LuMing Mao

Rhetorical Borderlands: Chinese American Rhetoric in the Making[1]

In this article I argue that the making of Chinese American rhetoric takes place in border zones and that it encodes both Chinese and European American rhetorical traditions. By focusing on the discursive category of "face" and "indirection"/ "directness," I demonstrate that Chinese American rhetoric becomes viable and transformative not by securing a logical, unified, or unique order, but by participating in a process of becoming where meanings are in flux and where significations are contingent upon each and every particular experience.

I. Opening Topics: Reading Chinese Fortune Cookies

It is perhaps not surprising to see emergent discourses trying to define themselves in terms of their uniqueness in relation to other related or more established discourses. Emergent discourses that secure their uniqueness from internal coherence help remove potential skepticism or incomprehension. Further, as they begin to be heard and listened to as unique discourses, they create a sense of authenticity and authority among other competing discourses. Before too long, ideally, they can obtain stability and identity—both of which

seem essential if emergent discourses want to secure the status of established discourses. The question, then, becomes this: should the making of Chinese American rhetoric follow this "growth pattern?" Put in a slightly different way, should Chinese American rhetoric be expected to possess this uniqueness qua coherence?

Definitions of rhetoric vary relative to, for example, historical periods and social and technological contexts—not to mention rhetoricians' own ideological and ethnic commitments. In our postmodern context, rhetoric, for me at least, represents the systematic, organized use and study of discourse in interpersonal, intercultural contexts, reflecting and reinforcing rhetoricians' own ideology, their own norms of discourse production and discourse interpretation, and their ability to persuade and to adjust. In this regard, it might be possible to devise for Chinese American rhetoric a core set of discursive features that could be viewed as internally coherent and that are to be realized by different forms of enunciations or representations in particular contexts. One might even go so far as to suggest that for Chinese American rhetoric to enjoy both visibility and viability it must be able to articulate its own unique differences from other rhetorical traditions and from their experiences. For example, Chinese American rhetoric, whatever discursive features it may end up possessing, must be Chinese American enough so that it can be coherently differentiated from, say, African American rhetoric or Native American rhetoric. But the process of differentiation always embeds the likely risk of evaluating or adjudicating one tradition according to the norm of some other tradition— the latter often happens to be more recognized, more dominant. And it is, then, not unusual to find that those who are actively engaged in the act of measuring or evaluating tend to invoke as their norm a rhetorical tradition that enjoys a wider circulation and a longer disciplinary canonization. In fact, to all intents and purposes, it is the widely circulated, the perennially canonized, that serves as the persistent norm, as the interpretive example of general applicability—in spite of its apparent unmarkedness.[2]

To legitimate the making of Chinese American rhetoric—or of any other ethnic rhetoric, for that matter—without reverting to the dominant tradition as its measuring stick, increasing efforts have been made to articulate and to conceptualize ethnic rhetorics as sites/sights of difference, as transformative practices, as viable alternatives to the oft-invisible, but no less dominant, European American rhetoric. And it is increasingly evident that these articulations are predicated on their own unique terms, not on the terms of such

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American rhetoric (Gilyard and Nunley; Gray-Rosendale and Gruber). These efforts help transform what used to be invisible rhetorical experiences into visible ones and what used to be marginalized players into legitimate, viable contenders.[3]

A word of caution might be in order here. To view ethnic rhetorics as transformative voices in relation to European American rhetoric does not assume at all that the latter is monolithic, rigid, and unchanging; after all, rhetoric is about discourse production and discourse interpretation in particular communities and environments. Since European American rhetoric, like any other rhetoric, changes over time, it might be more accurate to view such rhetoric as consisting of certain clusters of discursive features on a discursive continuum, and to recognize that over time new clusters or new alliances emerge that can overlap with the old (see Mao, "Re-clustering" 114–15). Such discursive clusters are likely to give rise to codified expressions that serve as preferred, though unmarked, modes of communication for people in structures of power in the community. It is this same group of people that has a stake in ensuring the continuity or stability of these discursive features—because the latter help encode and reinforce a pattern of assumptions, beliefs, values, and interpretations of the world by which these people operate (Foss 291). On the other hand, these "institutionalized" features may not necessarily reflect or square with ever-changing, multifaceted practices on the ground—even though, ironically, individuals or people of lower status might rely on these features to read or interpret their own divergent behaviors. To appropriate Bizzell ("Intellectual" 3), it is the privileged social position that has remained constant and that has in turn allowed such features to count as European American rhetoric.

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Effective as these alternative articulations might be in contesting the (apparently) universal norms of the dominant rhetoric, to tie the making of Chinese American rhetoric to rhetorical uniqueness qua coherence is problematic. First, rhetorical uniqueness is predicated on the importance of being different. Renato Rosaldo, in *Culture and Truth*, criticizes the methodological norms in ethnographical studies that conflate the notion of culture with the idea of differences. For him, the term "cultural difference" becomes just as redundant as that of "cultural order" because "to pursue a culture is to seek out its differences, and then to show how it makes sense, as they say, on its own terms"

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(201). Therefore, the notion of "difference" "poses a problem because such differences are not absolute," and they are "relative to the cultural practices of ethnographers and their readers" (202). Further, an exclusive focus on differences risks obscuring the dynamics of power and culture. For example, there are those who have "less," that is to say more nearly invisible, culture but enormous power to perform this kind of cultural analysis, and there are those who possess rich culture but wield no power, and who are only supposed to be dissected and disseminated (Rosaldo 201–02).

Second, internal coherence is based on an assumed boundedness, on a belief that Chinese American rhetoric can be logically set apart from other ethnic rhetorics. However, such a belief, it must be said, drawing upon Ien Ang's provocative critique of claiming an essentialized Chinese identity in a postcolonial nation-state, overlooks "the complex, historically determined relations of power" (13) in which Chinese American rhetoric has come to be constructed in relation to Chinese rhetorical tradition, on the one hand, and European American rhetorical tradition, on the other. These complex interrelationships are fraught with uncertainties, ambiguities, and contradictions—so much so that Chinese American rhetoric, I propose in this essay, can never be unique, not only because there is no internal coherence to speak about, but also because it is always in a state of adjusting and becoming both in relation to its "native" (Chinese) identity and in relation to its "adopted" (American) residency. And the process of adjusting and becoming is forever filled with its own tensions and struggles.

Third, if "our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds" (Rosaldo 207), and if "we are all implicated in each other's lives" (Anzaldúa 243), Chinese American rhetoric may become inevitably intertwined with other ethnic rhetorics, and its voices may very well find resonance and empathy in the chambers of other people's hearts. In addition, any ongoing efforts to stake out rhetorical uniqueness through coherence for Chinese American rhetoric may in fact betray a nagging anxiety, both distorted and revealing, to validate its existence and to cling to "a bounded, distinctive, and independent whole" (Geertz 59)—one that the making of Chinese American rhetoric is set out to challenge and dismantle in the first place. Not to mention, of course, the fact that any stabilized "unique characteristics" could quickly become candidates for stereotyping and for easy reproduction.

How do we, then, move beyond uniqueness qua coherence? How can we articulate the making of Chinese American rhetoric without incurring these problems? I think the answer to these questions may be found in Chinese for-

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tune cookies—not so much in the "good fortunes" they regularly dispense as in the two distinctive traditions they evoke and embody.

I often give out Chinese fortune cookies to my writing students at my own school. Not that I necessarily believe in the ability of "good fortunes" inside Chinese fortune cookies to lift up the spirits of my students, but that I see these fortune cookies as a telling analogy for the kind of rhetoric I want to articulate both for my students and for myself. Crispy, sugary, and dumpling-shaped, Chinese fortune cookies serve as the finale of, and in fact represent a constitutive ingredient/ritual of, a Chinese meal in Chinese restaurants in America. We would probably feel cheated if we didn't get served with fortune cookies at the end of such meals. While we may indulge ourselves in eating fortune cookies, we may not be cognizant of the two traditions they faithfully represent. On the one hand, fortune cookies represent a centuries-old Chinese tradition of using message-stuffed pastry as a means of communication—a tradition that started in fourteenth-century China.[4] On the other hand, serving dessert at the end of a meal is an American tradition; the Chinese traditionally do not eat dessert at the end of a meal. That is why we do not find fortune cookies in restaurants in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Europe at all—and we don't feel cheated, either, for not eating them at the end of such meals over there.[5]

In a sense, therefore, Chinese fortune cookies become a product of contradictions: they are born of two competing traditions and made viable—not to mention their tastiness—in a border zone where two cultures come into contact with each other and where rhetorical experiences intermingle with gastronomical narratives. In other words, Chinese fortune cookies allow two different traditions to coexist with each other without denying each its own history and its proper place in a Chinese meal. I submit that the making of Chinese American rhetoric bears an unmistakable resemblance to the birth of Chinese fortune cookies—a resemblance stemming not so much from any shared essence between them as from associations they invoke with both Chinese and European American traditions.[6] It is this kind of rhetoric that I will focus on in the remainder of this essay.

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II. Border Zones, Contact Zones, and Rhetorical Borderlands

What are those border zones or borderlands that Rosaldo and Gloria Anzaldúa talk about and that I have briefly referred to in my preceding section? Let me be more specific here. Anzaldúa characterizes borderlands as "physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" *(Borderlands* 19). In fact, we can go so far as to say that we all live in metaphorical if not literal borderlands if we consider this increasingly interconnected and interdependent world of ours (Ang 169). It is at these borderlands that Chinese American rhetoric, or any other ethnic rhetoric, has the potential to become most visible and viable. Not because Chinese American rhetoric can achieve its uniqueness through coherence at these borderlands, but because these borderlands provide a productive space where Chinese American rhetoric can gestate and coalesce, yielding multiple acts of signification, ambiguity, and contradiction, and creating identities that are implicated in the old relationships and indicative of the new ones. In this context, these spaces may also be called "rhetorical borderlands."

Anzaldúa further characterizes borderlands as "vague and undetermined," as places that are "in a constant state of transition" (25). For her, borderlands are both metaphorical and physical: they are places where the "mestiza" (the new consciousness) "operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (101). And these are places where divergent thinking is taking place, "characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (101). Rhetorical borderlands are no exception: they are vague and undetermined, not only because they are in transition, in movement, but also because there is always, for each discrete communicative act, an excess of meaning yet to be processed, yet to be fully grasped. It is this excess of meaning, both in its production and in its reception, that further aggravates this sense of ambiguity and indeterminacy—almost like our experiences in Chinese restaurants in America of read-

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ing our own "fortunes" inside Chinese fortune cookies. "Appropriate" or "auspicious" though our "fortunes" or those pithy proverbs or those Confucian sayings may sound to us, we fret, perhaps half seriously, over the unspoken, the silenced, and the yet-to-be-decoded. In other words, there is always a nagging "but" ready to punctuate the good "fortune" popping out of every fortune cookie.

