

## **Voices of Chinese Post-80s Students in English Academic Writing**

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### **Abstract**

This study looks into the changing voice of Chinese Post-80s' students in English academic writing. Data were collected qualitatively through interviews with four Chinese Post-80s overseas graduate students and through an examination of their English essays with a focus on discursive features. Findings indicate that Chinese Post-80s' voice is changing as a result of their use of linear logical patterns, reduced influence of the ideology of collectivism, and dismissal of the traditional eight-legged essay. The paper offers pedagogical implications for academic writing programs both in China and in the West. Further research on other discursive features employed in Chinese students' English writing is suggested.

*Keywords:* voice, academic writing, Chinese Post-80s, graduate students, discursive features

### *Introduction*

Voice has been a topic in second language writing that has received considerable scholarly attention. Researchers have focused on the cultural reasons for the gap between the Western voice and the Oriental voice (Bowden, 1995; Kaplan 1966, 1972; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1995, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). In particular, overseas Chinese students' struggles with constructing voice in their academic writing have been thoroughly examined, and the characteristics of their Oriental voice have been well summarized as "subtle, interpretive, interdependent, non-assertive, and even nonverbal" (e.g., Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 48). Most of the Chinese students who participated in these studies were born before China's opening up policy in the late 1970s. Nevertheless, research on the voice of contemporary Post-80s [1] Chinese students in English writing is scarce, and former research findings may not be easily generalized to them.

The Post-80s group currently constitutes the majority of overseas Chinese graduate students. In China, these young people are the first generation born after the introduction of the one-child policy and the implementation of reform and opening-up

policy. Growing up in modern China, this generation has witnessed China's economic prosperity. Living in a digital era, they have access to both Chinese traditional values and Western values. As Zhang (2010) noted, "these circumstances made them a unique generation" (p. 6). Do these circumstances also make their voice in academic writing distinct from that of earlier generations? This question sparked our interest in this research.

We drew from Matsuda's (2001) definition of voice, which he stated is "the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires" (p. 40). Matsuda and Tardy (2007) further added that discursive features include "both form (e.g., sentence structures, organization, the use of transition devices, word choice) as well as content (e.g., the choice of topic and specific examples, argumentative strategies)" (p. 2). This definition of voice is appropriate for guiding the analysis in this paper because it breaks the cultural constraints and points out that voice is not necessarily associated with any ideology or exists in any language.

In this paper, we examined the discursive features employed by Chinese Post-80s overseas graduate students in their English academic writing, including the placement of topic sentences, the use of transition words, the employment of first person pronouns, the use of quotations from famous revolutionary leaders, and the influence of the traditional Chinese eight-legged essay. The five discursive features contribute to the construction of voice in academic writing for the following reasons. First, the placement of topic sentences and the use of transition words represent students' logical pattern (i.e., the way that they organize and express their thoughts). In addition, the use of first person pronouns and the employment of quotations from revolutionary leaders represent whether they seek to construct authorial voice through presenting their own views or through speaking through the mouth of authorities. Finally, the eight-legged essay with strictly prescribed content and form may have influence on students' coherence and directiveness in writing, as contended by many scholars (Cai, 1993; Kaplan, 1972; Matalene, 1985).

While Chinese college English teachers need to increase their awareness of voice in English academic writing, Western instructors need to provide international students with explicit writing instruction and to improve their own sociocultural awareness so as to understand the plural nature of voice in cross-cultural contexts. In this article, we first review previous studies on the voice of Chinese student writers. Next, we present the data and analysis of an empirical study of four Chinese Post-80s overseas graduate students at a Canadian university. We also present our perceptions concerning their use of these discursive features. The results have pedagogical implications for English academic writing programs both in China and in the West.

### *Oriental Voice in English Academic Writing*

#### **Spiral Logical Pattern**

In second language writing scholarship, the logical pattern is one of the dominating issues that can be traced back to nearly half a century ago. For example, Kaplan (1966) described the Oriental thought pattern as spiral and the Western thought pattern as

linear. Kaplan further described the spiral thought pattern as “the circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly” (p. 10). Shen (1989) also indicated that his own illogical thinking pattern and *alogical* thinking pattern clashed with the Western logical system. The illogical thinking pattern referred to gradually approaching a topic “from the surface to core” (p. 462), instead of reaching it abruptly at the very beginning. The alogical thinking pattern, also called *yijing*, was “a creative process of inducing oneself, while reading a piece of literature or looking at piece of art, to create mental pictures, in order to reach a unity of nature, the author, and the reader” (p. 463-464). He further mentioned that his illogical and alogical thought patterns contradicted the Western logical approach in which the topic sentence often appears at the beginning.

