3 The Intersection Between Intercultural Communication and Comparative Rhetoric Studies

A Review and Case Studies

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1. Rhetoric and Intercultural Communication: A Review

Many intercultural communication studies have shown that rhetoric is an explicitly cultural activity rooted in cultural values, practices, and premises (e.g. Philipsen; Wills; Xiao). Robert Shuter makes it clear that “culture and rhetoric are inseparable – A critique of discourse is a critique of the culture that produced it” (Shuter 12). In this sense, culture provides the backdrop and schema for the enactment of rhetoric. Rhetoric is a means through which a culture or tradition is mirrored and manifested, and cultural traditions have great power to influence speech, modes of argument, persuasive strategies, and the use of rhetorical discourse. Through studying rhetoric comparatively and in connection with cultural history and contexts, we can achieve a better understanding of other cultures while reflecting our own cultural values and enrich our own rhetorical repertoires. As Hacking (2013) puts it succinctly: “every society will have its own modes of arguing, appropriate forms of words and considerations which are part of growing up in that group” (424). In his 1998 pioneering book Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction, George Kennedy introduces to the readers a few non-Western rhetorical traditions and defines comparative rhetoric as “the cross-cultural study of rhetorical traditions as they exist or have existed in different societies around the world” (1). All in all, it is evident that the studies of comparative rhetoric have illuminated the similarities and difference in cultural values and rhetorical practices simultaneously. Moreover, these studies have facilitated a global understanding and intercultural communication. I have divided these studies into four areas: (1) using indigenous concepts, (2) examining rhetoric based on cultural values, (3) providing data for cultural similarities and differences, and (4) contemporary rhetoric and international communication.

1.1 Using Indigenous Concepts

Rhetoric has been studied as part of the Western intellectual history based on the Aristotelian model of persuasion, which accentuated the values of discovering truth, audience adaptation, arguing from both sides, and self-defense as the ultimate goal (Aristotle). The Greco-Roman tradition views rhetoric as war – the opponent has to be defeated by a clear winner. For a long time, this Western approach to rhetoric has been a dominant force in the study of rhetoric – rhetoric originated from other traditions has been disregarded and cultural variations of rhetorical concepts and practices have been ignored. Fortunately, in the past decades, there has been a surge of scholarly works on comparative rhetoric and argumentation addressing various rhetorical traditions in an attempt to interrogate the Eurocentric domination of rhetorical studies. Progress has been made in recognizing and studying rhetoric on its own terms (e.g. Demo; Garrett 2012; Lipson and Binkley; Lu 1998; Mao). This increasing body of studies has explored a wide range of rhetorical concepts and practices based on respective
cultural values and traditions. However, the task of linking rhetoric to culture is challenging as it usually requires the researcher’s ability to understand and translate the language of said culture. Over time, we have seen a number of comparative rhetorical studies using indigenous concepts rather than English translations. For example, Mary Garrett’s (1991) first use of Chinese term *wen*, from China’s literary tradition. Further, Keith Lloyd’s (2013) article on India’s rhetorical concept of Nyaya offers the reader a new perspective on the formation of debate among different religions through analogies, emphasizing the importance of bridge building rather than winning. Jon Sung-Gi’s (2002) use of several indigenous Korean terms to contextualize the concepts of Korean rhetoric transmitted from ancient China and Japan in ancient times – the term *susa* has three meanings: the first one is the context where *susa* refers to the human nature (or ethos), that is to say to the ethical or moral forming; the second is when it refers to both the form and content, to the relation with thoughts and feelings; and the last one has to do with the social function of rhetoric, especially the writing of international diplomatic documents in Korean tradition (318).

Iklim Goksel’s (2018) introduction of the concept of tevazu (humility) in Turkish rhetoric, as one of the fundamental qualities of good character, is premised on the idea that growth is possible only by first becoming small; and because the concern over a moral character in speech is crucial in Turkish daily life, tevazu is conceived as a required quality for a speaker. Another example of using indigenous concept for a cultural understanding is Chanon Adsanatham’s article “Bloody Rhetoric and Civic Unrest: Rhetorical Aims of Human Blood Splashing in the 2010 Thai Political Revolt.” In the article, Adsanatham (2018) introduces the concept of *kaya karma*, “a Sanskrit term referring to the intentional use of one’s body and physical actions to accomplish an aim in Theravada Buddhism” (272). The concept explained why the Red Shirts protesters used splashing blood and bodily acts to intensify patriotic sentiments and induce political change in their energetic marches against the Thai government. Adsanatham explained, *kaya karma*, as employed by the Red Shirts, “enables us to extend the trajectory of cross-cultural research and rhetorical theory to challenge power imbalances and hegemonic modes of knowledge” (288). These indigenous and non-Western concepts have pushed the boundaries of rhetorical traditions and expanded our understanding of different forms of rhetorical practices as rooted in various cultural contexts.

