

The Dynamic Non-substantialistic Turn in Field-Being: A Pivot Point for Theories of Global Rhetoric

Rhetoric will certainly become a global order and a universal law to settle international disputes by argument in order to realize mutual development and create a World of Great Harmony. Chen Rudong¹

Once the “silk road’ to Chinese thought”² began more than five centuries ago, study of Eastern philosophy has been a subject of inquiry, but little attention has been paid to the study of Eastern rhetoric by either Western or Eastern scholars. However, study of Eastern rhetoric has entered a relatively new phase.³ Philosophers and rhetoricians have begun to debate more intensely: How to discover and explain rhetorical theory in texts of ancient China, and how to link Western and Eastern rhetoric.⁴ Western rhetoricians have also begun to focus on rhetoric in terms of change, becoming, ambiguity, and movement in order to reach broader and more nuanced definitions of rhetoric, and in so doing to find meaning beyond the traditional and bring western rhetoric in touch with eastern rhetoric.⁵

¹ The study of rhetoric has advanced globally, Peking University now has a doctoral program in rhetoric, for example, and Bai Zhenzhi wrote in the December 2012 newsletter from the 3rd biennial Conference of the Chinese Rhetoric Society of the World Meeting October 26-28 in Incheon, Korea that Professor Chen Rudong has founded the Global Rhetoric Society to welcome Asian and African rhetoric, saying that “rhetoric will certainly become a global order and a universal law to settle international disputes by argument in order to realize mutual development and create a World of Great Harmony.

²Chad Hansen in his discussion of Christian missionaries (Bo Mou, *Two Roads to Wisdom: Chinese and Aristotelian Philosophical Tradition*, Chicago: Open Court, 2001):197.

Cf. journals: *Philosophy East and West*, 1947---, and *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1972--.

³ Kathleen Jamieson organized the first conference on Rhetoric-East and West in 1988 at the University of Hawaii.

⁴ Some philosophers have published their work on Eastern and Western comparisons in articles in e.g. *Philosophy East and West* and *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, and in books: Cf. David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames (1987-2001) Chad Hansen (1983, 1992), Xing Lu (1998), Antonia S. Cua (1998), Bo Mo (2001, 2003, 2009), and Bryan Van Norden (2007).

⁵Note the works by Debora Hawhee (2012-13), Christa J. Olson (2013), Jane S. Sutton and Mari Lee Mifsud (2015), Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe (2011), Tarez Samra Graban (s015) and others who are rethinking feminist rhetoric as movement, e.g. as body or irony. Some have entered the debate on Eastern rhetoric with articles in e.g., *Philosophy and Rhetoric and Argument and Advocacy* and with books beginning with, Robert T. Oliver (1972) and among the more recent George A. Kennedy (1998), D. Ray Heisey (2000), Xiaoye You (2010 and with Korean theory, Jon Sung-Gi (2010, 2013), Japanese theory, Roichu Okabe (2013), and Middle Eastern theory, Margaret Larkin (1995) and Adul-Raof Hussein (2006).

What is being discovered and analyzed by these and others remains controversial in terms of methods, translations of terms, meanings, and comparisons. Nevertheless, such scholarship greatly benefits the understanding of the disciplines, philosophy and rhetoric, in terms of East-West discourse. Such inquiry leads also to the gaining of greater acceptance of each tradition, one with the other.⁶

In the current discussions, however, a divide persists between rhetoric as Eastern and rhetoric as Western, based, for example, on the traditional Confucius/Laozi and Aristotle/Plato split. A bridge to lessen the division, minimize the dichotomy, and shorten the width of difference seems to be what is needed, and for that to occur, a non-traditional, single standpoint is necessary. That standpoint must, however, encompass the two philosophically opposed notions of rhetoric.