Such descriptions of Chinese thought patterns as spiral, illogical, and alogical are not stand-alone cases, as many other studies indicated similar patterns. For example, as Matalene (1985) stated, “to be indirect in both spoken and written discourse, to expect the audience to infer meanings rather than to have them spelled out is a defining characteristic of Chinese rhetoric” (p.801). Gu (1992) also described a kind of Chinese writing pattern called *hua long dianjing*, which is much appreciated and valued by the Chinese. Translated to English, it means drawing a dragon first and dotting the eyes last, elaborating on the topic extensively in the first few paragraphs and explicitly stating the main idea in the last paragraph.

### **Collectivist voice**

Voice has often been associated with individualism, rather than collectivism. Bowden (1995) pointed out that voice originated from counterculture movements throughout the Western world in the late 1960s that focused on individual rights. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) concluded the characteristic of the individual voice is “clear, overt, expressive, and even assertive and demonstrative” (p. 48). They further indicated that such individual voice was contrary to the non-assertive collectivist voice. Scollon (1991) also indicated that the Western concept of voice as self-expression is “productive in North America” because it is based on individualism, and that is why voice is “unintelligible to Chinese writers” who have grown up in a collective society (p. 4).

A salient characteristic of collectivist voice is the avoidance of using first person pronouns in Chinese students’ writing. Hyland (2002a; 2002b) found that Chinese undergraduate writers tended to use fewer first person pronouns in their English academic compositions than experts did in their academic essays, and more specifically, they restricted their use of first person to achieve low-stakes functions, such as acknowledging assistance, stating purpose, and explaining procedures. He concluded that one of the reasons for such avoidance was the clash between students’ collectivist forms of self-representation and the individual stance of strong writer identity implied by “I.” Shen (1989) also stated that his avoidance of the use of “I” and his preference for the use of “we” were attributed to the political pressure at that time. Showing respect for the Communist Party, Mao Zedong, and other Marxist authorities was of greatest importance in his Chinese essays.

### **Influence of the Eight-legged Essay**

Many scholars have contended that the eight-legged essay exerts great influence on Chinese students' English academic writing (Kaplan, 1972; Matalene, 1985). During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), "the 'Eight-Legged Essay' was the required eight-part response to civil service examination questions based on Confucian thought" (Elman, 2009, p. 695). Both the essay's content and form were strictly prescribed within each part. For example, the writer was required to reveal his understanding of the title in the first part and to use parallel structure to claim his viewpoints in the sixth part (Kirkpatrick, 1997). Similarly, Kaplan (1972) attributed the lack of coherence in Chinese students' English essays to the influence of this classical form of Chinese writing. He compared four essays written by Chinese second language (L2) students with the English version of an eight-legged essay and found that the discursive features of the traditional Chinese essay were used throughout these students' academic writing, such as elaborating issues irrelevant to the topic. Therefore, he concluded that the eight-legged essay "has clearly endured into modern times" (Kaplan, 1972, p.49). In the same vein, Matalene (1985) also found that her students always presented their viewpoints in the later paragraphs. She believed such indirectness was greatly influenced by the eight-legged essay because the argument was required to follow the discussion of the theme and its significance in the eight-legged essay.

In sum, the Chinese students' voice depicted in the above studies was spiral, collectivistic, and influenced by the traditional Chinese eight-legged essay. However, most of these studies were issued in and around the 1990s, and most of the Chinese overseas students who had participated in these studies were born in the 1970s. At the present time, most international graduate students were born between 1980 and 1989. Few researchers have taken into consideration the fact that Chinese international students of different age groups may have a different voice in their English academic writing due to the dramatic changes of Chinese society in the past decades. Therefore, we decided to investigate Chinese Post-80s' voice in their English essays.

