Rhetoric as collective ethos: from classical Chinese texts to postmodern corporate images

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Rhetoric as collective ethos:
From classical Chinese texts to postmodern corporate images

by

Wei Yong-Kang

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Program of Study Committee:
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For the Major Program
for my parents
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the question of how to position ethos in rhetorical theory and practice by looking, mainly, at three areas: classical Chinese rhetoric, Web design, and the construction of corporate images in America after 9/11. In traditional Western rhetoric, ethos is perceived to be the appeal of one's personal character, with a vocabulary heavily steeped in individualism and self-representation. In the dissertation I argue for an alternative understanding of ethos, pointing out that ethos is essentially an invocation of cultural forces, with which rhetors not only identify themselves but also, through such identification, achieve their rhetorical purposes. The central point is that ethos is collectivist, not individualist.

The dissertation has four chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR), with a focus on some of its important features, such as rhetoric as harmonic, rhetoric as paradoxical (Yin and Yang), and rhetoric as multiaccentual, and the challenges CCR poses to the conception of ethos in traditional Western rhetoric. Chapter Two explores how ethos comes to embody a social projection of one's self image and why it is intertwined with the power of kingship in early Chinese society. The conclusion is that logos, as understood in the Western tradition, does not play as an important role as ethos does in classical Chinese rhetoric, which is driven by an ethocentric tradition as opposed to the logocentrism in the West.

Chapter Three first discusses how ethos is projected differently in visual arts and design between Western and Eastern (mainly Chinese) cultures, and then moves on to explore how such differences between the two are reflected in online text and design through an in-depth analysis of samples from various Web sites. Chapter Four discusses in theory
how postmodern corporate imagery should be approached as an entity constructed within the spectrum of codes of appeals that are culturally defined. Foucault's poststructuralism is drawn upon to demonstrate that such imagery is not substantiated by what may be called a corporate soul or self, but rather by the expectations of a society.
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the question of how to position ethos in rhetorical theory and practice by looking, mainly, at three areas: classical Chinese rhetoric, Web design, and the construction of corporate images in America after 9/11. In traditional Western rhetoric, ethos is perceived to be the appeal of one's personal character, with a vocabulary heavily steeped in individualism and self-representation. In the dissertation I am arguing for an alternative understanding of ethos, pointing out that it is essentially an invocation of cultural forces, with which rhetors not only identify themselves but also, through such identification, achieve their rhetorical purposes. The central point is that ethos is collectivist, not individualist.

In this introduction, I will first give some background about Western ethos and its grounding in the Western conception of self. Then, I will point out the problematic aspects of such ethos by focusing on how texts in ancient China take individuality out of the picture yet still maintain the appeal of ethos, thus raising the question of how to redefine ethos. Lastly, I will provide an outline of the dissertation with general themes and details of what I try to accomplish in each particular chapter.

Background of Western Ethos

Aristotle sees rhetorical persuasion as threefold, coming from logos, the appeal of logical reasoning, pathos, the appeal of emotional invocation, and ethos, the appeal of one's personal character. Of the three, says Aristotle, character "may almost be
called the most effective means of persuasion” (BH 154). He explains, “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided” (BH 153). Ethos, it thus can be said, refers to a rhetorical strategy that “emphasized the role a speaker’s character plays in persuasion” (James Baumlin xii).

However, traditional Western rhetoric seems to lack a consensus in terms of how to define that role, which is sometimes seen as relating to “the problematic identification of a speaker with/in his or her speech” (Baumlin xi). Indeed, there have been two conflicting versions of ethos in the history of rhetorical theory: One is Platonic, regarding ethos as an individual quality of a rhetor, independent of rhetorical manipulations; the other is artistic, treating ethos as something that can be created, and manipulated, through means of good sense, good will, and good use of language, as proposed by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*.

Strictly speaking, Plato himself never uses the word ethos, and his anti-rhetoric stance may well give the impression that he is also anti-ethos. However, his emphasis on “true rhetoric” and the truthfulness of human character presented in that rhetoric suggests that he is just as concerned about how to identify one’s self in a speech/writing as his sophist rivals, if not more than them. Thus, “by inference,” says James Baumlin, one might still figure out “a Platonic definition” of ethos (xiii).

To understand what counts as a Platonic ethos, we may need to first look at the Platonic or transcendent truth. Plato insists that such truth has nothing to do

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1 BH refers to *The Rhetorical Tradition*, a collection of readings edited by Bizzell and Herzberg.
with the worldly (rhetoric included); however, he believes that humans were somehow in contact with it before their birth, “when [their] souls were with the Divine” (BH 55). The question is, How can humans possibly seek truth when they exist in the flesh? Plato offers his dialectic, “the whole process of rational analysis by which the soul was led into the knowledge of Ideas” (Hunt 64). Obviously, this is where the issue of character plays out, for one must be truthful to oneself in order to discover or express truth, an assertion made by Plato in both the Gorgias and the Phaedrus. Of course, in his eyes, only the philosopher, not the rhetorician, has the moral rectitude to be truthful.

It is important to note that Plato’s ethos, the truthfulness of human character, is also an embodiment of soul knowledge. As Baumlin points out, since dialectic “seeks to discover and express the truth of the soul, then ethos describes the inner harmony among language, character, and truth—in Platonic fashion, ethos defines the space where language and truth meet or are made incarnate within the individual” (xiii). This is to say that the Platonic ethos is essentially incarnationist, in the sense that it projects truth by relating to what is deep within the individual: the soul.

We may never be able to determine what exactly Plato means by the “soul” in modern terms, but we can reasonably assume it is about some kind of immortal essence an individual self possesses within. If the Platonic ethos is individualistic, it’s because it is premised, fundamentally, on the notion of an essentialist self in Western ideology, presupposing the existence of an eternal, static identity within the individual that can endure the vicissitudes of time and space (Baumlin xvii–xviii). In other words, ethos (the character of self and embodiment of truth) stands by itself, to
be revealed through language, not to be created in language: Rhetoric has little role to play.

Without doubt, Aristotle departs to a great extent from his mentor in defining ethos. Though he includes the aspect of moral character in ethos, his pragmatism gives rhetoric a much more significant role in connecting human character to the epistemic function of language. Aristotle argues that persuasion through ethos ought to be achieved by "what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak" (BH 153). That is, the orator must construct his material (artistic proofs) to "make his own character look right" so as to "inspire trust in his audience" (BH 160; 161). In contrast to Plato who insists that the speaker’s character must be upright for its own sake, Aristotle seems to say that it is sufficient to win an audience simply by making "ourselves thought to be sensible and morally good" (BH 161). To put it bluntly, the Aristotelian ethos can be faked.

In sum, the Western tradition of rhetoric has been marked by a tension between the Platonic and the Aristotelian in terms of how to identify ethos. The Platonic ethos assumes the moral character of a speaker to be something innate, outside the confines of language and society, while the Aristotelian ethos reflects a rather pragmatic approach in discourse, stressing the need for a rhetorical reconstruction of human character. Or, we may say, the Platonic ethos entertains a philosophical essence, separable from the "flattery" of rhetoric; the Aristotelian ethos, on the other hand, incorporates with the rhetorical, which in turn adds to, and even creates, the trustworthiness of a rhetor.
Questions Raised

However, as Baumlin suggests, throughout the history of rhetorical theory, the Platonic ethos appears to have had the upper hand over the Aristotelian (even though Aristotle himself is considered the framer of Western rhetoric), due to a logocentric tradition in ideology that “embraces [...] the philosophical model of selfhood over the [...] rhetorical model” (xviii). He writes:

Western culture, in other words, has largely identified itself with the tradition beginning with Plato and Isocrates and developed by Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant—all of whom treat the self as a moral, metaphysical, and ultimately, theological category (rather than as a function or effect of verbal behavior). (ibid.)

Further, what appears problematic to me (and also relevant to my dissertation) is that, even though Aristotle’s ethos is said to be “quintessentially a linguistic phenomenon” (xxiii), it never gives up in its own categories the notion of selfhood or individualization—how to represent the character of an individual is still the central concern of the Aristotelian ethos. If the Platonic ethos is the projection of self through philosophy, then the Aristotelian ethos is largely the projection of self through rhetoric. That is, discourse has now become an instrument in such projection. So, no matter how we look at the Western ethos, it has always been seen as “the appeal of speakers or writers to their own credibility and character” (Covino & Jolliffe 52), be it the Platonic or Aristotelian. I would add that the image of a Greek
rhetor standing above the crowd and single-handedly inciting his audience into actions might also have its imprint on the Western perception of ethos.

By contrast, in classical Chinese rhetoric there is no such concern as to the relation between human character and discourse. This doesn’t mean that ethos has nothing to bear on Chinese rhetoric but only suggests that it takes on a different definition, with its sources (of credibility) shifted from self to non-self, or, to put it specifically, from the individual to the collective, communal, and cultural, as I will argue later in this section. It appears that Western ethos is anything but universal when perceived from an Eastern perspective, especially from the following three aspects of classical Chinese rhetoric: function of rhetoric, epistemology, and “bamboo hypertext.”

1. Function of rhetoric

Instead of striving for individual welfare as seen in Greek rhetoric, classical Chinese rhetoric emphasizes the need for maintaining social harmony (Scollan & Scollan 142), with its discourse production essentially depersonalized. It’s hard to imagine an ancient Chinese rhetor (su-i-ke) standing above the crowd engaging in some kind of public speech or debate—not because the notion of democracy failed to prevail, but because such practice was simply out of character with the cultural themes of humility, collectivism, and adherence to social rituals.

As I will argue later (in chapter 1), harmonic rhetoric in ancient China should not be interpreted simplistically as avoiding conflicts or submitting to authority; rather, it is about how to position one’s self in the world (society and nature) through the medium of language. To achieve harmony is ultimately to seek unity
between man and the Dao, a cosmic moral order of being in ancient Chinese ideology. Rhetorically, this would mean the denial of an individual appeal on the part of the rhetor, who would have to appeal to culturally and historically established authority, such as ancestral lineage and the sage-kings like Yao, Shun, and Yū, for the purpose of establishing ethos. The ancestral lineage would give the rhetor some kind of legitimacy in positioning himself in a social hierarchy. The sage-kings were thought to “maintain a divine afflatus” (Schwartz 26) and therefore have the power to perceive the Dao. So, the appeal to such authority is essentially the appeal to the Dao, through which the rhetor builds up his rhetorical power.

2. Epistemology

Unlike Western rhetoric, which is predominantly logocentrically oriented, classical Chinese rhetoric never embraces the ideal of language as “an enterprise to represent or depict or describe an external reality independent of man and society” (Hans Lenk 6). Its primary epistemological function is to make distinctions of the world perceived to be an ontological Yin-Yang duality, rather than to express the certainty of transcendent truth as advocated by Plato and other Western thinkers. For a Westerner, language and reality can be separable; for a Chinese, language and reality are one, in the sense that we have to use language to make distinctions between Yin and Yang, good and bad, right and wrong, etc. That’s why Confucius is so obsessed with the “rectification of names” (zheng ming), because he knows very well that such rectification can lead to the rectification of moral behavior. Within the Confucian (Daoist as well) system of ideology, discourse constitutes social reality.
Now we can see that the epistemology underlying CCR is turning the Platonic ethos upside down. Because it never concerns itself with "an object-marking account of the way words relate to the world" (Hansen 71), truth has been a non-issue in CCR, and the individual self, seen as an embodiment of truth in a Platonic definition, would thus carry little weight in presenting a rhetor's ethos. To put it another way, Chinese ethos does not have to serve as some kind of connection between the truthfulness of discourse and the truthfulness of human character.

We can also see that traditional Chinese epistemology implies a denial of human agency as presupposed in a Platonic definition of ethos. For Plato, the objective discovery and representation of truth must be done by (or incarnated within) an individual self, but because truth is a non-issue in ancient Chinese thought, the concern for human agency to exercise such objectivity is thus out of question. Indeed, I would say that discourse production in ancient China is "agent-less" in the sense that the speech-act itself has never been assumed to be something individual—not just because discourse is essentially depersonalized for the sake of maintaining social harmony, as mentioned earlier, but also because there has been a wide-spread recognition of language's structuring impact on man's behavior. For Lao Zi, the "name" (i.e., language) is "the mother of ten thousand things" (1); for Confucius and his followers like Xun Zi, morality comes out of naming, not the other way around. All this would pose further challenges to the Western definition of ethos: If discourse practice is "agent-less," then where do we locate a rhetor's ethos?
3. Bamboo hypertext

Classical Chinese rhetoric can be metaphorically described as "bamboo hypertext" in that it shares many textual features that are normally associated with modern electronic hypertext, which, according to Jay Bolter, is "the interactive interconnection of a set of symbolic elements" (27). The reason I choose the term "bamboo hypertext" also has to do with the physical features of classical Chinese texts, as all of them were written (or occasionally carved) on strings of bamboo strips. I will illustrate in length in chapter 1 how classical Chinese rhetoric fits all those descriptions about hypertext: namely, non-linear, open-ended, collective, multi-accentual, interactive, and networked. In the following, I will mainly discuss how the "bamboo hypertext" phenomenon in CCR raises questions to the Western definition of ethos in terms of authorship.

Almost all the Chinese classics we've seen today, like Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* and Confucius' *Analects* were created as a collection of short essays, paragraphs, or sentences written and rewritten by the disciples, or disciples of the disciples, of Lao Zi and Confucius over a span of decades or even centuries. While the texts bore the name of Lao Zi or Confucius, as its official author as a token of respect from those disciples, as Mark Lewis suggests (53), the master himself may never have contributed a single written word to the collection (though it is popularly believed that those quotations by Lao Zi or Confucius had the master's imprint one way or another).

Consequently, after the texts had passed through numerous hands, they would invariably become inconsistent or self-contradictory in both meaning and purpose due to the absence of individual authorship (or control). In addition, many
disciples would use the master as a source of authority to create their own texts (or
agenda, using today’s political terminology) with degrees of deviation and variance
from the predecessors depending on the then ideological climate and scholarly
trends. The readers also took an active role in interacting with the texts, and very
often they were even part of an ongoing process of textual transformation. So, it’s
not surprising to see that a classic Chinese work credited to a historic figure could
have numerous “adulterated” versions. The “problem,” of course, comes from a
collective authorship responsible for the production of “bamboo hypertext.”

What is significant about “bamboo hypertext” is that its authorship seems to
break away from all of the “self-structure” (Marshall Alcorn 3) associated with a
Western ethos: character, personality, person(a), voice, image, and, above all, the
self, none of which matters that much in classical Chinese rhetoric. Because of the
collective authorship that transcends time and space, a CCR text is typically defined
by motion rather than by “momentary location” (Moulthrop 303). That is to say, it
aims to dissolve itself, which would mean it also dissolves the kind of stableness,
however relative, that a self-structure must have in order to establish ethos (Alcorn
3-35).

Alcorn says, “A theory of ethos needs to be grounded in a relatively clear, but
also a relatively complex, understanding of the self” (4), but does this theory also
apply to classical Chinese rhetoric? I would doubt it, for the reason that its collective
authorship projects self-effacement rather than self-representation as commonly
seen in Western culture and rhetoric. I wouldn’t say there is no such thing as ethos
in “bamboo hypertext,” because a Chinese rhetorical text, like its Western
counterpart, must establish certain trust or credibility in order to effect persuasion.
Indeed, Confucius’ “xiu ci li qi chen,” which can be translated as “rhetoric oriented towards trust,” may exactly point out how important ethos is in Chinese rhetoric. But the difference is, a Western ethos is created to gain trust for the rhetor as an individual, whereas a Chinese ethos has a broader purpose of telling or, to use Lewis’ words, “writing the masters” (53) instead of one’s self.

In this section, I have discussed the three aspects of classical Chinese rhetoric to illustrate how a Chinese ethos can differ from a Western one, therefore raising questions as to the Western definition of ethos based on the identification of a speaker/writer within a discourse. The “function of rhetoric” part points out an important characteristic of classical Chinese rhetoric, depersonalization, which suggests that a Chinese rhetor must invoke culturally established authority, and ultimately the Dao, to create ethos. The “epistemology” part explains how truth is a non-issue in CCR; therefore, the individual self, which is supposed to be an embodiment of truth in the Platonic sense, would carry no weight in generating ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. And the “bamboo hypertext” part demonstrates at the discourse production level how a fluid, collective authorship in CCR defies the stableness of a self-structure considered to be necessary in formulating a Western ethos.

All the three aspects of classical Chinese rhetoric will be further explored in chapters to follow, and in greater detail and length.

Methods
The dissertation is meant to investigate in theory the possibility of redefining ethos, using categories that distinguish between Chinese and Western rhetoric, such as the
above mentioned three aspects; critical analysis of classical texts will be the key to explicating how ethos is perceived and established in the context of history, culture, and rhetorical theory. It will also explore in detail how persuasion can be effected when ethos is projected as an invocation of cultural forces rather than as an appeal to one’s own character and trust—by examining critically some primary texts produced in the Autumn and Spring and Warring States periods (722–481 B.C.; 403–221 B.C.), when Chinese rhetoric had reached its full bloom both in terms of theory and practice. I will utilize the existing English versions of Chinese texts whenever possible for the purpose of translation, except on two occasions: 1) when the English translation is not available, and 2) when the rendition itself does not fully express the original.

Since my target audience is meant to be Western readers, it’s necessary for me to establish my own ethos by identifying with some Western theorists, such as Goffman, Burke, and Foucault. The rhetorical theory in ancient China bears some striking similarity to poststructuralism in the West. I think it’s also feasible to do some comparative discussions on this topic: for example, between the authorship of “bamboo hypertext” and Foucault’s “author function.” This way, I might have the benefit of easing resistance from some Western readers.

In order to show that the idea of collective ethos has a broader application, beyond the cultural boundary of Chinese, or even Eastern, rhetoric, I will devote chapter 3 to discussing online ethos with a purpose to explore the possibility of cultural convergences in terms of ethos projection in addition to the question of Eastern-versus-Western differences in Web design, and chapter 4 is dedicated to demonstrating the applicability of collective ethos in business communication.
practices based on research on the construction of corporate images in America after 9/11.

Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation will focus on exploring in theory one of the three persuasive strategies in Western rhetoric—ethos—drawing on my research in classical Chinese rhetoric and some comparisons with Western poststructuralist discourse theory. The claims I wish to make are: 1) ethos is a collective cultural force, not an individual quality based on the rhetor’s self and character; 2) ethos is shifting, not static, and is always shaped (and reshaped) and defined (and redefined) by audience and context and, to a larger extent, by culture, community, and history; and 3) ethos and logos are the same in classical Chinese rhetoric.

The purpose of the dissertation is not to discuss what Chinese ethos is, but rather to redefine, conceptually, the notion of ethos. Some ancient Chinese thinkers, like Lao Zi and Confucius, and Western postmodern theorists Foucault (poststructuralism), Goffman (performance theory), and Kenneth Burke (rhetoric as identification) will provide a theoretical framework for my discussions. The dissertation will be divided into four chapters, as outlined in the following:

Chapter One: Overview. Some of the important features of classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR) are discussed, and so are the challenges CCR poses to the traditional conception of ethos in Western rhetoric. An overview of Western ethos is provided in the form of an appendix at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Two: Face and Heaven. This chapter will explore how ethos comes to embody a social projection of one’s self image and why it is intertwined with the
power of kingship in early Chinese society. The conclusion is that logos, as understood in the Western tradition, does not play as an important role as ethos does in classical Chinese rhetoric, which is driven by an ethocentric tradition as opposed to the logocentrism in the West.

Chapter Three: Ethos Online. This chapter first discusses how ethos is projected differently in visual arts and design between Western and Eastern (mainly Chinese) cultures, and then moves on to explore how such differences between the two are reflected in online text and design through an in-depth analysis of samples from various Web sites.

Chapter Four: Corporate Image as Collective Ethos. This chapter will discuss in theory how postmodern corporate imagery should be approached as an entity constructed within the spectrum of codes of appeals that are culturally defined. Foucault's poststructuralism is drawn upon to demonstrate that such imagery is not substantiated by what may be called a corporate soul or self, but rather by the expectations of a society.

The dissertation is structured using an article format, which means that each chapter can be read as an independent article. For that reason, some content may appear repeated across chapters for the sake of keeping in place the textual integrity of each chapter.

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CHAPTER 1

CLASSICAL RHETORIC IN CHINA: AN OVERVIEW

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The name is the mother of ten thousand things.

Good men do not argue.
Those who argue are not good.
Those who know are not learned.
The learned do not know.

— Lao Zi (570?–480? B.C.)

This chapter is meant to provide an overview about classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR), but I realize, immediately, that I’m launching an almost impossible task for myself: The overwhelming richness of classical Chinese rhetoric and its underlying philosophical tradition can never be adequately summarized within the limits of a few pages, just as there is no way to do so with the rhetorical tradition in the West. So, I would like to begin this chapter with an apology—for the deliberate selectiveness in presenting an overview about CCR and for the inevitable distortion of CCR that comes with such selectiveness.

To be selective means that I won’t cover everything in classical Chinese rhetoric; it also means that I will purposely highlight some aspects of CCR that I deem relevant to issues I will further explore in the dissertation: that is, issues regarding ethos as the collective cultural constitution of rhetorical appeal as opposed to something of a personal quality on the part of a rhetor. I am writing the chapter with two goals in mind: first, to provide a very brief introduction of classical Chinese
rhetoric with emphasis on its non-Western aspects; second, to discuss some of the
questions raised when rhetorical theorists are attempting to conceptualize those
non-Western aspects. I intend not to be conclusive. Indeed, what is concluded in this
chapter will be explored further in other chapters and, of course, with more rigor.
The chapter will be followed by an appendix, which will review ethos and its
conceptual metamorphoses in the history of Western rhetoric.

The Definition

Surprisingly enough, there is still no exact Chinese equivalent for the term rhetoric,
which has been traditionally translated as xiu-ci xue (which means, literally, the
study of language embellishing).\(^1\) While I cannot say that xiu-ci xue is totally out of
character with the Western definition of rhetoric (which does have something to do
with language polishing), it seems to have missed most of what we perceive to be
rhetoric, particularly its functions in persuading an audience, initiating social change,
signaling one's community membership, etc.

To me, the lack of a Chinese equivalent for “rhetoric” indicates, primarily,
that there is a difference between Western and Chinese rhetorical traditions: What is
distinctive about Western rhetoric and its cultural setting may not be directly
translated into the Chinese language (or vice versa). But it also points to the fact that
rhetoric itself has never been an independent subject of knowledge in China (at least
until early last century): Philosophers, thinkers, politicians, and literary elites have
practiced rhetoric all the time and even from time to time discussed theoretical
issues surrounding rhetoric, yet nobody has systematically studied and categorized

\(^1\) "Xiu-ci Xue" is also the title of Aristotle's Rhetoric in Chinese version.
it the way Westerners (e.g., Aristotle) have done in the past. Robert Oliver has an explanation that I think is worth quoting in full:

To state the matter most simply, in the West rhetoric has been considered so important that it has had to be explored and delineated separately, as a special field of knowledge about human relations. In the East, rhetoric has been considered so important that it could not be separated from the remainder of human knowledge. Asian thinkers have consistently seen rhetoric as being inseparably interconnected with problems of ethics, psychology, politics, and social relations. (360)

Well, if it has been the Chinese tradition not to separate rhetoric from other studies of knowledge and experience, then it shouldn’t be hard to conceive why in that tradition people haven’t had a specific technical term, equivalent to Western “rhetoric,” to make that distinction. George Kennedy has also observed that “rhetoric was not a distinct discipline in ancient China” (143). Following Graham, he points out that “the traditional Chinese arts were six: ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics” in comparison to “the seven liberal arts of West: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music” (ibid.).

In the summer of 1996, when I was in Beijing University attending an international conference on culture and communication, I was most struck by a new Chinese term for “rhetoric”: shuo-fu xue (the study of persuasion). The term is probably close enough to what has been traditionally defined as rhetoric in the West, but it just sounds “outlandish” to a Chinese ear. Yes, the Chinese do engage in
all kinds of persuasive activities just as Westerners or people from other cultures do, but they have just never heard of something called shuo-fu xue. The example again suggests direct translation doesn’t work well cross-culturally, but it also reveals, in my view, a flaw in the current scholarship in China: that is, the attempt to conceptualize rhetoric in Western terms.

For example, during that conference a keynote speaker (Gong Wen-Xiang) even declared that rhetoric in China doesn’t have cultural roots. The reason? Because of the dominance of Confucianism in Chinese culture and ideology, the mainstream “tended to despise the skill of persuasion,” favoring instead the use of “exemplary moral conduct” as a persuasive mode to influence other people’s social behavior. But I think that scholar from Beijing University has probably committed two errors. One is that he separates moral conduct from language behavior as if an individual were able to act morally, outside the structuring confines of discourse. The other is that he sees rhetoric largely in terms of how Western rhetoricians have defined it as if Chinese rhetoric, if it counts as rhetoric, had to match the Western conception of rhetoric. One of his arguments is that Aristotle’s ethos, a rhetorical strategy drawing on the appeal of a speaker/writer’s own personal character, does not exist in the traditional type of persuasive communication in China; therefore, it follows that rhetoric itself is not indigenous to Chinese culture. In his mind, rhetoric must involve such persuasive skills as logos, ethos, pathos, etc.; otherwise, it is not rhetoric.

I wouldn’t say that Gong is completely wrong, but the fact that he sees rhetoric strictly in terms of persuasion is very problematic. “Rhetoric refers to human behavior and communication seen as embodying strategies for affecting situations,” says Joseph Gusfield, when explaining Kenneth Burke’s conception of social action as rhetorical (6). In Burkean terms, the relevance of rhetoric to social action is not simply that rhetoric is a useful tool that people can use to persuade an audience to act in order to initiate certain social change; rather, social action itself, imbued with symbols, is seen as realized in and through rhetoric: An individual’s behavior is always driven by the motivation of affecting situations, and, for that purpose, he or she must be persuasional to other individuals as well as to him- or herself. That is to say, social action itself, including moral conduct, is essentially rhetorical.

With this in mind, we may be able to say that some of the classical texts in China, like Lao Zi’s *Dao De Jing* and Confucius’s *Analects*, with their seemingly anti-rhetorical stance, can still be read as texts on rhetoric or related to rhetoric as their main function “consists in erecting, initiating, motivating, and insinuating actions and action-oriented attitudes, not in describing a transcendent world independent of actions and consciousness, or in transmitting representations and opinions about this world in itself.” Thus, while Lao Zi says that “Good men do not argue,” in contrast to Quintilian’s “good man speaking well,” we still have many reasons to

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read his *Dao De jing* as "first and foremost a work of rhetoric." Indeed, George Kennedy believes that ancient China had "a body of rhetorical texts unmatched even in Greece and Rome" (142).

There are also scholars in China who link (or confuse?) rhetoric with linguistics. For example, Chen Wang-Dao, who is generally reputed as the pioneer of modern Chinese rhetoric, identifies *xiu-ci xue* as a study of language "existing somewhere between linguistics and literature" (*On Rhetoric* 250). And his followers, who are representing the mainstream thought on rhetoric in China, contend that rhetoric is "a branch of linguistics" since it is essentially a study of language at the linguistic level, though they recognize that rhetoric also relates to "literature, aesthetics, psychology, logic, writing, public speech, etc." (Zong Ting-Hu 4). But there are some variations between those scholars as to what branch of linguistics rhetoric is. Zhang Gong, the author of *Modern Chinese Rhetoric* (1963), holds that successful rhetoric lies in the proper use of vocabulary, sound, and grammar (16) while Chen Zong-Ming (1997) places rhetoric squarely under the category of "pragmatics" as he sees naming, arguing, persuading, and so on, as practical applications of language in a given social context.

The confusion of rhetoric with linguistics indicates Western influence on current Chinese rhetorical scholarship, but seemingly in the wrong way. One obvious reason is that rhetoric as an independent discipline is relatively new in China. According to Hu Yu-Shu (1990), a systematic study of rhetoric and rhetorical history started only after the 1950s (i): The scholarship is still at the stage of how to conceptualize and define the boundaries of its discipline. Another reason is that

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5 See Kristophee Koval’s "Reading Lao-tzu as Rhetoric" in *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, and*
those who study rhetoric may have mixed it with linguistics in the first place. For example, in Chen Wang-Dao’s landmark work, *Xiu-Ci Xue Fa-Fan* (Essentials of Rhetoric) (1932), the second chapter clearly shows the influence of Western linguists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (Zong Ting Hu 19). It appears that Chen’s insistence on language being the basis of rhetorical study has been a well established position in current scholarship in China (Zong Ting-Hu 19-20).

This linguistic bent is said to “enhance the scientific rigor of rhetorical study” (Zong Ting-Hu 20), but I think it also suggests a lack of understanding about Western rhetoric, as evidenced by the fact that current rhetorical study in China focuses primarily on refining or tuning language expressions (at the technical level). I wouldn’t say Western rhetoric has no imprint on modern Chinese scholarship. Chen’s statement that “writing and speaking must serve the purpose of reaching readers and hearers and must center around the task of influencing them” (8) is clearly Aristotelian, and his “adjustment theory” (i.e., adapting messages to purpose and context) demonstrates his affiliation to the Greco-Roman rhetoric despite the fact that his followers insist that Chen is the first to advance such a theory in the field of rhetoric (Zong Ting-Hu 21). However, because of Chen’s own bias toward linguistics and literature, his “adjustment theory” has never been developed in full bloom by himself, and later by his followers.

In sum, current Chinese rhetoric, as a discipline, is still at the stage of categorizing itself: Is it the study of language polishing (xiu-ci xue)? the study of persuasion (shuo-fu xue)? or the study of linguistics (yu-yan xue)? This indicates that the Western conception of rhetoric cannot be directly translated into the Chinese

language, or, when translated, it is often confused with linguistics. Realizing this problem, some scholars have attempted to divide rhetoric into two categories: rhetoric for the purpose of comprehension (i.e., audience oriented) and rhetoric for the purpose of expression (i.e., author oriented). My impression is that rhetoric for the purpose of comprehension is very much under-developed in China whereas rhetoric for the purpose of expression is very much over-developed.

Rhetoric in Ancient China

While many theorists in contemporary China have trouble defining what rhetoric is, there was no shortage of terms in classical Chinese that can be said to be conceptually comparable to the notion of “rhetoric” as perceived in the Western tradition. According to Lu Xing, “the ancient Chinese appear to have had their own well-developed sense of rhetoric, revealed morphologically throughout primary Chinese texts in the following frequently used terms: *yan* (language, speech); *ci* (mode of speech, artistic expressions); *jian* (advising, persuasion); *shui* (persuasion)/*shou* (explanation); *ming* (naming); and *bian* (distinction, disputation, argumentation)” (3-4). If language is the window of a culture, then those rhetorical terms identified by Lu may be a good indication of rhetoric in China dating back to a historic period called pre-Qin (722–221 B.C.), which parallels the Greco-Roman period in the West.

Lu tries to prove in her *Rhetoric in Ancient China* (1998) that rhetoric is not “the sole property and invention of the West” (1), arguing for the need to explore the non-Western tradition of rhetoric such as developed in pre-Qin China. However, she faces a dilemma in how to conceptualize classical Chinese rhetoric: On the one hand, she stresses “understanding Chinese rhetoric on its own terms” (71); on the
other, she takes pains to draw similarities between Greek rhetoric and classical Chinese rhetoric in an effort to "legitimate" CCR based on terms acceptable to Western students. Railing at "the unfortunate fact that Chinese rhetoric [...] is perceived as radically Other," the author contends that the ancient Chinese grasped "logic and rational thinking" just as those ancient Greeks did (33, 32). And she even identifies a few key words in CCR that "may be more closely related to logos" in Greek rhetoric (92). I wouldn’t say that Lu is trying to turn Chinese rhetoric into logocentric, but the way she insists that CCR had its share of "interest" in logic or logos seems to indicate the author cannot rid herself of Western standards when conceptualizing ancient Chinese rhetoric despite the fact that she also argues, strongly, against Western "misconceptions."

We may recall the claim made by Gong Wen-Xiang, the speaker at the Beijing Conference (1996), that rhetoric has no cultural roots in China because its tradition did not entertain persuasive skills such as ethos. Gong’s mistake is that he defines rhetoric largely through the eyes of Western theorists. It appears then that Lu Xing is making a similar mistake, even though she has a different conclusion in mind: namely, to use Western rhetorical concepts, such as logic and logos, to prove the existence of rhetoric in ancient China.

I won’t elaborate at this point how logic or logos plays out (or doesn’t play out) in classical Chinese rhetoric, but I would say that there is really no need to prove, or disprove, that there existed a rhetorical tradition in ancient China. If, as Gusfield says, in Burkean terms, rhetoric is "human behavior and communication seen as embodying strategies for affecting situations," we can reasonably assume it exists everywhere—as far as human civilization goes—like poetry, architecture, or
even food. It would be utterly ludicrous to launch a “scholarly” inquiry into whether or not ancient China or Greece had its own poetry, architecture, or food; rather, a sensible question should be: What was it like? Or how did it differ other cultural traditions? Likewise, it would be meaningless to deny or confirm the existence of classical Chinese rhetoric, as Gong and Lu have tried to do; rather, a meaningful inquiry should center around the nature of CCR, focusing on such questions as “how it differed from other traditions, such as the Greco-Roman rhetoric,” “how it was represented in classical texts,” “how it was practiced,” etc., etc.

Plenty of scholarship in recent years has explored the differences between traditional Chinese and Western rhetoric, notably, Lu Xing’s Rhetoric in Ancient China, as mentioned above, and Scollan and Scollan’s Intercultural Communication (1995). The latter points out that Chinese culture was dominated by the Confucian discourse system as opposed to the Utilitarian discourse system in Western cultures. “Discourse system” is a rather complex concept, involving ideology, socialization, forms of discourse, and social organization (170-71). From the communication’s perspective, the Confucian discourse system may be summarized as focusing on human relationship (e.g., building consensus) in contrast to the Utilitarian discourse system being goal-oriented (e.g., seeking effectiveness). The authors also write:

... one major difference between Ancient Chinese and Ancient Greek rhetoric was on [the] dimension of group harmony versus individual welfare. Ancient Chinese rhetoric emphasized the means by which one could phrase one’s position without causing any feeling of disruption or disharmony. Ancient Greek rhetoric, on the other hand, emphasized the
means of winning one's point through skillful argument, short of, says Aristotle, the use of torture. (142)

Scollan and Scollan's remark, which seems to reflect a popularly held view of ancient Chinese rhetoric by Western scholars (e.g., Oliver, Kennedy) is not without dispute. Lu Xing argues that the notion of "harmonious rhetoric" tends to overgeneralize, without regard to the "complex and varied nature of Chinese culture," not to mention the fact that the pre-Qin period witnessed "intense conflicts between and within ancient Chinese states and philosophical schools" (29). She even questions whether there is such a thing as rhetorical harmony, if it "is achieved by submission to authority, ... at the expense of truth and individuality" (30).

Here I find myself siding with those Western scholars. For one thing, "truth" or "individuality" had never become an issue in traditional Chinese thought (which I'll explain later). For another, harmonic rhetoric should not be interpreted, literally, as avoiding conflicts or submitting to authority; rather, it is about how to position one's self in the world (society and nature) through the medium of language. To achieve harmony is ultimately to seek unity between man and the Dao (also spelled as "Tao," meaning the Way or Principle), a cosmic moral order of being in ancient Chinese ideology. Socially speaking, this would mean promoting communal collectivism and de-emphasizing personal achievements in society (which is to say, "Don't stand out!"). In the philosophical sense, it is about situating human existence in "the stream of the universe," in which, Lao Zi says, mankind should humble itself "as a little child" (28).
Rhetorically, the notion of harmony would have several implications. First, it is the call for humility, discouraging arguments that tend to "enhance the welfare of the individual speaker or listener" (Olive 361). Second, it is the stance of holism, emphasizing the necessity in communication not only of seeing a particular tree but of seeing the forest as well that surrounds the tree, to put it in a Chinese way. The "high-context system," as described by Edward Hall (Beyond Culture 85–128) of Chinese and other non-Western cultures, explains to some extent how this holistic approach works in communicative situations: i.e., to utilize and rely on the context to convey messages, which are generally less explicit, less elaborated, compared to some low-context cultures in the West. Third, rhetoric aimed at achieving harmony implies the denial of an individual appeal on the part of the rhetor, celebrating instead the role of authority culturally and historically established, such as the sage-kings, like Yao, Shun, and Yu. The sage-kings were thought to have the power to perceive the Dao, capable of carrying out the "Mandate of Heaven" (tian-ming) and governing with virtue "all that is under Heaven" (tian-xia). Thus, the appeal to such authority was essentially the appeal to the Dao, the cosmic orders, from which the ancient writer/speaker drew the ultimate source of rhetorical power.

That rhetoric was depersonalized in ancient China contrasts sharply with the Western rhetorical tradition, in which the individual status of a rhetor has been given much more prominence in effecting persuasion. The personal character, says Aristotle, "may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (BH 154). Hence, questions may be posed as to how to define ethos, the

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6 According to Daoism, the Dao is "the source of all being and governor of all life, human and natural, and the basic, undivided unity in which all the contradictions and distinctions of existence are ultimately resolved" (see Sources of Chinese Tradition, 49–50).
rhetorical means that builds upon, and up, one's moral character to sway an audience: If the role of an individual does not count that much in the function of rhetoric, as in the case of classical Chinese rhetoric, then where is the ethos? Put differently, how do we identify ethos when the personal appeal is absent? Shall we dismiss it as non-existent? or shall we relate it to some outside forces beyond the individual such as culture, tradition, and community? I will address these questions later on and, in greater detail and length, in the dissertation. At this point, I just wish to say that classical Chinese rhetoric has its own version of ethos, different from what has been defined by Aristotle.

**Discourse Patterns, Face, and Treatment of Self**

It has long been observed that Chinese culture, among other Eastern cultures, prefers to use inductive discourse patterns (delaying the topic to the end) whereas Westerners opt for deductive discourse patterns (introducing the topic right at the beginning), which, according to Scollan and Scollan, indicates "differences in the cultural structuring of situations and participant roles" (83). What determines the cultural structuring of situations and participant roles, the Scollans argue, is the use of "face" strategies, which can be categorized either as "involvement" (asserting one's position) or "independence" (withholding from such assertion). The so-called face strategy originates from the Chinese concept of face, the "image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* 5). In sociological terms, it has to do with one's assumptions of interpersonal relationships; in rhetoric, it is about presentations of such assumptions: for instance, how to incorporate the perceived acceptance or rejection of one's role in a speech.

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7 Legendary figures in Chinese history (2357–2205 B.C.).
event. Scollan and Scollan relate the inductive discourse to the face strategy of independence and the deductive to the face strategy of involvement.

I would like to point out that the Scollans are countering their own argument about "cultural structuring" when they dismiss the "false east-west dichotomy" in discourse patterns (82), insisting that Chinese and Westerners would use the same face strategies in rhetoric given the same context. To them, what really matters is not culture, but "power" and "distance" (between participants of a communication), which can determine how people employ face/rhetorical strategies: For example, a person in higher power tends toward involvement strategies, therefore being deductive in discourse, and strangers would resort to independence strategies when communicating with each other, therefore being rhetorically inductive. What Scollan and Scollan try to say is that face/rhetorical strategies based on their power/distance model can apply everywhere, cutting across cultural boundaries. In their words, "what is significant in intercultural communication is not the difference in culture; it is the difference in that particular rhetorical strategy" (162). But somehow they stop short of explaining why, in general, Westerners prefer involvement strategies and Chinese prefer independence strategies despite the fact that power and distance exist in both cultures, shaping communicative situations and participant roles.

In my view, the face strategies are not just about power and distance; they are also concerned with self-representation—how to identify one's self-image or face (which is indeed ethos as I will argue later) in discourse through what Goffman calls "the definition of the situation" (Presentation of Self 6). As I understand it, Goffman's "definition of situation" can occur in the immediate context in which a
communicator finds him- or herself, but it can also occur in the broader context of culture to which an individual has had a lifetime exposure. Thus, it makes sense to see a person in higher power act aggressively in communication, using involvement strategies (as defined by the immediate situation), but it also makes sense to see that same person abstain from such aggressiveness, using independence strategies (as defined by the extended situation of culture) simply because of the ideological belief in collectivism or the way he or she was brought up. So, culture does count in formulating face strategies—in that it impacts the way an individual projects his or her self in society.

