sentence can best represent my thought. I have this same orientation while writing papers. While writing, I must come out with something that is very true, very original. Otherwise, I feel that you are
copying references. It’s like patching—treating an article as if a piece of cloth to which you can add different patches. It is OK, I mean, for elaborating on a certain point. But I don’t consider it as a research of quality. A research of quality has to have some originality, to contribute a really new view. That’s a research of quality. I saw writing as a way of self-expression. Now for academic writing, I also see writing as a way to communicate. I would like to know how people think while reading my essays. I’d like to see how other people can be in agreement with me and how my writing can trigger my readers’ thinking.

"Ingenuity," I repeat after Joan, while looking at her black straight long hair and thinking of the image of Chinese students posted by some composition teachers (e.g. Kaplan, Fox, Matalene) based on students' English writing. Composition teachers disclose that "be original" is a regular comment they give to Chinese students' writing because Chinese students tend to extensively cite authorities and use fixed phrases instead of stating their own ideas and using their own words. The image Joan poses here is the opposite. Is she in rebellion against the Chinese tradition? Or is she already "westernized"

Zhaohui: Well, that’s interesting. Remembering our education in China, we did not have the so-called individualized teaching, teachers treated all of us the same. We were not encouraged to have our own ideas...

Joan: Yeah, I think you are right. Except for composition (in Chinese), teachers would encourage creativity, for example, creative use of analogies. Otherwise, teachers rarely encouraged ingenuity.

Zhaohui: Then how do you connect your past learning with your today’s favouring of new thoughts? I mean what part of your experience do you think has contributed to your creativity?
Joan: I think it was my upbringing. My father has more influence than my mother does on this aspect. My mother emphasized hard work. “You have to work really hard,” she always said that to me. Whereas, my father taught me “You have to think.” But also it’s connected to my previous major – Chinese literature. People in natural sciences are different, one plus one is two, no room for imagination, right? But for literature students, teachers encourage you to create new versions. Say for writing stories, your story has to be different. You have to come out with something new and especially catchy. That’s why I am so afraid of repeating when I write. During my undergraduate years, I was a member of a poetry club in my university. I had written some poems that I felt quite good about. The rhetoric for writing poems excludes repetition so as to refresh readers. For example, to write poems, you need to use analogies that are to be special. Say, somebody has used the sun to analogize his/her zeal. Then you can’t use the same analogy in your poem – you have to use something unique. Anyway, you have to come out with new things. That still affects me now when I write essays. I guess it is related to my background and my previous major – how I developed my ingenuity. When my Canadian friends helped me editing my papers, they asked me why I was so scared of repeating. I told them that I didn’t think repeating makes good essays. But they said that repeating makes essays clear, more readable.

Joan credits her ingenuity to her upbringing and to her previous major. She grew up in a Chinese family, where the Chinese cultural tradition was embedded in daily life. She majored in Chinese language and literature, which represent the brilliance of the Chinese literacy tradition. Following this logic, her ingenuity should be originated from Chinese culture. But Chinese language and culture are known to feature linguistic formulas,
memorizing learning and the ideology of collectivism. Can such a culture nurture ingenuity?

Logically it would not. So, could we say that Chinese culture has been wrongly understood and it actually encourages originality as the western cultural tradition does? It might be too early to come to such a conclusion. I start to probe through another route.

Zhaohui: Do you think your experience with writing in Chinese is transferable to your writing in English?

Joan: Presently I feel that my language is not adequate and my research is not mature yet.

When I write term papers, I have to start with reading. I would go through references, and that is the process of formulating ideas. It is a painstaking process – you would be hit upon by so many wonderful ideas. You are juggling with them, seeing the trees while wondering where the forest is. But when my ideas have been formulated, when I know what I want to write about, I would start to play with my ideas, to see how I can illustrate them in the paper. Then the most enjoyable moment comes. I think that now both our writing and language are limited because we are not mature yet in the sense of doing research in this western academy. We do not know this context very well. We are not sure about the rules of playing this academic game. Sometimes I came up with some sophisticated ideas. However, when I was trying to put them on paper, my language became inadequate. I had to get to references and “borrow” some sentences from there. When I was thinking on my own, my written language (English) is simple, but they express my original thoughts. I think it’s just a matter of time. We will be able to write maturely. I believe the intellectual foundation of our Chinese students is very solid. We can be competent researchers in the west.
I ask Helen, who joins us later, the same question. Helen believes that she had also acquired basic skills for handling academic writing assignments before she came to Canada. The difficulty is her lack of language and contextual knowledge.

Helen: As for writing, I did not write much in China. The educational systems work differently. In China, science students were seldom required to write – a thesis is all they have to write. But here, writing is a very important part for learning and writing ability is very important in North America. At the beginning, I had little idea about how to get around with my paper assignments. First of all, I felt my vocabulary in English was too limited. Also I didn’t know the rules. You have to be careful about the format. Actually you have to look up lots of references – to read widely before writing. Then you would have more terms and phrases to vary your ways of expression. So I feel that collecting references is an important step. The method of checking references was new to me. But the capabilities of summarizing, generalizing and analyzing are what I have already had. They are the basics for research competence and connected with previous experiences.

Zhaohui: Do you feel that the way you write in Chinese affects your writing in English?

Helen: No, I don’t think they interfere with each other. I think the basic structures are the same. How we organize in English, we should do the same in Chinese.

I am surprised. What I have felt is very different. The pattern I have learned to organize a research paper felt very new to me. It was in a writing workshop for ESL students at OISE. The professor who held the workshop gave instruction on what were the parts we should include in our research papers, where each part should go, who should follow who and who should echo who. She stressed that the structure of a research paper (which I understood should be linear and systematic) was very important because it optimizes the
readability of an essay. From her assertive tone I sensed that this linear structure was a fundamental principle in academic writing and most of the journal articles I read confirmed my sense. My impression about Chinese academic writing is different. There are no strict rules for organization and structure. What is prescribed in Chinese essay writing is the theme. As for arrangement of the content, manipulation is allowed to maximize the persuasiveness.

In addition to the structure, two other rules the professor articulated felt difficult to observe. She emphasized that as a reader she wanted the first sentence of the paper to be "This research is about...." Contrary to such a direct approach, which I felt abrupt, my old habit was to use a short but interesting anecdote to invite my readers and then lead them step by step into my written world. But obviously being interesting is not the primary concern for academic writing in English. I also felt it was hard not to write phrases like "I think", "I observe", or "I believe" in my papers. I tended to agree with the professor when she said that the reader would know what I wrote was my observation and my thought so those phrases are not necessary. But when I read my paper without those phrases, I found myself sounding so assertive, declaring the truths to the world. It is against my view of writing. As I see it, the purpose of my writing is to explore a route toward the truth. So I have to stress in my essays that what I write is my reflection of the truth instead of the truth itself.

The impression I got from the workshop was that the rules were unbreakable. So I managed to observe them although I felt they restrained my thinking when I wrote. I wonder whether Joan and Helen are aware of those rhetorical rules and how they feel about them.

Zhaohui: Do you think that there is a fixed ... sort of formula, or standard for English academic writing?
Joan: Yeah, possibly. Just like the way they eat. Every time they eat, they have to eat the exact same thing, the same ingredients, very routine. But it also depends. Speaking of the style, the difference in styles among departments is salient. You can see clearly from my papers. The paper I wrote for the course I took in the Department of Applied Psychology is totally different from the ones I wrote for courses in our department (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning). A psychological paper has to be extremely tight-written. Also, they are not afraid of repeating. They have a Ba Gu pattern. Remember the type of essays that old Chinese scholars wrote for the imperial exam? Its form was so rigidly prescribed. It must contain the eight parts - no more and no less. And each part had to serve certain function, such as opening the discussion, discussing the significance, stating the argument, concluding the argument, so on and so forth (Ba Gu Wen, also called eight-legged essay, was a regulated written exam style of the Ming and Qing dynasties in China. Chinese scholars in old times took the exam to seek opportunity of working in the government. To pass the exam, they had to write essays by strictly following rules. According to these rules, a Ba Gu essay should consist of eight structural parts, four of them were the central parts, which should be completed by eight rhetorically parallel paragraphs - the eight legs. See more details in Kirkpatrick, 1997). They have a Western Ba Gu in psychology. You must write five parts – introduction, question statement, literature review, discussion, results and conclusion. You even have to use the exact phrases sometimes, for example, at the end of an article, you have to use “my conclusion is.” Our department is very different. Such kind of rigid patterns are not quite encouraged. Say Paulo Freire’s writing – it is very versatile. It is very good. You can feel from his writing his profound understanding of the society. I like this type of writing. Again, it is
connected to my previous learning. I know that I need to be more rational now when writing term papers. I am more concerned with how to organize my ideas. But still, sometimes I add emotionality to my writing. I think the style of my paper writing is like prose. I know that now some professors are trying to use fictional style to write academic essays. I wish I would be able to do that too in the future. I would like to venture with new types of writing. I believe that the language is established by usage and new language can be accepted by common practice. They are not fixed. So I like to experiment with genre. I would like to use my special way to express my meaning in my writing. Chinese language is more improvisational.

