

Tracing the Trajectory of International Students' Writing and Writer Identity  
Before, During, and After a First Year Composition Course

Dan Zhu

A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2019

Reading Committee:

Sandra Silberstein, Chair

Nancy Bou Ayash

Priti Sanhdu

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

©Copyright 2019

Dan Zhu

University of Washington

**Abstract**

Tracing the Trajectory of International Students' Writing and Writer Identity  
Before, During, and After a First Year Composition Course

Dan Zhu

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Sandra Silberstein

Department of English

As with many such institutions, in the last decade, the international student body at the researched university has increased 300% to a total of 8902 students in academic year 2018-2019. The academic success of international students requires that university professionals gain an understanding of the unique needs these students bring to classrooms, especially in first year composition (FYC) courses--a required course for entering most majors. While many studies on international students in FYC tend to address students' issues and challenges, little attention has been paid to their "incoming" knowledge--what they bring with them into writing classrooms. Moreover, the field of second language (L2) writing has traditionally focused on writing itself. Not until recently has interest in L2 writer identities begun to draw attention from scholars (See Cox, et. al, 2010). This dissertation undertakes to understand what resources, needs, and writer identities international students bring to FYC and to trace how their writing and writer identities evolve over the course of their FYC classes.

Drawing on theories including prior knowledge in FYC (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Robertson, Taczak, & Yancey, 2012), life reality and text reality (Pavlenko, 2007), and international student identities (Hsieh, 2006; Shen, 1989), this research focused on four female Chinese international

students' FYC experience in winter quarter 2015. I interviewed them one-on-one at the beginning, during, and after their FYC classes, and observed them in classes and other locations such as the university's writing center. Adopting a social constructivist view of interview and discourse analysis methods, this study paints two intertwined trajectories of each participant: one for writing development and the other for writer identity evolution. It is observed that for some participants (similar to findings of Caiqin, Sucheng, & Lufang), as their writing improved, their confidence in writing increased, and consequently, their writer identities evolved (e.g., from "writing as an assignment" to "writing as a way to enter scholarly conversation"). However, for one participant, though there were observed improvements in her writing, she reported an unchanged relationship with writing. In other words, writing remained a challenging task to her.

This study observes some common challenges during the first half of FYC classes, including experiencing anxiety when encountering new genres, as well as heavily focusing on grammar errors and language authenticity. By the end of FYC, participants reported gaining critical thinking and independent thinking skills. Several common identity themes emerged: each study participant created an imagined juxtaposition against American peers, noted a "hero" (someone they could always trust and rely on) at home, asserted a strong sense of resilience, and renewed their relationship with writing. Significance of these discoveries are presented along with implications for students and instructors. In the end, this study calls for an inclusive FYC class that takes international students' "incoming" knowledge into consideration and values their potential to enrich the class towards a more global university.

*Keywords:* International student, writer identity, First Year Composition

**DEDICATION**

To my mother and father who said to me as a child that, “The world you have seen is beyond what we can even imagine. Trust your own decisions because you have always done very well. And fly as high as you can!”

Yinxu Xing and Anren Zhu

To the best life partner and best friend

My husband, Miles Raymond Jr.

To the most silly and supportive young gentleman

My son, Miles Zi Raymond III

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Tracing the Trajectory of International Students' Writing and Writer Identity Before, During, and After a First Year Composition Course .....	1
Abstract.....	3
DEDICATION.....	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	10
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	12
Research Questions Intertwined with A Personal Story .....	12
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
Research on International-Student-Related L2 Writing in FYC.....	15
Research on Prior Knowledge and Writing Development in FYC.....	17
Research on L2 Writer Identity.....	18
Research on International Student Identities .....	19
Conclusion .....	20
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	21
A Qualitative Study.....	21
Reflection and Limitations.....	22
Validity and Reliability.....	22
Ethical Concerns .....	23
Methods.....	23
Research Interview.....	24
Narrative Inquiry.....	25
Discourse Analysis (CA & CR).....	26
Recruitment.....	27
Recruitment Criteria.....	27
Recruiting Channels.....	27
Communicating Risks, Concerns, and Discomfort.....	28
Participants.....	28
Yanjin.....	29
Caiqin.....	30
Sucheng.....	30
Lufang.....	30

Data Collection and Analysis.....	31
Background Survey.....	31
Collecting Writing Materials .....	31
Semi-structured Interviews .....	32
Non-participant Observations .....	33
Think-alouds .....	34
Data Analysis .....	34
Conclusion .....	34
Appendix I Recruitment Criteria .....	35
Appendix II Recruitment Letter.....	36
Appendix III Participants Consent Form for International Undergraduate Students ...	37
CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANTS’ “INCOMING” IDENTITIES .....	40
Upbringing and Parents.....	40
Pre-College Schooling .....	43
Decision to Study at a US College.....	46
Conclusion .....	48
CHAPTER 5 PRE-FYC WRITING LIFE AND WRITER IDENTITY .....	50
Introduction.....	50
Writing Life .....	50
Writing Prior to High School.....	51
Divergence in High School: IB English Writing for Sucheng and Caiqin .....	52
Divergence in High School: American English Literature Classes for Yanjin .....	53
TOEFL Writing for Everyone.....	54
College Application Essays for Everyone .....	55
Writer Identities .....	56
Sucheng.....	57
Caiqin.....	59
Yanjin.....	60
Lufang.....	62
Conclusion .....	64
Appendix.....	66
CHAPTER 6 MID-FYC: ACHIEVING APPERCEPTION.....	67
Introduction.....	67

Institutional Context.....	67
Participants and Their FYC Course .....	69
Caiqin’s English 299 Experience.....	69
Caiqin's Writer identity .....	70
Lufang’s English 131 Experience.....	71
Lufang's Writer Identity .....	74
Yanjin’s English 131 Experience.....	75
Yanjin's Writer Identity .....	78
Sucheng English 131 Experience.....	79
Sucheng's Writer Identity.....	82
Overarching Themes.....	82
Interactions with the Instructor .....	82
Interactions with Peers.....	85
Whole class discussion .....	88
Conclusion .....	90
Appendix.....	92
CHAPTER 7 POST-FYC: <i>RETROSPECT</i> .....	94
Introduction.....	94
Participants’ Writing Development and Writer Identity.....	94
Caiqin’s Writing Development.....	94
Caiqin’s Writer Identity .....	96
Lufang’s Writing Development .....	97
Lufang’s Writer Identity .....	99
Sucheng’s Writing Development.....	105
Sucheng’s Writer Identity .....	109
Yanjin’s Writing Development.....	114
Yanjin’s Writer Identity .....	118
Conclusion .....	121
Appendix I .....	123
Appendix II Lufang's CSE Case Summary.....	124
Appendix III Yanjin's SA2.2 Prompt.....	127
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION: CONNECTING THE DOTS .....	128
Findings on “Incoming” Knowledge .....	128

Findings on Writing Development.....	129
Confidence to Write in New Genres.....	131
A Shift from Grammar to Higher-order Writing Concerns .....	132
A Refinement of Critical Thinking.....	132
A Display of Intrinsic Motivation to Think and Write Independently .....	135
Findings on Writer Identity.....	135
From “Hero” at Home to “Hero” in K-12, and then to “Hero” in FYC .....	136
A Writer Identity Juxtaposed against American Counterparts .....	139
Strong Resilience .....	141
From “Writing as a Task” to “Writing as Something More”.....	143
Limitations and Implications for Future Studies .....	145
Concluding Remarks.....	147
REFERENCES .....	149

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey of completing a dissertation and earning a doctorate degree has been an incredibly long and difficult one. However, it has taught me a great deal about passion, resilience, sacrifice, and love. I would like to take a moment to thank all the professors, family, friends, and students who have supported me through this challenging yet meaningful process.

I am deeply grateful for my doctorate committee chair Professor Sandra Silberstein who has always had faith in me, even during times when I doubted my own ability to complete it. She has been a wonderful mentor ever since I arrived at the University of Washington in 2009. Without her constructive feedback and continuous encouragement, I would not have been able to cross the finishing line. I am especially thankful that in her comments, not only did she make revision suggestions, Professor Silberstein also taught me some important “fishing skills” by offering detailed explanations. I have greatly benefited from these nuanced language and rhetoric differences as a professional and a scholar. I would not have had the chance to learn these elsewhere had she not taken the time to guide me. Her professional experience, work efficacy, life wisdom, as well as her care about her students, have enlightened and molded me into who I am today.

I am also in debt to my other committee members: Professor Priti Sanhdu and Professor Nancy Bou Ayash. Their knowledge and guidance have been essential to my growth and to this dissertation journey. Professor Priti Sanhdu has a wealth of knowledge in research methods. For instance, she taught me rigors and tips when interviewing participants who share the same first language with the researcher. I felt encouraged every time when I walked out of her office hour, knowing dissertating can be challenging but my passion can help me last long. Professor Nancy Bou Ayash kindly joined my committee right after she arrived at the university. Her knowledge in second language writing opened a door to a field I was not familiar with initially and eventually helped me finalize a direction for my dissertation. She has also always been very supportive and encouraging when I encountered hurdles. I would also like to extend my thank-you to Professor Suhanthie Motha who initially served on my committee and encouraged me to pursue a PhD path. Lastly, I would like to thank my GSR Professor Sara Curran from Jackson School of International Studies and Evans School of Public Affairs. Her cross-disciplinary interview method class inspired me when choosing methods in observation and data analysis. I am also grateful that she has always showed great interest in my research. I have been fortunate to have had inspiration, guidance, and support from these wonderful professors.

Pursuing a PhD is a lonely journey but I was never been alone. I have been blessed to have my graduate peers who companied me and shared their research, knowledge, experience, sentiments, as well as selfless support. Just to name a few, Bonnie Vidrine-Isbell, Sani CJ, Norah Fahim, Tait Bergstrom, TJ Walker, Zhenzhen He-Weatherford, Joseph Telegen, Jennifer Eidum, and Sophia Chen. A special thank-you to Wei Zuo, my roommate, dear friend, as well as mental support whenever I am in need. She also helped to double check my translation for interview data in mandarin. We came from very similar backgrounds and supported each other in almost every aspect of our life here in U.S.. We call each other “sisters through thick and thin (患难姐妹)”, and I am very grateful to have her alongside this journey.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the students and instructors who participated in this study. The four Chinese female students graciously offered their time and support, and shared their writings and stories. Their hope that their own experience can help other international

students was genuine and thoughtful. They always wanted to share and participate more. I have been blessed to be able to work with these students and to record part of their life journey. And I am very glad to see all of them succeeding in their post-undergraduate careers and to be able to continue supporting them.

I would like to express deep gratitude to my family and friends. My dear Mother-in-law Mary Raymond-Kier has offered thoughtful insights and detailed editing which have greatly shaped this dissertation. More importantly, she treated me like her own daughter and has always been there for me, no matter if it is for work, life, or dissertation. My best friend Tom Fitzpatrick, along with the Fitzpatrick family, have always challenged me to be the best self. When I was on the edge of giving up the dissertation due to some unexpected data loss, Tom calmed me down and helped me analyze my options. A special thank-you to Madeline Bennett and Will Maes who provided feedback and helped to edit, which gave the final push to cross the finishing line.

My deepest debt is to my husband Miles Raymond Jr. and my three-year-old son Miles Raymond III. Miles Jr. is an enabler and a giver. His faith in me and my ability to conquer almost anything can be somewhat surreal, but when he brought me up after every hurdle I encountered and cheered me on step after step, I started to see a very different me that I was not able to see before. During this PhD process, he took very good care of me and our son, and supported me in almost every way he can. I am very fortunate to have a life partner and best friend to get through this daunting process. My son Miles III is silly. This little helper always makes laugh. Every time when I told him I had a big study goal to achieve that night, he would look at me very seriously and say, "Mommy, I will support you", which usually meant he would leave me alone and put himself to bed after hours of watching Paw Patrol.

Thank you all! Your love and support have helped me maintain a strong passion about understanding and supporting international students. I know my debt to you all will never be fully repaid, but I hope this dissertation will help pass on that love and support to others. Enjoy reading it.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Research Questions Intertwined with A Personal Story

This study examines the development of international undergraduate students' writing and writer identities over the course of their First Year Composition (FYC) classes. Adopting qualitative methods such as interviews, document collecting, and observations, I recruited four international undergraduate participants, all of whom happened to be female. Each had taken a different FYC class in the winter quarter of 2015 and was selected from the FYC student population in order to specifically explore the following questions:

- What writing-related resources, identities, and needs do these international students bring as they enter the university?
- How do the students evolve over the course of one quarter?
- What implications does this have for meeting the needs of international student writers?

My motives to conduct a research dissertation on international students' writing and writer identities are built on my study and teaching in a U.S. university. I hoped to discover ways to increase the educational value of international students' experience as well as to provide simple means that instructors can apply to increase their educational efficacy. First, during my more than ten years of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), I became motivated to uncover the needs of English language learners, especially learners with an intensive English learning experience in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. Entering the UW's MATESOL program with only an EFL background myself (I had learned and taught English intensively, but only in China), I had a difficult time adjusting my expectations because, although teaching English as a second language (ESL) emphasizes student-centered communication, in an EFL setting such as China, English teaching heavily focuses on teacher-centered instruction in test-taking and grammar.

In addition, the amount of language-learning goals introduced in each lesson in China tends to be much larger than that in an ESL setting. I have speculated that those disparities might explain why English language programs in the U.S. (such as the two U.S. programs I have taught in) do not attract many Chinese students compared to the total number of Chinese students arriving in the U.S. annually as matriculated students. These students might be concerned that their needs will not be efficiently met by English language teaching institutions in the U.S. On the other hand, according to college professors and composition teachers, the "purely" EFL-trained Chinese students who managed to skip the ESL scaffolding and were accepted into American universities with high TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores often have trouble with basic language issues.

This speculation plus personal observation has further led me to further speculate that if sufficient knowledge about EFL students' "incoming" knowledge—what they bring to the U.S.—is recognized, then perhaps EFL-trained students can be better prepared for their studies in American universities.

Coming to teach first year composition (FYC) in the university's Expository Writing Program (EWP), I found another reason why it is critical to understand international students' "incoming "knowledge and writer needs." Most of the course designs and materials I consulted when preparing for my own FYC class make inquiries into issues related to gender, race, class, identities, and so forth. According to Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), issues such as these are very "specific to the 'American' or at least to a 'Western' way of life" to which most international students are foreign (p.558). For instance, in the writing studio class I used to teach, which supports international students in conjunction with their FYC course, I observed a great number of these students tiptoeing around race issues such as Malcolm X's argument of the "House Negro" and "Field Negro." Having earnestly striven to learn about the necessary historical background, in the end, these international students would still make arguments that could sound naive to most people who grew up in America and who are therefore acquainted with more of the nuance of rhetoric about these social issues.

Another type of knowledge assumed in FYC lies in ways of making arguments. According to Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), FYC programs expect students to have the skills to analyze texts rhetorically and to think critically, which can also be new to many international students. Given these cultural and pedagogical assumptions in FYC classes, I also hypothesize that if instructors had been offered a strong grasp of what writing experiences and training international students had gone through in the past and what needs they might bring when they enter an American university, then our writing programs and composition materials could be better tailored to cater to the needs of international writers and to encourage them to bring out their genuine voice in more meaningful writing contexts.

For the second question, this research is intended to investigate how international students' writing and writer identities evolve over the course of their FYC class. The first goal of this study is to find out whether there are any changes (in terms of how they write, how they perceive writing, how they consider themselves as writers, and so forth) taking place by identifying possible indications. This study further examines a possible correlation between writing and writer identities. The hypothesis is that international students' identity shifts may result in the change of their writing, or vice versa. This hypothesis has been formed and shaped by my personal experience as an international graduate student who strove to enter the academic discourse community for years.

During my first two years of graduate study at the university, I began to gain extensive exposure to academic discourse through course readings and research projects; however, I still saw myself as an outsider intimidated by the unfamiliar world of academia. My writing back then read like somewhat immature imitations of others' work. The next two years of intensive teaching in FYC afforded me opportunities to wrestle with a brand-new set of writing strategies, which officially introduced me to academic English writing and also transformed me into a writer with a stronger sense of Western-style arguments. Being aware of who I am as a writer and knowing the audience I am writing to, I started to gain some ownership of my writing. Eventually, going through my doctoral general exams led to my first step towards my own voice in academic writing. The width and depth of reading and writing involved in this process not only helped me sort out the subject matter in each selected field; reading and critiquing various scholarly writing styles across the board in this exam process also helped me decide on the type of academic writer I preferred to become. While this "becoming" process continues, I have

already set out on my journey, collaborated with two other colleagues, and successfully presented at my very first academic conference. My own writing experience affords me possibilities and fascinates me in many ways. It is this very fascination with the intertwining between the growth in my writing and the shifts of my writer identity that has inspired me to explore the same topics in relation to undergraduate international students.

Admittedly, graduate-level writing demands and contexts can be completely different from those at the undergraduate level. Also, considering the much-shortened time period of this research (a quarter versus five years), there might not be as much growth to capture. However, I consider this research a small step toward demystifying a large puzzle of international students' writing needs and development. I set myself out as a listener and explorer, ready to discover any new stories and new voices. The contribution of this research is hoped to point at my last research question: "What implications do the findings of the first two questions have for meeting the needs of international student writers?" In other words, by analyzing international students' writing-related prior knowledge, identities, and needs, I am poised to provide meaningful suggestions on ways to bridge what they bring and what is expected from them. By finding the relationship between changes in writing and in writer identities, I am hoping to identify some tipping points and pivotal moments, as well as factors that might have triggered these changes, in order to inform how international students' writing needs can be better served in FYC programs and classrooms.

It is the understanding of this study that the terms "non-native speaker" and "native speaker" are fundamentally inappropriate as they insinuate the dominance of idealized native speaker model in Second Language Acquisition and view L2 users as inadequate imitations of monolingual native speakers rather than legitimate speakers. (Motha, p.42) In this study, participants sometimes referred to their American peers as native speakers or themselves as non-native speakers, mostly to indicate their lower English proficiency when compared to their American peers. Participants usually referred to these terms as a way to articulate a disadvantage they had and it did not seem they were aware of the nuanced bias reflected from these terms. This study has decided to keep these terms when they were used by the participants.

Having rationalized the empirical and personal significance of this research, in the next chapter of the Literature Review, I explain how this research plans to draw on existing literature in several areas: L2 writing in FYC, prior knowledge use in FYC, L2 writer identities, and international student identities.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Instead of relying on one overarching theoretical framework, this research has been inspired and informed by a collection of studies in the areas of FYC composition, L2 writing in FYC, L2 writer identities, and international student identities. This chapter introduces these studies and shows how they shaped the design of this research. Meanwhile, by putting these studies into conversation, this chapter explains how this research can be situated in the existing literature of those areas.

### **Research on International-Student-Related L2 Writing in FYC**

In the bulk of research on second language writing within the FYC setting, international students (also referred as “international visa students” in Matsuda & Silva, 1999) have rarely been singled out as a separate group from the umbrella term “ESL students,” which can also include immigrant permanent residents or naturalized citizens. Instead, research on L2 writing in FYC has traditionally based its study domain on institutional settings: ESL classes versus mainstream classes or, more recently, ESL sessions or L2 sessions of FYC versus mainstream FYC.

