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“Searching For An Entrance” And Finding A Two-Way Door: Using Poetry to Create East-West Contact Zones in TESOL Teacher Education

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Abstract

Discrimination against Non-Native Speakers (NNS) of English in the TESOL profession is wide-spread and well-documented, despite significant evidence of NNS contributions as TESOL educators and scholars. Several scholars have argued

for the importance of aesthetic and autobiographic narratives to democratize the TESOL field and showcase varieties of minoritized perspectives that often go unheard (Canagarajah, 2006; Nelson, 2011; Pavlenko, 2003). To this end, we present one thread of a larger study examining Chinese and Taiwanese international graduate students' participation in arts-based pedagogies within a graduate program in TESOL. We focus on their participation in poetry classes and the ways in which these instructional experiences created opportunities for both foreign-born students and U.S.-born faculty and students alike to revise assumptions related to cultural literacy and U.S. academic norms. The aim of this article is to showcase insights from Chinese graduate students' poems and interviews with Chinese-, Taiwanese- and U.S.-born course participants, illustrating how arts-based learning opportunities work to expand all students' potential for double vision, creating vibrant Eastern-Western exchanges of intellectual thought and intercultural understanding.

Introduction

While the numbers of Chinese students in U.S. higher education institutions has risen steadily since the 1980s, it wasn't until 2009/10 that China became the top country of origin for students coming to the United States. According to the Open Doors Report (2011) 22% (157,588) of all international students in the U.S. (723,277) are from China, a rise of over 155% from 2003/4 (61,765). Chinese-speaking students from Taiwan comprise an additional 3.4% (24,818), making Taiwan the fifth leading place of origin for international students. The economic impact of international students is indisputable, contributing over \$20 billion to the U.S. economy. Over 70% of all international students' funding comes from non-U.S. sources, and most pay out-of-state tuition, making them a very desirable population for universities to recruit.

Institutional responses to address international students' linguistic and cultural diversity are often framed as "services" – e.g. courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991; Jordan, 1997); classes for international teaching assistants in oral and written L2 communication (Abraham & Plakans, 1988; Rubin & Smith, 1990); writing centers for international students to improve English compositions (Zamel & Spack, 2004); international coffees and other social events to integrate students into academic social life (Trice, 2004); policy offices to manage bureaucratic concerns (e.g. student visas) related to immigration status (Urias & Yeakey, 2009).

With little exception, university services and programs aimed at international students are typically viewed as remedial accommodations to help overcome cultural, linguistic, social, and bureaucratic barriers and/or deficits and integrate students' into academic communication along U.S. norms (Zamel, 2004; Pennycook, 1996). This deficit orientation tends to

perpetuate perceptions of international students, and large numbers of Chinese-speaking students in particular, as “in need” of costly and/or time-consuming accommodation or remediation rather than as rich contributors and active creators of new, international academic life. As Villanueva (1993) remembers from his own schooling experiences, institutions of higher learning often perceive ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] students’ “bad language” as indicative of “insufficient cognitive development,” (p. 11) and placing inappropriate demands on U.S. faculty and resources. In contrast, Zamel (2004) argues: “Rather than seeing the implications of inclusion and diversity in opposition to excellence and academic standards (as they often are at meetings convened to discuss these issues), learning to teach ESOL students challenges us [U.S. faculty] to reconceptualize teaching and thus contributes to and enhances learning for all students” (p. 14).

This article presents one thread of a larger study examining Chinese and Taiwanese international graduate students’ participation in arts-based pedagogies within a graduate teacher education program in TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages]. We focus on their participation in poetry classes in particular, and the ways in which these instructional experiences created opportunities for both foreign-born students and U.S.-born faculty and students alike to revise assumptions related to cultural literacy and U.S. academic norms. By engaging native and non-native English speaking TESOL educators in training in a creative poetry writing course, we respond to Nelson’s (2011) call to increase “critical narrative knowledge,” inviting students to take themselves seriously as narrative lyric poets and surprise one another and themselves through poetic discovery. Our aim is to showcase insights from Chinese L1 graduate students’ poems and interviews with Chinese-, Taiwanese- and U.S.-born course participants, illustrating how arts-based learning opportunities work to expand all students’ potential for double vision, creating vibrant East-West exchanges of intellectual thought and intercultural understanding.

Like many TESOL teacher preparation programs in the U.S., our graduate program has also seen a dramatic rise in Chinese student enrollment and a simultaneous decrease in the number of U.S.-born students. There has been a great deal of research surrounding discrimination against non-native Speakers (NNS) in the TESOL profession and abundant evidence of discriminatory preferences for native speakers, even if they are pedagogically untrained. As Ping and Ma (2012) pointed out, “the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) – the belief that native speakers are ideal teachers – has resulted in non-native-English-speaking teachers being considered second-class citizens in the field of TESOL” (p. 280). Park (2012) further discussed the possible identity transformation for NNS students in TESOL programs and highlighted the disconnect between NNS students’ previous experiences and their TESOL program. Pavlenko (2003), on the other hand, described the “joys of double vision” in TESOL – suggesting there are many advantages of being in the field of Second Language

Acquisition and of it – studying a field that is deeply interconnected to one’s own multilingual identity. Prominent, international TESOL scholars have called for writing that is simultaneously “creative and critical” (e.g. Canagarajah, 2006, p. 329) and for “crafted narratives of classroom life” (Nelson, 2011), “that are meant to be evocative and aesthetically engaging” (p. 465).