**Helen:** But for me, I like the requirements for writing to be concrete and specific. The rules are facilitative for my writing, particularly when they are made explicit. I pay much attention to the structure of my paper. I want my writing to be well focused. I am afraid of digressing.

**Zhaohui:** Really? But it is believed that Chinese students tend to digress in their writing. You know, beating around the bush.

**Helen:** Is that true?

**Zhaohui:** Well...

_I do not know how to reply. I am not very surprised that we do not share the published view on the difference between Chinese rhetoric and English rhetoric. But I have not anticipated that our views of the two discourses would be so different. The distinction between them blurs and it becomes hard to grasp the particular features of each of them. I am alerted by this confusion. I realize that while I need to further my study of English rhetoric, I also need to re-learn Chinese rhetoric, which I have mistakenly considered I knew well about. Joan turns to another point._
Joan: Sometime in my writing, I wanted to express some meaning in a special way, which I thought was more succinct and interesting to read. However, when I let my Canadian friends read it, they told me that they understood what I wanted to say, but it was not the right way to say it. They would show me the right way, to express the same meaning in a more elaborated way. The language was very plain and objective. Sometimes, a single Chinese expression demands paragraphs of English to translate. The flavour – the tacit understanding embedded in the language is lost. Many people advised me “you’d better have your paper looked at by a Canadian.” I don’t know what I can say to them.

Zhaohui: You are afraid that their help would eliminate your special flavour in your writing?

Joan: It’s very painful. When Canadians helped me editing my papers, they were cutting off my original ideas, which was very painful. I think of everyone of my papers as my child. I can’t stand that my ideas are changed by language editing. But meanwhile, I very much want my papers to be standardized – grammar is correct, all else is correct, and in accordance with their ways of expression. But... I can sacrifice a little bit of my idea but not too much. It is suffering if I have to change all my ideas, my ways of expressions, and my way of organizing.

Zhaohui: Yes, it is a dilemma.

I can feel the pain Joan feels. I recall an incident that happened some time ago. I was working with my study group to finalize the research report for our summer course. I was assigned to write the part on the theoretical framework the day before. I had had to work fast so I had mostly focused on the overall coherence and completeness of the part but I had not done much to craft my wording. When the group was reviewing the part I had written we went very slowly because they had to change almost every key word I used. Sometimes they
followed their logic of thinking and went on to change the meaning without asking what I actually wanted to say. I was almost screaming “stop it!” But I did not. I knew that they meant well. I managed to get rid of the idea that sometimes word choices were made by personal preferences. I reminded myself that it was a good opportunity to learn the standard discourse. They were native speakers and therefore my teachers.

Responding to Joan's articulated feeling, I ask myself: "Was that my Chinese voice wanting to be let out at that particular moment? Or was it just a reaction toward embarrassment? I cannot be sure.

When I am transcribing the first round of our conversations, I find that there is no simple answer for whether our first culture is making our learning of English academic writing difficult. In order to grasp what is the Chinese flavour (He, 1998) presented in our writing, I have asked Joan and Helen whether I could have a look at their papers. They have agreed. The five papers Joan has given to me are particularly illustrative because on them there are detailed feedback from her professors.

Putting my papers together with Joan's and Helen's. I particularly examine the errors we made and points where our professors made corrections and suggestions for changes. Combining my analysis of our papers with the articulated standard for academic writing in English and the published view on Chinese students' writing problems, I have identified four commonplaces - grammar, citation, structuring and word choice - to compare and contrast our writing with the standard.

1. Grammar

We all constantly made errors with prepositions and articles. Probably it is because the Chinese language does not have these two linguistic elements. More or less we all made syntactical mistakes, depending on our respective sensitivity toward English. The
grammatical problem is not the central topic in the discussion of Chinese students' English writing. There may be the assumption that to progress in grammar only time and practice are needed for Chinese students. As learners, we surely all want our English writing to be a hundred percent grammatically correct. I guess that we do not want our writing to be flavoured by our incorrect grammar. But both Joan and I consider that being too sensitive to grammatical rules while writing affects the development of our ideas.

2. Citation

In the literature, two aspects are mostly discussed about citations - how to use them and what style to use. English rhetoricians believe that citations should be used both supportively to establish the connection between the paper and previously published works and critically to "open a gap" to argue that the paper is necessary to correct a falsely held position (Bloch and Chi, 1995, p. 235). Citation problems identified in Chinese students' English writing are also two - Chinese students tend to over-rely on supportive citations sometimes to the extent of plagiarizing while demonstrating that they have difficulty in taking a critical position toward published research. The explanation is that "the central focus of Chinese rhetoric is harmony" so Chinese writers would find it difficult to directly criticize other people.

I have not found these two problems in our papers. I can recall that I did feel reluctant and uncomfortable to explicitly "pick on" previous research (I finally wrote direct criticism because I understood that being critical is essential to academic writing).

Underlying such a discomfort was not a focus to maintain harmony but my view of knowing. That is why I greatly appreciate Joan's approach to "criticizing." In her papers, Joan often pointed out that some established hypotheses are illuminating in explaining particular aspects of phenomena, however they are incomplete and need complementary perspectives to
thoroughly understand the reality. Such an approach is congruent with our belief that things are multi-faceted and relative. This belief can be considered as representing the Chinese worldview but I do not think it is exclusively Chinese. Therefore I hesitate to conclude that this indirect criticism is the Chinese flavour in our writing. In their book Reasoning and Writing, Hatcher and Spencer (1993) define critical thinking as an attempt to honestly evaluate a position with respect to its alternatives. Had I known this definition, the term "critical thinking" would have been easier for me to understand because it is connected to relativism.

As for the style of citation, we were not familiar with either the differences between the two major styles (i.e., American Psychological Association style and Chicago style) or the variations within the styles. Therefore we made formatting mistakes. But we applaud this western approach to the exchanges for professional recognition in the academic community (Bloch and Chi, 1995). The more we write, the more facility we achieve in using this technique.

3. Structuring

I have talked about how I felt about the structuring of writing in English and in Chinese. My feeling is in accordance with some contrastive rhetoric researchers' analyses (e.g., Kaplan, Matalene, Fox). They observe that, as opposed to the 'straightforward' approach in English discourse, Chinese students usually delay their discussion about the issue but begin their essays with narrative examples. Contrary to the linearly structured argument, which originated with Aristotle's logical reasoning from premises to conclusion, Chinese students tend to digress, using examples that seem not to be logically related to the thesis. Between sentences, Chinese students do not explicitly signal the connections but leave them up to the reader (Matalene, 1985). I admit that the above observations accurately
summarize my old habit in writing Chinese. In my English papers, these habits are not salient because I am consciously avoiding them while I write. The only problem is that some of my sentences are not direct and the meanings they convey are ambiguous, so my professors put question marks beside those sentences.

I have outlined Joan's papers and found that the overall structure of her English writing has a little flavour of the Chinese way of structuring. Her professors do not particularly suggest Joan make changes to her overall structure.

Here, we may arrive at the conclusion that different ways of structuring an argument constitute an important part of the linguistic difference between Chinese and English. However, Helen's English writing reminds us to consider the disciplinary difference as well.