Rhetorical borderlands are also what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones." Contact zones, according to Pratt, are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). At the same time, contact zones provide, she suggests, creative energy for new forms of expression, and one such form is what she calls "autoethnographic text"—where "people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (35). That is, autoethnographic texts, composed by conquered others, are *"in response to* or in dialogue with those texts" that Europeans have constructed of their conquered others (35; emphasis original). These texts are outcomes of "a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror," and they often "constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture" (35). On the other hand, their entry can be quite indeterminate, if not perilous: since these texts are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the writer's own discourse community, they could suffer "miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning" (37). In short, autoethnographic texts are "a phenomenon of the contact zone"—similar to the process of transculturation whereby "members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (36).

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Rhetorical borderlands create and nurture new forms of expression, too, and they are almost like what Homi Bhabha calls "the third space," which "enables other positions to emerge" (211). In this respect, rhetorical borderlands make it possible for Chinese American rhetoric to emerge, to be heard and listened to. Like autoethnographic texts, Chinese American rhetoric may face similar perils, ranging from misunderstanding, to misrepresentation, to wholesale rejection. But unlike autoethnographic texts, Chinese American rhetoric does not just "select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metro-

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politan culture" (Pratt 36). Rather, it selects and invents from *both* Chinese rhetorical tradition *and* European American rhetorical tradition, and it engages these two traditions in a way that may blur boundaries and that may disrupt asymmetrical relations of power. Such rhetoric may further enable its "border residents," to use Min-Zhan Lu's term ("Conflict" 887), to take the other's perspectives as seriously as one takes one's own (Rosaldo 207)—however ambivalent, ambiguous, or antagonistic the other's perspectives may sometimes turn out to be.

What must be emphasized at this point is that Chinese American rhetoric should not be idealized as simply an example of "harmonious fusion or synthesis" (Ang 195) of two rhetorical traditions. In other words, we should resist any move to romanticize Chinese American rhetoric as liberating, empowering, or equalizing. At rhetorical borderlands where there is more than one language, more than one culture, and more than one rhetorical tradition, if nothing else the basic question of communication never goes away of who has the floor, who secures the uptake, and who gets listened to. To draw upon Ang again, the making of Chinese American rhetoric is "not only about fusion and synthesis, but also about friction and tension, about ambivalence and incommensurability, about the contestations and interrogations that go hand in hand with the heterogeneity, diversity and multiplicity we have to deal with as we live together-in-difference" (200; see also 166–67). It is the ongoing representation and negotiation of both traditions, of their complex interrelationships, that should characterize the making of Chinese American rhetoric—a rhetoric that seeks not uniqueness qua coherence from within, but complexity and complementarity from both within and without. As a result, there may not be any recognizable logic to its formation, but there is a lot of authenticity to its representation, to its expressiveness.

Nor should we view the making of Chinese American rhetoric simply as an example of hybrid rhetoric. It is perhaps logical to view Chinese American rhetoric as a hybrid because it indeed invokes and involves two rhetorical practices and their underlying traditions. However, just as the characterization of any ethnic rhetoric as "alternative" may have already marginalized it relative to its dominant counterpart, so the use of "hybrid" to characterize the making of Chinese American rhetoric engenders its own problems. For one thing, it may foster an illusion that the creation of a hybrid rhetoric will make boundary crossing, cultural or linguistic, both easier and more nearly risk-free (Bizzell, "Basic Writing" 7–8). For another, the metaphor of hybridization, according to Sidney I. Dobrin, is problematic in this context, both because the dominant

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rhetoric may not be any less hybrid and because any hybrid rhetoric may eventually be overwhelmed by the dominant rhetoric given the unequal, imbalanced relationship that exists between them (46–47, 51). Moreover, as I intend to demonstrate below, Chinese American rhetoric not only involves two different styles of communication that conflict with and complement each other, but it also becomes a metadiscourse—because it unpacks the history and ideology of each embodied tradition and because it reflects upon its own discursive tendencies, which are filled with tensions, ambivalences, and incommensurabilities.

III. "Togetherness-in-Difference:" Articulating Chinese American Rhetoric

So, what is, then, the making of Chinese American rhetoric? How does it come into being at rhetorical borderlands? These are, of course, empirical questions that need to be answered with concrete examples, not with "cultural allusions" or "indirect observations." I have, therefore, chosen two examples to illustrate how Chinese and European American rhetorical experiences have come to "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 34), and how their reflective encounters become the form and expression of Chinese American rhetoric. First, I will focus on how the concept of Chinese face clashes with that of European American face. Second, I will address complex interrelationships when Chinese indirection comes into dialogue with North American directness. I will close this essay by revisiting my earlier analogy to Chinese fortune cookies, by further exploring its significances, its rhetorical implications.

Face to Face: Chinese and European American

I am no doubt quite visible to my students as a Chinese American: my face in part gives that away. But my rhetoric, my way of communication, does not have to be as clearly visible—especially when I want to play safe and to avoid tensions in front of the mainstream American students at my school. Ironically, it is this acute awareness of my own face, both physical and metaphorical, that serves as a source of conflict and a catalyst for my reflective encounters. Let me begin here by acting like an European American academic—namely, by trying to get to the bottom of things as directly as I can.

      Face is a regularly invoked concept in the Chinese rhetorical repertoire. Its visibility has caught the attention of Western linguists and rhetoricians. Unfortunately, their attention, if not infatuation, has only made face become less visible. This is how. Sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson

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have characterized face, which they openly acknowledge is from the Chinese, as a *public-self* image that people across discourse and culture want to claim for themselves in face-to-face communication (emphasis added). Further, this face consists of two related aspects, which are negative face and positive face. They define negative face as the basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition, and they characterize positive face as the desire that one's wants be appreciated and approved of (61–62).

Such a characterization, however appropriate or relevant to the communicative dynamics of white, middle-class European Americans, is problematic to Chinese face because the central emphasis encoded in Chinese face is on the public, on the community. While such popular expressions as "saving face" or "losing face" continue to circulate in North American public discourse, their popularity in fact rides on the myth of the individual, of the individual's need either to be liked or to be free. On the other hand, the significance of the public orientation that underpins the original concept of Chinese face diminishes

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as face becomes more of a personal, rather than a public, property. Herein lies a revealing irony or contradiction: the very reason that Chinese face fascinated Western scholars in the first place may have to do with its visible emphasis on the public, on the interdependence between the self and the public. But as their fascination turned into concrete efforts to develop North American face and beyond,[7] the central feature of Chinese face fast recedes into the background, if not into oblivion. While Chinese face has become better known on this side of the Pacific thanks to these efforts, it has also become less visible, and thus less Chinese, because it is now just like North American face or it is being adjudicated on the strength of North American face.

How, then, can I address this contradiction and continue my reflective encounters? In an influential essay titled "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face'," the cultural anthropologist Hsien Chin Hu characterizes Chinese face as consisting of two specific constituents: they are "lian" (脸) and "mianzi" (面子). According to her, "lian" refers to "the respect of the group for a [person] with a good moral reputation," and by embodying "the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character," it becomes "both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction" (45). On the other hand, Professor Hu sees "mianzi" as connoting prestige or reputation, which is either achieved through getting on in life or ascribed (or even imagined, I might

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add) by members of one's own community (45). "Mianzi" in this sense becomes a property obtained and owned by the individual in a public arena and in relation to his or her own community.

Drawing upon Hu's conceptualization here, I define Chinese face, consisting of "lian" and "mianzi," as a *public* image that the self likes to claim or enhance *from others* in a communicative event. This is an image that signifies a reciprocal balance, at a given time, between the self and those others. In this sense, Chinese face is not a private or an internalized property "lodged in or on [the] body," but an image supported by the judgments of the others in the situation and "diffusely located in the flow of events" (Goffman, "On Face-Work" 6–7). Further, Chinese "lian" conveys a moral and normative connotation as it places the self in the judgment of the public and as it establishes and/or reinforces a link between the integrity of the self and his or her community. On the other hand, Chinese "mianzi" places its primary emphasis on securing public acknowledgment of one's reputation or prestige through social performance or by the social position one occupies in the community (Ho 883).[8]

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Therefore, there is a lot of "lian" at stake the moment I step into my classroom. In order for me to earn my "lian," I must comply with all the necessary conventions and requirements associated with good teaching, and I must meet and exceed the expectations of my students. I can further enhance my "lian" by proving to them that I am an intelligent, dedicated, and caring teacher. Consequently, my failure to do so would cost me a great deal of "lian" because being thought of as an ineffective teacher exerts a smearing effect on my "lian." Seen in this light, my "lian" is no longer so much about *my need* to be liked or appreciated by the students as about the kind of image I can claim from my students in my role as their teacher. Because of this strong normative and communal connotation associated with "lian," any loss of my "lian" necessarily erodes, if not completely damages, my "mianzi."

On the other hand, my "mianzi" will accrue if, for example, I grade and give back my students' assignments promptly, or if I dress up neatly and in style every time I go to my class. And my "mianzi" will suffer accordingly if I deviate from these obligations. Further, if such lapses persist, the damage to my "mianzi" may bleed into, and eventually impair, my hard-earned "lian." In other words, the longer I let my "mianzi" deteriorate, the more likely my "lian" will be adversely affected, and the more likely my relationship to my students,

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to those I am most intimately associated with, will be strained. While Chinese "mianzi" does involve an individual's need to secure public acknowledgment of his or her prestige or reputation, there always is a fine line between maintaining an appropriate level of "mianzi" and pursuing it at any cost, to the point of being seen as vain or excessive.[9] Differently stated, too much of "mianzi" has to be carefully guarded—because to gain "mianzi" at the expense of "lian" will in the end cost one both. Managing this kind of interlocking relationship between "lian" and "mianzi" can be characterized as performing face-work.

