Collectivism and Collective Ethos in Classical Chinese Rhetoric

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The paper explores two aspects in classical Chinese rhetoric: collectivism and collective ethos. It looks closely at some of the key notions, like harmony, face, and *cheng-yan* (诚言) to show how the spirit of collectivism drives Chinese rhetoric on a path different from its Western counterpart, which is defined as an art of persuasion characteristic of personal endeavors.

Keywords: rhetoric, harmony, face, ethos, and *cheng-yan*

Rhetoric, defined by the Western tradition, is difficult, if not impossible, to match with an equivalent concept in Chinese. Its most popular term in Chinese is 修辞学 (*xiu-ci xue*; study of language embellishing), which, of course, does not tell much about the primary function of rhetoric as it is in the West. In my view, the seeming untranslatability of the concept into Chinese does not mean that rhetoric does not exist in Chinese society; rather, it underlies some profound differences between Western and Chinese rhetoric. In this paper, the author will focus on defining ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric by looking closely at some prevalent notions in Chinese culture, harmony, "face", and *cheng-yan* (sincere speech), and in doing so, attempting to show how traditional Chinese rhetoric differs from its Western counterpart.

The Notion of Harmony

It has become a commonplace that the primary function of rhetoric in China is harmony as opposed to persuasion, which largely defines Greco-Roman rhetoric (Oliver, 1995, p. 361; Matalene, 1985, p. 795; R. Scollan & S. W. Scollan, 1995, p. 142). During the pre-Qin period (722-221 B.C.), when classical Chinese rhetoric (CCR) was thriving, China was plagued by "dynastic decay" (Schwartz, 1989, p. 56) and "social chaos" (Lu, 1998, p. 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 history, it appears 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 礼 (*li*; ritual; rites), the observance of which, according to the Master, was "a sign of perfect social order" (De Bary, W., & Chan, 1990, p. 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:

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> *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.[1] (p. 13)

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.

Patterned Rhetoric

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 Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* and Confucius' *Analects*, which were compilations of works contributed to Lao Zi and Confucius by generations of their disciples. But "collective workmanship", as defined in this paper, also refers to the fact that the CCR practitioners would frequently write/speak like each other, modeling after what Schaberg describes as "patterned rhetoric" (2001, p. 13), in which a discourse presentation was structured in line with the "order" and "terms" of the "received language" (p. 30). For example, as Schaberg notices, the historiographical speeches recorded in 左传 (*Zuo Zhuan*; Zuo Commentaries) and 国语 (*Guo Yu*; Narratives of the States)[2] had in general followed a "patterned structure" (p. 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" (p. 43). While numerous exceptions could be cited, it is safe to 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, p. 361), and eloquence was viewed as conforming oneself to discourse rituals that had been collectively valued and culturally sanctioned. This contrasts sharply 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 (1985, p. 795).

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[1] The translation was originally from J. Legge's *The Chinese classics* (1971, vol. 5, p. 704) but was revised by Leo Chang and Yu Feng in their *The four political treatises of the Yellow Emperor* (1998, p. 13).

[2] Early Chinese classics compiled by followers of Confucius. *Zuo Zhuan* expands, with exegetical comments, on *Chun Qiu* (Spring and Autumn), one of the Five Classics in the Confucian canon, which is a chronicle of historic events (during 722-479 B.C.) credited to the authorship of Confucius. *Guo Yu*, a collection of anecdotes, also with exegesis, is widely regarded as a supplement to *Zuo Zhuan*.

The impact of "patterned rhetoric" on 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.[3] 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 examinations (Lee, 1985, p. 154). However, according to Jin Ke-Mu (1994), 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 (pp. 129-47), which were also decreed by the state to be the exclusive content of the test. I am not here to weigh the pros and cons of *ba-gu*, but just wish to say that the essay 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, 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 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" (p. 800).[4] 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" (p. 801). These traits, the author 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*.

Westerner readers may be struck by the uniformity of languages and structures used in official documents in China, which could prompt one to wonder whether or not the Chinese are engaging in "empty talk". The author 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. The author will further discuss "patterned rhetoric" in relation to language ritualization later in the paper, when exploring Confucius' "rectification of names". For now, it is worth pointing 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 (p. 801), can be taken as an exhibition of what the author would refer to as "collective ethos", in that it shows how Chinese writers/speakers create their authoritative appeals (i.e., ethos) by engaging in "received", or culturally established, discourse practices. Some postmodern rhetorical theorists, like Hollaron (1975), would define ethos as culture-bound, built up on the "orator's mastery of the cultural heritage" (p. 621). Apparently, they should be able to find numerous examples for support in Chinese rhetoric because of the way ethos is created. The uniformity of official documents, as mentioned earlier, 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 (ethos) through the continual use of languages and structures that are commonly shared, as a cultural heritage, among Chinese communication practitioners.