The following passage is an excerpt from Helen's paper:

**Performance and efficiency problem**

These problems are mainly encountered by the physicians, nurses and patient care manager. Because of the difficulty to access information from different sources, the productivity of physicians and manager is seriously affected. For example, if a physician in the dialysis unit needs to evaluate a longitudinal effect about some specific problem, such as renal bone disease and anemia, he must be able to access and collect all the relevant information. These information may be generated by day to day, month to month, even year to year results form various sources, such as lab, pharmacy, dietary, dialysis, etc. Specifically, a physician has to go through all relevant departments, storage rooms, and file folders, flip page to page of the patient file to obtain necessary information he needs. Usually, this part of work takes 80% of a physician's time, which greatly limits the time that the physician has available to spend with his patients. Similarly, because of lack of automated information system, the nurses have to do a large amount of clerical work. Clerical work diverts the nurses' attention from patient care. The patient care manager also has to spend a large amount of time to collect and calculate all necessary data manually to create a monthly statistical report about the materials supplied by more than 20 suppliers. Therefore, there is an urgent need for performance and efficiency improvement in the unit through the introduction of information technology.

Being focused, which is well demonstrated in this passage, features Helen's English writing and even her spoken discourse, which is in Chinese. Such a feature is in obvious contrast with Joan's speech and also different from mine but we three all share one mother
tongue. Tentatively I thought that the feature of Helen's speech are related to her research discipline. She has been studying in engineering both in China and in Canada. Engineering is not a native-born subject in China but was introduced into China from the west at the end of the nineteenth century, like many other natural sciences. When there was no ready discourse for these scientific fields in the Chinese language, our pioneer scientists might have transplanted the discourse together with the subjects as a whole package from the west and let them develop in China. To test my assumption, I have gone to the Robarts Library to look up references on academic writing in Chinese. In the Chinese book The Guide for Scholarly Writing (Li and Zhu, 1993), the stated criteria for standard scientific writing in Chinese is strikingly similar to the criteria of good academic writing in English stressed by Hatcher and Spencer (1993) in their book Reasoning and Writing. The China's National Standards for Presentation of Scientific and Technical Reports, Dissertations and Scientific Papers included in the appendix of Li and Zhu's book is also very similar to the OISE/UT Guidelines for Theses and Orals (1997). Although scientific discourse is not native to China's literacy tradition, it does exist in the Chinese language. I have been too ignorant to realize the richness of our native language.

My discussion of disciplinary difference in our writing constitutes a digression. Coming back to my previous focus on linguistic differences between English and Chinese, I realize that with regard to the structure, the dominating features of English and Chinese discourses are the opposites of each other although they may not exclude each other. Such an opposition makes the reading of the two discourses feel different. When I read Helen's papers and re-read mine, which appear to be written in a more 'western' way, I realize that I automatically aim at information gathering. For readers, efficacy of the communication is important. When I read Joan's papers, I feel like playing a game of treasure finding. Many
meanings are left between the lines. My mind is activated to probe those meanings and thus the reading intellectually interests me. To think further, I agree with the contrastive rhetoric researchers' stance that the different ways of structuring are derived from the different worldviews. Western culture has been developed on the traditional belief in the cause-effect relationship between things. Action is a line that starts at the cause and ends at the effect. For writing, the writer is the starting point and therefore he or she is entitled to be responsible for the effect - to ensure that the reader can completely understand the writing. So the expectation for an English writer is to "have everything spelled out" (Matalene, 1985, p. 803). The Chinese worldview emphasizes the dynamic relativity among things and the interdependence between things. For Chinese people, understanding a piece of reading is a responsibility shared between the writer and the reader. A good writer in Chinese is one who is able to stimulate the reader to think far beyond the words.

4. Word choice

Hatcher and Spencer (1993) stress preciseness and powerfulness of wording. They believe that writing should "communicate no more and no less than what the individual words convey" (p. 10) and wording should avoid ambiguity. While admitting that emotive language is an effective technique for persuasiveness, they imply that powerful writing is characterized by an objective tone, thus words exhibiting the writer's emotionality should be avoided. Reflecting Hatcher and Spencer's principle of transparency, in the feedback to our papers, our professors often suggested changes to our word choice for two reasons - preciseness and tone.

For some English words, we understand their literal meanings but we are not aware of the specialized meanings which words may acquire in the context of a particular discourse community. When we use them we may confuse our readers. We pay close attention to such
kinds of suggestions and become more sensitive to the tacit meanings of terms. For some other words, our professors suggested we use the ones that mean the same but have a more academic tone. Here are two examples of professors' corrections from Joan's and my papers:

(1) Even after the intervention, Lina's aggressive behavior and unstable emotion kept bouncing back (the professor suggested "continued to occur" to replace the underlined words) and it is difficult for her mother to keep calm and avoid spontaneous reactions.

(2) My teaching philosophy tells me that it is rude (the professor wrote "discriminatory?" and "unproductive?" to suggest change for the underlined word) to categorize students as slow-learners, underachievers or high-ability learners and to conduct treatment instruction according to learners' academic performance.

In the first example, the effects of using "bouncing back" and "continue to occur" were different for me - the reader. "Bouncing back" implied the emotional connectiveness between the researcher and her participant - the five-year old girl - whereas "continue to occur" simply describes fact in a detached tone. Similarly, in the second example, I used "rude" because I wanted to emphasize the hurtful effect that labeling as such could bring to students. Either "discriminatory" or "unproductive" would keep me at a distance from the students.

From the professors' efforts to tone down our wording, we sense that English written discourse values a detached and controlled tone, which is possibly believed to be consistent with reasoning and objectivity. Joan told us at our first meeting that she had to be rational while writing in academic English. Discussion about the tone in writing is scattered through the conversations between Joan and me and we tend to share the view that the prevailing use of emotive language is another feature distinguishing Chinese written discourse from English.
written discourse. In the book *Good Writing in Cross-cultural Contexts* (Li, 1996), Mr. Wang, a Chinese composition teacher with decades of experience, reveals the epistemological belief underlying this linguistic feature:

"Qing (emotions, passions, intuition) has great persuasive powers. Li (reason) is inseparable from qing: qing is couched in li, and li is couched in qing... Li (reason) is different from lizhi (rational). Being rational one is emotionally controlled, somber, composed, exercising only intellectual and reasoning faculties. Reason, however, deals with truths. Truths, though existing in objectivity, are approached and understood only through subjectivity. Truth should be learned with passion and conviction... good writing should be excellent in both qing and arguments... you cannot produce powerful writing if you do not feel strongly about the truth. If the writer is not excited about the topic, how can he produce exciting works" (pp. 55 - 56).

While discussing the rhetorical difference in word choice between English and Chinese with Dr. Allen, who has lots of experience in working with ESL students, he points out that the problem of word choice illustrated by my examples suggests a conflict between genres, which Halliday (1978) calls "register." Register appears to be a very interesting notion so I have followed Dr. Allen's suggestion to find more about it. Register refers to the variety of ways of using languages and the variation is determined by the situation or the social context of language use. Halliday believes that "all language functions in contexts of situation" (p. 32). People change the way they use language, or to be more specific, they make different selections of words and structures according to situation types. However, as Halliday emphasizes, register is:

"...not an aggregate of conventional forms of expression superposed on some underlying content by social factors of one kind or another. It is the selection of meanings that constitutes the variety to which a text belongs" (p. 111).

So register is defined as meaning potential. When we, as readers, know the situation, the social context of the language use, we can predict a great deal about the language that will occur, or we expect what language will be used according to the situation. When our expectations are fulfilled, the meaning conveyed by the language will be considered clear
and coherent. As writers, we need to share the knowledge and understanding of the situation types with our readers and match our selections of meanings accordingly. However, we, as non-native writers "who are not yet completely and intuitively bilingual" (Dr. Allen, Email message, May 1999), may choose the 'wrong' words sometimes because we are not aware of the situation-specific meanings of those words, and sometimes because we are from a different cultural context, where a different classification system of situation types determines a different classification system of registers. I will explain the latter reason more because it is not as recognized as the former one.

In the English context, academic writing is usually considered as a synonym of scientific writing, for which the register of scientific discourse determines the choice of neutral and precise vocabulary. Personal, affective and expressive language would be inappropriate. However, in the Chinese context, academic writing refers more widely to both the writing for natural sciences, of which the register is close to English scientific writing, and the writing for social studies, which in the Chinese tradition belongs to literacy text that personal and affective, and expressive language is not unexpected. Considering its language use, Chinese academic writing for social studies may sometimes read as creative writing by an English reader. As student writers, when we are unaware of this difference in register expectations, we would not be able to truly understand why we make 'wrong' word choices and we would not know how we could negotiate meanings with our English readers.