What, then, about Chinese discourse patterns? Do they manifest and realize the same kind of face-work, the same kind of communicative tussle between "lian" and "mianzi?" Traditional Chinese rhetoric has been characterized as placing its primary emphasis not so much on originality and individualism as on preserving and promoting communal harmony and cohesion (Matalene 795). Chinese rhetors like to appeal to authority and tradition rather than to Western logic, and they also like to accumulate a series of parallel or complementary images instead of developing an argument from a synthetic or analytic perspective (800, 789; see Jolliffe for a similar argument). It appears too simplistic to rely upon an (imagined) opposition between valuing individualism and promoting harmony to characterize traditional Chinese rhetoric. If anyone has read Confucius with an open mind, he or she probably will not find such opposition in the *Analects* because individuals, for Confucius, can only establish themselves by establishing others, by correlating their own conduct with those near at hand (Ames and Rosemont, *Analects* 110; bk. 6, par. 30). For me, the desire to appeal to authority and tradition can in fact be seen as a necessary rhetorical move, on the part of Chinese rhetors, to enhance and promote their "lian"—their inseparable link to their community, to its own history and culture. In other words, if the past and the present are seen as integral parts of an individual's social environment, any efforts made to fortify this overall connectedness and to demonstrate one's conviction in it become part of this ongoing process to cultivate and actualize one's "lian."

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If this connection between "lian" and Chinese rhetors' desire to appeal to authority and tradition is plausible, it then makes a lot of sense for Chinese rhetors to regularly rely on citations or precedents as a means of providing background or support.[10] It becomes their way of securing and enhancing their

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"mianzi"—their ability to showcase their knowledge of a venerable tradition, thus solidifying the approval of their audience. In fact, the securing of "mianzi" in this context almost becomes a prerequisite for the enhancement of "lian," for the establishment of a connection with the past and with an integral part of an individual's larger social environment. Of course, as is the case with oral communication, any tendency to show an overdependence on citations or precedents—thus an example of showing off—amounts to an excessive concern over one's "mianzi." Such a tendency necessarily will erode and damage the rhetor's credibility and authority, that is, his or her "lian."

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By bringing back, as it were, "lian" and "mianzi" to the foreground, I want to make Chinese face more visible again—and on its own terms. However, what must be stressed is that visibility should not be automatically translated into uniqueness. Since "our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds" (Rosaldo 207), the emphasis encoded in Chinese face on an individual's connection to, and indeed his or her dependence upon, the public may very well be found in other "faces" belonging to other cultures or other communities. After all, if we are all implicated in one another's face, then Chinese face may find its own "mirror image(s)" in other "faces," or in other discursive concepts that share the same kind of communicative dynamics (see, for example, de Kadt's discussion of face in the Zulu language).

What happens, then, when Chinese face ("lian" and "mianzi") meets with European American face (positive and negative face)? What will take place when I interact, face to face, with my students in my own classroom, where different cultures intersect and different languages clash? There surely will be conflicts and confrontations when these two concepts of face are brought together. As I have suggested above, European American face focuses on the self, and on the ideology of the individual—an ideology that celebrates the belief that there is an inherent separateness of distinct persons and that its normative imperative is to become independent from others and to discover and express its distinct attributes (Markus and Kitayama 226).[11] In contrast, Chinese face puts emphasis on the interconnectedness between the self and the public, and it symbolizes this ever-expanding circle of face-giving and -taking in one's own community and beyond.

Just as conflicts and confrontations are bound to arise, so are new sets of discursive articulations. Such articulations aim to recognize, to negotiate these

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differences, giving voice to individual face-experiences on their own historical and ideological terms—so that neither face becomes displaced or, worse still, "disfigured" in the communicative process. Because the emphasis is not on adjudication, assimilation, or dissolution, but on coexistence punctured by discursive tensions, asymmetrical relationships, and semantic vagueness, such articulations promote, and in fact become part of, what Ang calls "together-ness-in-difference"—"in which borders and ethnic boundaries are blurred and where processes of hybridization are rife inevitably because groups of different backgrounds, ethnic and otherwise, cannot help but enter into relations with each other" (89–90). Out of this interaction emerges a new sense of identity that is both relational and expansive. Such an identity is akin to what Anzaldúa calls "a mestiza consciousness," which she defines as "a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts," and whose energy "comes from continual creative motion that keeps

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breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (102). In short, as these articulations actively construct rhetorical experiences brought on by face-to-face encounters between my students and me, they become examples of Chinese American rhetoric.[12]

So, I share my "lian" and "mianzi" with my writing students—most of whom are from white, middle- or upper-middle-class family backgrounds—to establish this web of interdependence wherein my public image needs their blessings as much as theirs do mine. In this context, I tell them that it is no longer my need either to be liked (as their teacher) or not to be bothered (when I am not in the classroom or when I am not having my office hours) that should be respected and satisfied. Rather, the issue is whether they can grant me the kind of public, teacherly image that comports with their overall expectations and with what they believe to be appropriate teacherly activities both inside and outside the classroom. At the same time, I ask my students to tell their stories of how their own face wants have been left unfulfilled because of my concern over what I imagine to be their need for "lian" and "mianzi." They tell me—somewhat nervously because of the nature of their "oppositional" dis-course—that my compliments or good grades are not as forthcoming as they have expected in spite of their solid work, and that they are often puzzled and frustrated by my tendency not to spell out what I want from them, but to em-phasize what should be expected of them by their peers and by the community with which they associate. They think I am too "noncommittal," "hard to

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read," and even "tricky." Through these kinds of exchanges, fragmented and tentative, we begin to see beyond the limits of our own face and of our own boundary and we begin to experience, perhaps indirectly, the dynamics of the other face. We do that, I insist, not to dissolve or erase our own, but to nurture, to negotiate "togetherness-in-difference" in a space that is, according to Henry Giroux, "crisscrossed with a variety of languages, experiences, and voices" and that is yielding a narrative fraught with internal tensions and incongruent with "the master narrative of a monolithic culture" (qtd. in Ang: 163–64).

I also discuss with my writing students personal narratives written in English by some Chinese students and I point out to them a tendency in these narratives to provide a detailed chronological past as a way to address the future or to link the future back to the past and the present. For example, the following is the first paragraph of a four-paragraph statement of purpose submitted to one of our graduate programs by a female Chinese applicant:

> Born in a doctor and teacher's family, I had my childhood dream of becoming a doctor or teacher. I learned to be diligent and independent at an early age. At the age of fifteen, I attended a provincial key high school. As the school was about fifteen miles away from home, I had to leave my parents and lived at school during weekdays. It was certainly not easy for a girl of that age. In China, kids, especially girls, are usually not educated to be very independent before they grow up. Besides, being the class monitor and a member of the school's field and track team, I had to do more than just taking care of myself. However, despite all the difficulties, I managed to do things well.

A statement of purpose should be expected to provide personal information about the applicant's past in order to respond to the question of her present and her future. Yet, it is quite striking that the applicant focuses on her past right from the get-go, and in such detail. Rather than telling her audience why she is applying for graduate work, the applicant chooses to focus on how she was born into a doctor and teacher's family, and how she became very independent and hardworking at a very early age. In fact, except for the last paragraph, the rest of her statement amounts to a detailed chronological account of her past accomplishments, which, not by accident, are wrapped around a nurturing family and a supportive community. By making so much of her past in her statement, she has in effect "laminated" her private self, to borrow a term from Goffman (*Frame Analysis* 82), onto a public that she expects would endorse and embrace such a self. In this sense, the process of lamination becomes a process of earning her "lian."

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Since any statement of purpose is expected to answer the question of "now and future," the applicant saves her answer for the last paragraph of her statement. But even there she still clings to her very past, to her established "lian:"

> I understand that the interesting curriculum and training provided in the pro-gram will help to enrich my knowledge in science and to improve my writing and interpersonal skills. I believe that, with my previous background and help from the faculty members and fellow students from the program, I will become a bet-ter communicator in scientific, technical, and other fields. I'd like to use the skills I learned to help make technical and scientific information more understandable and useful to people in China and in North America.

This paragraph consists of three sentences, and each sentence serves as a comparison with her past. First, she compares what should be her future knowl-edge of science and interpersonal skills with the knowledge she has so far ac-quired—which needs to be enriched; second, she believes she "will become a better communicator" than she has been; and third, she will develop the nec-essary skills to help others, skills that she does not have right now. These three sentences, in making these comparisons, take her future right back into her already-established past and present. Out of this web of interdependence emerges a secure, confident "lian," one, in turn, that lends credit and respect-ability to her "mianzi."

I further compare these narratives with those written by North Ameri-can applicants. The following is the first paragraph of a statement of purpose submitted to one of our graduate programs by a North American applicant:

> In applying to the doctorate program in Rhetoric and Composition, I'm endeav-oring to combine my interests in language and its multitude of systems and pedagogies, with a dual focus on sociolinguistics; attempting to gain relatable knowledge of the interrelatedness of all aspects of communication processes with social and cultural ideologies. In other words, I intend to pursue insights into how we, as individuals and as a culture and a society, perpetuate and maintain behavior and thought through language and communication strategies.

Unlike our Chinese applicant, this applicant does not address her past or her own success stories right away. Rather, she focuses on why she is applying to our graduate program, and on what she intends to pursue after joining us. Her need to be liked, and thus to be accepted, does not depend so much upon initially sharing her past accomplishments as upon what she can become in

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the near future—because positive face is not about the past, but about the present and the future. In other words, to relive your glorious past alone will probably not get you into graduate school, but to imagine a real, challenging future, of which you will be a part, will.

These reflections, limited and selective, enable my students to gradually become aware of their own discursive preferences, of their own positive and negative face wants. Out of this process emerges a discourse that engages both Chinese and North American face and that reflects on the limit each face presents to our discursive experiences. Such discourse allows us to be better prepared to resist the temptation "either to silence or to celebrate the voices that seek to oppose, critique and/or parody the work of constructing knowledge in the classroom" (Miller 407). We can begin to develop concrete plans of action to deal with discourses that can only express frustration, incomprehension, or rejection—discourses that the making of Chinese American rhetoric aims to replace and dissolve.

As must be emphasized, there is always a limit to this kind of reflection. As Ang rightly points out, "[T]here is only so much (or so little) that we can share" and "any process of 'translocal connecting' not only needs hard work, but, more importantly, can only be partial also" (176). The process of revealing and articulating our respective "face experiences" has to be discomforting because feeling tensions and conflicts face to face, coupled with the existing teacher-student hierarchy in the classroom, is at least unsettling, if not threatening. On the one hand, my students, in spite of my disclaimers to the contrary, will probably never stop asking, perhaps in the back of their minds, "Is this what the professor wants?" or "How can I get him to like my writing or my argument?" On the other hand, I cannot help asking how this web of interdependence called for by my own yearnings for "lian" and "mianzi" will ever get past my students' discourse of "wants" and "likes," and whether they will ever become an integral part of this web, upon which my own face depends. These unsettling, interrogating voices entangle our articulations, and they further complicate our own face needs and our own nagging ambivalences about them. However, as they inform and construct my students and me in the classroom, they become no less of the form and content of Chinese American rhetoric.