Needless to say, Chinese and Western cultures do not share the same approach to the self, which is to be reflected in their differed ways of constructing and presenting faces rhetorically. Given the notion of harmony, it is quite conceivable that the Chinese face is indeed a “faceless” face, in the sense that the participant of a communication tends to efface his or her own individual appeal, striving to restrain self-imposition in a speech/text. This is particularly true in classical Chinese rhetoric, in which the writer/speaker often went an extra mile to strike the reader/listener as humble and to make sure that discourse, points out Oliver, “adhered to approved patterns” (361). By contrast, the ultimate “I” in Western thought often dictates a full-blown augmentation of self-image in the attempt to expand one’s personal character (ethos) as a rhetorical appeal.

I might add that the term face has a highly individualistic connotation to Westerners, and that what I mean by “faceless” is not that Chinese people don’t have a face (Does this sound weird?), but that their face is not so much individualized, grounded solely in the notion of self by Western standards. Because
of this difference, it should come as no surprise that Chinese people and Westerners may end up using different face strategies given the same rhetorical setting (power and distance): While it is the norm for somebody in the West in higher power to use involvement face strategies to assert his or her position straightforward, the Chinese counterpart may simply feel uncomfortable to impose him- or herself, choosing instead independence face strategies, which are characterized in discourse as implicit, indirect, hedging, as well as inductive. Again, my point is that culture does count—it affects our attitudes towards the self and therefore face/rhetorical strategies that project it (self) into a communication act.

To be fair, Scollan and Scollan do distinguish between the Chinese and the Western concept of self, which, according to the authors, may result in varied “face needs” in intercultural communication: “a person from a highly individualistic culture would pay more attention to his or her personal face needs, whereas a person from a more collective culture would always have the face of others foremost in his or her mind” (134). So, Scollan and Scollan do recognize that cultural differences about the self have their impact on the way people communicate. Unfortunately, they fail to further the connection between face needs and face strategies but, instead, let themselves get carried away by the “universals” of power and distance in an attempt to shift from intercultural communication to interdiscourse communication to better suit their discourse analysis needs.

The reason I have had a lengthy, and probably excessive, discussion on discourse patterns and face strategies is because I think it is necessary to know these patterns and strategies intimate, to a large extent, cultural conceptions of self and related issues such as individuality, image, and face. The rhetorical difference is, so to
speak, a matter of how to treat the self in discourse within the framework of a culture. So, it makes sense to see that inductive (or, in my words, laid-back) discourse is a preferred rhetorical strategy in Chinese culture because of an age-old tradition that depersonalizes rhetoric for the purpose of achieving collectivist harmony. Of course, I wouldn’t say the notion of self had no place in classical Chinese rhetoric, but just that self-representation in terms of fitting into “accepted social ends” was far more important than self-fulfillment based on an individualistic language (de Bary, et al. 114). To a Confucian, like Xun Zi (313–238 B.C), the greatest of all principles was to abide by li (i.e., established social rituals and behavior codes), which, as Chen and Wang point out, could be the sole standard of “judging good or bad rhetoric” (44).

Without doubt, the Western conception of self, which is distinct from the Chinese, has led to a different, and more individualized, approach to rhetoric, resulting in much stress placed on the personal appeal of a rhetor as a way to solicit trust and induce persuasion. Quintilian’s “good man speaking well,” which is conventionally interpreted as stressing moral leadership in rhetoric (Bizzell and Herzberg 35), is a good example to show how much emphasis has been put on the self in Western rhetoric. That is to say, it is the individual who makes a difference between good and bad rhetoric. No wonder Western rhetoric would appear self-assertive to those from Chinese and other Eastern cultures, who are more or less accustomed to harmonic rhetoric.

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9 According to George Mead, a social theorist, the Western conception of self falls into two categories: One assumes a social process as “logically prior to the individuals and their individual experiencing”; the other assumes individuals and individual experiencing as “logically prior to the social process” (see his Mind, Self, and Society: 222-3). But no matter what, there is still much more emphasis on the individual in comparison to classical Chinese thought, which often saw individuality as incompatible with social order.
As a footnote, that Western and Chinese culture treat the individual self differently can also be felt in other branches of language arts besides rhetoric. For instance, Andrew Plaks has observed that the word “hero” in the Western narrative tradition may not have its conceptual equivalent in the Chinese. While “the Western narrative tradition has tended to see in human character a more or less substantial entity, [...] the central human figures in the Chinese tradition are generally something less than heroes, if not full-fledged anti-heroes” (340). And he notices, in the classical Chinese novel, “a certain ambivalence that hovers over them [human figures], an uncertainty that keeps them from presenting or even tending towards an unequivocal self-image” (ibid.). Like rhetoric, traditional Chinese narrative de-emphasizes self-representation on the individual basis.

**Speaking the Unspeakable**

Since the individual appeal has been taken out of the picture in traditional Chinese rhetoric, then can we say that good rhetoric doesn’t depend on “good men”? I would answer “Yes.” Indeed, Lao Zi’s “Good men do not argue” (81), which is often seen as anti-rhetorical at first glance, may say just that. At least we can see that Lao Zi separates the role of an individual from rhetoric even though this individual is a “good man.”

The problem is the next line, “Those who argue are not good” (81). Does this mean that rhetoric comes out of bad people? Not necessarily so, according to Chen and Wang, who argue that what Lao Zi really objects to is the “untruthful” in rhetoric, citing the fifth century literary/rhetorical theorist Liu Si (92-3). They especially point out that, since Lao Zi himself says, “Beautiful words command
respect from others," it would be impossible for the Old Master (Lao Zi’s Chinese meaning) to ignore the positive social function of rhetoric. I agree. But I do not agree with the authors when they stretch their argument to imply the beautiful to be something added or polished as opposed to the truthful seen as genuine, natural, and in harmony with the Dao. For one thing, the beautiful and the truthful do not necessarily contradict each other (Remember the English romantic poet John Keats’ “Beauty is truth, truth beauty”?). For another, given the Daoist ideal of *wu-wei* (roughly translated as “non-doing”), it is highly unlikely that Lao Zi, and his disciples, would cherish anything that is added or polished in speech in order to win respect from an audience.

*Wu-wei* is nothing nihilistic, in my view. On the surface, the term can be interpreted as doing or saying what comes naturally, to use Fish’s words, with the suggestion that one should not be overwhelmed by “the materialist quest for power, dominance, authority, and wealth” (Jacobus 18). Deep down, it is meant to answer the ever-lasting (or ever-haunting?) question of how to define virtue. Thomas Merton writes:

> If one is in harmony with Tao—the cosmic Tao, “Great Tao”—the answer [to the question of “what ought to be done”] will make itself clear when the time comes to act, for then one will act not according to the human and self-conscious mode of deliberation, but according to the divine and spontaneous mode of *wu wei*, which is the mode of action of Tao itself, and is therefore the source of all good.

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9 My translation. In Feng and English’s version of *Tao Te Ching*, it is “Sweet words can buy honor” (62), which I don’t think is close to the original.
The other way, the way of conscious striving, even though it may claim to be a way of virtue, is fundamentally a way of self-aggrandizement, and it is consequently bound to come into conflict with Tao. Hence it is self-destructive, ... (24)

We can probably draw two conclusions from Merton’s argument: One is that wu-wei is virtue, “the source of all good” because it accords with “the mode of action of Tao”; the other is that wu-wei as virtue is essentially a way of self-renunciation in that the other way, the way of “self-aggrandizement,” in the sense of “conscious striving,” poses conflict with the Dao. This seems to say that Daoism (Taoism) is recommending no action taken in order to cultivate virtue, since any action would by definition constitute a “conscious striving.”

Again, I would argue against approaching wu-wei too literally. Lao Zi is not a nihilist; rather, what he means by wu-wei is more or less like saying: Let everything in this world take its own course, and virtue will thus prevail. He teaches his followers: “Not exalting the gifted prevents quarreling. Not collecting treasures prevents stealing” (3). For Lao Zi, the gifted and treasures are just part of nature. They cause moral consequences only when you make a conscious striving to exalt them or collect them. Hence, virtue exists in doing nothing—wu-wei. In the philosophical sense, doing nothing is essentially to let the ultimate Dao prevail. But since now the Dao takes care of everything, doing nothing is indeed doing everything—and anything. That is why Lao Zi says, “If nothing is done, then all will be well” (3). Likewise, he advises those in power to rule by not governing: “Tao abides in non-action, [yet] nothing is left undone. If kings and lords observed this,

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10 The title of one of Stanley Fish’s books is called “Doing What Comes Naturally.”
[the] ten thousand things would develop naturally” (37). What a paradox! But underlying the paradox is Lao Zi’s deep concern about a mundane creature called “man,” who might “mess up” with the eternal, heavenly, sublime, all-embracing, and all-encompassing thing named the Dao.

Now the natural question is, What is the Dao? Lao Zi states, right from the beginning of *Dao De Jing*, “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name” (1). That is to say, there is no way to tell what the Dao is—the eternal is beyond words. And he even contradicts himself by declaring, “When the great Tao is forgotten, [k]indness and morality arise” (18). Western readers may find themselves immediately questioning the “logic” of *Dao De Jing*: If the eternal Dao cannot be told in words and should indeed be forgotten in order for virtue to thrive, then why does the Old Master keep “nagging” about the Dao and the ways that lead to it throughout the book?

One convenient answer is that Lao Zi is against conscious striving in conceptualizing the Dao: It exists in the forgotten, in the unspoken; as soon as one makes a deliberate, intellectual attempt to tell or to name what the Dao is, it slips away. As Zhang Long-Xi points out, “the totality of the tao is kept intact only in knowing silence” (29). Then, does this mean that Lao Zi advocates the “intuitive” approach to the Dao, as suggested by Herrlee Creel (106) and some other Westerners? Maybe. But I’d rather think that Lao Zi is saying there is no conventional way to conceptualize the Dao, because the infinite (i.e., the Dao) cannot be defined by the finite—the conventional language. In that sense, the eternal Dao has to remain untold. Paradoxically, while *Dao De Jing* may strike readers for its
sublimity, what it “dwells on,” says Schwartz, “is the impermanent, finite nature of all the determinate realities of which one can speak” (197).

The paradox persists—because the supposedly ineffable Dao still has its effable name by the word “Dao,” therefore becoming finite, and constrained within the limitations of language conventionality. Many Chinese scholars have tried to use the “one-and-many” concept to solve the puzzle: The Dao as One is transcendent, but the “daos” as many are phenomenal and therefore namable and effable (e.g., Chen Zong-Ming 142-5). This largely proves unsatisfactory (at least to me), and probably even unnecessary, especially since Lao Zi does not distinguish between the “Dao” and “daos.” I think what Dao De Jing deals with is basically an epistemological issue posed about language, which can be summarized as “speaking the unspeakable,” a paradox that characterizes not only Daoism but also other major schools of thought in ancient China.

“Speaking the unspeakable” is sometimes thought of as recognizing the “inadequacy and even futility of writing” (Zhang Long-Xi 28) because, the reasoning goes, the finite (language) simply cannot match with the infinite (the Dao), but I choose to believe it is indeed about how to comprehend the incomprehensible by making distinctions through the medium of language. We know something is good because we also know, through distinction, things that are not good. That’s why we can speak of the good. Likewise, we know something is the Dao, which is incomprehensible and unspeakable, because we also know, through distinction, things that are the non-Dao, which are comprehensible and speakable. That’s why we are able to speak of the unspeakable (Does this sound Derridean?). Keep in mind, however, that the unspeakable must remain unspeakable throughout: If it
becomes speakable, then the distinction is gone, which means everything would thus become unspeakable. But, according to Chad Hansen, eliminating such a distinction is exactly what Lao Zi wants to achieve in his Dao De Jing, since

Conventional moral terms and distinctions are introduced, [...] only because of breakdowns in the natural order of things. The Confucian distinctions [between morally good and evil, etc.] do not really alleviate the breakdowns but in a perverse way perpetuate them. The preferred policy would be to abandon the distinctions and words entirely and eliminate all learning (which is mere skill in word manipulation) and return to “natural” behavior. (71)

Hence, Lao Zi says, as quoted by Hansen:

When knowledge and wisdom appeared,
There emerged great hypocrisy.
When the six family relationships are not in harmony,
There will be advocacy of filial piety and deep love for children.
When a country is in disorder, there will be praise of loyal ministers.
Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom;
Then the people will benefit a hundredfold.
Abandon humanity and discard righteousness;
Then the people will return to filial piety and deep love.
Abandon skill and discard profit;
Then there will be no thieves or robbers. (ibid.)
Apart from Lao Zi's concern about returning to natural behaviour, which is to eliminate distinctions in language, we can draw two implications from the “speaking the unspeakable” paradox. One is that Lao Zi, as well as other ancient Chinese philosophers, appreciates the epistemic power of language, which is also evidenced in his statement that “The name [i.e., language] is the mother of ten thousand things” (1). The other is that the paradox tells us one important difference between Chinese and Western epistemology. Hansen points out, “The Taoist [indeed the Chinese, in my view] version is based on a distinction-making rather than an object-marking account of the way words relate to the world” (ibid.). The latter account (object-marking) typifies the Western ideal of perceiving the world in itself, and I have no interest here in commenting its merits. What I want to say is, rather, that distinction, which is bian in Chinese, was such an important feature in classical Chinese rhetoric that it had become almost identical with its definition.11

Because distinction-making has played a crucial role in ancient Chinese thought, it's not difficult to understand why CCR is typically full of paradoxes or, in Western terms, anti-logics, in that the rhetor would rely heavily on the portrayal of opposites to make an argument, which in some way is very much like Protagorean rhetoric in Greece. In addition, because of the influence of the Yin-Yang ideology, which sees the world as an ontological duality that is constantly changing, evolving, and reversing, the texts of CCR often appear to modern readers as fluid and unstable in terms of purpose and meaning. Deng Xi Zi, a rhetorician of the Warring States period (463–222 B.C.), has a motto about rhetoric that is strongly suggestive

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11 George Kennedy says, “In classical Chinese, the word pien [bian], literally ‘to till apart,’ thus ‘to distinguish,’ ‘to argue,’ or ‘argument,’ (many Chinese words can be used both as a noun and a verb) is probably the closest approximation to ‘rhetoric’ as understood in Greece” (143).
of Protagorean rhetoric: "Both (sides) can make sense. An argument is endless in itself." Deng's words epitomize, in some way, ancient Chinese's attitude towards rhetoric. Consequently, CCR texts are often "marred" by inconsistencies and self-contradictions, as seen in almost all the classics. (Traditional Chinese hermeneutics, known as kao zhen and xun gu, is largely a debate about what the author tried to say in the text, which could be interpreted contrarily due to text's "slippery" nature.)

Dao De Jing is a famous example of Yin-Yang anti-logic, in which Lao Zi argues knowledge paves the path to supreme wisdom. However, he also says knowledge can cause the loss of virtue. For him, the eternal Dao lies in the nameless, free from knowledge; yet, in order to reach that level, one must have knowledge first and then go beyond. Lao Zi's self-contradiction about knowledge can be best summarized by his own words: "Those who know are not learned. The learned do not know" (81). If you're learned, how can you not know? On the other hand, if you know, then what blocks your way to being learned? The debate goes on and on.

Lao Zi's follower, Zhuang Zi, widely known as "the first intellectual" in pre-Qin China, is even more notorious for heavily relying on the Yin-Yang anti-logics to teach the Daoist wisdom. Take a look at the excerpt about "self and other" from his book the Zhuangzi:

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12 My translation. Like Protagoras, Deng left behind a few fragments, but his "dual feasibility" motto on rhetorical practice was widely quoted in Chinese classics.
13 I'm referring to those written during or before the Spring-Autumn and Warring States times (770–464; 463–222 B.C.).
14 Another term for Dao is "Way," which is regarded as the underlying principle that governs all beings and non-beings in the universe. So, in a way, it is similar to the absolute truth in the Western sense, but there is an epistemological difference: In the West, truth in the absolute sense can be ultimately approached through reason and discourse; in ancient China, it is beyond reason and discourse. Indeed, Chinese philosophy cares little about seeking the absolute; it is more pragmatic, concerned with social behavior and ethics.
Everything is its own self; everything is something else’s other. Things do not know that they are other things’s other; they only know that they are themselves. Thus, it is said, the other arises out of the self, just as the self arises out of the other. This is the theory that self and other give rise to each other. Besides, where there is life, there is death; and where there is death, there is life. Where there is impossibility, there is possibility; where there is possibility, there is impossibility. It is because there is wrong, there is right. . . . Thereupon the self is also the other; the other is also the self. According to the other, there is one kind of right and wrong. According to the self, there is another kind of right and wrong. But really are there such distinctions as the self and the other, or are there no such distinctions?15

There is probably no need for me to interpret Zhuang Zi’s “meaning” here, but readers can clearly sense the antilogical reasonings between the lines. The statement that “the self is also the other; the other is also the self” reflects the Yin-Yang principle that could be formalized as “A is B and B is A,” as opposed to the analytical thinking of “A is A and B is B” that is prevailing in Western culture. The Zhuangzi, and Dao De Jing as well, is one of those classics that have been impacting Chinese (and Eastern) culture for over two millennia, so there is no reason to believe that a

rhetoric that does not rely on methodical or logical argumentation cannot appeal to an audience.¹⁶

Now let's go back to where we started in this section, to Lao Zi's "Good men do not argue. Those who argue are not good." Does this mean the Old Master is anti-rhetorical? Probably, but an appropriate answer would be "Yes" and "No."

"Bamboo Hypertext"

Probably nobody would question that hypertext was first invented in Western industrial countries with the advancement of modern computer technology. Historians of writing may not agree on the exact date hypertext was born, but it seems the general consensus that it somewhere started in the 1960s, when Ted Nelson invented the term "hypertext." A few years ago, when I was in China doing research on classical Chinese rhetoric, somehow I developed a different idea about where and when hypertext was started. And I feel compelled to say hypertext was first invented in China, not in the modern age but, surprisingly enough, over two thousand years ago.

As Jay Bolter defines it, hypertext is "the interactive interconnection of a set of symbolic elements" (27). But we may also describe it as a networked discourse system with its own characteristics, such as multiaccentualism and interaction, which indicates a collective act of discourse creation in Cyberspace between many writers/readers. As a result of this collectivism, a hypertext is typically non-linear and open-ended. Rhetorically speaking, the feature of non-linearity points to the suspension of logic. Structurally, it means the text lacks unity.

¹⁶ Unlike the West, which separates rhetoric from philosophy, in ancient China rhetoric and philosophy are one, inseparable. The Chinese classics are philosophical masterpieces. They are
Because it is network of many “come-and-go” texts, a hypertext is typically seen as fragmented and non-sequential. Hypertext’s open-endedness also implies a two-level meaning: at the rhetorical level, it suggests the text in Cyberspace is fluid—perpetually shifting and unstable; at the structural level, it means the text resists closure and therefore has no end.

The reason I believe hypertext was first born in ancient China is because classical Chinese rhetoric fits all those descriptions about hypertext: non-linear, open-ended, collective, multiaccentual, interactive, and, above all, networked.

Unlike Western logocentric rhetoric, classical Chinese rhetoric appeared predominantly non-linear. There are probably several reasons for this. One is that analytical thinking had never conquered the Chinese mind in ancient times. Another is that the Yin-Yang philosophy, which sees the world as a cosmological duality, had its grip on rhetoric. Still, there is one more reason to account for classical Chinese rhetoric’s non-linearity: i.e., the production and circulation process of scholarly works.

Almost all the Chinese classics we’ve seen today, like Confucius’ Analects and the Zhuangzi, can be described as “multiaccentual” as they were generally a collection of short essays, paragraphs, and sentences written and rewritten by the disciples, or disciples of the disciples, of Confucius and Zhuang Zi over a span of decades or even centuries. While the texts bore the name of Confucius or Zhuang Zi, as its official author as a token of respect from those disciples, as Mark Lewis suggests (53), the master himself may never have contributed a single written word to the collection (though it is popularly believed that those quotations by Confucius also rhetorical masterpieces.
or Zhuang Zi had the master’s imprint one way or another). The result was, after the texts had passed through numerous hands, they would invariably become inconsistent or self-contradictory in both meaning and purpose (i.e., non-linear rhetorically): Different disciples would use the master as a source of ethos to create their own texts (or agenda, using today’s political terminology) with degrees of deviation and variance from the predecessors depending on the then social climate and scholarly trends.

So, we can say Confucius’ Analyst and the Zhuangzi were indeed a mixture of fragmented texts created through a collective authorship that transcended both time and space. This helps explain why those classical texts are essentially multiaccentual. Like modern hypertext, a typical classical Chinese work experienced no such thing as a single author controlling the text (the masters were already dead in most cases), or a single voice or line of argument asserting dominance over others.

It is important to know that, before paper was invented, a typical Chinese book was actually written on bamboo strips that were strung together by cords (occasionally on silk), which, for physical reasons, would impose limits on the size of a book: Too many bamboo strips would make the book too heavy to carry around. So, what happened then is that the writer had to remove (i.e., delete) some of the strips (i.e., some text) from the original book in order to carry around or to add his own writings to it. (It was very likely that he would sometimes do so deliberately to

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17 According to A. G. Graham, the Zhuangzi is “a collection of writings of the fourth, third, and second centuries B.C., in which only the Inner chapters can be confidently attributed to Chuang-tzu himself” (Studies in Chinese Philosophy 283).

18 I suspect The Bible was also created that way in the West.
“cleanse” the text.) Because of this, the book was constantly changing in terms of content creation.

Likewise, the reader would have to remove some portion of a bamboo book (rolled into huge bundles) in order to read with ease. Consequently, there would be three options for the reader to do with that portion afterwards: 1) to “delete” it by dumping it into the trash can for various reasons; 2) to put it back into the book; or 3) to put it back, but not in the original order. Obviously, the last option points to the disruption of textual sequence, which further suggests the integrity of the book, if any, did not depend on sequence. Indeed, because the bamboo book was made of scores of separated bundles, the sequence of reading, which is prearranged by the author in a modern book, now fell completely in the hands of the reader, who could pick up whichever bundle (i.e., section) he (or, occasionally, she) wanted and start the joy of book reading. This may sound primitive to a reader who is used to modern print, but I would call that kind of ancient book “reader oriented” or “user friendly,” as the reader was able to take a more active role in interacting with the text. It was not only the writer who could decide what to keep or how to read; the reader had a say, too. (Does this remind us of a hypertext reader?) We can imagine that the writer had no worry about textual sequence, either: He could simply throw his own bundle into the bamboo pile. (Physically, the book looks like a bamboo pile.) Thus, strictly speaking, a classical Chinese work had no definitive beginning or ending.

At this point, I probably can say that a bamboo book was a hypertext in itself, because it was indeed a “networked” text with many fragmentary sub-texts (on bamboo strips) bound together through cords (not through logic). Because of the
way the book was bound, a writer/reader could at his disposal remove, add, or rearrange the texts (Lewis 55), or simply connect them to another book, a phenomenon we see only in today’s hypertext. This kind of interaction with the texts would have two implications. First, it means, as mentioned, that the bamboo book was non-linear and non-sequential, just like an electronic hypertext: No matter how you read it, it makes sense (or doesn’t make sense to the logocentric-minded). Second, it means that the bamboo book was fluid and open-ended, with numerous possibilities (it is “endless” in theory) of creating new ideas, new meanings, new interpretations, etc. Paul de Man says “Rhetoric suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration” (10). I think he has a good example, from the ancient bamboo book in China, to support that view.

It’s not hard to see why in ancient China a classic work commonly credited to a particular historic figure could result in numerous “adulterated” versions, because it was literally a social construction featuring an evolving process of textual transformation carried out by many writers/readers over the years. The variances of a text are the imprints of such a transformation. They tell us that classical Chinese rhetoric was shifting and unstable due to the absence of individual authorship (or control). Like what we have seen in hypertext, rhetoric in ancient China was defined by motion rather than by “momentary location” (Moulthrop 303). Stanley Fish once argued, following Paul de Man, that rhetoric is based on what it aims to dissolve.19 I tend to say classical Chinese rhetoric had done just that, but only two thousand

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years ago: In its virtually endless motion, it deconstructed itself, making unattainable any new totality in rhetoric.\(^{20}\)

By now, I wish that I had made a "good case" about my claim that hypertext was first started in China. At least I think the Chinese hypertext fits well into the definition by Bolter: "the interactive interconnection of a set of symbolic elements." No doubt, not everything matches: The Chinese hypertext was manually linked, off-line, whereas the modem hypertext is electronically connected, on-line. But I feel this is a minor difference. I'm speaking of classical Chinese rhetoric as "hypertextual" not just because its text was "networked" in the form of a bamboo book. More importantly, it exhibited a "spirit" we normally associate with modern hypertext: i.e., multiaccentual, fragmentary, non-linear, open-ended, fluid, unstable, and, finally, interactive.

But if someone insists that stuff like "electronic" or "on-line" must be included in the definition, then I can at least say that there existed a "bamboo hypertext" in ancient China.

**Conclusion**

So far, I have discussed several important features of classical Chinese rhetoric: namely, rhetoric as harmonic or self-effacing, rhetoric as paradoxical (Yin and Yang), and rhetoric as multiaccentual. Without doubt, these features pose questions about the traditional perceptions, and strategies, of rhetoric in the West, prodding people to explore new areas to expand their conceptions on rhetoric as well as on culture and other issues. I wouldn't say that the Chinese tradition is the right way to

\(^{20}\) As a matter of fact, the motion stopped sometime during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.–9 A.D.), when paper was invented. The rulers of the state also realized the need to uncover "orthodox"
understand rhetoric, but at least it shows us an alternative to approaching this particular language art.

For instance, reason and logic are very much privileged in the Western tradition of rhetoric, under the assumption that they provide epistemological certainty to the writer/speaker as well as to the reader/listener. Texts as such often appear “ordered, controlled, teleological, referential, and autonomously meaningful” (Alvin Kernan 144). Also, because of the obsession with logos, the Western tradition tends to treat rhetorical practice as a unilateral action, in which the rhetor argues “single-handedly,” from the beginning to end, just to prove he or she is right without yielding space for audience participation (Carolyn Matalene 803). In contrast, classical Chinese rhetoric operates rather paradoxically, with emphasis on understanding through distinction instead of logical representation aimed at describing the world as it is. And, because of the collective authorship, the texts in CCR are largely dialogic, involving an open-ended process of making and remaking, which in turn points to more interaction between writers and readers. As Lee Jacobus says of Dao De Jing (which is generally believed to be a collection of aphorisms contributed by generations of Daoists),

Sometimes the text seems to be purposely ambiguous—a rhetorical device that promotes examination and careful speculation on the part of the reader. This ambiguity may annoy a reader who is used to having ideas clearly spelled out and explained. [But] Lao-Tzu seems to treat ideas like seeds to be planted in the mind of a listener, to take root and grow as the soil will permit. (18)

classics to control ordinary people’s thought.
The ambiguity of *Dao De Jing* and numerous other classical texts may indicate the lack of control by one particular author in text production, but it may also suggest that logic doesn’t have much say in classical Chinese rhetoric. A. G. Graham has revealed the “curiously familiar-sounding syllogism” in a text by Wang Chong (A.D. 27–C. 100) (*Disputers of the Tao* 168), and many other scholars, both Chinese and Western, have made similar discoveries, so there is no reason to assume that the ancient Chinese did not understand logic or could not think logically. However, it seems safe to say that in ancient China logic, or logical thinking, had never been elevated to such an important epistemological status as it had enjoyed in the West. This is because, points out Graham, Chinese thinking engages in “correlative thinking” (*Unreason Within Reason* 97-119) as opposed to analytical thinking, that is, “in terms of process rather than of static entities” (77). That means, by extension, that the logical wouldn’t be singled out as the most important mode of thinking or reasoning in the Chinese mind.

It appears that I now have more grounding to say why classical Chinese rhetoric is holistic—because of the “process” mode of thinking that underlies it. “Process” indicates motion, which in rhetoric would be “fluidity,” a feature Graham identifies in such classical texts as *Dao De Jing* and *Yi Jing* (*Book of Changes*) (97-119). Thus we may have seen an epistemological reason behind the open-ended, antilogical nature of classical Chinese rhetoric, in addition to the technical reason of “bamboo hypertext,” as discussed previously. Once again, we may conclude, logocentrism has no place in Chinese rhetoric. Naturally, the next question will be, Does the other rhetorical strategy, logos, something intertwined with logocentric
thought in the Western tradition, have a place in the Chinese? A simple answer
would be “No.” A prudent, and more sophisticated, answer would be, “Yes, but the
Chinese tradition has a different definition of logos.” No matter what, I will further
discuss this issue separately, in Chapter 2. At this point, I think I can at least say
ethos has a much broader application than logos does in classical Chinese rhetoric.

Also in Chapter 2, I will give a more detailed discussion on Chinese ethos and
on how it distinguishes from Western ethos. But I would like to conclude this
chapter with some key terms in regard to Chinese ethos so that readers can have
some rough idea first as to how compare it with ethos in the Western tradition.

Like the word “rhetoric,” there is no equivalent in Chinese (either classical or
modern) to Greco-Roman ethos, but like “rhetoric,” there are some concepts in
Chinese rhetoric that are close enough to the concept of ethos defined in Western
rhetoric. One example would be chen (sincerity) and chen-yun (truthful words), as
identified by Lu Xing (175). Since ethos is to make one appear good or trustworthy
to an audience, these rhetorical concepts in ancient China can be said to have some
connotations of ethos as understood by Western students. To me, what appears
most significant in terms of ethos is probably the idea of xiu-ci li qi chen (roughly
translated as “rhetoric oriented towards trust”) in CCR. According to Chen and
Wang, Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was the first to invent the term xiu-ci in Chinese
rhetorical history (32). Because the Great Master (i.e., Confucius) was so obsessively
concerned with the moral codes of society, it’s not hard to see why he related xiu-ci
(rhetoric) to li qi chen (establishing trust). The next question is how to establish trust:
through individual appeal? or through the communal or cultural? My answer is,

obviously, in the latter, as I will explicate in the second chapter.
In modern Chinese, the closest concept to ethos is probably "face" (mian-zi). Goffman defines face as one's "self-image" projected through approved attributes of a society, suggesting that it is more than an individual property. The reason I believe face is ethos of Chinese rhetoric is because it directly points to one's credibility— in terms of how one is accepted in a community. Without face, without social acceptance. Then, of course, without credibility. Since face is not seen as entirely of a personal quality in Chinese society, we can reasonably assume that Chinese rhetoric approaches ethos in a way different from Western rhetoric. How different? I will again discuss the question in greater detail in the second chapter of the dissertation. At the moment I just leave it as it is (which is called "Chinese suspense").

Appendix: Ethos in Western Rhetoric

What is rhetorical ethos? The term is defined in Sharon Crowley's Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students as "a person's character" or "ethical proof" (81). But as we read through that whole chapter under the title of "Ethical Proof," we may soon discover that ethical proof does not tell us all about the concept of ethos, for technical devices, such as "verb tense and voice," "word size," and even "punctuation," also shape, or even create, the projection of ethos. Similarly, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg in their "Introduction" to classical rhetoric in The Rhetorical Tradition identify ethos as "the ethical appeal [that] evokes the speaker's own moral authority" (29). But if we dip into those classical treatises on rhetoric (included in their anthology), we may again realize that the notion of ethos as explicated by Aristotle, Cicero, or Quintilian goes far beyond ethical appeal or moral...
authority. I do not mean to dismiss from ethos the legitimate position of ethical proof. But, on the other hand, to set ethos within the confines of ethical proof does not seem to do justice to those classical rhetoricians. Still worse, our appreciation of the rhetorical role a rhetor plays in his or her own text could possibly be limited, or even distorted. This appendix is intended to discuss ethos from a broader perspective, based on analyzing classical treatises I have read, such as Aristotle’s Rhetoric, Cicero’s Of Oratory, and Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory; it also introduces some contemporary literature on ethos to call attention to its conceptual variance between classical and modern rhetorics.

As we know, Plato’s notorious attack on rhetoric was partly out of ethical concerns about the practice of rhetoric in his time. In the Gorgias, Plato condemns rhetoric as “flattery” because “it aims at the pleasant and ignores the best”; he also contends that rhetoric is not an “art” (techne) since “it has no account to give of the real nature of the things it applies” (BH 72). For Plato, there is an inextricable link between truth and ethics: in pursuing the eternal, the rhetorician must necessarily refuse to adapt himself to the “crowd” for the mere gratification of their “base desires.” Obviously, Plato’s message is not “rhetorical” in essence, for the idea of “audience” has been woefully excluded from his so-called “true rhetoric” (philosophy?). Thus, the Gorgias soon ends up in a dilemma: sophistic rhetoric is rejected, yet the ideal rhetoric, aimed at the good and just in the Platonic sense, has no practitioner since it does not stress “the reality of particular human circumstances” (Johnson 100). Plato is apparently aware of this dilemma, and in the Phaedrus he somehow provides a “corrective” to his original definition of rhetoric. Here Plato finally recognizes that “rhetoric in its entire nature [is] an art which leads the soul by means of words, not only in law courts and the various other public assemblages, but in private companies as well” (BH 132). His statement can be seen as acknowledging rhetoric’s persuasive power over the audience. Unfortunately, his elevation of philosophy over rhetoric makes his approval of rhetoric appear very pale. For Plato, reason, as exercised in dialectic, is “the
only faculty that affords an avenue to the Good” (Johnson 100). And his insistence that oratory comply with the eternal Good leads him in the end to limit rhetoric’s scope only to issues of good and evil: “whether one be awake or asleep, ignorance of right and wrong and good and bad is in truth inevitably a disgrace, even if the whole mob applaud it” (BH 142).

It must not be misunderstood that Plato, who raises ethical questions about rhetoric, is the same person who approves of the use of ethos in rhetoric, as suggested by scholars like Johnson (99-100). To the contrary, Plato rejects ethos as a means of appeal to the audience because persuasion so solicited would amount to providing “belief without knowledge” (BH 66), a sort of deception denounced by him in the Gorgias. It is the trickery of a sophist, Plato claims, “to make him appear in the eyes of the multitude to know things . . . when he does not know, and to appear to be good when he is not” (BH 69). There is probably one more reason for his rejection of ethos: since the only way to approach or convey truth is by reasoning rigorously in the form of syllogism, to appeal through one’s character would be totally irrelevant to his Platonic undertaking. It seems unnecessary to draw Plato into this discussion of ethos since he is against using “character appeal” for the purpose of securing persuasion. The point I am trying to make is that ethics and ethos are not the same for Plato.

Aristotle, unlike his teacher Plato, appears to be relatively pragmatic in his approach to rhetoric. He sees rhetoric as “the counterpart of dialectic” (BH 151), thereby reversing the pejorative role Plato has assigned to this language art. He also defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (BH 153), thus making space for rhetorical appeals previously disregarded by his teacher. For Aristotle, persuasion is effected through “three kinds” of appeals: ethos, “the personal character of the speaker”; pathos, “putting the audience into a certain frame of mind”; and logos, “the proof provided by the words itself.” Of ethos Aristotle has the following to say:
We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. (BH 153-4)

A careful reader may sense in the above passage some sort of criticism against Plato’s “true rhetoric” and, naturally, his rejection of ethos. Now “the appeal of character operates in the system of Aristotle because it admits persuasion based on probabilities and [. . .] is directed toward effecting a judgment in the audience” (Drew-Bear 10). Special attention should be given to Aristotle’s comment that persuasion through ethos ought to be achieved by “what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak,” which I think points to the orator’s own involvement in creating ethos or “ethical proof.” That is to say, the orator’s personal character or “goodness” does not have to be truly his own, as far as persuasion goes. We may understand this better if we look at the fact that ethos, like pathos and logos, is subsumed by Aristotle under the category of artistic proofs. This means that the orator must construct his material so as to “make his own character look right” (BH 145; 160).

Then, does Aristotle himself suggest ethical proof and ethos or character appeal are the same? From my understanding of Aristotle in this regard, I tend to say “No.” It is true that “personal goodness” belongs to Aristotle’s category of ethos, but to say it equals ethos per se would be another matter. In his Rhetoric, Aristotle divides ethos into “three things”: “good sense,” “good moral character,” and “good will” (BH 161). Strictly speaking, only
one of those “three things” has something to do with ethical proof. As Annette Drew-Bear has observed, Aristotle uses the word ethos to mean not only “moral character,” but also “disposition,” “temper” and “habitual way of life” (19).

In late classical times, Aristotle’s strategy of inspiring “confidence in the orator’s own character” was fully embraced by Roman rhetoricians, such as Cicero and Quintilian. More important is that ethos during this period was granted a conception “broader and more inclusive than Aristotle’s,” as James May points out: “it is an ethos that deals with the emotions, closely related to pathos but involving the milder feelings; it is an ethos attentive to and more intricately associated with style” (5). Cicero defines rhetoric as “an art of speaking well” (BH 237). To do so, an orator must attain the image of a stage actor with “consummate charm” (BH 218). Thus ethos for Cicero’s rhetors would indeed be a strategy used “to paint their characters in words.” He has Antonius speak of such “painting” in his Of Oratory:

... attributes useful in an advocate are a mild tone, a countenance expressive of modesty, gentle language, and the faculty of seeming to be dealing reluctantly and under compulsion with something you are really anxious to prove. It is very helpful to display tokens of good-nature, kindness, calmness, loyalty, and a disposition that is pleasing and not grasping or covetous, and all the qualities belonging to men who are upright, unassuming and not given to haste, stubbornness, strife or harshness, are powerful in winning goodwill. ... But all this kind of advocacy will be best in those cases wherein the arbitrator’s feelings are not likely to be kindled by what I may call the ardent and impassioned onset. For vigorous language is not always wanted, but often such as is calm, gentle, mild: this is the kind that most commends the parties. (BH 240)
As we can see here, a prominent feature of Ciceronian ethos is its aptness in style, which is not so much an indication of the rhetor's own character as an intimation of adaptation to the audience being addressed. In order to persuade, the orator must be able to "paint" his character, to alter his "ethos," as occasioned by his audience. This is made very clear when Antonius says, "he [the orator] does not wish to appear so completely a sage among fools, as to have his hearers either regarding him as a clumsy Greekling, or for all their approval of the orator's talent and astonishment at his wisdom, yet taking it ill that they themselves are foolish" (BH 224). So Cicero's orator, idealized in the image of "the consummate actor" (217), is the one who knows how to present himself both in and out of character to invoke his audience. The orator could thus play a multi-character, as described by Antonius: "I play three characters, myself, my opponent and the arbitrator" (233). Or, he could feign his own feelings to induce desired pathos from an audience: "it is impossible for the listener to feel indignation, hatred, or ill-will, to be terrified of anything, or reduced to tears of compassion, unless all those emotions, which the advocate would inspire in the arbitrator, are visibly stamped or rather branded on the advocate himself" (BH 241).

Ciceronian ethos has its characteristic "intimacy" with pathos, not only because ethos is exercised largely through a style adapted to the audience's frame of mind, but also because the distinction between ethos and pathos is now mainly determined by the style itself. As James May explains, "Ethos, for the Romans, represented a milder form of pathos, the presentation of the gentler emotions. Thus when ethos is vigorously and emotionally expressed, it yields to pathos, and the courtroom, to use Cicero's own words, is transformed from an iudicium into an incendium, inflaming the souls of the orator's audience and moving them where he wills" (167). Needless to say, to interpret ethos in terms of style has the implication of broadening its domain.