To sum up, the salient differences between English rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric are structure and word choice. Interestingly, among the three of us-Helen, Joan and I - our sensitivities toward the differences vary and the difficulties we have experienced with English academic writing appear different. Helen is least aware of
the differences and feels that any difficulty she may experience should be attributed to the development of her language skills in general. Joan senses the differences but does not use rules to restrain herself in her writing. She sees the difficulty is caused by our lack of experience in handling the English language and doing educational research in the west. I am more sensitive to the differences, and the difficulty I feel is being caught in between two discourses or literacy traditions. One reason I can think of to explain our different reactions is that we hold different attitudes toward language. An example can illustrate our different views. We all consider that it is important for children in Chinese new immigrant families to maintain their language skills in Mandarin. But we have different rationales. Joan thinks that maintaining the first language is critically beneficial for children to acquire a second language. I think that maintaining Mandarin can help to secure the tie for the children with their home culture. Helen thinks that the language skills can open up more career opportunity for the children when they grow up and enter the society because China has become an increasingly important economic partner of Canada. Our different views of language underlie our different struggles with English academic writing.
Chapter Five: Struggling

After I have finished transcribing the first round of our conversations, I start to think of rewriting my thesis proposal. I have the guideline of proposal development, prepared by Dr. Connelly. I work out a mental outline including major content I want to put into my proposal. The start had been smooth. But the actual writing becomes very difficult and slow. The reason is that I cannot find my voice. Voice is a notion particularly stressed in narrative inquiry. It acknowledges that the researcher has something to say, and also the dilemma about how to say it in research texts (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994). I am clear about what I have to say but I do not know how to say it. I recall a research memo I wrote after I had the first conversation with Joan:

"I noticed that while talking, Joan alternatively used English and Chinese. I asked her whether she was thinking in English or Chinese when she was writing papers. She said that sometimes she was thinking in English but sometimes, particularly when her ideas got complicated, she was thinking in Chinese. Reflecting on my writing process, I found myself mostly thinking in English, particularly when I wrote argumentative passages. For stories, I would rather write in Chinese. Thinking in English makes me able to think precisely, logically and assertively. Even in speaking, I use English when I have to argue for or against something, when I have to sound aggressive and assertive, and maybe more confident. When speaking in Chinese, I think I appear more intuitive, preferring to use ambiguity for humorous effect; my tone is softer and more accommodating. Do I have two different voices?"

As a matter of fact, in later conversations, all of us have quite often used English sentences or phrases to help ourselves complete our storytelling that is primarily in Chinese. Linguistics calls such a phenomenon - a speaker moves between languages in conversations - "code switching" (Halliday, 1978). Linguistic studies also observe that code switching is prevailing in conversations between people who are equally bilingual. Then, is there a shift of identity occurring when we switch our languages? I try to recall whether Joan or Helen appeared more English and less Chinese when they switched to English. The answer is uncertain. They might appear different but they were not doing so purposefully. They were
concentrating on meaning making. They used English possibly because the English expressions were readier than the Chinese ones in their language repertoire (Halliday, 1978). Such a reflection makes me ask myself the essential question: "What is the relationship between language and identity?" Furthermore, does what language we use define who we are, or is it the other way around?

Halliday's (1978) explanation of language from a sociolinguistic perspective helps me to locate the relationship between language and identity in the matrix of social relations. Halliday sees language as the means by which a person becomes a member of society. Being a member of society means occupying a social role, which is defined by social relations. The social relations that a society consists of vary and they define various social roles. Halliday continues to reason that:

"social roles are combinable and the individual, as a member of a society, occupies not just one role but many at a time, always through the medium of language. Language is again a necessary condition for this final element in the process of the development of the individual, from human being to person to what we may call 'personality', a personality being interpreted as a role complex" (p.15).

Halliday's notion of personality can be considered as the equivalent to identity and the role complex as the multiple aspects of identity. What roles have I synthesized (Halliday, 1978) into my personality or identity? First of all, I am Chinese. This role had been defined by the social relations in the Chinese society and I had occupied this role by learning and using the Chinese language. Now I am a Chinese student in a second culture and in this role my old role as a Chinese person has been redefined by a different system of social relations in this second culture. I also expect to occupy a new role - a member of a sub-society - the English academic community - by means of using English academic discourse. Will I be able to synthesize roles that defined by different systems of social relations and which language can be the medium that I use to synthesize?
Questions are coming to me one after another. I go back to reread the transcription of our conversations. I feel amazed by our adaptiveness to switch between English and Chinese and I start to see the dynamics of our identities in our conversations. However, it would be a different case in writing. Switching is expected in oral communication but not in formal academic writing in English. I recall that I had to switch off my Chinese voice while writing term papers because I was afraid that the Chinese voice might risk the clarity and coherence of my writing. In the meantime, I felt that I had lost myself in my English writing. Is there a middle ground between being myself and being a creditable academic writer? Can a third voice be worked out from my Chinese one and English one?

When I am struggling not to put my personality at risk in new social relations, Joan calls to tell me a story that happened to her. She has been worried about the grade for a paper she wrote for a course she took outside her home department during the summer. She senses that she might not be able to get an A, which she usually got in her home department, because the requirement for writing is more restricted in that department. "A- is OK for me," Joan says. Now the grade has come out and it is a B+. Joan wants to talk with the professor. She wants a fair judgement.

I read the paper, which Joan has put on her web site. My general impression is that Joan has done an excellent work on synthesizing published research about the function of infant-directed speech and the idea she proposed in the paper is fresh. There are language errors but they do not affect my understanding of the content. I think the paper deserves a good mark considering its content and the conscientious work needed to create it. I phone Joan and tell her what I think. She does go to talk with the professor - several times. I can imagine how difficult the conversations between Joan and the professor could be.
It is the middle of October. I come to Joan's place to start our second round of conversations. We reflect together on that incident. Joan hands me the paper first and I read the comment. Regarding the contents of the paper, the comment says that it is interesting to read. About the writing, the comment is that the structure of some sentences looks awkward and too much jargon makes the paper hard to understand.

Joan: She is the first professor who pointed out the language problem in my paper. Maybe I do have a problem in writing. But what I feel unfair is that as a course instructor, her focus of evaluating a student's paper should be the content, the meaning, instead of the language. I do not believe that my writing is so bad that it is not understandable. You can pick holes in an article forever. The sensible thing is that you have to stand at the right angle to pick holes.

Zhaohui: Her comment would be acceptable if she was a composition instructor.

Joan: Well, she said that my paper is too difficult for her to understand; I should try to make my paper more readable. But I think that as a course instructor she should be familiar with the terms. I know whom I was writing for. I wrote for people who can understand. It's like writing poems, I would write for people who can understand poems, who can smell the fragrance of the flowers, who can think of the mountains while smelling orchids. That’s my understanding, maybe right or maybe not. But I believe that you have to consider who are your readers when you write academic papers.

Zhaohui: So you were imagining who your readers would be when you wrote?

Joan: Of course. My imagined readers were scholars. We were studying certain issue and we wished to come out with some findings to share with people in the same research field. So my paper was to be read by those specialists who study infant development
(the paper is on infant-directed speech). If I wrote for kindergarten teachers, I would not use the terms at all. I might write a presentation, mapping out everything. The whole writing would be different.

Zhaohui: We call this “yin di zhi yi” (suit approaches to circumstances) or “yin yin er yi” (differentiate teaching approaches according to learners' situations) in Chinese.

Joan: Or “liang ti cai yi” (cut the garment according to the figure), we have a bunch of similar terms. Anyway, we should always speak from the real situation.

Zhaohui: Has somebody, like your students, told you that you are very Chinese, or more like a westerner? I ask because you seem to be very proud of your Chinese background. But you do not quite fit into the general image of Chinese students in the west. Chinese students are considered as being quite, submissive and never questioning teachers. You are not. You do not give up easily when you trust yourself. You went to question your professor and you did finally win a fair judgement. How do you see your Chineseness?

Joan: People are telling me that they feel I am very flexible, not confining myself to one particular pattern. When in China, many people, including my mother said that my way was closer to western. I myself feel that I still have a strong Chinese cultural background. I greatly appreciate Chinese culture. But I am realistic. When I first came to Canada, the way I viewed discrimination was that I should not make such an assumption that discrimination was everywhere here. So when I encountered some frustration I would not readily consider it as discrimination. I allow myself a large range to view things. I would not make assumptions before I have actually had experience. It has a good side and a bad side. It is time-consuming. But the experience you have obtained is deep in your heart. You are not going to forget it. I
think that even though we are very close and I have talked with you all about it, you would not be able to feel the pain I feel. The pain I feel is very strong in my mind. I wonder if you have ever had such a feeling, which is 'if I go into this way, I will fight, I will be excellent and people will have to admit that I am really good.' You may have experienced such a state of mind. Chinese people who have come here all want to excel, no matter how hard the situation is. And they can excel.