Depending on each university’s writing program, the relations between ESL classes and FYC can be roughly categorized into three groups: first, students pass an ESL or basic writing course before they can enroll in a FYC; second, students enroll in FYC in addition to ESL writing; and third, students self-select between ESL-specialized FYC and mainstream FYC (Silva, 1994). In the context of this study, international students are offered free choice between a mainstream FYC and a MLL-section of FYC. Simultaneously, they have the opportunity to receive extra writing support from what Grego and Thompson (2008) and Fraizer (2010) call “third spaces,” such as writing studios, small-group-targeted tutoring, and one-on-one tutoring from various writing centers on campus.

Furthermore, designation of students has evolved from “non-native English speaking (NNES) students” to “ESL students,” then recently onward to “L2 writers” or “multilingual learners” (MLL) (Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013). In regard to the denomination “international students”, Cox (2016) also pointed out that “the term *international student* is inappropriate when referring to linguistic identity,” as some international students do not use English as a second language, including students from India, where English instead serves as one of the primary languages (p. 55). Some studies also refer to international students as “international multilingual students” in order to differentiate them from “U.S.-resident multilingual students” (Friedrich, 2006; Nakamaru, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2016). Nakamaru (2010) referred to Reid’s (1998) term *eye learners*, coined to describe international students who learn English as a foreign language in their home countries, often through translation methods, and who therefore tend to perform better in reading and writing than listening and speaking (p. 97). On the other hand, Reid described U.S.-resident multilingual students as *ear learners* because they acquire English in the U.S. through oral interaction with other speakers of English (quoted in Nakamaru, 2010, p. 97). While these terms might overgeneralize about both groups, it is important to differentiate them as their past educational experiences, such as in language learning, writing, and classroom culture, can lead to very different needs in FYC.

Challenges L2 writers face can vary across writing programs. For instance, in more old-fashioned writing programs (e.g., the first and second categories) that set ESL or basic writing as mandatory for L2 writers, implementing gatekeeping exams (both entrance and exit) cause issues for L2 writers, including anxiety, pain, and a sense of unfairness due to different standards being applied to L2 writers and to the nature of timed, one-shot writing exams (Braine, 1996; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). L2 writers also perceive a disconnect between ESL and mainstream classes when they make the transition from one to the other (Harklau, 1994). This disjunction has also been captured over time by Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), Leki and Silva (2004), and Costino and Hyon (2011) from very different perspectives. When offered a free choice of ESL- or MLL-section FYC versus a mainstream FYC, L2 writers prefer and tend to perform better in the former due to an increased sense of comfort, confidence, and security resulting from more understanding teachers and friendlier peers (Braine, 1996). While ESL- or MLL-sections may be challenged for their potentially lower standards and for a lack of interaction with native speakers, mainstream FYC can be “intimidating,” thus serving as a site of struggles for L2 writers.

A review of L2 writing research in FYC (summarized over time in Silva, 1994; Matsuda, 1999; Matsuda and Silva, 1999; Leki, Cumming and Silvia, 2008; Cox, et. al., 2010; Matsuda, Saenkhum and Accardi, 2013) shows that studies based on instructors’ and administrators’ perspectives on international student writers have revealed a dominant monolingual trend in which the experience of this group has been framed very negatively. Thus, we see words like “dissonance,” “misunderstanding,” “isolation,” “fear,” and “intimidation” used to depict L2 writers, especially international students in mainstream FYC classes. The remaining few articles in these collections which have triumphant endings are more or less using students’ success stories to prove the superiority of a program or course design.

More recently, due to a dramatic increase in the number of international students, many of whom have also brought more prominent issues into writing classrooms and elsewhere on campus, it has become more urgent for program administrators and instructors to seek effective program-wide or campus-wide solutions. For instance, Dana Ferris and her colleagues (Ferris et al., 2015) surveyed writing instructors across University of California (UC) campuses on the instructors’ perceptions of a changing student population (mostly due to international student increases) and the instructors’ preparedness for this change. They found that, “as a group, our survey participants definitely felt that some of the international students were at risk, not only in their own classes, but also in their overall potential to succeed at the university” (p. 60). Such surveys also lead to manual-like publications that offer solutions (Ferris 2009, Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013). For example, when describing international students’ prior knowledge in L2 writing, Ferris and Hedgcock (2013) wrote, “It [their book] considers international and EFL students linguistically and culturally homogeneous because they have no exposure to the rhetoric of L2 composition” (p. 58). Such claims may help remind instructors to be better prepared; however, they also simplify international students’ writing experiences and writer identities.

Meanwhile, most studies that have sought students’ perceptions rely on *thematic/content analysis* (what is being said or written) with data from student interviews or autobiographical narratives and seem to lack scrutiny of *life reality* (in what global and local contexts it is being said) and/or *text reality* (what language and form are drawn on) (Pavlenko, 2007), which are critical to a genuine understanding of this increasing and complex group of writers. To fill in these gaps in literature, this research set forth to discover international student writers’ genuine

voices by exploring and researching sites including FYC, but also beyond, examining “third spaces,” such as writing studios, tutoring sessions, and after-class group discussions. This study also expanded understanding of international writers before the time frame of FYC—that is, besides a focus on “what is happening” during the time period of the FYC, the study also examines “what happened” before the FYC by surfacing students’ prior knowledge of writing and writer identities.

### **Research on Prior Knowledge and Writing Development in FYC**

Foundational studies of FYC students’ prior knowledge have been conducted by “genre” and “transfer” scholars in composition studies (such as Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), who have sought to learn what prior knowledge from high school first-year students might draw on and how they use this prior knowledge in new situations, such as college composition courses. For instance, in their important 2011 article “Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition,” Reiff and Bawarshi center the question of whether and how students’ understanding and use of genre facilitates their transition from high school to college writing situations. They have identified two types of students who utilize prior knowledge differently: first, *boundary crossers*, or “those...who were more likely to question their genre knowledge and to break this knowledge down into useful strategies and repurpose it;” second, *boundary guarders*, or “those...who were more likely to draw on whole genres with certainty, regardless of task” (p. 314). Reiff and Bawarshi’s study inspired me to explore international students’ transitioning process from high school writing classes to FYC classes, and provided a theoretical model useful for my research when dealing with prior knowledge, or what I call “incoming” knowledge here.

Building on Reiff and Bawarshi’s findings about students’ prior knowledge use in FYC, Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey (2012) pointed out an absence of applicable prior knowledge due to gaps between high school and FYC classrooms. The first gap lies in key writing concepts. Driven by high-stakes tests, high school writing classroom serving as a literature classroom that focuses on reading and dissecting literary texts and centers its writing concepts on “evaluating rhetorical devices” or “expressing feelings and thoughts.” In contrast, in FYC classrooms, writing is commonly conceptualized as a vehicle “for a dialogue with a reader or an opportunity to make knowledge” (p.5). The second gap involves the types of model texts provided for students, as high school offers “imaginative literature” (such as novels, memoirs, or writing textbooks), which do not “resemble the non-fiction reading characteristic of FYC” (p.6). By analyzing high school writing curricula, reading texts, writing assignments, textbooks, and so forth, this study by Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey has pointed me a clear direction to investigate international students’ “incoming” knowledge and how they apply this knowledge to FYC writing situations.

DePalma and Ringer’s 2011 article “Toward a Theory of Adaptive Transfer: Expanding Disciplinary Discussions of ‘Transfer’ in Second-Language Writing and Composition Studies” relates more closely to my research because it brings the exploration of prior knowledge into the domain of second language writing. In this study, the scholars challenge a traditional conceptualization of transfer in L1 and L2 writing studies, which tends to focus on the reuse of prior knowledge. DePalma and Ringer have coined the term *adaptive transfer* to capture the process whereby L2 writers consciously or intuitively apply their prior knowledge and reshape it to fit new writing contexts. This theory-building piece draws significantly on studies across

multiple disciplines in order to characterize the term *adaptive transfer* (as dynamic, idiosyncratic, multilingual, and transformative). Yet, compared to other studies mentioned above, the theory in this article is not based on any empirical research, nor does it present the contexts where this theory can be applied in practice. While my research can potentially draw on *adaptive transfer* theory, it can also serve to verify this theory with empirical evidence from a FYC setting.

In a more recent study, DasBender (2017) examined two Chinese international students' post-assignment reflections, which were full of their sophisticated articulation of the challenges ahead of them and their plans to learn and overcome these challenges. Though DasBender did not find solid evidence of *adaptive transfer*, he noticed that these two students were applying the skills they learned from previous assignments on new assignments in this class. Furthermore, they were quick to adapt to L2 writing conventions. DasBender concluded that "L2 students' socio-cultural background, the prior writing knowledge they carry from L1 settings, and the extent of their metacognitive awareness of linguistic and rhetorical differences in writing can not only foster or disrupt writing transfer, but also play a critical role in their development as multilingual writers in a US educational context" (p. 273). This study also touched upon writer identity. For instance, when referring to one of the students, DasBender noted, "To her, the moment of transformation—when one crosses a threshold and becomes an academic 'writer'—occurs as one engages intensely with the text as a critical thinker" (p. 284). My research resembles this study in many ways, including by drawing on participants' self-reflections on their learning processes and identity transformations through FYC; however, my research also involved entering environments such as their classrooms, group discussions, and office hours to examine the social interactions that could also have contributed to changes in their writing and writer identities.

### **Research on L2 Writer Identity**

In Mastuda's 2015 article "Identity in Written Discourse," he contrasts two different views of the nature of writing: the social-constructionist view and the social-constructivist view. He points out that the former "focuses on making social conventions available for adoption," while the latter pays more attention to "individual agency in appropriating, resisting, or negotiating those conventions" (148). When considering writer identity, the social-constructivist perspective values writers' agency in shaping the form and meaning of their writing, and writer identity "does not reside entirely in the text; instead, it exists in the interaction between writers and readers that is mediated by the text" (153). For instance, depending on the intended reader of their writing (e.g., an American instructor, American peers, or international peers), international student writers can vary their writing choices based on what expert knowledge they assume their intended readers have or how they want their writing and writer self to be perceived through the writing itself. In the context of this study, it can be argued that, since many international students from China learned English writing from samples or templates, they probably entered FYC classes with a social-constructionist view of writing, that writing is about learning to adopt existing norms and conventions in an L2. However, similar to DasBender's (2017) findings, it can be hypothesized that, as they become more and more familiar with FYC outcomes or L2 writing conventions (such as audiences and building conversations) and confident in their ability to make their own writing decisions, these international student writers can gradually shift to a social-constructivist view of writing, where their writer agency starts to emerge in order to

negotiate form and meaning. This study will set out to examine participants' writer identity through these theoretical lenses.

The papers in *Reinventing Identities in Second Language Writing* (Cox et al., 2010), outlined the trends in L2 writer identities that we would see in the succeeding decade. First, studies in this area have focused on L2 writer identity constructions and transitions. L2 writers' multifaceted, ever-changing, conflicting identities have been shaped along with their struggles in sites such as academic settings (e.g., FYC). Second, while L2 writers' struggles seem to be concentrated in academic settings, researchers also have sought alternative sites (e.g., writing centers or off-campus internship workplaces), in which L2 writers tend to be more successful in negotiating identities and expressing their own voices, partially due to increased confidence, reduced pressure, and more opportunities to express themselves. Third, researchers who took a "translingual" approach have focused on L2 writer identities and languages as resources by embracing hybrid language and hybrid identities. Thus, this depiction of "pluralization of composition" has given rise to the rich, complex, multilingual literacies and identities L2 writers have brought to writing classrooms. Fourth, they have identified a trend of technology-involved studies wherein L2 writer identity has been seen flourishing on numerous online writing communities, such as social media or email. However, the L2 writers studied did not see the impact of online writing on academic writing. Fifth, globally, L2 writers have received more attention than before. For example, Harushimana shows the complex fabric of identities African writers negotiate in their daily lives and in language choices in postcolonial Africa. Similarly, Daniloff-Merrill argues for the legitimacy of Nenglish (Nepalese English). The trend of L2 writer identities studies intersects with my research. On one hand, these studies mark a widening scope of topics and issues, writing sites, research methods, and analysis devices. On the other hand, my pursuit of not only L2 writer identity but also a correlation between identity and writing development can make contributions to this field.

### **Research on International Student Identities**

While the focus of this study is on writing and writer identities, participants' special status as "international students" can complicate the understanding of what occurs in FYC classrooms and other writing sites. Thus, it is worth consulting studies conducted on international student identities more generally.

The documentation of international student identity development often adopts "grounded theory," a bottom-up qualitative method that requires coding textual data (e.g., interview transcriptions, participant observation scripts, or field notes) and discovering theories through sorting out interrelationships of variables, categories, concepts, and so forth. (Kim, 2012; Tseng and Newton, 2002; McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Weidman, 2006). Grounded theory has advantages in identity trajectory studies in relation to international students. First, it maps out a fuller picture of their social, cultural, and educational backgrounds that is rarely available in L2 or composition studies. Second, it captures how identities flow from one context to another (e.g., how subjectivities formed elsewhere can inform why the learner performs the way they do in another given context). Despite these benefits, grounded theory's aim of theory building can run the risk of overgeneralization, running the risk of seeing international students as a fixed group. In reality, international students come from a variety of social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Throwing them all into one group with one identity growth trajectory can create or reinforce stereotypes and overlook the richness of the diverse resources they bring to campus,

therefore invalidating suggestions and solutions provided in identity studies adopting grounded theory. Even students from the same country, with the same social, cultural, and linguistic background, are quite likely to have taken vastly different educational paths to get to the U.S., and these varied paths could have shaped their identities and subjectivities in numerous ways. This reminds me that during the research process, it is important to be wary of possible overgeneralizations and to leave enough room for participants' storytelling.

My research is also informed by another recurring theme in international student identity studies: the construction of international student identity has been greatly shaped by how they imagine they are perceived (positioned) by domestic students or mainstream culture in the U.S. For instance, in Hsieh's 2006 article, a Japanese student Akiko had to resist her imagined perception of America's hegemonic view of Japanese women as voiceless and submissive; thus, she struggled to speak up using her own voice in class and in her writing. In her 1989 autobiographical narrative, scholar Fan Shen has contributed a very important concept when dealing with presumptions: *unlearning*. In this narrative, Shen described how she had to *unlearn* her bias against capitalism ideology formed in communist China in the 70's and 80's in order to construct an English identity in English writing without losing her Chinese identity. The process of *unlearning* allows new learning and formation of new identities. The importance of student perceptions of their positioning is confirmed by the University's 2019 research report on its International and Multilingual Student Academic Survey. Taken together, these reports imply the significance of exploring international students' presumptions in relation to their American peers and instructors, as well as examining how these presumptions might have shaped their writer identity and writing.

### Conclusion

Overall, this research situates itself in the intersections of multiple areas including FYC composition, L2 writing in FYC, L2 writer identities, and international student identities. Drawing on literature from those areas, this research is theorized to first look into international students' "incoming" knowledge—a cluster of knowledge encompassing their past writing experience, writing materials, perceptions on writing, etc. In other words, this study examines "what happened" before FYC. Secondly, it also studies "what's happening" during the time of FYC. In order to give rise to students' genuine voices, this study goes beyond *thematic/content analysis* (what is being said or written) of data from interviews and writing, but also examines local and global contexts of writing (*life reality*) and analyzes what language and form they draw on (*text reality*). By reading the work on international student identities, I was also reminded of the danger to overgeneralize their experiences and identities, as well as the significance of exploring their presumptions in relation to their American peers and instructors.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Beginning with a comparison of qualitative and quantitative paradigms, this chapter describes the reasoning behind the selection of a qualitative methodology for this study and analyzes the strengths and limitations of each specific data collection and analysis method. Given the nature of this research, qualitative methods, including interviews, observation, and text analysis, were employed to look closely at participants' writing experience and perceptions. The chapter then presents participant recruitment criteria, introduces all participants, and then explains some decisions I made as a researcher during the stages of data collection and analysis.

#### A Qualitative Study

Although contemporary perspectives increasingly acknowledge the complementary contributions of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Borland, 2001), they continue to be seen as divergent. The debate between the quantitative and qualitative research camps centers on their distinct philosophical underpinnings and questions about the validity and reliability of qualitative methods. The underlying ontological (about reality), epistemological (about knowledge) and axiological (about value) assumptions of quantitative and qualitative methods are distinct. Quantitative research sees the world "out there" is real, concrete, and observable. It is governed by laws and rules that can be discovered through variables, measurements, hypothesis-testing, and verification. Therefore, knowledge is assumed to be objective and independent of personal experience. On the other hand, qualitative research sees the world as essentially a construct created by individuals' interpretations, which are dependent on interactions between those individuals and their social environments. Subjectivity is inherent in these interpretations and leaves them never value-free (Richards, 2003). Major qualitative methods include observation, interviews, analysis of texts and documents, and so forth.

Compared to quantitative methods, which translate humans and human experience into variables and numbers, qualitative methods allow the researcher to understand complex phenomena that quantitative methods might not be able to explain. This offers a particular advantage for second language studies, a learner-centered enterprise that values learners' individual perspectives and experiences in language learning while taking sociocultural contexts and power dynamics into account. This requires researchers to go into the field, to observe, to inquire, and even to interact with participants. For instance, while quantitative research might use a survey identify variables and take at face value learners' stated beliefs about writing and whether these beliefs have had an impact on their writing, qualitative research might bring individual learners into the process and thereby offer insights on how learners make sense of their writing experiences. In the context of this study, to understand an international student participant's TOEFL writing experience, a qualitative approach will allow us to ask: What was it like to write for the TOEFL? How was TOEFL writing introduced and practiced, compared to Chinese writing or other English writing? Open-ended questions such as these offer a space for participants to recall pivotal moments in writing and capture feelings associated with those moments.

In addition, rather than merely relying on learners' own accounts, qualitative research allows the examination of immediate context (such as the physical research setting, the actual writing task, or a writing tutorial session) and global context (such as cultural, social, or historical influences). The attention paid to these contexts can broaden the understanding of L2

writers and L2 writing and help us view what participants may be unconscious of, keep to themselves, or deliberately omit. For this research on international student FYC experience and writer identities, it is important to take into consideration both immediate context (e.g., How do participants behave in a FYC classroom with mainly domestic students?) and global context (e.g., What cultural and social values do participants carry into the FYC classroom when they choose whether or not to participate in class discussions? What might have been influencing their choice?).

In addition, unlike quantitative methods, in which the researcher distances himself or herself from the field to increase validity, in qualitative studies the researcher gravitates towards the participants and immerses himself or herself in the environment. The ideas of “being there” and “seeing it yourself” instill an in-depth understanding of what is going on in the field and can prove beneficial to a thorough analysis and interpretation of outcomes. Finally, Keith Richards (2003) points out the “transformative” potential of qualitative inquiry to impact researchers in second language studies and in education. He quotes González (2001, p.560), who nicely describes her qualitative research journey as “liberating me as it shifts my self-reflection as oppressed object to culturally working actor” (as quoted in Richards, 2003, p.9). As many researchers in second language studies are teachers themselves, qualitative studies have the potential to alter the way they view their students and impact the ways they teach. Particularly for this research, I would like to embrace the role of a qualitative researcher: to “be there” and “to see it myself” so that I can capture pivotal moments and closely examine what is going on in the classroom, during group work, at a tutoring session, and more.