The Pedagogical Arts of the “Contact Zone”

Pratt’s (1991) essay introduced the concept of the “contact zone,” a term she used to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 34). This term emerged from analysis of a bilingual Quechua-Spanish manuscript, titled a “new chronicle,” dated in the city of Cuzco in 1613. The author, Guaman Poma, used a familiar colonial genre to agentively write his own story in his own words, “using the conqueror’s language” (Spanish) as well as his own (Quechua) as a form of self-representation as well as of resistance and critique (p. 35). This process, which Pratt (1991) defined as a transcultural contact zone, had also been theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), invoking the Aztecan term *nepantla*, a permanent in-between space where one dwells in collision – between languages, nation-states, sexual orientations, genders, and cultural assumptions. *Nepantla* compliments the collisions addressed in Foucault’s (1984) “genealogical method.” This method helps us understand that every interactional exchange, such as one between a native and non-native English speaker, is embedded within regimes of truth, where “humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination (p. 85). Foucault’s method shares with Pratt and Anzaldúa the critical intent to identify the discursive and embodied regimes that allow abuses of power and authority to take place, to denaturalize these abuses, and discover life-giving alternatives. These scholars as well as Butler (2004), Britzman (1994), and others working within poststructural identity frameworks, testify to the power of language to construct and shift identity. As a result of the intersections between language and identity, the guiding question becomes, “What, given the contemporary order of being, can I be?” (Butler, 2004, p. 58). If identity within a poststructural framework is not a question of what one is, but what one does within the possibilities and limits of discourse, this opens up every embodied moment of discourse to the creative options for what one might become through language(s). We adopt these poststructural concepts such as regimes of truth, *nepantla* and the contact zone to lay the strong theoretical basis for an analysis of the poems written by bilingual TESOL educators in preparation for living in the two languages and cultures.

While the poststructural concepts mentioned above have made an impact on university curricula, including major shifts to include ethnic and women’s studies at campuses across the United States, a widespread assimilationist paradigm is still alive and well in terms of English

language norms and international student education. The University might be said to be one of Anderson's (1991) "imagined communities" where solidarity is achieved on an "essentially imagined basis" (p. 74) related to standard English ability, where language is both "code" and "Code," a medium of communication as well as a symbol of genuine belonging. Along with Paris (2012), we do not believe current "culturally responsive" university practices go far enough to sustain and value cultural and linguistic sharing and transformation across difference (rather than be merely "responsive" to it).

The title of this paper stems from Runqing, one Chinese participant's description of a challenge posed by poetry instruction. When she reflected on her initial poetry experiences, she wrote:

We [Chinese graduate students in TESOL] could get the main point from [other] Chinese students' poems while English native-speaker readers are still searching for the entrance...the insurmountable cultural gaps and poetry writing conventions between China and America definitely deepen and broaden the difficulties of learning and writing processes for Chinese students in second language poetry writing.

In this study we found evidence to suggest that while students' may claim to be "searching for an entrance," poetry – and perhaps the arts in general – offer pedagogical tools for finding a two-way door, a place where TESOL educators, native- and non-native speakers alike, learn to teach English for aesthetic cross-cultural and cross-linguistic understanding. As students discuss each newly generated poem in the poetry class, what was once believed to be "insurmountable cultural gaps" may actually become more accessible through collective puzzling over the art-making process. Pratt's (1991) chapter describes a search in education for "the pedagogical arts of the contact zone," ways to create K-16+ and graduate school curricula which elicit and honor discourses of belonging and critique, attentive to university student demands such as: "I don't just want you to let me be here, I want to belong here; this institution should belong to me as much as it does to anyone else" (p. 39). Like Pratt (1991), Davis (2008), Lerman (2011) and many others, we, too, turn to the arts as powerful tools for establishing international students' rights to participate fully in U.S. academic and global TESOL discourses as well as to discover, alongside U.S.-born peers, forms of expression "that attest to a human connection contained in and beyond difference" (Davis, 2008, p. 23).

The Art in TESOL Research and Practice

Literacy & TESOL scholars have long documented the impact of arts-based teaching strategies such as creative writing (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2006; Fisher, 2007; Haddix, 2011), applied theatre (Conrad, 2008), digital storytelling (Hull & Katz, 2006; Nogueron-Liu, 2012),

and visual art (Wang, 2006) have had upon learners' investments, processes, and outcomes in English. For example, Dabach (2010) demonstrates the strategy of pairing an aesthetic tool or process with a content area skill, in particular using visual imagery to develop writing skills with English language learners. Moore (2002) argues that the use of poetic meters, emerging rhyme and rhythm patterns in writing process helps English language learners to be active language players and successful language learners. Advocates of such arts-based pedagogies argue that formal language instruction is more effective if it is embedded within lessons which intrinsically motivate learners to acquire English for self-expression and creativity (Chappell & Faltis, 2013).

Arts education scholars (e.g. Davis, 2008; Hetland, Winner, Veneema & Sheridan, 2007) have documented several unique qualities of learning through the arts which also apply to English language learning: persistence, imagination, agency, expression, empathy, respect for multiple viewpoints, social engagement, and responsibility. Louis (2005) documented his use of theatre of the oppressed strategies with adult TESOL learners, identifying the ways in which these methods disrupted learners' uncritical and passive classroom tendencies. These humanizing, integrated purposes of arts education underscore the very heart of language learning: to create new multilingual nepantla selves, make new meaning in the world, form new relationships, imagine new futures in contact zones, and question the status quo regimes of truth.

Research on L2 Poetry Writing

Studies on the use of poetry writing in TESOL education indicate that revision seems to be a necessary and indispensable process in creative writing as well as in second language acquisition (Bizarro, 1990). According to Hanauer (2010), the revision of poetry is "not by language correctness in normative terms but rather through the consideration of accuracy of the expression to personally held understandings" (p. 9). Therefore, poetry writing does not follow an objective or universal standard about correctness or incorrectness, which might be very refreshing for international students whose previous English learning may have focused solely on skills and grammar (Ostrow & Chang, 2012). In addition, revision is a helpful metaphor in TESOL teacher education, where teachers must constantly create and revise classroom lessons to suit individual and changing student needs.