In fact, such a non-traditional⁷ standpoint was conceived by Lik Kuen Tong,⁸ a standpoint that he termed the Non-substantialistic Turn. Reducing all Being and Becoming to Substantial and Non-substantial enlists a Turn from one to the other that occurs at the point of both activity and non-activity. Thus within the Non-substantialistic Turn are root Eastern *and* Western philosophy, as they are fundamentally Substantial and Non-substantial, meaning ontologically, Being and Becoming, *wu* and *you*.

⁶The contention of philosopher Bo Mou is that currently engagement with Chinese and Western philosophy is trending toward a world philosophy. “Constructive Enlargement of Chinese and Western Philosophy: A Contemporary Trend Toward World Philosophy” (Bo Mou, ed., *History of Chinese Philosophy*, NY: Routledge, 2009).

⁷ Lik Kuen Tong (1935-2012), esteemed philosopher in China, professor of philosophy at Fairfield University in Connecticut and at the Yuen Yuen Institute of Hong Kong, established a series of Field-Being conferences beginning at Fairfield in 1997. His philosophy is in summary articulated in a chapter, “The Art of Appropriation: Towards a Field-Being Conception of Philosophy,” in Bo Mou’s *Two Roads to Wisdom: Chinese and Aristotelian Philosophical Tradition*, Chicago: Open Court, 2001:57-83. Recently republished in *Tao and Logos*, 97-122, one of the seven volumes of Tong’s works published by China’s Social Science Publishing House, Beijing, 2016.

⁸ Tong coined this term “non-substantialistic turn” in his philosophy of Field-Being.

The Non-substantialistic Turn implies essentially a turning away from rigid, dichotomous and bifurcational thinking but at the same time necessarily involves such thinking. Tong's conceptual framework ontologically formulated as Field-Being philosophy, further explains "Being" in terms of "Field," one in which all Being is, he argues, "a plenum of activity."⁹ The ontological notion of Being and Becoming has existed in Western thinking since the pre-Socratic Heraclitus, who claimed that all exists as change, and Empedocles, who claimed that all exists as evolving change and non-change. It has also existed in Eastern thinking since the conception of yin/yang in the I-Ching or Book of Changes and in the notions of change/non-change. These metaphysical notions and the concept, field, as Tong was aware, as well permeate various theories of physics.¹⁰ The Non-substantialistic Turn within the Field unites Being and Becoming and at the edge differentiates them, like the ever present circle edge of a two-sided coin.

Philosopher Bo Mou has claimed that the "central concern" in the I-Ching text is the "becoming-changing aspect of the universe," as in Field-Being philosophy which emphasizes however, that "there is always something-unchanging in changing."¹¹ Mou also has pointed out that the ideograph "I" or "Yi" itself means both changing and unchanging not only in regard to the universe but to its own Chinese language character.¹² The paradox: the unchanging Substantial and the changing Non-substantial can never be apart and yet are separate.

In Tong's ontological Field of "activity," Becoming is defined as Non-substantial, yet within the Field, Being or Substance is ever emerging as karmic matter, i.e. "accumulated

⁹ Bo Mou, *Two Roads to Wisdom: Chinese and Aristotelian Philosophical Tradition* Chicago: Open Court, 2001: 59.

¹⁰ Note Gary Zukar (1980), Frijof Copra (1975, 1980), David Bohm (1980 and *The Elegant Universe* PBS (2003)—Non-Fragmentary world views, enfolding form and structure.

¹¹ Bo Mou, ed. *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003: 90.

¹² Ibid. 91. Noticed that I Ching and later Dao De Ching or Tao te Ching (Laozi or Lao Tze 6th c) refer to the same text with spelling changes over time. Note also: English spellings of Chinese words differ in philosophy and rhetoric texts.

effects.” “empowered activity,” or “vital energy” in its dissipated form. The ontological basis for the Substantial/Non-substantial divide is the opposition of the principle of individuation to Field principle, for the Field consists of the interplay of Substantialism and Non-substantialism. Hence, the Non-substantial and Substantial merge in both the “philosophical turn” and insofar as rhetoric is both Substantial and Non-substantial, the “rhetorical turn.” In that most Western philosophy focuses on Being and things, it ascribes to being Substantial, and in that most Eastern philosophy focuses on Becoming and relational rather than on things, it ascribes to being Non-substantial.

