

# **TRAIN THE TUTOR: English as a Second Language (ESL) WORKSHOPS**

**Strengthening resources for Chinese international students, their university instructors, writing center consultants and peer tutors.**

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# Part I:

## Purpose, objectives & mission

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- **Purpose(s):** 1) To support peer tutors, writing consultants (and writing faculty) as they encounter a growing Chinese student population on campus, understanding that they often share common language acquisition challenges. 2) To help them understand the trends in international enrollment which contribute to growing Chinese populations on US campuses.
- **Workshop objectives and outcomes:**
  - Peer tutors, writing consultants, and faculty will learn about the differences in education systems and educational preparation between the US and China in order to better understand this population's language challenges and acculturation needs.
  - The university community will acknowledge that educational and cultural differences play a role in problems associated with academic writing.
  - Those on the "front lines" will learn approaches that can assist ESL students with academic writing.
  - These persons will be able to identify common skill area challenges so they can anticipate and predict -- and ultimately help -- students of other languages become self-corrective, self-sufficient, and more proficient writers of English.
- **Mission**
  - Training sessions provide student-centered learning by intentionally focusing on ESL needs of international students. These sessions will contribute to the social growth of students by building cultural bridges. Tutoring students from other countries nurtures a better understanding of cultures and prepares students to lead and serve as global citizens.

# International student enrollment “fast facts”:

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- International recruiting/joint partnerships are a worldwide trend:
  - According to Open Doors (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>), international enrollment in is 2009 at all-time high:
    - **Total foreign student numbers increased 8% in 2008/09; all-time high: 671,616**
    - **New enrollments up by 16% nationwide; up 8.1% in Michigan**
    - **Largest percentage increase in international enrollments since 1980**
    - **China second leading sending country; up by 21%: total of 98,510**
    - **Business and Management, Engineering remain top fields of study**
    - **Net contribution to US economy: \$15.543 billion; \$5.25 million in Michigan.** See Open Doors report for international student enrollment’s contributions to your state’s economy.
  - [INSERT your university’s international student enrollment numbers here.]

# Recruiting in China – students and institutions benefit

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## Student's Standpoint

- Supply & demand
  - ▣ More high school graduates than available seats in China
    - 20.21 million college students
    - 24.76 million secondary graduates
      - What about the remaining 4.55 million?
  - ▣ Some students can afford to study abroad during this period of “economic miracles”
- Other reasons
  - ▣ Improve career choices, quality of life
  - ▣ Improve second language
  - ▣ Become globally competitive
  - ▣ Provides options for those who want to bypass national entrance exam or who fail the national exam

## Institution's Standpoint

- Supply & demand
  - In US:
    - ▣ Increases enrollment & revenue
    - ▣ Internationalizes campuses
  - In China:

Joint degree programs offer opportunities to create innovative educational models.

**Goal: Global Competition**

**Now 2<sup>nd</sup> to US, China's scientific research productivity on track to be highest in the world.** (Blum 2010)

# Joint degree programs – benefits and potential pitfalls

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## Benefits

- ▣ Speeds up education reform in China
- ▣ Mutual benefits – offsets supply and demand
- ▣ Increases enrollment and revenue at partner institutes
- ▣ Helps internationalize campuses in US and China
- ▣ Improves foreign relations/diplomacy

## Perils & Pitfalls

### Growing concerns:

Lack of English language preparation in two key skill areas:

- ▣ academic writing
- ▣ listening comprehension

Potential for academic fraud:

- ▣ Recent cases of agents in China misrepresenting universities:
  - ▣ English language requirements
  - ▣ Price gouging (building in hidden fees)
- ▣ Cases of students falsifying credentials/bank statements, test scores
- ▣ Cases of widespread plagiarism – (see site listing of articles of academic fraud for recent examples).

# Student Snapshot: Chinese students today

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“Today’s Chinese students may challenge our assumptions about *who* they are and *how* they learn.”

Wang Yong,  
Professor of History  
Southwest University:  
July 2010 lecture.