#### *Case Studies of Chinese Post-80s' Voice in English Academic Writing*

The purpose of this study is to explore how Chinese Post-80s overseas graduate students demonstrate voice in their English academic writing. Specifically, we aimed to address the following questions:

1. From what sources or programs have students learned academic writing in their Chinese undergraduate education and Western graduate education?
2. What are the logical patterns (i.e., the placement of topic sentence and transition devices) demonstrated in the writing of Chinese Post-80s overseas graduate students?
3. In what ways and at what level does the ideology of collectivism influence their English academic writing?
4. How does the traditional eight-legged essay structure influence their English academic writing?

We used a qualitative case study design to collect data from four Chinese students who are pursuing graduate study at a Canadian university. The four participants included Yang, Wei, Lan and Jing (all pseudonyms), all of whom were enrolled in four different

programs: Computer Engineering, Medicine, Oil and Gas Engineering, and Education. Table 1 provides an overview of their educational background.

**Table 1. Education Background of the Four Chinese Students**

Student Name	Year of Birth	Year of Admission	Graduate Program in Canada	Undergraduate Program in China
Yang	1988	2011 Fall	Computer Engineering	Computer Engineering
Wei	1988	2011 Fall	Medicine	Medicine
Lan	1985	2010 Fall	Oil & Gas Engineering	Civil Engineering
Jing	1981	2012 Fall	Education	Political Education

Data for this study were drawn from one round of semi-structured interviews with each student and a collection of English essays from each participant. We focused on the following discursive features in their English academic writing: the logical pattern in terms of the placement of the topic sentence and the use of transition words, the use of first person pronouns, the employment of quotations from famous revolutionary leaders, and the structure of the essay. All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and data were analyzed using constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), generating themes for further discussion. In particular, inductive analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) was used to reduce themes into a manageable size.

### *Findings*

#### **Topic Sentence Placement**

The four students acknowledged that when they wrote the English paper at the graduate level, they placed the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph. Not only did they follow this Western writing rule, but they were also aware of the cultural differences behind it. For example, Wei said he placed the topic sentence at the end when he wrote Chinese argumentative essays because the presence of the important point at the end of the paragraph was valued in Chinese writing. However, in his graduate-level English essays, he placed the topic sentence at the very beginning to help the reader understand the main idea of the paragraph. Lan said the placement of the topic sentence was flexible in Chinese essays but fixed in English essays. As he stated, "When I write academic writing in Chinese, maybe I will put the topic sentence at the end or in the middle sometimes, but in English academic writing I need to place it at the beginning, very often, it is the paragraph's first sentence to clearly indicate what the paragraph is about". Similarly, Jing mentioned *yijing* was appreciated in Chinese writing, while directness was valued in English writing.

In Jing and Wei's essays, the topic sentence was usually directly stated at the beginning to summarize the main idea of that paragraph. Such straightforwardness could be seen in the following extract from Wei's essay:

*Studies on the association between dietary factors and colorectal cancer (CRC) have largely focused on red and processed (e.g., pickled) meat, and other macro-nutrients. For instance, pickled meat has been found associated with increased CRC incidence and worsened CRC survival; and total energy intake related to a higher risk of CRC incidence, but a better CRC survival. Apart from these, recent studies have also begun to examine other dietary factors, such as micro-nutrients, which might also have significant impact on the CRC etiology and development.*

Wei stated the main idea at the very beginning: the focus of the previous studies on the association between dietary factors and CRC. This sentence acted as a topic sentence supported by the remainder of the paragraph. The second sentence moved on to the description of the association that had been found so far and then the last sentence described the ongoing research on micro-nutrients. All these sentences were related to the association between dietary factors and CRC articulated in the first sentence.

When asked about how they came to realize such different writing cultures, all four students said that their awareness of the directness of English academic writing in terms of the fixed placement of the topic sentence was gained from the English courses they took during their undergraduate study in China and was reinforced by the English academic writing courses they took during their graduate study in Canada.