### **Reflection and Limitations**

Despite its merits, adopting qualitative methods also comes with challenges, which can be summarized as: a) issues of validity and reliability and b) sensitivity to ethical concerns.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity concerns accuracy in data collection and interpretation; reliability involves questioning whether the same results can be achieved with consistency by others using the same data and methods. The charge that qualitative methods lack validity and reliability is mainly voiced by the quantitative camp. Responses by the qualitative camp to this charge generally fall into three categories: *objection*, e.g., Clavarino, Najman, and Silverman (1995), who claim these two terms are irrelevant in interpretive inquiry due to its distinct nature from quantitative methods; *appropriation*, e.g., Lincoln and Guba, who appropriate the two terms into “trustworthiness,” “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability,” (Richards, 2003, p.286); and *reversal*, e.g. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), who write that, “the objections of qualitative should be reversed and read as pointing to the strong points of qualitative interview research” and view the issue surrounding validity and reliability as a question of craftsmanship (p.245). The cultivation of qualitative research craftsmanship should not be centered on diminishing the role of researchers in order to achieve minimal distortion, but rather on ensuring researchers be mindful of the ethical issues that could impact results caused by their personal beliefs, the power relations between themselves and participants, and the overall reflection of researchers on the research outcomes and individual participants in order to avoid harm and achieve the most natural results.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Thus, ethical practices of qualitative research first require the researcher to be mindful of not imposing personal morals, values, and ideology onto participants when framing research questions or interacting with participants. A consent form and other ethical reviews will be required by the Institutional Review Board for research on human subjects to explicitly address confidentiality and anonymity and to define risks (e.g., vulnerability), reciprocity (benefits), participants' rights to withdraw and review, and compensation. However, in real-world qualitative practice, ethical issues can become quite complicated. For instance, to conduct an interview of the highest quality, the researcher might be tempted to use what Jette Fog calls a "trojan horse" to get behind a participant's defenses (in Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.169), while at the same time overlooking the possible consequences to the participant (e.g. emotional disturbance). During the data transcription and analysis process, ethical concerns can include fidelity and objectivity in reporting the participants' oral statements. For example, linguistic differences between the participant and interviewer can cause obscurity. Even when the participant is asked to review responses, there is still a question of who decides what is more objective when reporting. Finally, it is challenging to balance a researcher-participant relationship: being too close can cause distortion of views or difficulty when leaving the field without hurting the participant's emotions. On the other hand, if a distance is kept, then there can be a lack of appropriate rapport to gain an in-depth interview. In this matter, I am aligned with Seidman (2006), who contrasts an "I-Thou" relationship with the "WE" relationship, highlighting that the former suggests equal participation between the two, while keeping enough room for the participant to create independent thoughts (p.80).

Researchers should be responsible "not only to those who participate, but also to those for whom the knowledge is produced" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.105). In second language studies, qualitative methods offer insights into a deeper understanding of learners and their experiences. Reading about the main tenets, underpinning assumptions, and advantages and limitations of qualitative methods discussed above, I have gained a greater appreciation for what rigorous research entails and requires. The nature of qualitative study as never value-free would always remind me of this examination of my own researcher-subject positions, of sensitivity to ethical issues, and of the polished crafting and critical reflections necessary for rigorous research. All of these go into achieving the goal of "research integrity" that makes meaningful and productive contributions to second language studies possible.

### **Methods**

Having justified why qualitative methods best suit this study, in the following section I would like to introduce the specific qualitative methods adopted for its data collection and data analysis, including research interviews, observations, narrative inquiry, and discourse analysis. After providing academic rationale for these selections, I will demonstrate that, as a researcher, I am also aware of their limitations when applying them in my research. I understand that they do not work best in discrete parallelism; instead, methods overlap and support each other. Due to the unpredictable aspects of this study (e.g., it is unknown whether a participant's FYC class will cover the same assignments, such as autobiographical narratives), it is important to include all these methods to gain a fuller picture.

## Research Interview

We live in an “interview society” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), and the interview has become a basic mode of inquiry in which the subject listens and decodes the interview questions and then chooses what to tell or not tell and how to tell it. Taking into account the interviewer’s purpose and power position, the subject tailors answers and delivers stories through language, gestures, and facial expressions in order to make sense of her or his lived experience. On the other hand, the interviewer decodes the answers to understand the experience from the subject’s point of view, asks for clarifications, verifies interpretations, and probes for deeper understanding (e.g., how did the subject come to this view?) in order to make sense of the subject’s presumptions and assumptions about the world and the self.

Among various interview theories, I adopted a social constructivist view of interview (Talmy, 2010; Talmy, 2011; Talmy & Richards, 2011), according to which interview knowledge cannot be treated as reports of truths; rather, it is co-constructed by interviewer and interviewee. Thus, it is important to examine the asymmetrical power relations between the interviewer and interviewee and how their power dynamic could have had an impact on the conversation. The various power relations for investigation can range from institutional status, gender, race, or socioeconomic status to linguistic background, religion, or age. As a demonstration, Steven Talmy (2011) analyzes how an ESL student in a Hawaiian school, Ioane, when facing an interviewer who is also her ESL teacher, sophisticatedly delivered a message that ESL does not suit her without criticizing ESL. On the contrary, Ioane emphasized that ESL is good, but only for lower proficiency learners like her mother. By discussing the power relation between the researcher as a teacher and the participant as a student as well as by analyzing the “how” of the interview rather than merely the “what,” Talmy was able to show how the participant sophisticatedly used this interview as a site to present the teacher/researcher with her distinction between a lower-L2-English proficient and a newcomer ESL student.

To those who are interested in language learning and identity, in this instance, identity is not only told but also performed by the participant. Through such studies, Talmy, together with other scholars (including Elizabeth Miller, Matthew Prior, Keith Richards, Kathryn Roulston, and Steven Mann) in the *TESOL Quarterly* special issue titled “Theorizing Qualitative Interviews in Applied Linguistics,” have convinced me of the significance of a) making transcription and original data available for further review and investigation and b) providing a critical, reflective, meta-methodological discussion of the researcher’s role in the process of interview data analysis and representation (Talmy & Richards, 2011).

Another critical issue in interviewing is that of researcher subject positions and positioning. The subject positions of a researcher bring with them a repertoire of beliefs and assumptions about the topic and participants. Positioning is comprised of how the researcher positions themselves relative to the participant and how the participant is positioned. A simplified version of this can be observed in the distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders.” For instance, while it seems to make more sense to interview someone who shares the researcher’s cultural background because that gives the researcher *insider* advantages and can make a participant more comfortable, that could also result in distorting the participants’ answers through leading questions and limiting subject positions. It can also potentially silence students who hold different views. For example, being a FYC teacher and a native Chinese speaker, my *insider* advantages when interviewing Chinese international students who are taking a FYC class can potentially affect the interview process and skew analysis results. I believe a solution to this

issue is to take an inquisitive approach that leads to talking less and listening and probing more. On the other hand, when interviewing participants who do not share the same background, from an outsider perspective, there is a danger of revealing assumptions or stereotypes and then being prevented from gathering in-depth data. I believe a solution to this would be to take an open approach that shows interest, builds trust, values what participants have brought to the interview, and allows the researcher to be enlightened by keeping an open mind.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Labov and Waletzky's 1967 piece laid out a foundational framework for the study of narrative as a text type. Following it, a "narrative turn" has emerged in social sciences since 1980, when scholars proposed the perception of narrative as a mode of inquiry for comprehending life and reality. Narrative turn proponents pay attention not only to the "what" but also to the "how" with an emphasis on "language, discourse and contexts of storytelling" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p.18). In respect to second language studies, particularly to writing and identity, two approaches to narrative analysis can be relevant: autobiographical narrative (i.e., writing autobiographies) and the "small stories" approach (for analyzing brief stories that are part of larger interactions).

*Autobiographical narratives* (such as diaries, journals, linguistic autobiographies, and language memoirs) are analyzed to understand the experiences of second-language learners, how they make sense of those experiences, and how power relations embedded in gender, race, and class come into play in shaping learners' experiences and identity (Pavlenko, 2002; 2007). In her review article, Pavlenko (2007) summarises three aspects of personal narrative analysis: *subject reality* (content), *life reality* (context), and *text reality* (language and form). She points out that analysts who merely focus on subject reality can run the risk of taking narrative accounts at face value and suggests using supplementary means of data collection (e.g., interviews) as triangulation to clarify ambiguity, go under the surface, and pinpoint and explain whatever inconsistencies may appear. Writing from a poststructuralist perspective, Pavlenko recommends a combination of macroanalysis (analyzing larger impacts of communication shaped by cultural expectations) and microanalysis (analysis of the nuances participants use when relaying stories to present themselves in a desired manner) (p.169). In addition to depth of analysis, other technical issues should also be taken into consideration when applying this approach, such as language choice in collecting, transcribing, translating narrative data, and transcriber consistency.

Another form of narrative analysis relevant to the study of second-language writer identity is the "small stories" approach put forth by Bamberg (2006, 2011), De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006), and Georgakopoulou (2007). As opposed to "big stories" or biographic, thematic, or *grand narratives*, the "small stories" approach examines brief, naturally occurring narratives with a focus shift from tellers to co-tellership and identity "in-the-making." Bamberg's theory of *positioning* can be a useful tool for "small stories" analysis. Adapting from Davies and Harré's (1990) original *positioning* theory, Michael Bamberg advocates close scrutiny of three levels of participants' positioning in narrative: as a character in the story, as they position themselves in the story as the teller of the story, and as they define themselves beyond the context of the story (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p.163-164). Though this method has broadened methodological parameters for understanding and analyzing identity, the here-and-now nature of this approach limits the analysis to immediate contexts, overlooking larger social,

cultural, political contexts. To compensate for this, it should be supplemented with macroanalysis to understand its impact on the responses, other approaches, and other data forms.

### **Discourse Analysis (CA & CR)**

Placing language at the center, discourse analysts study how individuals and groups utilize language to enact specific activities and identities (Gee, 1999). After the “marriage of form and function,” discourse analysis has taken a “social turn” that “focuses on language in interaction.” (Silberstein, 2010, p.274). Approaches discussed here are limited to conversation analysis (CA) and contrastive rhetoric (CR).

#### ***Conversation Analysis (CA).***

Originated by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, CA examines conversational interactions using naturally occurring utterances. CA analysts investigate intersubjective understandings, that is, “speakers jointly construct conversation and their shared understanding of what is happening in it” (Richards, 2003, p. 26). CA analysts also examine how social roles are assigned sequentially and systematically in basic units of conversation structures and techniques, such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs (e.g., greetings and return greetings), and repairs for turn-taking errors. Going beyond the foci of the CA founders, examining minute features in conversation can provide a platform and evidence to reveal how speakers orient to gender, race, class, and more. However, it also has the potential to encourage hasty generalizations or lead to stereotypes. For instance, in “Sex Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation”, Zimmerman and West (1975) examined gender differences in cross-sex two-party conversations and showed male dominance in the conversations through findings such as: men interrupting 46 times while women do so only twice, men overlapping speech while women do not, and men using delayed minimal responses to indicate disinterest in a topic. Such applications of CA can be compelling, but they also have the danger of making a larger social claim based on microanalysis of random conversational segments without an examination of broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts. To overcome such challenges when adopting CA techniques, I have been mindful of the impact of selecting conversation segments and inform readers of my decision-making rationale, taking larger contexts into consideration. In addition, claims should be made with caution probably being more appropriate with support from supplementary data forms and other approaches.

#### ***Contrastive Rhetoric (CR).***

Influenced by linguistic relativity (specifically, the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis), Kaplan founded the field of contrastive rhetoric in his 1966 landmark article that generalizes cultural patterns of rhetorical organization in non-native speakers’ English writing in contrast to native speaker’s English writing. (e.g. Kaplan claimed, for example, that Arabic-speaking writers use extensive coordination, speakers of “Oriental” languages circle around, and speakers of French and Spanish tend to digress. Such generalizations in CR have faced accusations of being imprecise (both for English and other languages), oversimplifying, and deterministic, as well as accusations of stereotyping cultural patterns of other countries while reinforcing native speakers’ English writing superiority. Despite these charges, the contributions of CR to second language writing studies cannot be overlooked.

First, CR has inspired numerous studies aiming to apply, extend, challenge, or defend its original findings. Second, CR researchers have extended understanding of L2 writing from the

perspective of L2 writers' cultural background to that of educational contexts in home countries, such as L1 composition textbooks, researched by Liao and Chen (2010), and English writing in entrance examinations for universities, studied by Jie and Lederman (1998). Third, it provides ESL teachers with tangible tools for deepening their understanding of students' writing and helps students develop awareness of English readers' expectations for successful communication. As a FYC teacher, my takeaway from studying CR is caution against treating students' L1 influence as a negative factor in L2 literacy development; rather, I found it beneficial to focus on empowering L2 students in making use of their first language resources to negotiate expectations of English academic readers. As a researcher devoted to L2 writing studies, more current approaches to CR remind me to avoid an essentialist and stereotyped understanding of students' writing based on certain "cultural patterns" and instead to acknowledge individual differences and utilize mixed-methods in an effort to micro-analyze L2 writings.

The following sections outline the specifics of the current study.

## **Recruitment**

### **Recruitment Criteria**

Being well informed about the merits and limitations of the qualitative methods adopted in this study, I set forth to recruit three to five participants, with eligibility and disqualification criteria specified in Appendix I. Briefly, eligible participants would be international students who had had no more than three years of pre-college studying experience in the U.S. and who were taking a FYC course in winter 2015. Participants needed to be willing to share writing-related materials and feel comfortable talking about their writing experiences and related feelings; they would also be comfortable with me observing their classes, group discussions, and so forth. To gain a fuller picture of students' FYC writing performance and writer identity development, I also intended to include as participants those of the students' instructors who were willing to discuss their course design and rationale as well as share their opinions on the students' overall performances. This study did not take nationality, gender, age, or major into account in its criteria for participant selection. It also did not exclude student participants whose instructors were not willing to participate in the study, as the main focus of this study is the participants' own perception of their writing development and writer identity, whereas their instructors' opinions serve as supplementary data. When sharing or presenting this study, all student and instructor participants are given pseudonyms in order to protect participants' privacy and identity.

### **Recruiting Channels**

During winter break of 2015, I sent a recruitment email to all instructors teaching an FYC course in winter quarter 2015, including the University's Expository Writing Program and Interdisciplinary Writing Program. Included in the recruitment email were a blurb that briefly explained the purpose of this study and its recruitment criteria as well as an attachment with a formal recruitment letter (see Appendix 2) and a detailed consent form (see Appendix 3) that explained participants' responsibilities, data collection methods and time points, potential risks to those participating in the study, and participants' rights to pause or withdraw from the study.

I also emailed instructors of writing studios, two-credit writing courses that support students from various FYC classes. My hope was that instructors would share this email with their students and then interested students would email me to learn more about the study. For the

two writing studios I was teaching that quarter, I was also able to explain the study with more details at the end of my first studio sessions. I also reached out to students in my conversation group, a drop-in evening program housed in the University's Academic Support Programs, where international students joined me twice a week for two hours each evening to practice speaking English, discuss academic and life issues, and build a community for each other. I brought up this study during our first conversation group session and asked interested students to contact me for more details in an email format.

### **Communicating Risks, Concerns, and Discomfort**

This study anticipated that participants might be uncomfortable with being observed in various settings (e.g., in the classroom or in group work outside of class) or with certain questions when being interviewed. In the participant consent form in Appendix 3, it was explained to participants that, in situations of discomfort, they would be encouraged to refuse my observation requests or to choose not to answer certain questions. I also shared with them that, as a researcher, I am aware of the importance of not imposing any personal values or judgements on participants or their writings. This study also promised not to add any extra workload for its participants onto an already demanding FYC course. It would not ask participants to compose additional writings; instead, I would only collect those that had been done before and during their FYC classes.

Finally, this study also addressed concerns that sharing writings with or interviewing instructors might affect participants' grades for their FYC classes. In the consent form, I communicated that, during interviews with instructors, I would not discuss or imply any evaluation of participants' writing or class performance, and there would be no discussion of any sort about grades. Rather, instructors would be first interviewed at the beginning of the class to mostly focus on course design and then interviewed again after grades were posted to obtain the instructors' perspectives on what writing strategies and resources the participants had drawn on when writing and during class, what instructors had found helpful for facilitating participants' writing growth, and so forth. In other words, the timing of the two instructor interviews was intended to minimize the risk of affecting grades.

### **Participants**

A total of five students from five different FYC classes expressed interest in the study. Among the five students, four were from the two writing studios I was teaching that quarter, and the last student was from conversation group I had been facilitating. They were all first-year students. I met with each of them in order to explain more about this study and walk them through the consent form. After they agreed to join the study, they signed consent forms and began to schedule our pre-FYC interviews.

It is important to share that, among the five participants, the only male and only Thai student did not complete the full research project, though he was very supportive of the study. He was also recruited from one of my writing studios. We were able to successfully conduct the research, including two interviews with him, two class observations, and one interview with his instructor, until the last two weeks when he became quite sick. Apparently, he was also under great stress from his parents, who had demanded he transfer to another school with a less competitive program in Business. In the end, the participant did transfer to another school after

that winter quarter, which made it challenging to conduct the last interviews or to collect any writing materials.

Very kindly, he offered me the opportunity to conduct an interview through video chat and agreed to sort out his FYC writing materials to send to me. However, knowing that he was already going through a very stressful time transitioning to another school, the last thing I wanted was to create more work or more stress for him. It was a very difficult decision to drop him from the study, because by doing so, I would be left with only four female Chinese international students in my research, which challenges the representativeness of this study that claims to research international students more broadly. On the other hand, it also seemed wrong to include one participant just so that I could claim this is a study for international students in general rather than female Chinese students in particular. As a researcher, I would be more at peace being truthful about the research process: I set out to recruit international students with diverse backgrounds and ended up with four female Chinese students. Meanwhile, I was reminded that qualitative research should exercise caution so as to avoid making overgeneralizations about any group based on a small research sample. Rather, a focus on each individual and their experiences affords us in-depth knowledge and understanding of who they are and how they feel. With that, I was able to move forward with these four insightful Chinese female international participants (with pseudonyms): Yanjin, Caiqin, Sucheng, and Lufang.

Yanjin, Caiqin, and Sucheng were recruited from my writing studio course, a writing-support class that assists students concurrently with their FYC courses in a much smaller classroom setting. In each writing studio, a total of ten students from various composition courses meet for one-hour sessions twice a week to discuss key reading and writing concepts, develop revising skills, and dissect and brainstorm ideas for essay prompts from their respective composition courses. Unlike the other three participants, Lufang was recruited from the conversation group where she had been a regular attendee since fall 2015. The following section introduces each participant and how they were recruited.

### **Yanjin**

Prior to our first sessions, I reached out to writing studio students, 80% of whom were Chinese students, about my research via the course roster, and Yanjin responded quickly that she would like to join. At that time, Yanjin was in her second quarter at the university and her fourth year in the United States. Unlike the other three participants who came to the U.S. directly for college, Yanjin had spent three years at a high school in Michigan before she came to the University of Washington, which meant she left home to study abroad at the early age of fifteen.

Yanjin's strong command of spoken English could be observed during the interview as well as in the writing studio. When asked to choose between English and Mandarin as a preferred language for the interview, Yanjin did not hesitate to choose English. She spoke English comfortably, and she was a very natural conversationalist. Being aware that she and I share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Yanjin would occasionally insert some Chinese phrases or terminology to advance the conversation. For example, when explaining an end-of-middle-school writing experience, she used the original Chinese word "Zhongkao (中考)" for the provincial entrance exam for high school. In addition to her English language strength, her spontaneity in responding to questions made her stand out among the ten international students in my writing studio, most of whom were Chinese. She also seemed to be familiar with American

classrooms, evidenced in part by how frequently she spoke up during instruction. Yanjin was active in whole-class discussion and small-group collaboration.