**1.2 Examining Rhetoric Based on Cultural Values**

Hugo Mercie (2013) argues that “The most commonly invoked factor to explain cross-cultural differences in argumentation is a difference in other cultural values” (407). Specifically, Mercie believes that “Cultural values can influence whole categories of arguments through an explicit route in which the explicit recognition that an argument belongs to a given category influences the way it is produced or evaluated” (407). One cannot understand how an argument is formulated and presented, whether it is effective or ineffective to a particular audience, without first digging into the culture’s logic structure and fundamental values. In his article “Values and Practices in Asian Argumentation,” Vernon Jensen (1992) delineated several Asian values, drawing largely from Indian and Chinese traditions, such as the balance between yin and yang, harmony, groupness, inner strength, and the power of moral character. All these cultural values have shaped the way Asians engage in arguments and choose rhetorical strategies. For example, Zhang et al. (2013) studied the differences between Chinese and American elementary students in their class essays – Chinese children expressed more concerns for others and the group while American children showed more individual concerns guided
by a respective set of moral principles and cultural norms. They conclude that Confucius’s teachings on morality and group harmony have impacted argumentation and still remain the core of China’s moral education today. “With its stress on respect for elders, discipline, and conformity to moral and social norms, Confucianism has a fundamental impact on Chinese pedagogy” (517). After examining a number of ancient Egyptian texts in the Old and Middle Kingdoms period, David Hutto (2002) contends that rhetorical principles of ancient Egyptians are a result of the conservative nature of cultural values at the time, where there is a strong emphasis on morality and truthfulness of the speaker in both public and private domains. This is the “aspect of Egyptian rhetoric that is most notable arises from the Egyptian cultural situation” (226). While eloquent speakers are valued, speaking modestly, respecting for others, and even keeping silent, are considered desirable qualities for a moral speaker. Such emphasis on the moral character of the speaker and arguments are found in the rhetorical traditions of China, Korea, Turkey, India as just reviewed. By comparison, Swearingen (2013) observes that “Western style agonistic argumentation continues to be regarded as blunt, rude, and divisive” (109).

1.3 Providing Data for Cultural Similarities and Differences

The study of comparative rhetoric has helped with the understanding of other cultures and intercultural communications in significant ways. For example, Keith Lloyd’s 2013 study on Nyāya rhetoric has provided an impressive account of both similarities and differences between ancient Indian rhetoric and Western rhetoric in content and approach. In particular, Lloyd’s study identified deliberative rhetoric revealed in Nyāya sutra that resembles ancient Greek deliberative rhetoric. G.E.R. Lloyd (2013) and my own studies (1998) on Chinese rhetoric compared Chinese concepts with Greek concepts on rhetoric and discovered both similarities and differences. Likewise, Xiaoye You (2006) found similarities between Greek’s concept of epideictic rhetoric with Confucius’s notion of li, or rituals in its cultural and rhetorical functions. Scott Stroud (2018) discovered elements of invitational rhetoric in Swami Vivekanda’s rhetorical practices. Further, Lewiński et al. (2018) compared Portuguese and Americans in the levels of interpersonal argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, personalization of conflict, and argument frames. They found that Portuguese argue more cooperatively and civilly, and are ultimately more sophisticated in their reflections about argumentation styles than Americans.

These sample studies have provided reflections and insights in regard to theoretical development, metamethodological issues in the study of comparative rhetoric, as well as comparisons between and among various cultures in their rhetorical practices. This line of research offers intercultural data and insight for building commonalities and appreciation for difference, linking rhetoric with culture in a practical way that addresses challenges and provides knowledge in intercultural communication.