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[3] 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, 1963, pp. vii-viii). But according to Max Weber (1963), the "first traces of the examination system seem to emerge about the time of Confucius" (p. 59).

[4] 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 (*xiao-bi*); (6) middle exposition (*zhong-bi*); (7) final exposition (*hou-bi*); and (8) conclusion (*shou*).

The Burkean Definition

In practical terms, the "Chinese way" of using set, or received, language phrases or 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 rhetoric, may be called "good will", one of the three means identified by Aristotle that a rhetor can use to secure trust, therefore ethos. However, the term "identification", as initiated by Kenneth Burke (1950), may be a more appropriate application in describing 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" (p. 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" (p. 20), the "condition of possibility for collective action" among humans (Biesecker, 1997, p. 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*. (p. 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: i.e., 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" (p. 274). We will have to skip those passages in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that explain how Burke has reached that conclusion, but what is significant 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, 1997, p. 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, 1989, p. 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 millenniums 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, whose projection 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. Ethos as such can be called "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, 1989, p. 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, the collectivist aspect of ethos in CCR will be discussed in more detail with focus on what appears to be the defining concepts of Chinese rhetoric: namely, face and *cheng-yan* (诚言). The discussion will be devoted to the following sections: (1) ethos in Chinese rhetoric; (2) face as a rhetorical strategy; (3) the definition of the situation and Confucius' *li*; (4) the definition of the Other versus self-projection; (5) the Confucian ideal of good rhetoric; and (6) the performative function of language. Hopefully, the discussion would be able to shed some fresh insights into traditional Chinese rhetoric.

Ethos in Traditional Chinese Rhetoric

Speaking of ethos, we may also 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 (1994), a scholar on ancient Chinese thought, cites several CCR cases that involved the use of *lian-ming* (clean reputation) (p. 93), *hui-ren* (affection toward people) (pp. 98-111), and *cheng-xin* (trust and truthfulness) (pp. 112-19), which, we can see, are all reminiscent of Aristotelian ethos. And in the *Four Texts of the Yellow Emperor*, *xin* (trust), as a moral principle, had even been linked to "*li-ming*", the establishing of the Mandate of Heaven[5]: "The Yellow Ancestor,[6] 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".[7]

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".[8] In the first place, the statement by Confucius can be taken as an advocacy for a moral principle, but the suasory 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".

Face as a Rhetorical Strategy

In the author's view, the closest in meaning to the term ethos would be the concept of face (*mian-zi*) in

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[5] The Mandate of Heaven can be interpreted as the ultimate ethos for a ruling Chinese king or emperor.
[6] The Yellow Emperor.
[7] 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 (p. 145).
[8] My Translation, based on the original Chinese version in *The Complete Four Books and Five Classics with Annotations*, edited by Han Lu et al. (1995). See Section XIII, *Lun-Yu* (p. 123).

Chinese culture. For one thing, the concept is about one's image as perceived by others (R. Scollan & S. W. Scollan, 1995, p. 35), something also associated with Aristotle's ethos (Golden & Corbett, 1990, pp. 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 (2000), the concept embraces "the Confucian value placed on honor, pride, and achievement" (p. 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 Hanfei Zi (280-233 B.C.), a rhetorical, and social/political, theorist in pre-Qin China (*ibid.*). While Hanfei 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" (pp. 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 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.[9] (p. 380)

At first glance, what Hanfei 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, 2000, pp. 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, Hanfei Zi's "face saving" was meant to make the audience, not the rhetor, look good.[10]

One may argue that Hanfei 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 Hanfei 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 & Jolliffe, 1995, p. 52), does not appear to fit with the Chinese concept of ethos (i.e., face), which concentrates more on an audience when used as a rhetorical strategy.

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 (1994) would argue, in the

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[9] From *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*, edited by Convino and Jolliffe (1995, p. 380).
[10] 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.

"coherence" (p. 9) and "stability" (p. 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 (1959) in his *Preservation of Self* (p. 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).[11] 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 by judgements and evidence conveyed by other participants" (Goffman, 1967, p. 6) before it can be established.