Cicero's rhetoric is Aristotelian in essence, with persuasion as its ultimate goal. In contrast, Quintilian holds that to call oratory "the power of persuading is to give an
insufficient definition of it” (BH 319). Though he defines rhetoric, too, as the “art of speaking well” (BH 323), he gives the word “well” a tinge of both “effectively” and “virtuously,” and as Bizzell and Herzberg have pointed out, “Oratory that does not move its hearers toward the good is not ‘rhetoric,’ by Quintilian’s definition” (295). Thus Quintilian departs from Cicero regarding the role of rhetoric and, consequently, the definition of ethos. In his *Institutes Of Oratory*, Quintilian asserts Plato’s ideal about good rhetoric: “it embraces all the virtues of oratory at once, and includes also the character of the true orator, as he cannot speak well unless he be a good man” (BH 322). For him, the persuasive power of ethos lies in the orator being true to himself:

... for simulation, however guarded it be, always betrays itself, nor was there ever such power of eloquence in any man that he would not falter and hesitate whenever his words were at variance with his thoughts. But a bad man must of necessity utter words at variance with his thoughts; while to good men, on the contrary, a virtuous sincerity of language will never be wanting, nor (for good men will also be wise) a power of producing the most excellent thoughts, which, though they may be destitute of showy charms, will be sufficiently adorned by their own natural qualities, since whatever is said with honest feeling will also be said with eloquence. (BH 350)

From this message and also from Quintilian’s argument that “perfect eloquence [...] can[not] be united with a vicious character of mind” (351), we may draw a conclusion that ethos and eloquence are the same in Quintilian’s system of “real oratory.” Quintilian himself says, “If ethos denotes moral character, our speech must necessarily be based on ethos when it is engaged in portraying such character” (Book VI, ii. 17).
Drew-Bear has noticed that at times Quintilian betrays a less idealistic spirit when he comes to the practical treatment of ethos. For instance, Quintilian recommends the expedient of having the orator represent himself as “weak, unprepared, and no match for the powerful talents arrayed against [him], a frequent trick in the exordia of Messala” (35). Like Cicero, Quintilian treats ethos and pathos as alternative emotional modes for the orator to use from his repertoire of techniques; he regards ethos as “calm and composed” in contrast to pathos as “excited and disturbed” (Gill 159). Quintilian’s pragmatism can also be seen in his comment on ethos as a strategy in oratory:

The ethos which I have in my mind and which I desiderate in an orator is commended to our approval by goodness more than aught else and is not merely calm and mild, but in most cases ingratiating and courteous and such as to excite pleasure and affection in our hearers, while the chief merit in its expression lies in making it seem that all that we say derives directly from the nature of the facts and persons concerned and in the revelation of the character of the orator in such a way that all may recognise it. (Book VI, ii. 13)

We may regard Quintilian as a “split” rhetorician on the issue of ethos: in his ideal rhetoric, ethos is eloquence devoted to virtue; in his practical rhetoric, ethos is still eloquence but devoted to “the skillful exercise of feigned emotion or the employment of irony in making apologies or asking questions” (Drew-Bear 36). As Christopher Gill points out, Quintilian’s ethos becomes associated in practice with “a certain kind of emotional tenor and a range of stylistic qualities” (165). His irony is probably due to the central concern of rhetoric at the time—persuasion. No matter how virtuous the rhetor intends his oratory to be, he must necessarily adapt his speech to the audience in question in order to persuade. This means he has to alter his ethos.
When we look at ethos in classical rhetoric and then compare it with modern rhetoric, an obvious conclusion would be: Ethos has experienced a twist in its definition. Today, rhetoricians are probably less troubled with the question of ethical proof because rhetoric is seen by many as a mere skill (cf. Sullivan’s article “Political Ethical Implications of Defining Technical Communication as a Practice”). The term ethos is commonly replaced by the word “voice,” “tone,” or “persona” in our composition class or elsewhere, which, Johnson suggests, is “reminiscent of Cicero’s concept of ethos as the skill of ‘painting’ character in style” (112). In other words, ethos is more a verbal projection of one’s self than ethical proof.

Patricia Bizzell has noticed the classical notion of ethos being exploited on television in the talk-show format:

A celebrity’s views on abortion or censorship are solicited, not to begin a consideration of the reasonable or defensible positions that may be taken on such debatable issues but to establish what classical rhetoric terms the speaker’s “ethos.” The audience’s interest in a talk-show guest is determined, it seems to me, mainly by a series of aphorisms that contribute, along with his or her physical appearance, dress, and gestures, to make up the guest’s “media image.” (31-2)

She suggests that “the dearth of extended rational presentation of ideas on television and the medium’s dependence instead on the ethos of the speaker may help create freshman students of composition who have trouble with the skills of elucidation and validation and sequencing in expository writing” (which is based on the findings of a panel appointed by the College Board). If this is true, we may have to say that the “media image,” which represents the exploitation of ethos in this modern industrial and digital world, could have the negative effect of “painting” our students’ brains into the barren.
What appears most significant to me in the contemporary literature on ethos is a shift in identifying ethos from the "individual" to the "communal" in the postmodernist theory of rhetoric. Most notably, in his "On the End of Rhetoric," S. M. Halloran proposes that ethos "indicates the importance of the orator's mastery of the cultural heritage; through the cogency of his logical and emotional appeals he became a kind of living embodiment of that heritage, a voice of such apparent authority that the word spoken by this man was the word of communal wisdom, a word to be trusted for the weight of the man who spoke it and the tradition he spoke for" (621). His notion of ethos as culture-bound is further developed when, elsewhere, he emphasizes ethos as "the spirit of a culture or people," a binding force which transforms "an aggregation of individuals into a community" (qtd. in Harris 126). Halloran cites Kenneth Burke in arguing that "the key term for a modern rhetoric is not persuasion but identification" (626), thus pointing out the necessity of viewing one's individual ethos as part of a community's collective ethos.

Halloran’s view is probably better understood through the example of a discourse community in which membership is secured essentially through "the projection of ethos to the communal level" (qtd. in Harris 125). A rhetorical situation as defined by the community ethos is one in which the rhetor or author does not speak his or her individual voice but rather a language of the community to which he or she belongs. As Harris puts it, to be an identifiable member of such a community is "to draw on its vocabulary, to echo its enthymemes, to wallow in its stylistic proclivities; in short, to evoke and perpetuate its ethos" (127). In a way, when we are teaching college students composition, we are invisibly making efforts to imprint on them the ethos of an academic community, to hold them together through a cultural heritage, for better or worse.

Foucault sees ethos as a "way of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (39). If this holds true, then ethos in rhetoric should be considered less a strategy of persuasion than a task of
articulating and relating one’s own self to the outside world (Halloran 626-31). And, of course, ethos as such would be less concerned with appeal than with identification.

Works Cited


CHAPTER 2
FACE AND HEAVEN: KEY ISSUES OF ETHOS IN CLASSICAL CHINESE RHETORIC

Rhetoric, defined by the Western tradition, is difficult, if not impossible, to match with an equivalent concept in Chinese. Over the years, its translations have ranged from xiu-ci xue (study of language embellishing) through yu-yong xue (applied linguistics) to ming-bian xue (study of naming and arguing). But, we may notice, none of these concepts really matches well with what is indeed meant by "rhetoric" in the Western tradition. In recent years, some Chinese scholars attempted to translate the term into shuo-fu xue (study of persuasion), which by all accounts may be the closest "shot" when measured by Western standards. However, as I pointed out elsewhere,¹ because persuasion itself has never become an "art," or discipline, to be systemically studied and categorized in Chinese culture,² the translation (i.e., shuo-fu xue) could strike a Chinese ear as "outlandish." In my view, the seeming untranslatability of "rhetoric" into Chinese underlies some profound differences between Western and Chinese rhetoric that can best be explained from a cross-cultural point of view.

It has become a commonplace that the primary function of rhetoric in China is harmony as opposed to persuasion, which has largely defined Greco-Roman rhetoric (e.g., Oliver 361; Matalene 795; Scollan and Scollan 142). During the pre-Qin

¹ See Chapter 2, “Classical Chinese Rhetoric: An Overview” (pp. 2–6).
² The claim is subject to debate as there have been innumerable books or treatises written in the history of China that explore systematically the subjects of writing or composition. However, rhetoric, consciously defined as the art of persuasion that involves using any means in any situation to convince an audience, was not a familiar term in Chinese culture. The categorization and systematization of rhetoric as such was also unheard of in the rhetorical history of China.
period (722–221 B.C.) when classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR) was thriving, China was plagued by "dynastic decay" (Schwartz 56) and "social chaos" (Lu, Rhetoric in Ancient China 6), inflicted, among others, by wars and conflicts among the competing fiefs (independent states and principalities within the feudal system of the Zhou Dynasty). Given the historic background, it seems conceivable that harmony, other than persuasion, had come to play a defining role in classical Chinese rhetoric. In the first place, the idea of harmony relates to the question of how to restore or maintain social order, as characterized by Confucius’s (552–479 B.C.) “li” (ritual; rites), the observance of which, according to the Master, was “a sign of perfect social order” (de Bary, et al. 18). But, broadly speaking, harmony is also concerned about how to situate human existence in “the stream of the universe” (Lao Zi, ch. 28), in the sense of establishing unity between man and nature, and man and the Dao (the Way). To those ancient thinkers, social harmony in the form of li ought to be mirroring an order beyond (humans), as seen, for example, in a statement by Zi Chan (580–522 B.C.), a political reformer from the state of Zheng:

Li [Rites] represent[s] the fundamental regulation of heaven, the basic righteousness of earth, and the correct behavior of people. The fundamental regulation of heaven and earth should be followed by people. Modeling themselves after the brightness of heaven and following the nature of the earth, the six qi or vital energies are created, and the Five Phases are put into action. [...] The distinction between king and subjects and that between the inferior and the superior are used to follow the righteousness of the earth. The relationship between husband and wife, that between outer and inner, is established to regulate the opposites (yin and yang). The relationship
between father and son, that between elder and younger, and that between uncle and nephew, as well as the rites of marriage, are set to imitate the brightness of heaven. Endeavor in government is devoted to modeling oneself after the four seasons. Punishment and jails, which make people fearful of illegal actions, are employed in imitating thunder and lightening which kill things. Benevolence and harmony are cultivated in emulating heaven in creating things and nurturing them to grow.3

There is probably no need to question the validity of the argument quoted above in connecting relationships between family members to the "brightness of heaven," or prison and punishment to "thunder and lightening." What is significant is the understanding that Chinese harmony has its ideological roots in recognizing the Dao as the ultimate source of order—unveiled, to the Chinese mind, though such natural phenomena as heaven, earth, and the four seasons.

Because of the emphasis on harmony, rhetorical practice in ancient China would typically leave the role of an individual out of the picture, focusing instead on collective workmanship in discourse production, as exemplified in the case of "bamboo hypertext," where texts, like Lao Zi's Dao De Jing or Confucius' Lun Yu (Analects), were compilations of works contributed to by generations of disciples.4 But what I mean by collective workmanship also refers to the fact that the CCR practitioners would frequently write/speak like each other, modeling after what Schaberg describes as "patterned rhetoric" (13), in which a discourse presentation was structured in line with the "order" and "terms" of the "received language" (30).

3 The translation was originally from J. Legge's The Chinese Classics (Vol. 5, p. 704) but was revised by
For example, as Schaberg has noticed, the historiographical speeches recorded in *Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo Commentaries) and *Guo Yu* (Narratives of the States) had in general followed a “patterned structure” (44) that can be formulated like this: “a judgment of present events; general principles; citations from canonical works, aphorisms, and the like; historical precedents; observation and description of events at hand; matching of principles, citations, and precedents with these events; and a prediction of future events” (43). While numerous exceptions could be cited, I would say the “patterned” feature of CCR marks a rhetorical tradition distinct from Greco-Roman rhetoric. For what is suggested in patterned rhetoric, and, to a larger extent, collective workmanship and harmony, is that “Originality was discounted” (Oliver 361), and eloquence was viewed as conforming oneself to discourse rituals that had been collectively valued and culturally sanctioned. This does, of course, sharply contrast with the Western tradition, where rhetoric is seen as an individual endeavor, identified with self-presentation, or even self-sell. The Western sense of rhetoric “as an avenue for the individual to achieve control” warrants “originality and individuality,” says Matalene (795).

The impact of “patterned rhetoric” upon Chinese society can be illustrated by the example of “eight-legged essays” (*ba-gu*) administered in Ming and Qing civil
service examinations to recruit state officials. The “eight-legged essay” was divided into eight parts, hence the name. Its style and structural features (e.g. parallelism and antithesis) are said to have evolved from the jing-yi (exposition on the classics) used in Song\(^8\) examinations (Lee 154). However, according to Jin Ke-Mu, a Chinese scholar on ba-gu, the strict prescription imposed on its composition may actually reflect an attempt to mimic writing patterns in the Four Books\(^9\) (129–47), which were also decreed by the state to be the exclusive content of the test. Though the “eight-legged essay” was devised to measure the ability of examinees to make effective use of classical knowledge in argumentation, hence their potentials, it has been widely criticized (especially since the late 19th century) for stifling originality and stultifying the intelligentsia because of its obsession with platitudes and rigid adherence to the subject frame, structure, style, tone, number of characters, etc. I am not here to weigh the pros and cons of ba-gu, but just wish to say that the essay indeed represents the Chinese tradition of patterned rhetoric, which had been put to use to its extreme in the Ming-Qing period.

The “eight-legged essay” saw its official abolition in 1902, under an edict by the empress dowager Ci-Xi (Ayers 215). But tradition dies hard. Traces of ba-gu writing are still present in modern-day China, as discovered by Matalene, when she worked in the country as a writing teacher. From her students’ essays as well as the “arguments” that had appeared in the government-run English newspaper China

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\(^7\) The Chinese civil service examination system saw its emergence in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–221 A.D.), systematization in the Tang (618–906 A.D.), and abolition in 1905 (Menzel vii–viii). But according to Max Weber, the “first traces of the examination system seem to emerge about the time of Confucius” (59).

\(^8\) The Song Dynasty (960–1279 A.D.).

\(^9\) The Four Books (Great Learning, The Mean, Analects, and Mencius) and the Five Classics (Book of Rites, Book of Changes, Book of Poetry, Book of Documents, and Zuo Zhuan) have been regarded as the core of the Confucian canon in Chinese history.
Daily, Matalene noticed a “standard pattern” of writing that includes in it an “opening description” of an event, a “look back” at history, an “explanation,” and a “concluding moral exhortation” (800). While a pattern like this could have resulted from the rule of “communist bureaucracy,” which Matalene admits, it does show traits of writing characteristic of ba-gu, such as the “appeal to history, the delayed argument followed by a turn, and the final unconnected assertions” (801). These traits, I would like to add, also point to a rhetorical tradition dating back to the pre-Qin period, when patterned discourse found its way into classical texts, like Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu.

When I was in China a few years ago doing research on Chinese business communication, I was struck by the uniformity of languages and structures used in business documents there, which could prompt one to wonder whether or not the Chinese were engaging in “empty talk.” In retrospect, I would have to argue that this sort of “empty talk,” like the “eight-legged essay,” actually exemplifies the practice of using “received language” in traditional Chinese rhetoric, which, it would seem, goes all the way back to the Confucian teachings of “ritualization” in connection with harmony in antiquity. I will further discuss “patterned rhetoric” in relation to language ritualization later in the paper, when exploring Confucius’ “rectification of names.” But, for now, I would just like to point out what appears to be immediately related to the topic of the paper: i.e., the “empty talk,” or “new ba-gu” as Matalene would call it, after her Chinese colleagues (801), can be taken as an

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10 The “eight-legged essay” follows a pattern like this: 1) presentation of thesis (po-ti), 2) explanation of thesis (cheng-ti), 3) description (qi-jiang), 4) preliminary exposition (ti-bi), 5) minor exposition (xiaoi-bi), 6) middle exposition (zhong-bi), 7) final exposition (hou-bi), and 8) conclusion (shou).
exhibition of what I would call "collective ethos," in that it shows how Chinese writers/speakers create their appeals (i.e., ethos) by engaging in "received," or culturally established, discourse practices. Some postmodern rhetorical theorists, like S. M. Hollaron, would define ethos as culture-bound, built up on the "orator's mastery of the cultural heritage" (621). I think they will be able to find numerous examples for support in Chinese rhetoric because of the way ethos is created. The uniformity, as I once witnessed in the business documents, may highlight the fact that Chinese writers don't put a premium on "originality," something much valued in Western culture, but it also points to the possibility that they know how to evoke credibility through the continual use of languages and structures that are commonly shared, as a cultural heritage, among Chinese business communication practitioners.

In practical terms, the "Chinese way" of using set, or received, language phrases/structures to communicate could be an effective way to establish rapport with readers. Because they (i.e., set phrases and structures) are culturally familiar to readers, a writer can employ them to affirm a shared ground with his or her audience, which, in Aristotelian terms, may be called "good will," one of the three means identified by Aristotle that a rhetor can use to secure trust, therefore ethos. But I would like to choose "identification," after Kenneth Burke, to describe the rhetorical move by a rhetor to establish a shared ground with audience, in that it goes beyond the personal relationship implied in "good will."

In his *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke says, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (55). So, Burke's identification can be seen as a rhetorical strategy in the first place. However, he also uses the term to refer to
“consubstantiality” (20), the “condition of possibility for collective action” among humans (Biesecker 40). Burke writes:

A doctrine of consubstantiality, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial.

(21)

In the broader sense, then, the idea of identification points to an important goal of rhetoric transcending personal gains or advantages traditionally associated with rhetorical persuasion: achieving the sense of acting-together-ness, or collectivism. For Burke, rhetoric “could not be directed merely towards attainable advantages” because “a persuasion that succeeds, dies” (274). I will have to skip those passages in A Rhetoric of Motives that explain how Burke has reached that conclusion, but what is significant to me is that he sets the goal of rhetoric above persuasion, and that his identification theory “account[s] for the way in which discourses promote social cohesion between estranged individuals” (Biesecker 42).

We may notice a striking similarity between “social cohesion” involved in Burke’s rhetorical identification and “harmony” that characterizes the function of classical Chinese rhetoric—not just because they are almost identical in semantics, but also because they are both premised on collectivism, on understanding language as “a material mediator” (Oravec 182) that can bring individuals to act together through identifying their shared grounds, like history, cultural heritage, or even the
language itself. In the case of CCR, the “collective workmanship,” as mentioned earlier, could be a good example to illustrate the sort of acting-together-ness in discourse productions in pre-Qin China. But, more importantly, it was also a practice in which the CCR practitioners affirmed their common ground by, for example, engaging in ritualized discourse practices epitomized in the form of “patterned rhetoric,” and by creating texts attributed to the teachings of the same old masters, like Lao Zi and Confucius. Needless to say, the practice that happened over two millennia ago in pre-Qin China, of using the same patterned discourses and writing about the same masters, would be a classic act of identification in Burkean terms.

The theory of identification also helps explain the collectivist nature of ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. As I have argued elsewhere, the projection of ethos in CCR was quite different from that in Greco-Roman rhetoric: Instead of emphasizing the appeal of one’s personal character, with a vocabulary steeped in self-representation, Chines ethos was, in essence, an invocation of one’s cultural heritage, with which rhetors not only identified themselves but also, through such identification, created their own appeals. I would call ethos as such “collective” for reasons that the projection itself had little to do with the personal qualities of a rhetor, as was the case with Western ethos, and that the act of identification and the cultural heritage to be invoked through such an act were collectivist in nature. In classical Chinese rhetoric, to make one appear credible or one’s words trustworthy was to connect (i.e., identify) what one had to say/write with what had already been collectively established in history and culture, such as historical figures, values, rituals, the awesome, but also abstract, Dao and the attendant notion of Heaven, the
"wisdom" of legendary sage-kings in the remote past, who were believed to have
direct inspirations from the "divine" (i.e., the Dao/Heaven) (Schwartz 26), and the
teachings of great masters, like Lao Zi and Confucius, that would ensure the passing-
down of such wisdom from generation to generation. In this sense, we may say that
Chinese ethos comes from without (one's cultural heritage), rather than from within
(one's self-hood).

In what follows I will discuss in more detail the collectivist aspect of ethos in
CCR, by focusing on what I deem as the defining issues of rhetoric, and culture, in
pre-Qin China: namely, the issues of face and Heaven. The paper will have two
sections. Section I, "Face, Cheng-Yan, and Chinese Ethos," provides a general
description of ethos in CCR; Section II, "The Ethos of the Heavenly," tackles the
notion of Heaven as a cultural heritage and its ultimate role in defining Chinese
ethos. The first section serves to identify as well as to bridge the conceptual gap
between Western and Chinese ethos. The second section is the focus of the paper,
with questions related to contemporary theories of rhetoric and communication
being raised and explored.

Face, Cheng-Yan, and Chinese Ethos

1. A general remark
Speaking of ethos, we may face the challenge of finding an equivalent to it in
Chinese, just as we have had with the word "rhetoric." However, because ethos is
about trust or credibility, the Chinese language is not short of phrases that bear
similar connotations. For instance, Huo Yu-Jia, a scholar on ancient Chinese thought,
cites several CCR cases, in his Tactics of Winning the Heart, that involved the use of
lian-ming (clean reputation) (93), hui-ren (affection toward people) (98–111), and
ccheng-xin (trust and truthfulness) (112–19), which, we can see, are all reminiscent of
Aristotelian ethos. And in the Four Texts of the Yellow Emperor,\textsuperscript{12} xin (trust), as a moral
principle, had even been linked to “li-ming,” the establishing of the Mandate of
Heaven\textsuperscript{13}: “The Yellow Ancestor,\textsuperscript{14} of old, had been cherishing trustworthiness right
from the start, hence his image, whereby he ruled the nation with moral rectitude
and inculcated the multitude with devotion.”\textsuperscript{15}

For Confucius and his followers, the idea of trust or trustworthiness was, first
and foremost, a moral principle, but it was also recognized as a political tactic for
government, which by definition involves a rhetorical move. Confucius once stated:
“If the ruler adhered to trust, all the people would follow suit and be truthful with
their words.”\textsuperscript{16} In the first place, the statement by Confucius can be taken as an
advocacy for a moral principle, but the suasive aspect of “trust” is also implied here,
in that it (trust) could be utilized as a tactic to motivate people to be “truthful with
their words.”

2. Face as a rhetorical strategy

To me, the closest in meaning to the term ethos would be the concept of face (mian-zi)
in Chinese culture. For one thing, the concept is about one’s image as perceived by
others (Scollan and Scollan 35), something also associated with Aristotle’s ethos

\textsuperscript{12} The original author was unknown of the Four Texts, attributed to the Yellow Emperor, the legendary
ancestor of the Chinese people. According to Leo Chang and Yu Feng, the book was “more likely written in the
third century B.C.” (2).
\textsuperscript{13} The Mandate of Heaven can be interpreted as the ultimate ethos for a ruling Chinese king or emperor.
\textsuperscript{14} The Yellow Emperor.
\textsuperscript{15} My translation, based on the original Chinese version in Chang and Feng’s The Four Political Treatises of the
Yellow Emperor. See Section I, Book II (145).
(Golden and Corbett 3-4). For another, it deals with the question of credibility or trust; in Chinese culture, to say one loses face is to say one loses trust by others. According to Lu Xing, the concept embraces "the Confucian value placed on honor, pride, and achievement" ("Influence of Classical Chinese Rhetoric" 16), which may explain why "face" has carried such weight in shaping the life of a Chinese.

Rhetorically, face has long been used for persuasion, especially in the form of a "face saving strategy," which, Lu argues, can be traced back to Han Fei Zi (280–233 B.C.), a rhetorical, and social/political, theorist in pre-Qin China (ibid.). While Han Fei Zi himself did not mention the word "face," his theory of using the sense of "shame" and/or "pride" to control others' behavior has been widely considered as a proposal for "facework strategies" (15–6).

The following excerpt from "The Difficulties of Persuasion" by Han Fei Zi may illustrate how a face-saving strategy cashing in on somebody's sense of pride or shame could work in classical Chinese rhetoric:

The important thing in persuasion is to learn how to play up the aspects that the person you are talking to is proud of, and play down the aspects he is ashamed of. Thus, if the person has some urgent personal desire, you show him that it is his public duty to carry it out and urge him not to delay. If he has some mean objective in mind and yet cannot restrain himself, you should do your best to point out to him whatever admirable aspects it may have and to minimize the reprehensible ones. If he has some lofty objective in mind and yet does not have the ability needed to realize it, you should do your best

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to point out to him the faults and bad aspects of such an objective and make it seem a virtue not to pursue it. If he is anxious to make a show of wisdom and ability, mention several proposals which are different from the one you have in mind but of the same general nature in order to supply him with ideas; then let him build on your words, but pretend that you are unaware that he is doing so, and in this way abet his wisdom.¹⁷

At first glance, what Han Fei Zi proposed is very much like a persuasive strategy commonly employed in Western rhetoric in that it emphasizes the need to adjust, rhetorically, to what a target audience desires, or wants. However, we may notice that the face saving strategy implied here, in the sense of eliciting pride or eliminating shame (Lu 15–16), is being directed towards constructing or retaining the ethos (i.e., face) of an audience, not that of a rhetor, as has been the usual case in Western rhetoric. To put it another way, Han Fei Zi's "face saving" was meant to make the audience, not the rhetor, look good.¹⁸

One may argue that Han Fei Zi's strategy resonates with Aristotle's "good will," as both were designed to establish rapport between a rhetor and his/her audience. But for Aristotle, good will was used mainly for the purpose of gaining trust for the rhetor, whereas the face saving strategy proposed by Han Fei Zi was used largely for the purpose of building up trust, or the appearance of such trust, for the audience. This is where, we can see, the traditional definition of ethos in Western rhetoric, "the appeal of speakers or writers to their own credibility and character" (Covino and Jolliffe 52), does not appear to fit with the Chinese concept of ethos (i.e.,

face), which concentrates more on the appeal of an audience when used as a rhetorical strategy.

3. **The definition of the situation and Confucius' *li***

That Western ethos works quite differently from Chinese may have to do with the fact that it has been equated with a projection of a rhetor's personal character, grounded, Alcorn would argue, in the "coherence" (9) and "stability" (16) of the self. But Chinese ethos, or face, has more to do with the interpersonal than with the personal, as its projection hinges in a fundamental way on how one interacts with others on social occasions. The "definition of the situation," as proposed by Goffman in his *Preservation of Self* (4), may explain it better: Because the situation a person finds him-/herself in can be influenced, and therefore defined, by all the participants present, his or her behavior or "performance" would thus vary from one social occasion to another: for example, the "front-stage" performance (in public) versus the "back-stage" (in private).¹⁹ This would imply that his or her face presented as a result of interactions with other people would vary, too: Instead of being "coherent" and "stable," a person's face can simply be "chameleon-like," in correspondence to the fluidity of the definition of the situation. So, if Chinese ethos differs from Western, it is, first of all, because of the social dimension assumed in presenting one's face, which, in my view, would amount to rejecting the claim by some Western rhetoricians that ethos can be single-handedly created, or manipulated, by a rhetor. One can, of course, present a "trustworthy" face, but at least it has to be "supported

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¹⁸ One, of course, can also make somebody look bad by using a "face-losing" strategy, as seen in the case of "character assassination" used by politicians to attack their opponents.

¹⁹ For more information on the subject, see Chapter 1, "Performances," in Goffman's *Preservation of Self* (pp. 17–76).
by judgements and evidence conveyed by other participants” (Goffman, Interaction Ritual 6) before it can be established.

“Face,” says Goffman, “is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Interaction Ritual 5). If I interpret him correctly, Goffman is actually pointing out the communal, or collectivist, nature of one’s face: Namely, presenting one’s face involves a social process of fitting that face into the frame of expectations set by a community. For instance, in a collectivist society, where harmony is prized over other social attributes, it would be more appropriate for a person to present a face that shows “allegiance to groups like the family or the employer” (Goleman 40), whereas in an individualistic society, where competition takes priority, it might work better for people to present their face as “independent agents” (Samovar and Porter 85). In this sense, then the definition of the situation, where one’s face is presented, ought to be extended to the parameters of the communal or the cultural. Goffman’s face theory, based on his study of the Chinese concept of face, has been claimed to have some universal applications across cultures (e.g., Scollan and Scollan 36–49), but I think it may have more relevance to the explication of Chinese ethos, in that it is, in essence, a theory of identification, like Burke’s, which explains how one’s ethos (i.e., face) is projected through a process of identifying, or fitting in, with what has already been collectively established or approved in a culture, a point I have made earlier in the chapter.

One can rest certain that the “definition of the situation,” as a sociological terminology in the 20th century, would never find its equivalent in the massive body of classical Chinese texts; however, one can’t help noticing the resemblance it
bears to the “rules of conduct” (li) advocated by Confucius over two thousand years ago, as seen, for example, in the following excerpt from the *Analects*:

> At court, when speaking with officers of lower rank, he [Confucius] was pleasant and affable; when speaking with officers of upper rank, he was formal and proper. When his ruler was present, he combined an attitude of reverential respect with graceful ease.\(^20\)

We probably can—without guilt—use the term “face” to substitute the changing mannerism posed by Confucius on different social occasions. It may sound a bit disrespectful to say that the Great Master had shown a face of a chameleon, but it is significant to see that Confucius understood perfectly how the situation, where one interacts with other people, could impact the way one presents one’s social image. Thus, his changing behavior manners on different social occasions may be interpreted as a “rhetorical move” to adjust his self-image to the definition of the situation.

Students of Confucian studies would argue that the Great Master was indeed exemplifying the “rules of conduct” (li), or ritual, as part of the Confucian scheme to restore social order of his time, making sure that the conduct of every and each individual was to be held “within the framework of fixed convention” (Graham 11), which I wouldn’t dispute in the least. However, in emphasizing the observance of rituals, Confucius acknowledged, it would seem, the dynamics of social occasions on which one conducts, or presents, oneself. That is why, as the *Analects* recorded,

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\(^20\) From *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Ivanhoe and Van Norden (27).
Confucius frequently changed his “face,” for example, from a “respectful countenance” when seeing “someone wearing a ritual cap” to a “solemn expression” when attending “a sumptuous banquet.” His (in)famous motto, “junjun, chenchen, fufu, zizi” (i.e., Rulers must act like rulers, subjects like subjects, fathers like fathers, and sons like sons), has often been cited (in both Chinese and Western scholarship) as a formalistic prescription for a rigid social hierarchy, but, if we read it deconstructively, the motto also implies a recognition that one has multiple faces to present when interacting with other people: In front of one’s children, one must show the face of a father, but with somebody else, that face has to change.

In a word, the Confucian doctrine of “ritualization” (li) is reminiscent of Goffman’s “definition of the situation,” which views the presentation of one’s self as being defined “from the point of view of social interaction” (Preservation of Self 242). Of course, Confucius was more interested in restoring social order through li, the rules of conduct for all under Heaven to follow for the purpose of preserving harmony, but implicit in the ideal of li is the notion that one conducts or presents oneself in a manner befitting the situation where one interacts with others. As Heiner Roetz points out, “the rules of well-mannered social intercourse are themselves part of his message” (92). We may use Goffman’s “impression management” (Preservation of Self 208) to describe the “rituals” involved when one presents oneself in relation to other interacting partners, but I feel the phrase “ethos projection” could be equally appropriate, especially since it also deals with the question of how to present one’s self. However, this is where we may see, again, the distinction between Western and Chinese ethos.

21 From Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, edited by Ivanhoe and Van Norden (28–29).
Western ethos, points out Baumlin, is projected through the “identification of a speaker with/in his or her speech” (xi), which I may take liberty to interpret as a projection based on the definition of the text. Because text in Western society is treated as something to be “owned” by the writer or speaker, the “definition of the text” is thus, in my view, indeed the “definition of the self,” but only from the point of view of the writer or speaker, who is responsible not only for creating, or manipulating, text, but also for presenting his or her ethos. In a way, Western ethos is all about self-projection or self-representation.

4. The definition of the Other versus self-projection

I wouldn’t say that a Chinese writer or speaker is not responsible for text production or ethos projection, but such responsibility in Chinese society doesn’t necessarily translate into self-projection or self-representation. The practice of collective workmanship in classical Chinese rhetoric, as mentioned earlier in the paper, would have rendered irrelevant the idea of text ownership, the “material” basis for defining ethos as self-representation in Western rhetoric. The doctrine of ritualization (li), which I have just discussed, would have de-emphasized self-projection for the sake of “ritual propriety” (Ivanhoe, Self Cultivation xi), deemed quintessential to the realization of harmony and social order in Confucianism. More importantly, Confucius’s li demands that one carry his/her conduct strictly in accordance with the “definition” of the social occasions where one interacts with others. This would mean that the presentation of one’s self (or ethos, face, image, etc.,) would have to involve the participation, and even approval, of other people. In this sense, we probably can rephrase the “definition of the situation,” upon which a Chinese ethos,
or face, is projected, as the "definition of the Other," so as to distinguish from the "definition of the self," which, as I have argued, underpins Western ethos.

Earlier, I mentioned that the CCR practitioners had engaged in "patterned rhetoric" and identified themselves in writings with tradition and other cultural establishments, a case in which the definition of the Other, one may argue, could have been undermined because of the apparent absence of social interactions necessary for such a definition. But practicing a patterned rhetoric in writing was indeed following a path paved by the Other, not one's own (often in the name of "originality"), and identifying with tradition or other cultural establishments was actually invoking the authority of the Other in securing one's own ethos. So, the definition of the Other would still apply, albeit not directly.

5. Cheng-yan, the Confucian ideal of good rhetoric

Another phrase in Chinese rhetoric close to the meaning of "ethos" would be cheng-yan, as suggested by Lu Xing in her groundbreaking work, Rhetoric in Ancient China (175). The word could mean "honest talk," "genuine discourse," or, using Lu's own translation, "sincere speech" (ibid.). American scholar Kennedy argues that the "moral rightness of the message" among others would constitute Chinese ethos in classical texts (Comparative Rhetoric 151), a point that resonates with Lu's cheng-yan in my opinion. And Lu writes:

In his work, Mencius\(^2\) highlighted the persuasive power of cheng yan, claiming, "There has never been a case when total sincerity cannot move

\(^2\) Mencius (390–305 B.C.) has been widely considered the second most important figure in the founding of Confucianism.
others. Without sincerity, one cannot move others” (M 4a 12.161). Thus, for Mencius, cheng yan referred not only to sincere and honest speech, but also to an innate moral quality out of which sincere and honest speech naturally and powerfully arise in our efforts to influence one another. Therefore, his understanding of cheng yan was similar to Aristotle’s notion of ethos, in that cheng yan is an indication of ethos and serves as the most effective means of persuasion. (ibid.)

I am not certain whether cheng-yan, taken as an indication of one’s “innate moral quality,” would match Aristotle’s notion of ethos, which, we all know, is taken as a mode of artistic proof (i.e., rhetorical creation) in Aristotelian rhetoric (e.g., Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric 68), but because of the ethical dimension it points to, cheng-yan could be the closest link in bridging the gap between Chinese and Western ethos, especially in terms of how to create the perception of trust. In a sense, Mencius’s “sincerity” (in cheng-yan), used as means to “move others,” is just another word for the notion of “trust” embedded in Western ethos.

Despite some similarity, cheng-yan also distinguishes from Western ethos, in at least two ways. First, it is “both the means to an end and the end itself of communication,” according to Lu Xing (Rhetoric in Ancient China 175), whereas in Western rhetoric ethos is largely seen as a persuasive strategy. Perhaps we can compare cheng-yan to Burke’s “identification,” which, I have argued, can be taken as both a strategy and goal of communication. Confucius himself had put much more emphasis on “sincerity” or “sincere talk” as a moral principle, but one of his statements, to be quoted in the following, seems to indicate the principle can be used
as both the goal and the strategy: "A gentleman ought to dedicate himself to cultivating virtue and establishing glory. Because sincerity helps one improve on virtue, rhetoric must be used to build that sincerity,"^21 which, in turn, would pave the way to one’s achievements."^24

Heiner Roetz believes that “sincerity” has played “an important role in the Confucian concept of rhetoric” (92). His argument that it is “the prerequisite of a good and not only strategic rhetoric” (ibid.) seems to support Lu’s view that cheng-yan is “both the means to an end and the end itself of communication.” But a good rhetoric, says Roetz, can “[dispense] one from the need to convince the other” because, he quotes Xun Zi,^25 "‘even if others should not be convinced, one would still be held in esteem by all of them’ [because of one’s sincerity]” (ibid.). Thus, the ends of Confucian rhetoric, we may see, are much more important than its means, which I think proves a significant point of distinction from utilitarian rhetoric as commonly practiced in the West.

I am not saying that Western utilitarian rhetoric is not, or less, interested in its ends (utilitarian rhetoric, by definition, is “goal-oriented”), but it does not deliberately separate its ends from means (persuasive strategies) or treat means as if they were in a less important position, as seems to be the case with Confucian rhetoric, let alone singling out “sincerity” as the goal of rhetorical practice.

^21 “Rhetoric must be used to build that sincerity” comes from “xiu-ci li qi cheng,” which can also be translated as “rhetoric oriented towards trust.”


^25 Xun Zi (298–238 B.C.) is arguably the third most important figure in the founding of Confucianism.
6. The performative function of language

Second, and probably more important, the idea of cheng-yan in Confucian rhetoric focuses more on the appeal of language (i.e., yan) than on the very person who speaks or writes it, contrasting the emphasis placed on the appeal of the writer or speaker as a person in Western rhetoric. One explanation could be that “Confucians have always linked their concept of speech to that of right conduct and have, accordingly, seen one’s language as a mirror of one’s inner morality” (ibid.). That is to say that some sort of unity could be assumed between external language and internal morality in the Confucian concept of rhetoric (which sounds pretty much like Platonic rhetoric): the focus on language would mean the focus on those who use it. However, if we look at Confucius’s “rectification of names,” which I have discussed elsewhere, we may see the “performative function of language and its interdependence with social convention” (Graham 23) are weighing more in the Confucian moral system than the very person who speaks the language. For Confucius and his followers like Xun Zi, language was not just a medium for describing li, it was also a social practice that constitutes (part of) li. That is why they were so concerned about correctness in names (i.e., language), which they believed would lead to one’s moral correctness because of language’s structuring impact on human behavior.

Thus, we may have two implications to address with regard to cheng-yan. One is that language, as a social practice, mediates one’s conduct (e.g., through li). The emphasis on “sincere speech,” not on “sincere personality,” in Confucian rhetoric can therefore be seen as a recognition of the “regulative function of language” in shaping “people’s attitudes and inclinations to act” (Hansen 59). The other, also related to the
first, is that the emphasis on language would imply that human agency, if any, is playing a lesser role (at most) in the Confucian vision of “good rhetoric,” in contrast to the Platonic, which “seeks to discover and express the truth of the soul” on the premise of “the moral and, ultimately, theological inseparability of the speaker-agent from the speech-act” (Baumlin xiii). Confucian thinkers, such as Mencius and Xun Zi, did talk about human agency, but it was not so much about selfhood in an individual as about “human nature” in general terms (van Norden 103-34).

_Cheng-yan_, for its appeal to language, has presented a far cry from Western ethos, which, as Baumlin points out, is stressing “the inclusion of the speaker’s character as an aspect of discourse, the representation of that character in discourse, and the role of that character in persuasion” (xvii). And I’d like to add that understanding Chinese ethos as “sincere speech,” not as “sincere personality,” is also consistent with a rhetorical tradition that has been de-emphasizing the role of the individual in discourse practices.

To sum it up, I have given a general description of Chinese ethos in this section by exploring, mainly, two concepts in Chinese rhetoric: face and _cheng-yan_. Face can be used for the purpose of protecting the self-esteem of an audience (i.e., face saving). So, rhetorically, it works to make the audience look good rather than the speaker, as has been the case with Western ethos. At the sociological level, face can be seen as a function of the “definition of the situation,” to use Goffman’s terminology. Because of its implicit emphasis on the involvement of other people, face may well be regarded as a function of the “definition of the Other,” in contrast to the “definition of the self,” which characterizes Western ethos. _Cheng-yan_ mirrors Aristotle’s ethos when it comes to the notion of “trust.” However, _cheng-yan_ also implies the
Confucian ideal of a good rhetoric, therefore distinguishing itself from Aristotle's ethos in the sense that the latter is treated as no more than a mode of "artistic proof." Furthermore, cheng-yen embraces an understanding of the power of language in regulating a person's social behavior and moral attitudes. Finally, the emphasis on sincere language, instead of sincere personality, can be interpreted as a reflection of a tradition that depersonalizes discourse or rhetoric.

**Ethos of the Heavenly**

1. **The concept of Heaven**

Any Westerner who has an extended exposure to classical Chinese rhetoric will be struck by the "Chinese obsession" with Heaven (tian in Chinese), and Heaven-related notions, like the Mandate of Heaven, Will of Heaven, Way (i.e., Dao) of Heaven, etc. (The Mandate of Heaven can be thought of as the ultimate ethos only an emperor or king could lay claim to.) In many ways, Heaven was to the Chinese what God was to the Christians in Western countries (Goldin 51–4). But despite its "omnipresence" in ancient Chinese texts, the concept of Heaven didn't appear as clearly articulated in those texts as the Christian God did in the Bible. Ironically, the conceptual vagueness of Heaven often proved a rhetorical "advantage" to many of CCR practitioners, who would (ab)use Heaven to argue the unarguable and explain the unexplainable.

Heaven was meant to represent many things in ancient Chinese thought: Lord-on-High, a cosmic moral order in the sense of the Dao, a physical object in the

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**Footnote:**

26 According to Ivanhoe and Norden, Heaven in pre-Qin China was "not primarily thought of as a place," and was "not connected with any explicit views about an afterlife" (360), which may serve as a point of distinction from the Western concept of Heaven.
sense of the sky opposite to the earth, a metaphysical entity representing Yang complementary to Earth as Yin, nature, human nature, fate or destiny, just to name a few. The multivalent meaning of Heaven may indicate a conceptual evolution it had gone through in early Chinese thought. For example, in the early Zhou\(^{27}\) period (1066–771 B.C.), Shun Kwong-Loi points out, Heaven “was thought to be responsible for various natural phenomena, to have control over human affairs, and to have emotions and the capacity to act” (15). In addition, it represented “a source of political authority” for the Zhou king to rule, hence the Mandate of Heaven (tian-ming) (ibid.). But in the late Zhou, Heaven came to be known as a force for “rewarding the good and punishing the evil,” and for “the preservation and destruction of states,” a change that implies that the king was not the sole beneficiary of Heavenly authority (unless he behaved!) (16). During this period, Heaven was also seen as “the source of norms of conduct,” so that a moral basis could be established for “the observance of li” (ibid.).