**Zhaohui:** What you are saying is that the spirit to excel was rooted in our first culture. But to excel, you would choose the better means, no matter whether it belongs to the east or the west.

**Joan:** Right. I do not have a boundary that is automatically set by myself. I do not label myself. You have to act according to circumstances. China has good cultural traditions but some of them do not fit the Canadian context. Take my story as an example, in Chinese opinion, it would be believed that the teacher is right, reasonable. You can explain if you don’t agree with your teacher. But the teacher’s decision is the final decision. The western way would be different. If you consider it is unfair, you have to appeal. That is your right. That is their democracy. Well, they consider that democracy is so precious to them, why don’t they think it is precious to us too. So, I think their idea is better then we can practice it too. East and west can complement each other sometimes.

**Zhaohui:** So you enjoy staying in between, not only between cultures - you are taking courses in two departments.

**Joan:** Right. I like to play with differences. People all have biases. When you stay long enough in one place, you would naturally frown upon other ways of viewing and doing.
Zhaohui: Yes, I agree. But you might have an easier life if you stick with one. When you are crossing boundaries you always have to deal with the conflicts between them, to find a way to balance them.

Joan: It is painstaking, really. But what is good about it is that you would see things clearer. Say, when I am talking with you, when we are carrying on this conversation, I can completely come in terms with you about your narrative and qualitative research. When I talk to people in psychology, I can also closely follow their mental movements. This is very exciting. At such a moment, you would feel that the sky suddenly becomes brighter.

Zhaohui: Yes, things become transparent...

Joan: That is the joy of learning.

_The telling of our stories contains so many differences. Those differences are challenging the assumptions I had prior to the telling. A series of questions come to me: Who are we? How can we define "Chineseness"? How can we define our identity when we cross linguistic, disciplinary and cultural boundaries? Where do we locate ourselves in the matrix of relationships defined by differences in rhetoric, research paradigms and value systems? "I am flexible." Helen also says this to me when she is telling me about her last term paper. The paper was supposed to be a group project. Helen was grouped with two other students. The other two students had problematic working attitudes and Helen took the leadership._

Helen: We thought about the assignment very differently. Their expectations were very low. They said 'We will be happy to get a pass.' The whole project was divided into four phases. After the professor had given out the assignment at the beginning of each phase, it was always me who organized group activities and led the discussion.

Actually I was almost the only one who was doing the thinking, designing and talking...
on how to perform the tasks. Then I would distribute the tasks which I found out later had never been done. So the time I put in on that project was enormous. I was complaining at that time. But later I considered it worthwhile – I got more opportunity to practice…

**Zhaohui:** And you can practice your leadership.

**Helen:** Yes, it is important. During a job interview I did today, there was a question asking ‘What would you do if your group members do not do what they are supposed to do?’ I answered: ‘I have personally experienced this kind of situation. Until the night right before the deadline, my group workers practically did nothing. In that circumstance, first step I believe is to solve the problem, there is no time to blame, no time to find faults. As a leader, you have to possess the quality of foreseeing such situations and being equipped with a strategy to handle them. In my case, I felt that they might flunk their tasks so I got myself ready. I did the important part of the tasks that had been assigned to my team workers. I still wanted to see how they would do the tasks so that we could share as a group. However, the fact of the matter was that they didn’t do their tasks at all. What I did first was to make up what was missed so as to hand in the project as a completed work. And then, after handing it in, I would just yell at them. Literally I was yelling because I was really mad.

*Looking at Joan’s and Helen’s stories together, I find that they do not only share a flexible disposition but they are also similar in their ability to see the positive side of adverse circumstances and in their readiness to turn the negative into the positive. I recall Xin Li’s (1998) notion of improvisation I read in her narrative dissertation. Li reflected after she had visited her father in a labour camp during China’s Cultural Revolution:*

“*When I saw a miserable picture of the inhuman labour camp for professors in 1970's, my father saw a beautiful picture of Renaissance with brown background and*
vivid figures of human beings. 'When the people of the Earth all know the good as good, there arises (recognition of) evil.' When I thought it was cruel to cut the professors away from their academic work, my father held that it was good for the professors to study the real world. Because of the good will and expectations people usually have, it is difficult for them to see the 'good' and 'positive' aspects in the real world... If she/he could be able to adjust the angles of her/himself, she/he might improvise the experience, which can be labeled as 'positive', 'good', 'beautiful', 'healthy'... This seems like the key in my father's viewpoint toward the world and the life. This seems like the key in Taoist viewpoint about the relationship between people and the world" (pp. 10-11).

Xin Li's father, a Chinese scholar, seems to believe that 'good', 'bad', 'beautiful', 'evil', etc. are only concepts that humans create to reflect the reality. Their meanings are not definite. Human beings are able to "improvise" the good from the bad, the beautiful from the evil. Such a dialectical way of viewing 'seems like' the key in Taoism, one of the two mainstay philosophies of China (the other is Confucianism). Seeking greater precision, I revisit my small collection of books on Chinese philosophies. This review has helped me to realize that dialectics is not only the key to Taoism but it is also the cornerstone of the whole Chinese cultural tradition.

Taoism dialectics emphasize the point that everything in the world has its opposite. The two opposites rely on each other to exist and they are mutually transferable. The world is a continuity of movements between the two opposites.

Confucianism dialectics believes in the "middle way", which Confucius considers as the ultimate human wisdom. Confucius tells us that the wisest man is the one who always knows what is the proper action in any circumstances. To know what is proper, you need to compare and contrast what you see, to find the extremes and to balance between them to stay in the middle. This story in The Analects (Leys, 1997) illustrates how Confucius practices the middle way: "Gongxi Chi (one of Confucius' students) asked the Master (Confucius): 'When Zilu asked if he should practice at once what he had just learned, you told him to consult first
with his father and elder brother. When Ran Qiu asked if he should practice at once what he had just learned, you told him to practice it at once. I am confused: may I ask you to explain?' The Master said: 'Ran Qiu is slow, therefore I push him; Zilu has energy for two, therefore I hold him back'."

_I Ching_ is a book that is believed to integrate various schools of China's classical humanistic thought. The dialectics in _I Ching_ focus on transformation. _I Ching_ states that the definite nature of reality is that it is changing. The opposition between two interacting elements is the force to eternalize change. Therefore the wisest and most capable man is the one who follows the law of reality in tirelessly transforming himself.

I think I find the 'Chineseness', the very national quality that has founded our "fluid identity" (He, 1998), Joan and Helen's flexibility, Joan's not-labeling, my effort to find a third voice, Li's improvisation, and our boundary crossing is either a conscious or an unconscious practice of dialectics. With our dialectics, we are able to see similarities from differences, to seek balance among conflicts, to reach harmony through varieties and to turn wounds to wisdom. Our struggle, no matter how different they may appear, are all directed to excel. And the efforts to excel individually imply a wish to sublimate our cultural tradition in a new social/cultural context.

In this new context, differences and conflicts characterize our daily living and the practicing of dialectics becomes intensified. To perform our writing assignments for our graduate studies, we have learned to use a new language to express ourselves and have occupied new social roles through interactions in a new system of social relations. The interactions are two-way - between the academic community and us.
Chapter Six: Transforming

I have finished my proposal, for which I could not find my voice, and I have come to meet with Dr. Connelly to listen to his feedback. I myself have felt quite satisfied with the theme I developed in the proposal. But the writing does not read smoothly.

Having raised some questions about the content of my proposal, Dr. Connelly turned our discussion to the writing. He suggests that I try to pick up the notion of voice and signature as I think about my writing:

"When you write, you want to have your voice and you want to have your signature. Your signature would have Zhaohui - the Chinese woman or at least the one with that background - come through in your writing. You see, there is a tension - how could you write powerfully and effectively and all the English world wants to read you but meanwhile your writing is different, it is from China and it is you."

(Meeting with Dr. Connelly, November 11, 1998)

Yes, indeed there is a tension. And the tension was salient when I was writing the proposal. It was the tension between my voices - my Chinese voice which wanted to use a soft, conversational and even somewhat playful tone to tell stories and my English voice which wanted to articulate some arguments. As for signature, the particular rhyme, cadence and expression that make the work readily identifiable as the work of a certain author (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994), I have one in my Chinese writing but I am not certain whether I have one in English.