1.4 Contemporary Rhetoric and International Communication

Comparative rhetoric should not be just limited to ancient texts or traditions. Many contemporary examples of political rhetoric from different cultures have traces in their own rhetorical traditions, as well as called upon by rhetorical exigencies and political expediencies. As rhetoric is public and political, political leaders in various nations use different types of rhetoric, as well as rhetoric that can appeal to the international audience in both content and form. In addition to explanatory accounts and conceptual analyses, comparative rhetorical studies have helped address real issues confronting the global community. We live in a world filled with tension and conflict that could be the result of historical animosity, ideological or
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relational differences, power relations, media bias, as well as diversity in rhetorical strategies and linguistic expressions. Relations between Israel and Palestine, China and Japan, Russia and the US are just a few of such troubling spots in the world. As rhetorical scholars, we can examine how rhetoric is used to define a situation and if the rhetorical strategy employed has aggravated or ameliorated the situation by respective nations and groups, and propose workable solutions through the rhetoric of peace. To better understand the process of intercultural communication, we can focus on comparing specific persuasive and rhetorical techniques employed in these international and domestic contexts as constrained or enabled by social, political, and economic factors. For example, Sang-Chul Lee and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1988) examined Korean president Roh Tae-woo’s 1988 inaugural address, identifying similarities to both Western ceremonial speech as well as Confucian influences, through the use of humble self-reference, combined with democratic ideology. In Lu’s 2011’s study, she analyzed the shift of rhetorical discourse on the US-China relations in the period of 1940s to 1990s from allies to ideological enemies to strategic partners. The Chinese official rhetoric in regard to the US demonstrated an interplay of moralistic and utilitarian orientations rooted in China’s rhetorical tradition. In their study of the rhetoric of post-Mao Chinese leaders, Lu and Simons (2006) examined how these leaders used transitional rhetoric to legitimize the economic reform while still paying homage to Chinese traditional values and Marxist/Maoist orthodox. Moreover, through a content analysis of speeches given at UN debates (at the annual General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly), Salma Ghanem and Barbara Speicher (2016) examined 30 speeches from six countries (Australia, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and the US from 1984–2012), finding that US speeches are more analogical and use more storytelling, metaphors, and quotes than Arabs while Arab speeches take a more quasi-logical approach by using more facts and statistics, and cause and effect reasoning. Arab speakers also tend to use more emotion, religious references, honorifics, and vague speech. This case of comparative discourse analysis shows the efforts of rhetorical accommodation to the Western style of communication in its use of facts and statistics, while also maintaining the rhetorical features of Arabic tradition, which I would call it “a hybrid rhetoric.” These contemporary rhetorical studies shed light on international communication in resolving domestic dilemmas, international negotiations, and foreign relations for reaching more mutually beneficial solutions to meet the global challenges.

2. Two Case Studies

2.1 Comparison Between Han Feizi and Aristotle

Born into an aristocratic family, Han Feizi (280–233 BCE) was a leading philosopher for the School of Legalism as well as an envoy from the state of Han. He was invited to the state of Qin to advise the king of Qin (who later became the first emperor of China) on politics and government. The Book of History records that “Han Fei was a habitual stutterer. Although he was not an eloquent speaker, he was a good writer” (Sima 899).

Han (the family name) lived in the Warring State period (475–221 BCE) during which China was divided into several individual states. Each state attempted to dominate other states through military invasion or strategic negotiations. Although public rhetoric was not commonly exercised in ancient China (Becker), philosophical debates and political consultations at the interpersonal level were evident in the Warring States period (e.g. Crump and Dreher; Fung; Garrett 1993; Kroll). The ruler of each state sought advice from a group of people known as you shui (traveling persuaders). The you shui “began to be known more for their rhetoric than for their philosophy”; each was “constantly an envoy and always using the talent for which he was first employed – persuasion” (Crump 8). In this case, most classical Chinese
philosophers also played the role of advisors of state rulers. The ruler had to be convinced that it was in their interest to pursue a given course of action on military, political, and personal issues. Accordingly, Chinese you shui had to be strategic in presenting their arguments and to pay special attention to how the ruler’s mind worked, especially the ruler’s psychology. Han Feizi’s works provided a blueprint of persuasive strategies with a particular focus on audience adaptation, gaining trust, and face saving.

Defining rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion,” (Aristotle 36), Aristotle (384–322 BCE) also places emphasis on building a trusting relationship with the audience. In his seminal book Rhetoric, Aristotle identified different types of audiences, as well as the emotions – such as anger, pity, fear – that can be aroused from the audience. For Aristotle and similar to Han Feizi, it is absolutely essential to understanding the mindset of the audience for persuasion to even be possible. Moreover, Han views all human nature as evil. Likewise, Aristotle believes that humans have the inclination to do wrong things such as belittling and retaliation (Aristotle 140).

In ancient China, Confucianists base their doctrines of communication and social behavior on moral and humanistic assumptions, which Han considers immature and deceitful. Han believes that people basically seek benefits through their speech and conduct, offering examples of friends and family relations whose conduct reveal the utilitarian nature of humans, concluding that all people are self-centered. As human nature is benefit seeking, their social behavior tends to be unreliable and untrustworthy. In several places in his essays, Han (1982) states that a person’s language and conduct are guided by a utilitarian motives, made even more evident in the process of persuasion occurring between rulers and their ministers. Han suggests that utility should be the criterion for speech and conduct, because utility is concrete, tangible, and realistic. He advises rulers to use utilitarian criteria to make political decisions. Han’s philosophical perspectives of utilitarianism and his cynical view of human nature directly affect the way he perceives the process and strategies of persuasion. From a close reading of Han Feizi’s works, three categories of persuasion are discernible and can be compared with Aristotle: (1) audience adaptation (talking to the heart), (2) gaining trust (accumulating trust), and (3) face saving (embellishing the good). I will discuss each and compare Han’s view of rhetoric with that of Aristotle.