- Influenced by China’s recent history:
  - Born after *Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution* ended (1966-89)
    - Characterized by educational “brain drain” due to lack of access to information and free thinking
  - Born during time of Reform & Opening (1978-present)
    - One-child policy imposed
    - Formal diplomatic relations with United States
    - Highly centralized education system whose Ministry of Education controls, plans, and supervises curriculum and policies, controls access to information, influences what historical incidents are covered in the curriculum (e.g. what information is written about *June 4<sup>th</sup> Incident*).
  - Educated during “Period of Economic Miracles” (present)
    - Education system now undergoing reform
    - Growing middle-class with access to capital
  - Will influence “China’s Peaceful Rise” (characterized by a harmonious society that will feature democracy and mutual respect).
    - Still influenced by a collectivist culture that values the group over the individual.
    - Are similar in many ways to US Millennials (technologically savvy, concerned about environment).
    - Are expected (by family) and encouraged (by gov’t) to return to China after completing college - reverse migration trend known as *hai gui* (*sea turtles*).
    - Will return to become upwardly/socially mobile, yet face 12% unemployment rate of new graduates.

# Bridging cultural gaps: Acknowledging culture's influences on learning

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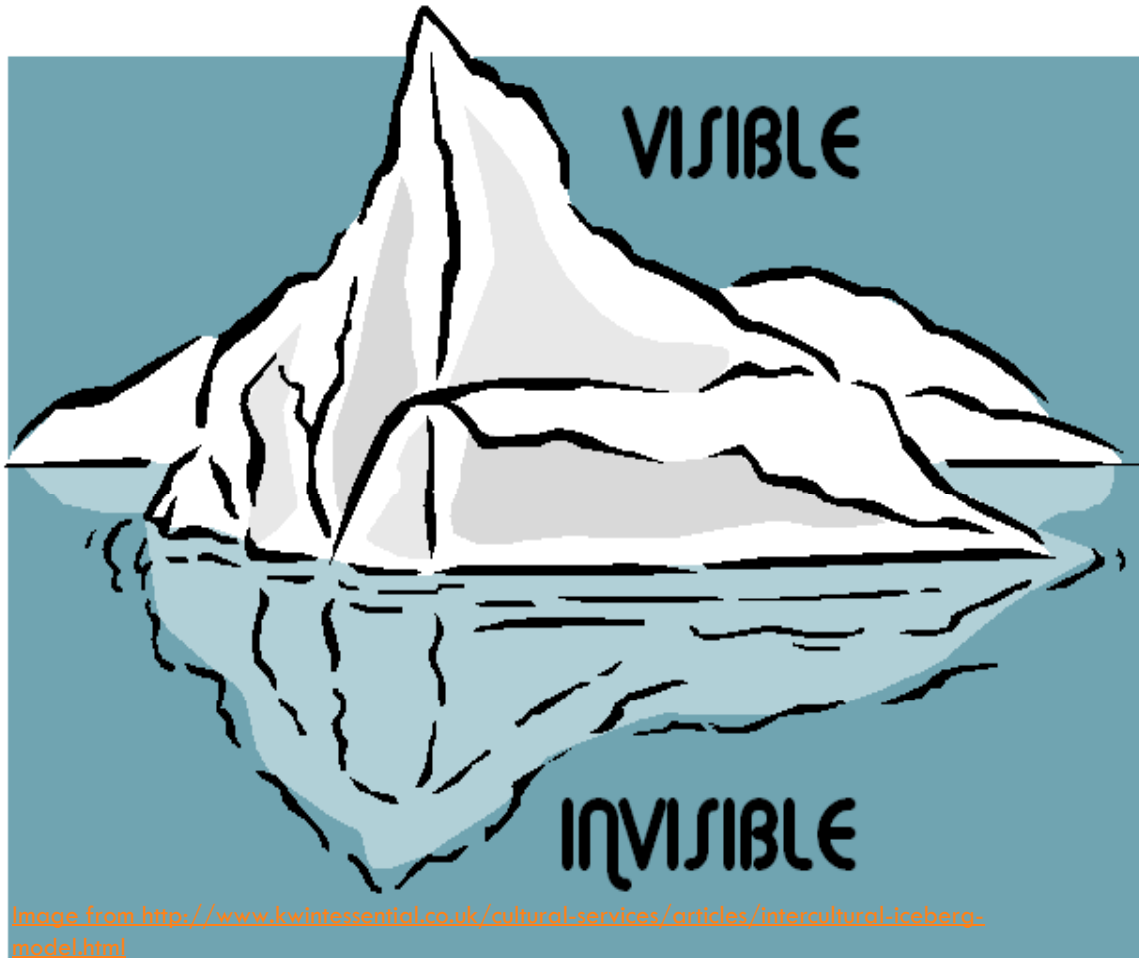
## The Iceberg Model:

Culture is like an iceberg: its influences in the classroom may be *invisible* to us.

Understanding what is beneath the surface helps us make sense of what we see above it.

VISIBLE = Errors made in academic writing

INVISIBLE = Cultural forces underneath that cause errors to occur.





# Identifying five common skill-area challenges

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## Reading

- Usually the best performance area
- Some decoding problems
  - ▣ adjusting to letters/words v. characters
  - ▣ information is “spread out” and words take longer to identify

## Speaking

- Pronunciation: speech & articulation issues
- Adjusting to new phonological structure
- Adjusting to inflections v. intonations
- Lack of practice in L2 discourse community
- Limited academic vocabulary/terminology

## Listening comprehension

- Adjusting to regional dialect & pronunciation
- Adjusting to rapidity of speech and use of slang
- Difficulty with word recognition
- Absorbing academic terminology

## Writing (the focus of our workshops)

- **Differences in style and approach**
- **Underdeveloped writing:** students may not write their first serious research paper until freshman year of college.
- **Limited academic vocabulary**
- **Grammar**
- **Word order**
- **Punctuation, spelling**
- **Translation issues (electronic translator “crutch”)**
- **Interference (transfer) errors**

## Cultural competency

- **Integration, acculturation, adaptation**
- **Adjusting to classroom culture**
- **Understanding plagiarism policies (the many contexts that constitutes it)**

# Linking academic writing and classroom culture

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## Visible (Academic Writing)

- Academic Writing
  - ▣ Paper structure
  - ▣ Sentence cohesion
  - ▣ Global coherence
  - ▣ Grammar
  - ▣ Style
  - ▣ Use of idioms
  - ▣ Use of citations

## Invisible (Classroom Culture)

- Academic preparation
- Differences in classroom culture that shape:
  - ▣ Attitudes
  - ▣ Discourse patterns
  - ▣ Power distance (between student and teacher)
- Rules and traditions
- Values & beliefs
  - ▣ Spirit of sharing

# Addressing differences in academic preparation

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## Higher Ed – China

### MICROMANAGED

- Teacher-centered
  - ▣ Rote learning
  - ▣ Individual learning
  - ▣ Lecture-style
- Exam determines grade, (success, career)
- First serious research paper freshman year in college.
- Plagiarism policies that are not always enforced

## Higher Ed - US

### AUTONOMOUS

- Learner-centered
  - ▣ Critical thinking
  - ▣ Group participation
  - ▣ Socratic method
- Grade based on multiple factors
- Research papers throughout high school and college
- Enforced plagiarism policies

# Acknowledging differences in classroom culture

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## Chinese students

- ❑ Rarely (openly) challenge teachers/other students
- ❑ May let older students in a group project do all the work out of deference to authority
- ❑ May keep their questions to themselves/stay silent out of respect
- ❑ Rarely “jump into” the conversation
- ❑ May not be willing to disagree with Chinese politics in an open forum

## US students

- ❑ Often challenge teachers
- ❑ Familiar with group and individual work
- ❑ Refer to personal experiences quite frequently
- ❑ Are comfortable jumping into the conversation, unafraid to ask “dumb” questions

# Understanding “cheating across cultures”

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In July 2010, Centenary College closed its joint degree programs with a Chinese university due to widespread plagiarism.