Not surprisingly, these kinds of unsettling voices also resonate in Min-Zhan Lu's *Shanghai Quartet: The Crossings of Four Women of China*—a memoir, addressed to Lu's own daughter, of her Haopo (grandma), her Mmma, her nanny, and herself. A naturalized Chinese American who first moved to America in 1981, Lu tells us story after story of how these four women overcame adver-

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sities not of their own making, and learned to live with differences and with other-imposed circumstances that often challenged their very existence. Through these stories, both real and imagined, and drawing upon "yi" (移)— the Chinese word for "immigrate" or "move," Lu points out that we are in fact all immigrants because we move from one place to another, as is best exemplified by her own crossing from China to America; from one circumstance to another, like her Haopo, who had to rely on her "cunning obedience" (8) to deal with her alienation after she was married to Lu's grandpa, a traditional, less-educated man; and from sorrow to triumph and back to sorrow again, when her Mmma switched from hot water to coffee and tea, after China survived the Three Years of Natural Calamities in the mid-1960s, and back to hot water again during the Cultural Revolution, to "keep pace with the deprivation her husband suffered behind prison bars" (235). As Lu tells her daughter in the prologue, "[W]e can't keep ourselves from wanting to *yi*—fuse, confuse, and diffuse—set ways of doing things" (xi). In my terms, it is these "yi" moments that yield such ambivalent and entangled encounters—both of which are to be further enriched and complicated by more yearnings for "yi" in rhetorical borderlands.

For example, in as trivial or mundane an activity as setting the dinner table and eating dinner with her "foreigner husband," Lu confronts and experiences one of her "yi" moments. In this case she needs to decide whether the dinnerware should be plate and silverware or bowl, chopsticks, and Chinese porcelain spoon, or whether *both* sets should be made available on their mission oak table. What is at stake is whether Lu can choose to slurp soup and shovel rice with chopsticks, or whether her husband can work through the vegetables, meat,

What is at stake is whether Lu can choose to slurp soup and shovel rice with chopsticks, or whether her husband can work through the vegetables, meat, and rice.

and rice—"one at a time, always in that same order" (196). This moment of "togetherness-in-difference," while it has taken them a long time to arrive at (196), continues to be filled with ambivalence and contradiction. For slurping and shoveling on Lu's part never fail to evoke visceral reactions in her husband, whereas her husband's eating habit remains "foreign" to Lu—because cutting everything into pieces just wastes the juice, the best part, on the plate, and smearing rice onto the fork simply ruins its very texture and flavor (196–97).

It is these moments that make them aware of both their culinary needs and their cultural prejudices. Their voices emerging from them can be quite

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unsettling, discomforting, and no less transformative. While not so easily gen-
eralizable, these moments share a family resemblance to other "yi" moments,
to other border-zone encounters, like mine. Through encounters like this one,
Lu and her "foreigner husband" can ask, "[A]re we making love when we sit
over bowl, chopsticks, porcelain spoon, and steamy tea across from plate, sil-
verware, and French wine?" (197). They can then "stay and move forward to-
gether" (197) with differences, with ambivalences. Similarly, because of our
own yearnings for our own face wants both inside and outside the classroom,
I can ask of my students and myself, "Are we ready to accept one another's face
yearnings and to weave this web of tension-filled interdependence together?"
These voices, perhaps halting and perhaps enabling, thus constitute the mak-
ing of Chinese American rhetoric.

Indirection versus Directness: A Relation of Complementarity

As a style of communication, Chinese indirection is quite visible. Not only have
China observers, from missionaries to sinologists,[13] studied it and linked it to
Chinese preference for harmony and stability, if not for the image of inscruta-
bility, but it has also been consistently contrasted with the direct style of com-
munication in European American culture. While Chinese indirection has been
attributed to the long-held tradition in China "to nurture the subtle, fragile
bonds and links in human relations" (Young 58–59), this style of communica-
tion is not unique. As Helen Fox has vividly demonstrated, this tendency to
communicate through subtle, indirect strategies, through innuendoes and al-
lusions, is shared by many other cultures in the world (18–22). Many of her
world-majority students, she tells us, are puzzled and frustrated by "the west-
ern need for clarity, even transparency, in written communication" and by "the
spare, relentless logic of the western tradition" (21). These kinds of frustra-
tions or confusions only add, perhaps not in the most positive light, to the
visibility of indirection, be it Chinese or otherwise.

And more directly put, Chinese indirection has often been singled out as
a weakness, as some kind of deficiency. For example, many Chinese people are
said to be reluctant to make their requests at the outset of an interaction even
when there is no perceived power hierarchy between the addressee(s) and
them.[14] They are also said to be reluctant to develop bold, transparent state-
ments up front in their written discourse—whether or not these statements
are to be substantiated later in the same text. Instead, they prefer to first es-
tablish a shared, sometimes elaborate, context wherein their requests or state-
ments can be judged. Further, such a context may not be tied directly to the

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requests or statements that they will later make or develop—this is a connection that the interlocutors/readers may have to make on their own. In this way, the requests can then be seen as expressions of cooperation, and the delayed statements as gestures of deference (Young 37–39).

In the widely anthologized "The Language of Discretion," Amy Tan tackles similar misconceptions. For example, it is said that the Chinese language lacks direct linguistic means to perform assertions or denials, and that Chinese people are incredibly discreet and modest, only capable of performing phatic (or indirect) speech acts (64, 67). But as Tan tells us, these are no more than misconceptions and stereotypes—though they are not only annoying, but also insidious in perpetuating stereotypes and compounding misunderstandings. Her own experiences growing up in a bicultural, bilingual family tell her that Chinese people in fact know how to answer "yes" or "no" directly relative to each specific speech event, and that their language may seem indirect or cryptic only to those uninitiated or on the outside looking in (66–67). Further, it is the richness of her linguistic experiences negotiating between Chinese and English, not any personal preferences for "wishy-washiness," that helps Tan speak "of two minds" (63) and that makes such a style of communication an ill-suited candidate for the characterization of "indirection."

But there is more. Chinese indirection has also been feminized, and such characterization, as far as I can tell, is meant well. For example, according to Linda W. L. Young, the need to be indirect and to nurture this sense of commonality or bonds "bears a striking similarity to some of the goals pursued by American women when conversing with American men" (59). Following Carol Gilligan and Deborah Tannen, Young tells us that when American women ask questions in a conversation with American men, they are often doing so not to get answers to their questions, but to keep the conversation going (59). Like Chinese speakers, American women want to "nurture and affirm the other's existence and presence" (60) because they are more interested "in seeing themselves functioning within a network of relationships" (61). But, as Mary M. Garrett warns us, such comparison can become part of this recurring effort to associate Chinese culture—Chinese indirection being an important part of it—with "a valorized feminine" that "hardly squares with the overtly patriarchal nature of the Chinese family, state, and culture" (58). Put differently, this kind

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of comparison, however well-intentioned, inevitably runs the risk of overgeneralizing each communicative style and of decontextualizing its own internal complexities. Not surprisingly, feminizing Chinese indirectness may in the end help turn the visible—Chinese indirection—into the less than visible, because, for now at least, the Chinese talk *just* like American women.

Chinese written discourse is regularly cited (or sighted) as a typical example of Chinese indirection—though no adequate consideration has been developed to account for its underlying cultural context. How can we, then, most directly evaluate Chinese indirection seen from this side of the Pacific without applying an Orientalist logic to it—that is, without invoking the Western public address paradigm as its norm, as its adjudicating authority? And how should we respond when we come, in our Chinese or Chinese American students' prose, to well-known quotations, literary allusions, and celebrated sayings, many of which may not include specific sources and many of which may not be directly linked to the main ideas the writers want to get across? As expected, we've seen responses ranging from romantic adulation, to utter condescension, to total frustration.

Amid these responses I often feel quite out of place simply because I share none of them. I fear that I would probably be deemed out of order should I decide to speak out directly. I wonder why, and I want to know how the context that underpins Chinese indirectness has been so conveniently left out—and herein unfolds the second part of my reflective encounters.

> Simply put, Chinese indirection becomes much more complex when viewed in its larger cultural context, and in fact it may not be necessarily viewed as just the opposite of directness—be it European American directness or that of any other community.

Simply put, Chinese indirection becomes much more complex when viewed in its larger cultural context, and in fact it may not be necessarily viewed as just the opposite of directness—be it European American directness or that of any other community. Before I proceed to explore this context, this much has to be noted right away. First, my effort here to reevaluate Chinese indirection should not be rationalized as an example, on my part, of cultivating harmony over discordance or accommodating Chinese indirection to the terms of the directness paradigm. To do so is, at best, to cancel important, productive opportunities for reflective encounters—encounters that, as I am arguing directly in this essay, should constitute the making of Chinese American rhetoric. Second, as I noted at the beginning of this essay about the dynamic nature of European American rhetoric, my reevaluation here of Chinese indirection in

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relation to European American directness should not entail the assumption that the latter is monolithic or unchanging. Not only does European American directness, like any other mode of communication, manifest itself in each and every particular situation, which necessarily is cause enough for variation, improvisation, and transformation, but also European American directness can quickly find itself not unique after all as its own discursive resources overlap with those claimed by other modes of communication. What remains constant, therefore, has to be structures of power, which hold European American directness in place and which further reify it as its own preferred, celebrated norm.

There are, admittedly, a multitude of components shaping a Chinese cultural context—if we consider China's long history and its changing social and political conditions. Here I want to focus on two of them—correlative thinking and the topic-prominent characteristic of the Chinese language—because these two are quite central, in my view, to the subject matter at hand.

Correlative thinking has been characterized as a fundamental Chinese characteristic,[15] one that is "grounded in necessarily informal and hence ad hoc analogical procedures presupposing both association and differentiation" (Hall and Ames 125). By putting items or events in groups as interrelated sets within a scheme explainable in terms of analogical relations, correlative thinking uses the association of image- or concept-clusters to yield similarities or contrasts and to produce richly vague significances. This mode of thinking parts with other modes of

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thinking that rely upon "natural kinds, part-whole relations, an implicit or explicit theory of types, or upon causal implications or entailments or anything like the sort one finds in Aristotelian or modern Western logics" (124; see also 125–41). To use David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames's example of totemic classifications for illustration, when a clan, or a family, or a group is associated with a particular animal or natural object, there is only a meaningful correlation assigned to it—no shared essence or causal connection, as would be expected by Western logic, underpins such association. The selected animal or natural object has characteristics that help create feelings and behaviors in the human beings associated with it. In turn, these feelings and behaviors help to establish their character and identity as individuals, as well as their patterns of communal association (125).