### **Caiqin**

Caiqin was also recruited from one of my writing studios in winter quarter 2015. Though she did not respond to my recruitment email, after I announced the opportunity again at the end of our first writing studio session, Caiqin stayed behind and asked for more information. After I explained and provided more details about the study to her in Chinese, she said, with a big smile (translated), *“I also want to know what kind of writer I am. I have never thought about it before.”* Then I emailed her the consent form and officially recruited her. According to Caiqin, since she was little, she has always been an easy-going tomboy.

When asked which language she would prefer for our interviews, Caiqin said that English was fine, and she wanted to practice it. Though Caiqin’s English did not come across as naturally as Yanjin’s, Caiqin spoke very clearly and concisely. Similar to Yanjin, Caiqin was active in the writing studio, and she liked to lead group work. During our final interview (also the only interview in Chinese), conducted a year and half after she took her composition course, I also noticed Caiqin’s strong sense of humor. For instance, recalling a time when she was reflecting on her successful college application experience with her mother, she said (translated), *“I asked my mother, ‘Mom, have you realized that since I was little, as long as I put my mind to it, I have always achieved whatever I wanted to achieve?’”* Then Caiqin looked into my eyes with a smile and commented, *“You rarely hear such bragging from a Chinese kid to her parent, huh?”* I nodded while laughing at her witty humor.

### **Sucheng**

Sucheng and Caiqin were like twin sisters. They grew up in the same city, went to the same middle and international high schools in China, came to the same university in the US, and became roommates. Not surprisingly, they were both in my writing studio, though they were taking different composition courses: Caiqin was taking an interdisciplinary composition course linked with her psychology lecture, while Sucheng was taking a regular session of the FYC course. Together, Caiqin and Sucheng approached me to join the study after our first studio class. By the time the research began, both of them had been in the US for a little over one quarter.

Sucheng appeared mostly quiet during the studio classes. When given the options of Mandarin or English for our interviews, she chose Mandarin with a very shy smile and said (translated), *“I am afraid my English might not be good enough to express myself.”* Sucheng also spoke softly during most of our interviews. However, during our last interview, a year and half after she took her composition course, I noticed her voice was much stronger, especially when defending Chinese international students like herself against the stigma of choosing to study abroad to avoid the challenge of the “Gaokao” or college entrance examinations.

### **Lufang**

Lufang was recruited from the conversation group, which she attended regularly in academic year 2014-2015. When I brought up my study during one of those meetings the quarter before, Lufang had asked to join right away. By the time she was recruited for the study, Lufang had been at the University of Washington for a little over one quarter and had attended almost all the conversation group nights since she arrived. I noticed that she was very curious about others’

experiences. She liked to relate those experiences to her own and then raise interesting questions for others.

Lufang spoke very thoughtfully. Her English might not have been the most fluent among the international conversation group participants, especially compared with those who had attended American high schools, but she had few problems expressing her own ideas and opinions. Whenever she did struggle with an expression, she would switch to Mandarin and then turn to me for translation. When offered language choices for our interviews, Lufang chose English. Of all the participants, Lufang was the only one who would ask me, “*How should I say this in English?*” She would often elaborate on the differences between the English and Chinese expressions. In a sense, she appeared to be very observant of linguistic differences.

Once all the participants were identified and confirmed, I reached out to their instructors and requested the instructors’ participation in this research. All instructors agreed to join and signed the instructor participant consent form, except for Sucheng’s instructor, who did not respond to multiple emails. I decided to keep Sucheng in the research, as her experience and her perceptions matter regardless of the instructor’s opinions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Main data collection for this qualitative study lasted for a little more than a quarter, from January to April 2015. During the summer of 2016, I added another interview with each of the four participants in order to collect data on their personal identities, which I believe could be closely associated with their writer identities. Five major data collecting methods were adopted: a background survey, collecting writing samples, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with students and instructors as participants, non-participant observation of the students’ classes and other writing-related occasions (e.g., targeted tutoring in a writing center), as well as think-alouds on writing prompts. In the section below, I will introduce how each method was employed and how each data set was analyzed.

#### **Background Survey**

A background survey was sent to each participant to gather data on participants’ past writing experience, both in Chinese and English. Questions included how many years they had been writing in English and what kinds of English writing they had done, such as journals, TOEFL, SAT, and college essays. This survey also asked about participants’ relationships with writing: what writing meant to them in general, or English writing in particular, and so forth. In the end, the survey collected information about their current FYC classes and writing support outside of class to help me create participants’ profiles and schedule interviews and observations. The intent of this survey was not to draw conclusions about their shared experiences; rather, it provided talking points to structure our first interview, at the beginning of the FYC class. For instance, if a participant responded that she had written English journals before, then in the first interview, I could ask questions to make sense of that specific writing experience. All participants filled out this survey prior to our first interview, so I was able to design individualized questions for each participant.

#### **Collecting Writing Materials**

With participants’ permission, I collected their writings and writing-related materials (e.g., writing prompts, revisions, or homework exercises) from before they entered the FYC

course, while they were taking it, and after they exited. They also shared with me their end-of-quarter portfolio (or only the cover letter), which included some self-reflection on their FYC experience. Not all materials were used or analyzed in this research, justifications for which are explained in each respective chapter. The intention of collecting participants' writing was not to evaluate their writing for conventions or content; Rather, these documents were collected and analyzed for the following reasons: to serve as textual evidence for their perceptions of writing development; examine how their writing foci might have or have not shifted; and demonstrate what writing resources they bring to a U.S. college and how these resources are similar to or different from the resources they receive during composition courses and beyond.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

I conducted three 30- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews with each student participant individually before, during, and after winter quarter 2015. This interview series was intended to help interpret participants' writing experience while demonstrating how they interacted with instructors, peers, and writing resources (including prompts, samples, and so forth), as well as how that interaction ultimately shaped who they were as writers.

Specifically, the first interviews were conducted during the second week of winter 2015 rather than before the quarter started, which had been the intended time. This was due to the process and time it took to recruit participants. However, this delay should not affect the result of the data collection, as the main goal of this interview was to sketch a writing life and describe writer identities based on participants' past writing experiences listed on the background info survey. Near the end of the interview, I also asked about their first impression of and expectations from their respective FYC class. This first interview is analyzed and presented in Chapter 5: Pre-FYC Writing Life and Writer Identity.

The second interviews, or mid-FYC interviews, were conducted after students all received feedback or a grade on their first major assignment so that they could also talk about their reaction to their instructor's feedback. During this interview, each participant was asked to recall her experience writing for the first sequence or first major paper. This interview also included some follow-up questions based on class observations and other situations. For instance, before Yanjin's mid-FYC interview, I observed three in-class peer reviews. I then asked specific questions based on my observations of her interactions with peers, how she received peer feedback, and so forth. Finally, this interview invited the participants to revisit the question of writer identity that asks, "What is your relationship with writing? Has it or has it not changed since you entered the class?" The results and analysis of this interview are presented in Chapter 6: Mid-FYC: Achieving Apperception.

The third interviews, or post-FYC interviews, were conducted during the first two weeks of the subsequent quarter, after participants returned from winter break and received final grades for their FYC classes. This interview examined participant's experience writing for their second FYC sequence, such as researching, revising, composing reflections for the final portfolio. It also covered participants' recollection and reflection of personal improvements and what, in retrospect, they might have done differently. Lastly, this interview asked participants to self-evaluate writer identity evolution and FYC's impact on future classes. This interview is captured in Chapter 7: Post-FYC: Retrospect.

During the summer of 2016, I noticed that this study lacked an understanding of who my participants were as people before I could explore who they were as writers, so I reached out and asked if I could schedule another interview. I was able to conduct this final interview in Mandarin with all four participants. This interview mainly looked into each participant's identity prior to FYC, with particular attention paid to aspects of family environment, schooling, and decisions made to study abroad, as I believe these factors played important roles in how they came to be who they were before they became "a Chinese international student in the US" in the eyes of many peers and instructors. Results of these additional interviews are presented in Chapter 4: Participants' Incoming Identities.

All participants chose English for the pre-, mid-, and post- interview series except for Sucheng. These English interviews with Yanjin, Caiqin and Lufang were transcribed verbatim and sometimes segmented based on shared themes. When quoting participants, only in order to preserve meaning, some minor language issues (e.g., tense, misuse of plural forms, or overuse of articles) were edited after transcription. When participants occasionally switched to Mandarin during an English interview, I transcribed it in Mandarin and translated it into English. For the last interview that looked into participants' "incoming" identities, I requested it to be in Mandarin to preserve the richness of their stories. These Mandarin data were all transcribed verbatim in Mandarin, and sections of the transcription were then translated and double checked by another Mandarin-speaking colleague, Wei Zuo, for the purpose of analysis.

I also interviewed the instructors of my study's participants (except for Sucheng's instructor, who did not respond to my multiple email inquiries) at the beginning and end of the quarter in order to learn about their courses and ascertain the teachers' perspectives on the students' writing development. The intent was not to triangulate participants' accounts. Rather it aimed to offer more perspectives into understanding of the course and each student's overall performance. Only relevant segments of instructor interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

### **Non-participant Observations**

I also observed each participant's FYC class two to three times during the quarter. Timing of these observations was based on suggestions from instructors and participants, as well as my availability. With permission from the instructor, I took detailed notes on classroom settings, participants' interactions with peers and instructor, as well as participants' performance in class. With permission from related parties and depending on what was available, I also observed other writing-related occasions, such as tutoring at writing centers, after-class group discussions, or group office hour visits. These observations offered an additional look at how participants processed writing materials and how they performed writer identities differently outside of the classroom. During these observations, I was not a participant but an observer with little to no participation.

When analyzing observation data, I examined the immediate context of what was happening, including physical setting, actual writing materials the participant referred to, and so forth. I also analyzed global contexts, such as what cultural norms the participants might have carried into the setting. Such analysis was then followed up in interviews to elicit participants' own interpretation of what happened and why it happened.

### Think-alouds

I originally planned to have each participant do think-alouds by verbalizing what is in their mind when presented with an assignment prompt. The intent of this method was to learn how they approach an existing writing assignment, what strategies and resources they draw on, and what confusion or challenges they might have. However, when I conducted two of those think-alouds and video recorded them, participants seemed to be confused and uncomfortable about monologuing in front of a camera. I also tried to remove the camera and stuck to audio recording; however, participants still reported not being comfortable or productive about this experiment. After the first few attempts, I decided to forgo this method.

### Data Analysis

When analyzing data, instead of approaching the data with a set of established coding themes and patterns, I built and tested these categories as they emerged in the data. For instance, when examining participants' upbringing and parents, it occurred that each participant had a "hero" at home who they looked up to and depended on. When necessary, I followed up with participants to ask for clarification and to help shape the emerging themes by having them review parts of the interviews or observations. Commonly in this study, each participant had her own unique story and her own unique FYC experience, which helped to enrich our understandings of what is possible in FYC rather than what common trends exist for international students in FYC.

In particular, when analyzing interview data, I adopted a social constructivist view of an interview (Talmy, 2010; Talmy, 2011; Talmy & Richard, 2011), which treats interview data not as reports of truths, but as co-constructed knowledge by interviewer and interviewee. Thus, it is important to examine the asymmetrical power relations between the interviewer and interviewee and how the power dynamic could have had an impact on the conversation. Aligning with this view, in my interview data analysis, I was aware of my role as participants' writing studio instructor or conversation group facilitator. My experience in teaching FYC and my *insider* advantage as a Mandarin-speaking female researcher on one hand helped me build a rapport with participants; on the other hand, might also have affected the co-construction process in my data collection and analysis. In the conclusion chapter, I offer a critical, reflective, meta-methodological discussion of my researcher role.

Finally, whenever it was necessary, narrative inquiry and discourse analysis methods were adopted for microanalysis. For instance, when referring to international students who did not study in American high school as she did, Yanjin shifted pronouns back-and-forth between "we" and "they" on different occasions. By analyzing her deliberation on pronoun shift, I was able to examine Yanjin's self-positioning: sometimes, she felt a sense of belonging with American students; other times, she sided with all other Chinese international students. Drawing on such analysis tools, I was able to closely examine my data collection.

### Conclusion

Overall, this dissertation research tapped into the gap of international undergraduate students' "incoming" knowledge, sparse in the fields of L2 writing and composition studies. Adopting qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis, the study followed four Chinese international female participants throughout their FYC courses and examined how they made use of this "incoming" knowledge when facing new writing tasks in

FYC. The study also traced the trajectory of their writer identities, aiming to identify possible connections between shifts in identity and changes in writing. This study extended the research to sites beyond FYC classrooms, looking at other writing sites in which students are involved, such as writing studios, after-class group discussions, and group or one-on-one tutoring in writing centers. Relying on analysis methods such as narrative inquiry and discourse analysis, this research was anticipated to draw conclusions on the three research questions mentioned in the introduction: what “incoming” knowledge these participants bring to FYC? How their writing and writer identity evolved over the course of their FYC classes? Finally, how do these insights inform us about teaching FYC?

## **Appendix I Recruitment Criteria**

### **Inclusion criteria**

*Student participants:* This research includes international undergraduate students who:

- are international students taking a FYC course (e.g., English 131, 121, 111, 197/297) in winter quarter 2015;
- are undergraduate students who are working towards a bachelor’s degree in the U.S. but have never studied or have studied for less than three years in the U.S., including high school or community college; and
- are willing to share their writing artifacts, to recall and discuss writing stories, and to be observed in their composition class and other writing settings.

*Instructors:* They have my research student participants in their composition classes. They would pay attention to these students and are willing to give feedback on student participants’ writing.

### **Exclusion criteria**

*Student participants:* This research is not aimed at student participants who:

- have studied in the U.S. for more than three years before their entry to a U.S. college;
- are graduate students, since their writer identities and writings needs can be very different from undergraduate students;
- speak English as first language or mother tongue;
- are hesitant to share their writings or discuss writing experiences; or
- have a freshman composition course instructor who is not available to or not willing to participate in this study.

*Instructors:* this research excludes composition instructors who do not have my research student participants in their classes or who are not willing to discuss their students' writing.

## Appendix II Recruitment Letter

Detailed Research Explanation

**Title of the Research:** Tracing the Trajectory of International Students' Writing and Writer Identity Before, During and After a First Year Composition Course

Dear international undergraduate fellows at the University,

My name is Dan Zhu. I am a doctoral candidate in the English Department. As an international student myself, I have a passion for education and desire to improve the educational experience for International students in particular. I have been studying for five years and teaching composition for over two years at the University of Washington. I am conducting a study regarding international students' experience in composition and would like to offer you an opportunity to participate.

My research relates to the development of international undergraduate's writing and writer identities. The number of international students has dramatically increased in U.S. higher education institutions in recent years. As an international student who has struggled with English writing through my studies and subsequent experience as a composition instructor witnessing similar struggles, and triumphs in my students, I have come to realize the urgency of understanding the needs, the identities international students bring when they enter a U.S. university, and available resources in an effort to provide stronger support for international student writers. Your participation in this research will greatly contribute to the effort.

I plan to recruit 3 to 5 international undergraduate participants who are taking a freshman composition course in the winter of 2015. If you are chosen as a participant, I will send you a consent form with details of research procedures, your rights and benefits. In brief, upon your approval, I will have you fill out a background survey to understand your past writing experience. Your course writings and writing materials will be collected to help me understand your writings and you will do three think-alouds on your composition course writing prompts to help me understand how you prepare for writing. In addition, I will conduct three 30-60 minute interviews before, during and after the winter quarter to understand more about your composition course, current writing assignments, etc. In addition, I will observe your composition class or other writing-related activities 3-4 times, with permission of yourself, instructors and others involved.

For your information, I will also interview your instructors in the beginning and in the end of the quarter to learn about the course and your writing development. However, this study is by no means an evaluation of your writing, and none of this will impact your grade in the class or the instructor's evaluation of you. I will also take strict steps to ensure that this study is not intrusive for you or your class.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Though you will not get paid for participating, you might find it helpful to reflect on your writing skills and growth, to explore who you are as a writer, and to talk about your writing strategies and challenges. This can be a great experience for your own writing learning process. All information will be kept confidential and you may stop participating at any time. If the results of the study are published or presented, I will not use the names of people, the university, the class or any other information that would identify participants, the department or the university.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone or by email. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Division.

Sincerely,

Dan Zhu  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Language and Rhetoric  
English Department

### Appendix III

#### Participants Consent Form for International Undergraduate Students

Title: Tracing the Trajectory of International Students' Writing and Writer Identity Before, During and After a First Year Composition Course

Investigator: Dan Zhu, Language and Rhetoric, English Department

Faculty Advisor: Professor Sandra Silberstein, English Department

#### Investigator's Statement

I am requesting your participation in a research. The purpose of this consent form is to provide information you will need for deciding whether or not you would like to participate in this study. Please read the form carefully. I also encourage you to ask questions you have regarding the purpose of the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. I want to ensure all of your questions have been answered to help you decide whether or not to participate in the study. This process is called "informed consent" and you will receive a copy of this form for your records.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to monitor the development of international undergraduate students' writing and writer identity over the course of a First Year Composition class. I would like to collect data that helps me understand:

- What writing resources (e.g., writing training), writer identities and needs do international students bring as they enter the university?
- How do the students evolve over the course of one quarter?
- What implications does this have for meeting the needs of international student writers?

#### Procedures

I will select 3-5 participants, gather writing samples and follow up with semi-structured interviews with them before, during and after the winter quarter. The research lasts for one quarter. If you choose to participate, at the beginning of the quarter, you will fill out a writing background survey that tells me about your past writing experiences. I will also collect samples of your writings and writing-related materials (e.g., writing prompt, revisions, writing textbook/exercise, instructor feedback, etc.) before and during your freshman composition course and follow up with semi-structured interviews. Informal conversations will also take place; such as before or after their classes. This interview series will hopefully help me interpret participants' writing, show me how international students interact with writing resources and how that interaction translates who they are as a writer. If students permit, I would also like to organize a focus group discussion, asking a similar set of questions as in individual interviews in order to see how they communicate about writing and writer identities with one another.

During the beginning, the middle and towards the end of the quarter, you will bring in a writing prompt from your composition class to a 30-minute meeting with me in which you will be asked to verbalize what is in your mind while you prepare for writing. This method will help me understand how you approach an existing writing assignment, what strategies and resources you draw on, and what confusions or challenges you might have.

I will observe your composition class 2-3 times during the quarter. With the permission of the instructor and the class, I will take detailed notes with regards to classroom settings, your interactions with peers and the instructor, and your performance in class. With permission from related parties, I would also like to observe other writing-related occasions, such as tutoring at Writing Center, group discussions, etc. I might ask you questions

about how you interpret your behavior/choice/performance in the classroom after the class. These observations are necessary to help me understand how international students process writing materials, how they perform writer identities differently at different writing settings, and what writing needs they are more likely to have. None of data will influence your score and participation is voluntary.

With your permission, I would like to audio tape your interviews and videotape the "think-alouds" to be able to have an accurate written transcription. I will assign a pseudonym to you to protect your identity, and I will destroy the original recording at the end of December 2020. If you would like a copy of the transcript, I will gladly provide you one. The data will be stored in a password protected computer only I will have the access to it.

#### Risks, Stress or Discomfort

The greatest discomfort involved in this study is the possible invasion of privacy during observations. If you are stressed about being observed in certain writing settings, you are encouraged to refuse the observation requests. If you are uncomfortable with any specific questions during interviews, you can choose not to answer them. When interviewing international students from various cultures and ethnicities, I, the researcher, will be very careful about not imposing any personal values or judgments on participants or their writings. Rather, I will mainly focus on listening to and understanding how you write and why you write the way you write.