2. Heaven and the Dao

Whatever the differences in view of Heaven, the general consensus among scholarship seems to be that for Confucius the term referred to “a supreme, personal deity,” but after him it was more and more associated with “a superior moral force or nature” (Ching 80). In the latter sense, Heaven came close to the concept of the Dao, the ultimate principle of governance in the universe for all of the beings and non-beings. In many classical texts, Heaven and the Dao were used interchangeably to denote the order of the divine or the natural, believed to be above or beyond that

\(^{27}\) Zhou refers to the Zhou Dynasty in Chinese history, roughly from 1066 to 221 B.C. The later Zhou included
of the human. But very often Heaven would serve as an attendant notion of the Dao to suggest that the visible or the nameable (i.e., Heaven) is, ultimately, a reflection, and part, of the invisible or the nameless (i.e., Dao). For example, in his essay “On Heaven” Xun Zi argued that “Heaven is governed by a constant Way (tian you chang dao),” making it clear that Heaven is dependent on the Dao; in Dao De Jing Lao Zi claimed that “the nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth” (ch. 1), thus implying that “Heaven and earth are not the ultimate” (Schwartz 196).

In early Chinese thought, the term Dao was also used to refer to a variety of subjects, covering a range of references greater than Heaven. Philosophically, especially in the school of Daoism, it was often meant as a metaphysical concept to represent the ultimate, which by definition remains “completely beyond human perception” (Kohn 46), hence the ineffable Dao. In a way, this may add to the explanation why the concept of Heaven could be ambiguous (i.e., when used in association with the ultimate Dao).

3. The Dao, Truth, and Western logocentrism

In the rest of this section, I will mainly discuss the centrality of Heaven to the projection of ethos in ancient China and the raison d'être behind it, but before that, I would like to give a little background information concerning the position of ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. First, let me start with a passage from Dao De Jing in which Lao Zi describes the Dao:

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the “Spring-Autumn” (722–481 B.C.) and Warring-States (403–221 B.C.) periods, often likened to the Axial Period in the West by historians.

Look, it cannot be seen—it is beyond form.
Listen, it cannot be heard—it is beyond sound.
Grasp, it cannot be held—it is intangible.
These three are indefinable;
Therefore they are joined in one.

From above it is not bright;
From below it is not dark:
An unbroken thread beyond description.
It returns to nothingness.
The form of the formless,
The image of the imageless,
It is called indefinable and beyond imagination.

Stand before it and there is no beginning.
Follow it and there is no end. (ch. 14)

The passage by Lao Zi could be easily dismissed as “elusive” by someone with a “positivist” attitude, but actually it addresses several important philosophical issues being echoed in the postmodernist movement in the West. And what strikes me most is the extraordinary similarity it shares with the Vacuum Genesis theory in modern physics, which declares literally, and bluntly, that the whole universe simply started from “absolute nothingness.”29 There is probably no need to elaborate on the “eternal emptiness” of the world from the point of view of Daoism, which

may turn out quite a distraction from the major theme of the chapter, but nevertheless we can still draw implications from Lao Zi's passage relevant to issues of language and rhetoric.

First, the Dao, or the ultimate reality, is considered beyond reach in early Chinese thought in that it cannot be "seen," "heard," "held" or even "imagined." If we compare it with the transcendental truth framed in the Platonic fashion, we may see the immediate difference. For Plato believes that truth, like "the great power of geometrical equality among both gods and men" (BH 100), is accessible to humans if a rigorous reasoning, modeled after his dialectic, is conducted. It is known that Western philosophy, since Plato, has been driven by what Derrida calls "logocentrism" (11), phrased after the Greek term logos (i.e., logic, reason, language, etc.,), but what has been celebrated in the logocentric tradition is indeed Plato's idealistic notion that absolute truth can somehow be determined.

To say that absolute truth is beyond reach is one thing, but to say that such truth does not exist in early Chinese thought is another. In fact, the Dao is just another word for absolute truth. However, unlike their Greek counterparts, who were so possessed with rational demonstration in their quest for truth, supposedly independent of human intervention, ancient Chinese thinkers (at least the vast majority of them) appeared to take a "let-it-go" attitude towards truth so that they could redirect their energy to using what had already been accepted as true, like the Dao, to promote their moral or political agendas. It seems that Graham sums it up quite well: for Confucius and Lao Zi, "problem-solving without useful purpose is a pointless frivolity" (7). Or, perhaps we can rephrase it: the approach to truth in early Chinese philosophy is based on "a pragmatic [,...] not a logical or empirical
justification,” to borrow terms from Johnston (4). “Logically,” we can further draw two conclusions here: 1) the pragmatic approach to truth yields more space for rhetorical actions (or shui in Chinese); 2) such an approach blends rhetoric (study of the conventional\(^\text{30}\)) and philosophy (study of the truthful) into one instead of separating them. That is why, says Kowal, Dao De Jing can be read as “a work of rhetoric” as well as a treatise on philosophy (364).

Second, Lao Zi’s message can also be interpreted as a recognition that ultimate Truth, if any, cannot be conveyed through language, simply because it is “indefinable,” and “beyond description.” Again, if we compare Lao Zi with Plato or Aristotle, we can see the difference between them. Though Plato has been known for his hostility to rhetoric, he never abandons rhetoric altogether. (Or, put another way, he can’t separate rhetoric from philosophy.) What is more, he believes that “the truth behind appearances can be delineated” by a discourse that is “more analytical, objective, and dialectical” (Bizzell and Herzberg 56). So, what he really denounces is the emotive, or irrational, elements that he thinks can induce “flattery” (BH 96). Clearly, Plato privileges logic, or logos (as Derrida would call it), the defining element of a “good rhetoric.” We know that Aristotle has made a vigorous defense of rhetoric, placing it as “the counterpart of Dialectic” (BH 151), but, like his teacher Plato, he, too, privileges logic, as is made clear in his statement that “enthymemes [...] are the substance of rhetorical persuasion” (ibid.). In many ways, Aristotle’s Rhetoric can be read as “a popular logic” among others (Cooper xx). That Plato and Aristotle and, by extension, the

\(^{30}\) By “the conventional” I imply the cultural. A good example would be the use of Heaven in Chinese ethos, which can be seen as a cultural phenomenon. I will further explain this later in the section.
logocentric turn of Western philosophy privilege logic seems self-explanatory: It operates, conceptually, on the premise of truth; whoever knows how to apply logic grasps, in Derrida’s words, the “signifier” and “signification of truth” (10).

4. Logic and its position in Chinese rhetoric

While the absolute was absolutely “indefinable” in language to Lao Zi and other thinkers, I wouldn’t say that logic, as a special language formulation, was completely alien to early Chinese philosophy and rhetoric alike, but rather that it just did not enjoy the status it did with Plato, Aristotle, and other Greeks. For example, as Schaberg has demonstrated through his analysis of passages in Zuo Zhuan, “the syllogism was among the techniques of proof available to early Chinese speakers and writers.” He uses the following form as an example: “one who is the object of awe, concern, modeling, and imitation has weiyi [i.e., dignity and deportment]; King Wen was the object of awe, concern, modeling, and imitation; therefore King Wen had weiyi” (41).

What seemed to distinguish the Chinese from the Greek is that the former generally didn’t share the same degree of “rigor” with the latter, for two reasons. One is that Chinese writers or speakers were more pragmatic: if everything else is already made clear, then “the conclusion [...] is left implicit;” the other is that the Chinese preferred to have “logical demonstration” (apodeixis) and “showy display” (epideixis) “intertwined” in texts (ibid.), a point that appears to confirm what I have

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31 Founder of the Zhou Dynasty (1171–1122 B.C), widely regarded as a sage-king in Chinese history.
32 For a Chinese, something like “All swans are white, and this is a swan” could be enough, as the conclusion, “Therefore this swan is white,” is self-evident and therefore can be left unsaid. This may in part explain why many Chinese find it perplexing that writings in the West frequently demand a “conclusion.” As an added note, Aristotle prefers to leave the premises implicit because of the concern that “a tight logical argument is not
suggested: the pragmatic approach to truth blends the rhetorical and the philosophical. But overall, it seems, early Chinese writers or speakers would pay more attention to the rhetorical; as Schaberg points out, rhetorical “elegance” is “paramount” in the texts of Zou Zhuan and Gou Yu (30).

Aside from some sporadic pieces of “logical” writing collected in the aforementioned Confucian classics, it is generally agreed that pre-Qin China did see a brief episode of “rationalism” represented by Mo Zi (480–420 B.C.) and his school of thought, Mohism. While Mo Zi and his followers didn’t formalize logic in the Aristotelian sense, their “logical sophistication” (Graham 137) has been widely recognized by both Chinese and Western theorists. The early Mohists were primarily concerned over “problems of morals and government,” but the Neo-Mohists extended their inquiry into such areas as “logical puzzles, geometry, optics, mechanics, economics” (ibid.). Nevertheless, the Mohist school of thought has been traditionally “dubbed” as an anti-Confucian, therefore anti-establishment, movement. Thus, despite a brief period of thriving in the pre-Qin period, its position in the development of Chinese philosophy has remained at best “secondary” (7), if not marginal.

Because of a renewed interest in Mohism and other schools of rationalism (like the School of Naming) in recent years, many contemporary Chinese scholars feel the urge to correct the “misconception” Western scholars have entertained: namely, “Chinese rhetoric is not interested in logic” (Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China* 31). For example, in 1997, Dong Zhi-Tie compared Aristotle’s logic with Chinese effective in rhetoric” (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 71), seemingly contrasting the Chinese preference for an implicit conclusion.
“naming” and “arguing” (largely based on Mohism), and reached the conclusion that the latter, despite its lesser degree of formalism (190), represents “the study of logic in ancient China” (4). Lu Xing, for another example, argued that Western theorists have been wrong in using their own terms to judge Chinese rhetoric, in that they are “unfamiliar” with terms in Chinese “associated with the classical Greek meaning of logos” (37).

I would have to say these Chinese scholars do have some merits in their arguments, but elevating Chinese rhetoric (i.e., naming and arguing in pre-Qin China) to the “logical” status may suggest, on their part, a misunderstanding of the cultural, intellectual context with which classical Chinese rhetoric had been developed. As discussed earlier, the absolute truth, and its determinability by humans, has formed part and parcel of Western philosophy, hence the tradition of logocentrism, but such has never been the case with Chinese thought—at least in classical times. Because the mainstream philosophers, who were also rhetoricians, were “pragmatic” about truth, they were, generally, not particularly interested in logic, both as the “signifier” and “signification of truth” by Western standards. Yes, logic or logos did have its presence in CCR texts, but it was rarely considered the substance of rhetoric because of—for the most part—the rhetor’s “faith” in the “incontrovertibility” of “received definitions and texts” (Schaberg 42). And based on my own readings of classical texts, even a rationalist like Mo Zi would frequently have to resort to “Heaven” to hammer out his argument. So, in my view, the assessment by some of the Western theorists, such as Oliver, that “Chinese rhetoric
is not interested in logic” is basically “可” (acceptable), even though it may sound a bit belittling to those who are attempting to “rationalize” classical Chinese rhetoric. Once more, this doesn’t mean that “the Chinese do not speak or write in ways that presume the facticity of assertions. It is only that there is little interest in raising the issue of facticity or literalness to the level of speculation and theory” (Hall and Ames 135).

By now I may have risked a “digression” from the main topic of the paper, but I think it is important for readers to see how ancient Chinese differed from Greeks in their attitudes towards logic and its application in rhetoric: logos. For, only when we understand that logos was never as privileged in CCR as it was in Greek rhetoric, then can we better appreciate the fact that ethos has taken center stage in traditional Chinese rhetoric. Hall and Ames argue that “the Chinese have been more apt to argue along pathos- and ethos-based lines than to employ objective logos-style argumentation” (ibid.), a view echoed, in part, in Kennedy’s Comparative Rhetoric, which suggests that Chinese rhetoric is “strong in ethos” (151). He does not say that logos “was not privileged” in CCR, but his statement that “Deductive argument in the form of enthymemes seems underdeveloped” at least suggests that logos in CCR was not held with the same amount of enthusiasm as in Greek rhetoric. However, Kennedy also contradicts Hall and Ames by stating that Chinese rhetoric “generally avoids pathos except in military exhortations and in some of the more severe announcements or instructions” (ibid.). As far as pathos is concerned,

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33 The word “可” (acceptable) was characteristically used in classical Chinese texts when a judgment was called for, in contrast to the frequent use of “true” or “valid” in similar situations in Western texts. This may also serve as an example to show that ancient Chinese in general were not particularly interested in strict logical demonstrations. For practical reasons, what is “acceptable” would have a wider range of applications than what is “true” or “valid” based on logical demonstration.
my impression is that it has been as much applied in Chinese rhetoric as it has in Western rhetoric, but it has not yet arrived at the status of ethos in Chinese rhetoric just as it hasn’t the status of logos in the West. Since pathos is not the concern of this paper, I would like to avoid further statements on the issue.

5. Ethos as a cultural construct

The seemingly unshakable “faith” in received wisdom or knowledge that Schaberg mentioned may have constituted a rhetorical strategy in itself. Because it “must never open to question,” such a faith, Schaberg contends, “encouraged a looseness of form in proofs” (42). For pragmatic reasons, an argument using Heaven to “bluff” others would be easier to make than the one relying on a rigid process of rational demonstration, which could well turn out to be—for Heaven’s sake!—a linguistic “drab,” given the cultural penchant for rhetorical elegance. I would like to add that the faith in the past, as a tradition, is still being observed in today’s Chinese rhetorical practice, notably, for its emphasis on “repeating set phrases and maxims, following patterns, and imitating texts” (Matalene 804).34

Besides being pragmatic, the emphasis on received wisdom or knowledge in CCR can also be seen as signifying a conscious effort on the part of a rhetor to utilize what had already been culturally accepted, or established, in constructing an appeal to his audience, a point that I have made earlier when speaking of the collective nature of Chinese ethos. But, we may see, ethos as such is essentially a cultural construct—based on the invocation of tradition. The faith in the wisdom of the past could be an indication of an intellectual tradition (indeed a cultural tradition), but
the variables of such wisdom, such as the Dao, Yin-Yang, Heaven, Confucianism, etc., are all of cultural formulations of an early Chinese tradition distinct from that of the West. That is why ethos projected based on such wisdom is a cultural, and therefore collective, construct. Kennedy points out that the “tradition of the ancestors who continue to watch the living” plays an important role in creating Chinese ethos (151), which, I think, confirms the significance of the cultural in shaping how the Chinese choose to present their ethos (through the ancestral lineage, for example). But in what follows, I will mainly concentrate on the tradition of using Heaven as the ultimate source of appeal in classical Chinese rhetoric, which is probably more revealing about the culture-dependent aspect of Chinese ethos.

For obvious reasons, whoever could appropriate the power of Heaven or place himself under the “blessings” of Heaven would conveniently have ethos in his hands to do what might otherwise be thought of as morally incomprehensive: for example, usurping the throne or conquering another kingdom. That is why every founder of a dynasty in Chinese history would invariably claim to inherit tian-ming (the Mandate of Heaven) for “the establishment of new regimes” (Lu, Rhetoric in Ancient China 50) and kings or emperors would never hesitate to claim the title of tian-zi (the Son of Heaven) to ensure their authority as “the ultimate rulers of human affairs” (55). Shi Jing (the Book of Poetry) contains numerous lines describing how King Wen, founder of the Zhou, had been granted a “command” (ling) from Heaven.

\footnote{This may help explain, at least in part, why the issue of plagiarism has never been culturally serious in Chinese society.}
to overthrow the Shang\textsuperscript{35} and to establish his own dynasty, as seen, for example, in the stanza of Da Ming:

\begin{quote}
The Mandate came from Heaven
Commanding this King Wen
To rename the kingdom as Zhou and establish its capital in Haojing
And to marry an heiress from the state of Shen.
She later bore King Wu,
The elder son [of King Wen] who continued the course [of the farther].
Blessed by Heaven, he [King Wu] carried on the Mandate,
Coordinating military attacks against the Great Shang.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Apart from \textit{Shi Jing}, \textit{Shang Shu} (the \textit{Book of Documents}), and other classics, has similar passages showing how King Wu had used the Mandate of Heaven to “spin” his political ethos, as seen, for example, in a “motivational speech” given to his generals and soldiers:

\begin{quote}
Heaven always shows its mercy to the people, and the ruler must obey the Will of Heaven. Jie of the Xia\textsuperscript{37} disobeyed Heaven above and therefore caused grave calamities all over on Earth. That is why Heaven granted its Mandate
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} The Shang Dynasty (around 1600–1066 B.C.). King Zhou, the last ruler of the Shang, is historically perceived as personally responsible for the demise of the dynasty because of his “wicked” rule. In \textit{Shi Jing} and other early classics, he often serves to exemplify how a bad ruler is doomed by the Will of Heaven.


\textsuperscript{37} Jie, the last king of the Xia Dynasty, established around 2100 B.C. and conquered by the Shang around 1600 B.C. Historically, Jie, together with Zhou (earlier mentioned in a footnote), is a typical example of despotism. But unlike Zhou, the existence of Jie is not positively supported by historical evidence.
to Cheng Tang to terminate the Dynasty of Xia. Today, the crimes of the king [Zhou] far exceed those committed by Jie. He persecutes the innocent and sends them into exile; he punishes and butchers his ministers who try to voice an honest opinion. He claims to have the Mandate of Heaven, yet dares to say that to revere Heaven is useless, that sacrificial ceremonies produce nothing good, and that his despotic practices won’t hurt society. He is thus not far away from his own demise, as shown by the example of Jie. That is why Heaven confers the turn on me to rule the country. Plus, the dream I dreamed accords with the signs revealed through divination: They both tell good fortunes ahead, predicting an inevitable victory over the Shang. It is true that he has followers in millions, but they are shallow and ignorant. It is true that I have only ten ministers, but they are highly capable, knowing fully well how to govern the country and having a strong determination of working together for me. Surrounding oneself with crowds of cronies is nothing compared with leading a few men defined by virtue.

My people have witnessed what Heaven has witnessed [i.e., the ills of the day]; my people have heard what Heaven has condemned. If the people are complaining [of the social ills], I cannot stand aside; I have the sole responsibility to react. Now, I will lead my troops to charge forward.38

While it may not be necessary to do a lengthy rhetorical analysis to point out the complexity of modes of appeals King Wu used and to show their relation to the historical, cultural context in which the audience was addressed, it is important to know that the quoted passage from Shang Shu displays the presence of a high level of virtue.

38 Founder of the Shang, one of the legendary sage-kings in Chinese history.
of rhetorical technique long prior to the time of Confucius.\textsuperscript{40} For instance, logic, especially in the Aristotelian category of “historical example” (BH 147), was applied in the argument to show that the Shang Dynasty would be doomed because of its despotic king, Zhou. The usage of “example” could be summarized as this: “King Jie disobeyed Heaven, hence the destruction of his dynasty. Now King Zhou is disobeying Heaven; his dynasty is approaching an end, too.” There is little doubt that King Wu was using this “example” to legitimize his military attacks against the Shang as well as to advise his listeners that victory would be on his side in the end.

However, we may also sense a subjugation of logos to ethos in the speech for the fact that the use of logic is dependent on the spin of Heaven—the basis of King Wu’s ethos or, in Schwartz’s words, “the ultimate source of the king’s authority” (29). In fact, the whole argument would collapse if his ethos could not be sustained by the invocation of Heaven. For example, if Heaven did not exist, or Heaven did not punish Jie (but rather Jie caused his own failure), then it will be useless for King Wu to present his ethos, in the speech, as the inheritor of a heavenly mandate (as in “Heaven confers the turn on me to rule”), which will in turn render “invalid” the application of a “logical” example that links Jie’s fall to the prospect of Zhou’s fall. (At least, there is no way to tell that Heaven chooses King Wu to execute its Mandate.) But what appears to be ludicrous to a modern mind made perfect sense to King Wu and his audience, because the king’s claim “to a special relation to Heaven” had been quite established in early Chinese thought for both “political”

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Shang Shu} is historically classified as a pre-Confucius classic, though Confucius and his disciples may have plaid a role in its editing or even revising.
and “religious” reasons (43). In this sense, we might say as well that King Wu’s ethos—in the name of the Mandate of Heaven—is a cultural construct of his time.

Schwartz and Ching, among others, have both traced the permeance of Heaven in Chinese culture and its association with kingship in Chinese thought to the practice of shamanism in the early stages of Chinese civilization. “The emergence of Ti [Heaven]\(^{41}\)” with its supreme power, speculates Schwartz, “may be associated with the theological meditations of shamans and other religious specialists who were in the royal entourage” (30). In that “motivational speech” just cited, King Wu’s accusation that King Zhou did not revere Heaven may be seen as a recognition of Heaven’s “ultimate sovereignty” (ibid.) over all humans, under heaven including the king. The mentioning of “sacrificial ceremonies” and “divination” by King Wu is suggestive of the fact that practices of a shamanistic or religious nature in the early stages of Chinese civilization were used to reveal the power of the divine and to confirm “the king’s claim to a monopoly of access to Ti” (ibid.).

In *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, Ching points out that Chinese kings of the early ages were often “shamanic figures” themselves (xiii).\(^{42}\) For obvious reasons, those “shamanic kings,” as well as “their heirs,” “fabricated the tales of divine ancestry,” creating the “mystical” role of kingship as “mediator between Heaven and Earth” (xii–iii). The legends of “sage-kings,” who have “semi-divine attributes and the ability to maintain communication with the divine” (67), were indeed the invention of “later times,” possibly by Confucius, Mencius, and other pre-Qin

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\(^{41}\) Ti, also *Di* or *Shang-Di* in Chinese (i.e., Lord on High), was the god worshipped by people of the Shang Dynasty. It was replaced by Heaven in the Zhou Dynasty, but with the meaning remaining the same.
thinkers, who created the "myth" of sage-kings "for the sake of having real rulers emulate such mythical figures" (xii). Confucians and the like may have created the "sage-king" myth for the purpose of promoting their own moral or political agendas, but in doing so, we may infer, they were also, wittingly or unwittingly, institutionalizing the office of kingship, together with its "heavenly" authority, just as those shamanic kings in the earlier period had used sacrificial ceremonies, divination, ancestral worship, and other ritualistic practices to institutionalize their rule over all under Heaven. In a way, this may explain why Confucianism "was declared the official creed of the nation" by the court of the Han (in the second century B.C.), and Confucian Classics "became the principal study, if not the sole, of all scholars and statesmen" in post-Qin China (de Barry, et al. 19). But perhaps we are witnessing something even more significant here: the institutionalizing (Confucianism) finally turns into the institutionalized.

Though Ching does not use the word "ethos" to describe the authority of the king's "mandate," the following excerpt is quite telling in terms of how ethos was created for the king and how it was institutionalized for its own sustention:

... the charisma associated with shamanic ecstasy created the aura for the office of kingship, giving it a sacred, even a priestly character. But this charisma was eventually institutionalised and routinised, by a line of men who no longer possessed the gifts for summoning the spirits and deities. To support their power, however, they frequently resorted to the suggestion of charisma and of divine favour. They fabricated tales of divine or semi-divine

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4 For example, the author cites a study by the Japanese scholar, Kato Joken, as saying that King Wen and his son, King Wu, were both "shamans" (17).
origins; they consulted with the deities and spirits through divination, sacrifices, and other rituals. Such examples abounded in the rest of Chinese history. (xii)

It probably won’t change the semantics of “charisma,” “aura,” or “divine favour” if we substitute them here with the rhetorical term “ethos.” But what is more revealing is the fact that the power of early Chinese kingship clearly depends on the creation, or fabrication, of ethos or, in Ching’s words, “charisma,” “aura,” “a sacred and priestly character,” etc. The association of ethos with “power” helps explain why it (i.e., ethos) was eventually “institutionalised and routinised,” but we may push the argument further: i.e., the reason that ethos is institutionalized is exactly because it partakes in the process of institutionalising kingship and its power, hence the conclusion that ethos and power, or the institutionalizing and the institutionalized, are implying each other—and are intertwined!

Perhaps we can push the argument even further: If logos is the “signifier” and “signification” of truth in the Western tradition of “logocentrism,” then ethos is certainly the “signifier” and “signification” of power in the Chinese tradition of what I would have to call “ethocentrism.” The notion of ethocentrism, I believe, should explain, in the fundamental way, why ethos has taken center stage in the development of Chinese, especially classical Chinese, rhetoric. (With this ethocentrism in mind, Westerners may better appreciate why the concept of face,

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43 I probably need to give a little clarification here. By ethos as “signifier” of power, I clearly mean that ethos has the function of signifying the power, say, of Chinese kingship; by ethos as “signification” of power, I mean such power is also implied in the process of the signification, for example, in the case of institutionalization. And I believe Derrida is suggesting the same—truth is signified by logos and at the same time is implied by logos. Or, I might put it this way: because of truth, that’s why we have logos as signifier; because of logos as
which is also ethos, has been carrying such a massive weight in the life and thought of the Chinese."

6. **Ethos as an institutionalized discourse formation**

Because of the cruciality of shamanic ethos (or charisma) to sustaining the power of kingship, the creation of such ethos, which we might say is a discourse practice or a function of discourse practice using postmodernist jargon, was well incorporated into the institutions of the early Chinese dynasties. For example, the Shang Dynasty set up the offices of *Duo-Bu* and *Zhan* specially to take charge of divination, and the *wu* (i.e., shaman) at the time was the official bureaucrat responsible for mediating between gods or spirits and humans (Guo 208). In the Zhou Dynasty, the *shamanic* bureaucracy became even more complex and more powerful, given the status ranked second only to the king. In fact most of the six highest-ranking offices, such as *Tai-Zhu* (Grand Invocator, in charge of sacrificial ceremonies), *Tai-Bu* (Grand Diviner), and *Tai-Zong* (Grand Genealogist, in charge of recording royal lineage), were directly responsible for religious or shamanic practices (265). The bureaucratic system of the Shang or the Zhou went of course beyond the periphery of shamanism, but we could see that the system was quite dedicated to mystifying and, in doing so, sustaining, the authority or power of kingship—with the suggestion of divine or heavenly charisma, aura, etc., associated with the state-run, institutionalized apparatus of signification, such as divination and sacrificial signification, that's why we have truth. Likewise, because of power, the Chinese king has ethos to signify it; because of ethos as signification, that’s why the Chinese king has power!  

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44 Ching believes that “religious fervor had greatly diminished” during the Zhou times (8), but I doubt it happened right away in the beginning of the Zhou. Since the Zhou covered a span of over 800 years, it’s more likely (and even certain) that religious or shamanic practices played a lesser role in the political system in the later periods of the dynasty.
ceremonies. And the remark made by King Wu, in a speech quoted earlier, that “the dream I dreamed accords with the signs revealed through divination” can thus be taken as a strategy of ethos signifying his relation to Heaven and, as such, implying his Heaven-related power as well.

The “bizarre machinery”—as Foucault would call it (135)—involved in the process of signifying the ethos and therefore power of early Chinese kingship is a good example to show what Foucault has illustrated in his The Archaeology of Knowledge: namely, discourses are institutionalized formations (as in the case of heavenly ethos in China), “made possible by a group of relations […] established between institutions, economical and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization” (44–5).

However, he also suggests that the power of institutions, etc., cannot escape the “totality” of discourse (55) because, after all, discourses are “practices that systematically form the object of which they speak” (49). I would rather not dwell on Foucault’s discourse theory, but it is important to point out the obvious: i.e., the mutually defining relationship between the institutionalized (discourse) and the institutionalizing (authorizing institutions) that Foucault has identified is applicable to what I have just argued about the “ethocentric” nature of the system of signification in the early ages of Chinese civilization, where ethos and power were mutually implying each other.46

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46 Schwartz points out that the king is “in some sense the ‘high priest’ of the worship of Ti [Heaven]” (35).

46 The fact that the power of kingship is implied by a system of signification suggests that the system can sometimes override the power of the king. For example, according to James Legge, Yi-Jing (the Book of Changes, used as a divination manual) has intimations that “only defensive war, or war waged by the rightful authority to put down rebellion or lawlessness, is right,” that “the younger men […] would cause evil if allowed to share [power] with the oldest son,” etc., (The I Ching 24), suggesting that the king has to follow what has been unveiled though divination, or signification. Similarly, Ching points out that the kingship system,
So far, I have explained the central position of ethos in the development of traditional Chinese rhetoric by focusing on its intertwinment with divine power in early shamanic or religious practices that often served to link the authority of kingship to that of Di or Heaven, a point that may, simultaneously, help account for the centrality of Heaven to Chinese ethos. I wouldn’t say shamanism in early Chinese culture was “utter nonsense,” but it is more important to see that its practice as a way of signification was reflective “of the needs or desires of society and institutions and of available methods [...] of coming to know something,” to quote Bizzell and Herzberg (1127). The unique historicity of the early shamanic or religious practices, of the methods of knowing and signifying characteristic of such practices, and, finally, of the association of ethos with power intimated with such practices and methods ought to lead us to conclude that Chinese ethos, as a discourse formation, is—fundamentally—a function of a cultural heritage, rather than a creation of a personal making.

7. A philosophical paradigm

The fact that Heaven has played such a crucial role in creating Chinese ethos may prompt one to speculate whether or not the rampant (ab)use of Heaven in classical texts might have something to do with a humanly desire to appropriate Heaven to “boost” the ethos of the writers working behind those texts. While the king may control the access to Heaven, it is a fair game for anybody else to say that he has the zhi (knowing) of how Heaven operates, for example, in terms of punishing the evil,

which includes the system of signification, “became a factor that restrained a ruler’s arbitrary exercise of authority, and sometimes functioned as an ultimate control over state power itself” (34).

*The fact that so many Chinese and Western scholars are still fascinated by Yi-Jing, which was written starting the 12th century B.C. as a divination manual, should be quite telling about the shamanic wisdom.*
or bringing down good to those who have diligently obeyed tian-ming, or the Mandate of Heaven. (In many cases, the king would need such explicatory spins to support his authority.) Dong Zhong-Shu⁴⁸ (1797–104? B.C.), the leading Confucian scholar of the Han Dynasty,⁴⁹ once said: “[To know] is to predict accurately . . . The person who knows can see fortune and misfortune a long way off, and can anticipate benefit and harm” (qtd. in Ching 5). So, we can infer, from the statement, that the zhi in ancient Chinese society implied some sort of knowing about Heaven (as in “see fortune and misfortune a long way off” or “anticipate benefit and harm”), and it was not monopolized by the king. In the Analects, Confucius has been presented as someone who knows the Dao (Way) of Heaven (Ivanhoe and van Norden 2), blessed by “a special relationship with Heaven” (Ching 79), which I think can be taken as a rhetorical move on the part of his followers to add to the appeal of the Great Master. Sometimes Confucius claims that he is the one who understands “the Mandate of Heaven,” and lashes out at “the petty person” for failing to appreciate the Mandate (e.g., Ivanhoe and van Norden 43; 50). But again we may interpret this as a strategy of ethos, used to legitimize his moral mission to restore the li of the early Zhou times, which the historical Confucius believed was “the Golden Age of humankind” (Ivanhoe and van Norden 1).

But perhaps a more “logical” explanation regarding the “high-frequency” occurrence of Heaven in classical Chinese texts, one seemingly supported by documentary evidence, is the philosophical longings among the ancient Chinese for “seeking a higher consciousness of oneness with the universe” (Ching xiii), which

⁴⁸ Dong is credited as the most important figure in Chinese history for establishing Confucianism as the official creed of the nation.
⁴⁹ The Han was the first post-Qin dynasty in Chinese history, lasting from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D.
may be rephrased as something like “maintaining harmony with nature,” “striving for unity between man and nature, and between man and the Dao,” etc. The idea is that the humankind is part of nature or the universe, and therefore is, like anything else, governed by Heaven as a “guiding Providence” (de Barry et al. 17). This sort of idealism, believed to form a philosophical paradigm in early Chinese thought (Ching 99–131), underpins almost all the schools of philosophy in pre-Qin China, particularly, Daoism and Confucianism.

For Daoism, “Heaven’s net casts wide,” with nothing to slip through “its meshes” (ch. 73). It advocates “caring for others and serving heaven” (Lao Zi ch. 59) and “realiz[ing] one’s true nature” by leading a life of “simplicity,” “cast[ing] off selfishness,” and “temper[ing] desire” (ch. 19). Its ideal of wu-wei (i.e., doing-nothing) (ch. 2) is sometimes seen by Westerners as “nihilistic,” but actually it carries a political message for rulers, for example, in advising them against using a heavy hand in governing (ch. 58). Morally speaking, wu-wei cautions people not to be obsessed with material gains, for the “Tao [Dao] of heaven is to take from those who have too much and give to those who do not have enough” (ch. 77). The nihilistic overtone probably comes from the notion of “non-striving” as embedded in wu-wei, but, as Merton explains, Daoism is actually emphasizing conforming one’s action to the “divine and spontaneous mode […] of action” of the Dao, the “source of all good” (24). So, philosophically, we may say, the ideal of wu-wei, and Daoism at large, has formulated “an expression of the continuum between the human being as the microcosm of the universe as macrocosm,” to use words from Ching (xi).
The Dao of Heaven[^50] stands at the core of Confucius’ call for the return of *li*, and for moral rectitude. For the Great Master, the consummate ritual system (*li*), established by the Zhou founders, King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou[^51] has carried within it “a set of sacred practices” (Ivanhoe and van Norden 1) embodying the Dao of Heaven. So, his teachings on *li* can be regarded as an attempt to “lead his fallen world back to the Dao, ‘Way,’ of Heaven” (2). Once Confucius claimed, “though my studies are lowly, they penetrate the sublime on high. Perhaps after all I am known—by Heaven,”[^52] thus linking his teachings to the order of the divine. Another time he uttered, “If I have done anything contrary to the Way, may Heaven reject me! May Heaven reject me!”[^53], implying that the Dao of Heaven is the ultimate guiding principle for all human actions. But then what is the Dao of Heaven for Confucius? Let us take a look at an excerpt from the *Analects* to get a clue:

Confucius said: “I wish I did not have to speak at all.” Tzu Kung [his student] said: “But if you did not speak, Sir, what we disciples pass on to others?”

Confucius said: “Look at Heaven there. Does it speak? The four seasons run their course and all things are produced. Does Heaven speak?” (Section 17)[^54]

[^50]: The word *dao* literally means “path” or “way” in Chinese. It is used metaphorically to refer to some sort of transcendent governing force of the universe in Chinese philosophy. The Dao of Heaven (*tian-dao*), which occurs in the *Analects* (Section 5), could have two connotations: one is that Heaven itself is governed by the Dao; the other is that Heaven is representative of the Dao. Either way, we can see that Heaven serves as an attendant notion of the Dao, pointing to some kind of absolute truth beyond.

[^51]: The brother of King Wu (1043–1036 B.C.). After King Wu died, he served as the prince regent, resisting the advice of many to usurp the throne, hence widely regarded as a paragon of virtue by later generations. Historically, he is more significant for his role in establishing and perfecting the rituals and institutions of the Zhou Dynasty, the model for *li* to Confucians.

[^52]: From *Sources of Chinese Wisdom*, edited by de Barry, et al. (22).

[^53]: From *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Ivanhoe and van Norden (18).

[^54]: From *Sources of Chinese Wisdom*, edited by de Barry, et al. (30).
The Great Master seems to pose a paradox for himself by suggesting that true knowledge is not to be taught or learned but rather comes directly from Heaven, a point that rings quite similar to Socrates' "soul knowledge." For, if this were true, his sacred mission of transmitting the wisdom about the Dao of Heaven would certainly lose its practicable basis. That aside, we may sense that Heaven referred to by Confucius is indeed "a natural order" (de Barry, et al. 17), which does not speak but yet reveals itself through the cycle of four seasons, growths of ten thousand things, etc. For Confucius such an order carries norms (as in the "season-comes-season-goes" cycle), or messages of the Dao, which he believes must translate into "a moral order" (ibid.) in society. So, the idea of li, as discussed earlier, is really about the norm of human behavior, as seen, for example, in his motto: "Rulers must act like rulers, subjects like subjects, fathers like fathers, and sons like sons."

In a word, Confucius' teachings, like Lao Zi's, fit into the philosophical paradigm described earlier of ancient Chinese thought: the oneness of Heaven and humanity (tian-ren he-yi). But Daoism and Confucianism have different leanings: Daoism, in general, is more interested in transcending humanity to the Dao of Heaven, whereas Confucianism is more intent on applying the Dao of Heaven to this world, focusing on what is right for human mortals. The "Dao," as Schwartz points out, has thus become "Confucius' inclusive name for the all-embracing normative human order" (63).

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55 This may show Confucius' indebtedness to Daoism, famous for its speaking-the-unspeakable paradox.
56 See, for example, the Memo (in The Collected Dialogues of Plato), where Socrates says that "the truth about reality is always in our soul" (371), and that "there is no such thing as teaching, only recollection" (364).
57 Using the phenomena of four seasons, day and night, life and death, etc., had been a cliché among ancient Chinese thinkers to show the existence of a natural order and, further, of the governing force of the Dao.
58 This may explain, in part, why Daoism later, for the most part, deteriorated into mystic, and even superstitious, practices whereas Confucianism came to enjoy the status of state orthodoxy.
8. Oneness of ethos and logos

If we take a closer look at Heaven used in Daoism or Confucianism and Heaven in earlier shamanic practices as the ultimate source of ethos for the king, we may soon realize that these two "Heaven's" actually refer to two different concepts: in the former case, Heaven represents an impersonal, natural process, more or less in the category of truth (e.g., transcendent truth) whereas in the latter, Heaven is a personal god, or a supreme deity, more or less in the category of power (e.g., the power of awarding the good and punishing the evil). In this sense, the word "Heaven" has symbolized what Westerners would see as an antithesis: an "active conscious will" and the "source of universal order" (Schwartz 51) or, to put it in a philosophical way, "the category of ontological creativity" and "the categories of the primary cosmology" (Neville 72).

Many hypotheses have been proposed to solve this philosophical or non-philosophical puzzle, ranging from the dismissal that the Chinese mind doesn't know the distinction between theism and non-theism to the admiration that it is more "inclusive" and "balanced," therefore able to reconcile what appears to be irreconcilable to the Westerner (e.g., see Neville 48-74). I have no intention to get into the debate, but just wish to point out the obvious, something I have mentioned earlier in the section: namely, Heaven had gone through a conceptual evolution in early Chinese thought, for example, from Lord-on-High worshiped by the Shang people to the "source of norms of conduct" revered by Confucians. Undoubtedly, such an evolution has caused a semantic "problem" for Heaven as a concept—its ambiguity, one of those "corrupting elements" that a positivist feels ought to be
purged for the sake of "the reasonableness of discourse," points out Bennett (244). However, citing Kenneth Burke, Bennett argues that ambiguity can actually prove an advantage, in that it "makes possible the transformation by means of which a symbolic act develops" (247). The analysis by Burke of the speeches on love in the *Phaedrus*, says Bennett, illustrates this advantage: Because of "the ambiguity of 'love'," that is why the transformation in speech, from erotic love to divine love and finally to "the principles of loving speech," can be made possible (248).

Likewise, the reason that the ancient Chinese used Heaven to refer to two seemingly antithetical concepts is because "Heaven" as an ambiguous term had materialized a conceptual transformation. Just as the Western "love" could mean both "erotic love" and "divine love," the Chinese "Heaven" could be used—with a degree of comfort—to represent an "active conscious will," as well as the "source of universal order." We probably can imagine what would happen next because of the "heavenly" ambiguity (which I believe has opened wider space for rhetorical maneuvering): The king, or Son of Heaven, can utilize Heaven to symbolize his power sanctioned by the divine, as well as his moral authority derived from the order of the universe. I wouldn't say that "the centrality of kingship" (Ching 36) in Chinese society (until the 1911 revolution) has been completely built upon the ambiguity of Heaven as a conceptual term; however, it is important to realize how Heaven, with its dual association with the divine and the cosmic, has played a central role in formulating a discourse that has transformed the king into "the paradigmatic individual, reflecting in himself so much of that which is greater than himself: the universe as an organic whole, vibrant and alive" (66).
Perhaps more significant, and more relevant to philosophy and rhetoric alike, is that the Chinese “Heaven” has blurred the line of demarcation between ethos and logos. If ethos signifies power and logos truth, as has been discussed earlier, then we might say that Heaven signifies both, because of its conceptual ambiguity or dual association. That is to say, Heaven can be used as both ethos and logos, and for both rhetorical and philosophical purposes. I have already explained the centrality of Heaven to Chinese ethos, which I think is essentially in the rhetorical category because of its conventional, or cultural, nature. The idea of Heaven used as logos seems self-explanatory if we go back to what was discussed a little earlier: namely, humanity as implied in the heavenly, a moral order in the natural, the transcendent in the cosmic, etc., for all of these can be categorized as truthful and therefore philosophical.\(^5^\)

The following passage, from the *Four Texts of the Yellow Emperor*, may exemplify Heaven’s ethos/logos ambiguity:

> As for the principle of [human] affairs, it depends on whether one complies with (the way of heaven) or rebels against it. If one’s achievement transgresses (the ways of) heaven, then there is punishment by death. If one’s achievement is not enough as heaven requires, then one retreats without any...