In Field-Being, the standpoint from which both East and West rhetoric are both observable and understandable is at the Non-substantialistic Turn. For Tong that Turn arises from within the Field but also originates in the Absolute Non-substantial Turn. Rhetoric in Field-Being philosophy is an empowered activity, which means it is both a thing and a no-thing, and thus definable as both Substantial and Non-substantial, non-change and change, Being and Becoming.

The two most distinct worldviews, Western and Eastern, are both expressed through rhetoric. Indeed, only through discourse is it possible to share discoveries of serious truths, values, and significant meanings among the peoples of the world. With rhetoric, the global world is capable of establishing *meaningful* connections by engaging in face to face meetings, lectures, speeches, writings, the arts, i.e. through embodied activity. With a Field-Being understanding of rhetoric, global discourse recognizes commonalities and differences not as East and West, or Daoist and Aristotelian but as they arise from Substantial and Non-substantial roots in eastern

and western thinking.¹³ Importantly, such an understanding clears the “field” of the stumbling blocks of cultures and traditions that prevent more meaningful and expedient rhetorical movement.

The aim here is to introduce and present an outline of a Field-Being understanding of eastern and western rhetoric as Substantial and Non-substantial. Since both Substantial and Non-substantial philosophy and rhetoric exist in both traditions, I use the small letters for “east” and “west” when the words mean simply Non-substantial and Substantial rather than tradition, culture, or place. For, it will become clear, not all western philosophy or rhetoric is found in the Western tradition and not all eastern philosophy or rhetoric is found in the Eastern tradition. While this paper offers an alternative worldview and perspective on the discipline of both Western and Eastern rhetoric, it will be formulating rhetoric as Field-Being philosophy. Both a philosophy and an art of oral and written expression, the discipline of rhetoric is defined here simply as discourse, meaning discourse as a thing and discourse as movement.

Since I intend to examine the nature of rhetoric as Substantial and Non-substantial, I will not focus on local concepts, particular interdisciplinary approaches, specific politics and relationships, nor on religions or cultures, but *only on philosophical origins* as they are explained in Field-Being philosophy. Of course, I note that certain concepts, literature, and experiences affect the carrying out of specific rhetorical assignments, but such are not the focus here. To bridge eastern and western theories of rhetoric and conceive rhetoric anew depends exclusively on this non-traditional foundational or philosophical approach.

¹³ Note: The terms east and west will not necessarily mean the East and the West as places but rather as ways of thinking and expression, although of course, most western thinkers are Western and most eastern thinkers are Eastern. Chinese here represents the Eastern approach to language, philosophy, and rhetoric.

Rhetoric/Philosophy

Lik Kuen Tong (1925-2012), the philosopher, believed, as did Robert T. Oliver (1909-2000), the rhetorician,¹⁴ in the importance of studying rhetorical theory and practice in both eastern and western traditions as a means to enter global communication and understand global affairs. Both believed, as did the 20th c. philosopher Richard P. McKeon (1900-1985) and rhetorician Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), in the power of rhetoric. Rhetoric as conceived by these particular scholars is preoccupied with the nature of thought, values, interpretation, and meaning.

Rhetoric is one of those words, like freedom, which is not easy to define, and so it is continually being redefined by philosophers and rhetoricians. In fact, as a Western concept it has a history of various definitions: rhetoric means finding the available means of persuasion; eloquence and wisdom; the oration of a good man; what convinces by trickery; a means, a discipline, an art, forms of discourse or effective discourse, written and/or spoken. Rhetoric has all these meanings and more, yet none fully explains its essence, nor its depth and breadth. Rhetoric, here defined simply as discourse, means a lengthy body of organized and meaningful effective expression.