I have decided to experiment to develop a signature in my English writing. A perfect opportunity comes when I write my last term paper for the course "Language, Culture and Identity: Using the Literacy Text in Teacher Development" given by Professor Grace Feuerverger. The title of my paper is "Growing with Stories - An Autobiography about Writing." It is the first time I can be myself while writing in English. I have the belief that
Professor Feuerverger would understand me. Following is an excerpt from that paper. I was talking about my Nanny, who introduced me to the world of stories.

"My Nanny was the first person I asked to tell me stories. She was in her late fifties when she was hired by my parents to babysit me. Yes, I am talking about the Communist China in the early 1970’s. In Beijing and other major cities, it was not unusual for some families to have nannies at home to take care of the babies so that both of the parents could be completely devoted to the revolutionary cause. She was from a suburban village south of Beijing. She was almost illiterate. So when I asked her to tell stories, she could only think of two folk tales passed down by her mother. One was about obeying one’s mother’s words to prevent possible dangers; the other was about always keeping a kind heart to enjoy the kindness from others. I heard them so many times that I could recite them exactly word by word. But still, I asked her to tell them to me, particularly during hot summer evenings. I made her repeat the story one time after another, when she was shaking a large cattail leaf fan to bring breeze and chase away mosquitoes. Her soothing voice would not stop until I fell asleep.

Thinking in retrospect, she herself was a book full of stories. But she never opened herself up in front of me. The only thing I knew about her was that she was married to an abusive and addictive husband at the age of 16. Her husband died in her early forties and left three daughters whom she had to bring up all by herself. To feed her daughters, she left them to her relatives in the village and made money by being other children’s maid in the city. She never mentioned her husband to me, not even much of her daughters. Actually she seldom spoke anything about herself. She was telling stories through the things she kept doing. She was such a talented cook and tailor. As many other spoiled children, I had a bad appetite for food. She was able to use flour and sugar to create pastry of all kinds of shapes and flavours to entice me to eat more. Up to my school age, all the clothes and shoes I wore were hand-made by her. I still wonder how she did it, no patterns and instructions to follow, no sewing machine, all by her hands and her senses. I never saw her not working. Her eyes were always searching for something to do. But she never complained. Instead, she seemed always happy and peaceful in front of me.

When I grew older, I noticed that she could never walk fast enough to chase me. I looked at her feet and found they were disproportionedly small. So I asked her:

“Granny, (she enjoyed the respect of my family close to our grandmothers who both died early. So all of my family addressed her as our grandmother) why are your feet so small?”

“They were bound.” She simply answered.

“Who bound them and why?”

“In my day, every girl had to have their feet bound. Otherwise no man would want her as his wife. So my mother bound my feet when I was eight or something, using long strips of cloth.”

“Was that hurt?”

“How couldn’t be. I was crying all day and all night until I lost my voice. But my mother knew it was for my benefit.”
I shrank myself with horror.
"You girls are lucky. You are liberated now," she continued. I ran away.

It was on her deformed feet that she used to walk in the dark nights outside. It must be during her menopause when she was constantly suffering from terrible headache. She could not sleep during the night and did not want to trouble anybody. So she went outside alone to walk off her headache. From her, I had sensed and felt instead of listened to the stories of traditional Chinese woman, who were born to take care of others, in the positions of daughter, wife, mother and daughter-in-law.

I had been living with my Nanny for eighteen years but never realized her value for my upbringing. Only in reflection can I feel how great her influence is on my way of living, although the influence was silent.

Reading Ibolya Grossman’s (1990) autobiography also reminds me of my Nanny. Ibi (the author’s pet name) is a wonder to me and it is an unusual pleasure and honour to meet her in person. I see her as the same kind of woman as my Nanny, strong, courageous yet humble and gentle, intelligent yet peaceful, hiding the extraordinariness behind the ordinariness, practicing the sound humour after having tasted all kinds of bitterness through life. I feel that there is much more behind the simple words of Ibi’s book. But I like the way it is, which is very personally and emotionally touching. Meanwhile, I wonder what if Ibi had gone to university and got a degree of some kind. I also wonder what it would be like if my Nanny had known how to read and write.

Nanny must have known the power of literacy. Since I had learned to read, books started to set the distance between Nanny and me. The longer the stories I was reading, the shorter the time I spent with her. She was still not complaining though. She believed what I was doing was right and important. She always kept my surrounding extremely quite because I was "studying the books." Only once she asked me “what do you see inside the books?” I answered “you won’t understand” and then got absorbed into the written world again. Silence, which must be hurt. But I did not pay any attention at that time. I had not known yet that silence could be as sharp as a knife, with or without the intention to hurt. I get to know it better when I came to a country where I become a nonnative speaker."

In that paper, I shaped the cadence to follow the waves of my emotions, slowed the rhyme so that the reader could read out the meanings between lines, and simplified the wording while not simplifying the meanings conveyed by the words.

While my focus is turning from the standard of English academic writing to the development of my own signature in English, Joan is turning in a direction opposite to mine.

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Joan is taking her second course in the department where she had the encounter we have discussed in Chapter Four. The instructor for this second course, let us call him Professor L., has very specific requirements for writing assignments and is very strict in sustaining the standard of English academic writing. He gives writing assignments for every other week. For the assignments, he specifies what he expects to read in the first paragraph, what in the second, what in the third and so on. “And you can write only one page. He would not read even one more line,” Joan tells me on the phone. Usually on the one-page writing, Joan has to work hours after hours. Such training has paid off. The final paper Joan has written for this course gets the highest comment and grade in the whole class. Where Joan is a minority student who speaks a different language, majors in a different field and comes from a different culture.

We meet again at Joan’s place in early February. To our regret, Helen cannot make any more meetings with us. She is very successful in seeking employment and has been hired by a Canadian manufactory, which is located in Cambridge, Ontario. Helen has moved with her family to Waterloo. Our collaboration carries on without Helen’s further participation but Joan and I are truthfully happy for Helen.

Zhaohui: Most importantly, I want to know how you think about that incident? I mean - your paper was unfairly marked and you went to talk it over with the professor and finally got your grade changed.

Joan: Oh, that incident has really shocked me. After I have overcome my emotional reactions, I began to take the professor’s comment seriously. I don’t necessarily consider she was right. But I realized that I should try to be careful. They have an evaluation system. I don’t have to challenge their system at my own risk. They have this assumption that ESL students have severe problems in grammar or format.
according to their own writing standard. So they are very careful when they are evaluating our papers. And because of their carefulness toward our language problems their evaluation on your content might be biased. I don’t want to be the victim of that carefulness. So I become very careful. But still, it depends on whom (which professor) I am writing for. When I pay too much attention to the format, I feel I will sacrifice many of my creative thoughts. Generally, this incident has really given me a warning. I understand more about the research community. Meanwhile, it has prompted me to examine myself. It has made me become more aware of how others would see my writing, view my capability, what would influence their evaluation. It is a good warning bell. I felt like I was a running train which was suddenly stopped. It was not the problem of the train that made it stop. It’s something wrong with the rail track. But others weren’t aware of the real reason so they would do a general check-up. Meanwhile, I was examining myself and found there was a problem with the train, although it was not serious enough to stop it. So I still appreciated the professor who stopped me. I am the type of person who is always running without thinking carefully. That’s my character, doing everything fast, thinking fast and trying to pursue creative thought. She made me examine and adjust myself so that I could run smoother. So I appreciate her. The incident leads to my excellent performance on Professor L’s course.

Zhaohui: I have noticed that for your two latest papers, both the professors commented on the excellent organization of your papers. Do you consider that you have developed new strength in your writing?

Joan: I can’t be sure to say that for the other paper. But for Professor L’s, yes.

Zhaohui: This paper reads very differently from your other papers.
Joan: Yes. I wrote it according to my knowledge of what he wants. I did this because I wanted to convince them that I am capable of uplifting myself to reach and surpass their standard. I was experimenting and I succeeded, although I felt that working like that killed some of my genius and killed some of the enjoyment I used to get from writing. I felt I was deprived of...

Zhaohui: Pleasure?