\(^5^\) How to decide what is true or not true is really an epistemological or methodological (e.g., scientific demonstration) issue. Since different cultures may have different epistemological approaches, it’s important not to set a universal standard on the issue. The Dao, which is regarded as the absolute among the Chinese, may appear ludicrous to the Western mind; the Platonic Truth, which may have an enduring appeal to Westerners, would make little sense to the Chinese, not to mention the fact that Plato failed to discover it himself, except in theory or through the suggestion of mathematical models. It is known that mathematical equations have led to the proof of the Big Bang, but nothing further. That is, the Absolute is still elusive to all of us. However, I would regard those equations as truthful, even though they are not truth themselves. Those Chinese ideas, like humanity implied in the heavenly, may sound untrue to a Westerner, but they are true or truthful to the Chinese.
fame. If one's achievement accords with heaven, one will thereby attain great fame. It is the principle of [human] affairs. One who complies will enjoy life; one who follows the principles will succeed; one who is rebellious will suffer death; one who loses [will have no] fame. (1.8.2)*

In the first place, the passage may be summarized as something like "follow the Dao of Heaven," in that it advises the reader to act in compliance with Heaven. In this sense, Heaven is used as logos because it represents a moral order guiding human behavior, something the ancient Chinese would accept as true. However, if we take a closer look at the passage, we may sense that it is actually advocating the doctrine of the Golden Mean, advising people against being too aggressive or too shy in getting what they want. Thus, the repeated use of Heaven can be seen as a strategy of ethos for the purpose of adding to the appeal of the message. (That is, even though less appealing, the message itself still stays if the author did not use Heaven in the text.) What is more, Heaven is invoked for its power in punishing those who rebel and awarding those who follow—a clear indication of ethos being applied. I may appear over-stretching in my explanation, but what seems clear is that Heaven's role as logos or ethos is ambiguous in the text.

The oneness of ethos and logos is not uniquely Chinese. The fact that Plato tried to split philosophy from rhetoric but failed to do so suggests that the truthful simply cannot be separated from the conventional or cultural in the first place. And the famous aphorism by John Keats, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," actually points and approached as such by Chinese philosophers. That's why I categorize them as the philosophical and treat them as logos.

* From Chang and Feng's *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor*. See Section 8, Book I (139).
to an awareness in the West of such oneness long before the postmodernist movement. But due to the dominance of logocentric thinking, the issue has largely been ignored in the Western rhetorical/philosophical tradition. I have argued that the Chinese were pragmatic in their attitudes towards truth; they blended the rhetorical with the philosophical, the conventional with the truthful, instead of separating them, thus making it possible for ethos and logos to become one, as seen in the application of Heaven in early Chinese writings that has bridged the gap between the two seemingly different categories in the West. We may use a simple diagram for illustration:

![Diagram of oneness of Chinese Heaven](image)

Figure 1.1. Diagram of oneness of Chinese Heaven

According to Kenneth Burke, human beings are capable of both using and misusing “verbal symbols,” which can in turn become the “realities of human existence” (Bennett 243–4). This would imply language practice, as a symbolic or signifying action, creates meanings that may not cohere with reality in the true sense. Further, it suggests that language itself may even imply or constitute reality, a point that early Chinese thinkers, such as Confucius and Lao Zi, would have fully appreciated. Indeed, Heaven would be a good example to illustrate how a language symbol can be (mis)used or (ab)used to create reality far beyond our imagination. The fact that Heaven had permeated through Chinese culture for thousands of years

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51 I suspect that “Power is knowledge” would be another example of such awareness in the West.
may point to the triumph of a language symbol and the reality created with such a symbol, despite its conceptual ambiguity. Finally, I would like to point out that the oneness of ethos and logos is indeed the triumph of ethocentrism in that it indicates that the rational appropriation of logos cannot be set apart from the irrational, conventional, rhetorical, or cultural projection of ethos—philosophy in the end is “in defense of un-reason” (Bennett 243).

To sum it up, I have explored, in this part of the chapter, the concept of Heaven and its central role in defining Chinese ethos. To put my explication in perspective, I have also discussed rather extensively the centrality of logos, or logocentrism, in the Western tradition, in comparison with Chinese ethocentrism. Just as there are historical, cultural, or epistemological reasons behind logocentric thinking in the West, the ethocentric turn in Chinese rhetoric has to be appreciated in light of a cultural tradition that carries its own historical complexities and philosophical intricacies. As I understand it, the significance of Heaven in defining Chinese ethos points to a unique cultural heritage shaped by a collective human desire in seeking "a higher consciousness of oneness with the universe" (Ching xiii). Historically, Heaven symbolizes, and has been institutionalized into, the power of kingship because of its dual association with the divine and the cosmic in Chinese culture. In the former case, Heaven represents the ultimate ethos that only a king or emperor can lay claim to; in the latter, Heaven intimates the order of the universe that a king or emperor can appropriate to secure his moral authority over tian-xia (all under heaven). And because the order of the universe (the Dao, indeed) is conceptually close to what might be called the absolute, or Truth, in Western ideology, Heaven can be said to represent the truthful in the philosophical sense.
One may thus conclude that in ancient Chinese discourse, the concept of Heaven blends into one power and truth, ethos and logos, and, finally, rhetoric and philosophy.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the central topic of the dissertation, collective ethos, with an in-depth look at “face” and “heaven,” two of the defining issues in regard to ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. While it is impossible to exhaust discussions on the subject, what has been presented here ought to give readers some idea as to how Chinese ethos had evolved on a track rather different from the Western tradition, especially when we think of it as a collectively shared cultural heritage.

Like Western ethos, the concept of face deals with the question of how to present oneself, with concern over one’s image, credibility, etc. It has also been used as a persuasive strategy by rhetors to influence their audience’s attitude and action. What distinguishes Chinese face from Western ethos, however, is that the former is largely projected through involving the participation, and approval, of other people, hence the “definition of the Other,” which, broadly speaking, can be interpreted as a social process of making one’s face or image fit into the frame of expectations set by a community. In contrast, traditional Western ethos is often projected through the “identification of a speaker with/in his or her speech” (Baumlin xi), understood to be the creation of a personal making. It is true that a Western rhetor has to adjust his or her own ethos, rhetorically, to the demands of the audience and situation, but such adjustment is largely motivated by a drive for self-representation (e.g., making one look good) rather than by an expectation that one should follow the
crowd—behaving like others. So, the “definition of the self” befits ethos in the Western tradition.

The collective nature of Chinese ethos is perhaps better understood when we look at how the creation of ethos had been incorporated into the institutions of early Chinese society, where rulers would engage in shamanic or religious practices to signify, and mystify, their power and authority with the suggestion of divine and heavenly charisma. The reason that Heaven was so central to the projection of ethos on their behalf is because it was deeply rooted in a cultural psyche, where the desire for heavenly transcendence had long been harbored. So, in the end, the significance of Heaven in defining the ultimate ethos in Chinese society can be appreciated as a function of a cultural tradition.

Before ending this chapter, I want to make it clear again that I didn’t mean to exhaust all the explanations about collective ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. Personally, I feel the investigation is far from over, especially since I already have other topics in mind, like Confucius’ self-cultivation and rectification of names. The idea of self-cultivation has its political and moral purpose of restoring li, but it also points to the ideological differences between the East and West in view of the individual and its relationship to society at large. In Chinese culture, the self has been traditionally played down, which could add to the explanation why it has been out of the picture where Chinese ethos is concerned. Investigating what Confucius and his followers had to say of the virtue of self-cultivation and their impact on the rhetorical practices of later generations might shed additional light on understanding collective ethos from a cultural point of view.
The notion of rectification of names has been another important feature that defines the Confucian discourse system. The famous statement by Confucius that “If names are not rectified then language will not be in accord, if language is not in accord then things cannot be accomplished . . .” can be regarded as a blunt acknowledgment that language plays a role in shaping how one can reach moral accomplishments. More importantly, it also implies a denial of agency, deemed to be crucial to the formulations of Western ethos, in that language is recognized for its potential in regulating human behavior. We are who we are not because of some kind of essence within, as Plato might have claimed, but because of the epistemic function of language in formulating moral and metaphysical categories and in creating social reality based on those categories. Confucius’s rectification of names poses an interesting comparison with Foucault’s poststructuralism, which also rejects human agency, together with such notions as self, ego, subject, and individual.

What was discussed very early, in the beginning section of the chapter, of “patterned rhetoric” in classical Chinese texts is also a subject worthy of further research and discussion—because, in my view, this phenomenon is not uniquely Chinese. One may find numerous examples in professional writings in the West that fall into the category of patterned rhetoric, such as memo, letter, proposal, report, just to name a few. Also, those who submit articles for publication in a scholarly journal cannot afford to ignore conventions and formats. It is common to see a research paper written in a “patterned” way: for example, starting with an introduction of a topic, then a review of existing literature, followed by a new thought that would contribute to the current discussion, then a research design
and/or methodology, followed by research findings, followed by a discussion

drawing on the findings, and finally followed by a conclusion in which some sort of

“confession” is the norm—how imperfect the findings are, how inconclusive the

conclusion is, how much remains to be done, etc. All these would remind me of ba-
gu writings (eight-legged essay) in old China!

But what interests me most is the question whether the patterned rhetoric

mentioned here would also translate into a consciousness of collective ethos with the

mainstream Western rhetoricians. With the rise of postmodernism, which has

seriously challenged the philosophical basis of self, ego, human agency, etc., and

with the rapid advancement of Internet technology, which has already put to

question the traditional notion of authorship, it seems possible that more and more

people will realize that rhetoric as social praxis is indeed a collective action, hence

the need for “the projection of ethos to the communal level,” as Holloran has once

pointed out (qtd. in Harris 125). At this point, perhaps a more prudent answer

should be: “Let’s wait and see.”

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CHAPTER 3

ETHOS ONLINE: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

An online text should still be considered a rhetorical text, in the sense that it has to be persuasive one way or another in order to induce some kind of action in a reader: for example, purchasing a product or service, leaning towards a new attitude, or simply getting interested in the content of the text. It is rhetorical also because the creation of such a text takes into consideration purpose, audience, context, etc., elements that shape the production of ordinary discourses, such as a speech presentation or a scholarly writing. The reason I’m speaking of an online text as rhetorical is because this would lead to what I’ll try to explore in this paper: i.e., an online text involves the use of rhetorical ethos, which varies from culture to culture just as rhetoric in general does from culture to culture (Robert Oliver 358).

One may argue that an online text is more than rhetoric in that it involves the use of digital expression as in the case of multimedia, where various communication media such as graphics, audio, animation, and video are brought to play together, as we have often seen on the Internet. The implication is that rhetorical rules, including the use of ethos, don’t necessarily apply online. But I would argue that when text moves from page to screen, it still falls within the realm of rhetoric simply because it has a mission of fulfilling communicative purposes. The difference, as Richard Lanham points out, is that electronic media “are essentially dynamic rather than static” (16). Lanham also argues, “Digital expression has resurrected the world of proverbial wisdom, but through vast databanks of icons rather than words” (37). So, it may be said, if traditional print text is a medium of rhetoric through written
words, then digital expression is a medium of rhetoric—more dramatic, apparently—through iconic presentations.

In Greco-Roman times, rhetoric relied heavily on oral delivery for its effectiveness in persuasion. Based on Aristotle's five-canon definition, delivery is simply part of rhetoric, serving to present speeches with effective acting and vocal modulation. What is noticeable here is that the non-verbal (as in delivery) is not separated from the verbal in classical rhetoric. But, as we know, since print text replaced oral text as the principal means of transmitting knowledge in human society, the system of delivery has been frequently neglected or treated as if it were inconsequential in the practice of rhetoric. Naturally, when rhetoric becomes truncated, stripped of its non-verbal component, its effectiveness in persuasion can be called into question.

Jay Bolter has argued that electronic text "more closely resembles oral discourse than it does conventional printing or handwriting" (58-9), which I take to mean, especially after reading his Writing Space, that an online text has incorporated what is generally missing in a printed text: the non-verbal. And, in the context of this paper, I would like to take one step further to suggest that digital expressions may have also restored classical rhetoric in the true sense of the word, by providing new means of delivery (e.g., multimedia) that cannot be realized through ordinary written words.

At this point it seems "logical" to say that one of the rhetorical strategies, ethos, can be digitally enhanced online. In classic rhetoric, ethos is projected, at least partly, through delivery. Cicero once claimed that the orator must be "the consummate actor" so as to be able to "paint" his character (i.e., ethos) (BH 217;
That is to say, the presentation of one's ethos is also a function of delivery. I certainly have no intention to contend that ethos presented electronically would be the same in effect as that presented through oral delivery over two thousand years ago, but it is important to realize that the electronic text represents an expressive process that can enhance the projection of ethos through iconic manifestation. While the physicality of a Greek orator standing above the crowd delivering the appeal of his character with effective voice, gestures, and facial expressions may yet have a long way to go to become a digital reality, the promise of electronic media in creating an image, or ethos, through visual and sound manipulations certainly surpasses a printed page. In addition, the online ethos can be constantly recreated, remodeled, and therefore redelivered, an advantage that can never be matched in traditional print text.

Having established the idea of ethos being projected through delivery, I now might be able to have more leeway to tackle the central topic of this paper: i.e., online ethos varies from culture to culture. This is because the question of delivery is also a question of cultural variance, which, I have every reason to say, impacts the way ethos is being delivered.

In what follows, I'll try to answer these four questions: 1) What is ethos?; 2) How does it vary cross-culturally?; 3) How does culture impact the delivery of ethos in visual arts and design?; and 4) How does online ethos vary from culture to culture? The question of how to define ethos has yet to be settled in rhetorical scholarship, so a brief theoretical introduction may be necessary for the purpose of clarification. The answer to the second question is framed from the Chinese perspective. Chinese ethos, as well as Chinese rhetoric at large, differs drastically
from its Western counterpart, which could serve as an example to illustrate how ethos can vary cross-culturally. The third question is tackled mainly from the point of view of visual delivery, whose cultural variations may directly impact the way ethos is created. The answer to the last question is meant to be practical—to analyze and compare online texts (Eastern and Western) to illustrate how ethos is delivered differently (or similarly, if I have to draw that conclusion) in Cyberspace across cultures. This section is not intended to be a "scientific" study, but rather an attempt to demonstrate the "typical," which, I admit, could be a very subjective choice.

As a note of caution, I do not intend to present any sort of conclusive findings in this paper; rather, my whole purpose is to initiate further discussion on the topic so that we may better appreciate the fact that the online ethos is culturally constructed just as much as the offline is.

I. Background

Aristotle sees rhetorical persuasion as threefold, coming from logos, the appeal of logical reasoning, pathos, the appeal of emotional invocation, and ethos, the appeal of one's personal character. Of the three, says Aristotle, character "may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion" (BH 154). He explains, "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided" (BH 153). Ethos, it thus can be said, refers to a rhetorical strategy that "emphasized the role a speaker's character plays in persuasion" (James Baumlin xii).
However, traditional Western rhetoric seems to lack a consensus in terms of how to define that role, which is sometimes seen as relating to “the problematic identification of a speaker with/in his or her speech” (Baumlin xi). There have been, mainly, two versions of ethos in the history of Western rhetorical theory: One is Platonic, regarding ethos as an individual quality of a rhetor, independent of rhetorical manipulations; the other is artistic, treating ethos as something that can be created, and manipulated, through means of good sense, good will, and good use of language, as proposed by Aristotle in his Rhetoric. Obviously, the two versions are in conflict with each other.

Strictly speaking, Plato himself never uses the word ethos, and his anti-rhetoric stance may well give the impression that he is also anti-ethos. However, his emphasis on “true rhetoric” and the truthfulness of human character presented in that rhetoric suggest that he is just as concerned about how to identify one’s self in a speech/writing as his sophist rivals, if not more than them. Thus, “by inference,” says James Baumlin, one might still figure out “a Platonic definition” of ethos (xiii).

To understand what counts as a Platonic ethos, we may need to look first at the Platonic or transcendent truth. Plato insists that such truth has nothing to do with the worldly (rhetoric included); however, he believes that humans were somehow in contact with it before their birth, “when [their] souls were with the Divine” (BH 55). The question is, How can humans possibly seek truth when they exist in the flesh? Plato offers his dialectic, “the whole process of rational analysis by which the soul was led into the knowledge of Ideas” (Hunt 64). Obviously, this is where the issue of character plays out, for one must be truthful to oneself in order to discover or express truth, an assertion made by Plato in both the Gorgias and the
Phaedrus. Of course, in his eyes, only the philosopher, not the rhetorician, has the moral rectitude to be truthful.

It is important to note that Plato's ethos, the truthfulness of human character, is also an embodiment of soul knowledge. As Baumlin points out, since dialectic "seeks to discover and express the truth of the soul, then ethos describes the inner harmony among language, character, and truth—in Platonic fashion, ethos defines the space where language and truth meet or are made incarnate within the individual" (xiii). This is to say that the Platonic ethos is essentially incarnationist, in the sense that it projects truth by relating to what is deep within the individual: the soul.

We may never be able to determine what exactly Plato means by the "soul" in modern terms, but we can reasonably assume it is about some kind of immortal essence an individual self possesses within. If the Platonic ethos is individualistic, it's because it is premised, fundamentally, on the notion of an essentialist self in Western ideology, presupposing the existence of an eternal, static identity within the individual that can endure the vicissitudes of time and space (Baumlin xvii–xviii). In other words, ethos (the character of self and embodiment of truth) stands by itself, to be revealed through language, not to be created in language: Rhetoric has no role to play.

Without doubt, Aristotle departs to a great extent from his mentor in conceptualizing ethos. Though he includes the aspect of moral character in ethos, his pragmatism gives rhetoric a much more significant role in connecting human character to the epistemic function of language. Aristotle argues that persuasion by means of ethos ought to be achieved by "what the speaker says, not by what people
think of his character before he begins to speak” (BH 153). Namely, the orator must construct his material (artistic proofs) to “make his own character look right” so as to “inspire trust in his audience” (BH 160; 161). So, in contrast to Plato who insists that the speaker’s character must be upright for its own sake, Aristotle seems to say that it is sufficient to win an audience simply by making “ourselves thought to be sensible and morally good” (BH 161). To put it bluntly, the Aristotelian ethos can be faked.

In sum, the Western tradition of rhetoric has been marked by a tension between the Platonic and the Aristotelian in terms of how to identify ethos. The Platonic ethos assumes the moral character of a speaker to be something innate, outside the confines of language and society, while the Aristotelian ethos reflects a rather pragmatic approach in discourse, stressing the need for a rhetorical reconstruction of human character. Or, we may say, the Platonic ethos entertains a philosophical essence, separable from the “flattery” of rhetoric; the Aristotelian ethos, on the other hand, incorporates the rhetorical, which in turn adds to, and even creates, the trustworthiness of a rhetor.

II. Eastern Perspective

However, as Baumlin suggests, throughout the history of rhetorical theory, the Platonic ethos appears to have had the upper hand over the Aristotelian (even though Aristotle himself is considered the framer of Western rhetoric), due to a logocentric tradition in ideology that “embraces [...] the philosophical model of selfhood over the [...] rhetorical model” (xviii). He writes:
Western culture, in other words, has largely identified itself with the tradition beginning with Plato and Isocrates and developed by Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant—all of whom treat the self as a moral, metaphysical, and ultimately, theological category (rather than as a function or effect of verbal behavior). (ibid.)

Further, what appears problematic is that, even though Aristotle’s ethos is said to be “quintessentially a linguistic phenomenon” (xxiii), it never gives up in its own categories the notion of selfhood or individualization—how to represent the character of an individual is still the central concern of the Aristotelian ethos. If the Platonic ethos is the projection of self through philosophy, then the Aristotelian ethos is largely the projection of self through rhetoric. That is, discourse has now become an instrument in such projection. So, no matter how we look at the Western ethos, it has always been seen as “the appeal of speakers or writers to their own credibility and character” (Covino & Jolliffe 52), be it the Platonic or Aristotelian. I would add that the image of a Greek rhetor standing above the crowd and single-handedly inciting his audience into actions might also have its imprint on the Western perception of ethos.

By contrast in Chinese rhetoric, especially in classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR), there is no such concern as to the relations between human character and discourse. This doesn’t mean that ethos has no bearing on Chinese rhetoric but only suggests that it takes on a different definition, with its sources (of credibility) shifted from self to non-self, or, to put it more specifically, from the individual to the collective, communal, and cultural, as I will argue in this section. It appears that when perceived from an Eastern perspective, Western ethos is anything but universal,
especially from the following three aspects of classical Chinese rhetoric: function of rhetoric, epistemology, and “bamboo hypertext.”

1. Function of rhetoric

Instead of striving for individual welfare as seen in Greek rhetoric, classical Chinese rhetoric emphasizes the need for maintaining social harmony (Scollan and Scollan 142), with its discourse production essentially depersonalized. It’s hard to imagine an ancient Chinese rhetor (suí-ke) standing above the crowd engaging in some kind of public speech or debate—not because the notion of democracy failed to prevail, but because such practice was simply out of character with the cultural themes of humility, collectivism, and adherence to social rituals.

It must be pointed out that harmonic rhetoric should not be interpreted simplistically as avoiding conflicts or submitting to authority; rather, it is about how to position one’s self in the world (society and nature) through the medium of language. To achieve harmony is ultimately to seek unity between man and the Dao, a cosmic moral order of being in ancient Chinese ideology. Rhetorically, this would mean denying an individual appeal on the part of the rhetor, who would have to appeal to culturally and historically established authority, such as ancestral lineage and the sage-kings like Yao, Shun, and Yǔ, for the purpose of establishing his ethos. The ancestral lineage would give the rhetor some kind of legitimacy in positioning himself in a social hierarchy. The sage-kings were thought to “maintain a divine afflatus” (Schwartz 26) and therefore have the power to perceive the Dao. Therefore, the appeal to such authority is essentially the appeal to the Dao, through which the rhetor builds up his persuasive power.
2. Epistemology

Unlike Western rhetoric, which is predominantly logocentrically oriented, classical Chinese rhetoric never embraces the ideal of language as "an enterprise to represent or depict or describe an external reality independent of man and society" (Hans Lenk 6). Its primary epistemological function is to make distinctions of the world perceived to be an ontological Yin-Yang duality, rather than to express the certainty of transcendent truth as advocated by Plato and other Western thinkers. For a Westerner, language and reality can be separable; for a Chinese, language and reality are one, in the sense that we have to use language to make distinctions between Yin and Yang, good and bad, right and wrong, etc. That's why Confucius is so obsessed with the "rectification of names" (zheng ming), because he knows very well that such rectification can lead to the rectification of moral behavior. Within the Confucian (Daoist as well) system of ideology, discourse constitutes social reality.

Now we can see that the epistemology underlying CCR is turning the Platonic ethos upside down. Because it never concerns itself with "an object-marking account of the way words relate to the world" (Hansen 71), truth has been a non-issue in CCR, and the individual self, seen as an embodiment of truth in a Platonic definition, would thus carry little weight in presenting a rhetor's ethos. To put it another way, Chinese ethos does not have to serve as some kind of connection between the truthfulness of discourse and the truthfulness of human character.

We can also see that traditional Chinese epistemology implies a denial of human agency as presupposed in a Platonic definition of ethos. For Plato, the objective discovery and representation of truth must be done by (or incarnated within) an individual self, but because truth is a non-issue in ancient Chinese
thought, the concern for human agency to exercise such objectivity is thus out of the question. Indeed, I would say that discourse production in ancient China is "agent-less" in the sense that the speech-act itself has never been assumed to be something individual—not just because discourse is essentially depersonalized for the sake of maintaining social harmony, as mentioned earlier, but also because there has been a widespread recognition of language's structuring impact on human behavior. For Lao Zi, the "name" (i.e., language) is "the mother of ten thousand things" (1); for Confucius and his followers like Xun Zi, morality comes out of naming, not the other way around. All this would pose further challenges to the Western perception of ethos: If discourse practice is "agent-less," then where do we locate a rhetor's ethos?

3. Bamboo hypertext

Classical Chinese rhetoric can be metaphorically described as "bamboo hypertext" in that it shares many textual features that are normally associated with modern electronic hypertext, which, according to Jay Bolter, is "the interactive interconnection of a set of symbolic elements" (27). The reason I choose the term "bamboo hypertext" also has to do with the physical features of classical Chinese texts, as all of them were written (or occasionally carved) on bamboo strips. I have already argued elsewhere how classical Chinese rhetoric fits all those descriptions about hypertext: namely, non-linear, open-ended, collective, multi-accentual, interactive, and networked. In the following, I will mainly discuss how the "bamboo hypertext" phenomenon in CCR questions the Western definition of ethos in terms of authorship.
Almost all the Chinese classics we've seen today, like Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* and Confucius' *Analects* were created as a collection of short essays, paragraphs, or sentences written and rewritten by the disciples, or disciples of the disciples, of Lao Zi and Confucius over a span of decades or even centuries. While the texts bore the name of Lao Zi or Confucius, as its official author as a token of respect from those disciples, as Mark Lewis suggests (53), the master himself may never have contributed a single written word to the collection (though it is popularly believed that those quotations by Lao Zi or Confucius had the master's imprint one way or another).

Consequently, after the texts had passed through numerous hands, they would invariably become inconsistent or self-contradictory in both meaning and purpose due to the absence of individual authorship (or control). In addition, many disciples would use the master as a source of authority to create their own texts (or agenda, using today's political terminology) with degrees of deviation and variance from the predecessors depending on the then ideological climate and scholarly trends. The readers also took an active role in interacting with the texts, and very often they were even part of an ongoing process of textual transformation. So, it's not surprising to see that a classic Chinese work credited to a historic figure could have numerous "adulterated" versions. The problem, of course, comes from a collective authorship responsible for the production of "bamboo hypertext."

What is significant about "bamboo hypertext" is that its authorship seems to break away from all of the "self-structure" (Marshall Alcorn 3) associated with a Western ethos: character, personality, person(a), voice, image, and, above all, the self, none of which matters that much in classical Chinese rhetoric. Because of the
collective authorship that transcends time and space, a CCR text is typically defined by motion rather than by "momentary location" (Moulthrop 303). That is to say, it aims to dissolve itself, which would mean it also dissolves the kind of stableness, however relative, that a self-structure must have in order to establish ethos (Alcorn 3-35).

Alcorn says, "A theory of ethos needs to be grounded in a relatively clear, but also a relatively complex, understanding of the self" (4), but does this theory also apply to classical Chinese rhetoric? I would doubt it, for the reason that its collective authorship projects self-effacement rather than self-representation as commonly seen in Western culture and rhetoric. I wouldn’t say there is no such thing as ethos in "bamboo hypertext," because a Chinese rhetorical text, like its Western counterpart, must establish certain trust or credibility in order to effect persuasion. Indeed, Confucius’ "xiu ci li qi chen," which can be translated as "rhetoric oriented towards trust," may exactly point out how important ethos is in Chinese rhetoric. But the difference is that Western ethos is created to gain trust for the rhetor as an individual, whereas Chinese ethos has a broader purpose of telling or, to use Lewis’ words, "writing the masters" (53) instead of one’s self.

In this section, I have discussed the three aspects of classical Chinese rhetoric to illustrate how a Chinese ethos can differ from a Western one. The “function of rhetoric” part points out an important characteristic of classical Chinese rhetoric, depersonalization, which suggests that a Chinese rhetor must invoke culturally established authority, and ultimately the Dao, to create ethos. The “epistemology” part explains how truth is a non-issue in CCR; therefore, the individual self, which is supposed to be an embodiment of truth in the Platonic sense, would carry no
weight in generating ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric. The “bamboo hypertext”
demonstrates at the discourse production level how a fluid, collective authorship in
CCR defies the stableness of a self-structure thought to be necessary in formulating
a Western ethos.

III. Ethos in Visual Arts and Design

In the above two sections, I have briefly discussed how ethos has been defined in
the Western rhetorical tradition and how a Chinese ethos appears to be a far cry
from such a definition. In this section, I would like to explain, in passing, how the
delivery of ethos can vary cross-culturally (mainly Chinese vs. Western) with focus
on visual arts and design. But before doing that, I think it may be necessary to
clarify what I mean by the delivery of ethos. To me, delivery implies creation: The
two cannot be separated, just as we cannot separate the process of writing from the
process of creating a fiction. Thus, in this section, and the following, the word
delivery would mean creation or, specifically, “creation through visual delivery.”

Visual design has long been recognized for its rhetorical effectiveness, so
much so that sometimes it is also known as “demonstrative rhetoric” (Buchanan
91–109). Because of the need to attract (or sometimes to overwhelm) an audience or
to affect its attitudes or emotions, principles of rhetoric have been widely used in the
visual arts, such as sculpture, architecture, and painting (Vickers 340–74). The notion
of ethos, accordingly, has found its way into the design of those arts, in which
demonstrating good taste, good will, good skill, and good command of material is
commonly considered a very important appeal to the audience (see, for example,
Buchanan 101–3; Vickers 351–2). Designers, like architects, are sometimes known as
"builders of images" (Tafuri 103), which suggests that they are aware of their work being related to building up ethos (the "image" is a core component of ethos).

How exactly ethos is delivered in visual design is probably a question only designers can answer. I would rather focus in the following on how culture impacts the way ethos is conceptualized (with visual examples, of course). The discussion will be divided into three parts: 1) the visual sublime, 2) the question of self-representation, and 3) the notion of harmony.

1. The visual sublime

To make it clear, my purpose here is not to theorize about the sublime in design art, but rather to use it as an example to show cultural differences in the creation of ethos. The conception of sublime was, arguably, first proposed by the Greek rhetorician Longinus, who defined sublimity as "a certain distinction and excellence in expression" (62). Longinus' sublime is traditionally associated with the emotive (Monk 13), but in my view it is also a play of ethos, as it builds upon "grand" and "lofty" images. A key component of Longinus' sublime is "noble conceptions," which suggests to me that the sublime has more to do with ethos than with pathos, because it is essentially an appeal to something "great."

In visual arts, works that display "grace" and "greatness" can be said to have a "sublime" appeal (Monk 177; Harrington 124). I have coined the term "visual sublime" to mean some kind of excellence in design that "wows" an audience by invoking forces of the grandiose or the great: for instance, Michelangelo's *Final Judgment* (frescos painted in the Sistine Chapel), the majestic dome of the U.S. Capitol, or the Great Wall in China. According to Monk, the idea of sublime implies
"supreme beauty" (185), but it also suggests breaking down the normal, in the sense of conveying beauty through "the terrific" (188-98), as seen, for example, in the architectural design of European gothic cathedrals or the mystic pictures drawn by the eighteenth-century English Romanticist William Blake (Appendix 1), where beauty is mingled with the grotesque and grace comes in the awesome. So, we might say, the sublime is ethos created, and also intensified, through the extraordinary.

In Chinese culture, the idea of sublime in visual design is probably just as old as that in the European tradition. The grandeur of the Great Wall, stretching for thousands of miles over the North China mountain ridges, is a good example to illustrate how a finite man-made design can rise above the ordinary human scale arousing the feeling of sublimity. The "terrific" sublime (i.e., grand beauty of the awesome) is also a common theme in Chinese arts and design as typically represented through the grotesque image of dragons, the primary embodiments of the imperial and the heavenly (Appendix 2).

The visual sublime may exist in both Western and Chinese cultures, but there is a world of difference between the two in terms of sources of its ethos. To summarize it, the sublime in the West draws much admiration to the magnificence of design itself, whereas the Chinese sublime focuses more on how to relate a design to "the Great Whole of continuous duration, infinite space, and infinite change" (Rawson and Legeza 11): i.e., nature and, ultimately, the Dao. For example, the sheer magnitude of the Capitol’s dome may well stand for its own appeal of ethos, but the greatness of the Great Wall has to be appreciated with the

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1 According to Richard Buchanan, showing "a concern for beauty" delivers ethos, so we might well say that the
architectural structure integrated into the mountainous surroundings that stretch out endlessly (Appendix 3): Its ethos is delivered from without, not from within.

Or, let me phrase it a bit differently: In the Western world, the “grace and greatness” of sublimity can be delivered through design itself, just as Longinus believes that it can be done through the art of rhetoric; in Chinese culture, the “grace and greatness” of the sublime can also be delivered, but only by relating the design to something beyond, like nature or the Dao. Traditional Chinese thought holds that the Great Whole is nameless, beyond human reach (see, for example, Lao Zi’s Dao De Jing), which would mean in design that the unspeakable supreme beauty can never be defined, or confined, within a mundane visual format. To reach the sublime is thus to do it indirectly: to “use objects,” suggest Rawson and Legeza, “to convey a sense [my emphasis] of the infinite space and undefined possibility which stretch out beyond their borders, both before and beyond the surface” (20).

Therefore, in the true sense, the Great Wall itself is not the sublime; rather, it relates to the sublime, indirectly.

In short, in the West, the visual sublime (or supreme beauty, or supreme ethos) is believed to be delivered from within (the design), whereas in Chinese culture, the visual sublime is thought to be from without. The difference, I think, still rests on how to define ethos: Is it individualist, amounting to some kind of self-representation? or is it collectivist, drawing on appeals of things other than the self or works of the self? I will explore the question further in what follows.
2. Question of self-representation

Rawson and Legeza argue that Western people “tend to think, diagrammatically, of a world of separate things—some of them alive—arranged in an independent space” (9), a point that I think may explain, in the philosophical way, why mainstream Western thought tends to focus on the individual self instead of the community or environment, of which the individual is a part. To the Western visual artists and designers, this sort of individualistic view of the world may have two implications regarding ethos: One is that ethos is now thought of as an individual appeal, equal to self-representation; the other, also related to the first, is that the art of design has now become an isolated undertaking, with efforts focusing on creating its own character or ethos, without regard to its relationship to the environment.

Let me explain further by quoting a statement made by Richard Buchanan in his “Declaration by Design.” In defining ethos of design, Buchanan writes:

Products have character because in some way they reflect their makers, and part of the art of design is the control of such character in order to persuade users that a product has credibility in their lives. In essence, the problem is the way designers choose to represent themselves in products, not as they are, but as they wish to appear. Designers fashion objects to speak in particular voices, imbuing them with personal qualities they think will give confidence to users, . . . (101)

While Buchanan may be echoing Aristotle's vision of ethos—projecting the self through artistic manipulation (of design, to be specific), he is basically saying that the "character" (i.e., ethos) of design points to designers, and that "credibility" or
"confidence" evoked through such design has much to do with how designers "choose to represent themselves in products."

But, as I have argued earlier, ethos in the sense of self-representation is problematic from a Chinese perspective, not just because the individual appeal is out of the picture, but also because sources of ethos are considered non-individual, located in ancestral lineage, culturally and historically established authority, etc., and, ultimately, in the Dao. Thus, instead of representing one's self, the Chinese artist/designer may well choose to draw on the appeals of ancestry, sage-kings, or entities the Dao is believed to work through (nature, heaven, etc.), for the purpose of establishing his or her ethos.

An example I'm thinking of is a painting by Lan Ying (1585-1664 A.D.) of the Ming Dynasty (Appendix 4). The painting might be taken as a simple landscape picture at first glance, but a closer look could reveal a "hidden dragon" (in the shape of "dragon veins") winding itself all the way up into the sky, which, according to Rawson and Legeza, would "lend magic power to painting" (26). Whether readers are sensing its magic power is not something I can tell, but one conclusion seems reasonable: since the dragon is a cultural symbol in China, its presence in the picture may well indicate efforts made by the artist to appeal to a collective ethos in order to reach out to his audience. I have argued elsewhere (in my dissertation) that in Chinese culture ethos is essentially an invocation of cultural forces, so the "hidden dragon" might be seen as a deliberate attempt by the artist to invoke cultural forces (embodied in the dragon) to deliver his ethos.

Another aspect at issue of Western ethos as self-representation is that it separates the design of an individual work from its environment, as if an object of
design could stand by itself. We can see this from Buchanan’s emphasis on presenting “qualities of character” in design so that objects can “assert their own existence and, through that existence, the attitudes that are an integral part of an object’s present being” (101, 107). Whether to assert the existence of one’s individual work or to show “attitudes” as a means of that assertion, the Western ethos in visual design is clearly seen as something projected from within, to be built on the merits of “an object’s present being.” Thus, to a Western visual artist/designer, a golden temple is a golden temple: its beauty and craftsmanship declares itself.

Without a question the Chinese counterpart would approach it quite differently. Rather than focus on the design itself, he or she will first ask where to fit the golden temple and then decide how to match the design with the place where it is to be built, so that the beauty and craftsmanship of the building may reflect the unity of its natural environment. Thus, instead of asserting its own existence, a Chinese golden temple would draw its appeal from fitting into a natural scheme that transcends the physical limits of the temple (Appendix 5). That is to say, the ethos of the temple does not stand by itself.

When visiting a traditional Chinese garden, a Westerner may be struck by its “irregular design, broken edges, meandering streams, and patches of plants” (Martin /u4 -1.html), things that don’t assert their own “character” or “attitudes” by Western standards. But, as David Martin points out, they were actually designed in line with the Daoist theme of expressing nature and harmony (ibid.), a theme that by definition contrasts sharply with the Western ideal of expressing one’s own individual character and passions. Thus, unlike the Western designer who deliberately puts up man-made efforts by, for example, setting sculpture or
displaying ornaments in the garden, the Chinese designer would seek to transfer the garden into a natural setting, where twisted and eroded rocks and stone of natural shapes will greet a visitor's eye (Appendix 6), to attain, as Martin has put it, the “spiritual communion” with the Dao (ibid.).

I should point out here that the ideal of expressing nature has been nothing foreign to Western artists and visual designers: for example, the rise of landscape gardening in eighteenth-century Europe with England taking the lead and followed by France and Germany (Monk 164). The so-called Romantic movement in the West, starting around the end of the eighteenth century and continuing through much of the nineteenth century, could probably be best described as one featuring a strong “going-back-to-nature” sentiment, as seen, for example, in many of the landscape paintings by Millet (French), Turner (English), and Thomas Cole (American). But the Western romanticism was also characteristically driven by a passion for self-expression, by the belief that the individual, not social, order is closer to nature. Because of this individualistic bent, nature was frequently used by those romantic artists/designers as an occasion for self-projection, and “was sought,” as Monk points out, “not so much for what she was, as for what she was not” (204). This is undoubtedly in sharp contrast with the Chinese ideal of self-effacement—to portray nature in such a way so as to submerge one's self within its harmony (Appendix 7).

In Chinese visual arts, such as garden designing, sculpturing, painting, and seal engraving, to express nature or, in the words of the fourth-century Chinese

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2 Landscape gardening in the West might have been inspired by the Chinese garden, according to Monk, who drew references from Author Lovejoy's "The Chinese Origin of a Romanticism." See JEGP, XXXII (1933), 1-20.
artist Gu Kai-Zi, to “portray the Dao through natural images” (yi-xin-mei-dao) (see Zhang Guang-Fuo 187) demands the ability to hide one’s skill and craftsmanship or to erase traces of man-made efforts put into design. This is because in Chinese thought skill or craftsmanship is an indication of artificiality, not necessarily in tandem with the naturalness of the Dao. Therefore, great artists/designers often try to inject a “primitive” quality into their works, as if they were done by some “awkward” hands (Appendices 8 & 9). If skill or craftsmanship shows off one’s ethos by Western standards, then it appears that those Chinese artists/designers are just interested in “damaging” their own ethos. But in Chinese culture the sources of ethos come, ultimately, from the Dao: To clear away the artificiality of one’s art work is to clear away the obstacles standing in the way to portraying the Dao, therefore enhancing one’s ethos.