Xing Lu found that when she began to search for a Chinese rhetoric, she found a rich Chinese rhetorical tradition.¹⁵ “Ancient Chinese rhetorical perspectives were not monolithic,” but derived from schools of Ming, Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, and Daoism which had their own “well-developed senses of rhetoric,” e.g. the Daoist perspective on rhetoric is rooted in its

¹⁴ Lik Kuen Tong, defined being in terms of field, i.e. ever changing field of all becoming, but becoming also “individuates” as “being” in its intensifying and presencing activity in the field. Thus the substantial is necessarily considered as well as the non-substantial. Hence field includes both western and eastern concepts of being. Robert T. Oliver, prolific author, expert in both Western and Eastern rhetoric, and in informal diplomacy before the word “global” had gained prominence, had for many years addressed the global state of rhetorical affairs.

¹⁵ Xing Lu *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century, BCE: A Comparison and Classical Greek Rhetoric*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1998:xi.

philosophical orientation: *wu wei*/non-action.¹⁶ In Chinese, words referring to rhetoric have many meanings, are often ambiguous, and are evolutionary in meaning or fluid: *ming*-appropriate expression and to seek truth, justice, *bian*-art of discourse, argument, eloquence, *ci*-mode of speech, *tui*-inference, *li*-reason, *gu*-cause, *iu*-classification, *jian*-persuasion and advice.¹⁷ Such words did not form a discipline in China, but a discipline is now in the 21st c. being formed in China's universities.

The study of the discipline of rhetoric, its history, meaning, and practice, until recently has been a preoccupation mostly of Western thinkers. Current investigation proves that Eastern thinkers have studied the art but not generally as a separate discipline.¹⁸ This does not mean that Eastern rhetoric did not exist over the centuries; rather it means that as a discipline less attention was given to Eastern rhetoric.¹⁹ The reasons for this derive partly from the nature of Eastern languages and partly from world views established by Eastern philosophy. Western attempts to analyze Eastern rhetoric from a Western point of view have been unsatisfactory and prone to misunderstanding: Only recently, Asian and African universities have begun to teach rhetoric and sponsor journals on the subject. In the United States, the resurgence of the study of rhetoric that began to lag in the 19th century was initiated in 1966 with Edward P.J. Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. This resurgence continues with new theories into the 21st century.

¹⁶ Xing Lu, *ibid.*, 5, 7, 9, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 89-90

¹⁸ Antonia S. Cua has determined that “unlike the West, there is virtually no work in either ancient China or India that is “explicitly devoted to rhetoric” but not to be construed as absence of rhetorical concerns. (*Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1998): 103.

¹⁹ Xiaoye You explains: in 5th c. China, there was one writing on discourse and it touched upon invention, organization, and style, in 16th and 17th c. a few rhetoric texts offered instruction, but only in the 19th c. did science writing enter with its demand for logic--syllogistic, inductive formal reasoning. In the 20th c., available were 3 texts influenced by Japanese treatises which were in turn influenced by John Genung, A.S. Hill, and Barrett Wendell, (“Conflation of Rhetorical Tradition: The Formation of Modern Chinese Writing Instruction” www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/x/y/xuy10/Articles)

When rhetoric is founded in two distinct foundational ways of thinking, Substantial and Non-substantial or as western and eastern, it is as yet unevenly studied and understood. Nevertheless, apprehension of the discipline of rhetoric at the Non-substantialistic Turn benefits global communication and thus global community, for it permits insight into both ways of thinking in their deepest divide and necessary merging. As power, ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology, rhetoric is affected by both perspectives. The aim for transparency in meaning rests on this inclusive grasp of rhetoric. Transparency achieved through discourse is worth pursuing in a diverse world aiming for peace.

The state of affairs today indicates that many nations under one rule that either neglected or suppressed the study of rhetoric, have overlooked preparing their citizens for participation in global communication, but even nations prepared in the study of rhetoric are never fully prepared, for such educational practices that have been deemphasizing rhetoric, eliminating the study of grammar, and raising the status of multiple choice testing over essays, and information over reasoned discourse, have had their effect on limiting the study of rhetoric.