Susan Blum writes about this incident and other issues of academic integrity in her July 29, 2010 blog *The China Beat*. The article is entitled, "Wang Hui, Plagiarism, and the Great Bourgeois Academic Cultural Revolution."

- Reasons for “cheating across cultures”:
  - Western-style of citing sources is not universal.
  - Students have varied concepts of cheating, may not associate cheating with stealing of intellectual property.
  - Language barriers can prevent students from understanding plagiarism policies.
  - Students in some countries **do not write their first serious research paper until their first year in college**. Students may enter a US university without research writing experience, without understanding what constitutes plagiarism and knowledge of how to properly cite sources.
  - Students feel social pressure to succeed.
- Common cultural “excuses” for plagiarism:
  - “Spirit of Sharing!” Knowledge is not property of one individual. It is meant to be shared.
  - Repeating back verbatim is a sign of respect and a frequent practice in many cultures.
  - Group-dependent study, including paper writing, is a collectivist endeavor.
  - Helping each other in group work helps to build social networks.

# East Meets West: Comparing cultural conventions

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Yang Liu's infographic *East Meets West* is a representation of differences between eastern and western cultures.

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Ost trifft West (EAST MEETS  
WEST) by Yang Liu  
Hermann-Schmidt-Verlag  
Mainz 2007, 7th print