To sum it up, the point I’m trying to make here is that Western ethos is questionable from a Chinese perspective, for two reasons. One is that ethos has been treated as some kind of “individual property,” with a narrow focus on self-representation (linking ethos of design to character of a designer). Obviously, ethos as such cannot hold true when we look at those Chinese artists/designers, who do not resort to their personal characters in design. The other is that, because of its focus on self-representation, the Western notion of ethos appears to lose sight of relations between works of design and their environment, with much emphasis on displaying the “attitudes” of the former. I would term such an approach to design as a “micro” approach. Since the Chinese artist/designer prefers a rather holistic approach (i.e., taking into consideration the relationship of design products to the environment), which may be called a “macro” approach, efforts to deliberately
“boost” the beauty or craftsmanship (i.e., ethos) of an individual work without due regard to context would thus be considered inappropriate. As a result, we often see Chinese artists/designers taking great pains to make sure that their design would get along with the flow of the environment (cultural, natural, etc.,) and their products wouldn’t be artificially intrusive.

“High context” and the notion of harmony
Wang Qiuye, a Chinese scholar, recently did a study comparing graphics from Chinese and American science magazines and manuals, and she found that the Chinese visuals are more context-oriented (i.e., providing more contextual information) as opposed to the American visuals, which are “focused and direct” (553–60). While Wang’s study had nothing to do with “visual ethos,” it did reflect the fact that Chinese design pays more attention to the question of how to relate a visual design to its context.

Wang’s findings may echo Edward Hall’s “high-context system,” which describes Chinese and other non-Western cultures as “high-context” cultures, in the sense that communication in these cultures relies on the context to deliver messages, which are generally less explicit, less elaborated, compared to those “low-context” cultures in the West (Beyond Culture, 85-128). Hall’s “high context system” doesn’t tell directly about Chinese ethos, but it does point to the linkage between context and communication and, by extension, visual design (which is communication, too). Since Chinese visual arts and design pay great attention to the environment that surrounds an individual work, we might just say that an ethos thus delivered is an ethos of “high context.”
A Chinese term for Hall's "high context" would be harmony (he-xie). This is because "harmony," like Hall's "high-context," suggests a holistic approach to communication that emphasizes the necessity of not only seeing a particular tree but also seeing the forest, of which the tree is a part, to put it in a Chinese way. The notion of harmony in Chinese thought is sometimes narrowly interpreted as avoiding conflicts or submitting to authority (Lu Xing 29-30). But, in my view, it actually is more concerned with the question of how to grapple with the Whole\(^3\) (humanity as a whole, nature as a whole, humanity-nature as a whole, the Dao as a whole, etc.). The idea is that harmony is achieved only when one is able to perceive the whole and find a way to be in that whole. In visual arts and design, this would mean that emphasis should be on making connections to seeing the whole picture (forest) rather than on highlighting isolated visual items (trees). Wang's study, which has shown Chinese visuals to be more contextualized, seems to suggest that Chinese designers are culturally "geared" towards making connections.

But the "harmony of the whole"\(^4\) is more than about making contextual connections; it also means, in a more significant way, that visual design reflects the pulse of the Dao, which, according to Rawson and Legeza, is like "a seamless web of unbroken time and change" (10). If, as I have argued, one's ethos comes ultimately from the Dao, then visual design invoking the harmony of that "web" would certainly appeal to an audience steeped in the Daoist tradition. In today's language, this is to say that design work ought to be placed under the control and influence of nature and environment. I have already mentioned that Chinese artists/designers adopt a macro approach to design, focusing primarily on how design objects will

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\(^1\) According to Osamu, "true harmony" in Chinese thought is closely associated with the "whole" (91).
chime in with their surroundings. In the following, I’ll briefly discuss how traditional Chinese artists/designers also strive to keep their works “in harmony with the skeins of the Dao” (Rawson and Legeza 21) at the metaphysical level by introducing two key concepts in Chinese design: Yin-Yang and Feng-Shui. In doing so, I might be able to explain from a broader angle why ethos is essentially a cultural thing, instead of a personal quality.

Yin-Yang is often seen in the West as a pure philosophical concept, abstract as well as mysterious, but in Chinese culture there has never been such a thing as pure philosophy (in the Platonic sense): A philosophical concept like Yin-Yang is also a pragmatic principle that can be applied in everyday life. To me, Yin-Yang is somewhat like applied philosophy, as it has been widely practiced in Chinese and other Eastern cultures in almost all aspects of human life, for example, in food preparation, medicine, martial arts, military, rhetoric, and visual arts and design.

One way to describe Yin-Yang is that it is a perception of the world as an ontological duality, where the opposite forces of nature (Yin and Yang, male and female, heaven

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4 I borrow the term from Osamu (91).
and earth, ups and downs, hot and cold, light and dark, etc.) are constantly changing, evolving, and reversing. So, Yin-Yang signifies, one might suggest, change and motion (in the form of black and white swirls of its symbol, as shown above). On the other hand, and probably more significantly, the concept of Yin-Yang also represents balance and harmony. The equally divided black and white swirls of the Yin-Yang symbol (seen above) portray the world as a rhythmic, give-and-take dynamic that at the same time underlies order and stability. Put differently, the Yin-Yang opposites are not just contradictory; they are also complementary with each other in creating harmony. Indeed, it is this scheme of Yin-Yang, says Graham, that "calls attention to the most often noticed difference between Western and Chinese thinking, that the Western tends to centre on conflicting opposites (truth/falsehood, good/evil), the Chinese on complimentary polarities (64).

Yin-Yang, and the notions of motion and balance, has been a dominating factor in shaping traditional Chinese visual arts and design. The art of calligraphy has been so important in Chinese culture (also in Korean, Japanese, and other Eastern cultures) mostly because of its potential in helping cultivate the vision of motion and balance. The flow of strokes displays one's mastery of Qi (some kind of vital energy, which will be discussed later), but the key lies in how to channel the flow of Qi so as to create a rhythmic yet balanced line of visual characters that also intimates the oscillation between Yin and Yang (e.g., some strokes slow, some fast; some strokes thin, some thick; some strokes light, some heavy) (Appendices 10 & 11). According to Rawson and Legeza, even the popular color pattern in Chinese visual arts and design—red and green—identifies with the Daoist scheme of Yang and Yin (30).
When applied in visual arts and design, the concept of Yin-Yang would often translate into the principle of “complementarity” (Mitchell and Wu 16-8), as seen, for example, in Chinese garden, where hills (Yang) and ponds (Yin), and stones (Yang) and woods (Yin), etc., are used to complement each other so as to reflect, says Chan, “the harmony and order of the universe” (qtd. in Mitchell and Wu 17).

Beijing, the ancient Chinese capital, has been well known for its architectural complementarity. There, the famous Gate of Heavenly Peace (i.e., Tian-An Men, the front gate of Forbidden City) is being complemented by the Gate of Earthly Peace further to the south of the city. Tourists who have visited the Temple of Heaven might be lured to see its complementary “other,” the Temple of Earth. Incidentally, the Coca-Cola Company has branded one of its drinking products as “Heaven and Earth” (Tian-Yu-Di, which is equivalent to “Dasani” sold in the U. S. A.) in the Chinese market with a symbol of Beijing’s architecture printed on the bottle.

Western viewers may have little trouble noticing that traditional Chinese painting, particularly of the “mountain-water” theme, is conspicuously unrealistic in that the landscape presented in a painting does not match reality at all. This is because, explains Zhang Guang-Fu, the Chinese artist is far more concerned about capturing the “spirit” of nature than about directly copying the “scenes” of nature (188-89). I would “stretch” Zhang’s argument by pointing out that the “unrealistic” aspect of Chinese painting might well reflect efforts on the part of the artist to fit metaphysically into the Daoist scheme of Yin and Yang. In Daoist thought, mountains represent forces of Yang and waters (rivers, lakes, etc.) represent Yin just as heaven is part of Yang and earth part of Yin. So, traditional Chinese artists often use “mountain-water” landscape paintings as a way to portray the metaphysical
harmony of *Yin-Yang*, to show, through images of mountains and waters, how the opposite forces of nature interact, integrate, and complement with each other (Appendix 12). Needless to say, the landscape painted as such can be a far cry from physical reality.

Whether the *Yin-Yang* stuff makes scientific sense to Westerners is not the concern of this paper. What I have been trying to show is that Chinese visual arts and design are more metaphysically oriented in the sense that "we are not just designing for ourselves but instead are relating our work to the patterns [i.e., *Yin* and *Yang*] of the cosmos" (Mitchell and Wu 37). I have suggested that Chinese culture embraces a "macro" approach to visual arts and design as opposed to a "micro" approach often observed in the West. The macro approach is more or less collectively driven drawing on appeals of design culturally established (e.g., harmony), whereas the micro approach is more or less individually oriented with much emphasis placed on design as self-representation (e.g., character or attitudes of designer). Now I might as well say that the Chinese approach to visual arts and design bears on the cosmic in that it connects design to *Yin-Yang*, presumably the metaphysical totality of a changing universe. *Yin-Yang*, so to speak, defines Chinese visual arts and design. It also constitutes their ethos, as the "harmony of the whole" thus invoked would have an appeal of eternity to the Chinese audience (Rawson and Legeza 25). What is worthy of mention here, and relevant to the central topic of this paper, is that the ethos of *Yin-Yang* is definitely a collective ethos, having nothing to do with what is perceived to be at the core of Western ethos: the self or self-representation. And we could have a better understanding of the cosmic appeal of Chinese ethos by looking at another key concept in Chinese design, *Feng-Shui.*
Translated literally, *Feng-Shui* means wind and water. Though sometimes tainted with superstitious beliefs, the concept of *Feng-Shui* basically tells us how to integrate in design with nature and environment and, further, with the metaphysical *Qi*, which in Daoist thought is the vital energy of the universe that animates everything from heaven to earth. To apply *Feng-Shui* in design is to coordinate human activities with the flow of *Qi* so as to “enable people to live in better harmony with the natural environment and the cosmos” (Mitchell and Wu, 25). A simple example would be one’s living home, where a certain measure of width and height in space must be secured to ensure that one can live and breathe in comfort. In the language of *Feng-Shui*, this is to say that home design must be such that it induces the healthy flow of *Qi* in our living space.

*Feng-Shui* has been widely practiced in Chinese architecture and design, but its impact can also be seen in other branches of visual arts and design. For instance, Chinese painting artists use white space much more boldly, and freely, than their Western counterparts. This is because white space can help create a sense of fluidity resembling the flow of *Qi*, as seen, for example, in Appendix 13, where the lavish white space can easily be recognized as sky and water. So, *Qi* is induced here, in the sense of energizing the picture through the use of white space. We can also do a little experiment by cutting off white space on the top of a mountain-water picture (Appendix 14) to see how *Qi* works. Picture A (with white space cut off) brings a sense of crowded-ness, and readers may feel there is little room for breathing (i.e.,

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5 Later Daoism was also tainted with superstition.
6 There is no equivalent in English to *Qi*, but we may define it as some kind of essence or spirit in the universe that “pervades and enlivens all things and is therefore synonymous with primordial energy” (see *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zen*. Boston: Shambhala, 1994).
Qi is blocked); in contrast, readers may breathe with much more ease with picture B (the original), where the white space helps create a feeling of openness.

Recently, I was struck by a direct-mail document sent by Sprint targeting the Chinese community in this country. The designer has incorporated many Chinese themes (visual symbols, color, slogans, etc.), but I was most intrigued by the bold use of white space, which adds liveliness to the document because of the fluidity it has created (Appendix 15). To be fair, using white space in document design is greatly encouraged in Western cultures, but for different reasons. For example, white space can make a document appear clean; it can also make texts easier to read. However, it is never used for the purpose of energizing design by bringing in a sense of fluidity (Qi). Thus, the wide use of white space often carries the “guilt” of making a document look “thin,” resulting in less appeal, or less ethos (Appendix 16). But with Chinese design, we probably don’t have to worry about this “problem”: Since white space indicates the flow of Qi, what appears to be “thin” to a Western eye might just look “full” to a Chinese audience.

It seems safe to say that the “trick” of Western ethos lies (at least in part), in how to make works of design look “full,” as if the more you express yourself, the more credible you appear. I would define this as a “doing-more” mentality as opposed to the Chinese “doing-less” mentality. Buchanan says design “persuades by looking authoritative” (102). Obviously, things that appear “thin” because of less work (e.g., more white space) would thus look less authoritative. This “doing-more” mentality, I think, may account in a fundamental way for the fact that like Western rhetoric, Western visual arts and design are generally more elaborate, more explicit,
more colorful, and, of course, more “fully” expressed, in comparison with Chinese visual arts and design.

But what underlies this “doing-more” mentality is still the perception of ethos: i.e., how to regard the role an individual plays in his or her work. In the West, because ethos is associated with self-projection or self-representation, as discussed earlier, doing more or expressing more is thus deemed necessary to render one’s ethos. So, unlike the Chinese counterpart, who would deliberately leave large chunks of space unpainted to visualize the flow of Qi, the Western painting artist might feel the urge to do the opposite—to paint every corner of a canvas—for fear of not expressing his or her self fully. In Chinese culture, because ethos is a seen as a collective phenomenon, and because visual arts and design integrate with nature and environment and, metaphysically, with the cosmic order of the Dao, doing more for the purpose of self-representation would thus seem out of question. Instead, we might see a different mind-set, one I would call the “doing-less” mentality, in the sense that the “harmony of the whole” does not need much meddling from humans, and that a design does not have to declare itself in full.

The “doing-less” mentality characterizing traditional Chinese visual arts and design might be better understood in the light of wu-wei (translated, literally, as “doing-nothing”), the Daoist ideal of cultivating virtue by abstaining from “striving” consciously in everyday life. In the philosophical sense, doing nothing is essentially to let the ultimate Dao prevail. But since now the Dao takes care of everything under heaven, doing nothing is indeed doing everything—and anything. That is why Lao Zi insists, “If nothing is done, then all will be well” (3). So, that is to say,

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7 I have a rather detailed discussion of wu-wei in my dissertation.
doing less in design—with less artistic elaboration or fewer personal touches—could also mean "doing more," if perceived from the point of view of wu-wei. That traditional Chinese visual artists/designers can use less expression to make their works of design look more energetic (e.g., in painting) is a good example to illustrate this "less-is-more" Eastern logic.

The reason I'm raising the doing-more/less question is because it marks an important distinction between Chinese and Western web design. As we will see later, in the following section, Chinese web sites are generally more "plain-looking," fitting in with the "doing-less" characterization whereas Western web sites tend to be more elaborate and aggressive, clearly exhibiting a "doing-more" attitude. But, more importantly, the question also tells us, in a nutshell, a major difference between Chinese and Western ethos whether it concerns web design or conventional visual design. Western ethos is individualistic, hence the need to do more to create personal clout to deliver that individual appeal. But because Chinese ethos is a collective thing, drawing on appeals from outside the self, doing less would be more becoming, as it could reduce personal show-off and let the harmony of the Dao unveil itself. Indeed, because of the broader appeal created in the reminiscence of the Dao, the ethos delivered by the Chinese visual artist/designer could have more substantial power of persuasion over the audience.

To summarize, in this part of the section, I have argued in length that Chinese visual arts and design have been characterized by a holistic approach, which can be described as "high-context," to borrow Edward Hall's term, in the sense that the Chinese artist/designer lays emphasis in connecting objects of design to their context, instead of concentrating on design as an independent vehicle of visual
expression. But the holistic approach also means making cultural connections, in the sense of incorporating in design the culturally appealing themes of Yin-Yang and Feng-Shui so as to create the appeal of the "harmony of the whole." Because of this desire to integrate with the metaphysical order of the Dao, traditional Chinese visual artists/designers typically would do less in their design to make sure that the Dao has been observed without much meddling by human hands. While there is no such thing as "personal character" due to the lack of self-representation, the traditional Chinese visual arts and design have never been short of the appeal of what we call ethos because of their grounding in making cultural connections and in delivering, or intimating, the "harmony of the whole."

IV. Investigation

In the previous section, I have discussed how ethos is delivered in traditional Chinese visual arts and design, with focus on visual characteristics that clearly distinguish between Chinese and Western design. Those visual characteristics also reflect, in my view, an ideological tradition that conceptualizes the self and related issues like individuality, personal character, etc., differently from the West. The question of ethos, by Western standards, is essentially the question of how to project one's self through design so as to achieve an individualized, or micro, appeal, but in Chinese culture it is the question of how to relate design to entities beyond one's self, such as nature, environment, and the Dao, so that one can achieve an appeal that has collective, or macro, connotations.

Having said that, we might find it not that easy to draw such a distinction when comparing Eastern ethos with Western online. For one thing, digital expression has been shared across all cultures: Whether you are a Chinese or an
American, when it comes to designing an online text, more likely than not, you will resort to the same digital technique or the same databanks of icons to create visual messages. (Microsoft has dominated the Chinese market!) For another, the electronic technology has brought the Eastern and Western closer even in the rhetorical sense. I have used the term “bamboo hypertext” to describe classical Chinese rhetoric in that it shares many textual features commonly identified in modern electronic hypertext such as fluidity and collective authorship. We could also put it the other way around: i.e., Western hypertext resembles classical Chinese rhetoric. This is especially true when we look at the issue of ethos, as the apparent absence of the self, a crucial ingredient of Western ethos, due to the collective authorship involved in online text production, raises questions about the traditional (Western) way of identifying ethos in terms of personal character, individuality, etc. (Can we still treat ethos online as some kind of self-projection?) If we take a closer look at the organizational, governmental, and corporate Web sites in this country, we may be able to notice that ethos delivered on those sites is more of a collective kind than of an individual one because the visual messages presented there mostly serve to project the image of a whole organization, not a single individual.

The hypertext phenomenon has posed challenges to the conventional approach to ethos, especially in the tradition of Plato’s essentialism, which I think can be a topic for another paper, but for the purpose of this paper I will stay focused on exploring online ethos cross-culturally—through comparing and contrasting a selection of online visual works done by Eastern (mainly Chinese) and Western Web designers. We can assume that, even though the Internet has altered the presentation of ethos, and the self, the way designers deliver their ethos may still be
shaped by what would I call "cultural programming": i.e., the ethos presented online can still be categorized as "collective" or "individualistic," depending on how the delivery of ethos is perceived in the cultural tradition of the designer. For instance, a Western designer may believe that an online design per se is a source of ethos, therefore choosing to use "fancy" graphics to make his or her design stand out; in this case, the ethos delivered should be considered to be "individualistic," as it points to a cultural tradition that separates design from its context or environment. It goes without saying then that if a Chinese designer decides to do the opposite for his or her design so as to achieve some moderation in terms of visual appeal, then the ethos generated as such may well indicate a "doing-less" mentality and therefore can be categorized as "collective." It is likely that a designer may not be aware of such a difference, but because culture shapes one's communicative behavior, we can reasonably expect that it also leaves its imprints on the way designers present their ethos online, wittingly or unwittingly.

So, in the following, I will discuss those "imprints of culture" using the methods and sample selection criteria similar to those used by Wang Qiuye in her cross-cultural study of graphics (554–5). Again, I would like to point out, what is being discussed here is not meant to provide "scientific evidence" but rather to serve as an initiation into further discussions on the subject. The section will be divided into five parts: 1. defining limits of authorship; 2. methods and sample selection criteria; 3. description of samples; 4. analysis and comparison; and 5. discussion. I'm adding the "defining limits" to suggest that online authorship ought to be categorized differently from conventional authorship.
1. Defining limits of authorship

Ethos online, like ethos offline, is created to induce trustworthiness (or, at least, appearance of such quality) on the part of the author(s). The word “authorship” can be immediately problematic if we follow the traditional definition of ethos proposed by Aristotle, who sees ethos as something dependent on “the personal character of the speaker” (BH 153). This is because, in most cases, the online authorship remains unidentifiable, and the “personal character,” which is built on authorship (or speaker-ship), is thus rendered insignificant. I don’t mean to say that there is no such thing as authorship, but we may have to rethink of its traditional defining role in terms of ethos, especially when dealing with online designs or texts. Take for example the homepage of the English Department at Iowa State University (http://www.engl.iastate.edu/): From the reader’s point of view, what matters is the ethos of the department delivered through the design of the Web page, not the personal character of the designer(s), even though the latter may have a lot of say in shaping the image of the former. (The fact that the designer(s) remains anonymous on the English Department’s home page may well indicate an appreciation of the insignificance of conventional authorship online.) Thus, what I mean by “author(s)” is in most cases a collective authorship, pointing to an organizational or communal entity (English Department, Iowa State University, city of Ames, etc.,) that a Web designer is working for. Likewise, what I mean by “ethos” here is mostly the ethos of an organization or community as represented online, not something to be confined within the limits of conventional authorship.

* At least we can say that collective authorship is true of most of Web designs.
2. Methods and sample selection criteria

What I will do for analysis is, basically, to compare samples selected from both Western and Eastern (mostly Chinese) Web sites. Though my intention is to point out the differences, I will keep myself open to possibilities of finding some commonalities. It is likely, as I have said earlier, that the Internet has altered the presentation of ethos, and the self, bringing the West and the East seemingly "closer" to each other. Two kinds of criteria were used to select samples: One is rather subjective, based on what I see as typical of Western or Eastern ethos online; the other is meant to be relatively objective (?) using some common basis for analysis and comparison (e.g., selecting samples from Coca Cola’s Chinese and American Web sites). I have to admit that the criteria set (of both kinds) and the comparison based on them can be very biased, more of a personal opinion rather than of a scientific observation, but I take comfort in acknowledging that a rhetorical study (of ethos) may never be able to rise to the status of scientific certainty.

3. Description of samples

Using the first kind of criteria, I have chosen the following pages from Western Web sites: Red Lobster (sample 1), Misty Slims (cigarettes) (sample 2), and Great Britain’s Budweiser (sample 3). I have also selected three samples representing Chinese culture: one from the “Hong Kong Computer Society” (sample 4), one from the “World of Chinese Culture” (based in Taiwan) (sample 5), and one from the “Chinese Language Teachers Association” (based in North America) (sample 6). And using the second kind of criteria, I have selected one home page from “Yahoo! Finance” on its North American site and one from its Hong Kong site (samples 7 &
8). In addition, I have selected pages from three different Coca-Cola sites: American, Japanese, and Chinese (samples 9, 10, & 11).

Perhaps the best way to describe samples 1, 2, and 3 (from Western sites) is that they are glamorous, as all of them are designed with elaborate details of graphics. Sample 1, the home page of the restaurant chain Red Lobster, is featuring, overwhelmingly, a ready-to-serve jumbo lobster on a plate, presented vividly in both color and image. Right above the picture is the slogan of “Go Overboard!” implying customers’ enthusiasm over the seafood served in Red Lobster. Sample 2 is a page featuring a classy lady, with a man at her side (partly presented) lighting her Misty Slims cigarette. The picture appears very eye-catching, and the featured lady, elegantly dressed and postured, glaringly takes center stage in the picture. Sample 3 is Budweiser’s home page in the U. K. Like samples 2 and 3, the design is very expressive, characterized by its lavish use of Budweiser color, red, and display of a larger-than-usual Budweiser bottle (left). The Americanism “Whassup?!” (seen in the upper right quarter of the page) also grabs viewers’ eye.

In contrast, the samples representing Chinese culture are mostly subdued and conservative in design, suggesting that the designers may lack the “urge to sell.” Sample 4 comes from a Web site hosted by the Hong Kong Computer Society. The site is designed for users to search standard Chinese computer terms (in both simplified and traditional Chinese characters). The only “fancy” thing on this page is the display of “An Intelligent Database for Standard Chinese Computer Terminology” at the top with a picturesque background of the Great Wall and Hong Kong skyline. Towards the bottom are three lines of Chinese (in green color), which

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*For technical reasons, the description will focus on the main features of each sample.*
says, "Computer Science and Technology Terms, Complied by the China Computer Society and Published by the National Committee on Standardization of Nature and Science Terms." And two organizational logos are seen to the left of those Chinese lines.

Sample 5 is from the "World of Chinese Culture," a Web site hosted by the governmental administration in Taiwan. As part of an information project, the page tells of the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival (October 1, 2001), with details on how to take joy in watching the "full moon" that night, how to make moon cakes, etc. There isn’t much graphics on the page, except for a small and non-intrusive picture of moon cakes, embedded in the midst of lines of Chinese text.

Sample 6 is the home page of the Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA) headquartered at Ohio State University. Though it is created in English (with the exception of the Chinese title), its "more-text-and-less-graphics" design characteristics and unidiomatic use of English may still point to a "Chinese hand" behind the design. Plus, the picture of bamboo leaves with much white space in the background is also distinctively Chinese. (The bamboo is an intellectual symbol in Chinese culture, worshiped among Daoist/Confucian intellects for its lofty spirit within. A bamboo tree is growing straight upwards and never bent down, a quality much admired by those pursuing the moral rectitude of Daoism and Confucianism.) However, unlike the "moon cakes" picture in sample 5, the "bamboo leaves" seems to be given much more prominence visually.

Readers may object to the selection of samples as described in the above. One obvious "drawback" of such a selection is that all the three Western samples were

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10 It is governmental organization in China.
chosen from commercial sites whereas the Chinese samples were not, which I must say might have affected the use of graphics and even the outcome of Web design. But the matter of truth (at least in my research) is that it is next to impossible to locate a Chinese commercial site that is comparable to Red Lobster, Misty Slims, or Budweiser Beer.\textsuperscript{11} So, to compensate for the above-mentioned "defect," I chose a few samples based on the second kind of selection criteria. The samples, which are relatively comparable by some "research" standards, are described as follows.

Samples 7 and 8 are both from "Yahoo! Finance," an Internet search site focusing exclusively on investment and finance. Sample 7 is in English (American edition) while sample 8 is in Chinese (Hong Kong edition). The two pages appear quite similar in their visual layout, but a closer look may reveal the fact that the American site is more colorful in design and more packed with links than the Hong Kong site, which has more white space between links. The "Market Overview," "Transfer Funds," and "Real-Time Package," each matched with an colored, iconic symbol, as seen on the upper part of the American site, are entirely missing on the Hong Kong site. What is also absent on the Hong Kong site is the financial briefing column under the "Market Summary," as well as the advertisement column (very colorful and elaborate) next to it, as seen on the American home page. The "Market Summary" of the Hong Kong site seems to have a "global" touch as it covers stock market indices not just from Hong Kong, but also from China, Taiwan, Japan, Britain, and the United States whereas the American "Yahoo! Finance" focuses purely on American market indices: Dow, Nasdaq, and S&P 500.

\textsuperscript{11} One reason is probably that Chinese restaurants, cigarette factories or beer companies don't have adequate resources in Web design or simply don't pay attention to it.
The only eye-catching thing on the Hong Kong site is the advertisement link (against the backdrop of dark blue) at the top of the page for selling moon cakes. The strategy used seems to be typical of the Chinese, as it is very indirect, saying nothing about moon cake sale itself. The advertisement link is decorated with pictures of a full moon, an elderly couple, a box of moon cakes, etc., but all these make sense only when the word “Mid-Autumn Festival: Time to Show Filial Duty to Your Parents” (printed in the fashion of calligraphy) sinks in. The implicit message is: “Go and buy the cakes for your parents so that you can fulfill your duty as children.” I say it is indirect also because the ad cashes on the appeal of “filial duty” in Chinese society instead of using hard-sell tactics, as we often see in Western commercials. But from the (Western) rhetorical point of view, the advertisement doesn’t relate very well to the host-site in terms of targeting its audience: the latter has a focused audience—those interested in investment and finance, whereas the “Moon Cake” ad’s audience can be anyone.

There is also an advertisement link on the American Web site of “Yahoo! Finance,” on the same location and with the same background color as the Hong Kong site. It comes as no surprise that some hard-sell techniques are employed: the $100 give-away as a lure to entice people into opening a brokerage account¹² is nothing short of the push characterizing the “Star” strategy frequently used in American direct-mail sales letters (see Business and Administrative Communication by Locker, Chapter 10). Rhetorically, the ad appears more relevant to its host site (when compared with the “Moon Cake” one in sample 8), as both are targeting a focused audience—those who are interested in investment and finance.
Samples 9, 10, and 11 are all home pages selected from the same source: the Coca-Cola Company, but their cultural sites vary. Sample 9, of the American site, is probably in every way reminiscent of what has been described earlier of the “aggressive” nature of Web design in the West: heavy in graphics and heavy in colors. At the center of the page is the cool, thirst-quenching image of a Coke bottle (partly shown) with the brand name “Coca-Cola” printed in a calligraphic fashion right across the top of it. Below the bottle is a strip of pictures displaying a sports star (Lance Armstrong) smiling, couples overflowing with “Coca-Cola” joy, polar bear cubs relishing “Coca-Cola” pop, etc. These pictures seem to suggest a conscious effort to build up a positive, consumer-friendly image of the Coca-Cola Company. What appears noticeable about the design is that there is little white space left as the “Coca-Cola” red fills up the whole background.

Sample 10, of the Japanese site, is quite unique in design, for two reasons. One is that it employs quite a lot of white space (light-colored background, to be exact). As we can see, more than two thirds of the site are literally graphic-free, forming a sharp contrast with the “red-full-ness” of the American Web page. The other is that the picture in the middle has been cartoonized, with arms and legs installed on a Coca-Cola vending machine to create a dramatic effect on the design. Japan is a culture with seemingly boundless affections for cartoons. Since the 1950’s, many of world-famous cartoon characters have been created in Japan, including the most recent one, Pokémon, which has been a dominating character for years in the world’s video-game market. So, the dramatic design of the Japanese Web page can be seen as an effort to cater to the “cartoon rage” in the host culture.

For technical reasons, the $100 give-away by an online brokerage firm could not be printed on a hard copy,
It is worth mentioning that the “cartoon” machine carries a marketing message about a new green tea product (printed in Japanese together with the picture of a green tea can on the window of the machine). The message doesn’t appear visually intrusive; its weight can only be appreciated from the content, and from the fact that it is the only item printed in Japanese (presumably, to reach a broader audience in Japan).

Sample 11, of the (mainland) Chinese site, may strike readers as atypical of Chinese design, as it registers a strong emphasis in using graphics and colors. As we can see, the whole design appears quite elaborate, even to the extent of being visually “noisy.” This is especially true when we look at the original online Web page that is being digitally equipped with sound and animation. All those blinking images—torch, alarm clock, dirigible, radar, etc., (each representing a link to the world of Coca Cola joy)—are constantly moving back and forth, or up and down, exposing an intense degree of digital manipulation in Web design. The Coca-Cola bottle, displayed in combination with pictures of super highway and super-high buildings (shown in various modern-looking shapes) seems to indicate the designers’ intention to connect Coca-Cola with the world of modern technology. Notice that, at the bottom of the page, Coca-Cola is identified as the “herald of modern times” (in Chinese) with the English modifier “In” (not Out!) preceding it. While the Coca-Cola brand, together with the Coca-Cola bottle, has been given prominence in visual treatment, it is also meshed, as we can see, with items of design featuring things other than Coca-Cola (as described in the above). Noticeably, Coca-Cola does not stand by itself in the design.
On the right side of the Chinese Web site, there is a column called “Public Information,” which takes almost half of the site. Interestingly, it provides links to news and stories (mostly of foreign sources) that have no bearing on the Coca-Cola Company and its products. The reader can click on “Overseas Campuses,” “Highlights of Exotic Lands,” “Dangerous Lovers,” etc., to access all sorts of “public information” that ranges from genuine news items to sensational tabloids. Again, the column does not relate very well to the host page in terms of targeting its audience, as there is no guarantee that those interested in Coke will also be interested in stories like “Dangerous Lovers.”

4. Analysis and comparison
Frankly, the immediate challenge I am facing when analyzing the above-listed online samples is how to directly apply what has been discussed in the previous section to the analysis. For example, how can we make a reasonable decision as to which online sample has a “sublime” quality and which one doesn’t? I take solace in insisting that what I tried to accomplish was not to theorize about the visual sublime but rather to use it as a conceptual example to illustrate what distinguishes Western and Eastern ethos in visual arts and design: i.e., the question of whether ethos is to be delivered from within (by focusing on design itself) or from without (by relating design to context and environment). This, I think, can be analyzed. Similarly, there is no reliable way to show whether an online Web page has incorporated the Yin-Yang, or Feng-Shui, principle in its design or not, but we can certainly tell through analysis whether it has built up its ethos by making cultural connections. Indeed, the reason I discussed Yin-Yang and Feng-Shui was to prove a central point of the paper:
i.e., Chinese ethos lies in making cultural connections and is therefore a purely collective phenomenon, as opposed to Western ethos, which is highly individualistic.

Based on what has been discussed about ethos in Chinese visual arts and design in the previous section, the following three aspects of design ideology will be the focus of analysis and comparison: 1) self-assertion versus self-effacement, 2) micro versus macro, and 3) doing-less versus doing-more.

**Self-assertion or self-effacement?**

The term “self-assertion” might be a misnomer here because, as indicated earlier in the section, online authorship is, at least in most cases, a collective authorship representing an organization or community. This would mean that the kind of ethos, to be presented on behalf of an individual self imbued with appeals of “personality” and “character,” has largely become a non-issue in cyberspace. However, I do not mean to suggest that there is no such thing as online ethos (which would make this paper impossible): As long as issues of credibility or trustworthiness link with rhetorical persuasion, how to project ethos will always remain a matter of concern for the presenters, whether online or offline. Nor do I want to say that the unconventionality of online authorship has necessarily transformed the way online designers/writers approach ethos or its delivery, at least for now.

While the traditional Western definition of ethos in the strict sense of self-representation may not apply well online, Western Web designers may still find themselves, albeit unwittingly oftentimes, under the influence of such a tradition. For example, they may apply digital devices to deliberately enhance the visual “glamour” of Web design so as to assert, in Buchanan’s words, its “existence” or
"attitudes." So, what I mean by "self-assertion" in the analysis that follows refers to the assertion of design items objectified through the hands of online designers. I use the word "self" as a modifier because the assertion of design can still be attributed to the traditional understanding of ethos as self-representation, based on which designers can ignore relationships between design and its context and environment, as if design items could contain some sort of "self" within.

Using the Web samples described earlier in the section, we might be able to identify, with relative ease, the "self-assertion" tendency on the Western sites, where the heavy application of graphics appears to be the norm. Generally speaking, using graphics in design is seen as attempting to "maximize the impact of communication through the combined or disjointed means of the written message, the sign, or the image" (Moles 122). Due to its potential to make design objects visually appealing, graphic design may also be considered an effective way to maximize the impact of visual ethos (which is part of a communication after all). This appears to be especially true with online design objects, where the delivery of ethos may depend more on the visual appeals of graphics used.

It is hard to tell whether the designers of those Western sites have made a conscious effort to "maximize" the impact of online ethos, but judging from the effusive use of graphics in constructing "cool" images of commercial products (e.g., the mouth-watering red lobster, the thirst-quenching Budweiser, the classy "Misty Slims" lady, and the joyful Coca-Cola), it seems reasonable to suggest that the Aristotelian ethos can still be identified. For example, the presentation of those friendly business corporations, with the help of color, icons, images, etc., is reminiscent of Aristotle's "good sense" and "good will" (BH 161), to be crafted
through the skillful use of language (or graphics in the case of online design). We can assume that self-assertion, as implied in the Aristotelian approach to ethos, is also brought into play when designers are using graphics to maximize the visual impact of their online design.

One simple reason for designers to apply graphics is that design objects would thus look good, hence the potential to deliver ethos. However, a heavy reliance on graphics could signal an obsession with the technical manipulation of ethos as though "looking good" (i.e., ethos) is all about "designing good." As mentioned earlier, I'd rather think of such an approach in design as "isolated" or "focused" in that designers direct too much of their attention to asserting a single design item without regarding its relations with context and environment or simply with other items. Probably a better way to appreciate the "isolated" or "focused" design approach on those Western sites is to contrast them (see samples 1, 2, 3, and 9) with the Chinese sites, where the use of graphics tends to be moderate. As we can see, some of the Chinese Web pages are quite dull-looking because of the "insufficient" use of graphics (see samples 5 and 6). In sample 6, we do have a bamboo picture, but its design is rather symbolic, short of graphic details that more often than not bombard a Western design. I would use the phrase "self-effacement" to describe Chinese Web design in the sense that its "low-profile" approach (i.e., using less graphics and glamour) does not assert too much of its own. Yes, the bamboo does have its charm, but we won't be as much overwhelmed by it as we are by the picture of Red Lobster, "Misty Slims" Lady, Budweiser, or Coca-Cola.

The attempt to use visually overwhelming pictures or images can be seen as indicative of a "focused" or "high-profile" design approach, but it may also point to
an individualistic sentiment associated with the design ideology of the West: i.e., delivering distinction to individual design items. One such example would be that of "Misty Slims" Lady (sample 3), featured with glamour and distinction. We may even sense a deliberate play of ethos in the design, where a female smoker is presented to incarnate elegance, charm, beauty, and seemingly high social status. But, as we can see, ethos created as such is also of an individual kind, as it is built up on the image of a female individual (actress?), and on the distinction (at least visually) brought along with such an image.

Other Western Web sites, like the ones we have seen in samples 1, 3, and 9, do not have the individual glamour of "Misty Slims" Lady to personify their ethos, but we can still sense an individualistic sentiment underlying design and delivery of ethos on these sites. For example, the aggressive visual projection of lobster (food), Budweiser beer, or Coca-Cola could be taken to signify an urge to individualize design items by bringing visual distinction to them. In contrast, the Chinese sites, because of the self-effacement design ideology of their designers, do not emphasize the need to individualize design items; rather, they show a degree of moderation in treating individual items. One such example would be the "World of Chinese Culture" (sample 5), hosted by the Taiwan administration. Visually speaking, the whole site is much less assertive if judged by Western standards. But perhaps even more telling is the "moon-cake" picture, whose "shyness" in design points to what is NOT at work: the idea of individualization. This is because the picture is treated as part of the whole: an aggressive treatment could disrupt its visual harmony or coordination with the rest of the page. (We probably can imagine what a Western
Web designer would do with the picture: to enlarge its size, and to use various visual “tricks” to dramatize the moon-cakes.)

The marketing of a new green-tea product on the Japanese Coca-Cola site is also very telling (Sample 10). Rather than have the can of Maro Cha\(^{13}\) stand out visually, the designers choose to bury it, inconspicuously, within the window of that cartoon-like vending machine. The presentation of Maro Cha as such may be considered visually ineffective by Western Web designers, who might prefer to “individualize” the design by, for example, magnifying the Maro Cha can out of proportion (perhaps with a high-sounding slogan like “Maro Cha: Secret to Slim Health” to accompany it). But I would rather argue that the way Maro Cha is presented may just reflect the Eastern tradition of “self-effacement” in design ideology: i.e., it is being treated as “part of the whole” in relation to the Coca-Cola family (of products)\(^{14}\), instead of something that takes the spotlight to itself.

Speaking of ethos, we might sense the difference here: The Eastern designer would show a design item (e.g., Maro Cha) to be credible by making it fit into, or associated with, an object that already carries ethos (e.g., the brand of Coca-Cola as it appears on the cartoon machine) whereas a Western designer would show a design item to be credible by making the design look good, impressive, and, above all, visually outstanding in itself.

Sample 11, of the Chinese Coca-Cola site, could be seen as an example of Western invasion of Chinese design because of the apparent bent on using heavy graphics, color and other sorts of digital expressions. However, I wouldn’t say it is totally out of tune with the self-effacement design tradition in Chinese culture. While

\(^{13}\) Product name of the green tea.
the Coca-Cola bottle and sign have been given much of visual attention, they don't appear, in my view, so aloof as to give the impression that they stand as isolated design items. For one thing, they have been woven into a collage of icons featuring themes more than Coca-Cola. For another, the Public Information column on the right side of the page has offered a visual balance for the site so that the Coca-Cola bottle and sign won't take all of the highlights. The balance could be dismissed by a Western designer as lack of focus in design, but I would argue that it probably has more to do with the idea of "contextualization" in Chinese design, which I will discuss in detail next.

*Micro or macro?*

In her cross-cultural comparison of the use of graphics in scientific and technical communication, Wang Qiuye observes that American manuals are "direct and focused" (559) with close integration between "visuals and texts" (556), whereas "the Chinese visuals are not so well connected with the texts to which they correspond" (ibid.). The poor visual-verbal integration in Chinese manuals, explains Wang, may result from the holistic communication style in Chinese culture, in which context "is always an important part of understanding and communication" (558). It is probably hard to explain why a manual with poor visual-verbal integration can be holistic, whereas one with close visual-verbal integration can not. The answer, as Wang implies, may exist in the fact that Chinese manuals tend to include contextual elements that are not directly related to a task performance, whereas American manuals tend to concentrate on the technical details of a performance, which

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14 Maro Cha is produced by the Japanese Coca-Cola Company.
demands close integration between the verbal and visual, yet ignores the context in which a task is to be performed.