Significance of Field-Being Rhetoric

Rhetoric as Substantial is defined as exposing the materiality or physically of the world—categorized as space, time, matter, and motion through discourse categorized as description, narration, exposition, and argument. Rhetoric as Non-substantial is defined as ever creating the world through discourse that subsumes argument, description, and exposition in, and so as, “narrative.” Thus, the categories differ in the two definitions of discourse. For example, this narrative event: on her plunge down into the abyss, she spies a rose growing in the rock alongside, she picks it and smells it. As Substantial discourse, this is what happened in time,

temporal movement. This narrative event as Non-substantial discourse, simplistically put, moves a motion or asserts, opening the question, on the way through life, should we not smell the roses? The questions differ as the meaning of narrative differs: in the first a following question is, what does this event mean? then, do you agree or disagree with that interpretation? In this case narrative is a thing, an event which can be explicated. In the second a following question is, if we should smell the roses, then what? Such a question furthers the point or argument but without demanding agreement or disagreement. In this case, narrative is an argument as Becoming. Thus, knowledge making in each differs even though, e.g., the ethics involved is the same or similar. The irony, too, of living life in the midst of dying, exists in the language and rhetorical choices of the narrative, but subjected to this double-vision scrutiny, understanding of irony is deepened. Because ontologically the rhetorical example of narrative discourse, apprehended as Substantial and Non-substantial differ, together they enrich human understanding across global inquiry and communication, the one removing disruptive categories, the other putting them in.

The significance of rhetoric as a discipline is obvious in a global world. Being able to distinguish Substantial from Non-substantial rhetoric and understand the merits of both, forms a beginning for using rhetoric inclusively to solve individual and global problems and to advance co-existence. Without discourse, we are faced with grim alternatives and lost opportunities for the general improvement of the human condition; without understanding the discourse as it explains or describes the world as it exists *and* as it creates itself, we are limited.

Conclusion

Briefly in summary, the Substantialist views the world as it exists composed of things, analyzable, divisional, of parts and wholes, static; the Non-substantialist views the world as change and relational, i.e. in which there are no entities or things, only relational motion. In

Field-Being terms the Non-substantial Field is defined as “activity” as opposed to entity. Field-Being develops an eastern philosophy in the Daoist tradition but acknowledges and embraces western philosophy. What must be ultimately acknowledged is that in actuality, neither way of thinking is possible without the other. Hence, *both* perspectives together are necessary to understand not only rhetoric but the world.

The Substantial and the Non-substantial foundations as being both one and two can be imagined as a coin, two sides of a single coin, inseparable as one, each necessary to the other, the two sides meeting at what Tong termed “the Non-substantialistic Turn.” Or, Tong’s image: The two *Yin-Yang* symbols with a third one identical but open, the third, symbolic of Field-Being philosophy of flow open to future and acknowledging like modern physics both the predictable and non-predictable.²⁰ The symbolization of Tong’s ontological Field, clarifies its being one and many, and at the Non-substantialistic Turn, existing as change and not-change.

Lik Kuen Tong argued that eastern and western thinking at the most foundational level has predominated in but has not been confined to either the East or West, for there has always been a strand of eastern way of thinking in Western philosophy and western in Eastern.²¹ The divide is not as divisive as we surmise and both sides of it are in fact more familiar as ways of thinking than we might realize. All rivers have banks.

From the standpoint of Field-Being philosophy one can deduce that the ancient Greek rhetorician, Gorgias, for example, was an eastern thinker in a Western tradition, for he made a case that rhetoric does not express the world but creates it. The world of rhetoric for Gorgias, is a

²⁰ Order and flowing change as Field are interdependent. As Kongshi Daoren (1050-1135) pointed out, there is no single correct position, for space/time position is always changing. 156 (Sallie Tisdale, *Women of the Way: Discovering 2,500 Years of Buddhist Wisdom*, Harper: San Francisco, 2006).