Whereas Pennycook's (1996) interviews with Hong Kong TESOL students revealed the challenges students perceived writing academic prose in a "colonial language," Achugar (2009), Pavlenko (1998), Hanauer (2010) and Courtivron (2003) have all found that creative writing in a second language offers bilinguals an opportunity to define bilingualism as a post-colonial asset. In Hanauer's (2010) study, a student poet remarked, "writing poetry and this class enable us to have our own voice and speak in English but with our own mother tongue"

(p. 8). According to Hanauer (2010), this statement reflects “the central aim and tension of second language poetry writing – the ability to express one's own voice and experiences in a second language” (p. 8). For this reason, Hanauer (2011) designates poetry writing in the L2 classroom as a form of meaningful literacy instruction because it demonstrates the attributes of autobiographical writing, emotional writing, personal insight, and authentic public access. Mansoor's (2010) study of Pakistani students writing poetry in their English L2 also illustrates bilingual opportunity, “[Students] did not violate the syntactic patterns of the target language, rather, they incorporated some L1 lexical items into the L2 syntax because they could convey certain nuances attached with certain words that they were utilizing to highlight a particular indigenous context” (p. 211). Bilingual writers may find unique opportunities to express cultural critique and post-colonial expression through their second language just as many contemporary African American poets (e.g. Trethewey, 2006; Nelson, 2012) have found expression by repurposing received Anglo-centric poetic forms, such as the sonnet and villanelle, to critical ends.

By overlooking poetry as a genre of study in TESOL education, we may be overlooking its potential to develop L2 cultural and linguistic critique as well as a way to “consider/view [the first language and culture] in a different and creative way” (Mor-Sommerfeld, 2002, p. 104; see also Preston, 1982). Masny (2005) states, “acquiring a second language and literacies that involve different writing systems create an environment for worldviews to collide because of the sociocultural, political and historical situatedness of learning” (p. 149). Nelson (2011) is one of the only TESOL scholars to have illustrated the impact poetry writing can have on cultivating a critical TESOL educator. Through her own poetry, fiction, and a research-based play, she complicates linguistic, cultural, and sexual identity in the TESOL classroom. The Chinese graduate students' poems and interviews analyzed in this paper help illustrate many of the points raised by scholars of bilingual creative writing: opportunities for self-expression and hybridized identity, for cultivating a critical, post-colonial voice, and for reflecting on one's home language and culture in newly critical and complex ways. The current study contributes to this ongoing dialogue regarding the value of arts-based teaching in TESOL by illuminating poetry instruction's dialogic and contact zone potential in heterogeneous TESOL graduate school classrooms with international and U.S.-born peers.

The Current Study: Context and Method

The research related to arts-based interventions/teaching reviewed thus far inform this study's focus on the creative works of 12 Chinese-L1 international students in an MATESOL program in the Southeastern United States. These students enrolled in an optional creative writing seminar offered Fall 2011, Summer 2012, and Fall 2012 by Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, a TESOL faculty member who holds both a Ph.D. in Educational Linguistics and an M.F.A. in poetry writing. Believing in the importance of bilingual language play and creativity in

TESOL teacher preparation and instruction (Chappell & Faltis, 2013), Cahnmann-Taylor's aims were to instruct TESOL educators' as creative users of the English language themselves. In so doing, TESOL pre-service teachers might consider both themselves and their students as emergent bilinguals as well as emergent language- and teacher-artists, knowledgeable and practiced at the aesthetics of language choice and use.

Training included apprenticeship in poetic craft (e.g. figuration, line breaks, anaphora), practice writing poetry drafts with specific guidelines (e.g. numbers of lines, metrical feet per line, use of metaphor etc.), and writing workshops where participants discussed the form and content of newly written poetry drafts. The class discussed the literal and figurative connections between learning to write as a poet within formal aesthetic constraints and learning to speak an L2 within knowledge constraints of grammar and vocabulary as well as learning to teach within constraints in any given learning context.

Aside from several students' publication successes (e.g. Bleyle, 2013; Hwang, 2013; Zhang, 2013; Song, 2011; Hall, 2010), Cahnmann-Taylor also observed other transformations taking place, including unexpected transcultural conversations between L1 and L2 English speaking student-teachers about language teaching and learning as well as about the English language itself. As the numbers of Chinese speakers enrolled in the poetry class began to rise, in keeping with U.S. institutional trends (Open Doors Report, 2011), Cahnmann-Taylor alongside Zhang, Bleyle, and Hwang (all former students in the course), decided to focus empirical attention on the creative works of twelve Chinese-L1 international students to understand the impact poetry coursework may have had on their identities as TESOL teachers and learners. In addition to student-teachers' poems, data for this study included transcripts of interviews with participants as well as Cahnmann-Taylor's and Hwang's field notes from class observations.

For a period of 45-75 minutes we interviewed six Chinese-L1 students as well as four U.S.-born students who enrolled in the optional creative writing seminar during Fall 2011, Summer 2012, and/or Fall 2012. While many interesting themes emerged across the poems produced by all students, including those written by students with L1 English, Russian, and Korean, in this paper we focus on Chinese-L1 students' work (all in their first or second year of US graduate study in TESOL) as they represented the largest group of NNS participants enrolled in the course. Some descriptive statistics about the participants across the three semesters are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

<i>Course Participants</i>		
Fall 2011	Country of Origin	Number
	China	4
	U.S.	9
	Russia	1
	Australia	1
		15
Summer 2012*	Country of Origin	Number
	China	3
	U.S.	7
		10
Fall 2012	Country of Origin	Number
	China	6
	Taiwan	2
	U.S.	4
	Korea	1
		13

*Because the summer course requires the fall course as a prerequisite, most summer participants were also participants in the Fall 2011 course.