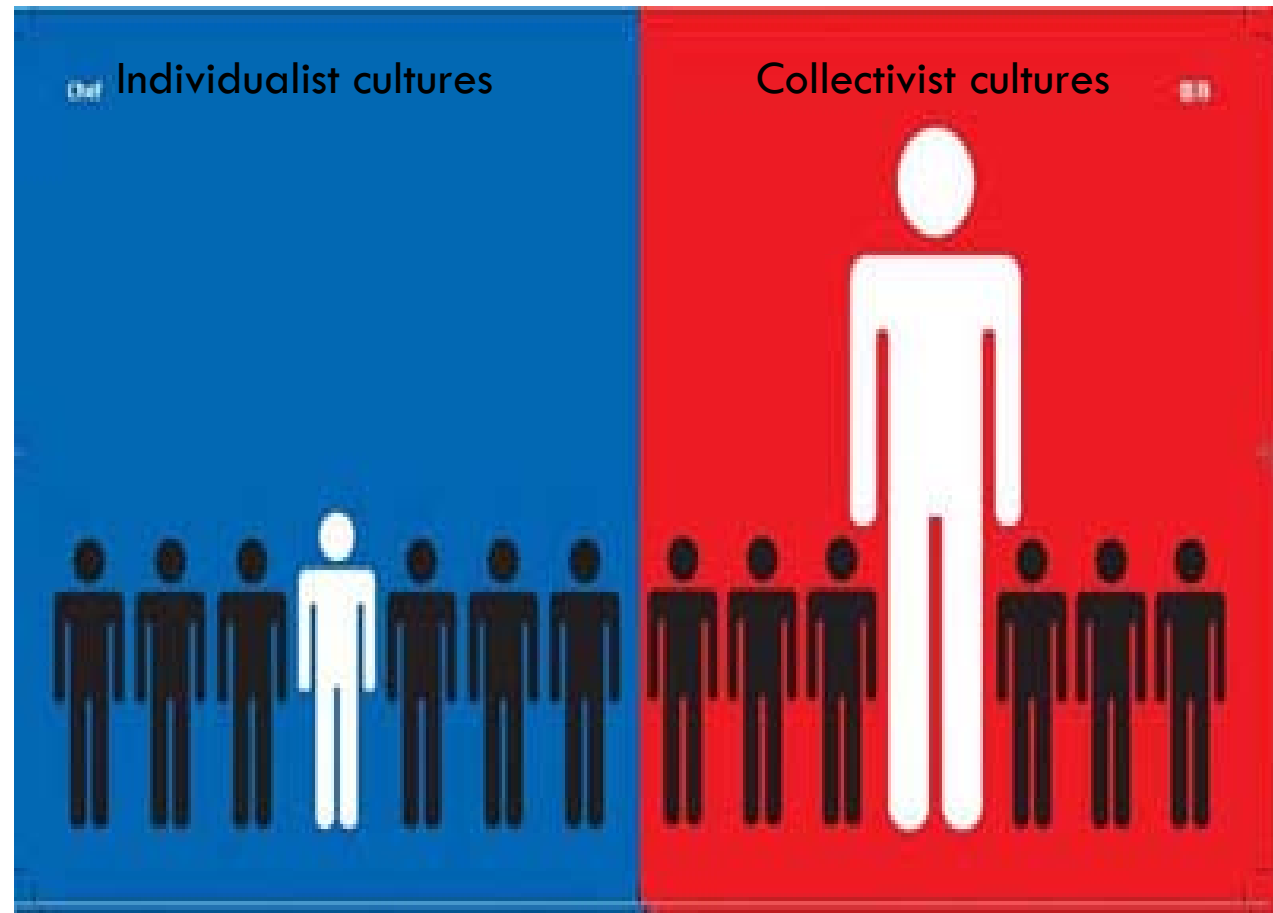
# THE BOSS

(IMPACT: demonstrates power distance between student and teacher)

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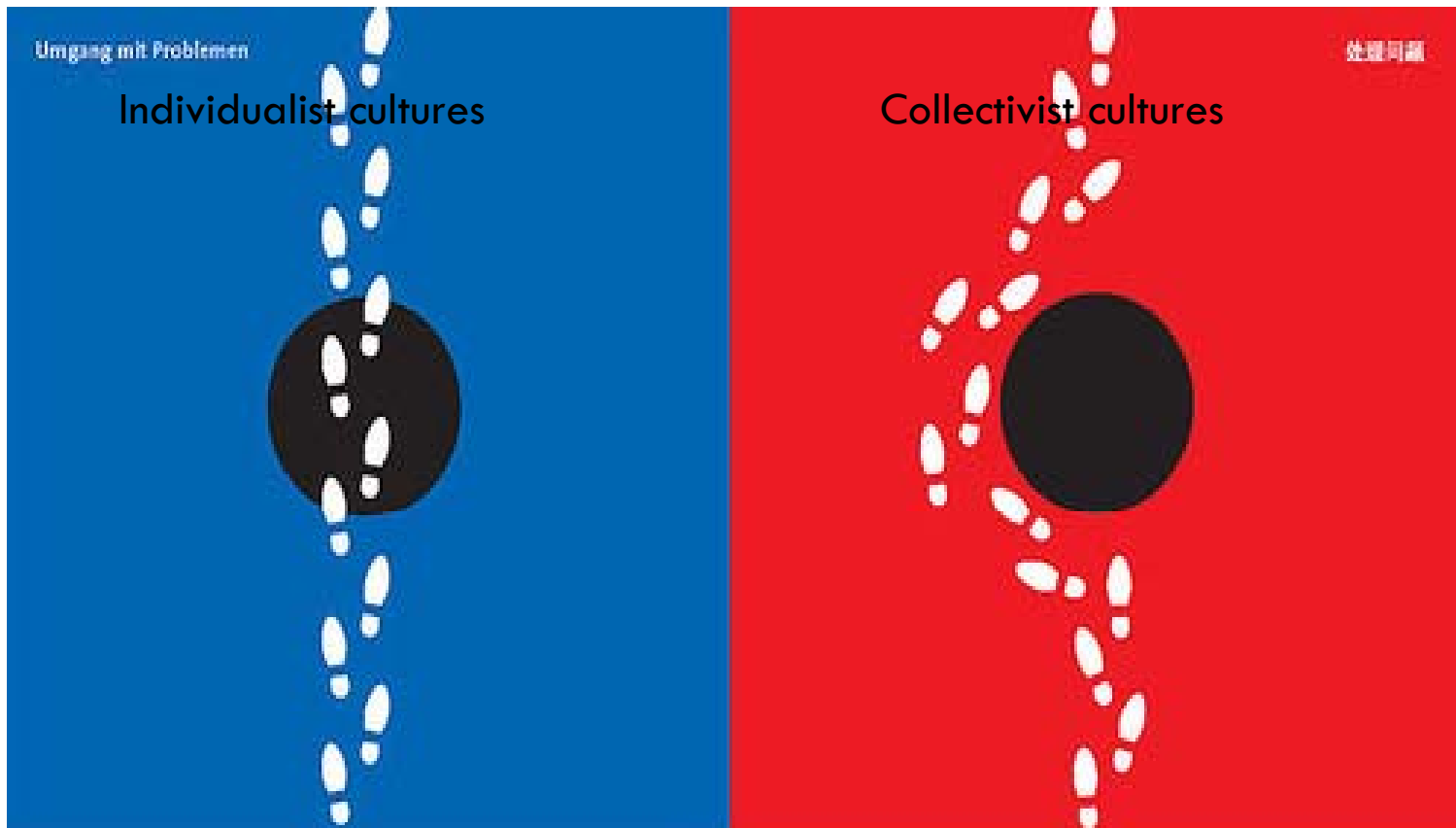
I have obtained the author's permission to use these three selected infographs as a springboard to explore the differences in classroom culture and writing between US & Chinese students.