The four students pointed out that although they did not have specific English academic writing courses at their undergraduate universities, they had all taken general English courses focusing on three areas: reading, translation, and writing, all of which had a main purpose of helping them pass the exit exam for undergraduates called the *College English Test Band Four* (CET-4). Although they could not remember all the writing skills they had learned from those courses, placing the topic sentence at the very beginning was one of the rules they had remembered clearly up until now. Wei told us that his English teacher had taught them an English writing model in order to make sure they could get high marks in the CET-4 writing section. In this model, each body paragraph consisted of presenting the main idea in the first sentence, giving some examples in the following sentences to support the main idea, and making a conclusion at the end.

The four students all mentioned that when they started their graduate study in Canada, the university offered them a general English academic writing course that was mandatory for most international students. One of the skills stressed in this course was placing the topic sentence at the beginning. Yang told us that the university also provided him with a one-month English program that was geared to international engineering students. This program taught international students the presentation skills and the academic writing styles specified in their discipline of engineering. Yang said the directness of the topic sentence was mentioned in this course as well. In addition, his advisor told him how to organize the paper and mentioned the direct placement of the topic sentence. Therefore, it was not a struggle for these students to follow the straightforwardness of the topic sentence, and such a linear thought pattern was used in their English essays.

While we agree with the descriptions of traditional Chinese thought patterns, we feel that we also need to adopt a developmental perspective in viewing the influence of

cultural thought patterns on students' writing. With globalization and easy access to information in the contemporary world, Chinese writing styles could be influenced by multiple factors and thus the linear thought pattern could be found in Chinese argumentative essays. Theoretical evidence of Chinese students' straightforwardness in writing can be found in Wang and Li's *University Writing Course: New Edition* (2008), one of the contemporary Chinese writing books employed by most universities in China. In this book, they suggested students write the sub-points at the beginning of each body paragraph. Additional empirical evidence is provided by Chen (2011), who conducted a study on the use of topic sentences in Chinese students' argumentative essays. In the 45 essays collected from Chinese undergraduate students, 80.68% of topic sentences appeared at the beginning of the paragraph and 12.5% were in the middle. Chen concluded that Chinese students are "capable of direct writing" (p. 26). The above theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that the linear logical pattern is encouraged in Chinese argumentative writing, and contemporary Chinese students are more likely to place the topic sentence at the beginning of their argumentative writing.

### **Use of Transition Devices**

The students acknowledged the importance of using transition words in their English academic writing. For example, as Wei reported, "I think transition words are very helpful because it is easy for my readers to understand and to accept my ideas." Even Jing, who began her graduate study shortly before, articulated that "with the use of transition words, I can attract readers' attention and make my essay coherent."

In the following conclusion section extracted from Lan's essay, she linked each sentence with a transition word or phrase. By using *but*, she illustrated that the environmental impacts of offshore oil and gas operations could not be overlooked; by using *on one hand* and *on the other hand*, she pointed out two different ways to control the environment impact; and finally by using *so*, she concluded the whole paragraph with an idea about sustainable economic opportunity. However, it needs to be pointed out that *but* and *so* should not appear at the beginning of a sentence in academic writing, and that they should be replaced by *however* and *therefore*, respectively.

*The development of offshore oil and gas project on the coastline of Newfoundland and Labrador, without doubt, will bring great economic benefits to the province and will make the city and community a prosperous future. But the environmental impact should always be in mind, because the damage would not be remediable. On one hand, the adverse effect could be investigated precisely by field research, in order to have more data to support the point. On the other hand, right now it is important that government and industry officials closely monitor how oil is produced, refined, stored, and delivered to market to reduce the impact on the environment. So the sustainable economic opportunity is encouraged while respecting the conservation to the marine environment.*

The use of transition words was another basic rule that these students have learnt from their English courses both in China and in Canada. According to the syllabus for CET-4 (2006), students are required to use linking words to indicate contrast, cause and effect, intensification, and other logical relationships. Although CET-4 writing is far from a full-

length essay, its emphasis on the importance of transitional devices is undeniable. Compared to the English course in her undergraduate study, Jing told us she felt the instruction of transitions in her English academic writing course was more systematic because she had learnt more categories of the logical relationships, such as clarification and adversity.