The close integration in manual design as observed by Wang indicates the goal-oriented style of communication that prevails in Western culture (ibid.), but it also reveals what I perceive to be an individualistic (as opposed to holistic) sentiment that dominates the ideology of Western design: i.e., to work on design within its closed parameters without addressing the broad question of how to relate design to its context and environment. I would call such “focused” design “micro” to differentiate from the “context-oriented,” or “macro” design. Based on the descriptions of those Web samples, it is possible for us to identify a micro trend on the Western sites as opposed to a macro one on the Eastern sites.

The Western samples may well be labeled as “micro” simply because of the underlying tendency in individualizing design items, but I also use the term to mean, specifically, the kind of design that does not connect design items to their context, or something that does directly relate to design thematically (e.g., content or purpose). As readers may have seen, all of the Western Web sites can be considered “content-specific,” with technical details well coordinated to the subject of design. In other words, there has been a close integration between design and content “to show the logical relationships among all elements that appear on the page” (Farkas and Farkas 241). For example, on the American Coca-Cola site (sample 9), everything in design, from the use of color (the Coca-Cola red) to the display of polar bear cubs, coheres logically with the “joy” of Coca-Cola. The jumbo lobster, which takes center stage on Red Lobster’s home page (sample 1), is designed to highlight the appetizing effects of seafood served in the restaurant, and
the picture itself also integrates closely with the slogan of “Go Overboard,” which implies what Red Lobster has to offer: superior food quality, utmost customer satisfaction, etc.

The integration seen between design and content on the Western Web sites is an indication of a “direct and focused” approach at work, suggesting that designers’ decisions are directed towards design mainly at the micro level, such as concern over how to correspond to the theme(s) of a design project. As a result, Red Lobster’s Web site is now all about Red Lobster (restaurant chain and its seafood), and Coca-Cola’s Web site is all about Coca-Cola or things that carry a “Coca-Cola” theme. What is more, because of design decisions being leveled at micro details, Western Web sites can exhibit a disconnection from the cultural context of their target audience. Take for example Budweiser’s U.K. site (sample 3), where the Americanism “Whassup?!” along with the message printed below, is incorporated well with the theme of the site, as it is meant to lure curious Web surfers to click into the fun world of “Bud.” However, this is also where we can sense a cultural disconnect: Will the Brits, who usually relish wry humor and polished usage of language, buy into an American lingo “Whassup”? The fine print at the bottom of the screen, which says “U.S. residents under 21 years old should not enter the site,” may expose as well a lack of connection with the host country, whose residents are mostly non-U.S. and are allowed to drink at age 16.

The “macro” disjunction, as seen on Budweiser’s U.K. Web page, will certainly be less of an issue on Chinese Web sites, where designers tend to show more concern over how to incorporate their design items into the context of host culture or society. However, such a broad approach could result in a “micro”
disjunction in design, causing a Web site to be thematically digressive or, to use Wang’s words, “loose and inaccurate” (557) in terms of correspondence between design and the subject of design. Take for example the Chinese Coca-Cola Web site, which is overlaid with links in the Public Information column that virtually have no bearing on Coca-Cola. Apparently, the goal of helping “express the theme of the website,” as proposed by Farkas and Farkas for American Web designers (241), was never to be accomplished. But the design can still be credited with meaningfulness if critics appreciate the emphasis put on contextualization in Chinese design: i.e., to approach design macrocosmically, through integration with cultural context.

As far as I know, the Public Info column tells of what is currently in vogue in (mainland) China, especially among the younger population: sex (Dangerous Lovers), studying abroad (Overseas Campuses), travel (Highlights of Exotic Lands), etc. Despite the fact that it may prove thematically irrelevant to the Coca-Cola Company and its products, the column may well play a role in connecting the Web site with the “IN” trends in today’s Chinese society. Interestingly, we may also sense an attempt on the part of designers to turn Coca-Cola, a drinking product, into one of those “IN’s,” in that Coke is now presented as something to be associated with modern technologies (see sample and description), which the Chinese leadership is more than enthusiastic to embrace in the new millennium for the ambitions of industrializing the country.

The Moon-Cake ad on Hong Kong “Yahoo! Finance” also illustrates, in my view, the notion of contextualization in Eastern design. While the ad may not integrate well, in content or theme, with the host page, which is dedicated to money and investment, it does demonstrate a sense of connection with Hong Kong’s
cultural environment, where the Confucian tradition of “filial piety” is still being observed among the Chinese as the norm of family life. From the strict rhetorical point of view, the ad could be declared a design failure because there is no guarantee that those interested in buying stocks would be equally interested in buying moon-cakes. (It would make more sense to place the ad on a Web site covering food items.) But one could argue that the design fails only at the micro level, for not corresponding with the “finance” theme of the host site; on the macro level, it fares quite well, for linking ordinary moon-cakes to the possible fulfillment of one’s “filial duty” and creating an extraordinary cultural appeal in host society. One could argue further that there is equally no guarantee that those who feel their filial piety inspired, whether stock junkies or Web surfers, would decide against ordering moon-cakes for their parents.

Whether the Moon-Cake ad is effective or not in targeting its audience, I would leave the answer to the readers. My point is that it incorporates a design tradition (perhaps unwittingly on the part of designers) that is macroscopically attuned to the host site’s cultural context, as opposed to a tradition that is driven microscopically by design’s inner coherence (e.g., close integration between host sites and ads published on them, as seen on the American “Yahoo! Finance” site). Again, we probably can imagine what a typical Western Web designer would do with the Moon-Cake ad. Because of the micro concern in design, he or she may well end up focusing, exclusively, on the graphic details of those moon-cakes so as to induce an “mouthwatering” effect on online consumers. There is no doubt that an ad like this will have its own charm or ethos, especially if it is well designed. However, ethos of this sort is a “micro” ethos, based on devotion to details of a
design. And, as we may recall, Eastern ethos, on the other hand, is created at the macro level, with allusion made to sources of inspirations from outside of a design, as seen in the example of an online moon-cake ad in Hong Kong that draws on Confucius' "filial piety," a culturally popular theme in the host society, to build up its appeal.

The home page of the Hong Kong Computer Society (HKCS) (sample 4) could be another example to illustrate how an Eastern ethos is delivered through macro designing. The Great Wall and the skyline of Hong Kong City, designed as a background scene at the top, could well indicate an attempt to contextualize the HKCS in design by showing its cultural standing and geographical location. More significantly, the Chinese line, "Computer Science and Technology Terms, Complied by China Computer Society and Published by National Committee on Standardization of Nature and Science Terminologies" (printed at the bottom), could reveal a deliberate attempt to create ethos for the HKCS, for what is really at stake is the credibility of the computer science and technology terms provided online by the host.

In Hong-Kong, and also in China, terminologies in computer science and technology have posed a persistent challenge to researchers and professionals in the field due to the confusion caused by new technical terms as a result of rapid advancement of computer science and technology. But reducing such confusion by imposing some sort of standardization could be equally challenging, because not everyone has the "mandate" to do that. For two reasons at least, the HKCS does not avail itself of that "mandate." First, the HKCS is a local professional organization; its status does not carry enough credibility to standardize technical
terminologies on its own terms. Second, the Chinese spoken in Hong Kong differentiates significantly from mainstream Chinese, which could make it even less credible for the HKCS to impose standardization on its own. Nevertheless, those searching the HKCS’s Web site for “standard” terms in computer science and technology may not feel the credibility of the site at issue here because of the legitimacy the HKCS can claim under the “auspices” of two most prestigious, and also authoritative, professional institutions on the subject in China: the China Computer Society (CCS) and the National Committee on Standardization of Nature and Science Terminologies (NCSNST). One might argue the credibility, or ethos, of the Hong Kong Computer Society goes beyond the design of a Web site, but at least we can see that its designers know how to incorporate in design sources of ethos from outside: namely, an institutionalized endorsement from the CCS and the NCSNST.

The example of the Hong Kong Computer Society’s site helps affirm the argument I made earlier about an important feature of Chinese rhetoric: i.e., the rhetor secures his or her persuasive power by invoking the socially or culturally established authority. For the purpose of this analysis, it points out, once again, how ethos can be created online: i.e., the designer chooses to present the credible not by tending to micro details of design but by showing off macro affiliation with sources of appeal from outside of Web design. The aforementioned Chinese line (i.e.,

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15 Hong Kong people predominantly speak Cantonese, a dialect that for the most part doesn’t have equivalents in written Chinese.
16 In China, professional organizations at the national level are generally considered very prestigious, partly because they are government-run or -sponsored and partly because they are also first-rate research institutes “elite” intellectuals are affiliated with, like the National Science Academy and the National Social Science Academy (both administered under the Central Government).
17 In my paper, “Corporate Image as Collective Ethos,” I have argued to the effect that ethos is essentially an institutionalized discourse formation.
"Computer Science and Technology Terms, Compiled by China Computer Society and Published by National Committee on Standardization of Nature and Science Terminologies") is nothing dramatic visually, especially from the point of those indulging in heavy graphics, but because of the linkage it signifies between the host and big names like the CCS and the NCSNST, it may turn out to be the most significant piece of design in delivering ethos.

Doing-more or doing-less?

In Section III of this paper, I have discussed rather in length two different design mentalities, pointing out that Western visual designers, because of the drive to express themselves in full, tend to do more with design objects than their Eastern counterparts, who are more concerned about letting nature, environment, and the ultimate Dao unveil themselves and therefore tend to do less with design. At the center of such differentiation lies the perception of ethos: Western ethos is equated with self-projection or self-representation, therefore the need to do more to assert design objects and, through them, one's self; Eastern ethos, on the other hand, downplays personal show-off, emphasizing instead the necessity to do less to abstain from "man-made" elaboration in design.

In online design, the "doing-more" mentality could result in, for example, complex combinations of content types (i.e., text, graphics, animation, video, and audio), heavy use of color, and frequent display of sleek icons and images, as we have often seen on Western, especially American, Web sites. Needless to say, the "doing-less" mentality leads to the opposite: simple combinations of content types, light use of color, and infrequent display of icons and images (which are in general
visually moderate), as has been observed on Chinese and other Eastern countries’ Web sites.

Admittedly, two factors could dictate the outcome of a design in terms of doing-more or doing-less. One is that Internet technology varies across countries. Since the Western world has been the (technological) leader in online design, it is likely that Western designers may end up doing more with their design objects simply because of easy access to advancements in Internet technology. The other is that an online designer, whether Western or Eastern, may not be aware of the “doing-more/doing-less” differentiation at all, which would mean that what has been created in a Web design could have been the function of personal whims, rather than the result of cultural mandates.

I have no desire to deny the impact that technological advancements and individual propensities can exert on the outcome of Web design. However, it is equally, if not more, important to recognize that designers make their decisions within the constraints of a design tradition, a point already iterated in my earlier discussion about the Western/Eastern distinction between self-assertion and Eastern self-effacement, or between micro and macro design approach. In a way, the analysis that follows, about the “doing-more/doing-less” distinction between the West and East, can be taken as a repeat of what has already been discussed, but only from a different angle. I think readers may be aware of the connections: Because of the urge to assert their design, designers feel compelled to do more with their Web pages so as to materialize that assertion; because of the concern about inner coherence, designers may have to do more with their online projects to work out the micro details of design. Likewise, the tradition of projecting ethos on the basis of
self-effacement would make it desirable for designers to do less so as to avoid individual spotlights, and the practice of drawing on collective appeals in one's culture would also discourage designers to do more so that their designs will mesh well into the cultural framework.

At this juncture it is probably necessary to bring in, once again, Edward Hall's famous "low- and high-context" theory, which could help conceptualize, further, how the "doing-more/-less" mentality plays out in visual, as well as in Web, design in different cultures. In low-context cultures, such as North America, communication is "vested in the explicit code" (Beyond Culture 91), to the extent that it can stand clear of its context. But doing so would necessarily entail "elaborated" codes (92) in communication, therefore compelling communicators to do more to make their messages clear. In high-context cultures, like Eastern Asia, communication comes together with context, with "very little" in the "coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (91). Understandably, communicators, such as visual designers, would thus feel themselves "restricted" (92) in communication, but it would also mean that they don’t have to do as much as their "low-context" counterparts do to make their messages clear.\(^1\) I have mentioned earlier that the high-context communication style embraces a holistic approach (i.e., involving context) that can be termed "macro," whereas the low-context communication style adopts a rather direct and focused approach that can be called "micro." So, Hall’s "context" theory helps to explain how micro design relates to the doing-more mentality and micro design, or how macro design relates to the doing-more mentality. In the following, I would

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\(^1\) According to Scollon and Scollon, communications always imply ambiguity: No matter how hard one tries, a message can never be clear and explicit (see their Intercultural Communication, pp. 5-11). So, it seems to make sense to do less to let people draw inferences from the context.
like to address the doing-more/-less question by focusing on these two aspects of online design: use of graphics and use of white space.

Graphic design\(^{19}\) can maximize the impact of a message, but it also means that more design efforts have to be made by designers, for the conceivable reason that screen graphics demand more creativity than ordinary words or text. From those selected samples, we probably can see a fairly clear distinction between Western and Eastern Web design in terms of the amount of graphics involved. The Western samples generally incorporate more visuals (e.g., icons, images, pictures, etc.) presumably for the purpose of enhancing the message as well as the appeal of design, as seen in the Web pages of Red Lobster, Misty Slims, Budweiser, and Coca-Cola (samples 1, 2, 3, and 9), whereas Eastern pages (with the exception of the Chinese Coca-Cola Web site) tend to be visually subdued, with less graphics applied, as seen on the home pages of the Hong-Kong Computer Society, World of Chinese Culture (in Taiwan), and Chinese Language Teachers Association (in U. S.) (samples 4, 5, and 6). What is more, we can also see a sharp distinction between Western and Eastern design in terms of details involved.

As discussed earlier, attention to details could signal a "micro" approach in design, but with Hall's "context" theory in mind, we might say, as well, that it points to "the explicit code" governing design decisions in "low-context" culture. The display of a chilled, larger than usual "Bud" bottle, as seen in sample 3, would be a good example to illustrate the degree of explicitness in Western Web design, where

\(^{19}\) Strictly speaking, online graphic design also includes decisions about the "appearance of words on the screen," whether it is body text or display text, according to Farkas and Farkas (248). Decisions made as to typeface and typesize selections, treatment of words (colored, bold, underlined, italicized, etc.), cases of characters (upper or lower), etc., are all considered "an aspect of graphic design" (ibid.). But I use the term graphics to mean, specifically, visual elements of design as distinguished from ordinary words or text: for example, various iconic
fine details of graphics, like those on that “Bud” picture, would often leave no room for imagination, as if all one has to offer must be made clear up-front so that viewers could be spared a second guess. Not surprisingly, we may find the opposite to be true with designs in “high-context” culture, where lack of details is very often indicative of the implicit style of design and communication. Take for example the “bamboo” picture featured on the Web site of the Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA) (sample 6). For one thing, the bamboo does not have the vivid visual details as we have normally seen on Western Web sites: the whole picture is rather simple in design, with bamboo leaves drawn symbolically in the shape of brush strokes. For another, it does not tell explicitly of what it has to “offer”: the message is rather tacit in the sense that viewers have to know of the bamboo’s symbolic associations in Chinese culture before figuring out why it found its way there. (The bamboo serves as a cultural symbol of moral rectitude.) Because of this implicitness in a design message, Chinese designers, we may infer, do not have to go an extra mile to pile up graphics to elaborate on the details of a design. As seen in the example of that bamboo picture, a few strokes of ink would be sufficient to convey a message. In contrast, their Western counterparts may have a different story to tell: the demand for explicit design messages, coupled with hard-sell tactics to create an enticing grip upon viewers, would make it all the more imperative for them to refrain from using simple or less expressive graphics on their works. It would be hard to imagine that Budweiser’s U.K. Web page can be designed otherwise (in terms of design philosophy) if its message is all about what exactly Budweiser can offer or sell. (Can we think of an implicit way to project Bud’s

expressions we have seen on the Web. Indeed, Farkas and Farkas also draw such a distinction when they speak
refreshing image?) In other words, Western Web designers are compelled to do more for the sake of pushing through their design messages.

We probably can see the difference here in terms of how online ethos is delivered. The ethos of Budweiser’s U.K. page, which is driven by a doing-more mentality and created in accordance drawing on “elaborated” codes (through a display of expressive graphics), is more of a direct type of appeal, built on explicit visual details that can exert a strong, immediate, “eye-grabbing” effect on the viewer. The appeal of that “chilled” Bud beer, we can see, comes from none other than the use of high graphics. Needless to say, the appeal, or ethos, of the CLTA’s home page is more of an indirect type, in the sense that it has less to do with design, particularly, the use of high graphics, than with symbolic allusions, elicited through the bamboo, to culturally appealing moral qualities. This indirect way to deliver ethos can definitely relieve Chinese designers of the burden of relying on the visual dimension of a Web design to create an appeal, which may also explain why they can afford to do less.

The fact that Budweiser’s U.K. site is serving a commercial purpose while the CLTA’s is targeting an academic audience could declare incomparable the samples selected from these two sites, therefore rendering invalid the distinction I have attempted to draw—between high graphics/explicit or iconic expression in Western design and low graphics/implicit or symbolic expression in Eastern design. For this reason, I took a look at a few more sites that might be more comparable to a

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While recognizing that the function of a Web site can shape the amount and intensity of graphics used, I also believe that patterns of design can be traced, at least in part, to the cultural framework. Besides, my intent is to discuss what is perceived to be a general trend in online graphic design (doing-more or doing-less), rather than to present some clear-cut evidence for scientific demonstration.
demanding reader, such as Pepsi-Cola’s American (http://www.pepsi.com) and Chinese sites (http://www.pepsi-cola.co.cn) and the car-maker Honda’s American (http://www.honda.com) and Japanese sites (http://www.honda.co.jp). And what I found seems to reinforce the point that has been made. For example, Pepsi-Cola’s USA home page is much more “iconic” in design, packed with visuals ranging from the photo of a pop star to graphic images of Pepsi-Cola products. The Chinese site, on the other hand, is rather “humble” in using graphics. Except for the Pepsi logo and one single picture of a Pepsi-Cola can, the whole Web page relies mainly on using Chinese characters to appeal to its audience.

The contrast between Honda’s two Web sites is even more dramatic. The American home page is featuring, side by side, a sleek Civic Hybrid car and an oversized “HONDA” sign displayed against a burgundy background, whereas the Japanese page was designed plainly, without resorting to high graphics, like the above-mentioned car and sign, to “dazzle” its viewers. There is no way to tell who was behind the designings for Honda’s two different Web sites, but it appears clear that designers have adapted their designs to the different communication styles in host cultures. The “posh” image of a Honda Civic Hybrid calls to mind hard-sell tactics commonly practiced in North-American business communications, as it is intended to visualize the physical appeals of the car for the purpose of tempting potential buyers. Such a direct, explicit style of communication may work well in a society with a short attention span and an enduring fascination with visually flashy materials, but it may not achieve its purpose in Japan, where the communication style is predominantly tacit and indirect, hence the preference for plain-looking design on the Web.
The “doing-more/-less” distinction between Western and Eastern Web design is also reflected in designers’ decisions as to how to deal with white space (blank areas) on Web pages. As has been discussed in the earlier section, Chinese visual artists and designers tend to take more liberty with white space because of the belief that “less is more,” whereas their Western counterparts would go the other way around, for fear of not expressing themselves in full. While the line may not be that clearly cut on the Web, some distinction in terms of allocating white space can still be discerned from the samples I have selected. The Western Web pages, readers may have already noticed, are, overall, more crowded with design items, which, together with effusive use of vibrant colors and expressive graphics, can produce a “screen-ful” look to a viewer’s eye. The Eastern pages, to the contrary, appear to have utilized more of white space, which, in combination with low graphics and light color schemes, can leave a visual impression that is “laid-back” and, of course, less “screen-ful.”

The home page of Coca-Cola’s American site may serve to exemplify the Western “screenfulness,” notably for the fact that there is virtually no space left “unoccupied” on the screen (sample 9). The full-page design, mainly featuring the classic Coca-Cola trademark, the gushing image of Coke, and several Coca-Cola “joy” scenes, all of them against the background of Coca-Cola red, is a good indication of the doing-more mentality at work. It also reveals, in my view, a conscious maneuvering by designers to build up ethos for the host site, as the “screenful” design could be translated, subliminally, into saying: “Hey, we’ve got a lot for you!” By comparison the CLTA’s home page may strike a different tone, apparently for its lavish use of white space (sample 6). As I pointed out earlier in
Section III, including a large chunk of white space in design could be detrimental to one’s ethos, if judged by Western standards (not in the absolute sense, of course). This is because it yields an impression that designers did not put enough into their work. And, if we compare the CLTA’s with Coca-Cola’s American site, it is not hard to decide (at least at first glance) which site is “thin” and which is “full.” However, I wouldn’t thus conclude that the CLTA’s site suffers a shortage of ethos. The reason is that white space has been frequently utilized in Eastern cultures for the purpose of energizing design by bringing out a flowing zone for Qi.

On the CLTA’s home page, such a flowing zone, we may see, was created mostly to the right side of that symbolic bamboo. The enormous chunk of white space could be dismissed as wasteful by Western designers, but its value may be appreciated by the fact that the space has provided plenty of room for Qi to flow, therefore creating a sense of vividness for the bamboo, which is, so to speak, the center piece of design on the CLTA’s site. We probably can imagine what would happen if the white space surrounding the bamboo picture were filled “full”: The flowing zone of Qi could be blocked, and the picture could thus be stripped of its liveliness.

Using Western design language, we might just say that the visual impact of the bamboo could be diminished, because smaller white space minimizes the effect of figure-ground contrast, through which the bamboo tree can be visually brought to “life” (i.e., vividness or liveliness). But let me make myself clear here: I’m not attempting to say that the use of white space in design can be explained in terms of “Qi” or “figure-ground contrast,” but rather that the “doing-more/-less” mentality can determine how much of white space will be incorporated into Web design. In
Western cultures, the "doing-more" mentality would translate into making design items objects of "full expression." Designers would therefore do everything they can (for example, using high graphics) to visualize that "full expression." Because of this mentality, white space could be thought of as irrelevant to design items and subsequently treated as mere "blank areas." But in Chinese and other Eastern cultures, doing less could mean "more," and white space can thus be lavishly incorporated into design (as a flowing zone for Qi) so as to enliven the appeal of design items, as seen in the example of that bamboo tree on the CLTA's site.

The home page of Coca-Cola's Japanese site (sample 10) is also worthy of analysis, simply for the reason that the enormous white space surrounding that Coca-Cola "cartoon" machine cannot escape anybody's attention. Again we may sense the cultural difference: For Western online viewers (and designers alike), if they look at the Coke machine as a design item isolated from the white space surrounding it, then clearly more needs to be done to fill that design "vacuum," but for Eastern viewers (and designers alike) who can appreciate white space as part of design, the enormity of that "vacuum" around the Coke machine would make all the more sense. As we can see, the "cartoon" machine, equipped with arms and legs, needs quite a bit of space to move around in order to be "alive." (Psychologically, viewers could feel the need.) If its designers shrank the white space by filling in more design items there, it might make the screen look full to an Western eye, but in my (Eastern) view it could end up sacrificing the "Qi" of the Web page and rendering the whole page less energetic.

Finally, I'd like to make a brief comment on the samples (7 and 8) selected from two rather "comparable" Web sites: American "Yahoo! Finance" and Hong
Kong “Yahoo! Finance.” The two sites are quite similar in their visual layout, probably due to the fact that they both carry the same “task mission” as a finance/investment information provider and are run by the same Internet company. However, we may notice this difference: The American site is packed with information links and other visual items like icons or online ads, in contrast with the Hong Kong site, which is, visually, marked by wide margins of white space. One explanation could be that Chinese characters take less space compared with an alphabetic language like English, but I think the “doing-more/-less” distinction also plays its part. For example, under that same heading, “Investing,” the American site has thirty-six links, while the Hong Kong site has only twenty-two. Overall, the American site has more visually “flashy” devices in comparison with its Hong Kong counterpart.

Again, there is no way to tell who was behind all of the designs on “Yahoo! Finance,” but we can assume that some cultural adjustment has been made for targeting audiences more effectively. To the American viewer, Yahoo! Finance’s credibility (or ethos) rests in part upon how much information it can provide; therefore, more links and less white space would be a better choice. But in Hong Kong, a similar design decision may not work well; rather, adapting to a “doing-less” mentality by incorporating more of white space into Web design can probably better meet the viewer’s (visual) expectations. I will have to stretch myself to argue that “Qi” flows on the site of Hong Kong “Yahoo! Finance,” but at least we can say that its wider white space enables users to move around and access information with more ease, therefore ensuring better online interactions. In that sense, doing less can definitely be translated into doing more.
5. Discussion

In what has been a rather lengthy analysis (and comparison) of samples selected from a variety of Web sites, I have addressed three major distinctions between Western and Eastern online design in regard to ethos: i.e., self-assertion versus self-effacement, micro versus macro, and doing-more versus doing-less. They in turn are mirroring broader differences between the West and East in visual arts and design as well as in rhetoric. While acknowledging the possibility that those online distinctions could have been caused by factors other than culture, such as Internet technology, commercial purpose, and designers’ personal background, I was more interested in showing how, for example, a difference in using graphics can be attributed to the difference in projecting ethos, the perception of which, I must say, is culturally “ordained.”

Whether the connections I have been trying to show make sense, it must be for the readers of this paper to decide. For my part, I just wish to say it again: What was presented is by no means meant to be conclusive; I’ll remain content to see the paper as an initiation into further research, and discussion, on the topic of online ethos, especially its cross-cultural perspective. On the other hand, I also wish to say that culture does play a tangible role in structuring the way Web designers present their works, including how they are going to deliver ethos for and through their works. For instance, the reason Western designers are likely to use a plethora of digital expressions to enhance the glamour of their design may well be that they like to assert the “existence” or “attitudes” of their work, as implied in the Western approach to ethos as some sort of self-assertion. But such an approach may also relate to the individualistic understanding of the self in Western culture, as opposed
to Eastern culture, where individualism and the self have been traditionally
downplayed, and, consequently, the projection of ethos is characterized by skills of
(Web) design that reflect on the relationships of design items to objects or beings
(usually) present on a larger scale (e.g., context, authority, etc.).

There is probably no need to recite everything that has already been said, but
instead I'd like to use this opportunity to broach a few additional thoughts I had in
my attempt to compare and analyze Western and Eastern online ethos. To begin
with, I wish that I didn't give the impression that Eastern online design is culturally
oriented while Western is not, which is simply not true. Postmodern critics, like
Barthes, would argue that a text (including online), no matter where it is created, has
to “procee[d] from several cultures” (54), and that authorship is at best “a historical
construct” (Tuman 64). This would mean that all of the Western samples selected for
comparison and analysis in this paper are—just like their Eastern
counterparts—“macro” in essence, culturally defined and even culturally designed.
Indeed, we can clearly identify traces of cultural or macro design in some of those
Western samples. In sample 2 (Misty Slims’ home page), for example, the American
pop-culture has left its unambiguous marks of celebrity-worship and sex-obsession,
which is illustrated through the charm and elegance of a female beauty. In sample 9
(the U.S. Coca-Cola), we can feel the imprints of American consumerism on a Web
design in a rather subtle manner: A consumer product (Coke) is now projected as an
equivalent to the joy of life. If celebrity, sex, or consumerism has anything to do
with cultural appeals, these (Western) Web pages, then, clearly exhibit an approach
to ethos that has to be interpreted in a language beyond individualistic terms.
What is more, after the September 11th events, the theme of patriotism has surged dramatically on many of U. S. corporations' Web sites, where the star-spangled flag has almost become the norm of design, as seen, for example, on MBNA America's\textsuperscript{21} home page (http://www.mbna.com). The patriotic boom in corporate Web design may point to the possibility that business corporations are trying to take advantage of the public mood, but it may also reveal, I would think, a "macro" move on the part of designers to identify with the sentiment of the nation after September 11th and therefore to promote the ethos of host sites. Or, at least it suggests that designers are making conscious efforts to connect with society in their works of design.

The apparent "macro" design as seen on those Western Web sites would have weakened what I have been trying to establish, the distinctions between Western and Eastern (mainly Chinese) online ethos, but I would like to point out what seems to me to be reasonable explanations. One is that it is still appropriate to say that designers follow their own (culturally structured) design tradition in making design decisions, albeit relatively (which is to say that we cannot draw a clean-cut line between the West and East). If Hall's "context" theory holds merit, we certainly have the reason to believe that a Western online designer would incorporate less of cultural context in design in comparison with his/her Eastern counterpart. And, if the Western perception of ethos is individualistic at the core, it certainly makes sense to expect that a Western designer would project ethos quite differently than an Eastern counterpart by, for example, making an online design more visually intense.

\textsuperscript{21} One of the largest banking corporations in America.
The other is that the “macro” phenomenon observed on Western Web designs actually strengthens, though rather ironically, the argument I have made about the problematic aspects of Western ethos, which is defined as some sort of self-representation. At least, I should say that Buchanan's formulation of ethos in visual design does not apply well in his own (Western) culture. I have argued in the paper “Ethos in Classical Chinese Rhetoric” that ethos is essentially an invocation of cultural forces, with which rhetors not only identify themselves but also, through such identification, secure persuasion. I have also argued in my other paper “Corporate Image as Collective Ethos” that ethos is a shared social character, using building corporate images in Western society as an example to illustrate why it has to be approached from a social and cultural perspective. So, it is not inconceivable that the collective (social and cultural) aspect of ethos has found its way online, into the design of Western sites.

On the other hand, it is important to understand that the individualistic approach to visual ethos, such as formulated by Buchanan and other design critics/practitioners, is deeply rooted in a rhetorical tradition that sees ethos as a strategy of persuasion based upon the play of a rhetor's personal character. It also reflects, in my view, cultural entrenchment in an ideology that “assumes individual selves as the presuppositions, logically and biologically, of the social process or order within which they interact” (Mead 222).^22 Thus, it may come as no surprise that Western Web designers would generally adhere in design to the “self-assertion/micro/doing-more” line to build online ethos despite the fact that they

^22 To be fair, George Mead also points out that the social theory of the self has been existing in the West as opposed to the individualistic. However, until the rise of postmodernism, the former had never been a leading voice in the tradition of Western ideology.
also try to incorporate culture and other elements of “macro” design into their works.

If Western sites have registered features of design that can be categorized as “macro,” it is also true that Eastern sites have shown signs of Web design that can be described as “micro,” “self-asserting,” or “doing-more,” as seen, for example, on the site of Chinese Coca-Cola (sample11), where the heavy use of colors, graphics, etc., has rendered the design almost indistinguishable from its Western counterparts. When doing my research, I have also become increasingly aware of visually intensive Web designs in countries such as Japan, Korea, and China. Indeed, it would be quite a stretch to draw a “cultural distinction” between, say, the design of China Daily (www.chinadaily.co.cn) and that of The New York Times (www.nytimes.com), especially in their visual layout and use of graphics.

It would be quite presumptuous to categorize the design of China Daily or other Eastern Web sites as “Westernized,” just as there is no reason to declare the home pages of MBNA America and other U.S. corporations as “Easternized” simply because of the presence of certain “micro” or “macro” design characteristics in them. But it would be of interest to notice that Cyber space can serve as the locus where cultures converge rather than diverge, as evidenced by the fact that some of the samples analyzed have demonstrated features of design that crosscut cultural boundaries. I would use the term “Cyber hybrids” to describe Web designs that are culturally indistinctive, as a result of efforts made by designers to cross the line of their own tradition and incorporate elements of design from other cultures into their works.

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2 A government-run English newspaper in China.
But hybridism in Cyber space might be more than a testament to cultural convergence: It could signal, using Fredric Jameson’s words, “the disappearance of certain relationships to history and the past” (Stephanson 5), which could be translated to mean that culture, or cultural tradition, is playing a lesser role in informing or shaping design decisions a designer makes. I pointed out this likelihood earlier when suggesting that the Internet has brought the Eastern and Western closer to each other, in the sense that Web designers, whether Eastern or Western, will possibly resort to the same digital technique or the same databanks of icons to create their visual messages. Jameson predicted a text of postmodernism characterized by “the production of discontinuous sentences without any larger unifying forces” (ibid.), which has yet to be proven in print space, but in Cyber space we might have already witnessed the proliferation of texts or designs that appear “discontinuous” and, to a large extent, culturally incohesive, as shown in the aforementioned Web “hybrids” (i.e., sites that are culturally crosscutting in their design features).

I’m not saying the disappearance of “larger unifying forces” that govern conventional text production and design will necessarily point to the emergence of “one-world culture” on the Net, but it’s important to know that the Internet has its own uniqueness that exceeds cultural boundaries, just as communication and information technologies can transcend cultural constraints and be utilized both in the West and East. For critics like Moulthrop, cyberspace is impregnated with “possibilities for cultural change” (316). To me, the space may also represent a

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24 I borrowed the term from Ashok Malhotra, who portrays “globalization as an all-encompassing concept of moving towards the creation of a one-world culture/civilization where the world economy will have a crucial place but will be only one among many other significant factors.”
disconnect with the “dictates” of culture because of the unique mode evolved for online text production and design. Perhaps I’m just speaking of the same thing with different wordings. The point I’m making is that it probably won’t do much justice to analyze or critique online texts/designs using the “this culture versus that culture” model. And the Web “hybrids” that were just mentioned seem to prove that point.

Jameson once had this to say about the postmodernist “metabooks” and “metatexts,” which I think also sheds light on those Web “hybrids”:

that pure and random play of signifiers [. . .] no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type, but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalise other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts. (“Reading”223)

In a way, the description of “metabooks/metatexts” by Jameson mirrors what has been termed “Cyber hybridism.” And like those “metabooks/metatexts,” Web designs deviating from designers’ cultural tradition may well result from a reshuffling process, namely, from cannibalizing other designs and collating bits of Web pages from other sites. For that reason, these designs may rightly be called “metadesigns,” following Jameson. But whether these “metadesigns” are portending cultural convergences, or signifying the uniqueness of Web design that is more or less technologically determined, or pointing to a combination of both, we may need to see more discussions in the future to determine. At this point, it seems
reasonable to suggest that cultural distinctions are vague in such designs. And the trend seems to keep growing.

The idea of "metadesigns" or Cyber hybridism may appear to undermine my earlier arguments about the distinctions between the West and East with regard to online ethos, but I tend to think otherwise, for two reasons. One is that we are still at the early phase of transformation. While some Web designs may have registered characteristics that are "meta" or culturally indistinguishable, a great majority of them are still falling into culturally identifiable categories. The other, probably more significant, is that the idea of "metadesigns" can actually strengthen the thesis of my dissertation, which has been arguing for ethos as a collective social phenomenon, because what is implied in "metadesigns," just as in "bamboo hypertext" of classical Chinese rhetoric, is "a world of multiple notions of authorship, based on multiple notions of texts" (Truman 64). (We can be certain that no individual authorship is capable of constructing a design on a "meta" scale.) We all know Western ethos has been intertwined with individual authorship, whether it has to do with good character, good will, or good sense, but the idea of "metadesigns," and its implied collective authorship, could force people to rethink of the role an individual can play in design and its association with ethos.

V. Conclusion

To summarize the paper, we can draw distinctions, albeit not clear-cut, between Western and Eastern online ethos by looking at the three issues inherent in the creation of a (Web) design: 1) whether the purpose of a design is for "self-assertion" or "self-effacement"; 2) whether the approach to design is "micro" or "macro"; and 3) whether the attitude towards design is "doing-less" or "doing-more." But
underlying those differences is, fundamentally, the question of how to treat the individual self in relation to design. In Western society, the individual is believed to be an embodiment of ethos, and, therefore, very much has been put into design to visualize that embodiment. As Hall and Hall pointed out when speaking of Western architectural design, “Somehow we in the Western world cannot get away from the preoccupation with the individual” (Fourth Dimension 8). In Chinese and other Eastern cultures, however, ethos is projected through an invocation of collectively celebrated entities, such as nature and the Dao. That is why great efforts have been initiated in design to objectify connections with such entities, instead of using design as a vehicle for self-representation.

It appears conceivable then that self-assertion can lead to individual ethos, whereas self-effacement will contribute to collective ethos. But the projection of ethos as individual or collective is also dependent on the design approach (micro or macro?) and the mentality or attitude (doing less or doing more?) designers entertain towards their works. I have already discussed these questions rather in length in the paper. In what follows, I’d like to add a little more to the discussion by expanding on how Westerners and Easterners differ in their thinking patterns and in their takes on the function of rhetoric (including design rhetoric).

The obsession with the individual self in Western design may derive, in a philosophical sense, from the habitual thinking patterns, the analytical, in the West that conceptualize the world as comprised of separate entities, in contrast with the holistic or “correlative” thinking patterns in the East that perceive reality in terms of continuity and process (Graham 63; Yang 3). According to A. C. Graham, all human thinking proceeds from correlative thinking because it is more
“spontaneous”—operative outside the “bounds of strict logic” and “exact formulation” (80), but because of the logocentric drive to “separate knowledge from opinion” Western society has put a premium on analytical thinking in an effort to secure the “complete independence” of knowledge (ibid.). We probably don’t have to dwell on the epistemological differences between the West and East here, but it is important to see that the obsession with self-representation in Western design has its roots in a tradition that makes it epistemologically perceivable to have the self stand out separately as an individual entity from the rest of the world. Likewise, concern over the harmony of the whole in Eastern visual arts and design can also be traced to an epistemological tradition that does not separate the self from the rest of the world.

I tend to think of analytical thinking as “micro thinking,” in the sense that it perceives the world in separate terms without exhibiting much concern about the “whole picture.” Apparently, the “micro” approach (much discussed in this paper) is the objectification of analytical thinking in design, characterized by the assumption that individual design items can be independent of their physical or cultural environments.

My argument about the “micro” approach in Western design is nothing new. In a way, it just echoes a point made by Hall and Hall back in the seventies, when they were critiquing “some unstated assumptions” in the Western world “concerning the nature of man’s [sic] relationship to his environment and the effect of culture on design” (7):
The most pervasive and important assumption, a cornerstone in the edifice of Western thought, is one that lies hidden from our consciousness and has to do with man's relationship to his environment. Quite simply the Western view is that human processes, particularly behavior, are independent of environmental controls and influence. (ibid.)

While Hall and Hall did not use the word "analytical" or "micro" to describe the "Western view," we could clearly sense a critique of the analytical in their arguments, especially later when they talked about the "underlying assumption" in Western architecture that "a building is a single thing, something which has integrity and can be singled out from the rest of the physical setting" (8). What is suggested in their critique is that Western thinking conceptualizes the world in separates terms.

But self-representation in Western design certainly goes beyond the issue of epistemological roots or thinking patterns. The fact that the individual self has been thought of as a "moral, metaphysical and, ultimately, theological category" in Western ideology since Plato (Baumlin xviii) suggests that there has existed an ontological grounding for treating design objects as individual creations—to be separated from the rest of the world. Put simply, self-representation in Western design is not just a function of analytical thinking, it is also a reflection of an ideological tradition that celebrates the self as an embodiment of "essence," as presupposed in the Platonic ethos.

As discussed in the earlier part of the paper (see pp. 10-11), the essentialist self in Platonic ethos implies human agency, in that "soul knowledge," or truth, has to be discovered by the individual self—within its soul, of course—capable of such discovery. In other words, it is that mysterious agency (essence?) that motivates a
rhetor in Platonic fashion to seek, and speak of, truth, and therefore stand to present his ethos. Baumlin says, "A Platonic definition of ethos [...] is premised on the moral and, ultimately, theological inseparability of the speaker-agent from the speech-act" (xiii). If truth (speech-act) is not to be separated from an individual (speaker-agent) in Platonic ethos, the reason may well be, among others, that the latter also serves as a carrier of agency to materialize that truth. The point I'm trying to make here is that understanding the essentialist self and agency in Platonic idealism may shed further light on why ethos in Western design and, more broadly, in Western rhetoric has long been characterized by a "doing-more" mentality: Presumably, a "doing-more" design/rhetoric can tell more about the designer/rhetor as a carrier of agency.

The ideal of agency may help explain why "man is viewed as dominating all that is around him" in the Western world (Hall and Hall 8), but I think it is also responsible for the traditional definition of rhetoric as "art of persuasion" in the West. What had been presupposed, or taken for granted, in rhetorical persuasion is the power of human agency, imbued with which a rhetor can do anything (or to "use any means," to quote Aristotle) to influence (i.e., persuade) his audience. Even to this day, the notion of persuasive rhetoric as means to exercise agency and/or to initiate social change is still advocated by some "anti-tradition," postmodernist critics, who see rhetoric as "praxis," and rhetoricians as agents of "social change" (e.g., Ellen Cushman 7-28). It must be pointed out that rhetoric for the purpose of exploration (or argument II, as some critics may call it)—not persuasion—has long been advertised in the West by some rhetorical theorists, like Protagoras in ancient Greece or Ehninger (101-110) in the 1970's. However, the idea of exploratory
rhetoric has never entered the mainstream thinking in the West, and throughout the history of rhetorical theory, persuasion has been considered, persistently, to be the defining function of rhetoric.