**Audience Adaptation**

Han (1982) argues that the task of persuasion “lies in understanding the psychology of the audience so as to fit the speech into it” (294). The “audience” Han refers to here is the one-person audience who is the superior to the speaker, claiming that due to the unbalanced power relationship between the ruler and ministers, each side may have ulterior motives that cannot be detected in speech. The difficulty lies in discovering the audience’s true values, motives, and character, which often are concealed by pretense. A message often can be misinterpreted if it is not addressed to the audience’s true motives. Han gives the following example:

If the audience seeks for a good name while you try to persuade him of big profit, you will be considered low bred. You will be treated basely and kept at a distance. If the audience strives after big profit while you persuade him to seek a good name, you will be considered mindless and unable to adapt to practical situations. You will never be put in an important position. If the audience’s true motive is to strive after big profit but pretends to seek a good name while you try to persuade him to seek a good name, you will be accepted on the surface but kept at a distance in actuality; and if you persuade him to strive for big profit, your advice will be adopted in secret but you will not be accepted openly.

(294)
In a similar vein, Aristotle asserts that the audience can be disposed in a certain way: “for things do not seem the same to those who are friendly and those who are hostile, nor [the same] to the angry and the calm but either altogether different or different in importance” (Aristotle 120). Further, Aristotle points out that “If someone works against him [the audience] and does not cooperate with him and annoys him when so disposed, he becomes angry.” . . . “In general those longing for something and not getting it – are irascible and easily get angry” (127). Here, Han and Aristotle share a remarkably similar view on audience adaptation. Both emphasize the state of the mind, motives, and emotional inclinations of the audience – a person must first analyze the audience’s emotional state before determining verbal strategies to evoke necessary emotions in order to achieve true convincing power.

As the true motive of the audience is often disguised by pretense, discovering that motive becomes essential to persuasion. Interestingly, Han suggests that pretense is also the means to discovery. Among the seven shu (tactics) Han proposes for government affairs, two are directly related to pretense: “the pretense of not knowing something that you already know” and “asking something the contrary of what is really meant” (435). By using such techniques, the persuader “traps” the audience, gradually discovers the “inside” of the audience, and adjusts the message accordingly. For this reason, recognizing pretense and deception is crucial to forming one’s own rhetorical strategy. And in attempting to persuade the ruler, the advisor should not speak openly about the ruler’s true motive or secret. If he does so, he will not only fail to persuade the ruler, but place himself in danger of losing his office or even his life. For more effective persuasion and self-protection, Han (1982) concludes, the advisor “must carefully observe the ruler’s feelings of love and hate before he starts his speech” (302). Put another way, the persuader must be very sensitive to the audience’s state of mind, and be subtle and circuitous in presenting his message. As Garrett (1993) observes, “persuaders were urged to pander to the audience’s interests and to approach emotionally distressing conclusions indirectly, through a graduated series of examples or analogies” (28). Thus, for Han, the audience analysis and the accompanying adaptation of oneself to the psychological mind and heart of the audience are the keys to the true art of persuasion.

Aristotle is also keenly aware of the elements of disguise in the process of persuasion. He provides an explanation for the pretense as he states:

For speakers make mistakes in what they say or advise through [failure to exhibit] either all or one of these; for either through lack of practical sense they do not form opinions rightly; or though forming opinions rightly they do not say what they think because of a bad character; or they are prudent and fair-minded but lack good will, so that it is possible for people not to give the best advice.

(Aristotle 121)

Additionally, for Aristotle, many other factors should be also considered in persuasion: such as birth, wealth, power, fortune, relationships, age, dispositions, reputations, and possessions (159, 163). It is evident both Han and Aristotle pay close attention to the discrepancies between exterior behavior and inner thoughts in persuasion, from the perspective of the audience as well as the speaker.

Gaining Trust

In recognizing deceptive behavior in human communication, Han perceives establishing trust as the most challenging and essential component in successful persuasion. Trust is not simply obtained by looking at one’s credibility or status, but by displaying trustworthy conduct and establishing close social relationships. Han divides trust into small trust and big trust. Small
trust is gained through everyday speech, daily conduct, and ordinary things. It is essential to establishing big (real) trust through doing small things. Such a strategy is closely connected to his utilitarian view of human communication, as the long-term profits of big trust are made possible by accumulating small trust. For Han, successful persuasion often depends not on what is said but on who said it and what the relationship between the ruler and advisor is like. As he writes, “If the king likes the persuader, he will feel close to the persuader and accept his wisdom [speech]. If the king dislikes the persuader, he may consider the persuader evil. Thus the person’s wisdom [speech] will not be taken” (1982, 302). The fact that the advisor could be regarded as wise men often poses a threat to the ruler, but a good relationship between the audience and speaker will reduce such threat. To build trust and gain the favor of the audience, the persuader may have to sacrifice a piece of himself. Han gives a historical example to illustrate his point:

In ancient time, Tang was the sanest and I Yin the wisest [man]. The wisest attempted to persuade the sanest, yet after speaking to him seventy times, the sanest was still not persuaded. I Yin then brought his cook wares and became Tang’s cook. In doing so he won favor and trust from Tang. Tang got to know his competence and wisdom and put him in an important position.