### **Use of First Person Pronouns**

The four students all articulated that they seldom used first person pronouns in their English essays because these pronouns sound unprofessional, informal, weak, and subjective. For example, Yang said he had read other experts' essays in his field of computer engineering and found that these experts rarely used *I* or *we* in their paper, so he thought it would be unprofessional for him to use these in his own writing. He further added that "for the part I modified and the part I developed myself, I will use 'I'. If I did a study in a group, I will use 'we' instead." The following introductory section of his essay supported his statement:

*This paper introduces an improved version of MIPS implemented by VHDL. Compared to the design of pipelined MIPS in Hennessy's books [1] [2], we add another forwarding unit in the MEM stage which forwards from MEM/WB pipeline to MEM stage in order to remove the potential hazards in certain situations. Meanwhile, minor changes are made in the MEM-to-EX forwarding part and the hazard detection unit. We also add a MAC unit to support the multiplication-and-accumulation instructions. Brief introductions of each stage of the system are provided below, along with the simulation and synthesis results.*

Yang used "we" not only because this was a joint project done with his classmate, but also because he wanted to point out the two units they had added to Hennessy's design of pipelined MIPS, which echoed his statement in the interview. However, this paragraph was the only place where he used the first person pronoun; he avoided them in the remainder of the essay.

Wei thought it was weak to support his viewpoints with the use of first person pronouns. As he noted, "In academic writing, you are supposed to use evidence to back up your ideas, instead of using your own ideas to force readers to believe you." In addition, because his field was relevant to statistics, he preferred to support his arguments with numbers. Lan also felt it was too informal to use first person because these pronouns sounded like stating personal opinions. Finally, when she was working in collaboration with other Canadian students on some projects, Lan found that they never used first person pronouns in their writing, and she followed what her peers had done in their writing.

Different from the above three students, Jing said when she completed her undergraduate degree in the field of political education in China, she was used to using *I* in her Chinese essays to voice her own point of view. However, when she started her graduate program in Canada, she came to perceive that objectivity characterizes English academic writing, so it was inappropriate and overly subjective for her to use first person pronouns in English essays. In terms of writing instruction, the four students pointed out that neither the English courses at their undergraduate universities nor



those offered by their graduate university taught them specifically about the usage of first person pronouns. They were all led by their own perceptions gained from reading experts' essays and their Canadian classmates' writing.

Chinese students' reluctance to mention themselves in their writing may be more or less influenced by their collectivist sociocultural background. However, we could not overlook other reasons. For instance, Tang and John (1999) pointed out that "some students may be avoiding the use of the first person simply because of some vague preconceived notion that academic writing should be distant and impersonal" (p. 35). Hyland (2002a) indicated that such uncertainty of self-mention in writing was partially due to the disagreements among textbook writers. He cited writing instructions related to the use of first person from several textbooks. Some books advise students not to use first person pronouns but to use passive voice and it-subject clauses to achieve objectivity, while others encourage students to present strong authorial voice through the use of the first person. Hyland (2002a) further pointed out that such textbooks would confuse not only second language students, but also native English speaking students in their first year of university. In addition, students may feel powerless to expose their opinions to their teachers who they though are authoritative in the field. As Tang and John (1999) argued, "students feel insecure about the validity of their claims, seeing themselves to be at one of the lowest rungs of the academic ladder" (p. 34).

### **Using Quotations from Revolutionary Leaders**

Yang, Wei, and Lan claimed that they never used quotations from Marx, Lenin, or Mao in their English academic writing because they believed these great revolutionary leaders' words were not relevant to their fields of study. They acknowledged that they were required to memorize some of these quotations when they were in high school in China; however, they were not required to use them in their Chinese essays in their disciplines when they were undergraduate students. As Wei stated, "these quotations are more of social science about people, ideas, and views, but my subject is about how the human body works. It's nothing to do with my research background, not relevant." Moreover, after so many years, they said they had forgotten most of these quotations.

Jing did not use any revolutionary leaders' words in her academic writing either; however, she believed she was somewhat influenced by some of these quotations because of her previous education and work experience. Her major in undergraduate study was Political Education, and she had been a politics teacher in a college for almost eight years before she came to Canada, so she had profound understanding of Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. In particular, she said, "I am greatly influenced by Historical Materialism and Dialectics, and now my specialization is educational policy, so I think to some extent, the two theories will influence me especially when I compare the theory with the practice." In other words, these quotations might influence her way of considering a problem or an issue.