Because of its stress on persuasion, Western rhetoric can be identified as a unilateral discourse action, in which the rhetor argues, single-handedly, from the beginning to the end trying to “achieve control and to be a force for change” (Matalene 790). In the words of Scollan and Scollan, Western rhetoric emphasizes “the means of winning one’s point through skillful argument, short of, Aristotle says, the use of torture” (142). But no matter what Matalene, or the Scollans, has to say, rhetorical practice as such clearly demonstrates a “doing-more” mentality in that it is predicated on what the rhetor—carrier of agency—can do, whether in terms of controlling other people or winning an argument for one’s own sake. Frankly, I would call such praxis (persuasive rhetoric) “one-way traffic.”

In contrast to the Western, Aristotelian definition, the rhetoric of Chinese and other Eastern cultures does not assume persuasion to be its defining function (Schabergt 30). In classical Chinese rhetoric, “a speech can be good even when it fails to convince” (ibid.). It has been the consensus that rhetors of Eastern cultures are primarily concerned about “harmony” (Scollan and Scollan 142; Matalene 795) and “good order” (Schabergt 21) of society. As was discussed in the earlier part of the paper (see p. 11), classical Chinese rhetoric is essentially “agent-less,” for two good

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25 One may argue that Plato’s dialectic is not a one-way traffic, in that it is a rational dialogue conducted in a question-answer format eventually leading the participants to clear the path to truth of its obstacles. But as Brian Vickers’ detailed analysis of the Gorgias reveals (84–113), dialectic has been a “game” for Socrates, who uses it to trick other interlocutors into errors and then to silence them. That’s why the Gorgias ends up with a lengthy monologue by Socrates, with other characters being silent aside. What I see as problematic about the so-called Platonic dialogue is that truth is invariably pre-set by Socrates even before the dialogue starts: it is not reached afterwards. In short, Plato’s dialectic emphasizes what one person (in this case, a philosopher, not a rhetor) can do to influence others or simply to win.
reasons: (1) the practice of discourse is depersonalized for the sake of social
harmony, and (2) the recognition of language’s structuring impact upon human
behavior has further denied rhetors’ individuality (which can be interpreted as
“exertion of agency”) in discourse production. Now, I would like to add another
reason: that is, classical Chinese rhetoric does not presuppose the involvement of
agency, the drive for personal assertion (in the form of persuasion) in Western
rhetorical practice. Indeed, the ideal of agency would be futile when everything
under heaven is believed to take its own cause under the ultimate Dao. (Where is
the need for persuasion?) The idea of “agent-less” rhetoric, I would also like to add,
does not necessarily mean that a rhetor cannot speak or write on his or her own;
rather, it suggests that the potential of a rhetoric is contingent upon “fitting man
into nature or into society or both,” to quote Hall and Hall (8). In the Eastern world,
human processes (including rhetoric, visual arts and design, etc.,) are not considered
to be “independent of environmental controls and influence.”

It seems more than obvious that an “agent-less” rhetoric would demand a
rhetor to do less, not more, for doing more would risk meddling with what is
already there in order (in nature and society), as implied in the concept of wuwei
(doing-nothing) in Daoism. Carolyn Matalene has noticed, from her experience as a
writing teacher in China, that Chinese writers have the habit of using “fixed phrases
and common references” (796) in their writings, a practice that would be dismissed
by her American colleagues as lack of originality. Matalene attributes the practice to
the “staggering feats of memorization” required in the tradition of Chinese rhetoric
(790), which I agree with wholeheartedly. But I believe what Matalene has observed
can also be attributed to the deferring to collective ethos in Chinese rhetorical
practice: If Chinese writers love to use some “fixed phrases and common
references,” it is more likely because they (i.e., those phrases and references) prove
to be culturally appealing. What is more, the lack of originality in Chinese discourse
practice, as perceived by Westerners, may well point to the working of a “doing-
less” mentality: i.e., Chinese writers do not go beyond what is already culturally
established by exercising the so-called “agency,” which is commonly expressed in
the Western world in the form of independent thinking or, to borrow Matalene’s
words, “authentic voice” and “self-expression” (ibid.).

By now, I hope my point has been made clear, that Western rhetoric
presupposes agency whereas Eastern (especially Chinese) rhetoric doesn’t, which
has further resulted in different takes on the function of rhetoric in two cultures,
with persuasion to be the primacy in the West, and harmony the priority in the East.
And, by definition, a persuasive rhetoric would have to be a “doing-more” rhetoric
because of its underlying assumption about human agency, about what rhetors can
do to sway the crowd. Since harmony has been the primary concern for rhetors in
the East, where there is not much assumption about human agency, it is
understandable that rhetors would have to try to fit into the crowd by engaging in
“doing-less” discourse practice. We may also see at this point that different takes on
the function of rhetoric can be traced back to the cultural issue of how to treat the
self, which was addressed rather in length in this paper, when differences between
the West and East regarding visual arts and design were being discussed. For, if
there is such a thing as agency, then it has to be located somewhere within the self
as some sort of human essence. This is to say that the presupposition of agency is,
ultimately, a presupposition of the self, and that the persuasive function of Western rhetoric, like the doing-more mentality, ought to be considered an attribute of self-representation.

In conclusion, I have discussed how Westerners and Easterners differ in their thinking patterns and in their takes on the function of rhetoric in an attempt to provide a broader perspective on two of the issues underlying the distinctions between Western and Eastern online ethos: i.e., the “micro versus macro” and the “doing-more versus doing-less.” The fact that analytical thinking is privileged over holistic in Western society may explain, epistemologically, why Western (online) designers have the tendency to “micro-approach” design, as opposed to their Eastern counterparts who would do otherwise. Also, the “micro” approach makes sense in a cultural environment where the self is considered the center of the world. But in Eastern (typically Chinese) ontology the center of the world has been shifted to the Dao, presumably, the governing force of all beings; therefore, the “macro” approach, integration with society, nature, and, ultimately, the Dao, would seem more appropriate for designers to take. In the philosophical sense, persuasion, defined as the primary function of Western rhetoric, can be seen as a way to confirm the self, whereas harmony, believed to be the primary function of Eastern rhetoric, can be regarded as a way to suppress the self. In design, such a distinction translates into one between “doing-more” and “doing-less.”

26 By all accounts, agency has been a very controversial subject even among Western theorists, who have come up with numerous definitions as a result.
Works Cited


Appendices (1–16)
Figure 3.1

Appendix 1: Picture by William Blake

Figure: 3.2

Appendix 2: Chinese dragon on a vase

Appendix 3: The Great Wall

Appendix 4: Mountain ridge in the semblance of dragon veins in a Chinese painting

Appendix 5: Temple basking in serenity of nature

Appendix 6: Twisted and eroded rocks in a Chinese garden

Appendix 7:
Submerging one’s self in nature’s harmony

Appendix 8: Painting of mountains by an "awkward" hand

Appendix 9: "Happy New Year" on a seal with a broken and uneven line around to counter artificiality

Source: 1983 "Happy New Year" post card issued by Postal Service of China
Appendix 10: “Longevity,” a favorite character in Chinese calligraphy, created with one single brush stroke, demonstrating the flow of *Qi*, and rhythm and balance of *Yin-Yang*

Appendix 11: One more example of Chinese calligraphy

Appendix 12:
"Mountain-water" landscape painting portraying the metaphysical harmony of Yin-Yang, through images of mountains and waters complementing each other.

Appendix 13: White space used for sky and water in a Chinese picture

Source: *Ma Yi Hua Bao* (Treasure House of Ma Yi's Pictures) by Ma Yi, reprinted by Rongbao Zhai, Beijing, 1982
Appendix 14 (A): Picture with little white space at top

Source: *Ma Yi Hua Bao* (Treasure House of Ma Yi's Pictures) by Ma Yi, reprinted by Rongbao Zhai, Beijing, 1982
Appendix 14 (B): Picture with plenty of white space at top to create a sense of openness

Source: *Ma Yi Hua Bao* (Treasure House of Ma Yi’s Pictures) by Ma Yi, reprinted by Rongbao Zhai, Beijing, 1982
Appendix 15: Direct-mail document from Sprint featuring lavish use of white space

Source: 1999 Chinese New Year direct mail by Sprint
Who Visits the Writing Center?
During the 1995-1996 academic year, the writing center assisted 1337 students (652 fall semester, 655 spring semester). During this same time, we also turned away 461 students. Of the 1337 students we assisted, 67% came to the writing center because of papers assigned in classes other than English, while 15% visited us with English 104 assignments, 14% with English 105 assignments, and 4% with English 302 assignments. Compared to the 1994-1995 academic year, the number of students coming to the writing center from classes other than English increased by 26%.

Appendix 16: Mug on the newsletter betraying an attempt to fill up white space

Source: Writing Center Newsletter, Iowa State University, fall 1996
Web Sample 1: Homepage of Red Lobster

Source: http://www.redlobster.com/home.asp (July 7, 2001)
Web Sample 2: Introduction page of Misty Slims

Source: http://mistyl20s.com/Misty120s/Index.shtml (March 25, 2001)
Web Sample 3: Home page of Budweiser.co.uk

Source: http://budweiser.co.uk/home.htm (March 25, 2001)
Web Sample 4: Home page of Hong Kong Computer Society

圖中秋節

當天氣轉涼，時序入秋，八月十五月圓人也團圓的中秋節便來臨了。中秋節，也稱為「人節」，是一個最富詩情畫意與人情味濃厚的佳節。各式各樣口味不同、包裝精美的月餅，經常在中秋節前一週造成搶購的熱潮，過去，月餅製作通常都釀發許多製作師傅的雙手，月餅的衛生與美味也只能靠直覺來判斷了。

近年來，全自動化生產的科技加入了月餅的行列，使得社會大眾在消費權益上獲得了更多的保障，事實上，中秋節也是少數節慶中頗具人情味的習俗，或許，這和團圓和諧的意義不無關聯吧！除了吃月餅之外，出門賞月更是中秋節的一件盛事，除了選擇賞月的風景名勝區之外，天氣的好壞也會影響到人們的賞月。每當中秋節一到來，人潮不是結伴前往風景區，便是趕回家與家人團聚。而造成了春節之外的交通尖峰。接下來，我們就為您介紹廣式與蘇式月餅的製法。

Web Sample 5: Web page from the World of Chinese Culture

Web Sample 6: Home page of the Chinese Language Teachers

Source: http://clta.deall.ohio-state.edu/ (July 10, 2001)
Web Sample 7: Home page of Yahoo! Finance

Source: http://quote.yahoo.com/ (September 20, 2001)

Greenspan: Attacks to Disrupt the Economy
U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress on Thursday that last week's devastating attacks on the United States will damage the economy in the short-term by making Americans fearful of

FinanceVision

Today's guests
All times are Eastern Time.
10:00 am hearing: The Condition
Web Sample 8: Home page of Yahoo! Finance Hong Kong

Source: http://hk.finance.yahoo.com/ (September 20, 2001)
Web Sample 9: Home page of Coca-Cola.com

Web Sample 10: Home page of Coca-Cola Japan

Source: http://www.cocacola.co.jp/index4.html (March 23, 2001)
Web Sample 11: Home page of Coca-Cola China

CHAPTER 4

CORPORATE IMAGE AS COLLECTIVE ETHOS:
A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH

This paper discusses the idea of projecting corporate image in terms of culturally regulated codes of appeals by using, mainly, the examples of ad campaigns by some U.S. business companies in the post-9/11 environment. The image of patriotism those companies are aspiring to suggests corporate imagery can be a shared social phenomenon, i.e., collective ethos, thus raising questions about the traditional approach to corporate imagery, which is summarized as “self-representation.” The way to build up collective ethos is through Burke’s “identification,” seen as both a strategy and goal of communication. The paper also provides an overview of rhetorical theory on using image as a presentation strategy to explore the reason why it has been treated in history as a way for self-projection, or representation of a “corporate self.”

Speaking of corporate image, we may need, first of all, to clarify the term “image,” which appears to have been, surprisingly enough, short of consistency in definition among corporate communication scholars and practitioners (Abratt, 1989; Davies, Chun, and da Silva, 2001). Very often the word “image” is used to mean “identity” or “reputation” or, in the more strict sense, to mean the internal perception of a company held by its employees (Kennedy, 1977).

According to Davies, et al. (2001), “Image is taken to mean the view of the company held by external stakeholders, especially that held by customers” (p. 113). Clearly, their definition contrasts with the “internal” view of a company, which they think ought to be labeled as “identity” (i.e., the perception of a company held by its

* This chapter, originally an article, was formatted following the style prescribed by the publisher of Corporate Communications: An International Journal.
employees) following Albert and Whetten's (1985) notion of organizational identity. Interestingly, Davies, et al. define "reputation" as a collective term "referring to all stakeholders' views of corporate reputation, including identity and image" (p. 114). For them, the question of measuring corporate reputation can boil down to the question of how to assess a company's identity and image (i.e., the internal and external perspectives).

My purpose here is certainly not to join the crowd in redefining, or disputing the existing definitions of, "image," "identity," and "reputation," but for the sake of this paper, I feel it is necessary to come up with understanding from a rhetorical point of view, so that I can proceed with the topic of the paper: corporate image as collective ethos.

The paper is divided into five sections besides the conclusion. Section (1), definition, is to provide understandings of image from a rhetorical point of view based on two crucial issues: audience and persuasion. Section (2), questions about the traditional approaches to corporate imagery, points out what has been traditionally missing in the creation of a corporate image: connecting with the audience/public. Section (3), insights from the 9/11 ads, argues, based on the rush on patriotism in today's corporate America, that corporate image is essentially a projection of what is perceived and expected by society and culture. Section (4), corporate image as collective ethos, argues that image making should be taken as an initiation into connecting with the public and society—free from the confines of a "corporate self"; it also points out theoretical possibilities for collective ethos using Burke's concept of "identification." And section (5), a poststructuralist approach,
explores the philosophical aspect of collective ethos drawing on Foucault’s poststructuralism.

**Definition**

Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the art of observing means to persuade your audience (*Rhetoric, 1.2, 1355b26ff.*). Defining “image” from a rhetorical standpoint would thus imply two elements: audience and persuasion. We all know that the image of a company hinges on its audience’s perception, whether it is external customers or internal employees. That is, we have to have an audience when talking about a company’s image. So, in the rest of this paper, when I discuss corporate image, it will be addressed with the general notion of audience in mind—without regard to the division between external and internal “stakeholders.”

Then, what is “image”? I will have to do the impossible to give a precise definition here, especially considering the fact that it has been used in the past to mean so many things by so many different authors, but we could reasonably assume that it has something to do with “presentation,” with public perceptions or impressions produced as a result of such presentation (Selame and Selame, 1988). This is how the element of persuasion is brought into play as the idea of presentation, in the sense of creating or influencing public perceptions or impressions, implies that the presenter has to observe ways to persuade his or her audience to be receptive of a certain company image.

Due to the influence of scientific positivism, many people would prefer the term “identity” than “image” for the reason that the former somehow suggests “what one really is” while the latter means “how one appears to other people” (*ibid.*,
In other words, "identity" concerns facts whereas "image" is more or less about appearances and needs much more "upkeep" (ibid.). I would say a company should have both: identity and image. But, rhetorically, image making is probably more significant. This is because "identity" only tells who you are, but "image" tells how you appeal to other people. Public relationships, marketing, corporate advertising, etc., all have to do with image "upkeep."

I think it is exactly because of this "upkeep" business that the notion of rhetoric has found its way into the image-making process for a company, which is to connect to the audience and to observe ways of persuasion to make the image it wishes to build up come across or, in Aristotle's words, "look right" (1356a1–3) to that audience.

After the September 11th events, many of U.S. business companies, big and small, have been capturing the theme of nationalism/patriotism to advertise their corporate images. The new "upkeep" phenomenon will be further explored later in this paper, but at this point I just wish to point out that it seems to make perfect "rhetorical" sense to advertise the company image that way. For one thing, those companies can effectively connect to an audience that is overflowing with patriotic sentiments; for another, using nationalism/patriotism to do image upkeep also proves to be most persuasive given the social environment after September 11th.

Whether or not the word "reputation" should be treated as a collective term that includes "image" could be a topic for another paper. Here I would like to go with Fombrun (1996), who says that reputation is "partly a reflection of company's identity, partly a result of managers' efforts to persuade us of their excellence" (p. 11). If "reputation" stems (partly) from persuasion, as suggested by Fombrun, then it
ought to be subsumed under "image," not the other way round. Of course, reputation also contributes to the making of a corporate image, but still it should be considered a variable within the parameters of "image," like other variables, such as marketing strategies, product qualities and customer services, all of which can shape the outcome of image making.

Questions About Traditional Approaches to Corporate Image

Another word for "image" would be "ethos," a rhetorical term that has much broader connotations. Like "image," "ethos" also refers to presentation, specifically, to strategies used in making the presenter appear good or credible to his or her audience. The reason some big companies have spent millions of dollars searching for brand names and trademarks or designing company logos and product packages is because this will make them (or their products/services) appear good to the customers, creating positive images in the marketplace. In the words of the Selames, it is all about "adding 'face' to otherwise faceless corporations" (p. 92), but from the rhetorical point of view, one might just say, it is the application of ethos in marketing on the part of those companies.

Strictly speaking, image is only part of ethos, which also includes such attributes as character, persona, voice, attitude, etc., according to Johnson (1984). In short, using any devices that can add to one's credibility in the eyes of an audience is considered to be exercising ethos in persuasion. Using image as a rhetorical device is reminiscent of Roman rhetorician Cicero's concept of ethos as character "painting" (Of Oratory, Book II, xliii). In order to convince his hearers, an orator must attain the "image" of a stage actor with "consummate charm," says Cicero (Of Oratory, Book I,
xxviii). But in this paper, I would like to treat "image" and "ethos" as interchangeable phrases, for the reason that they both relate to something called the self or the soul.

In the history of Western communication theory, there have existed two conflicting versions about ethos centering around the issue of self, with Platonism on the one hand and pragmatism on the other. The Platonic ethos presupposes the existence of an eternal, static identity within an individual that can endure the vicissitudes of time and space (Baumlin, 1994, xvii–xviii). That is, there is some kind of essence deep within the individual self—the soul—that is not to be swayed by "gusts" of society. The essentialist self, or the soul, is crucial to Platonic ethos because it is an embodiment of soul knowledge (or absolute truth in today's language). In Platonic fashion, whoever possesses such knowledge would certainly be regarded as most truthful and, of course, most credible. So, projection of ethos is seen as a presentation of one's true self or character.

The pragmatic ethos, proposed by Plato's student, Aristotle, emphasizes the role a presenter can play in constructing his or her self-image through skillful use of language. In contrast to Plato who insists that the speaker's character must be upright for its own sake, Aristotle seems to say that it is sufficient to win an audience simply by making "ourselves thought to be sensible and morally good" (1356a9–10). In other words, in Aristotelian fashion, ethos can be created, or recreated, by the presenter. Underlying this pragmatic notion of ethos is the concept of "a social self," as opposed to "a central self" (Lanham, 1976). The latter is the core of Platonic ethos. The social self, says Lanham, "conceives of reality as fundamentally dramatic, man as fundamentally a role player" (p. 4), which is to
suggest that the pragmatic approach to ethos, based on the concept of “social self,” has its philosophical grounds for “dramatic” manipulations by a presenter.

However, as Baumlin (1994) points out, throughout the history of communication theory, the Platonic ethos appears to have had the upper hand over the pragmatic, due to the logocentric tradition in ideology that “embraces [...] the philosophical model of selfhood over the [...] rhetorical model” (xviii). He writes:

> Western culture, in other words, has largely identified itself with the tradition beginning with Plato and Isocrates and developed by Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant—all of whom treat the self as a moral, metaphysical, and, ultimately, theological category (rather than as a function or effect of verbal behavior). (ibid.)

What is more, questions can be raised about the pragmatic approach to ethos, which is said to be “quintessentially a linguistic phenomenon” (ibid., xxiii), as it never gives up in its own categories the notion of selfhood—how to bring up the individual appeal of a presenter is still the central concern of the pragmatic ethos. If the Platonic ethos is the projection of self through philosophy (i.e., concerned about essence), then the Pragmatic, or Aristotelian, ethos is largely the projection of self through language (i.e., concerned about appearances). That is, discourse has now become an instrument in creating one’s ethos or image. So, no matter how we look at the traditional definition of ethos, it has always been seen as “the appeal of speakers or writers to their own credibility and character” (Covino and Jolliffe, 1995, p. 52), be it the Platonic or the pragmatic.
It comes as no surprise then that two different versions of corporate imagery have existed in the literature of corporate communication. One version, says Marchand (1998), embraces a mode of business practice that "favored a 'stick-to-business' attitude: a serious, 'masculine,' production-oriented, sense of independence"; the other version features a mode that "employed new, more 'feminine,' practices, consciously catering to public opinion, adopting show-business techniques of display and publicity, and institutionalizing welfare and public relations programs" (p. 4).

The first version can be traced back to the tradition of Platonic ethos as discussed earlier, in the sense that it seeks to define some sort of essence within corporations in order to create a "sense of independence" for them. The quests for a "corporate soul," as some may have called (Marchand, 1998; Kunde, 2000), indicate the historical impact on building a corporate image based on the notion of an independent corporate self. The second version of corporate imagery, which recalls the "dramatic" manipulations of a presenter's personal character as implied in the concept of social self, is similar to the pragmatic approach to ethos in communication theory. A good example would be Aaker's (1999) "malleable self," a concept she proposes for developing persuasive marketing strategies in expanding a corporation's image.

While the pragmatic approach to corporate imagery has been on the rise ever since the early decades of the twentieth century (Marchand, 1998), the essentialist ideal about corporate image never yields its ground. Indeed, there is an indication that it (i.e., the essentialist version) has regained its popularity in recent years among many of the corporate communication scholars and practitioners who are tired of
"soulless" corporate image. One way to fix "corporate soullessness" is, of course, "to project a distinct personality" (ibid., 8), which may explain why the word "personality" has been so frequently used in association with building corporate image or with assessment of image building (e.g., Kunde, 2000; Aaker, 1997; Davies, et al., 2001).

Whether the approach to the creation of a corporate image is essentialist, in the sense of looking for some sort of "character" (Goffee and Jones, 1998) or "spirit" (Kunde, 2000) within a corporation, or pragmatic, in the sense of making "the appropriate outward gesture" (Marchand, 1998, p. 362), what I see as one problematic issue here is that an approach of this sort has invariably centered on the presenter/corporation, instead of the audience/public.

For one thing, imagery to be created as such presupposes the notion of a corporate self, whether innate or socially constructed, which is indeed an expansion of an individual, personal self that was discussed earlier. Like what was said of the traditional ethos in communications, a corporate image, because of this notion of "corporate selfhood," is then, fundamentally, and also problematically, all about the "appeal" of corporations "to their own credibility and character," to borrow from Covino and Jolliffe (1995, p. 52). One might say that the pragmatic approach to corporate imagery is in a way "selfless" because it focuses on appearances, not on the substance of a "soul," but I would call this kind of image making as self-representation in that it is still aimed at creating appeals about corporations, with a purpose to influence stakeholders.

For another, an approach to corporate imagery focusing on the presenter/corporation denies the fundamental role the audience/public plays in
constructing a corporate image. Again, one might say this is simply not true, as the role of the audience/public in creating images has long been recognized in corporate communications: for example, the idea of formulating image building strategies based on the perception of stakeholders, etc., etc., but what I am trying to suggest here is not that the audience/public can impact the creation of a company’s image, which is undeniably true, but that the audience/public can directly determine the image projection of a company. To put it simply, a corporate image is created through, and out of, the audience/public. This is to demand that we must make a shift: from concentrating on building up the appeal of business corporations to identifying with the public to locate a corporate image.

I will further my argument in the following section drawing on those image ad campaigns launched by some of the U.S. companies after September 11th.

**Insights from the 9/11 Ads**

As we all have noticed, after the September 11th events, many U.S. companies have been cashing in on the rage of patriotism to advertise their corporate images, either directly or indirectly. For example, in one of the TV commercials by Boeing, viewers have seen none of the company’s state-of-the-art aircraft or rockets, but instead its salutation to the heroism of firefighters, police officers, relief workers, military soldiers, etc., accompanied by the Star-Spangled Banner anthem. The *Time* magazine included in its direct mail packages last fall a “new” and “unusual” gift for subscribers—a Liberty watch and U.S.A. Flag pin—as a “poignant reminder” of the nation’s “patriotism” and “heroism” (Fig. 4.1).
Even a small, unknown company in Maine, the Pinetree Garden Seeds, looks to show its patriotism by quoting a paragraph of a letter on its Web site from a German sympathizer, who is in “sad and helpless spirits”. The paragraph serves as part of the introductory remark on Pinetree Garden Seeds’ home page, but a closer reading reveals that it does not cohere thematically with the rest of the text, suggesting that it might just have been thrown in without being given much thought. This may also raise suspicion that some businesses have been engaging in exploiting the public mood.

Indeed, some of those post-9/11 ad campaigns are not without controversy at all. And perhaps the most controversial one is the recent “Helping the Victims’ Families” TV ad campaign by Cantor Fitzgerald, a stock and bond trading firm, which used to be headquartered in the World Trade Center. The ad features the terrible scene of collapsing WTC towers and tales of company employees who survived the disaster describing the loss of their coworkers. At one point, the ad says, “We want to make sure that these families can go on, and that’s why we are in
business today." The commercial has been criticized for "crossing the line" and "exploiting the 9/11 tragedy."4

While acknowledging the possibility that some businesses may have capitalized on the 9/11 events and the theme of patriotism/nationalism to make more money, I would also like to argue that the situation is not that simple, and that those "patriotic" ad campaigns should not be simply dismissed as "exploitative," as some may have suggested. The reason for me to make this argument is because the post-9/11 ads have provided fresh insights into how to build a corporate image (and a patriotic corporate image in this case): i.e., to identify with stakeholders or, more generally, with the audience/public. And the central purpose of this paper is to explore why such identification can translate into corporate imagery.

But at this point, I would like to point out two reasons for corporate image identification: One is that image making is very much constrained by what would be called "cultural scripts" (Colombo, Lisle, and Mano, 1997); the other is that a corporate image is essentially a projection of what is being expected by a society or community, not something that can be manipulated at will by the presenter.

The notion of "cultural scripts" was proposed by Colombo, et al., following Kluckholm’s "designs for living" (1960). It suggests that culture has created for us "a set of scripts" that specifies "many of our daily actions and activities and even many of our ideas and conversations" (Colombo, et al., 1997, p. 122). And extending from the notion, we may suggest further that people's perception of the world, including that of corporate imagery, has also been "culturally scripted," to borrow their words. In many ways, a corporation's image has already been preset, or embedded, in a culture where it is located. For instance, Cantor Fitzgerald's image today could
be quite different from that before September 11th. Today, it is a victim of terrorism, but before September 11th it could be any of those “greedy” Wall Street firms taking profits out of the stock market’s ups and downs.

With “cultural scripts” in mind, it might be easier to see why a corporate image is essentially a projection of what is being expected by society. This is because the image making of a corporation has to confine itself within the spectrum of available codes of appeals in a particular social and cultural environment. We may, again, turn to Cantor Fitzgerald’s controversial TV ad for insight. The idea of making more money ought to be perfectly legitimate (even in the moral sense) for a financial business like Cantor Fitzgerald, especially in a capitalist society, but it can strike a negative tone on its image projection, as some have already felt, given the cultural and political environment after September 11th. The reason is that 9/11 has catalyzed the change of codes of appeals in American society (at least for now): what was appealing before may turn out to be unacceptable now. So, in my view, the ad campaign could have been more effective if that “in business” line were dropped because it would make Cantor Fitzgerald’s image more or less in line with the post-9/11 social climate.

An advertisement anecdote cited by Weiss (1995), which tells how a Western airline company changed the theme of punctuality to hospitality for Arabic audiences to advertise its image, could be another example to illustrate the point that image making has to concur with codes of appeals that are culturally prescribed. In Arabic culture, punctuality does not have its usual appeal as it does in Western society. That is why an image campaign boasting of the airline’s punctual services did not work. So, in a way, corporations have to build up their images in
terms of what their audience wants to see, not in terms of what they would like to foster about themselves. As Weiss points out, “Audience is the grounding reality” (p. 417).

It goes without saying then that since September 11th, patriotism, nationalism, heroism, etc., have become dominant codes of appeals in American society. Logically, it makes perfect sense for us to see so many business corporations have rushed to cash in on these themes to have their images reflect on currently popular appeals.

**Corporate Image as Collective Ethos**

A more general way of describing American businesses cashing in on currently dominant codes of appeals would be what I have mentioned in the previous section—identification with the audience/public. Indeed, the strategy used by Boeing and other U.S. companies to appeal to the patriotic sentiment of the public in their image campaigns may rightly be called the strategy of "identification." That is, by invoking what the American public feels most strongly about at a historic moment, these companies are able to identify themselves with the pulse of the nation, therefore adding to their own ethos.

The idea of identification as a key “aspect” of rhetoric and communication comes originally from Kenneth Burke (1950), who states, in his *A Rhetoric of Motives*, that “identification ranges from the politician who, addressing an audience of farmers, says, ‘I was a farm boy myself,’ through the mysteries of social status, to the mystic’s devout identification with the source of all being” (p. xiv). Interpreted narrowly, identification opens a shared ground (e.g., shared interests) between the
presenter and audience, thus enabling the presenter to "establish rapport between himself and his audience" (p. 46). Interpreted broadly, identification points to the necessity for acknowledging, and attaining, "an ontology of the social, an ontology of collective being," to quote Biesecker (1997, p. 40). In short, Burke's "identification" iterates a persuasive strategy in communication, but, more significantly, it also tells us of an important goal implied in human communication: achieving the sense of collectivism or coming-together-ness.

When applied in projecting a corporation's image, the idea of identification would suggest that such projection should not be practiced, narrowly, as self-representation, or representation of a corporate self; rather, it should be seen as an initiation into making connections with the audience and public and, further, with society and culture. Indeed, what has been discussed in the previous section—cultural scripts and social expectations and codes of appeals based on the two notions—would dictate that we must go beyond the idea of self-representation to the ontology of culturally and socially shared perceptions in order to create an effective, up-to-the-time corporate image.

I do not wish to argue against using such assets as company history, reputation, brand name, product quality, etc., in launching an image campaign for a company, but my point is, it has to be incorporated with the aforementioned codes of appeals. For instance, Lockheed Martin certainly wouldn't advertise on its Web site the numerous fighter-jets and bombers it had manufactured and sold to the U.S. and other countries, which would be solid proof of its product quality, but instead we have seen it put in the spotlight "Airport Security," which Lockheed Martin was selected by government to help implement across the country (Fig. 2). Needless to
say, in doing so, Lockheed Martin has projected an image concurrent with the concerns of the American public. I would add that an image as such is, in essence, an image of identification.

In what follows, I will argue that corporate images made on the basis of identification, as seen in the post-9/11 ad campaigns by Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and many other corporations, can rightly be termed "collective ethos," for two obvious reasons: One is that such imagery is shared imagery; the other is that such imagery represents less of corporations and more of the public.

In Selame and Selame's (1988) *The Company Image*, there is an interesting chapter in it with the title of "The product is the package [original emphasis], not the product" (pp. 133–156). The gist of that chapter is, the product does not necessarily
distinguish itself; rather, it is the package that counts. For example, all the ice-cream cones or electric bulbs would look the same no matter what company, big or small, known or unknown, produces them. So, it is the package, the appearance, that makes a difference, hence the need to create uniqueness in package design to materialize the distinction, as the authors advocate.

To me, that chapter has raised many interesting questions, but the immediate one is: Since corporate image is also concerned about appearances (see earlier discussion about the pragmatic version of image), then do we have to create a unique image for a company to make it stand out? According to the Selames, the answer would be “yes.” However, if we take a look at those post-9/11 ad campaigns, an opposite answer could also be brought up, as those all companies are now competing for the same image projection: patriotic/nationalistic. The phenomenon deserves further in-depth research in the future, but at this juncture I just wish to point out the obvious: that the patriotic/nationalistic image is a shared image, and that companies that are competing to be cast in such imagery are indeed striving to be the same!

Shared corporate imagery could be seen as resulting from identification with the current of society on the part of presenters/corporations. I use the term “collective ethos” to refer to it not just because it is “shared,” but also because it points to the “ontology of the social” at work, an ontology that dictates, through codes of appeals, what is (or what is not) expected of a company in terms of its imagery. In other words, collective ethos imposes itself on us as a given, to be identified but not to be created or manipulated. The reason is simple: There is no such thing as fixed or essentialist that underpins the image of a corporation, to put it
from the poststructuralist point of view. Poststructuralism also denies the notion of self as understood in traditional Western ideology, which, I think, in a fundamental way rejects ethos or image as representation of an individual or corporate self.

Interestingly, Selame and Selame's argument seems to support my poststructuralist view. If the package is more important than the product, then they are really trying to say that the image does not have substance, or at least substance does not matter in image making. To me, this is an equivalent of saying that a company's image does not have to be bound by a "soul" within to substantiate itself. I might go too far to advocate a "soulless" corporate image (so please don't interpret me literally!), but what I am driving at is the necessity to reach out and define corporate image in the eyes of the public, and through the scripts of culture. Again, I would term such image as "collective ethos," because it is less about a particular, individual corporate self, more about a general, collective social Self.

A Poststructuralist Approach

There is probably no way to delineate a unified theory of poststructuralism because of the wide variety of perspectives having been attributed to this key theoretical movement behind what we call "postmodernism." However, we can be certain about two positions that poststructuralists, most notably Foucault, have been taking: the first is that poststructuralism rejects such concepts as subject, self, ego, individual, and agency, which have served as underpinnings of traditional Western ideology; the second, and related to the first, is that it stresses the role language plays in creating knowledge, power, and even reality and truth, all of which are now
taken as a function of discourse—institutionalized practices of representation that dictate what we can present and how we present it.

The rejection of subject, self, etc., by poststructuralism, would take away the philosophical basis from the notion of ethos as self-representation. The Panopticon, as is discussed extensively in Foucault's (1975) *Discipline and Punish*, may be interpreted as a metaphor referring to the "disciplinary mechanisms" (p. 209) of society that subject us rather than let us be subject. Put differently, we are who we are, not because of a determinate selfhood within, but because of the panoptic society without that keeps us under constant surveillance and discipline, structuring the way we present ourselves to others. Thus, from the poststructuralist point of view, ethos is just a reflection of such panoptic subjection, rather than a representation of an individual self, which is central to the traditional thinking of ethos.

The panoptic nature of corporate image can be illustrated by the fact that it (corporate image) is fluid, shifting, and always subject to the current of a social/cultural environment. Take for example Philip Morris, which in recent years has been trying to shift its image from a cigarette maker to a consumer-goods manufacturer with emphasis in the food business. (It has been reported that Philip Morris even planned to change the company name to "Altria" to better reflect its business position as a "global package-goods company."?) The campaign launched by Philip Morris to change its corporate image would, in my view, serve to attest to the "discipline" of our society, where cigarette smoking is no longer considered "cool."
The environment-friendly face that some of the energy companies have attempted to put on also bears testimony to the "panoptic machine" (p. 217): British Petroleum's corporate color (green), Exxon Mobil's "Save the Tiger" ad campaign, and Williams' dedication to bringing "exploration, production, and conservation" within "harmony," all can be seen as "disciplined" responses to the demands of an increasingly environment-conscious public. Little doubt the principle of panopticism applies to the aforementioned Cantor Fitzgerald as well. The reason its recent ad campaign has caused so much controversy is because it is out of character with a socio-political environment after September 11th, where, for obvious reasons, patriotism/nationalism has been reinstalled into society's disciplinary mechanism.

If language is so central to poststructuralism, it is because it constitutes the world that we know and understand. I take Foucault and other poststructuralists to mean that language should not be taken as a medium that only reflects what is being (re)presented; rather, it is integrated with what is (re)presented to us through the constraints of its signification such as those of metaphors and categories. In other words, the signifier is also the signified. What is suggested here is that language or text speaks itself—without the participation of author or subject, which, poststructuralists would argue, is a function of discourse. Foucault (1972) makes this clear in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where he states, "discourse is not the majestically unfolding of a thinking, knowing, and speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (p. 55).

When it comes to the matter of making corporate images, we probably don't have to dwell, literally, on the question whether or not the author/presenter is
“dead.” Rather, the focus should be on how to conceive corporate imagery as a discourse formation (p. 107) based upon the playing of signifiers. Philip Morris’ plan to change its company name to Altria would be a good example to show how variation of signifiers could impact a company’s image, despite the fact that the company itself will be the same. In the case of Boeing and other U.S. companies, the flag, the anthem, and the pictures of firefighters, relief workers, police officers, etc., as shown in their TV commercials, can all be treated as discourse signifiers, which translate into an image of patriotism given the cultural setting in America after September 11th.

Readers may have noticed that Foucault prefers to use the term discourse to distinguish from language as a linguistic system of representation. For Foucault, discourse is “a practice” (p. 46), “an event” (p. 229) characterized by “its ponderous, awesome materiality” (p. 216). One of the major contributions made by Foucault towards discourse theory is the emphasis he places in understanding language practice as institutionalized: i.e., discourse formations are made possible only when brought “under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations [that are] established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization” (p. 45). This is to say that practices of signification—from discourse production in general to corporate image making in particular—are essentially disciplined, and subject to the panoptic control of social institutions.10

It becomes clear, once again, that the projection of corporate images lies in identification because like any kind of discourse formation it has to go through a process of institutionalization (i.e., identifying with institutionally controlled and
regulated modes of signification) in order to be "approved" by a panoptic society.
Perhaps we can rephrase it: If corporate image and the way of presenting it, which is
by definition a discourse practice, are institutionalized, historically and culturally,
then the only thing the presenter can do is to identify: i.e., to find out under the grip
of society and institutions what can be presented and how it can be presented.

Conclusion

This paper is not meant to be a treatise on poststructuralism, nor is it intended to
discuss the philosophical question as to whether there is such a thing as "self" or
"no-self." Rather, the focus of this paper is to explore corporate image from a
social/cultural perspective, which could also be approached from the point of view
of poststructuralism. While I did not apply the word "poststructuralism"
throughout the paper, many statements were actually implied in the postmodernist
theory, such as those about collective ethos, cultural scripts, social expectations, and
codes of image appeals, etc.

The purpose of the paper is to initiate further discussion on the social and
cultural nature of corporate image, especially in the light of the post-9/11
environment, where we have seen the rush to patriotism/nationalism in corporate
America. The phenomenon can be seen as a good indication of culture and society’s
structuring impact on constructing corporate images. It also points to the need to
understand them as collective ethos. Instead of begging to be different or unique,
which dominates the conventional way of building up a company’s image, we have
now witnessed a sweeping change in the tactics adopted by those American
companies, which are now striving to share similar imagery. The change reveals a
cultural mandate on selecting new codes of appeals, but more importantly it also
signals a realization that image projection on the part of corporations has to go
beyond self-representation, towards the ideal of identification with society and
culture. For this reason, it is important to reject the traditional notions of self and
corporate self and their extended concepts such as "soul," "personality,"
"substance," etc.

Admittedly, there are also some questions that I cannot answer at this point.
For instance, if all the corporations share the same imagery, which is very likely
unrealistic, what would happen to stakeholders' preferences then? Also, if collective
identification determines the outcome of image projection, what should a company
do with those traditional variables like product quality and company history?
Perhaps a certain degree of balance has to be maintained between the collective
social side and individual business side of corporations. I would certainly like to see
more research and discussion on the questions. At this point, however, I remain
content with the argument that corporations must project their images as collective
ethos, which seems to have had less attention in the past.

Endnotes

4. See NBC's Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, reported by Anne Thompson on May 29, 2002.
5. One may say that the "mystic's devout identification with the source of all being," mentioned by Burke, does
not point to a "shared ground" between the presenter and audience, since identification of this nature must
exclude the latter. I would argue that identification as such must be culturally established as true, and be
acknowledged by the audience as believable even though the latter does not have access to the "source of all
being." In other words, we could still draw some common ground between the presenter and audience, such
as cultural heritage, religious belief, etc.
9. Foucault (1971) also says discourses can be treated as “ensembles of discursive events.” See The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language (p. 231).
10. One can make an argument that social institutions are also relying on discourses or discourse formations to assert their power and authority. Foucault (1976) implies this when he says, in The History of Sexuality, “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (p. 100). However, since the central topic of this paper is not about Foucault’s poststructuralism, I’d rather not discuss further how discourses and social institutions are mutually defining.

References


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