"Face", says Goffman, "is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1967, p. 5). If we 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, 1990, p. 40), whereas in an individualistic society, where competition takes priority, it might work better for people to present their face as "independent agents" (Samovar & Porter, 1995, p. 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 (R. Scollan & S. W. Scollan, 1995, pp. 36-49), but it also bears 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 that was made earlier.

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, 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.[12]

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

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[11] For more information on the subject, see Chapter 1, "Performances", in Goffman's *Preservation of Self* (pp. 17-76).

[12] From *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2001, p. 27).

one interacts with other people, could impact the way one presents one's social image. Thus, his changing behavior and 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 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, 1989, p. 11), which the author 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, 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".[13] His 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 (1959) "definition of the situation", which views the presentation of one's self as being defined "from the point of view of social interaction" (p. 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 Roetz (1993) points out, "the rules of well-mannered social intercourse are themselves part of his message" (p. 92). We may use Goffman's "impression management" (p. 208) to describe the "rituals" involved when one presents oneself in relation to other interacting partners, but 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.

Western ethos, points out J. Baumlin and T. Baumlin (1994), is projected through the "identification of a speaker with/in his or her speech" (p. xi), which the author 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.

The Definition of the Other Versus Self-projection

The author 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, 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 has just been discussed, would have de-emphasized self-projection for the sake of "ritual propriety" (Ivanhoe, 2000, p. xi), deemed

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[13] From *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Ivanhoe and Van Norden (28-29).

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 the author has argued, underpins Western ethos.

As mentioned earlier, 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.

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* (p. 175). The word could mean "honest talk," "genuine discourse", or, using Lu's own translation, "sincere speech" (*ibid*.). American scholar Kennedy (1998) argues that the "moral rightness of the message" among others would constitute Chinese ethos in classical texts (p. 151), a point that resonates with Lu's *cheng-yan* in my opinion. And Lu writes:

> In his work, Mencius[14] highlighted the persuasive power of cheng yan, claiming, "There has never been a case when total sincerity cannot move others. Without sincerity, one cannot move others". 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. (p. 175)

It would be a little stretching to suggest that *cheng-yan*, taken as an indication of one's "innate moral quality", matches Aristotle's notion of ethos, which, we all know, is regarded as a mode of artistic proof (i.e., rhetorical creation) in Aristotelian rhetoric (Kennedy, 1980, p. 68), but because of the ethical dimension it points to, *cheng-yan* could be the closest shot 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, as pointed out earlier, 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

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[14] Mencius (390-305 B.C.) has been widely considered the second most important figure in the founding of Confucianism.

glory. Because sincerity helps one improve on virtue, rhetoric must be used to build that sincerity,[15] which, in turn, would pave the way to one's achievements".[16]

Roetz believes that "sincerity" has played "an important role in the Confucian concept of *rhetoric*" (p. 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,[17] "'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, the author believes, proves a significant point of distinction from utilitarian rhetoric as commonly practiced in the West.

Here the author is not suggesting 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.

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 project of "rectification of names", we may see the "performative function of language and its interdependence with social convention" (Graham, 1989, p. 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, 1983, p. 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" (J. Baumlin & T. Baumlin, 1994, p. xiii). Confucian thinkers, such as

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[15] "Rhetoric must be used to build that sincerity" comes from "*xiu-ci li qi cheng*" (修辞立其诚), which can also be translated as "rhetoric oriented towards trust".

[16] My translation, based on the original Chinese version in *The Complete Four Books and Five Classics with Annotations*, edited by Han Lu, et al. (See "Wen-Yan Zhuan", *Zhou Yi* (p. 439).

[17] Xun Zi (298-238 B.C.) is arguably the third most important figure in the founding of Confucianism.

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, 2000, pp. 103-34).

Cheng-yan, for its appeal to language, has thus 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" (p. xvii). And I would 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.

Conclusion

This paper discusses Chinese ethos as collective ethos, with an in-depth look at "face" and "*cheng-yan*", two defining concepts 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" (J. Baumlin & T. Baumlin, 1994, p. 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 author has no intention to claim that all the explanations about collective ethos in classical Chinese rhetoric have been exhausted. Rather, the investigation is far from over; there is much more to do in research and scholarship about the collective nature of Chinese ethos and, in general, Chinese rhetoric. For example, the idea of self-cultivation by Confucius 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 could 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 in the beginning, of "patterned rhetoric" in classical Chinese texts, is also a subject worthy of further investigations—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 appears of interest is the question whether the patterned rhetoric mentioned here would also translate into a consciousness of collective ethos with the mainstream Western rhetoric. 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 stated by Harris after Halloran (1993, p. 125).

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