It is important to note that Chinese Post-80s students have grown up in a relatively liberal social environment compared to their parents' generation, whose upbringing was shadowed by the Cultural Revolution. These young people are only required to use basic principles of Marxism and Maoism to support a thesis in their Chinese argumentative

writing (Liu, 2005), whereas their parents' generation were required to memorize a large number of quotations from Marx, Lenin, and Mao (Lu, 1987). Moreover, in comparison to their parents, this young generation is granted more freedom of speech. Their parents were not even allowed to speak English during the Cultural Revolution, fearing that they would be denounced as "counter-revolutionaries" (Lu, 1987). China Post-80s students have also grown up in the era of computer and internet and have increasing exposure to the Western world. With the birth of online social networking services and microblogging, they have more freedom and channels to express themselves. And with fewer political constraints, this generation tends to be more expressive of their personal views.

### **Prior Knowledge of the Eight-Legged Essay**

These students acknowledged that they had heard of this ancient Chinese essay structure but they did not know any specifics. For example, Yang said he deliberately searched relevant information on this type of writing as soon as he received our interview questions and recalled the characteristic of the eight-legged essay that he had learned in middle school the prescribed content within each part. Lan also said she remembered that in the eight-legged essay, each part followed certain rules regarding the content and structure, such as, "what to write in this part, how to start, how to transition, and how to end." It is evident that the only element they still remembered about this traditional essay is its fixed content and structure.

When it came to its influence on their English academic writing, most of the students claimed that such a classical form of writing had no effect on the way they wrote because they had not been trained to write in this essay style at all. However, Wei believed that the eight-legged essay had positively influenced his English academic writing. Although his knowledge of this traditional writing was no more than its prescribed structure before we interviewed him, he felt the English essay was similar to the eight-legged essay simply based on this point. He reported:

*If you want to have your paper published in Western academic world, you have to follow the very fixed structure, like stating your research problem first, and then reviewing the relevant literature, indicating your purpose, introducing your method, and then presenting findings.*

Because the two writing styles bore similarity in the rigid prescribed structure, accepting and following the fixed structure and content in English academic writing was easier for him to do.

It was evident that the eight-legged essay exerts little influence on Post-80s' Chinese writing, let alone on students' English academic writing. The reasons for this lack of influence are multifaceted. First, since the overthrow of the last imperial dynasty of China in 1912, numerous scholars have criticized the use of the eight-legged essays. For example, in the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s and 1920s, some reputed scholars rejected the use of eight-legged essays and instead encouraged the use of vernacular literature (Chow, 1960). Second, Mao, the founder of the People's Republic of China and a well-known literary figure in China, also criticized this style of essay writing in his speech delivered in 1942 for its long and empty pages, pretentiousness of

intimidating people, and rigid arrangement of items under a set of headings, among others (Mao, 1955). His critique had far-reaching influence in China for the decades to come.

Furthermore, according to *The University Chinese Writing Coursebook* (Wang et al., 1993), the general structure of Chinese argumentative essays is a three-part structure (i.e., raising a problem, analyzing the problem, and providing a solution). This structure is quite similar to the English problem-solution pattern, which includes a description of a situation, identification of a problem, description of a solution, and evaluation of the solution (Swales & Feak, 2004). Swales and Feak (2004) pointed out that this organizational pattern is common in English academic writing, which tends to be more argumentative and evaluative compared to other structures. Finally, contemporary Chinese students are not required to write eight-legged essays for any genre of writing. The sample texts they memorized in high school might resemble the traditional structure, and they may thus subtly influence on their writing. However, students have been explicitly taught that the three-part Chinese argumentative writing structure which is close to the problem-solution texts in English.

#### *Discussion*

#### **Pedagogical Implications**

In this study, we argue that Chinese Post-80s students' Oriental voice has changed due to the discursive features that are socially available to this generation. However, the gap between their voice and the voice expected by their Western teachers still exists. For instance, in this study, students failed to build authorial voice by using first person due to their uncertainty about the presentation of personal voice. In particular, they tended to avoid first person pronouns to express their opinions and new ideas, and their voice appeared unassertive in their English essays.