In terms of stress, some participants might be concerned about extra workload added onto an already demanding freshman composition course. This research does NOT ask you to do any extra writings except for the background survey which takes about 30-45 minutes to complete at the beginning of the quarter when you haven't got busy with the quarter yet. I will only collect the writings you have done before and during your composition course. In addition, the 30-minute think-alouds can serve as necessary components of your writing preparation which shouldn't take your extra time or efforts. Research has shown think-alouds can potentially accelerate writing.

As for risks, some participants might be concerned that sharing writings or interviewing their instructor might affect their grades in the composition class. First, the researcher will not discuss or imply any evaluation of your writing or class performance. During the interview with your instructor, there will be no discussion on grades of any sort. Rather, it will focus on the instructor's explanation of the class design, and his/her perspective on what writing strategies and resources you have drawn on in your writings and in class; what he/she has found helpful for facilitating your writing growth. Second, your instructors will not have access to data of this research for any evaluation purposes.

If you would like to withdraw from the study, you have the right to do so any time.

#### Benefits of the Study

Though you will not get paid for participating, you might find it helpful to reflect on your writing skills and growth, to explore who you are as a writer, and to talk about your challenges and strategies. This can be a great experience for your own writing learning process. Another potential benefit for participants of the study can be that they will have a chance to learn about the various writing supports on campus and online. Though as a composition instructor, I could potentially provide some writing support for participants, considering this involvement is very likely to alter the results of the research, I will not be actively involved in helping participants with writing.

#### Other Information

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. Your information is confidential as I will assign pseudonyms and code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the numerical code in a separate, secure location until December 2020. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name or any other information that might identify you. Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at any legal risk.

I may want to re-contact you for future related studies. Please indicate below if you give me permission to contact you for future research. Giving me permission to recontact you will not obligate you in any way. If you

have any questions about this research study, please contact me by email or phone listed at the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University Human Subjects Division.

---

Signature of Investigator

Printed Name

Date

### Participant's Statement

This study has been explained to me clearly. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I give permission for this researcher to audiotape my interview.

I do NOT give my permission for the research to audiotape my interview.

I give permission for this researcher to videotape the "think-aloud" activity.

I do NOT give permission for this researcher to videotape the "think-aloud" activity.

I give permission for this researcher to observe me in the class and video/audiotape.

I do NOT give my permission for the research to observe me in the class.

I give permission for this researcher to observe other writing related settings, such as tutoring and group meetings.

I do NOT give permission for this research to observe other writing related settings, such as tutoring and group meetings.

I give permission for this researcher to collect course related document and previous writings.

I do NOT give my permission for the research to collect course related document and previous writings.

I give permission for this researcher to organize a focus group discussion at the time and location convenient for me.

I do NOT give my permission for the research to organize a focus group discussion.

I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

I do NOT give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

---

Signature of Participant

Printed Name

Date

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANTS' "INCOMING" IDENTITIES

This chapter examines each participant's identity prior to their first year composition course. Even though the study is centered on writer identity and writing development, I believe that one's writer identity is inevitably embedded in how one perceives who one is as a person and how one recalls and reflects on one's own stories. Particularly in the case of Chinese international students, the factors of family environment, schooling, and decisions made to study abroad all played important roles in how they came to be who they were before they each became "a Chinese international student in the US." Through these lenses, this chapter aims to analyze the participants' identities based on their own narratives.

To note, these narratives were based on a final interview conducted one and a half years after the participants took their FYC courses. I requested the interviews to be in Mandarin, as I did not want to miss the richness of their stories. These interviews were transcribed verbatim, after which sections of the transcription were translated and double-checked for the purpose of analysis. Throughout the study, quotes given orally by participants are italicized. When translated from Mandarin, this will be indicated before the quote. Words from students' writing are not italicized. When especially relevant content appears, it will be bolded and indicated as (emphasis added).

#### Upbringing and Parents

When it comes to parents, almost all the participants treated one of their parents as a role model or a "hero" that they aspired to become. In their own way, each participant tried to make sense of who they were by relating to that hero at home, which indicates the importance of recalling some parental stories in order to capture each participant's self-identity.

For instance, Yanjin treated her father as the hero. Yanjin grew up in a middle-class family in Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu Province, China. This is called a 1.5-tier city, as it is less competitive than first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou or Shenzhen. Yanjin's father worked as an engineer in a top-ranked company. When asked to describe her family environment, she indicated (translated), "*Overall, I think my teenage life was very comfortable and worry-free.*" According to Yanjin, she always felt trusted and supported to make her own decisions. Her engineer father had always been there when important decisions were made, no matter whether the decision was for a one-year exchange in the US or a last-minute plan change from that one-year exchange to a three-year high school exchange. Yanjin admired her father's success as a lead engineer and emphasized how her father's success has secured a comfortable life for her and her stay-at-home mother. The influence of her father was prominent in her decision on majors, "*To some extent, I am more like my father, and I have always been slightly stronger at science than liberal arts, so I think engineering majors suit me better.*" At the beginning of her sophomore year, Yanjin applied and was accepted to the Material Engineering major.

Sucheng's hero was also her father; however, she admired her father's personality more than his career success. Sucheng grew up in a middle-class family in a second-tier city in Jiangsu Province called Wuxi. Her father started his career as an engineer and later on advanced into a management role. According to Sucheng, her father is the man of the house, who takes very good care of his wife and daughter. In her own words (translated), "*My father is a very typical*

*male chauvinist (大男子主义) Chinese man who, by tradition, married a typical weak and dependent Chinese woman. Hmmm, he must have felt a strong sense of achievement [for taking care of his wife].*” Sucheng continued to use examples of her mother’s reliance on her father to further sketch an image of her father being “a good and patriarchal husband.” Sucheng mentioned that her mother prefers to stay at home and is very timid about going out because she worries about getting lost. Sucheng’s mother did not drive; she would only go to places close to home. Whenever things happened, big or small, her mother would turn to her father for help. On the other hand, Sucheng also believed her parents’ personalities were nicely complementary to one another, even though her mother’s dependence sometimes annoyed her father. It was noticeable that Sucheng admired her father as she recalled a story of her father fighting for his rights as a BMW customer during which he protested at an international automobile exhibition over BMW’s safety concerns and received a brand-new BMW vehicle with a life-long warranty for free. When asked how her parents had influenced who she was, Sucheng stated (translated),

*I believe half of my blood came from my mom, which makes me more introverted, if not timid. I wish I could be more like my dad, so that I could have been more successful than now. ...Also, during our frequent video chats, my mom sometimes wanted me to stay in the US, though she has never been straightforward about it and she sometimes changes her mind. On the contrary, my dad is always quiet when this topic is brought up. I could read through his eyes and see how reluctant he was to let me stay in the US.*

It appears to me that Sucheng disapproved of her mother’s introvertedness and indecisiveness, and she tended to associate those traits with her own personality. Meanwhile, Sucheng was very verbal about her admiration of her father’s courage and capability. She also paid very close attention to her father’s subtle feelings. Reading between the lines, it was very interesting to hear Sucheng commenting on how her parents’ personalities reflect who she was then and who she aspired to become. I could not help but note a hidden contradiction: on one hand, Sucheng spoke positively of her parents’ “complementary personalities” in a male-dominant family and took it for granted that a weak wife gives a husband “a strong sense of achievement” in the household. On the other hand, as a woman, she disliked the introverted and weak self and aspired to become someone as confident and strong as her father.

Though Caiqin liked her father, her role model was clearly her mother instead. Caiqin was also born and raised in a middle-class family in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province. As an only child, Caiqin expressed admiration for her hard-working and successful parents, especially her mother, who rose from a poor family in rural eastern China through schooling in the 1980s. According to Caiqin, her mother worked in a bank diligently for 20 years, and recently she transitioned to a different company with a completely new position in “*pursuit of a different kind of life joy.*” Caiqin felt fortunate to have grown up in an open-minded family, which left her great space to make her own decisions. She spoke admiringly about her mother’s parenting (translated):

*She (my mother) would set “the big direction” with me and then let me explore the detailed plans by myself. She never compared me to other children. Instead, she would always ask me after each test, “How well do you think you did in this test?”... I am also very thankful that, unlike other Chinese moms who heavily depend on their only child for their happiness and life, my mother is pretty cool... As I now recall, since I was little, my mother has been delivering the message to*

*me that she has her own life. She won't sacrifice herself... She won't center her life on mine. She won't lose her own self.*

Here, Caiqin emphasized her mother's independence not only as a successful career woman, but also as a mother. In contemporary China, where parents, especially mothers, often quit their jobs to take care of their only children full-time, Caiqin's mother stood out for insisting on living a life independent from her child. Caiqin was clearly appreciative of this parenting style, as it might have left sufficient space for her growth. When asked about her father, Caiqin was not as straightforward, but she still spoke very fondly of him. According to Caiqin, her father was very strict yet rather “hands off.” He tended to only interfere when she was making big decisions, such as which schools to attend, or “*at least he pretended to,*” said Caiqin, with a big smile on her face.

Compared to the other three participants, who favored one parent over the other as a role model, Lufang had more balanced accounts of her parents and their parenting styles. Lufang grew up with her mother and grandparents in her hometown, Shenyang, a second-tier city in northeastern China, while her father worked as a TV producer, far away in Beijing. For the first ten years of her life, she could only meet her father a few times a year, though she felt like her father was always the one who gave her “invisible pressure” to become better. This did not mean her mother was pressure-free. Similar to many Chinese parents, Lufang's mother set very high expectations for grades, but she never attempted to micromanage her life, nor did she try to surveil her day-to-day study.

According to Lufang, she had always been a good child, meaning she had strong grades. As she described, “*I have always been a good kid. Everybody liked me very much. I just enjoyed the feelings of being a good kid and being liked by everyone.*” In a sense, Lufang internalized her mother's high-grade expectation and turned them into a strong sense of self-esteem. During our interview, Lufang was not shy to express her appreciation for her mother's successful parenting, as well as a touch of regret for her father's sporadic presence in the first ten years of her life.

After many years of separation, the family finally moved to Beijing together right before Lufang started her junior high school. This transition helped her build a much better relationship with her father and eventually resulted in much more balanced parental roles in her upbringing, as Lufang recalled (translated and emphasis added):

*After junior high school, when we moved to Beijing, like all other girls, I was closer and closer to my father. It seemed that when girls grew up, their relationships get better and better with their fathers. My mother would still set high expectations for me, and sometimes we would get into arguments—you know, I was a teenager—but my father would defend me all the time. It looked like my mother had switched her role with my father. The fact that she always held me accountable for things made her the stern parent instead. But overall, they switched roles whenever needed. How would I say it? **In my family, whenever necessary, my parents always play “good cop, bad cop” (一个唱红脸, 一个唱白脸)** with me.*

It was interesting to see the parental role change when Lufang and her mother moved to live with her father in Beijing. It is unclear why the two parents switched roles, but it seems that their adjustment of parenting styles whenever necessary was favored and appreciated by Lufang.

The big smile on Lufang's face during this part of the conversation showed her satisfaction over and appreciation for this “good cop, bad cop” parenting. I pictured this: Lufang was steering a ship, with her mother pushing it along the journey and her father providing “a harbor” for healing whenever necessary. Occasionally, the ship would hit an iceberg, for example, when Lufang transitioned from junior high school to senior high, but then they would discuss problems as a team in order to guide the ship back on route.

### Pre-College Schooling

Among the four participants, Sucheng and Caiqin studied at a Chinese international school, while Lufang went through a regular public high school but took one and a half years off to prepare for American college applications. Yanjin was the only one who studied for three years of high school in the US. These three separate cases resemble the range of high school experiences for the majority of Chinese international students in American universities. Together, they help portray the extremely competitive environment that most Chinese international students have gone through. The competition at every stage of their schooling can keep narrowing their definition of achievement to grades only. When the major part of a person's life is merely associated with grades, it is not hard to explain why they see themselves as “a bad writer” because they have received a low score on a piece of writing. In a sense, this competitiveness contributes to the formation of Chinese international students' self-identities, i.e. writer identities.

For instance, Sucheng's memories of elementary school remain in these phrases (translated): “*decreasing grades,*” “*always wanting to be the top student,*” and “*struggling to catch up with others.*” Apparently, Sucheng had very strong grades for the first few years of elementary school and then her preeminence started to fade. She enjoyed being the top student as it (translated) “*gave me a strong sense of achievement (很有成就感).*” She was particularly good at Chinese and English but intimidated by math. Later on, when all the other students started to compete for math olympiad, she started to fall behind and struggled to catch up with the others. Seeing herself as a failure, she lost her confidence as a student and could not speak a word during a group interview for entering a highly ranked local middle school for high-achieving children. Thankfully, Sucheng was able to turn things around in middle and high school when she consistently had high grades in most subjects. When I commented that “Your parents must be very proud of you,” Sucheng quickly shifted the conversation to other topics. It is interesting that Sucheng had no problem discussing her failures, introvertedness, or non-confidence, but she became too shy to discuss her successes or achievements.

Growing up in the same school district as Sucheng, Caiqin's most vivid memories during school were of her struggles to gain entrance to middle school and high school. Some of the struggles reveal a unique and resilient Caiqin. Most reflect the conflicts against her parents' will and, again, extreme school competition.

From elementary school to middle school, to her parents' surprise, Caiqin refused to attend the public elementary school assigned to her neighborhood. Instead, she chose to challenge herself, primarily driven by curiosity, to test into a very competitive private elementary school:

*Back then, I was just curious about how well I could do on these tests. When our teacher presented the previous years' test papers to us, I was immediately*

*obsessed with the challenges shown in these tests. They were very difficult, but I could still solve some; I had to think much harder for the rest. Then I told my mom, 'I want to take the entrance test.' Later on, my mother said she never thought I could actually make it. But I did. So she let me go to this school.*

If Caiqin's transition from kindergarten to elementary school was nothing more than the result of being a curious girl who enjoyed challenges, the choices she had to face during the transition from elementary to middle school appear much more risky. To showcase how local Chinese schools compete against one another for the students with the best academic performance, Caiqin's elementary school at the time tried to keep her in its middle school division by offering her an exemption on the entrance exam while forcing her to give up applying for other middle schools, including a private school she had long dreamed about. The consequence of rejecting this offer in order to apply for her dream middle school would be that she could end up failing the competitive entrance exam for the latter and be left with no place to go. Despite the consequence, Caiqin chose to try for her dream school. She admitted that she had moments of hesitation, especially when her mother tried to convince her to change her mind, but she never doubted or let go of her dream, as she recalled (translated), "*For all of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I had been dreaming about going to this private school; I thought if I didn't go and try, I would feel very sorry for myself. And I knew I could do it. And I did.*"

Taking a turn from middle school to high school, Caiqin went through the exact same drama created by these intense school competitions, only this time, it was her father who came to her door and tried to change her mind about her choice between a traditional high school that would guide her to the Gaokao (China's national college entrance examination) and a private international school that would prepare her for overseas colleges. Caiqin remembered the conversation word for word (translated):

*In one of the very few serious conversations my father had ever had with me, this time, he listed the pros and cons of studying abroad and convinced me that studying abroad isn't necessarily the best choice, because in his opinion, my life could be so much more comfortable if I studied closer to home. I understood his reasoning and saw his concerns, so I agreed to join the [traditional] high school's summer camp and tried not to think about my dream of studying overseas.*

However, the one-month summer camp turned out to be very disappointing. Among a full class of the best students from all different middle schools in the area, Caiqin lost her advantageous place. She was not the best anymore—as she put it, "*My math grade was literally at the bottom of the class.*" Moreover, her teacher criticized her for her poor performance in math in front of the whole class. She felt unprepared for that: "*I truly didn't know how to solve [the math problems], really, but the teacher thought I didn't try hard enough. I thought everyone else was so much smarter than me.*" More so, Caiqin became scared of a picture of her school life for the next three years, a dull and dreadful life, as she described it (translated): "*I felt like I could foresee what my next three years would look like. It's so boring and so scary! This is not the life I have desired.*" It took Caiqin great effort and courage to turn things around. She appealed to her mother, who encouraged her to set aside her parents' opinions but required her to solve the problem by herself. She then waited outside of the international school's admission director's office for hours and earned herself a chance to explain why she had changed her mind. Given

Caiqin's excellent academic performance in middle school, Caiqin was admitted to this international school with no entrance exam.

Listening to Caiqin recalling these memories has helped me picture a resilient Caiqin who never forgot to listen to her heart. I was deeply touched by her determination to pursue her dream in spite of all the hurdles she had to go through. Meanwhile, I am deeply troubled by the extreme and unhealthy competition created by Chinese schools like these, the ones that can simply put a child's dream at risk. These competitions cannot only be seen when students transition from one schooling stage to another; they are also very real after students enter the school, as we can see from Lufang's story.

After three years at Beijing No. 55 School, an average junior high school where she was always among the top ten out of the total 300 students, Lufang successfully tested into Beijing No. 5 High School, the top ranked high school in her district. During the very first test she took at this school, for the first time in her life, her grades fell to 70<sup>th</sup> place with a similar student population size. Lufang mentally collapsed, as she recalled:

*I felt like the sky is collapsing (感觉天都要塌下来了). I started to doubt myself. I started to realize that I was not necessarily very special, compared to all my gifted classmates. That was a very depressing time period for me. Even though my mother tried to comfort me and encourage me, I felt that the pressure all came from myself, my self-esteem. I wanted to be the good kid....[Luckily,] I studied very hard and finally moved up in ranking.*

In highly competitive school environments in China like Beijing No. 5, where student ranking has been taken for granted, students like Lufang are engineered to directly associate failure and success with grades throughout their day-to-day school routine. The ones who survived, like Lufang, can potentially come out with strong resilience, which is essential for overcoming academic challenges in the future. In the case of Lufang, with some support from her family, this self-driven and good child demonstrated the resilience she gained through this experience of failure, but her understanding of success and achievement had been narrowed to grades, rankings, and other tangibles.

At an earlier age, Yanjin resisted this type of grade-only competition, or, in her words, the “*test-prep-oriented education (应试教育)*” in China. When asked why she chose to study in the US in the first place, especially at such a young age as 15, Yanjin revealed her resistance to China's traditional classroom education. She recalled how, sadly, she failed the timed Chinese essay writing during the Zhongkao, or provincial high school entrance exam, even though she had always been fond of Chinese writing. This failure led her to the conclusion that (translated), “*China's 'test-prep-oriented education' just doesn't suit me.*” She simply wanted a change of environment, as she emphasized: “*I wanted to learn something meaningful, even though I didn't know what exactly I wanted to learn, maybe engineering?*” On the other hand, she believed that her “*laid-back and adventurous personality*” did not fit in the extremely competitive Chinese schools. So Yanjin applied for a one-year exchange program in the US and ended up completing three years of high school in a small town in Michigan.

Yanjin opened up about this study-abroad experience like this (translated): “*The most challenging and tear-filled experience during those three years was not the schooling, but my homestay-hopping experience. I had to change between 4 families. They were all so different!*”

She had extensively detailed memories of each host family. She articulated the various clashes she had with each family due to linguistic, cultural, religious, and ideological differences. For instance, the first family would not cook meals even though food was included in monthly compensation; additionally, Yanjin could not communicate with them because this family would only speak Spanish and refused to speak English to her. The second family, with a newly widowed woman, hosted Yanjin for extra income. This woman ended up being too sick to take care of Yanjin, but at the same time, she had trust and control issues over Yanjin's daily life. The old man in the third family tried to convert Yanjin to Christianity, and he could not believe that back in China, a third-world country, Yanjin's father had been able to own a car to drive her to school every day. Yanjin liked this host dad because, unlike other hosts, he was nice to her, but she still had a hard time adjusting, given all these pre-conceptions and differences. Yanjin concluded that (translated), "*He is just very Republican, a very typical white man!*"

Among all the four participants, Yanjin was the only one who touched upon religion, politics (e.g., "Republican"), and race (e.g., "white man"). Setting aside the question of the depth of her knowledge about these concepts, Yanjin's experience of mingling with these various American homestay families provided her first contact with American society, while the other three participants were working very hard in competitive Chinese schools to get into an American university. Perhaps, their mere focus on competing for academic excellence might also have resulted in sheltered and narrowed perspectives compared to what Yanjin gained in the US.