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Let me use another example—the twelve animals of Chinese astrology. According to the Chinese zodiacal system, which consists of a twelve-year cycle, each year of the cycle is named after one of twelve animals: the Rat, the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit, the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Ram, the Monkey, the Rooster, the Dog, and the Boar.[16] Each animal accords a set of distinct characteristics to its year, and a person born in that year then takes on these characteristics, and in fact his or her future or fortune is determined by the year of his or her birth, by this association, by this assigned relationship. For example, if you are born in the year of the Dog, you are then trustworthy and faithful, and you are adept at assessing information and will always fight for truth (Kwok 14). Further, your association with the Dog also entitles you to certain kinds of relationships with other individuals. As a Dog, you are suited to the Horse (that is, the individual born in the year of the Horse), but not the Dragon, the Ram, or the Rooster (Kwok 16–17). Once again, no efforts are being expended to connect you to the characteristics of a given animal from a causal perspective, nor are any gestures being made toward establishing some shared essence or identity between you and the animal. Rather, by clustering together the images and characteristics of the twelve animals within the twelve-year zodiac cycle informed by correlative logic,[17] Chinese astrology creates meanings and significances for individuals associated with each of these twelve animals.

To suggest that correlative thinking is a central characteristic of Chinese culture should not lead us to conclude that it is necessarily unique to the Chinese mind.[18] According to A. C. Graham, correlative thinking was the dominant mode of thought in the West until Galileo, and the correlative cosmos was the only game in town until the development of modern science (315–18). Such development began the shift away from correlative to causal thinking and began to assume "an objective ground that can underwrite standards of evidence, allowing claims to certitude or plausibility" (Hall and Ames 126). As a result, even modern Western astrology—the most recognizable artifact evidently shaped by correlative thinking—is being rationalized, and much of its language is not correlative, but causal (131).

What must be underscored in any discussion of Chinese correlative thinking is that interrelated sets or correlatives within a given scheme of twos, threes, fives, or nines are not logically or causally related. Correlatives like "day" and "night," "heaven" and "earth," and "action" and "inaction" in a classificatory scheme of twos should not be characterized, as has often been the case, as opposites that conflict, but as opposites that complement (Graham 331–40). Otherwise stated, the contrast between these correlative pairings does not mean

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that one excludes the other, or that one logically entails the other. Nor does it mean that they together yield completeness or totality. Rather, they become, to use Hall and Ames's words, "complementary contrasts" (130).

For example, a quintessential example of "complementary contrasts," "yin" and "yang," are always conceptually interdependent, and they are always in the process of *becoming* in relation to one or more other pairings. So, the chest is "yin" (receptive, soft, submissive) in relation to the back, which is "yang" (creative, hard, aggressive). However, in relation to the abdomen, the chest becomes "yang." And these relations can be further transformed with any other changes in the human body, such as a broken leg or a pinched nerve (Ames and Rosemont, Introduction 25). Most ironically, on the other hand, the "yin"/"yang" contrast, the basis for ordering all binary correlatives in Chinese cosmology,[19] has frequently been interpreted as representing bipolar, irreversible contrasts in social realms to justify, for example, the separation of the sexes—women as "yin" suited only for the "inside" and men as "yang" belonging to the "outside"— or to maintain the status quo—those who dare to challenge the existing social system being described as upsetting the "yin"/"yang" balance and thus ruled out of order.

Let me now turn to the second component—the topic-prominent characteristic of the Chinese language. In a quite influential essay on language typology, Charles N. Li and Sandra A. Thompson demonstrate in some detail that Chinese is a topic-prominent language because topic-comment structure is its significant typological feature ("Subject" 460)—though they admit that they are not the first to make this proposal (477). Unlike English, a subject-prominent language, which prominently features subject-verb structure, Chinese has as its basic sentence type topic-comment structure, with the topic always being definite, in initial position, and the center of attention (464–66).[20] For example,

> Zheijian shiqing ni bu neng guang mafan yige ren.
> 这件事情你不能光麻烦一个人
> this (classifier) matter you not can only bother one person
> The matter (topic), you can't just bother one person. (479)

Here the relationship of "zheijian shiqing" ("this matter") and "ni bu neng guang mafan yige ren" ("you can't just bother one person") is not that of subject to object, nor subject to predicate. Rather, "ni bu neng guang mafan yige

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ren" serves as a comment on the topic "zheijian shiqing." Differently stated, "zheijian shiqing" provides a framework or establishes a theme for the discourse—hence the topic-comment structure.

Li and Thompson further suggest that the topic in Chinese topic-comment structure essentially belongs to discourse. By relating, for example, the sentence of which it is a part to some preceding sentence, the topic functions in "the context in which a given sentence occurs, whether it is a conversation, a paragraph, a story, or some other kind of language situation" *(Mandarin* 100). The function of the topic as a discourse element to establish a framework for the rest of the discourse is further reinforced by other connective pairs in Chinese like "yinwei ... suoyi ..." (因为 ... 所以 ...) ("because ... so").[21] Like the topic in topic-comment structure, "yinwei" ("because") establishes a "causal" framework, one that is not necessarily confined to one dominant factor or agency; nor is it necessary to be realized by just one or two sentences. But such a framework is essential for the comment-like "suoyi" ("so") part to emerge.

Drawing upon *Shuowen jiezi*, the first comprehensive Chinese lexicon, compiled by Xushen in the second-century Han dynasty, Young takes into account the classical meanings for each constituent in this modern connective pair. In this context, "yinwei" is better defined as "'accommodating' or taking into account those contingent conditions," and "suoyi" means "'thereby' a particular 'place' or 'position' is configured as a center of these *yin* [accommodating] conditions" (40). In other words, what "yinwei" connotes is a cluster of contingent conditions or relationships upon which the "suoyi" part of the discourse depends. The "yinwei ... suoyi ..." construction, as Young points out, "suggests a peculiarly Chinese sense of causality in which a full range of conditions must be elaborated and considered as causes for a particular event" (40), and it represents "a holistic disposition in the movement of foci from big to small" and "a kind of bidirectional responsiveness in which each party 'moves toward' the other" (43). In short, both topic-comment structure and connective pairs like "yinwei ... suoyi ..." in Chinese foster a discursive tendency where "topics" or clusters of conditions precede "comments" or definitive statements and where information is being packaged as "one gigantic unit" (83) analyzable only in terms of topic-comment structure or regularly signified by connectives like "yinwei ... suoyi ...."

Along a similar line—though with more of a philosophical focus, Ames and Rosemont describe classical Chinese as "an eventful language," whereas they characterize English as a "substantive and essentialistic" language (Introduction 20–21). More specifically, classical Chinese displays what they call

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"a more relational focus"—a concern to describe how things stand in relation to other things at a given moment rather than how they are in themselves despite differing appearances (23).[22] Because of this relational focus, the meaning of a given word in classical Chinese becomes dependent upon its relationship with other words that it becomes associated with or it comes in contact with. For example, "jun" (君) ("exemplary person") is defined by its cognate and phonetically similar "qun" (群) ("gathering"); similarly, "gui" (鬼) ("ghost") is defined as "gui" (歸) ("return") because presumably the ghost "has found its way back to some more primordial state" (28–29). This kind of discursive interdependence thus underscores "the primacy of process over form as a grounding presupposition in this tradition" (29). To put it another way, the "meaningfulness," not the "essence," of these terms lies not in the unchanging Form that transcends the human realm, but in a long-held recognition that the only constant is change itself.

The "eventful" properties of classical Chinese, coupled with the fact that classical Chinese does not have definite articles, copulas, plurals, or tenses, have often been viewed as evidence that Chinese remains highly ambiguous because these "eventful" properties lead to a "cryptic and ambiguous style" (Becker 80). This view is patently mistaken. As I have suggested above, the contextual interdependence is in fact "a decided communicative asset" or an example of "productive vagueness," because it "requires the reader to participate in establishing an interpretation, and to internalize the given passage in the process of doing so" (Ames and Rosemont, Introduction 42). In addition, such a view assumes, erroneously, that this lack of "precision" in the classical written Chinese necessarily carries over into speech, and that the classical written Chinese was more or less a transcription of speech.[23]

My discussion so far of the "eventful" characteristics of classical Chinese is perhaps far too brief, but it seems evident that this focus on discursive interdependence, on how events stand in relation to other events, is shared by both classical written Chinese and modern Chinese. The fact that this affinity has been maintained for all these years is significant if one just considers how much has changed in the language since the use of oracle bone inscriptions ("jiaguwen" 甲骨文) in the late Shang dynasty (circa 1200 BCE)—from Archaic Chinese, to Medieval Chinese, to Premodern Chinese, to Modern Chinese (P. Chen 2). On the other hand, one may also argue, as I am doing right now, that nothing substantive has changed after all, because this relational focus has remained a central underpinning that informs and reinforces how Chinese as a language operates, how its users use the language to interact with the world.

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In fact, without making any explicit connection to topic-comment structure in modern Chinese, Ames and Rosemont propose a heuristic for how to read classical written Chinese: read pictograms, which are stylized direct representations of objects, as nouns or *topics,* and read ideograms, which are created by joining two ideas or pictures, as *comments*—as long as there is no contextual evidence to the contrary *(Analects* 304; emphasis added). Therefore, not to articulate the "eventful" properties of classical written Chinese, and not to connect them to topic-comment structure in modern Chinese, is tantamount to denying Chinese one major defining characteristic. Similarly, to characterize this relational focus as a discursive liability rather than an example of "productive vagueness" (Ames and Rosemont, Introduction) reminds us of the Orientalist logic that relies on some Western model to adjudicate non-Western phenomena and that treats those "recalcitrant exceptions" as instances of liability or deficiency.

So, how, then, is our understanding of Chinese indirection going to be different in this new context informed by correlative thinking in cosmology and this relational, topic-comment focus in the language? To begin with, Chinese indirection should no longer be seen simply as an example of a nontransparent style of communication or, worse still, of indecision and incoherence. For example, Carolyn Matalene tells us that Chinese rhetors or her Chinese composition students like to accumulate a series of parallel or complementary images instead of developing an argument from a synthetic or analytic perspective (789), and they are more prone to appeal to authority and tradition rather than to Western logic (800). Similarly, one of the four characteristics that Joan Gregg attributes to Chinese expository writing style is that it regularly employs rhetorical question, formulaic phrasing, and illustrative anecdote—all of which are examples of indirect expressive mode (356).