Joan: Yeah, well... not only pleasure. I admit that at the beginning of my graduate study I did not write very well. My language was not precise, my logic was not very tight. Those were my weaknesses. But there was the enjoyment I felt from writing – the swift flux of my thinking and my language. That’s the way it should be. Being a scholar, I have to be in that mental state. Only when I can keep in that state, can I improve in my academic field and create meaningful things.

Zhaohui: So you are saying that you want to be a scholar who gets your own way, instead of following conventions?

Joan: I hope there can be a compromise. People are different. I don’t want to be required to think exactly as others think. It would be also hard for other people if I require them to think the same as I do. I only hope that we all become more considerate for each other. There should be more understanding. Before you speak out your judgment, think carefully.

Zhaohui: Yes, I agree. We should have the attitude to appreciate differences instead of trying to require others to change according to our standard. Standards are good. People need to hold onto their standards, or principles. But meanwhile, you have to be aware of different ways of viewing and knowing, different standards and principles. It is not wise to rely solely on your standard to make judgement of the different ways.
\textbf{Joan}: Right, even the two of us, we share lots of things, but we are very different. I noticed that you are more concerned about your structure, to keep the consistency of your writing. To use an analogy, there are baskets to contain apples. Apples of different sizes and colors should be put into different baskets. You would be the one who must find the right basket to put in the right apples, whereas I would just throw the apples I get into whatever basket. If somebody points out that I am wrong, I would argue to justify why I do so. My Canadian friends said that I like ‘stretching theory.’ But my focus is to express my ideas while I write. By reading the reflective journal you wrote, I felt that when you wrote you were trying to figure out what your readers would think about your writing. Usually I don’t. I also found that you are more conscientious in understanding theories than I am. You know how to follow instruction and how to be precise. They are what I should learn from you. So you see, because we are different, we could have this fair exchange. The differences keep us together.

\textbf{Zhaohui}: Helen is indeed precise and specific. She is a conscientious scientist. I have learned a lot from her. Actually I was not a precise person at all. I used to say ‘I love Chinese culture. The Chinese language is the most beautiful language of the world.’ But if I were questioned why, I would not have been able to state what exactly made me believe so. I just had the feeling, the impression that Chinese culture is great. But now when I am living out of our homeland, questions about our old culture keep coming together with the questions about the new culture. The impression has to be interpreted and articulated. And for interpretation and articulation, we have to learn, you know, new knowledge, or techniques. We need the training to be professional researchers. Disciplines and standards help us learn to be precise and specific.
While I am writing this part, the train of my thoughts run to a talk I had with Helen on her last term paper. For a course project, Helen was performing information system analysis for a medical unit. When we met, Helen started to explain to me how she went through the analyzing process.

Helen: Having overviewed the system, we used some techniques to model the system to give a clear idea of the information flow and data structure, data relationship. When the modeled system got all set, we worked out specific requirements and translated them into technical terms so that computer programmers could exactly know how to handle them. We did that by this data flow diagram. First we used a general content diagram, indicating what will be the input, going through what system, and what will be the output. Next I decomposed this input part, which expanded to another flow chart. Then I decomposed the ‘patient folder’ part, which I wanted to work on, and it turned out as this extensive flow chart. You see, the process is like... from object to particles, to atoms, and to molecules, protons and neutrons. You have to decompose until you can’t do that any further. It’s very specific and detailed.

The data flow diagram that Helen was pointing at looked so familiar to me. I recalled that I had seen the same kind of decomposing flows in reading and learning about qualitative data analysis, linguistic and cognitive theories. Decomposing seems to be a general tool across disciplines in the west. Western analytical thinking seems to be directed to recognize every minute quality of the constituent parts of the being. And the parts are studied separately.

Based on such an association, I wonder if I could further infer that analytics is what grounds the way western people view the world. Contrary to dialectics, which grounds the Chinese worldview and emphasizes the interactivity and the wholeness of reality, analytics
stresses the specifications and individuality of the phenomena being studied. Dialectics abstracted the ultimate law that rules the universe while analytics abstracted the laws that rule individuals. The different writing systems of English and Chinese best represent the distinction between these two views. An English word is composed of letters that are abstract and independent. A Chinese character is composed of strokes, which originated in pictography, and the abstract configuration of the strokes symbolizes the meaning of the character.

If my assumption of this epistemological distinction between Chinese and western traditions is valid, I would conclude that what we have been struggling with is the conflict between different ways of knowing. Our struggling has signified both the strengths and weaknesses of dialectics and analytics respectively. Wearing dialectical lenses, Chinese people always look out for the big picture while paying less attention to the specific details. Using the analytical microscope, western people put great effort into exhaustively examining the individual details but tend to forget that every individual is always part of the interactive whole and the interactions greatly influence the quality of the individuals, which is not static but dynamic and always changing.

Juggling between dialectics and analytics we, as student writers, seek compromise with our western professors, who are simultaneously our mentors and primary readers. With their help, we are composing our new selves in and out of our writing.

Joan: Professor L did give me a hard time. But I greatly appreciate his teaching. He’s a scholar who does not easily make compromise. He made it for me. I could give up my way of writing to follow his way, but I couldn’t as easily give up my ideas when they are not in agreement with Professor L. I kept talking to him. I communicate a lot with professors. Sometimes I got quite frustrated by the social code - when it happened
that the professor didn’t want to talk with me I would suspect that I had made some mistakes. But I always push myself to talk with them. For example, with Professor L, he expressed a certain viewpoint. I didn’t think he was right, but I couldn’t speak against him directly. So I sent him emails, stated what I thought, asking him if I understood him right. Actually I was trying to explain in another way. And he finally replied, saying ‘Yes, I think that makes sense.’ I couldn’t say that ‘You are wrong.’ It’s not because I was afraid of offending him. It’s also because I was not sure if I was completely right. He is the expert, a famous scholar in this field. I had to be careful about what I was saying. It might be my mistake. It might also be that my perspective, my point of view is better. I feel that to be a scholar your effort to learn from others should equal your effort to fight for your own standards and to get your individual credits. The compromising is mutual.

It is very remarkable of Joan to recognize that compromising between the academic community and us ESL students is mutual. It is also very remarkable for Dr. Connelly to not only make compromise and to give space, but to fight for space for students and scholars with “dramatically different backgrounds.”

In the foreword they write for Critical Inquiry (1999), Connelly, Clandinin and Phillion reflect upon the criticism that western reviewers gave to Ming Fang He’s writing and ask:

“If we are to open our minds to new ways of thinking we need to be aesthetically awake to difference, not critical gatekeepers closing the doors to new possibilities that offend our conservative aesthetic sensibility. How can beautiful new forms of thinking about human experience of the sort that one finds in Ming Fang’s work flourish when she is rounded up, boxed in and penned, by an aesthetic of North American inquiry? How can we flourish if we imprison her? Do we imprison ourselves when we imprison Ming Fang?”

Then they say to the English speaking academic community:
"Those of us with firm unshaken aesthetic sensibilities, rooted in a North American identity, need, somehow, to learn what Ming Fang knows."

When I was reading her thesis, I asked how the communication and negotiation between languages and cultures He conducted with her Canadian professors and colleagues have influenced the North American academic community. Now Connelly, Clandinin and Phillion answer my question by making it clear that there is a need for "an aesthetic of wakefulness" which will make the North American academic community more responsive to other languages and cultures. Their articulation completes the circle of the communication and negotiation. Furthermore, they initiate another round of communication and negotiation by encouraging Ming Fang and all of us who come from other cultures to ask ourselves how we can "educate our critics" while permitting ourselves to be educated.

Without understanding Dr. Connelly's role in helping students from other cultures, I would not believe that there are possibilities that we could educate our critics. Without hearing Joan's stories, I would not be clear about how we could educate our critics. The connection between writing and transformation becomes concrete.

Joan: I've changed a lot, not only the way I write, but the way I see myself – I know myself better. I know how much potential I have for learning and for changing, not only to change myself, but to change the way that people think of me.

Zhaohui: Yes, I feel the same way. I am happy that we have worked together and talked all through the process of changing.
Chapter Seven: Concluding the Inquiry

Now I feel like coming to the end of a journey, an intellectual journey, which I have profoundly enjoyed. Looking back, I am delighted to see the fruition of this journey. But what seems more important for me is the new inquiry that has been raised and new direction that has been indicated for further exploration by this journey, thanks to the help of my participants.