This example not only illustrates the importance of establishing trustworthy relationships in paving the way for persuasion but also pinpoints the patience and humbleness a person needs to exhibit. Han explains why such a process is necessary and helpful:

When the ruler and the minister take time to get along, the ruler will not be suspicious of the persuader’s words; heated argument will not be considered as crime. The persuader can be honest with the ruler by telling him what is right and what is wrong so as to help the ruler gain his virtue. This is the successful way of persuasion.

Indeed, more often than not, the relationship itself tells the degree of trust the audience has in the speaker, which will determine whether he is persuaded. This is especially true in China, where family ties, piety, and loyalty are particularly valued and social relationships are the basis for building trust. Once trust is established, persuasion comes easy.

On the other hand, Aristotle’s approach to building trust is correlated to one’s credibility and personal character such as reputation, honor, justice, courage, temperance, magnanimity, knowledge (Aristotle 64). Aristotle believes that people are more likely to trust others with these attributes and be persuaded by them. However, Aristotle also believes that people base their trust on likes and dislikes (135). On this point, Han and Aristotle are both similar and different in their view on the role of trust and trustworthiness in persuasion.

**Face Saving**

In addition to audience adaptation and gaining trust, Han emphasizes another key factor in persuasion: how successfully a persuader protects and enhances the face of the audience. As Han (1982) writes, “the secret of persuasion lies in the use of flattering words to embellish the audience’s pride and cover the shame of the persuaded” (297). For example,

If he [the ruler] perceives himself as a very competent leader, do not ask him to do things he is not able to do. If he believes he is a determined and brave person, do not provoke
him with a mistake he once made. If he thinks his plan is superb, do not embarrass him with his failure.

Protecting the audience’s face also serves to protect and empower oneself. If a ruler loses face, his moral character is challenged and his office will be in jeopardy. To save his face, the ruler may take revenge and punish the advisor. The concept of face can be traced back to the Confucian concern for proper human relationships, which implies preserving each other’s face or positive image (Yum). Thus, for Confucius, face-saving serves to maintain and promote harmony at the social and humanistic level. But for Han, face-saving is a means to the end of persuasion and self-protection.

For Aristotle, rhetoric can function as a tool of face saving and face threatening which can directly affect the outcome of persuasion. He describes two face threatening scenarios: First, “People so disposed when are easily moved to anger, and they become angry at those who laugh at them and scoff and mock; for these wantonly insult them” (Aristotle 128). Second, “those by whom they wish to be admired, or [those] before whom they are embarrassed or [those] who are embarrassed before them” by belittlement and mockery (129). Another way to make someone to lose face is shame that Aristotle defined as “a sort of pain and agitation concerning the class of evils, whether present or past or future, that seems to bring a person into disrespect and shamelessness” (144). Shame is also “about a loss of reputation” for those who wish to be admired (146). In this sense, Aristotle and Han make a similar point on why facework must be considered in choosing rhetorical strategies.

Through this comparison, we can see some similarities and differences between the rhetoric of Han Feizi and that of Aristotle in the aspects of audience adaptation, building trust, and face saving. Both Han and Aristotle are deeply aware of audience psychology and human motivation in the process of persuasion. However, Han’s notion of building trust is largely based on interpersonal relationship while Aristotle emphasizes ethos or character of the speaker as the ultimate criteria for building trust. Both point out face saving and face threatening situations, and the use of rhetoric can enhance or ruin the efforts of persuasion if these situations are not handled well. By comparing their theories of rhetoric in these aspects, we can have a better understanding of the influence from each rhetorical tradition on the commonalities in behavior and rhetorical practices of peoples from different cultures.

2.2 The Case of US-China Trade War

China, the most populated nation and second largest economy in the world, has developed rapidly its economy in the last 40 years. Although slowed down, China’s GDP has been consistently high comparing with other parts of the world, representing 19.74 percent of the world economy in 2017.1 China’s growing prosperity has lifted millions of Chinese people out of poverty and has been perceived by many as an “economic miracle.”2 The path of the US-China relations has been bumpy and troubling throughout modern history (Lu 2011). The tension between the two nations is often caused by differences in rhetorical traditions, cultural values, history, ideological orientations, and political systems. Stuart Hall (1996) states that culture is best understood through “specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (4). Therefore, the rhetoric from each side of the trade war needs to be situated in historical and political contexts.