The authors of this paper represent a range of perspectives including the poetry course instructor (A) as well as international (C, D) and U.S.-born (B) graduate students who enrolled in the poetry seminar offered for repeat credit between 2011–2012. Researchers sought to understand elements of the “contact zone” afforded by the poetry genre. How did bilingual students use their cultural and linguistic resources and to what end? What did their selection of content and form reveal about the development of a critical, transcultural voice? What are the experiences and implications of teaching poetry to prepare heterogeneous groups of ESOL educators, native and non-native English speakers to teach in the U.S. and abroad? To answer these research questions, we analyzed both the poems’ form and content, comparing researcher perspectives on each text from the vantage points of a native Chinese speaker, Zhang (the only researcher with Chinese ability), a native Korean speaker, Hwang, and native English speakers, Cahnmann-Taylor and Bleyle. Researchers used inductive

coding analysis of 14 poem drafts written by each of three Chinese students who took both Fall 2011 and Summer 2012 sessions (n = 42 poems) and applied these codes to an additional 6-7 poems composed by each of eight Chinese-L1 students enrolled in the Fall 2012 poetry course (n = 54).

To further triangulate our emic (insider) and etic (outsider) understandings, Zhang and Bleyle conducted interviews with Chinese L1 participants as well as with their American-born classmates (Chinese L1 students were interviewed by Zhang first in Chinese and subsequently by Bleyle in English to allow for maximum articulation of their reflections). We asked questions about students' writing processes, the affordances of working in one or more languages with a diverse group of U.S.-born and Foreign born students, and the perceived impact of this course on their own TESOL teacher preparation.

All interviews were fully transcribed and interviews that were conducted in Mandarin were translated into English by Zhang. The interview transcripts and poetry were analyzed using inductive coding – no a priori categories were used and themes emerged from the data. To ensure reliability, each researcher coded the transcripts independently and meetings were scheduled to compare and contrast discrepancies. There were often different codes between the Chinese L1/English L2 researcher (Zhang) and the other coders as only the Chinese researcher could analyze Chinese language and literary influences. We also analyzed ethnographic field notes written by Cahnmann-Taylor and Hwang throughout the Fall 2012 semester, documenting observed classroom experiences from an instructor's and student's perspective.

Findings

Analysis of Chinese L1 students' poem drafts and interviews with Chinese L1 and native English speaking classmates illustrated varied contributions poetry writing made toward TESOL teacher preparation. While some participants identified poetry writing as a unique tool for expanding one's understanding of English structure and vocabulary, others felt little to no new language learning took place or that language learned was less important than learning to use language creatively to explore and express feelings. Rather than worry about correctness, many Chinese L1 students felt poetry liberated anxieties about Standard English use in favor of emotionally vulnerable language inflected with Chinese linguistic and cultural features. Our analysis yielded several themes unique to participants' expressions of displacement, intercultural connection, discovery through examined language, and cultural critique.

Contact Zone Poems of Displacement

Through analysis of students' poems, interviews, and researcher field notes, we found that an important quality of students' poetry writing experience was the unique opportunity to openly address feelings of displacement that coincide with teaching and learning in a second language. A consistent theme across all Chinese L1 students' poems is the provision of textual space for writing about the experience of in-betweenness or the contact zone (Pratt, 1991), which situated the writer as literally and figuratively between languages, cultures, and world views. The setting for the poems – whether in a U.S. museum exhibit about Tibet, a crowded Beijing bus, or on a "21 hours [sic] flight" between the U.S. and China, students' poems contained "nepantla" (Anzaldúa, 1987) that represents the social and cultural collision in terms of both longing for and displacement from conceptions of "home."

When given an open assignment to visually display text expressing the "seen" and "unseen," participant and co-author Zhang titled her poem "Athens (GA) vs. Beijing," splitting her poem in two sections on the page, conveying a sense of the split self, juxtaposing her new U.S. graduate school location with what she had previously considered "home."

Poem 1:

Athens (GA) vs. Beijing (excerpt)

<p>... Dreaming of Beijing, whenever your children refuse to speak Chinese. Days, months, years slide blandly on the margin.</p>	<p>... Dreaming of Athens, whenever you fight for house, car, children and house, car for children. Chase for MORE happiness than others.</p>
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This poem, a critical reflection on the life as a Chinese person in both Beijing and Athens, GA, demonstrates the inner displacement and a contact zone of struggle in the middle, which has a straight line as a symbol of a border. In their research deconstructing the cultural contact zone between indigenous and non-indigenous in Australia, Somerville and Perkins (2003) argued that "border maintenance" produced and protected difference, while "border crossing" opened up the possibilities of hybridity that blurred borders and challenged hegemonies (p. 257). Similarly, after Chinese students physically cross the border to study in the US and mentally cross the border to touch American culture and life, they express the entanglement of getting stuck in the middle while facing the big question of staying or leaving, which showcases the contact zone in a modern cross cultural context.

Writing during the Autumn Moon Festival, another student, Yuning¹, articulated the contact zone where tension exists between efforts needed to uphold family tradition on a rainy fall evening far from home vs. the demands and desires of a U.S. graduate student for whom it would be easier to simply not pay attention to tradition's demands. When making workshop suggestions to Yuning's English language choices, classmates identified certain errors in grammar and syntax, but were more often focused on the group's shared understanding of this celestial and spiritual celebration and suggestions to most accurately convey the speaker's sense of both isolation and connection. We noticed the contrast between the "protuberant moon" and the drizzle which falls on the solitary speaker, undecided whether to remain "perch[ed] in bed" or step outside in the rain to see the moonlight and be reminded of loved ones far away.