These gaps in expectations may be caused by the disconnect between test-oriented English classes in China and the English academic writing tasks required by Western colleges. According to the syllabus for CET-4 (2006), the requirements for writing focus more on language than on content and structure (i.e., accuracy in expression, coherence, and sentence structure). The college English curriculum in China does not seem to prepare students well for the academic writing tasks faced by them in their further education in English-speaking countries. Therefore, it is recommended that educational stakeholders in China consider this issue and address it.

In addition, the gap between voice of the four students and the voice expected by their Western teachers may also be a result of the inductive approach to teaching writing in Western colleges that is not familiar to Chinese L2 students. For example, Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) pointed out that inductive approach encourages students to "discover" form in their writing process" (p.23). That is to say, students are supposed to acquire writing skills without explicit teaching. This kind of pedagogical approach is popular in college writing programs because the number of native-speaker students is much larger than that of L2 students in the college. However, the effectiveness of applying this L1 writing pedagogy to L2 students is yet to be determined, considering the two groups of students do not share a common culture background (Ramanathan &

Atkinson, 1995). Furthermore, some rules in English composition are too vague to make any sense to L2 students. As Shen (1989) stated that although his composition instructors told him “be yourself” and “Just write what you think” (p. 460) several times, he still could not understand the actual meaning of these instructions.

International higher education requires joint efforts of both the home country instruction and that of the host country in order to bridge the gap between students’ educational experiences in China and in the West. Chinese colleges need to improve their English teachers’ professional qualifications in English writing by providing further teacher education. The current English teaching in China mainly focuses on grammar and sentence structures to prepare students for the CET-4 test, and the concept of constructing voice in writing might be alien to most Chinese EFL teachers (Li, 1996). As Hyland (2002b) suggested, teachers should help their students construct voice in their writing by creating their own awareness of the issue of voice. To do so, further teacher education is necessary. Meanwhile, Western colleges need to provide L2 writers with discipline specific writing instructions. According to Hyland (2002b), teachers could help their students with analyzing expert essays to figure out the specific conventions in their field and their subject teachers’ expectations so that they are able to develop their voice and join their disciplinary communities.

### **Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

It is important to point out that while this study drew data from a small sample size, it is not our intention to generalize the findings to other contexts. Our purposes are to indicate that Chinese Post-80s’ voice is changing as a result of their use of linear logical patterns, reduced influence of the ideology of collectivism, and dismissal of the traditional eight-legged essay, and to offer pedagogical implications for academic writing programs both in China and in the West.

As noted above, discursive features include both form and content (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). That is, these features include sentence structure, organization, transition devices, and word choice, as well as the choice of topic and argumentative strategies. To date, many researchers have examined the association between the discursive features of the first person pronoun (Hyland, 2002a; Hyland, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999); however, few studies have looked into other discursive features such as sentence structures, word choice, the choice of topic and specific examples, and argumentative strategies. Therefore, further research on L2 students’ voice in English academic writing by looking at how they use these discursive features is needed.

In addition, in this paper we have explored the Chinese Post-80s Oriental voice only in terms of topic sentences, transition words, first personal pronouns, quotations from famous revolutionary leaders, and the influence of the traditional Chinese eight-legged essay. Other discursive differences may exist between the Post-80s Chinese students and the former generations in China. Empirical studies on cross-generation differences in voice construction may be a valuable addition to the field of second language writing research.

Finally, this study examined the construction of voice only in terms of the discursive features that international students chose to use in their writing. We would like to note

that that the notion of voice is not limited to the use of discursive features. As Ivanic and Camps (2001) argued, voice is a reflection of writers' sense of authoritativeness. The establishment of authorial identity not only includes the employment of first person pronouns, but also involves the use of categorical present tense verbs, the use of evaluation, and the use of modal makers of certainty. Cadman (1997) also pointed out that the representation of writers' voice is related to "the sense of identity which informs their approach" (p. 8). Therefore, further research on authorial identity is needed to better understand how Chinese Post-80s' students demonstrate voice in English academic writing.

### Note

[1] The Post-80s (or the Post-1980) is a colloquial term to refer to the generation who were born between 1980 to 1989 in Mainland China, after the adoption of the one-child and open-door policies, and who currently range in age from 23 to 33.

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