However, these instances of Chinese indirection, be they repeated appeals to tradition/authority or recurrent parallel statements without any transparent progression of ideas, take on new meanings or associations in our new context. For one thing, they can now be viewed as part of an ever-present effort to establish a field of conditions or contingencies. It is quite possible that these discursive moves may contribute to the impression that there are too many piles of facts, quotations, and anecdotes that seem unconnected to the original argument. But it is precisely these facts, quotations, and anecdotes that help create this relational focus, that help explore how "events" stand in relation to, and become, other "events." For another, as examples of "productive vagueness," they serve as "contextualization cues," as linguistic features

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that signal contextual presuppositions and that suggest how the entire discourse should be understood (Gumperz 131–32). In other words, they initiate and invite the audience to make necessary associations, to recognize the interdependence of texts, and to participate in the overall meaning-making process. Of course, audience participation in meaning making can be fraught with uncertainty and incompleteness. And there will always be a surplus of meaning in communication—in the sense that meaning is both always deferred and always yielding new meanings to those who resonate with this mode of thinking (Hall and Ames 228–29)—and Chinese indirection makes no effort to control that surplus, and in fact it thrives on this kind of meaning surplus to create "richly vague significance" (124). Therefore, to characterize Chinese indirection simply as an example of a lack or, worse still, of "Chinese inscrutability," is to miss the point altogether. And no less off the mark is the effort to feminize Chinese indirection, to compare it, however charitably, with European American women's style of communication.

Here then is the question: how will this new understanding of Chinese indirection influence our encounters at rhetorical borderlands? It surely creates tensions if I choose to compose a prose piece in English with clusters of initial "topics" or with repeated efforts to embed my argument within allusions and analogies—both of which are being attempted in this essay, perhaps indirectly. Such a move directly conflicts with what may be called the "directness norm" in analytical writing, and it challenges the expectation that precise definitions and explicit statements of cause and effect be provided and that paragraphs begin with general statements to be followed by appropriate examples (Fox xviii). However, conflict of this kind helps foster a more open, rigorous recognition of the values and assumptions associated with each style of communication, with its concomitant view of the world. And such recognition becomes crucial in any dialogic knowledge-making process. To be more specific, by creating this tension, I can begin to highlight, for Chinese indirection, a sense of coexistence or interdependence, and I can explore this focus on how some "events" can become other "events" in a world that depends not on univocal meanings, but on clusters of images and inferences. For European American directness, I can be more understanding of the need, if not the compulsion, to go directly to the marrow of a subject, to explain everything, in order to be credible and to be authoritative. I can become equally attentive to the history behind the "directness norm," to the emergence of essayist literacy in Europe in the eighteenth century, when language came to be viewed "as a transparent representation of the natural order of the universe" (Scollon and

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Scollon, *Narrative* 44) and when "an explicit, decontextualized presentation" was valued over an unclear, contextual, and symbolic presentation (52).

Again, to bring out the ideological underpinning informing each style of communication is not, as one might expect, to engineer some sort of harmony between them, because there isn't one to be had. Nor am I advocating, in doing so, a relativity of values, because each style constitutes a distinct method of investigation and signifies a distinct aspect of reality. While no assimilation should be attempted in this kind of encounter, the kinds of reflections I am articulating here promote a sense of "togetherness-in-difference." That is, they embody how we can fully participate in "events" while being cognizant of the context of "things," and they reveal how we can get to the bottom of "things" with the realization that other conditions and other events may eventually turn the bottom into the top again. Seen in this light, Chinese indirection does not have to be viewed as the undesirable opposite of European American directness; rather, it should become a necessary complement to the latter—since, after all, indirection and directness, like "yin" and "yang," are never not fluid and fluctuating, and the value of one is always parasitic upon that of the other, and vice versa.

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In *Shanghai Quartet* Min-Zhan Lu also reveals these fluid moments negotiating between indirection and directness. For example, people regularly ask her, when she either accepts or declines coffee while green tea is also being offered, "Do the Chinese drink coffee?" (231). She feels the need to be direct: to give a "yes" or "no" answer to this question and to present "a single, all-encompassing story" (230). But she simply can't, because "taste and distaste for coffee are often as much matters of economics and politics as of palate or habit" (231), and because no single story can get to the bottom of things. For her, therefore, any direct answer to such a question has to start from "the seemingly insignificant incidents of everyday life" and from "variations and collages of little stories" (230). For her American audience, however, this kind of answer may become a bit too "indirect."

Growing up in an upper-class household where coffee was served on all occasions involving her surgeon father, Lu coveted the taste of coffee early on, though she had to wait until she was ten, when she was granted a few drops. By 1961, she was old enough to drink coffee, and she quickly formed the habit of mixing it with milk and three lumps of sugar, though both milk and sugar were rationed in those years in China. She only began to realize her privileged posi-

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tion when her nanny's two-year-old adopted grandson asked for "a bowl of life-saving sugar water" to fight off his dizziness (237). Now she takes her coffee straight because she discovered, soon after coming to America, that the dishwater variety served at most places could not have been taken any other way. Yet, to reject sugar and milk when they are offered with coffee remains emotionally challenging, because they conjure up so many past memories about her growing up in Shanghai, and about her trips, with her "foreigner husband," to a local Vietnamese restaurant "where coffee was still served *our way*" (238; emphasis original).

These memories or these felt experiences make it only fitting for Lu to tell these stories, to provide a full range of conditions, in order to answer or to talk about whether or not the Chinese drink coffee. On the other hand, an otherwise all-encompassing response would necessarily become quite incomplete or too abstract—no matter how "direct" it might be. Her own acute awareness of the inadequacy evidenced in this "direct" approach makes the telling of her stories all the more appropriate (and quite direct to her) —no matter how "indirect" they might appear to her American interlocutors. These stories, and these reflective efforts of hers to talk about "Do the Chinese drink coffee?" then constitute, as I have been suggesting in this essay, the making of Chinese American rhetoric.

In my writing class I regularly teach Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* to illustrate, for my mainstream American students, how Chinese Americans, like Kingston, are negotiating between two powerful cultural traditions, and how memories, dreams, and "talk-stories" shape and influence their experiences and their sense of who they are. More important, I use the book to articulate, both for them and for myself, the making of Chinese American rhetoric. Let me share a few such moments here: while they are real and direct most of the time, I know, in the back of my mind, that some of these moments can be just as imagined and as informed by my yearning for Chinese indirectness.

The "general" American readers, according to Victoria Chen, view *The Woman Warrior* as both interesting and confusing, and they think that "Kingston does not write clearly" because "it is difficult to tell where her fantasies end and reality begins" (4). Reflecting the mood of the "general" American readers, critics have measured the book "against the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental" (Kingston, "Cultural" 55). A good number of my students share a similar reading experience: while they all enjoyed reading the book, they were puzzled by its recurrent use of Chinese myths and fairy

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tales in the construction of Kingston's personal journey. To use my terms, this inability to appreciate the blurring, the border crossing, reflects, to a large extent, the tendency to read the Chinese "events" through the framework of European American "things"—that is, they were expecting a transparent, causal progression from the relational bias that values meaning interdependence and "productive vagueness." The failure of their expectation conveniently matches, and perhaps reinforces, their culturally conditioned image of the Chinese as the exotic, as the inscrutable. For me, then, it becomes crucial to move beyond discourses that simply dub *The Woman Warrior* an example of "fictional autobiography" and that quickly condemn "the ghostly otherness" in Kingston's Chinese American experience to the exotic Orient (Kingston, "Cultural" 57). Instead, I must develop discourses that can, as Elaine H. Kim suggests, stake

The Woman Warrior should be read, I tell my students in no uncertain terms, as a story of Chinese indirectness.

our claim on America without relinquishing "our marginality" (147) and that can, to draw on my preceding discussions, claim "the ghostly otherness" as part of this "togetherness-in-difference" at rhetorical borderlands.

The Woman Warrior should be read, I tell my students in no uncertain terms, as a story of Chinese indirectness. Throughout the book, Kingston weaves the personal with "talk-stories" to yield a complex tale of her experience growing up as a Chinese American. The book begins with a story of "No Name Woman," Kingston's aunt, who drowned herself in the family well with her just-born infant because she became pregnant while her husband was on the other side of the Pacific. Because of this disgraceful act and the shame it created, the family didn't want to even acknowledge that she had ever existed, and her mother warned Kingston not to tell the story to anyone else (3, 18). But for Kingston, this story has to be told first (19), because doing so not only rebels against her mother's injunction not to tell, but also transforms an absence of fifty years (19) into a haunting presence—both of which are necessary for her own account to come out later. Her No Name Aunt had to commit suicide so as to repair "the break she had made in the 'roundness'" (14) of the patriarchal tradition, to make the family whole again by removing herself and her illegitimate child—both of whom proved to be "malignant growth" that had to be fixed. Kingston has to tell, and tell on, her aunt's story as a necessary introduction to her own story—where ghosts have to be "talked-story" and experiences of growing up in America have to be recounted in the spirit of a Chinese woman warrior (24). To the extent that No Name Woman serves as a haunting analogy to Kingston's own struggle to break free from old traditions, the first chapter

becomes a good example of Chinese indirection, and of creating part of an ambiguous, cyclical world—a world that Kingston inherits and tries to mold in her own way.

In the second chapter, "White Tigers," Kingston mixes history with myth to tell a story of a Chinese woman warrior, who, against all odds, led an uprising and eventually overthrew a dynasty—only to come home to be a filial daughter and daughter-in-law (53–54), to complete the cycle that was broken temporarily when she left home, following the call of a bird into the mountains at the age of seven to become "a female avenger" (24, 51). Like the story of No Name Woman, the creation of this woman warrior becomes Kingston's way of anticipating her own struggle, while growing up, with Chinese values and traditions—such as lying to be polite (25), feeling loved on New Year's morning by receiving red money in her pockets (36), rejecting the constant drumming that "[G]irls are maggots in the rice" (51), and dealing with the fact that "[E]ven now China wraps double binds around my feet" (57). Again, the woman warrior serves as a compelling "topic"—one that is about a mythical past and one that fully prepares for, to use Kingston's word, "the climax" ("Cultural" 57) or, to use mine, the comment in the final chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe."