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# PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

(IMPACT = addresses classroom behavior and academic writing)



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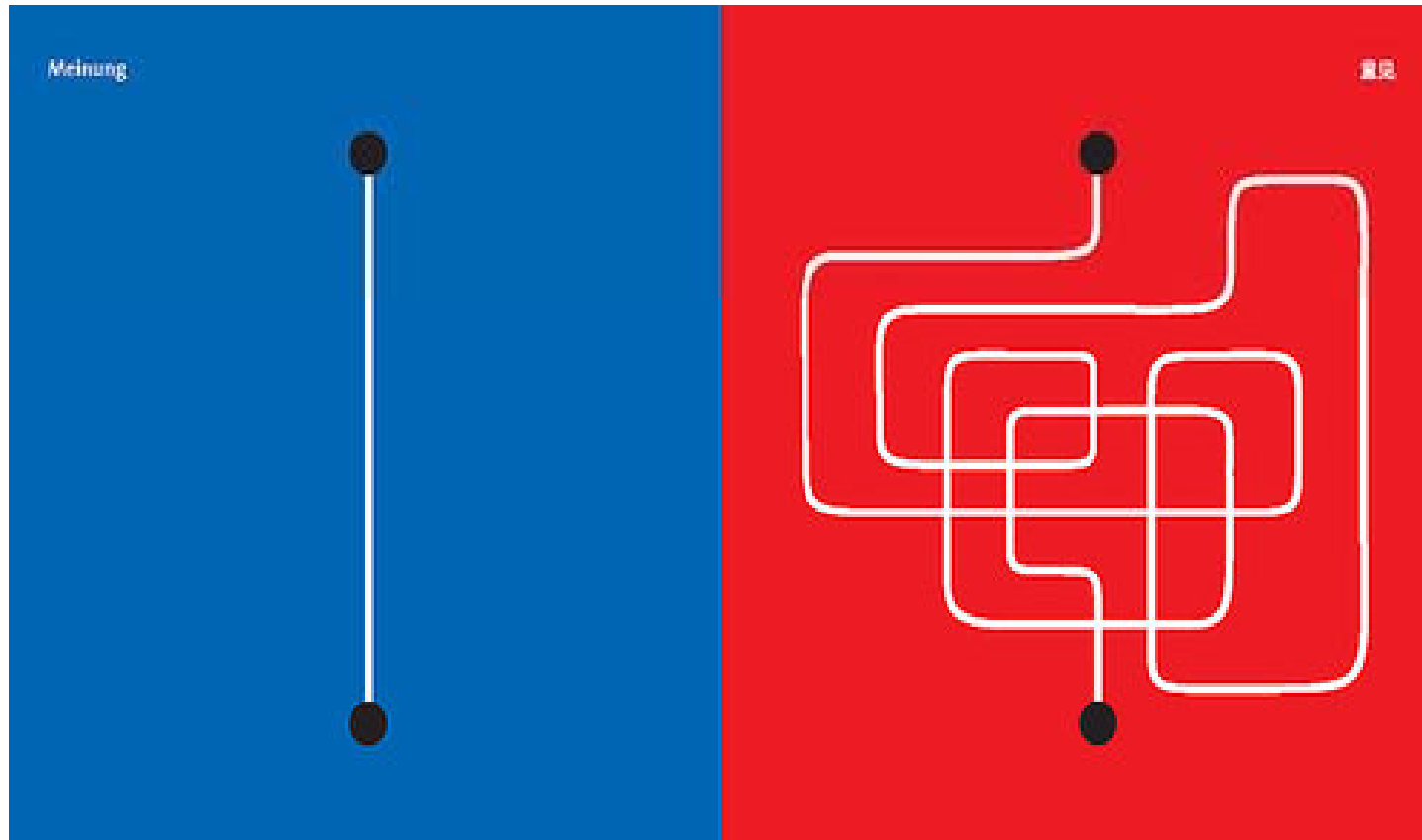
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# COMPLEXITY OF SELF-EXPRESSION