Poem 2:

Mid-Autumn Festival

I knew protuberant the moon must be,
A dot that, glimmers, glistens, gleams and glows.
All crumbs and bits, make dimmed to what degree?
I fluttered, wavering to get a glimpse.

And what if unescorted, lotus paste[1]?
A symbiotic match, for Festival.
Rectangular and double yolks, thin crust,
Accompanied by moon, adorable.

But why it matters, if my folks away,
And I disliked the drizzles, like a blind!
So I would rather – perch on bed and stay,
to rest, to count, to nap, to reminisced.
But ocean apart, under single orb,
I stepped out, solitary and aplomb.

[1] Moon cakes

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all study participants except Chinese L1 participants, at their request, whose creative works are highlighted.

We observed that many of the Chinese L1 students' English poetry drafts became containers for loss and loneliness, resulting in universal objects of aesthetic value. Thus, deliberations on lexical choice, e.g. "protuberant" vs. "bulging" (stanza 1; line 1), and clarity regarding the festival taking place during "blinding rain" vs. "like a blind" (stanza 3, line 2) or verb form in "reminisced" vs. "reminisce" (stanza 3, line 3) were discussed by the group with the urgency to clarify the poet's intentions and convey the particulars of this international student's experience in a way that connects to universal themes of kinship, ritual, cultural memory, and cultural shift.

Chinese L1 students in our study were struggling to achieve sympathy and understanding from native speaker readers, challenged to write using language and cultural references that may have been unfamiliar to non-Chinese peers. These Chinese language and cultural references helped to maintain the differences, which to some extent fulfilled the interest and curiosity of their American readers. In an interview, Alma, a native English-speaking classmate of Yuning, reflected on the contrast between the amounts of cross cultural learning that occurred in the poetry workshop as compared to the other classes she shared with Chinese-speaking peers:

[To U.S.-born co-author Bleyle]...You probably remember when the Harvest Moon Festival happened? A lot of them [the Chinese students] had poems about that, and so they were exploring culture and homesickness, and estrangement in their poems, but, you know in our [other] class...we didn't even know it happened.²

Sarah, another native speaker of English, noted that the perspectives of her non-native speaking peers afforded her new windows of entry into themes of longing and loss. Faced with the experience of being in a long-distance relationship with her boyfriend, and having recently suffered the loss of her mother, Sarah noted that "there have been things brought up in some of these poems that I would not have even thought about, things that I totally would have taken for granted, feelings that are both universal and alien." She was particularly struck by the fact that many of her classmates are distanced from the people they love while also surrounded by an "environment where everything around them is just strange and different, the colors are different, the food is different, the smells are different, the texture of everything is different." The rich, poetic descriptions in her classmates' writings of the contact zone enabled Sarah to forge new emotional connections with fellow graduate students whose

² The interview transcripts that appear in the paper have not been edited by the researchers in terms of grammar.

backgrounds varied so greatly from her own.

Analysis of the students' poems and interviews revealed the ways in which poetry writing gave language to in-betweenness that became sources of vital dialogue among all TESOL students – U.S. and Foreign born – to reflect on the tensions between language acquisition and cultural shift. Through all the struggles and endeavors to make the poems accessible, special and aesthetic, Chinese students finally found a contact zone to communicate with their American readers. As Pratt (1991) stated, “along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom – the joy of the contact zone” (p. 39).

Celebrations of Connection and Discovery

Students' poems did not dwell in feelings of remorse and isolation. Another important finding from this study is that poetry writing afforded opportunities for students to articulate second language experiences as opportunities to discover new wonders, honor belonging, and celebrate hybridized international and bilingual identities. Contact Zone. The cultural differences and diversity of the contact zone brought Chinese students increased confidence and a new lens to reflect on their experiences. One student, Shanshan, experimented with the complicated “terza rima” poetic form³ to celebrate the “unforgettable joy” of rehearsing Shakespeare in her second language. In interlocking three-line stanzas she wrote:

Poem 3:

Unforgettable Joy (excerpt)

...

Tough work to recite, I cannot deny,
Props were prepared during the nights,
With women's scarfs as cloaks, and toy swords for fights.

Far from fluent English, we tried our best to enact
The tragedy in court, centuries ago, from a distant sight,
No professionals involved, but the entertainment was pure.

³ Terza Rima is a poetic form traditionally consisting of three-line stanzas linked by end-rhymes in the pattern aba, bcb, cdc, ded, efe, etc. Students in the course were merely encouraged to link rhymes from one three line stanza to the next in an effort to appreciate and imitate the complexity of this form.

Likewise, Mengqiao played with the traditional "ode" (as in Pablo Neruda's (1994) style), writing an "Ode to Voice" (excerpted below) which humorously celebrated the speaker's voice in both the American culture of jazz and professional "associations" as well as in the tranquility of a Chinese line of poetry suggested in the poem's final line:

Poem 4:

Ode to Voice (excerpt)

...

Songs heard years ago,
Leisurely Jazz has a relaxing voice.
I wonder why there's no voice association,
[I] Would be dying to become a member.
Just lie down,
Patiently,
Listen to the voice of life ,
a flower blossoming.*

...

*A tranquil life. Man and nature are in oneness (天人合一)。

For Mengqiao, poetry writing created "the pedagogical arts of the contact zone" (Pratt, 1991) as a unique and welcome open space, which echoes Wang's (2006) belief in second language poetry writing as "a new world of space and time, where the sun and moon shine together in the sky, and I swim in many rivers and run along many paths at the same time" (p. 15). Such space allowed Chinese students to no longer constantly strive and fail to replicate the voice of a native-speaker, as they had done in so much of the other academic writing required of them in their graduate program. Mengqiao described her feelings to Bleyle:

As language learners I think one of my top goal[s] is to try to be as native as possible because I'm learning a language, so I want to be speaking like you do... but when I'm writing poems in English, I don't have to try that hard, I can focus on the language itself. I can just write a beautiful poem and I don't need to worry about being non-native.