Globalization has created trade relations and exchanges between China and the US in many fronts. The normalization between China and the US in 1979, following the handshake between Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon in 1972 had opened the door of China’s
market to the world with the US as the largest trading partner for China. Both nations have benefited from globalization (Lu 2018; Mourdoukoutas 2017). As Jeffery Sachs (2019) argues that while China becomes wealthier through its trading with the US, “Trade with China provides the United States with low-cost consumer goods and increasingly high-quality products. . . . And US consumers enjoy higher living standard as a result of China’s low-cost goods.” However, the trade deficient between the US and China has raised eyebrows for American leaders in the past decades. Moreover, because many American corporations have outsourced their manufacturing jobs to China for cheap labor and prices, 3.4 millions of Americans have lost manufacturing jobs between 2001–2007. During his presidential campaign in 2016, Donald Trump blamed China for stealing American jobs and causing the downfall of working-class families. He called China “our enemy,” “a major threat,” and tweeted that “China is not a friend of the United States” (Li) and that “The United States has been losing, for many years, 600 to 800 Billion Dollars a year on Trade. With China we lose 500 Billion Dollars. Sorry, we’re not going to be doing that anymore” (Trump 2019). Trump’s callout on China has won partisan support as Democrat leader Chuck Schumer (2019) tweeted to Trump “Hang tough on China.” It is evident that Trump and American lawmakers depict the US as the victim of China’s economical rise. Moreover, “The United States is increasingly wary of China’s emerging role in the global economy and the tactics it uses to get ahead” (Swanson and Bradsher).

Since early 2018, the Trump administration has accused China of exacerbating the trade deficient, violating intellectual property rights and stealing American technology. Trump initiated a trade war with China by imposing 10 percent tariffs initially on the important goods and then increased to 25 percent tariff when China refused to make changes in some areas after a round of negotiations between the two countries. Trump also saw the threat of China’s technology company Huawei and signed an executive order declaring a national emergency banning the sales and use of telecom equipment from Huawei, a leading provider of 5G equipment, in the name of national security on May 15, 2019. Moreover, Trump restricted Huawei’s access to American technology such as Google software on the company’s smartphones and its apps. These moves strike a technological “Cold War” or posed a digital Iron Curtain. Further, Mike Pompeo, the secretary of the state, named China to be worse than the former Soviet Union as an enemy to America, stating in a speech that “Beijing poses a new kind of challenge; an authoritarian regime that’s integrated economically into the West in ways that the Soviet Union never was” (Swanson and Bradsher). In a more severe tone, Vice President Mike Pence delivered a speech at Munich Security Conference in which he demanded European nations reject Huawei’s technology, launching a global campaign to block Huawei and other Chinese firms from building and selling 5G network. Pence declares in the speech,

The United States has also been very clear with our security partners on the threat posed by Huawei and other Chinese telecom companies. . . . We must protect our critical telecom infrastructure, and America is calling on all our security partners to be vigilant and to reject any enterprise that would compromise the integrity of our communications technology or our national security systems.

(Pence, February 16, 2019)

In order to reach a trade agreement, the high-level officials from both sides have had several negotiation talks. The US has made several demands in the hope of changing China’s business practice behavior, including: halting “Made in China 2025” programs, changing China’s domestic laws on government involvement in China’s companies, protection of intellectual property, etc. China has made concessions to reduce the deficit, protecting intellectual
property, and opening its banking system to the world, but yet refused to change their legis-
lature and ultimately denied the charges of stealing American technologies.

The Chinese propaganda machine framed American demands as an attack to national sov-
ereignty and integrity. The People's Daily, the major China's state media under the pennname
Zhong Shen stated, China “will not give in to the U.S.'s extreme pressure. We will not com-
promise on matters of principle” (Zhong 3). Many internet users charge the US with hege-
mony, unilateralism, isolationism, and trade protectionism. It is clear that rhetoric has triggered
patriotic sentiments among the Chinese. The Chinese official media demand mutual respect
and mutual benefit. They feel the US threatens China by intentionally blocking China’s eco-
nomic development. An anchorman for CCTV read the government’s position on the issue,
“The U.S.-initiated trade war with China is just a hurdle in China’s development process. It
is no big deal. China must strengthen its confidence, overcome difficulties, turn crisis into
opportunity, and fight to create a new world” (Telford, Paletta, and Smith). China’s public and
social media are filled with a nationalist tone of discourse. Several articles have been published
in the state media denouncing Trump administration’s unilateral trade policy. One of the
articles in the People's Daily dated May 31, 2019, is titled, “Breaking Trust in Words, One Side
Action, the United States Will Fail.” The article is anonymous, but clearly representing the
government. It condemns the US for its self-righteousness, double standard, playing zero-sum
game, ignoring rules, being aggressive and pretentious.