(IMPACT = classroom behavior & academic writing)



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# Writing around the world – how culture affects writing

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Table 1.1: High altitude differences between writer responsibility and reader responsibility.

## Reader Responsible

- ❑ Flowery
- ❑ Ornate
- ❑ Subject-oriented
- ❑ Theoretical
- ❑ Quasi-inductive

## Writer Responsible

- ❑ Clear
- ❑ Concise
- ❑ Action-oriented
- ❑ Practical
- ❑ Deductive

Table 1.1: McCool, M. (2009). *Writing Around the World: A guide to writing across cultures*. N.Y. Continuum. p.2

# Writing Around the World - differences in style

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## Eastern style

- Writing tends to be ***indirect***
  - ▣ Uses passive voice
  - ▣ Can be circular
- Uses *pathos* (emotional appeal)
  - ▣ May resist personal arguments
  - ▣ May be puzzled by tasks that ask for personal opinion, esp. regarding politics

## Western style

- Writing tends to be ***direct***
- Uses active voice
- Uses *logos* (logic) in order to persuade:
  - ▣ Thesis statement
  - ▣ Evidence
  - ▣ Evidence
  - ▣ Evidence

McCool, M. (2009). Writing Around the World: A guide to writing across cultures. N.Y. Continuum. p.2

# Learner English: Understanding L1's influence on the English language learner

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“Interference (or transfer) mistakes are directly related to the student’s mother tongue, most evident in pronunciation. But, all aspects of language use are also likely to carry a mother tongue ‘accent’.”

Swan & Smith (2010). Learner English.

- A student’s first language influences their use of English in many ways, according to Swan & Smith:
- Interlingual & intralingual errors
  - Language systems may not have equivalent features or structures (e.g. Chinese lacks an article system).
  - Words may not have equivalences when translated; therefore, direct translations are not always possible.
- Interference (transfer errors)
  - Those common mistakes that interfere with the L2 speaker’s ability to communicate in English. Interference leads to words and ideas being “lost in translation”.
  - Transfer (interference) mistakes most often occur when toggling between languages w/similar structures (e.g. German & English). These errors are caused by **interference** of L1 and inadequate understanding, and, therefore, application of grammatical rules of L2 (English).
  - However, speakers of languages **unrelated** to English (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Russian) often encounter structural difficulties, as well

# Anticipating common writing errors

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## Common English mistakes made by native Chinese speakers.

by Philip Guo  
(philip@pgbovine.net)

<http://www.stanford.edu/~pgbovine/chinese-english-mistakes.htm>

According to Philip Guo, Chinese writers are prone to making these common mistakes when writing. Go to his website to review examples of these errors.