The native speakers of English and Chinese L1 students indicated the exchange of cultural information and hybridity goes both ways. Zijun, a Chinese-L1 student commented upon the dynamic influence others' poems had upon her understanding of both English poetic craft as well as language and culture:

In the first workshop, Charles's (a U.S.-born student of Taiwanese heritage) poem really impressed me. The structure is so fresh and attracting (sic) that I never have boldness (sic) to try that form before. So does the content. Reading Chinese peers' poems is much easier because they always write things I am familiar with. But American peers' poems bring me fresh ideas. Steven (another U.S.-born student) wrote about [his] 'Pop' and religion, which were totally unfamiliar to me. The poetry gives me a chance to know more about other cultures.

In other words, one of the many affordances of poetry in TESOL teacher preparation was an awakening to fresh language as well as cross-cultural thought. We found the act of poetry writing engaged TESOL educators in an essential language-thought dialectic: awakened attention to language leads to heightened experience and awakened attention to experience leads to heightened language.

Discovery through Examined Language

We found that differentiation between cliché and fresh language informed students' complex appreciation of bilingual affordances in creative L2 expression. In class we discussed the dangers of cliché (also described as "inherited language") and the poet's search for fresh language. This instruction proved distressing to many students, Chinese in particular, who strive to acquire familiar English idioms and expression for both academic as well as quotidian purposes. Xing stated "Since English is not our mother tongue, the words we have learned are quite common and normal. They must be clichés in the teacher's eyes." When asked about the use of the dictionary in English poetry writing, she explained, "For example, when I think of a word, I have the Chinese meaning in mind. I could think of one equivalent English word without the aid of a dictionary. However, the word I could first think of must be cliché. It is too weak." Students' understanding of cliché echoes Nelson's (2008) opinions of clichés as "substitutes for thinking" (p. 30). For non-native writers, if they didn't think hard to find a stronger or "high level" word, they might regard their original simple words as clichés. Poetry writing helps distinguish "low-level language" (e.g. verbs such as go and say; adjectives such as happy and sad) from "cliché language" and to recognize when each type of language may be useful in the pursuit of fresh writing or undermine it.

What is "inherited" and what is "fresh" English can be very confusing to Chinese L1 students. For example, Shanshan meditated on the fall season for a "sonnet" assignment, addressing Autumn with this closing couplet:

Poem 5:

Thoughts of Autumn (excerpt)

...
Slow down, thy hurried pace, gentle beauty,
Greeting us every year, that's your duty.

After discussions about cliché and the contemporary poet's avoidance of archaic (as in "thy") and overly "poetic" language of the past ("gentle beauty") she changed the couplet for her final draft, speaking to Autumn as much as to herself about the importance of patience and maturity to bear witness to natural beauty:

Slow down, I see your pace hurried,
Greet me every year, with the age that you carried.

Although people from different cultural backgrounds share numerous universal emotions and motifs, such as love and death, clichés themselves differ widely across languages. L2 poetry writers often find that the translation of concepts and diction from Chinese – often clichés in the L1– can result in unusual and refreshing choices in L2 English verse. For example, native speakers of English, Cahnmann-Taylor and Bleyle, delighted in Runqing Diao's opening lines in her poem "Chance".

Poem 6:

Chance (excerpt)

...
So your goodbye smile is not far behind,
quirked-up mouth with dimple aside, lovely tiger teeth

Not only is "dimple aside" a quirky and refreshing alternative to "side dimple" but to describe "canine teeth" as tiger teeth struck both Cahnmann-Taylor and Bleyle as distinctly original and refreshing. Zhang and Hwang clarified that the Chinese and Korean literal translations actually refer to "tiger teeth" – what L1 English speakers found unusual and unique, turned out to be the literal translation of a Chinese L1 cliché! In another poem, "Bel Ami," Runqing wrote, "the waterfall is your neatly combed hair," which is unique in English but is the Chinese equivalent of "cascading hair," a much more familiar way in English of describing fairytale princess locks. When asked about these choices which appear fresh in English but cliché in Chinese, Runqing replied: "Sometimes, the reason for me to use that word is that I really do not know how to say it in English, such as the "tiger teeth." I didn't realize I was using it. I thought it should be that!"

On the one hand, Runqing's employment of cliché (in Chinese) in her English poetry writing

reflects her own creative selection and re-creation to make the old fixed phrase fit into the new linguistic and cultural context. On the other hand, blindly encouraging cliché might fail to alert emerging writers to distinguish the acquisition of idiomatic language vs. the creation of language for original and/or critical expression. Students, L1 and L2 English speakers alike, wrestle with frustrations over their emergent understanding of “cliché” and its avoidance in poetry and celebrate unexpected or purposeful originality – e.g. when translations of the L1 result in refreshing L2 use and insight. Cliché becomes a complicated and thought-provoking issue in the process of second language poetry writing due to its paradoxical relationship with creativity, different interpretations of its definition and its potential assistance in language and culture learning. The discussion of clichés across cultures and languages allows us to further explore the construct of contact zone where the “notions that cultures are tightly bounded and unchanging” have been thoroughly broken down (Manathunga, 2009, p. 168). This also allowed us to question ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1984) such as creative writing dictums against using “cliché language” since what is ‘tired language’ in one language may appear fresh and unique in another. Alma, an L1 speaker of English, explained the expansive, lexical advantages of workshopping poems with her Chinese-speaking peers:

I think it also helps with sensitivity to language in terms of vocabulary because they bring in those words that maybe we don’t use because, they’re just as valid, but they aren’t as frequent, and so we’re exposed to those kinds of words and you can say, look, there’s so much more exploration to be done and there are so many different shades of meaning.