My students, so far, are not quite convinced. While they remain interested in the plot of the story and in the Chinese myths and traditions, they keep asking, "Why doesn't Kingston start telling us more about her own growing-up experiences?" "How can we tell for sure which is real, and which is myth?" It is clear that they are getting impatient when confronted with the flow of "events," because they have yet to recast the frame of their own "directness norm" with the discursive tendency to lay out the "topics" first.

Things are not going to get any more direct for my students for now— though in my world of indirectness, they are just events holding out for more events, more relations. Therefore, the next two chapters—"Shaman" and "At the Western Palace"—are still not directly focused on Kingston herself. They are more about her mother ("Shaman") and about her aunt Moon Orchid ("At the Western Palace"). Like Kingston, we may not be able to tell, in these two chapters, "where the stories left off and the dreams began" (24). But with these two chapters, Kingston has unfolded two more sets of conditions or topics that are necessary for her own memory and for her own self-realization. Since they reveal how her mother and her aunt meet and grapple with the other (American) culture, these topics have to be spelled out first, so to speak, before her own climax can be reached or the final comment offered.

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It is not until the last chapter that Kingston begins to *directly* deal with her own memory of growing up as a Chinese American, who struggles, for example, between her parents' injunction to hide secrets from all kinds of ghosts in America (212–13) and her own need to talk, to explain things so that she can remain sane (216). In the process, Kingston begins to connect all the "preceding topics" to reach for the climax. For example, unlike her no name aunt, who could only repair the "roundness" she had broken by committing suicide, Kingston can now repair the "roundness" by trying to sort out what is real and what is imaginary (239) without having to yell out to her mother "the hardest ten or twelve things on my list all in one outburst" (235). But, like the woman warrior, Kingston has to leave home, too, "in order to see the world logically" (237)—only to come back to tell her mom that she now also "talks-story" (240). And finally, she completes, though with a telling twist, the story that her mother began (240)—thus signifying that the family tradition is now being passed down. The story is based on the cycle of poems known as "Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute" credited to Ts'ai Yen (Cai Yan[24]蔡琰), the daughter of the eminent poet and statesman Cai Yong (133–92 CE). These eighteen poetic compositions, in some most direct, most passionate expressions, portray how Ts'ai Yen was captured by a Southern Hsiung-nu (Xiongnu匈奴) chieftain, how she spent the next twelve years among the barbarians with a grieving heart, and how she had to break her heart again when she had to abandon her two nomad sons to return to her ancestral home.[25]

As Kingston is about to conclude the climax, the boundary between the real and the imagined continues to be blurred and to be crisscrossed. While Ts'ai Yen did return to her homeland to be remarried so that her deceased father could have Han descendants, her return was not without hardships, not without ultimate sacrifices on her part: she had to forever leave behind her Hsiung-nu husband and her two sons. This pain of losing home twice permeates the entire eighteen songs. Yet, Kingston chooses to focus on Ts'ai Yen's pain of losing her ancestral home when she was abducted by the Hsiung-nu tribe, and on her longing for return after she became a mother of two sons in the harsh and alien land. She chooses to edit out Ts'ai Yen's anguish and grief at giving up her second (barbarian) home—a key condition for her ransomed release from the tribe.

Kingston's omission here in the creation of Ts'ai Yen is deliberate and revealing, I tell my students. Namely, Kingston may need Ts'ai Yen's safe and uncomplicated return to her ancestral home to shore up her own reunion with her family, to help her search for new possibilities from this world with blurred

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boundaries and shifting paradoxes (Chen 10)—a search that is fraught with ambivalences and ambiguities. While her mother's story may have begun with a tragic development (the loss of a daughter to a barbarian tribe), Kingston creates for it a happier, more settled ending—whereby Ts'ai Yen was rescued and reunited with her ancestral family and whereby no mention was made of her gut-wrenching loss of her loved ones. Such an ending perhaps helps Kingston better prepare for her own ongoing crossings—crossings that have taken her through a culture that is mythical and ambiguous to a culture that commands a different logic or, as she put it, "the new way of seeing" (237). For Kingston, those cultures will continue to vex, if not antagonize, each other because they are forever entangled in America where they "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 34). And while no harmony is at sight, their entanglement makes it possible for them to coexist with their differences, and it is this coexistence that leads Kingston to allow both cultures to wrap double binds around her feet (57). Such narrative, in turn, gives me hope that Kingston may eventually be able to draw positive energy, for example, from her childhood agony and the trauma of speaking English; from the haunting presence of her no name aunt; and from her struggles in navigating these cultural crosscurrents. At the same time, I cannot help wondering: Is she going to "talk-story" to her own children in the same way that her mother did to her? What would she do if they should accuse her of "lying," as she did her mother? And will this crisscrossing between the real and the imagined continue to dominate her life?

My students, I can tell, may not be particularly thrilled by these kinds of open-ended questions or by the way I have been reading Kingston. But I want to use their discomfort to help them realize that their classroom is part of this rhetorical borderland where they must learn to recognize their own rhetorical tendencies and where they must prepare to negotiate with other perspectives, with other ways of reading and writing. For me, on the other hand, to read *The Woman Warrior* as an example of Chinese indirection is in large part to claim, as directly as I can, "the ghostly otherness" (read as "Chinese tradition") that American reviewers have tried so hard to exorcise (Kingston, "Cultural"). No less real is my desire to enter a dialogue that will also allow me to start where my students are, to imagine how a directness approach can be

No less real is my desire to enter a dialogue that will also allow me to start where my students are, to imagine how a directness approach can be recast so that we can read *The Woman Warrior* without measuring it against the stereotype of the Chinese as mythical or exotic.

recast so that we can read *The Woman Warrior* without measuring it against the stereotype of the Chinese as mythical or exotic. After all, indirection and directness should not be viewed necessarily as an example of opposing polarity. As I have argued above, they are a pair of complementary opposites, whose values or meaningfulness could change at any time in relation to changes in the context of other complementary opposites. It is this kind of discourse that can engage both styles of communication without either feminizing one or idealizing the other. And by practicing "togetherness-in-difference," this kind of discourse becomes part and parcel of Chinese American rhetoric—a rhetoric that, I imagine, both Kingston's mother and her children may very well appreciate and come to embrace.

IV. Closing Comment: Chinese Fortune Cookies as a Topic Again

Productive vagueness is particularly at work when it comes to using analogies or metaphors to make connections between events/things that may not embody any shared essence. My effort to use Chinese fortune cookies to help articulate the making of Chinese American rhetoric is no exception. For my closing comment, it is only fitting that I return to the analogy of Chinese fortune cookies to tease out a few instances of productive vagueness and to unpack their corresponding significances.

First, as I reflect upon my own experiences, upon those emerging articulations in my own classroom and beyond, I often come back to the image of Chinese fortune cookies. The Chinese fortune cookie, born of two competing traditions and made viable in a border zone, is real and identifiable. On the other hand, Chinese American rhetoric, as I have so far developed, may not readily offer itself to easy identification as, say, having a list of identifiable traits. How do I account for this apparent difference?

Like the Chinese fortune cookie, Chinese American rhetoric is also born of two competing traditions in a rhetorical borderland like my classroom. However, it becomes visible and viable not by securing a logical or unified order, but by participating in a process of becoming where meanings are in flux and where significations are predicated upon each and every particular experience. In this process of becoming, Chinese American rhetoric is not to be had either by abstraction or by our searching for identifiable features. Rather, the making of Chinese American rhetoric lies in reflective moments, and it finds its markings through emergent alignments and unsettled associations. Otherwise stated, in a land of border zones, meanings are not necessarily to be calculated in terms of orders, patterns, or expected outcomes. Rather, they are defined

and determined in terms of our particular experiences and in terms of our comings-to-be. As a result, there may not be any generalizable patterns to the kinds of reflections my students and I are engaged in. For example, I may not be able to ascribe my reflections, linearly or unequivocally, to "lian" and "mianzi," and my students' reflections to positive and negative face. Nor can Min-Zhan Lu pin her cravings for a cup of good coffee to her being Chinese, to her being Chinese American, or to her being an American Chinese immigrant *(Shanghai Quartet* 243). At the same time, these kinds of reflections can be no less enabling because, through our reflective encounters, both my students and I begin to see what lies beyond our own face needs, and to learn how to negotiate tensions and conflicts each time we face up in the classroom and at our life's crossings. And because of (the telling of) these stories, Lu can begin figuring out "new ways of seeing and talking about" "Do the Chinese drink coffee?" or "Where am I from?" *(Shanghai Quartet* 230). In this regard, therefore, the making of Chinese American rhetoric becomes specific—to the extent that each and every one of our encounters is informed and guided by these reflections, by these negotiations; to the extent that each and every one of these encounters enriches this web of interdependence in spite of our own ambivalences and our own apprehensions.

Second, for both mainstream Americans and Chinese/Chinese Americans, reading "fortunes" and eating fortune cookies has probably become a welcome indulgence at the end of every Chinese meal here in America: we share our "fortunes" with comforting laughs or loud protestations or both, and we then go on with our lives without necessarily thinking about the need to modify our behavior in relation to the predictions or injunctions conveyed in the "fortunes." In other words, while there is a lot of illocution or uptake in such an event, there is, most likely, not much perlocution emerging out of it (Austin 116–19). On the other hand, when Chinese and European American rhetorical traditions come in contact face to face, and when we are engaged in nurturing "togetherness-in-difference," both illocution and perlocution are a must. That is, our experiences at rhetorical borderlands will inevitably call for changes in our behavior, in our views about ourselves and the other, and in our visions for the future. As they command their own context and their own web of interdependence, these experiences will yield a new sense of identity and authority— one that is perhaps no less indeterminate and no less ambiguous, but one that is intensely rich in associations and significations.

Third, Chinese fortune cookies, to all intents and purposes, have become a natural part of eating a Chinese meal in America, even though, as I have

suggested at the beginning of this essay, they could be considered a gastro-
nomical contradiction *par excellence*. In comparison, there is nothing natural
at all about articulating, on my part, the making of Chinese American rheto-
ric. While it is a fact of life that Chinese and European American cultures are
now forever entangled, I face several choices: whether or not I want to reject
my Chinese self so as to write appropriate or direct English (see Shen 460–61);
whether or not I want to remain on the margin forever switching between two
rhetorics—experiences somewhat similar to how Lu juggled between her (West-
ern humanistic) home discourse and her (Marxist) school discourse as she
was growing up ("From" 438; *Shanghai* 254–64); and whether or not I want to
claim both "the ghostly otherness" and America at the same time—even though
the latter is "so thick with ghosts" too (Kingston, *Woman Warrior* 113). Not
only does each choice entail its own linguistic and material consequences, but
more important each choice reveals an individual's desire to be identified with
a particular speech community. More specifically, my decision to enact a par-
ticular rhetoric—such as Chinese American rhetoric—has to be viewed as
"lian"-motivated. Namely, such a decision is very much grounded in my own
desire to align myself with my own community, to secure its approval and its
blessings. Otherwise stated, my discursive alignment can never be divorced
from the context of other emergent discursive practices, and those communal
ideologies are forever implicated in, or continuously impress themselves upon,
my personal rhetorical choices.