²¹ Interchange of ideas, East and West, through Buddhist scholars and Christian Jesuits who traveled to the East, influenced 18th century philosophy, e.g. with the notion of self, for instance, in David Hume’s notion of self and Adam Smith’s notion of ethics, and later the Pragmatist’s concept of truth. Cf. Alison Gobnik’s “How David Hume Helped Me Solve My Midlife Crisis,” *The Atlantic* (October 2015).

world of Becoming, i.e. Non-substantial; the nineteenth century American Pragmatists explained Truth as existing not as Being but as Becoming; the twentieth century Existentialists explained that the world exists but is not—all these theories are compatible with Eastern tradition. On the other hand, Confucian concepts of a “gentleman” and a “state” albeit also within a Non-substantial Daoist tradition, are compatible with the Western tradition of Substantial, of Being, things.²²

We have often missed in our reading and listening, the two-sided possibilities this theory promotes. Western scholars who are now defining rhetoric as Non-substantial in addition to Substantial are opening histories of rhetoric with more sensitivity to new questions and new interpretations, so to find rather than the entrenched, instabilities versus stable collections and questions of future versus past,²³ also to see in archived rhetoric, notions of rhetoric as movement, that were before unrecognized. For Eastern scholars, studying Western rhetoric means participating in rhetorical situations that, first encountered, may appear elusive, but which later, actually appear familiar in their thematic focus on eloquence, ethics, and effect. Ancient Chinese history of rhetoric does admit to including at times Substantial rhetoric, but language and Daoist philosophy in the main hold to tradition.

So with both eastern and western rhetoric understood as originating at the same ontological source, the Non-substantialistic Turn, a multicultural rhetoric is possible as is better global communication.²⁴ In fact, as Xing Lu has articulated, “East and West require each other

²² Examples: Gorgias’s “Encomium of Helen,” William James’s *The Meaning of Truth*, Confucius’s Analects, and Lao Tze’s *I Ching*.

²³ Tarez Samra Graban, *Women’s Irony: Rewriting Feminist Rhetorical Histories*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2015: 144-47. Others currently involved with Non-substantial ideas: Debra Hawhee, Christa J. Olson, Joan Wallace Scott and others.

²⁴ Xin Lu, “Multicultural rhetoric can be defined as rhetoric that is not based on any particular canonized system but rather recognizes and celebrates a diversity of rhetorical styles and persuasive discourse.” (*Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century, BCE: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1998:309.

for their own existence, and future development depends not on one system of thought replacing the other, but on an integrated growth which maintains and expands both tendencies.”²⁵ The Non-substantialistic Turn, as explained by Lik Kuen Tong in his Field-Being philosophy, offers the hope that this will happen in our common global field of activity.

Therese B. Dykeman
Independent Scholar

²⁵ Xing Lu, *ibid.*, 310.

Bibliography:

Cua, Anthony S. *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1998.

_____. *Ethical Argumentation*. N.p.: University of Hawaii Press. 1985.

Gobnik, Alison, "How David Hume Helped Me Solve My Midlife Crisis," *The Atlantic* (October 2015).

Graban, Tarez Samra. *Women's irony: Rewriting Feminist Rhetorical Histories*, Carbondale Southern Illinois UP, 2015.

Hansen, Chad. *Language and Logic in Ancient China*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press. 1982.

Heisey, D. Ray. *Chinese Perspectives in Rhetoric and Communication*. Westport, CT: ABC-CLIO, 2000.

Kennedy, George A. *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction*. NY: Oxford UP, 1998.

Lu, Xing. *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century, BCE: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1998.

Mou, Bo, ed *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2003.

_____, ed. *History of Chinese Philosophy*, NY: Routledge, 2009.

_____. *Two Roads to Wisdom: Chinese and Aristotelian Philosophical Tradition*, Chicago: Open Court, 2001.

Tisdale, Sallie. *Women of the Way: Discovering 2,500 Years of Buddhist Wisdom*. Harper: San Francisco, 2006.

You, Xiaoye. "Conflation of Rhetorical Tradition: The Formation of Modern Chinese Writing Instruction." www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/x/v/xuy10/Articles