Moreover, in his speech on April 30, 2019, at the 100th anniversary celebration of the
May Fourth Movement, Xi Jinping, China’s president said “the core of the [May Fourth]
movement is patriotism. Patriotism is the Chinese spirit unity and self-strength. Patriotism is
in the blood of Chinese people. It is our national dignity” (Xi, April 30, 2019). At the same
time, the call for patriotism is evident in Trump’s rhetoric as well, in its praise of American
farmers’ patriotism after China issued a retaliatory tariff on soybeans (Trump May 23), along
with a series of tweets of similar rhetoric. As Gabby Orr (2019) points out, “President Don-
ald Trump and his allies are appealing to nationalism in the trade war with China, calling on
Americans to make ‘patriotic’ sacrifices in language reminiscent of national crises and even
wars.” Clearly, the top leader of both China and the US pushed the bottom of hypernational-
ism through the trade war.

However, Chinese leaders and official media have been restrained in its rhetoric in attack-
ing Trump personally. Ren Zhenfei, the CEO of Huawei who was interviewed by CBS and
CNN did not attack the US. Instead, he thanked the US to make Huawei and 5G known to
the world. In an interview by CCTV, Ren (2019) said, “We are very grateful to American
companies who helped our company grow in the past 30 years. They taught us what direction
they take. Majority of consulting companies are actually American companies.” He also said that
there should be a differentiation between American companies and American politics. He
warned the Chinese people not to escalate the block of Huawei by the US through patriotism
and nationalism. His advice to China’s leaders is to continue to open the door to the world
and embrace globalization. Chinese leaders’ speeches have also attempted to soften the tone
of hospitality between the two nations. In his speech at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian
Civilization, Xi Jinping (5/15/2019) emphasized that there is no clash between different
civilizations. China will always open to and embrace the world, without directly referencing
the trade war with the US. Xi also states, “We need to respect each other and treat each other
equally . . . thinking one’s own race and culture are superior, and insisting on transforming or
even replacing other civilizations is stupid and even disastrous in practice.” He used a Chinese
proverb “Be kind and benevolent to your neighbors; in harmony with the world” and referred
it as a fundamental value of Chinese civilization. Both Ren and Xi are using rhetoric of face
saving to diminish the antagonism between China and the US, trying to find a common
ground to remedy the relationship between the two countries.
If we go back to Han Feizi and Aristotle’s theories of persuasion. The first important factor in persuasion is to know the motives and psychology of your audience. Trump wants to make “America great again” and aims to win the trade war even at the cost of a short-term loss for American farmers and consumers. In doing so, Trump has elevated the trade war as a matter of patriotism for both Americans and the Chinese. Trump’s tough stance on China is seen as putting himself in a better position in the 2020 presidential reelection. But the Chinese interpret Trump’s move as disrespectful, and an imposition of a superpower, which is reminiscent of the nineteenth century’s history of unequal treaties imposed by Europe and the US as well as wars forced on China by foreign powers (e.g. the Opium War, Japanese invasion, looting of Beijing by the Eight Nation Alliance). All these past events remind the Chinese people of the humiliation by the Western powers in its recent history. Second, both sides portray each other as unethical and untrustworthy. Due to China’s wounded psyche through rhetoric of victimization and rhetoric of patriotism and American propaganda in demonizing China, both countries have lost the trust for each other, drenching each other in conspiracy theories and depicting each other as enemies rather than strategic partners for mutual benefits. Difference in political systems and ideology aggravated the rhetoric of trade to that of nationalism and patriotism. Confusingly President Trump has claimed that he is a friend of Xi Jinping – and in fact, both leaders are strident nationalists, with Trump’s presidential campaign catchphrase “Make America Great Again” and Xi Jinping’s slogans “national rejuvenation” and “Chinese dream.” “Both leaders romanticize historical eras when their respective countries commanded more respect or power.” Further, both leaders have shown narcissistic personality traits (Balding). Accordingly, each may care more of their strong man image in the world than the actual interests of their people. Third, the rhetoric from the US leaders and officials are face-threatening to Chinese leaders. Accusing China stealing technology, government secrecy, and openly requesting American allies not to buy Huawei products is a slap of the face on the Chinese and has prompted “traumatized patriotism” (Hartnett) due to the history of humiliation by Western powers. Xi Jinping, China’s president, would look weak if China surrenders to US demands. At the same time, China’s refusal to meet the demands of the US also poses a face threat to Trump’s ego. Any face threatening rhetoric or tactics will only make the situation worse.