During the process of doing my narrative inquiry, I have established invaluable collaborative relationships with my two research participants. We are different in personality, past learning experiences, disciplinary training and relationships with languages. The difficulties we encountered in learning English academic writing and the approaches we have created to deal with the difficulties vary. Accordingly, the new knowledge we have acquired is diverse. But we share a dialectical way of knowing and an elastic disposition, which we may call our cultural characteristics. Our differences helped us develop intersubjectivity (Clandinin, 1987), which is vital for us to be more aware of our individualities - our personal potentials, limits as well as biases and myths. Such awareness is healthy for us to sustain the continuity of our individual growth. Our commonality reminds us of our heritage. It also helps us to become more sensitive to the advantages of our new learning context and to make our new learning better focused. It identifies us as a group that bears the responsibility of continuing our cultural legacy in a foreign land.

The process of writing my narrative inquiry is the process by which I crystallize what I become to know through learning to write academic English and how I have come to know. The writing enables me to find myself. The image of myself was blurry when I started the writing but now it comes out clear. Who am I? I am a person with an identify that consists of

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four major aspects – the aspects of a learner, an educator, a Chinese and a westerner. These four aspects are not in four separate compartments but they are interconnected and interacting. As a person, I am trying to balance the multiple aspects of my identity. I wish I could be able to reach a state where my mindset is adequately configured to guide my body to function in various social/cultural situations. It is a non-static state. The process of balancing is a continuing flow between disharmony and harmony.

The process of reconstructing and reflecting on the stories my participants and I have lived and have told is the process that I have acquired the knowledge about myself - the understanding of what I know and how I can know. I have acquired this understanding by paying close attention to the interactions, particularly conflicts, between my internal conditions – my ethical, aesthetic and emotional changes (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988), and the external conditions – the social relationships I am engaged in, including my relationship with my research participants, with my Canadian professors and colleagues. Even more important than paying attention, the telling and retelling of my stories are essential to achieve my self-awakening. The new learning context is a wonderful environment because it offers a wealth of differences. The differences urge me constantly to re-evaluate the events I have experienced. The differences sharpen my self-scrutiny and I believe they do the same for my research participants.

I think I have partly answered the question “What difference does narrative inquiry make to research focused on writing.” Narrative inquiry is marked by an epistemological quality. Doing a narrative inquiry has enabled me to connect writing with my epistemological growth. Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge (Greco, 1999). It tries to answer the two questions – what is knowledge and how can we know. Narrative inquiry answers the questions by the notion of personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994):
"We see personal practical knowledge as in the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body and in the person's future plans and actions. It is knowledge that reflects the individual's prior knowledge and acknowledges the contextual nature of that teacher's knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge carved out of, and shaped by situations: knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through processes of reflections" (Clandinin, 1992, p. 125).

Conventional composition research focuses on generating knowledge of the subject matter (writing) and puts text production at the centre of research. In my narrative research, student writers were the centre. They have been viewed as knowledge holders. The focus of my study was to conceptualize our knowledge about ourselves, about the subject matter (i.e. English academic writing) and about the milieu (i.e. academic community and Canadian socio-cultural context). Through storytelling, we came to understand the nature of knowledge. We realized that while scientific knowledge is important for our education, practical knowledge is the essential force for us to pursue personal growth.

The second difference narrative approach has made for my study is that it has allowed an interdependent relationship between my participants and me to grow through the process. My participants and I were sharing a same goal that was to work together in order to achieve a better understanding of our situations and ourselves. We were having the ownership of the stories and interpretations but we did not have reservations to offer them to each other when the stories and interpretations could contribute to our understanding. During our conversations, we were holding onto our own voices but also validating others' voices. We borrowed 'lenses' from each other to re-examine our own problems from different perspectives. We learned from each other how we could strategically deal with difficulties. Our shared narrative has contributed to our transformation.

The third difference narrative approach has made for my study is that it has allowed me to take the writing of my inquiry as a reflective experiment to find a genre of writing that
can fit myself. In order to have all my participants' voices and my voice heard, I have used multi-vocal text and long quotations of conversations in my research text. Kirsch (1996) cautions that multi-vocal texts may “make new and difficult demands on readers, they require tolerance for ambiguity and contradictory claims” (p. 194). Dr. Allen also suggests that because "oral discourse often contains vague language, we (researchers) need to check back with participants" (Email message, Dr. Allen. July 1999). In addition to returning to the field, I think that the context constructed by conversations can also help to make the meaning of conversational discourse salient. The methodological problem is that as a researcher, I could not present all the original conversations in my research text. I had to cut and select sometimes according to my research purpose. Therefore, readers of my research text will inevitably encounter ambiguity and sometimes contradictory claims while reading the text. But rather than asking for tolerance, I would like to invite my readers to interpret the text from their points of view. The multiple interpretations imply the possibility that meaning can evolve further. We deal with and learn from ambiguities and contradictions in our daily conduct. We can also deal with them in our writing.

I hope that my thesis will be read by ESL composition researchers and instructors. I hope that my thesis could suggest a shift of the focus for ESL composition research and teaching - to move from the text production to the writer. I suggest that researchers and instructors see through the surface of ESL students' language problems. It will be of great help to both ESL students and the English academic community if more members within the community could do what Dr. Connelly and Dr. Allen have done - to understand the students' language errors as possibilities for meaning negotiations and to give space for those students to re-invent selves.
I also hope that my thesis will be read by other Chinese students in North America. There were over ten thousand Chinese students and scholars studying in North America in 1998 (Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, 1998). The number is growing year by year. For all of us, writing is an important part of our cross-cultural learning. Many of us will finally succeed in writing perfect academic essays and establish our membership in the English academic community, with or without realizing that we may have silenced our original voices. The silenced voices are actually reserving a wealth of intelligence which is drawn from our epistemological experiences in different cultures. This intelligence deserves to be declared and to be shared with others in order to build continuity. My participants and I cannot and do not have the intentions to speak for all Chinese students in North America. But I hope that the telling of my participants and me could serve as a mirror for other Chinese students and could encourage more telling, which will benefit the lives of our younger generations and the lives of people back in China.

I also hope that my thesis will be read by educators in Canada. Canada is more and more recognized as a multicultural society. Such a society makes a new demand on educators. An educator in such a society needs to possess a mindset that embraces differences and is able to use differences to combat institutionalized prejudices and personal biases. An educator with such a mindset will make a significant difference in the lives of the children he or she teaches and therefore bring about change to the society.

My thesis is primarily about language. Language has been seen as a tool to express self, or in Halliday's terms (1978), a tool to convey ideational meanings, and as a medium to synthesize social roles, or a means to make interpersonal meanings (Halliday, 1978). The intriguing relationship between the two functions of language indicates the direction for my further exploration. Through the process of writing my thesis, I often felt that my tool - the language
of English - was inefficient to express myself. Sometimes I felt that I had no language to present my thinking. I have worked out the dialectic for the conflict of my role complex. But I have not worked out the dialectic between the languages. Is it because my English is not as good as my Chinese? I ask myself. Joan has also questioned me in our last meeting, when she was commenting on my thesis proposal:

Joan: There is one thing that I don’t totally agree with. It’s my opinion that it is maybe too subjective. Now we feel it is very hard to use English to express ourselves in their form. You propose that it may be because our thinking patterns are different from theirs. But I think it might be just because of our language. Maybe when our English is good enough, we will be able to freely express ourselves and to manipulate English like we manipulate Chinese. Do you think that we could do that if we really knew English? But in the meantime I feel... you know, many things in Chinese, such as idioms, humorous uses, are not translatable into English. I am not sure whether it is because they don’t exist at all in English or we are not aware of them.

Zhaohui: Right, particularly phrases to express emotions. I feel that there are lots of feelings we do not share with English speaking people. We have different patterns of meaning making.

Joan: And the other side of the coin is also true. For example, I could never find an exact Chinese translation for ‘negotiation.’ And also we may still do translation while writing, not completely think in English. I often feel that my deepest thoughts, most original ideas are translated. When I go really deep in my thinking, I can’t think in English because I don’t have the vocabulary. Nor do I have the logic. So I still have to think in Chinese. I think that’s a good point.

Zhaohui: Yes, that’s a very good point.
Can we finally write powerful English with our own signatures, which represent our true personalities or identities? To find the answer, I think I need to experiment and explore further on how to work out the meanings lost in translation. Constant negotiations between languages and different processes of meaning making may help us to finally become bilingual and to be inventive with both English and Chinese.
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