We found that discovery of these “happy accidents” raised all students’ awareness, L1 and L2-speakers alike, of the rich and natural assets provided by a focus on creativity and bilingualism.

Liberating the Voice of Political Critique (East and West)

Through writing English language poetry, we found some Chinese L1 participants discovered a vehicle for saying the unsayable, and seeing the overlooked, particularly in terms of giving voice to critique that they had not always been free to explore or express in China. Runqing’s poem “Place of the Gods,” for example, explores her growing awareness of and dissatisfaction with China’s control of Tibet. In the first stanza of her poem, Runqing is external to, and almost surprised by, the vehemence with which some Americans advocate for Tibet’s freedom:

Poem 7:

Place of the Gods (excerpt)

...

I visited the field museum in Chicago three months ago,
The second floor: Tibet.
Americans seemed angry at our country, their words
yelled on the sticker,
"Free! Free Tibet!"

By the conclusion, the speaker is part of a Chinese tour group in Tibet and words like "weird Tibetans," and "Could you speak Mandarin" reflect the contact zone as a new level of self-awareness towards the speaker's place as part of the Chinese ethnic majority that is implicated in Tibetan repression.

"Group two, follow me, get ready to enter Potala Square! 15 minutes to take pictures!"
"Ladies, please stand up and take your bags, it is not allowed to squat or seat on the Square."
"Look at those weird Tibetans! Could you speak Mandarin?"

Urban tourists, cameras, flashlight, tickets, souvenir shops,
Brand-new fire engines, regimental police, guns, security check,
every district, every street, every corner.

Similarly, Zhang's poem "June 4, 1989" reflects on the still-forbidden topic in China of the Tiananmen Square student uprising. The poem's opening raises multiple questions that were new for the author as she explored not only what actually happened on that day, but also the more overarching concern of whether this type of political cover-up is universal or unique to her native country.

Poem 8:

June 4, 1989 (excerpt)

...

I wonder if any country
hides
some sensitive dates
like June 4
in China.
A taboo crawls

like snakes
in undercurrents.

Zhang reflects:

When I wrote “June 4, 1989,” it happened to be June 4 that day and I had to write a poem to finish my assignments for class. Since June 4 is always a sensitive date in China, I felt interested and decided to write a poem. I admit, the education I’ve received in America dramatically encouraged critical thinking. I learned to doubt, to question, and to think deeper... poetry writing serves as a fuse and provides an opportunity for me to express my ideas in a critical way.

Not all critique in the Chinese poets’ writing was as overtly political as in these poems on the subjects of Tibet, Tiananmen Square, or in another poem from the course subsequently published by Zhang on China’s One Child policy (Zhang, 2013). In “Chaos is the New Order”, Mengqiao voiced her long-standing frustration with the unruliness and turmoil of Chinese traffic, a problem that is certainly not unique to China but was a frustration that had grown much stronger after a year spent in the more orderly traffic patterns of a U.S. college town. The poem’s last stanza reads as follows and contains a dialectic awakening between “rules” and “(dis)order”:

Poem 9:

Chaos is the New Order (excerpt)
...
Why not follow the basic rules?
The rule is disorder, disorder rules.
Don’t follow others on a wrong path?
If everyone is wrong,
How can you be sure what’s right?
I’m still trapped in
People’s Republic of Chaos.

In the poem’s final line it is clear that Mengqiao adeptly moves beyond a mere critique of Chinese traffic and towards a deeper understanding of how broader societal problems are reflected in the disorder of the Beijing streets. While critical in tone, the poem was not intended by Mengqiao as a disavowal of her homeland. As she explained, “On one hand, I am kind of disappointed about China, but on the other hand, I still love my country so I wish there

could be a better future for it." In this instance, poetry provides Mengqiao a space to grapple in the contact zone with complex and emerging understandings of her own native country. Importantly, Chinese poets did not limit the orientation of their critical voices towards the East but also discovered discourses of parody and critique towards their Western host culture. Mengqiao's humorous poem offers a self-parody of the non-native English speaker that also critiques widespread U.S. ignorance about Asian people.

Poem 10:

Exchange

What on earth does LOL mean?
Lots of love? Laugh out loud?
Or "penis face" as Jenna told me?
How to answer "how are you"
knowing it's not a question?
Since when is using "shall we"
obsolete rather than being polite?
Are Chinese rude because of
preferring "I want" to "can I have"?
Does the world sound more gay
if I keep messing up he/she him/her ?

Excuse me, do you speak Japanese?

I'm sorry? Oh, sorry I don't.

So you're not Japanese?

Yes. No!

I mean, yes you're right

and no, I'm not a Japanese.

At the end of the poem, Mengqiao claims her right to Chinese nationality and makes her "underlying humanity" (Lerman, 2011, p. 218) evident through art.

The poetry workshop also evoked L1 English speakers' layers of critique towards their own cultural orientations. Sarah, for example, came to realize that some of her past experiences with L2 speakers had been influenced by a deficit perspective that equated non-native English ability with a lack of intelligence. She claimed the poetry class helped her overcome this bias:

I feel it's really opened my eyes a lot, and especially since working in [the writing center] when I have students who are non-native English speakers, you know.

First flush is just to, you know like, “Do you dumb it down? Do you try and make it simpler? How do you explain something as integral to our understanding of English as prepositions without sounding like you’re talking to someone who’s kind of slow?” And then you’re like reading these poems put out by non-native English speakers and you’re like, “You don’t need to dumb it down, apparently.” These people have the brains in their heads to totally understand what you’re talking about. You just need to find a way to help them produce it.