### **Decision to Study at a US College**

If Yanjin's decision to study at an American high school was more like following a rising trend among young Chinese students who were resistant to a stifling education in China, her choice to apply to universities located along the US coasts was a much more deliberate and informed one. She carefully chose this current university in the Pacific Northwest in a large urban city because, after years of studying and living in Michigan, Yanjin had fostered a strong desire to move to another place, "*where there are more Chinese*" and "*where Asian rights are protected.*" She frequently compared the Michigan town she used to live in with her current city of residence and concluded that "*people here [in Seattle] are much more open-minded because they grew up being exposed to a very diverse population and food options.*"

Clearly, Yanjin's university choice was informed by her three-year experience living and studying in the US as a teenager. She had the opportunity to grapple with more Western ideas such as "rights" and "diversity," which were absent in the decision-making of the other three participants. Still, Sucheng, Caiqin, and Lufang each had a unique story, showcasing China's social constraints on education choices.

Caiqin's and Sucheng's paths to an overseas university was set the moment they joined an international high school in China. A typical three-year layout would be: for Senior I (first year), students all learn the same common subjects as in traditional high schools to prepare to test for a Chinese high school diploma. Meanwhile, they also take the IB (International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme) or A-level courses to practice English and gain college credits. For Senior II, students prepare for the TOEFL and SAT/ACT exams intensively. Both Caiqin and Sucheng had to take these two tests several times to receive an ideal score. Between the second half of Senior II and the first half of Senior III, students work closely with a counselor or hire an agent to prepare for college applications. They usually apply to eight to ten universities. The end of application season usually marks freedom for these students, but many

continue A-level or take AP courses to gain more college credits and prepare for university transitions.

This intensive schedule is another example of China's academic competitiveness for students, regardless of whether they are in traditional schools or international schools. On the other hand, despite the challenges they have to overcome, students in international schools are still stigmatized as escapees from the traditional Gaokao, China's national college entrance examination. When asked about the benefits of her international school experience, Sucheng digressed into strong opinions on this stigma (translated):

*The outside world believes that we choose to study abroad so that things will be much easier for us. However, what others don't know is even though we escaped from the Gaokao, right, ESCAPED from the Gaokao, the pressure has never been lessened, especially when we take the SSAT, TOEFL, and SAT exams and when we craft college essays and so on. These are all very stressful. But it seems like others always thought it should be pretty easy for us since we are not taking the Gaokao.*

With the same passionate voice, Sucheng continued for several minutes to defend her choice of studying abroad. It is disconcerting to imagine an 18-year-old who had to go through so much on a daily basis to achieve her dream while being judged over a decision made for her own education. Troubled by this social judgment, Sucheng showed her strong emotions. But when overlooking those emotions, I found some thoughtful reasoning (translated):

*As Chinese students, we are basically faced with two choices: to take the extremely competitive Gaokao and, if you are lucky, you might make it to a top Chinese university, but you don't get to learn that much except for socializing or being told what to do. Or, if your parents can afford it, you can apply for many American universities, and you will have a much higher chance to get into one. Once you enter, you will have an opportunity to stand on your own feet, rather than relying on parents or others. [Also,] to prepare for the Gaokao, all the pressure is geared towards that one final exam. It's like gambling, but you don't have to plan. Your teachers will set up homework drills and mock exams for you. If you take the route of studying abroad, every class matters, every assignment matters, every test matters, because [it] all shows up in your GPA report. During the application process, you are on your own to make many decisions and to prepare for many steps that will affect you.*

It was noticeable that Sucheng held very strong yet level-headed opinions. In my eyes, Sucheng at this moment was no less than the brave, confident, and strong father she had aspired to become. Like many other Chinese students who are determined to pursue a meaningful education and an independent life in the US, Sucheng carried the social stigma, overcame the stress of the journey, and made her way to university in the US. Lufang shared that same dream as Sucheng and many others, but her stories showed a different side of China's society when it comes to the choice between Chinese or American university educations. In a sense, Sucheng was inaccurate, because there *is* a third option, but only for a privileged few.

As the third generation of a TV/film producer family, Lufang had been promised an entrance to China's prestigious film academies with a much lowered bar thanks to the networks

and connections established by her father and grandfather. Similarly, it is also not uncommon for the descendants of well-established political families to gain an easier entrance into top universities in China. A college degree for these privileged few can also translate into a much smoother career in the future, as Lufang put it (translated): “*This [TV/film industry] is a very small world. The platform has been more or less established if one’s family has long been in the industry. My father entered it because of my grandfather, so it seemed so natural for me to enter after my father.*” However, Lufang rejected this easy and “natural” path after some careful considerations. She noticed that a successful film producer like her father is required to be very strong at networking among different power levels and putting talents together to make things happen. But she believes she is the opposite. She sees herself as more of a “technical type” rather than a “social or political type.” She would rather be handed a singular task so she can spend hours and even days figuring it out all by herself without having to deal with complicated interpersonal connections, or as she put it, “*I would prefer to simply focus on accomplishing one task at a time and doing it well (我只想踏踏实实简单地把一件事情做好).*” Meanwhile, she emphasized her respect for those who are capable of social tasks, and she acknowledged she is not confident in those skill sets.

Lufang appeared very down-to-earth. For the two years we had known each other, Lufang never mentioned what her family did for a living until this very interview, when I asked to learn more about her family stories. When asked, she did not narrate as if she were bragging about her family’s special status in the movie industry but merely focused on the factual situation she was in when making a decision about her education. It is clear that Lufang was able to carefully analyze who she was and where her heart was pointed before she decided to abandon an easy path to film academies. In a sense, Lufang was aware of her privilege, but she did not let the privilege blind her.

After that choice, Lufang also had to give up the opportunities to enter other Chinese universities through the Gaokao, due to her “migrant student” status in Beijing. The fact that Lufang does not hold a Beijing household registration (户口) determined that she had to return to her hometown of Shenyang, Shandong Province to take the Gaokao. However, taking the Gaokao in Shandong would definitely put her in a disadvantaged position because of the quota system, which allows universities to admit in-province students with much lower scores than those from other regions. And most top universities are in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing or Guangzhou, but not Shandong. So, to avoid unfair treatment, Lufang and her family believed that Lufang’s best option was to study abroad.

### Conclusion

A close look at the participants’ families, schooling, and decisions to study overseas makes each of them stand out as a unique individual who undertook similar challenges and shared similar values in education. Family-wise, they all look up to their parent(s) as role models and appreciated the support of their families; on the other hand, a stifling and competitive Chinese education system pushed them to look for an alternative. Possessing a desire for a more meaningful education and a dream future with more independence and freedom, these young students made a decision to do undergraduate study overseas. However, this decision had a price. Some had to challenge family expectations; others had to carry a social stigma or educational inequality. And Yanjin, who came to the US at an earlier age, found herself grappling with social, cultural, and ideological clashes, which might have also offered her a less sheltered view

than the others. While Sucheng, Lufang, and Caiqin had gone through a stressful and tedious preparation and admissions process, they came to taste what it means to be “standing on your own feet” for the first time. Sorting through their unique stories, I have no doubt about one trait they all share: very strong resilience. And I hope the personal, domestic, social, and educational context provided in this chapter will help shed light on the next chapter’s exploration of each participant’s writer identity, a term they had never encountered before.

## CHAPTER 5 PRE-FYC WRITING LIFE AND WRITER IDENTITY

### Introduction

After a close look at each participant's identity through the lenses of family, schooling, and the decision to study overseas in the previous chapter, this chapter sketches out a writing life of each individual prior to their First Year Composition (FYC) experience. Doing so involves describing the types of writing they have done, including Chinese and English writing, writing for fun, and writing for tests or college applications. This chapter also explores the participants' writer identities and reports how each participant receives and perceives each writing experience when asked to compare and contrast the types of writing they have done.

At the initial stage of this study, each participant signed a consent form and responded to a survey (see Appendix) that asked about their past writing experience, their relationship with writing, and their primary weaknesses and strengths in writing. An hour-long interview was then scheduled to discuss the survey answers and collect narratives to enrich the understanding of their writing experiences. It is also worth noting that the first round of interviews were all conducted when the participants had just entered the third week of their respective FYC courses. All pre-FYC interviews were conducted in English, according to the participants' preferences, except for Sucheng's.

### Writing Life

As illustrated in Table 5.1, all participants had a similar writing path with a divergence in their respective high school experiences. They all started Chinese writing at a very young age. Some enjoyed keeping journals in Chinese to record interesting life moments, and they also expressed dislike of formal Chinese writing on tests due to the time pressure and restricted structures expected by Chinese teachers. In terms of English writing, they all started learning English in the second half of elementary school with some words and simple sentences. In middle school, they would write a 100-word paragraph in comprehensive English tests for grammar drills. During high school, they all had to prepare writings for the TOEFL and SAT/ACT, followed by crafting a considerable number of essays for college applications.

**Table 5.1 A Quick Overview of Participants' Writing Life**

Name	Total Yrs of Writing	Elementary (1-6th Grade)	Middle School (7-9th Grade)	High School formal writing (10-12th Grade)	College Application Essays (PS)	Writing for fun
Sucheng	Chinese: 13 English: 6	-Up to 800-word Chinese essays; -Simple English sentences	-More frequent timed Chinese essay writing; -100-word paragraphs in comprehensive English tests	-TOEFL writing prep; -IB English essays; -SAT writing practice; -Debate write-out;	-Applied to 8 schools; -Essays reviewed by a Chinese and an American counselor	-School English magazine articles; -blogs and QQ Space
Caiqin	Chinese: 11 English: 6			-Presentation write-out; -Science lab reports		Has written diary since little and through today

Lufang	Chinese: 12 English: 7			TOEFL writing prep	Agent guided and revised (throughout)	Has written diary daily since 15
Yanjin	Chinese: 13 English: 5			-5-paragraph literary analysis essays; -1 research paper; Lab reports; -TOEFL writing prep; -SAT writing practice	-Agent revised (one-time, one-way feedback); -Mostly worked on it by self	Since middle school, writing blogs on social media to record turning points in life

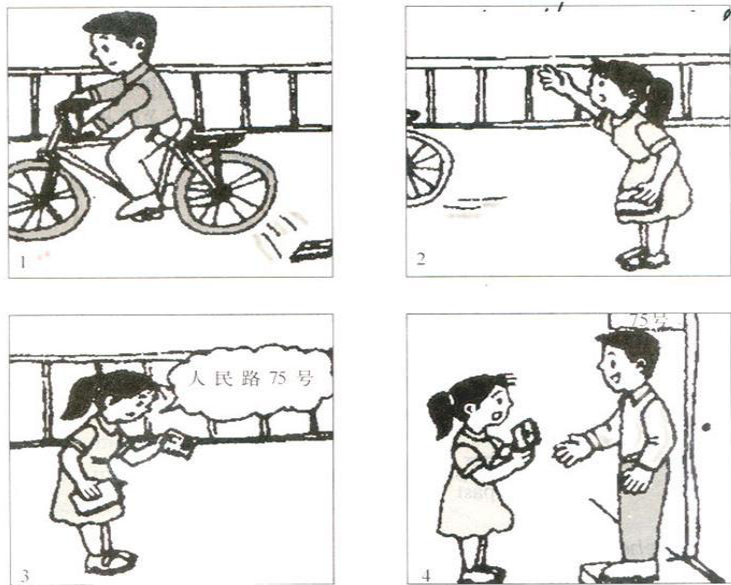
Their writing paths diverged after they entered very different high schools. Sucheng and Caiqin attended international high schools in China that adopted a UK-based IB curriculum, so their memories of writing were centered on IB essay practice. Yanjin attended an American high school, so the largest piece of her writing life was based on her three years of English literature classes. The writing experience of Lufang, who finished one year in a traditional Chinese high school and spent the next two years between home and private test prep classrooms preparing to study overseas, centered on TOEFL prep. To that end, Lufang's high school experience was very different from the other three participants. In the following section, I draw on the memories of each participant to depict a writing trajectory typical of Chinese students while allowing room for each individual's unique story.

### Writing Prior to High School

Like most Chinese students of her age, Sucheng started Chinese writing in elementary school and English writing in junior high school, though she learned some English (e.g. words and simple sentences) in later elementary school years. Sucheng studied in a regular Chinese middle school where English was highly valued and was also comprehensively taught as a foreign language via listening, reading, speaking, and writing, with a heavy emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and language accuracy. During these three years, Sucheng practiced writing English paragraphs. These were usually 80- to 100-word paragraphs that asked students to describe a daily activity or tell a simple story utilizing provided pictures, phrases, or grammatical structures. For instance, the prompt below asks students to "describe the pictures in at least six sentences" in order to tell a story titled "Mary is a good girl." When grading, teachers would usually be provided with a prescriptive sample. Points would be taken away based on how many spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors were found in the writing. This subtractive grading approach leaves students with marks for incorrect English. For homework, students would then be required to copy the correct English forms several times to help memorize them.

Describe the following pictures in at least six sentences.

Mary is a good girl



The comic strip consists of four panels. Panel 1 shows a boy riding a bicycle. Panel 2 shows a girl pointing at the bicycle. Panel 3 shows the girl holding a book, with a speech bubble containing the Chinese text '人民路 75 号' (Renmin Road No. 75). Panel 4 shows the girl handing the book to the boy. The URL 'blog.sina.com.cn/1986zhanglu' is written at the bottom right of the comic frame.

Every participant joked about this shared grammar-only writing practice in middle school. Lufang commented that writing prompts like this are removed from any real-life context, entirely focusing on vocabulary and grammar rather than ideas or logic. She also brought up their high degree of predictability, because most of the vocabulary and phrases would be drawn out of the recent readings in the textbook. Lufang considered it a very boring and meaningless task. To Sucheng, it was a reminder of failure, as she recalled (translated): “*I usually saw red marks all over my paper; I began feeling uncomfortable to the point where I was not willing to write.*” The focus on grammatical errors and correct forms of English might have further lessened the motivation of English learners like Sucheng and kept them from appreciating writing as a communicative activity.

### **Divergence in High School: IB English Writing for Sucheng and Caiqin**

After moving to an international high school, Sucheng and Caiqin received more formal English writing training. After two years of intensive formal classroom test prep for the TOEFL and SAT, in the last year, they took the same IB English course, followed by an exit IB writing exam. Taught by a teacher from New Zealand with a doctoral degree in linguistics, this class offered fewer testing drills but more exposure to a variety of authentic text types with a wide range of themes. Their maximum written document length was 400-500 words.

In this comprehensive English class, students would read and analyze online and newspaper articles concerning various contemporary themes ranging from cultural diversity to equality in education to China’s aging population. Meanwhile, students were required to listen to CNN news stories, write down main points, and then describe details. For speaking, students would be asked to form groups with an assigned topic for daily class discussions and to complete an end-of-semester presentation. In terms of writing, the teacher focused on teaching the text

types required in the IB exit exam, including diaries, letters, interviews, blogs, column articles, arguments, and so on. Language use or diction (e.g. formal versus informal word choice) was heavily weighted throughout reading and writing.

The class would take two to three weeks to cover each type of writing, and each process involved three to four drafts based on teacher comments and peer reviews. Commonly, the teacher would provide the first round of comments on content, such as the idea, the topic, and the suitability of the text type. After revision, the paper would be shared with three peers for everything ranging from content to language use to structure. Students would also be required to write a reflection on how they processed these reviews. According to Caiqin, these peer review experiences were much more detailed and serious than the one peer review she practiced during the third week of her current FYC course. It seemed to Caiqin that her IB teacher was very interested not only in the reviews, but also in how the students interacted with one another during the peer review exchange. That is why the IB teacher collected all of the peer comments and held everyone accountable for this practice. In contrast, her FYC class required a few general sentences, which Caiqin did not find helpful.

In regard to grammar, while most FYC courses try to avoid explicit grammar correction, Caiqin preferred the way grammar errors were cued by her IB teacher in the following statement (in English):

*She [Caiqin's IB teacher] paid a lot of attention to all grammar...In the homework, she had a set of symbols she used herself. Sometimes I can't understand them, but she would explain, for example, WC for Word Choice. Every homework we handed in, she would mark it and pay a lot of attention to grammars...She would correct my expressions, not only grammar, for example, my Chinglish expressions. And she would write a more natural way of putting it. She is a very nice teacher. She put a lot of time helping us with the language.*

Caiqin's apparent appreciation of the IB teacher marking grammar in every homework assignment is quite different from the pain Sucheng endured when she saw red marks all over her 100-word paragraphs on middle school tests. The former focused on cueing rather than **correcting** grammar errors and emphasized a more natural rather than the only correct form of English expressions. Admittedly, the IB teacher's nativeness could have lent her more credibility to address grammar issues, which fits Chinese learners' common pursuit of native-like English.

Both Caiqin and Sucheng spoke highly of this class and mentioned its benefits in various ways. Caiqin believed this class had introduced some Western topics and concepts she had never heard of (e.g. civil partnerships and cultural taboos). She gained some background knowledge through readings and her own research, which helped enrich the content of her writing tremendously. Sucheng was thankful for the exposure to different types of texts and the emphasis on language use, which had helped her develop a stronger sense of genre knowledge, even though she was still struggling to write interviews (meaning to come up with interview dialogues with imagined interviewees) with appropriate word choice and felt a lack of ideas when writing argumentative papers on contemporary issues.

### **Divergence in High School: American English Literature Classes for Yanjin**

While the UK-based IB English curriculum offers a variety of writing genres, the American language arts curriculum Yanjin went through focused on a thorough experience of

writing about literary texts. In a private Catholic high school in Pontiac City in Michigan's greater Detroit area, Yanjin took three years of English literature classes: the first year on American literature, the second year on classics, and the third year on world literature. According to Yanjin, writing assignments in this class were mostly 5-paragraph rhetorical analysis essays based on novels and plays read during class. The content of analysis was usually focused on rhetorical devices such as symbols, emotions, storylines, backgrounds or plots, themes, word choices, and so forth. The three years of practice seemed to have trained Yanjin well enough to clearly see that, *"There is a template for 5-paragraph academic essays. You won't have to worry about running out of ideas because there is a long list of devices you can choose from."*

All assignments required one draft only, with little room for revision. However, through the years, Yanjin learned how to self-correct her grammar, even though she would always turn to her last host mother for proofreading before she handed in the essay. The only multi-draft assignment Yanjin had written was a research paper in her junior year that emphasized strict formatting guidelines, such as listing references and crafting main arguments in subheadings. Revision for each draft was based on the teacher's comments, and there was no peer review involved. Yanjin did not enjoy this writing experience when she recalled the time and effort she had to devote to researching a self-selected topic in the school's library database. However, when asked how her English had changed, Yanjin stated, *"My English is at a totally different level after three years."* In terms of writing improvement, in addition to the grammar correction skills she developed by herself, Yanjin believed she had picked up some critical thinking skills, for instance, using a flow chart. Though she could not explain how a flowchart helps hone critical thinking skills, Yanjin was positive about her overall English improvement after three years of high school in the US.