Therefore, unless I take the time, as I have done in this essay, to open up
Chinese fortune cookies, they will most likely remain a "harmonious" constitu-
ent of a Chinese meal on this side of the Pacific. By contrast, unless I get to the
bottom of things, and unless I call a spade a spade, the making of Chinese
American rhetoric will probably be seen as incoherent, as unnatural, or as un-
specific.

Finally, there seems to be an equilibrium born of Chinese fortune cook-
ies. Without exception each and every fortune cookie represents both tradi-
tions well—one tradition uses message-stuffed pastry as a means of communi-
cation and the other serves dessert at the end of a meal. I am afraid there is no
equilibrium yet in the making of Chinese American rhetoric because it is still
English, not Chinese, that serves as the code. The use of English in this en-
deavor of mine obviously has consequences. To be brutally direct—though with
fear of injuring my face beyond redemption, it favors European American rheto-
ric: it helps keep European American face and the direct style of communica-
tion as the unmarked norm. On the other hand, Chinese face and the indirect

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style of communication may remain as marked, and on the outside looking in. Until there is a different language—a rhetorical creole of sorts—emerging to serve as the code for Chinese American rhetoric, reflective encounters of this kind will have to acknowledge and deal with this unequal, imbalanced relationship—to be forever mindful, for example, of how the un- marked can be so dominating or controlling without having to justify itself. Should I then ever get discouraged or silenced because of miscomprehension, incomprehension, or this unequal relationship, I will stop at my favor- ite local Chinese restaurant to order a Chinese meal with a bowl and a pair of chopsticks, and to reflect upon Chinese fortune cookies again. Not that I nec- essarily trust the healing power of the good "fortunes" found in these fortune cookies, but I want to remind myself that it is viable to practice "togetherness- in-difference" and to imagine the birth of a new medium—just as it is now commonplace to enjoy fortune cookies at the end of every Chinese meal in America.

> I want to remind myself that it is viable to practice "togetherness-in-difference" and to imagine the birth of a new medium— just as it is now commonplace to enjoy fortune cookies at the end of every Chinese meal in America.

Notes

1. A number of individuals have helped me with this project. I thank Lisa Ede, Keith Gilyard, Susan Jarratt, Marilyn Moller, and Charles Schuster for their encour- agement and for their wise counsel. Marilyn Cooper and an anonymous reader read an earlier version of this article and offered many thoughtful comments. I am very grateful to them.

2. George Kennedy's work on comparative rhetoric is a good example—where Kennedy anchors his discussions of other cultures' rhetorical traditions, quite ex- plicitly, within the Western rhetorical paradigm of logos, ethos, and pathos. As a result, Chinese American rhetoric would become more visible, more viable insofar as it could be compared with, or measured up to, the unmarked norm of the domi- nant tradition.

3. To characterize any ethnic rhetoric as "alternative" can be problematic because the term may have already marginalized it relative to its dominant counterpart, which it aims to challenge and disrupt in the first place. For more on this point, see Mao ("Re-clustering" 112–14).

4. In the year 1353 the peasant leader Zhu Yuanzhang, who became the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, had hidden inside mooncakes a message about the time and place of the rebellion against the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty, and the

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mooncakes were then distributed to the villagers on the day of the Midautumn Festival (Stepanchuk and Wong 55; Perkins 21).

5. According to Perkins, fortune cookies were invented in the 1920s by a worker in the Kay Heong Noodle Factory in San Francisco (167). But another legend has it that fortune cookies were first introduced in the Japanese Tea Garden in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park to accompany the tea (Driscoll). So, the debate continues over who "owns" the idea of creating fortune cookies on this side of the Pacific.

6. My effort to use Chinese fortune cookies as a generative analogy has also been inspired by Professor Ang's work. She invokes the image of the fortune cookie when she discusses how Chineseness takes on new form and content in its new, diasporic environment. She states, "Thus, we have the fortune cookie, a uniquely Chinese-American invention quite unknown elsewhere in the Chinese diaspora or, for that matter, in China itself " (35).

7. It is clear that Brown and Levinson's intent is to offer a universal concept of face that can transcend spatial-temporal boundaries. For the untenable nature of their claim, please see, for example, Matsumoto.

8. As is pointed out by others (see, e.g., Ho 868), the distinction between "lian" and "mianzi" is not absolute, and it is determined, sometimes, more by context than by the use of one term over the other. For more on their dynamics and their contextual dependence, see Mao ("Beyond Politeness Theory").

9. The Chinese expression, "si yao mianzi huo shouzui" (死要面子活受罪 , suffer mightily to gain "mianzi"), vividly identifies the danger of pursuing "mianzi" at any cost. Should this happen, the amount of "mianzi" one gains loses its value, and in fact becomes associated with negative connotations, with vanity and shallowness.

10. For more on the use of citations by Chinese writers, and on their rhetorical and social contexts, see Bloch and Chi.

11. Even when others' expectations are being considered, these expectations are "incorporated into the individual's own subjective frame of reference, that is, into [his or her] own definition of their significance for [his or her] own action" (Ho 882).

12. My conceptualization here of Chinese American rhetoric bears, to some extent, some interesting resemblance to what Scott Lyons calls "contact heteroglossia"—where, as he develops a mixedblood pedagogy of conflict and contact, his Indian students produce their own narratives "against, within, and in tandem with the grand narratives of contemporary American life and culture: race and racism, intelligence and learning, literacy and orality, success and failure, them and us" (88–89).

13. For example, Arthur Smith, who lived in China for over twenty years in the nineteenth century as a missionary of the American Board, observes that it is impossible for a foreigner to tell what a Chinese person means from merely hearing what he or she says. The reason is that "the speaker did not express what he had in mind, but something else more or less cognate to it, from which he wished his meaning or a part of it to be inferred" (66).

14. Of course, I suspect there are perhaps as many Chinese people who can be just as direct in situations such as in taxis, train ticket sales, and banks. Scollon and Scollon suggest that these "exceptions" are due to the fact that "the participants are and remain strangers to each other" ("Face Parameters" 135).

15. According to Hall and Ames, the notion of correlative thinking may be traced to Marcel Granet's *La pensée chinoise*, written in 1934, in which "correlativity is taken to be a characteristic of the 'Chinese mind'" (295). On the other hand, in 1938 Professor Chang Tung-sun published an essay in Chinese, which was independent of Granet's thesis and which later was translated into English (1959). In this essay Chang suggests that Chinese culture is informed by what he calls "correlation logic" (316)—a logic that focuses exclusively on "the correlational implications between different signs" (312) and that relies on "nonexclusive classification, analogical definition" (316).

16. There are different legends behind the origin of the twelve animals of Chinese astrology. According to one legend, the dying Buddha asked all the animals in creation to visit him on New Year's Day to bid him farewell before he departed his life on earth, but only twelve animals came. The Buddha thus rewarded each of the twelve who came with a year bearing its personality traits (Perkins 630).

17. The Chinese further associate each cycle with one of the Five Processes—Wood, Fire, Soil, Metal, and Water—to form a sixty-year cycle. Each of the Five Processes is then associated with several other aspects, such as the "yin" and "yang" "qi" (roughly "energy") or a season or month of the year (Graham 325–34; Perkins 630). In this sense, the world, according to the Chinese, is one of correlation, both expansive and unlimited.

18. By the same token, the dominance of correlative thinking in Chinese culture does not mean at all that causal thinking is nonexistent—the technological achievements throughout Chinese history provide sufficient evidence for its existence. Or, as Hall and Ames point out, all cultures possess both the correlative and causal modes of thinking, and the dominant mode only tends to "inform and recast the recessive mode" (131).

19. For example, "yin" is associated with earth, moon, north, below, squareness, darkness, cold, wetness, softness, quiescence, femininity, and much else, whereas

"yang" is associated with heaven, sun, south, above, roundness, brightness, heat, dryness, hardness, activity, masculinity, and much else (Bodde 100).

20. Of course, Chinese has subject-verb construction, just as English has topic-comment construction, which is often marked by "as to," "in regard to," or "you know." On the other hand, a topic in Chinese can be separated from the comment by a pause or by one of the pause particles (Li and Thompson, *Mandarin* 86). And regardless of how topics are marked in different languages, to quote Li and Thompson, "some languages can be more insightfully described by taking the concept of topic to be basic, while others can be more insightfully described by taking the notion of subject as basic" ("Subject" 460).

21. For more on these connective pairs, see Li and Thompson (*Mandarin* 635–40).

22. Interestingly enough, the English word "thing" is "dong-xi" (东西) in Chinese, which literally means "east-west" and which expresses "a nonsubstantive relationship" (Ames and Rosemont 22). On the other hand, the popular news program on NPR (National Public Radio) is called "All Things Considered," but not "All Events Considered"—a not-insignificant choice of word, in my view.

23. Ames and Rosemont have forcefully argued that classical written Chinese is a distinct, visually oriented medium of communication independent of the spoken language. For a detailed analysis of their reasoning, see, in particular, 285–300 *(Analects)*. For a similar perspective, see Ping Chen (65–90).

24. I am using the "pinyin" system for the romanization of Chinese characters in parentheses—in case anyone is not familiar with the Wade-Giles system Kingston uses in the book.

25. For a complete English translation of "Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute" and Cai Yan's brief biographical note (both by Dore Levy), see Chang and Saussy (22–30).

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LuMing Mao

LuMing Mao is associate professor of English at Miami University of Ohio. This article is part of the book project, titled *Reading Chinese Fortune Cookies: Chinese American Rhetoric in the Making,* which he has just completed. His writings on comparative rhetoric, Chinese rhetorical tradition, and critical discourse analysis have been placed in book chapters, in journals including *Rhetoric Review,* the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, Style,* and the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication.* He is coeditor, with Robert Hariman, Susan Jarratt, Andrea Lunsford, and Jacqueline Jones Royster, of the upcoming *Norton Anthology of Rhetoric and Writing.*

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