Other L1 English speaking workshop participants were equally surprised to experience a transformation in their perception of participating in a creative writing course with so many L2 speaking peers. Alma’s assumption at the course’s beginning was that she and her English L1 peers would quickly emerge as the class “experts” because of superior English language knowledge. Instead, she found participation level and poetic sensibilities seemed much more related to students’ “individual experiences and convictions that seem to transcend the specific cultural barriers.” Charles, too, acknowledged his newfound appreciation for his Chinese L1 peers: “It’s more than just a poetry class. It’s like a class about cultures. I learned, like, what non-native speakers are capable of.” Charles particularly valued his broadened aesthetic sensibility, influenced by qualities more typically valued in Chinese poetry, such as abstraction, rather than the concrete details his professor (Cahnmann-Taylor) usually encouraged. Because it validated the contributions and writing styles of all course participants, Charles believed “this class actually produces its own kind of poetry- it’s like its own kind of style of poems, kind of like an East meets West kind of thing.” Liberating the voice of political critique in and through poetry writing made a crucial connection to the Pratt’s (1991) contact zone and Foucault’s (1984) regimes of truth, encouraging bilingual students to construct their own complicated socio-political identities.

Poetry, Not a Panacea: Discussion & Implications

The Chinese graduate students’ poems and interviews analyzed in this paper help illustrate many of the points raised by scholars of bilingual creative writing: opportunities for self-expression and hybridized identity, for cultivating a critical, post-colonial voice, and for reflecting on one’s home language and culture in newly critical and complex ways. The data also illuminate poetry instruction’s dialogic and contact zone potential in heterogeneous TESOL graduate school classrooms with international and U.S.-born peers. Clearly, however, poetry writing is not a panacea for resolving all of the challenges inherent in graduate TESOL education. As a result of this class, US-born Sarah confided in her interview that NNS’ poems gave her the “chance to kind of feel what they feel and to kind of explore my own life, kind of thing.” However, we cannot claim that the poetry class on its own was enough to nurture close relationships between all students or clearly improve students’ abilities in English. For example, while one Chinese L1 student’s poem shaped Sarah’s cross cultural understanding,

social and emotional distance continued. She explained:

I don't really talk to any of them outside class, and even in class, since our time is very limited...I mean I get a little insight, but it's sort of a lie that poetry bares your soul, like you bare a part of your soul, for like 14 lines, and then you kind of, you have the rest of it held secret, you know?

Chinese L1 participants also expressed contradictions regarding the degree to which the poetry class sharpened their own English abilities. For example, Kexin began her interview by stating that the poetry class had little impact on her English: "I found it had few improvement and practices for my writing." She later contradicted herself, however, stating that "during the process of poetry writing, I have learnt the difference of some subtle words through looking up dictionaries or the feedbacks from my classmates. It would help me pay more attention during my future writing and study."

Insight from students' poems and interviews suggests that the poetry writing class did serve as a contact zone where creative use of the English language allowed students to address personal issues that often lead to universal understandings. But poetry writing did not prove to be a panacea, helping all students feel more personally and socially connected to one another or convinced of poetry's impact on their own English development. Nevertheless, the rich and varied experiences that resulted from the poetry workshop indicate that adding arts-based pedagogies such as poetry writing to the curriculum have a great deal to offer emerging TESOL professionals. Our analysis of students' poems and interviews about the experience showcase the wide variety of outcomes that include and go beyond a complex and layered understanding of the English language. In addition to English language development, students' poems reveal these aesthetic creations became containers of complex emotional and cultural experience, vital expressions of displacement, joy, connection, frustration, and cross-cultural critique.

The thrill of this instructional experience for the instructor and students seems to have been in the creation of a heterogeneous group of emerging TESOL professionals who care deeply and passionately about cross-cultural exchanges that value TESOL students' home language(s) and culture(s) and their expressions in the English language. We are convinced that poetry classes for TESOL educators can help cultivate an expansive orientation in our discipline, one which views English language instruction not as something to "give" to the rest of the world, but an open-source constructed in conversation between native and non-native speakers of a language. Just as open source codes refer to programs in which the original source code becomes open to the general public for use and modification from its original design in an effort to improve upon it and share it (Gleason, 2003) so, too, the English language is an open

source, lexically and becomes conceptually improved by native and non-native speaker users, enhancing not only the English code, but the users themselves in so far as they expand what is and can be known to them.

While we do advocate poetry for TESOL education, and non-native speaker TESOL preparation in particular, we do not propose that creative writing classes replace more standard curriculum, e.g. courses in TESOL assessment, second language acquisition theory, curriculum and methods, and courses in language policy and planning among others. However, our analysis concurs with Nelson (2011) that narrative (and poetic) ways of knowing have a great deal to contribute toward the true democratization of the TESOL field, providing a mode of expression that advantages L1 and L2 speakers alike, yet in different ways as compellingly described by participants in this study. The sample poem-drafts and interview excerpts showcase the complexity of L1-L2 experience, which encourages sincere and deep listening, challenges biases against the NNS professional, and requires new kinds of dialogue between educators and their students, dialogue which dares to address topics of which may be controversial due to their political and/or personal nature. While we cannot claim poetry writing was a panacea for nurturing full East-West language learning and cultural exchange, poems and interviews illustrate this arts-based pedagogy's power for expanding critical cross-cultural ways of knowing and for challenging what is problematic about existing accommodation-oriented discourses and practices in the TESOL context. We encourage TESOL educators and TESOL teacher educators to experience creative writing pedagogies and discover what these might add to repertoires for teaching and learning English. We suggest that our next steps as a field be to include greater opportunities for poetic and narrative TESOL scholars and educators to engage in "analytical and artistic ways of knowing" (Conquergood, 2002, p. 151). In this way, TESOL educators and scholars can expand our linguistic and pedagogic expertise with aesthetic dimensions of language, as well as critical and arts-based ways of knowing and thinking.

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