### **TOEFL Writing for Everyone**

All four participants had certain forms of TOEFL training and took the test several times, typical among the majority of Chinese international students. For instance, Sucheng and Caiqin had intensive TOEFL training during their first year in international school. Lufang joined a 20-day boot camp and another 5-month regular TOEFL course offered at China's best-known private educational company, named New Oriental, which provides test trainings from preparatory lectures to private tutoring for up to thousands of US dollars. Most participants remembered TOEFL writing preparation as drills on testing skills, as Lufang described in English:

*Generally, it [TOEFL prep classes] didn't help you really improve your English language, just kind of tell you some skills about testing—some skills about saving time and some skills about how to guess the answer when you don't know it. For example, in the writing part, they didn't tell you how to write it. You know, for TOEFL writing, there are a lot of popular or classic topics. They just introduce the topic to you and kind of introduce how to build the article structure for this kind of topic. For example, which is more important, protecting the environment or developing economy? They will ask us to make three paragraphs. The first two paragraphs goes: "of course, environment is important"; in the last paragraph, you make kind of concession (translated from 让步) or to say that "if we can develop the economy and protect the*

*environment in the same time, it will be great”....because TOEFL is a timed test. They will tell you how to come up with 300 words within 25 minutes and leave 5 minutes to review it.”*

Lufang’s narrative best captures the practicality of TOEFL test training. This mind-training plus template-building process, though disapproved of by all participants regarding its benefits in improving either English language or writing, appeared to be somewhat effective for gaining adequate scores in such a time-pressured high-stakes test. But, according to most participants, their writing scores capped at 18-23 out of 30 after this type of training, and it was almost impossible to break through that threshold regardless of the number of times they underwent the training or took the test. For instance, Lufang took the TOEFL a total of six times, and she still remembered the trauma before the last test. By that point, Lufang expressed in English how she felt that she had encountered a bottleneck that she would never be able to overcome (emphasis added),

*The pressure was suffocating(那个压力让人窒息). I knew the differences between 89 and 90 [out of 120] in the applications, and everybody told me I should try it one more time no matter what. But I thought I tried everything I could, and there was no way I could get any higher scores. Looking back, I was grateful that my parents and others had pushed me to pursue a little further, because my new TOEFL score of 98 had smoothed my applications so much that I got accepted by seven out of the eight schools I applied to. More so, I felt a relief and it was like Nirvana (就好像涅槃重生).*

This test placed high pressure on Lufang to such an extreme that she believed her applications could be greatly impacted by a one-point difference. Though in the end she came out of this situation with strong confidence and resilience, this painful experience was clearly not going to help her build an English self. However, according to the participants’ collective memory, accomplishing a high result on the TOEFL symbolized an end to time-pressured English writing, while also marking a milestone during the languishing journey to get themselves into an American university.

### **College Application Essays for Everyone**

Right after the TOEFL and SAT/ACT, the college application process initiated. Depending on the university, applicants needed to draft a certain number of college essays to meet admission requirements. Some universities required a 400- to 500-word personal statement only. For example, Ohio State University and Boston University, two of the most popular destinations for Chinese students, relied on an online undergraduate college admissions platform called The Common Application. Applicants may select any of five prompt questions created anew and announced by the website each year, regarding background, identity, accomplishments, failures, future goals, or a similar topic. Some universities required several 200-word short essay responses to highlight specific values and traits, including family background, cultural diversity, leadership, teamwork, and the like; a typical and also well-known example would be the University of California system’s admissions. Others required both a personal statement and short essays, such as the University of Washington Admissions, which does not use the Common Application.

All four applicants in this study applied to eight to ten US universities with varied levels of support from others. For instance, Caiqin and Sucheng had support from a Chinese counselor and an American counselor at their international school. They both found the Chinese counselor's critique of their essay was confusing and discouraging. Meanwhile, this counselor was not able to provide any concrete suggestions except for a recurring comment that "*It has nothing unique about yourself.*" Fortunately, they were able to receive some valuable feedback from the American counselor and their classmates to support the multiple revisions they ended up doing. Typical among Chinese applicants, Yanjin hired a counselor who pointed out some problems in her essay and then revised it for her. According to Yanjin, the American-born counselor added some "*professional vocabulary*" and "*more professional ways to express [her] original ideas.*" Yanjin conceded that the revision was effective, though she did not find this one-time and one-way feedback beneficial for her writing improvement because it was not explained to her why changes were made. Lufang's privately hired college agent was able to guide her through the process to brainstorm ideas and translate her ideas from Chinese into English, but she found it more helpful when she turned to others who had worked or studied in the US for revision advice.

Regardless of the extent to which these college application essays showed input from others, this process seemed to have become an intriguing experience for many of the participants to make sense of writing in English. For instance, Yanjin stated, "*It [the college essay] is for admissions, so you have to put a lot of good words about yourself [She smiled shyly]. It is weird!*" Having been writing rhetorical analysis for the last three years in her American high school, Yanjin was introduced to a new genre through this college essay writing experience, one with which she was not so comfortable. Lufang developed a sense of genre awareness, expressed in her account that "*It is helpful during the process to learn about what kinds of values Americans prefer. For example, they like more details. They don't want you to just tell a general story. They want a detailed story to show your true emotions.*" To Lufang, the writer's "*true emotions*" matter in order to convince the American admission officers. For her, this writing experience deviated from conventional Chinese writing, which usually begins with a general story and ends with a moral lesson that is appropriate for the collectivist society of China (e.g. describing one's first time doing laundry and concluding with a realization of one's parents' selfless love). Lufang's consideration of the writer's feelings and American readers' different values exemplifies a genre awareness of college essays developed among the participants. To most of them, this writing experience seemed to be the first step towards thinking about and reflecting on who they were and what they aspired to be if they were accepted into an American university.

### Writer Identities

Besides their past writing experience, the first interviews (the pre-FYC interviews) also asked participants to elaborate on their English answers to two of the background survey questions:

- How do you see yourself as a writer, or what is your relationship with writing?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in writing?

These two questions were intended to invite participants to explore what their writer identities had been before they entered a FYC course. Interestingly, participants were puzzled by the term "writer identity." They did not quite perceive themselves as writers, which commonly

indicates a prestigious status in China, nor did they understand how one could develop a “relationship” with writing. This next section of this chapter is devoted to exploring each individual's writing self in light of the following questions: How did each participant see herself as a writer in English? And in Chinese? How did they interact with English writing? And Chinese writing? What role did grammar and vocabulary play in their English writing? Were there any memorable writing-related stories of joy, tears, success, or failure? I will begin with Sucheng, who chose Chinese for her interview, and then continue with Caiqin, Yanjin, and Lufang, who all preferred their interviews to be in English.

### Sucheng

In the survey section on strengths in writing, Sucheng responded (in English) “probably none.” During the follow-up interview in Chinese, she corrected herself and added that she might be better at “describing things.” In the section on weaknesses, she put down “grammar, vocabulary, [and] lack of ideas.” Also, she described her relationship with writing in a short English sentence: “Writing, to me, is mostly about a task, honestly.”

As mentioned in the Writing Life section, Sucheng felt very uncomfortable with red marks all over her middle school English test papers. This unease could be associated with the fact that somewhere in Sucheng's understanding of “*good English*,” there existed a distinct emphasis on things like correct grammar. For example, in this survey follow-up interview, she recalled discouraging moments when the IB English teacher returned homework on which (translated) “[t]here were grammar changes everywhere... So I think my grammar is pretty bad.” Secondly, there also seemed to be a preoccupation with accurate word choice. For instance, she found writing interviews as one of her IB class text types the most challenging because (translated) “*It is hard to shift points of view or to set the appropriate tones for different speaking roles.*” She realized that it was mostly because she did not have authentic language exposure to these scenarios, so thoughts often came to her mind in Chinese first. And then she would heavily rely on cell phone dictionaries to translate these words into English. However, she was always told by her native-speaker IB teacher that these translated words were not quite suitable for the given context. The nuances in meaning and usage usually get lost during direct translation, especially in digital dictionaries. In addition, her training in formal English writing during the IB English class also left her with a habit of pursuing “*big words (in English)*” that can impress readers such as IB writing exam evaluators or college admissions officers. For example, she expressed that she was very proud of her very first draft of her personal statement because she believed she had used a lot of “*high-level vocabulary (in English)*.” Though she learned from her American counselor that these “*high-level*” words did not read quite right, it was still noticeable that Sucheng aspired to achieve high proficiency in these “*big words*”.

Despite an unease with English writing, Sucheng thought she was probably better at describing things. She demonstrated this with a pleasant writing experience for the international school's magazine (translated and emphasis added):

*I might be good at descriptive writing, such as scenic views, with the support of a dictionary. In Senior Year II, I was asked to publish an article in the school magazine, and I wrote about the Universe. I wrote about 400-500 words. I watched a BBC documentary about the Universe, and I used sentences from that documentary. So, **I am okay with describing things, but just don't ask for my opinion.***

Putting aside the potential plagiarizing issue here, Sucheng depicted a moment of achievement in describing things using English. She had fonder memories of writing for this school magazine, which, according to her, allowed space to describe the school life she was acquainted with. Also, she recalled moments of ease knowing that the magazine's native-speaker teacher adviser would proofread everything before it went out for printing. In addition, Sucheng remembered enjoying writing letters more than all other text types practiced in her IB English class because that medium allowed her to express feelings in an informal and subjective manner. Besides describing things or expressing feelings, Sucheng tended to be reluctant to do other types of English writing. For instance, she admitted to being out of her comfort zone when asked to write about contemporary social issues. According to Sucheng, this type of article requires (translated) "*opinions, creativity, and critical thinking,*" which further explains why she put "lack of ideas" as a weakness in the survey.

Compared to English writing, which she considered an assignment or a task, Sucheng was more intrinsically motivated to write blogs in Chinese. Sucheng seemed to find herself more of a writer when she wrote Chinese blogs (translated and emphasis added):

*Most of the time, writing is just an assignment. But there are some special occasions—for example, when I feel like expressing my feelings and opinions. But mostly, I actually wanted to write them in Chinese and usually post them on blogs and QQ Space [a social media blogging platform]. The difference between English and Chinese writing is that the former is assigned by a teacher, so you will have to write it. But the latter is usually when you feel like writing something (后者是你很想写点什么). For instance, when you feel sad, you would want to write down your observations and emotions, but it is hard to find the appropriate English vocabulary to best capture those moments.*

Again, the emphasis on appropriate vocabulary and expressions took away the joy of writing and further discouraged her from developing an English writing self. However, towards the end of our first interview, when I asked if she might have missed any memorable writing stories, Sucheng shared with me what she called an "*enlightening moment (translated)*" of understanding English writing. She recalled a summer camp lecture by a former Harvard admissions officer on strong personal statements for college applications. According to this admissions expert, Sucheng recalled (translated), "*A common mistake in Chinese students' personal statements is that they mostly center on 'I learned a lesson!'*" On the contrary, the expert favored essays that tell a unique story about the student or writer. Sucheng explained (translated), "*This type of essay might not show your character or personality through a lesson you learned, but it is something unique about you and that happened to you!*" Sucheng could not have agreed more with this expert and further concluded that Chinese students' "I-learned-a-lesson" type of writing stemmed from the sort of Chinese writing training they have received since they were young.

Though Sucheng was unable to explain more about how Chinese writing training influenced how she wrote in English, she seemed to be illuminated by this newly learned notion of English writing. In her new perspective, English writing turns the writer's unique beliefs and qualities into a well-orchestrated story rather than a piece that simply pleases the reader (in this case, admissions officers) by reflexively describing commonly praised traits or virtues. I was delighted to see how Sucheng was prompted to think more deeply about the differences between

Chinese writing and English writing as well as make a nuanced distinction between *writer-centered* writing versus *reader-oriented* writing. Meanwhile, I look forward to the further development of her writer identity through her FYC course.

### Caiqin

In the survey, Caiqin described her relationship with writing as “a method to express feelings and release stress.” During the interview, Caiqin clarified that this only applied to Chinese writing and specifically referred to diary writing in Chinese. When asked about her strengths and weaknesses, she wrote in English, “I am good at make argument from different perspectives, but my weakness is vocab and expression.” Again, she pointed out that this is mainly about making arguments in Chinese.

Caiqin had kept the habit of writing in a diary every day since the age of ten. When reading this diary, sometimes she could not even remember what precisely had happened, but the diary always recorded her feelings and emotions: as she put it, “*It [the diary] is like a friend who can listen to my voice.*” To Caiqin, diary writing has helped her deal with strong emotions--positive and negative ones--and she habitually relied on this space to let out her inner voice. While Caiqin treated her Chinese diary as a close friend, her English diary was more or less like an acquaintance with deficits. For about two years, Caiqin was required by her mother, who also loved writing, to write a diary in English in order to improve English writing skills. Caiqin didn’t find it helpful. When asked for a reason, she explained, “*Because no one taught me how to improve it. I just...I didn’t see any progression.*” It was clear that when writing in English, the purpose was not about delivering meaning or exchanging feelings anymore, rather, it focused on perfecting the language or finding the accurate expressions that she had little exposure to. When further asked how and where she gained the language exposure to enrich Chinese diary writing, Caiqin explained (emphasis added),

*I read a lot in Chinese. I read a lot of Chinese articles, like the Reader's Digest (读者). I read out loud. Every time I read a new article, actually, unconsciously I learned about the writing skills. e.g., How does the author express the same feelings that I wanted to express, but in a different way? I didn’t read a lot of English articles, like novels. I had to spend an entire summer holiday finishing reading a short novel in English.*

It is through reading that Caiqin gained expressions and other Chinese language input. She also seemed to be an active reader in Chinese. When processing reading in Chinese, she exchanged thoughts with the author by comparing her own expressions with the author’s. It also seemed that when she recognized a different or a new expression, she was able to memorize it automatically. This active exchange process and automatic recording could have potentially led to a stronger grasp of the language, which could help explain how reading a new article can unconsciously teach her writing skills in Chinese. When asked further why then reading English novels was so much more challenging than reading Chinese ones, Caiqin explained (emphasis added),

*Because when I read Chinese articles, I didn’t have to focus on grammar, new vocabulary. But when I read English articles, the vocabulary is a big big challenge for me. I had to spend a lot of time using English dictionaries. It stopped me from just get the feeling of the author, but I need to pay a lot*

*attention to just understand, not to feel. ...so understanding is difficult, that's why feeling is very difficult.*

Here, Caiqin used *read to feel* and *read to understand* to suggest two different stages of processing text between reading in Chinese and in English. She needed to be able to *understand the text* before she can *feel the author*. To feel and to understand also suggested two different interactions with the text, with the former focusing on context and rhetorical awareness while the latter focusing on word meaning and comprehension. Caiqin was also aware that struggling to be understood or having to work extra hard to be understood, was not because of a lack of vocabulary. Quite the opposite, Caiqin had a comparatively large vocabulary pool in English, as she stated,

*Actually, I learned a lot of vocabulary, but in my writing, I couldn't use them. I don't know how to use them... I think it is a general problem for every Chinese student... Sometimes, I used some vocabulary I believe is high level, but my American counselor would sometimes tell me it is used totally wrong. Often times, what I wanted to express is different from what they got from my writing on the paper.*

Caiqin was speaking for Chinese students like her whose English learning was heavily weighted on vocabulary, more precisely, learning words out of context and lacking rhetorical nuance. Similar to Sucheng, a pursuit of high-level vocabulary has dominated their English learning. Based on my ten years of English learning and four years of English teaching in China, it is a common learning strategy among Chinese students to copy down high-level words during reading (occasionally listening) with a Chinese translation word next to the word entry. However, in doing so students seldom grasp how a word is used in context or how it differs from similar words. Subsequently producing new meaning through use of the word becomes problematic. Lack of appreciation for a word's connotations and implications impedes a writer's ownership over the word. Another common example can be found when Chinese students cram for vocabulary during TOEFL preparation<sup>1</sup>. Caiqin was aware of the problem; however, there is not much she could do in a test-orientated English learning environment.

Caiqin has maintained diary habit to this day. She has still been writing it in Chinese, but she also noticed a shift in the diary after she arrived in the US: *"It [My current diary] is more about the experiences, not about the feelings. Like the first day, the flight, the scene. And I wrote about the library. The friends I made. The people I met, like my roommates."* According to Caiqin, instead of focusing on emotions as in her previous diary, her current diary entry reads much closer to journal entries that went beyond how she felt, but also recorded her experience, observations and reflections. As Caiqin's experience as an international student unfolded at the university, her horizon had also been broadened. Meanwhile, her friendship with the diary had been evolving, as well as her relationship with writing. In the next chapter, I look forward to exploring more of her writer identities as Caiqin started her very first writing course in the US.

## **Yanjin**

Yanjin stated in the survey that writing to her is just "homework, not for fun." When asked about her strengths and weaknesses in writing during the follow-up interview, Yanjin wrote, *"I am good at academic writings but not personal essays."* She explained that *academic writing* here mainly referred to the lab reports and rhetorical analysis papers she wrote in high

school. However, because she only wrote these two forms, even though she attended high school in the US, she still felt her English writing was poor. Furthermore, Yanjin called out *personal essays* as a weakness and provided reasons in the interview:

*It is just easy to write analysis. I feel like because I am an engineer, I am better at dissecting stuff than just digging through my old experience. It's like one little thing that can be summarized in a sentence, you need to expand that sentence into a whole essay. I found it really hard to do. Especially sometimes topics you don't want to talk about, for example, I feel like it is pretty personal, but the teacher asks you to write it in the essay and do a peer review. I feel a lot of pressure. I probably don't want people to read my essays.... Sometimes, I know she is going to do a peer review, so I won't write anything that is that personal; but if it's not personal, it's hard to write [the assignment]. You don't really have that much to say.*

It is worth noting that this first interview was conducted three weeks into her FYC course, the first weeks of which focused on personal essays. Yanjin was struggling with this new genre. Part of the struggle could be explained through her identity perception and attitude towards personal essays. She first showed her resistance to writing personal essays by aligning herself with the identity of an engineer and insinuated a stereotype that an engineer is not good at writing about past experience. She then derided the genre by claiming that personal essays are inflated narratives that can be simplified into one sentence. Finally, she appealed to pathos and pointed out the pressure and the uncomfortableness of writing personal essays that will be exposed to others. Overall, Yanjin laid out relatively strong arguments to prove why she felt unable to write personal essays. However, these seemingly convincing arguments can potentially further prevent her from overcoming challenges in writing.

Compared to English writing, Yanjin's Chinese experience seemed to be more positive. She recalled writing blogs on Chinese social media (e.g., *163.com* and *sina.com*) to record transitioning into middle school and some life turning points so that her mother and friends could read them. She enjoyed writing the blogs, because: "*It made me think more clearly about my life, what I want to do in my life. Or maybe when I am confused, then what made me confused?*" Though she didn't carry the habit after she came to the US for high school, her Chinese blogs had served as sites for her to record experiences, to exchange insights and to make sense of those experiences. To Yanjin, this had been a very rewarding and enjoyable writing experience. However, not all Chinese writing had been as rewarding. Towards the end of the interview, Yanjin revealed a writing experience during her High School Entrance Exam or Zhongkao which eventually pushed her to study abroad. She began the story like this (emphasis added):

***You probably want to know this.** Before I graduated from my middle school, I was pretty good at Chinese writing. During the test of Chinese language art in Zhongkao, writing section is huge and it weights 50/120. During the first mock test, I scored 103/120, with almost a full score in writing section. For the actual test, I only scored 76/120 because my writing was graded poorly, which basically ruined my whole plan [to attend a Chinese high school]. My teacher said the topic I wrote was irrelevant [to the prompt]. But I think it is pretty relevant. This doesn't change my perception of writing. **It's just that they don't understand my meaning, but it doesn't mean I am not good at writing.** I came*

*to the US one year after that test, and I didn't have much practice in Chinese writing any more.*

The first sentence shows Yanjin sensed a “juicy” story for me. But it is still shocking to learn how this one piece of Chinese writing has fundamentally changed Yanjin’s life trajectory. Instead of following her plan to enter a prestigious local high school, after failing the writing section in her Chinese exam, Yanjin was recommended to study overseas. Not willing to be limited by a test score or to be defined by one piece of writing, Yanjin left home for America at the age of 15. She might sound overly self-assured at the time, especially in the highlighted sentence above when she claimed her perception of writing was not affected by others who didn’t understand it; and her confidence as a Chinese writer stood out so powerfully that she seemed to be able to overcome almost any challenges in Chinese writing. Yet, this confidence had not been found in her English writing.