3. Conclusion and Implications

Rhetoric is an integral part of culture, which functions as a screen that determines what people pay attention to (Hall 1976). Research findings of various rhetorical concepts and practices rooted in different traditions have provided helpful insights for intercultural communication. By studying rhetoric on its indigenous terms as reviewed in this chapter, we have expanded the scope of rhetoric in vocabulary, concepts, practices, and perspectives. More encouraging, we begin to see a growing acceptance of alternative rhetorical terms from non-Western cultures. The conceptualization and practice of rhetoric cannot be separated from the basic cultural values that influence the way people in a particular culture think, express emotions, and view human relationships. Data from current studies indicate that there are more commonalities than differences in the conceptualization and practice of rhetoric among cultures. For example, China, Korea, Turkey, Egypt, ancient Greece all emphasize the moral character of the speaker. The Greek tropes of deliberative rhetoric, epideictic rhetoric, and contemporary feminist trope of invitational rhetoric can all be found in other non-Western rhetorical traditions as well. Globalization has facilitated an emergence of hybrid rhetoric, pushing more accommodation of rhetorical styles to international audiences. Rhetoric may be defined more by specific situations rather than by cultural orientations as demonstrated in contemporary studies of political discourse in South Korea, China, and Saudi Arabia.
Intentionally or not, we have seen an integration of global and local rhetorical styles to appeal both international and domestic audiences. Undoubtedly, it is a progressive sign that “Scholars increasingly attend to the presence of multiple rhetorical models and cultures throughout the world” (Swearingen 118).

In the past, intercultural communication scholars tend to exaggerate cultural differences, dividing cultures into collectivistic and individualistic, high and low context (Hall 1997; Hofstede). Studies on Chinese culture and rhetoric have been largely focused on Confucian values for harmony and moral teachings. However, classical Chinese rhetoric is not monolithic. This chapter has introduced Han Feizi’s theory of persuasion that is utilitarian in orientation with specific emphasis on audience adaptation, trust building, and face saving. A close examination between Han Feizi’s work and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in this chapter reveals more similarities than differences in the understanding of the complexity of the human mind and rhetorical strategies in the process of persuasion.

The recent case of the trade war between China and the US involves the understanding of the history, psychology, political, and cultural orientations of each country. However, it is also a case that proves Han Feizi’s claim that all human communication is utilitarian in purpose. Each country aims at their own gains. However, there is still a great need to understand how the other culture approaches an argument, how factors like history, politics, and cultural orientations affect the presentation and acceptance/non-acceptance of an argument. Just as C. Jan Swearingen points out, cultures with different rhetorical traditions “must be better understood if we are to engage in productive cross-cultural exchange” (109). For example, the Chinese value smooth social relationships and facework (Kincaid; Hwang). Any face-threatening rhetoric from the US is likely to receive retaliation and resistance. Negotiations without trust and good terms in relationship are destined to fail.

It is my hope that people from different cultures and political systems can still listen, learn, and open themselves up to multiple perspectives and alternative approaches of persuasion instead of making assumptions of each other. It is more beneficial to build trust and to show reciprocal respect instead of playing power games and political/economic expediences. In the twenty-first century, it is absolutely essential for people from various cultures and political leaders to engage in dialogues that help achieve a genuine sense of global community and meaningful communication for world peace and mutual benefits. Rhetorical scholars have the responsibility to expand our notions of rhetoric and equip ourselves with rhetorical abilities to promote inclusive dialogues across intercultural and international public spheres. To put another way, it is the task of rhetorical scholars to develop intercultural rhetoric as a vehicle for creating and sustaining a vibrant global community.

In order to achieve a genuine sense of global community, Tu Weiming (2014) laid out seven conditions for engaging dialogues between nations and cultures. They are: the ability to tolerate differences, the ability to see both sides of the argument, a willingness to build on trust and reciprocal respect; working on shared values and create new meanings; a willingness to listen, learn, and open to multiple perspectives; constantly reflecting our own assumptions, and finally aiming for mutual learning (502). In order to meet these conditions, we need to create a rhetoric of reciprocity, rhetoric of intersubjective empathy which is defined as positioning “each other as subjects, to engage each other’s emotions, not through identification with other’s emotions or pure rational reasoning, but through mutual and simultaneous recognition of difference and commonality” (Zhao 23). It means to follow the Golden Rule or the law of reciprocity: “Treat others as you wish to be treated” or “Do not treat others as you do not wish to be treated” (Confucius 12.2). Culture is changing, and so is rhetoric. C. Jan Swearingen said well, “Cross-cultural and comparative studies in the history of rhetoric are increasing the possibilities of improved communication, negotiation, and understanding” in an ever-changing world (109).
Notes

2. According to the World Bank, more than 850 million people have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty as China’s poverty rate fell from 88 percent in 1981 to 0.7 percent in 2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_China
3. US import from China was $540 billion whereas US export to China was $120 billion in 2018. www.thebalance.com/u-s-china-trade-deficit-causes-effects-and-solutions-3306277
5. Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on the US side, Vice President Liu He from the China side.
6. This is the link to the article: www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-05/31/c_1124567774.htm.

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Xing Lu


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