<http://www.stanford.edu/~pgbovine/chinese-english-mistakes.htm>

- ❑ **Gender confusion**
- ❑ **Singular/plural noun confusion**
- ❑ **Subject-verb agreement confusion**
- ❑ **Verb tense confusion**
- ❑ **Omitting or inserting articles**
- ❑ **Confusing prepositions**
- ❑ **Mixing up first and last names**
- ❑ **Combining multiple mistakes**

# Learning the etiology of the mistake

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“One wants to get beyond the amusement and find out what caused the problem in the first place.”

Victor Mair, Professor of Chinese Language & Literature, University of Pennsylvania as quoted in forward to [Chinglish: Speaking in Tongues](#).

- Inferior translation software
- English uses an alphabet. Chinese uses pictographs (ideograms) that are non-alphabetic. Visual decoding is an issue b/c information is “spread out” and words take longer to identify.
- Memorization v. practice
- Shifting from lower to higher order taxonomies
  - ▣ Mainly due to students’ lack of practical experience in evaluating and analyzing and interpreting in the target language.
- Developmental errors
- Phonetics perception and carelessness

# TIP SHEET (p.1)

Things to keep in mind when working with ESL students:

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- 1) **Speak slowly. Speak clearly.** This may be the most useful, instantly effective tactic you can use!
- 2) **If a student doesn't seem to recognize a word, write it down** so they can see the spelling.
- 3) **Many students with prior English experience may have learned British English.**  
Pronunciation of some vowel sounds may reflect this. Likewise, they may not understand all American English idioms. Ask your student's experience with English and which form of English – American or British – he/she's studied.
- 4) **Try to put students at ease.** Nervousness about pronunciation issues or limited ability with English will distract both of you.
- 5) **Some may not ask questions even when they clearly should.** Don't hesitate to test your student's comprehension of your work or discussion. This can be done quickly or unobtrusively by asking the student a quick question about some aspect of what they've been working on; see how well they recap and interpret for you.
- 6) **When testing comprehension, don't let your students simply quote your own words back to you.** Ask them to offer their interpretations using different vocabulary to show they grasp the discussion. If they're not understanding you, you need to know; such gaps will likely show here.

# TIP SHEET (p.2). How writing consultants can help. Focus on *high order elements* first.

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## High Order Elements

- title
- introduction
- thesis statement
- topic sentences
- coherence
- organization
- development
- transitions
- conclusions

## Low Order Elements

- grammar
- syntax
- capitalization
- punctuation
- spelling
- format



# Part II: Breakout session

## Anticipating writing errors/helping students self-correct

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### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pair off in teams of 2-3 persons to review the section on *Chinese Speakers* in *Learner English*.
2. Each team will be assigned a sub-section to review in detail (starting with *Orthography: reading and writing*, p. 313). Each team will record the differences (contained in their sub-sections), then will explain what they have learned about that particular sub-section with the other tutors. (20 minutes)
3. Teams will categorize these sub-sections into higher and lower order elements. Discuss which categories should be given priority during a 30-minute long tutoring session. (10 minutes)
4. Pair off to “role-play” a 30-minute long tutoring session. Center director distributes samples of students’ writing (*with names removed, if using authentic papers!*). Tutors will review papers with students, assess them for higher and lower order elements, and make recommendations accordingly. (30 minutes)

### REMINDERS

Remind tutors to do the following:

- Review the Tip Sheets (pp. 1-2)
- Remember to focus on higher, then lower-order elements.
- Review the common English mistakes made by Chinese speakers. (Visit Philip Guo’s website to view examples of common mistakes:

<http://www.stanford.edu/~pgbovine/chinese-english-mistakes.htm>)