### **Lufang**

Similar to Caiqin, Lufang also kept a diary and enjoyed expressing herself in this private sphere. In the background survey about relationship with writing, Lufang wrote in English, “In fact I really enjoy writing. I write diary [in Chinese] every day since I was 15.” According to Lufang, these diary entries are hand-written short passages of a couple of sentences that recorded all aspects of her life. In this particular written form, Lufang tried to capture everything that was important and intriguing to her. She provided several examples in follow-up interviews, “*Today, I had a fantastic meal,*” or “*today I made a new friend,*” or “*I went through some difficulties,*” or “*I lost something,*” etc. Lufang recorded and reflected in her diary; sometimes, she found inspiration; other times, she found strength. She also enjoyed reading her past diary entries and found it interesting how she felt differently now and back then over the same occurrence.

Lufang continued Chinese diary writing through the present, though she now writes less frequently. She would occasionally insert an English word or a sentence in the diary, but Lufang insisted that she would not write in her diary in English. Lufang explained, “*I feel like, when you write in your mother language, you will have that kinda... more close...close to your feelings.*” Similar to Caiqin, Lufang receives this diary space as a friend which has kept her company and allowed better expressions of her feelings. According to Lufang, it is more **natural** and **truthful** to write in her native language. In contrast, writing a diary in English has taken away the intimate interaction she has had with the diary, because she would have to spend more time searching for the right vocabulary and sentence structures in order to capture the moments. Failing to do so, she would then become not as natural or truthful to her friend.

Among all other participants, Lufang is the most elaborate regarding the difference between formal Chinese and English writing. Lufang described,

*In Chinese writings, teachers will first ask you to describe a story, an obscure story, then you will need to show what you have learned or felt based the details of the story. ...In Chinese argumentative essays, you don't need to make your argument very clear and logic doesn't matter here. They would ask you to give your opinion, but they really just want you to use rhetorical devices and florid language (translated from 修辞渲染). Versus in English, they give you a sentence or a statement, then ask if you agree or disagree. You will then provide reasons #1, #2, #3, and so on.*

She began this part in English and code-switched to Chinese when the phrase *rhetorical devices* were brought up. Lufang's first example above echoed what Sucheng called the "I-learned-a-lesson" type of Chinese writing, the genre of which usually expects a sort of moral lesson from the writer. Lufang was well-trained to present a lesson the teacher prefers to read about. When composing the argumentative essays required in Chinese class, Lufang recalled how she was trained to copy down witty quotes and beautiful sentences to use in future essays. It doesn't matter who wrote them or where they came from, as long as one could copy them in their own writing. Though Lufang was strong at writing both Chinese forms (I-learned-a-lesson and argumentative essays), she felt connected with neither. Contrary to her diary, these writings were not avenues to express true feelings or opinions. To Lufang, they were merely forms to present what was expected, and sometimes they were just ways to impress.

Lufang did not seem to have developed a relationship with English writing yet. In the survey section on relationship to writing, Lufang wrote in English, "Writing in English is hard. I saw it as a big weakness of me." When asked to elaborate in the interview, Lufang pointed out that her English writing was bad because her grades were not good. She gave an example of TOEFL writing again. She said she received almost full scores in both reading and listening, but always struggled with writing. No matter how hard she tried, she just could not make a breakthrough. When asked to comment on other English writing that is not test writing, Lufang said, "*I won't write anything [in English] which is not required.*" In other words, English writing to Lufang is a required task which, if given a choice, she would rather not do. However, a few minutes later, Lufang did bring up occasional English texting and said (emphasis added):

*Maybe sometimes I will text friends in English, but I won't write a very formal article in English by myself... **Texting is kinda more free.** You don't have to focus on that kind of grammar mistakes, because no one will blame you... But if it is a formal article, I need to focus on grammar. I need to focus on sentence structure.*

To interpret, Lufang believed that formal English writing is not as "free" as texting; and the consequences of making grammar mistakes in formal English articles can be real and tangible. A writer can be blamed for making grammar mistakes or using improper sentence structures. In Lufang's case, the fear of being blamed could potentially have discouraged her from writing in English, or even prevented her from wanting to write in English, which takes us to what Lufang put in the section of writing strengths and weaknesses in the survey, "Sadly, I do not think I have any strength in writing in English....I make unbelievable huge amount of grammar and spelling mistakes."

When asked to recall any memorable writing experience, Lufang switched to Chinese and shared her story of writing personal statement which is translated below:

*I came up with the idea and I picked a very unique angle. Because my grandfather is a scriptwriter and producer, I wrote about him, his work and his experiences. I focused on how he educated me and impacted me. I think Americans, especially educators, will care a lot about one's family status and background. I read some articles, saying that when admission officers make their pick, surely they hope the student can succeed, but more so, they are very practical in what nurtures success. For example, if a student has a higher family profile, he or she will probably be much more advantageous to succeed because they are more likely to have a better career platform and better personality*

*quality (人格). So I focused on constructing an image of a family of scholars (书香门第).*

This is another demonstration of Lufang's genre awareness in which she called out a specific audience: American educators. She understood that this audience could play an important role when they approach the text during the admission process, so she played with this genre knowledge and applied it to her personal statement. The fact that she got accepted by seven out of eight universities has further prompted her to believe that understanding what Americans value is critical to English writing, even though she might not have known the concept of genre awareness at this point. Lufang was smiling the entire time when she told me this writing story and she was clearly very proud of this experience.

### Conclusion

This chapter first reports on participants' past writing experience based on the findings from a background survey and a follow-up interview. A typical writing life for Chinese students was drawn out based on the four participants' collective memories of test-orientated, grammar/vocabulary-focused English learning in elementary and middle school. The four participants then diverged to attend different types of high schools and experienced different writing practices before they all came back to write intensively for the TOEFL, SAT and college applications. For instance, Caiqin and Sucheng's IB English writing class from the international school drew on a variety of themes and genres to develop critical thinking and research skills, and Yanjin's English literature classes in the US heavily centered on rhetorical analysis of texts from classics, American literature, and world literature for building rhetorical awareness over language use. In contrast to these three participants, Lufang spent most of her high school English writing time between home and TOEFL training classes. Aside from the practicality of TOEFL training, it has little to do with improving English writing. Lufang's traumatized TOEFL testing experiences also showcased the high pressure this test has placed on students. Besides TOEFL writing, all participants had also been deeply involved with composing college essays for applications. Through this intensive college essay-writing experience, with support from others to various degrees, all participants had a chance to truly explore questions such as who they are and what they aspire to become. Though it can be uncomfortable, this has been the first time most participants started to engage the self in English writing.

The second half of this chapter was intended to capture individual's voices regarding writer identities based on participants' accounts of their relationship with writing, as well as writing strengths and weaknesses. Most participants enjoyed low-stakes Chinese writing, such as blogs and diaries. In particular, Caiqin and Lufang had developed a close relationship with their Chinese diary. To them, a diary is like a friend they can turn to in order to let out emotions and make sense of life experience. On the contrary, almost all participants viewed English writing as "a task," "an assignment," "homework," or "*something they would usually procrastinate doing till the last minute.*" It is safe to conclude that none of the participants have developed a writer identity in English yet. Instead, anecdotally, Sucheng felt unease with red marks all over her English test paper; Yanjin showed resistance to writing personal essays; Lufang demonstrated fear towards making grammar mistakes. Overall, participants shared a lack of confidence in English writing in general, due to deep concerns about grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, or native-like expressions. Though the participants have not developed an English self yet, a holistic understanding of the participants' writing experience and writer identities in this chapter

hoped to surface what they brought into their FYC course and how this prior knowledge on writing intersects with their FYC writing experience, described in the next chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Note: Caiqin was speaking for most Chinese students whose English learning was heavily weighted on vocabulary, more precisely, learning words lacking context and rhetorical nuance. A good illustration can be a “must-have” vocabulary book series in China called *Red Diamond Vocabulary Book* by the founder of New Oriental Education Company (see book cover on the right).

Almost every Chinese student starts TOEFL or GRE preparation with an intensive vocabulary memorization period guided by this book series. A *Red Diamond Vocabulary Book* typically lists 7500 “high level” words with high frequency. As illustrated below, each word entry includes: one to two Chinese translations, a confusing way to assist memorization, one short sentence example, and word forms. Take the word *abandon* as an example below:



<b>abandon</b>	[ə'bændən] <i>vt.</i> 离弃, 完全放弃( <i>desert</i> ) <i>n.</i> 放纵 【记】分析联想: a + hand(乐队) + on → 一个乐队在演出 → 放纵 【例】She and her tribe had to <b>abandon</b> their lands and retreat to Canada. 【派】abandoned( <i>a.</i> 被抛弃的, 废置的); abandonment( <i>n.</i> 放弃, 抛弃)
----------------	--

To help memorize the word *abandon*, it is suggested to imagine “a band” who is “on,” suggesting that the band is indulging when they play. Here the nuanced difference between “abandon” and “indulge” are completely ignored in Chinese translation and memorization support. What’s worse, to be able to memorize 7500 words in 3 months, students are suggested setting a goal of memorizing 100 words per day and constantly go back to refresh. It usually results in reducing the vocabulary process to one English word associated with one Chinese translated word. This vocabulary cramming method can be helpful for test prep especially in the reading section, because it does help take out those panic moments when a pressured test taker spots a completely new word; however, students will be less unlikely to own the word without grasping its nuanced usage in authentic contexts.

### Appendix Background Survey

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part I Writing experience

1. How long have you been writing? How about writing in English? How is writing in English different than writing in your mother tongue to you?
2. What types of writing experience have you had before? For example, have you done writing for tests (e.g., school exams, TOEFL, SAT, AP, etc.), for fun, for applying schools, for communicating, for publishing, etc.?
3. What writing class/training/tutoring have you had before? Where did you take it? What is its focus? What textbooks, if any, does it require? What types of writing did you do for this writing class/training/tutoring? Have you kept them with you?
4. How do you see yourself as a writer or what is your relationship with writing?
5. What are your strengths and weakness in your writing?
6. What are your academic and career goals? How important is writing in your academic study or future career?

#### Part II English learning experience

1. Is English your first language? How many years have you been studying English? What other languages do you speak? Which do you consider as your mother tongue?

#### Part III Current Composition course

1. Which freshman composition course are you taking this quarter (winter 2015), English 109/110, 111, 121, 131, 197, 198, 199? What time on which days does the class meet? Who is your instructor and what is his/her email address? (Please note: This will help me understand what is going on in your current composition, thus, I can tailor my class to better serve your needs.)
2. Have you heard of the following writing support sources on campus? Are you going to use them?

Writing Support Sources	Have you heard of it? (Yes/No)	Are you planning to use it this quarter? (Yes/No)
OWRC Targeted Group Tutoring		
Writing Tutoring at OWRC		
Writing Tutoring at CLUE Writing Center		
English 115 Writing Studio		

## CHAPTER 6 MID-FYC: ACHIEVING APPERCEPTION

### Introduction

This chapter is based on interviews conducted during the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> week of the quarter when all participants were halfway through FYC and they all had received feedback from their instructor on their first major paper and have started working on their second one. The interview was structured to understand participants' overall writing experience on their first major paper, and to capture their accounts of any changes in writing and writer identity. Specifically, each participant was asked to recall: How did they approach each assignment? How was that writing experience compared to previous writings? How did they react to the instructor's feedback? What was their experience like during peer review, whole-class discussion, group work, office hours, tutoring at the writing center, etc.? In addition, follow-up questions were asked based on some observations made between the pre- and mid-FYC interviews (see Appendix: Sample Mid-FYC Interview Questions: Yanjin). These observations include once for Caiqin's class, once for Lufang's writing center tutoring session, and three times for Yanjin's class. Sucheng's instructor did not respond to the research requests, which did not allow observation of Sucheng in class to occur. Finally, the mid-FYC interviews were concluded with: How, if at all, has your understanding of writing changed? How do you see yourself as a writer now?

Similar to the first interview, all participants chose to be interviewed in English except for Sucheng, who preferred Chinese. All English interviews were transcribed verbatim, while Sucheng's interview was transcribed verbatim into Chinese first. Relevant sections of the transcription were selected and translated into English for analysis purposes. To achieve Chinese to English translation accuracy, another Chinese scholar Wei Zuo, who graduated from the English Department in 2015, was asked to confirm the translated work within the context of the full interview. Zuo's dissertation focused on Chinese international students' academic socialization at the same university.

This chapter will review the institutional context of the various types of FYC classes offered in the University's Expository Writing Program (EWP) and Interdisciplinary Writing Program (IWP) in order to situate each participant's FYC experience within this local context. Then each participant's individual FYC course will be presented and a summary of their experiences provided along with one or two highlighted stories. The chapter will then bring together some overarching themes shared among all four participants, especially through the lens of interactions with writing, instructor, peers, and research. Finally, the chapter will return to each individual participant and put a spotlight on the nuanced and ongoing development of each individual's writer identity.

### Institutional Context

The university in Northwest Pacific where this research was situated is a large Research One institution with 31,078 undergraduates in the autumn of 2018, 16.5% of whom were international students, according to its official website. All students are required to take a 5-credit composition course in order to satisfy the university's "C-credit" or composition credit requirement for major entrance or/and graduation. All FYC courses are self-registered and capped at 23 students, with no placement test or specific TOEFL scores required for international students.

Each year, the university's Expository Writing Program (EWP) offers an array of first year composition courses, such as English 109/110, 111, 121, 131, 182, for more than 4,000 freshman or sophomore students to choose from. All of these EWP 100-level courses are designed around a shared set of outcomes; however, each course has its own focus. For instance, English 109/110 is a two-quarter stretched model; English 111 focuses on literary works; English 121 includes a service-learning component that takes students into the community, and the recent English 182 encourages students to compose multimodal texts. The most popular course, English 131, has a general focus on academic discourse which allows individual instructors to build their own content. To put this into perspective, 36 out of the 76 FYC sessions offered in the winter quarter of 2015 at EWP were English 131 sessions. The participants in this research Lufang, Yanjin and Sucheng each took a separate English 131 session.

Alternatively, students can also fulfill their C-credit requirement through a linked composition course at the university's Interdisciplinary Writing Program (IWP), known as "links." These "links," including English 197, 198, 199 and English 297, 298, 299, are synchronized with lecture courses in various disciplines. For instance, English 197 & 297 are linked with humanities such as film studies or Greek & Roman mythology; English 198 & 298 are linked with social sciences such as philosophy, communications, or international studies, and so forth and English 199 & 299 are linked with natural sciences such as biology, chemistry, or astronomy, etc.. These "links" are designed to familiarize students with disciplinary genres, cultivate critical reading and writing skills, and encourage further exploration of ideas and materials assigned in the lecture courses. Students taking a "link" enroll in it concurrently with a lecture course covering relevant material, and the instructor of the "link" coordinates with the main class' professor to help students write about the content in even more depth. Among the four participants, Caiqin was the only one who took an English 299, which was linked with a 200-level Psychology lecture course.

Students at the university also receive writing support outside of their FYC classrooms in the forms of writing studios and writing centers. For instance, international students can take a two-credit writing studio session numbered English 115 alongside their FYC course. Up to 10 students from different FYC courses bring course readings, essay prompts, questions, and concerns from their respective FYC courses into the studio for a one-hour session twice a week. The teacher, usually with a TESOL background, will then structure these in-class sessions around some of the commonly raised issues and offer concrete examples for hands-on reading and writing practice. In addition to in-class sessions, students benefit from online writing collaboration with peers, as well as a great deal of conferencing time with the teacher for individual writing support. As mentioned in previous chapters, Sucheng, Caiqin and Yanjin were recruited from separate writing studios that I taught at the time of initial data collection (Lufang was recruited from Conversation Groups at CLUE). Though the studio was not considered a major research site, it was mentioned by participants as an important form of support for their FYC course.

At the university, students also pay frequent visits to writing centers across campus. The two most popular writing centers among FYC students are the Odegaard Research and Writing Center (OWRC) and the Writing Center at the Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment (CLUE). The OWRC offers up to three 50-minute, free tutoring sessions per week by appointment while the CLUE writing center offers 45-minute, free drop-in tutoring sessions late into the night. Both writing centers have experienced, well-trained tutors who are able to

respond one-on-one to all sorts of requests for writing assistance, though tutors focus on higher-order concerns rather than proofreading. Observations of several tutoring sessions have also been included in this research in order to capture a more holistic picture of participants' writing experience. After a quick look at the university's layout of FYC courses and writing support network, I would like to focus on each participant's class.

### Participants and Their FYC Course

With the wide range of FYC options at the university, international students sometimes turn to peers for course recommendations (e.g., Yanjin), choose a course based on an intended major (e.g., Caiqin), or are limited by other course schedules (e.g., Lufang and Sucheng). After securing a FYC spot, they are often referred to outside support such as writing studios and writing centers.

### Caiqin's English 299 Experience

Caiqin took IWP's English 299, linked with PSYCH 202, expecting to learn how to write scientific papers in her intended major, Psychology. Initially, Caiqin did not think the class reached her expectation, as she put it, "*The class is boring...and the instructor teaches too little.*" When comparing her college class with her high school English teacher from New Zealand, Caiqin thought her current instructor was "very nice" but "too serious" and "less informative." Additionally, Caiqin was not used to having a significant amount of class time spent on group discussions as she was doubtful about actually learning from peers: "*What I learned is mostly based on my classmate's' ideas....but sometimes I don't know whether they are true or not.*" Caiqin expected more teaching from the instructor and her explanation was: "*so I can know if I am on the right track.*" She believed peer's ideas were interesting and beneficial; however, it was extremely important for her to be able to learn from "the authority," which in this case was the instructor.

As the course progressed, Caiqin started to focus on reading and writing. The course she chose requires three papers: a four-page expository essay, an eight- to ten-page literature review, and a four-page rhetorical analysis based on a self-designed multimodal text. To prepare for each paper, the instructor assigns a series of small scaffolding assignments. For instance, Paper 1 was broken down to an outline, a half draft and a final draft. After submission, each paper receives a final grade. There is no cover letter or portfolio in the end, unlike English 131.

At Week 2, Caiqin came across her first hurdle: she struggled to write a homework assignment that required a one-paragraph rhetorical analysis of each of the three readings. Caiqin had never written a rhetorical analysis before, nor did she know "*what it looks like.*" "*I was very upset,*" she said when she recalled this experience. Fortunately, the writing studio happened to introduce some key concepts and strategies commonly applied in rhetorical analysis. Caiqin was a quick learner and she was able to apply them immediately. For instance, she wrote in this Homework 1.4 that: "The authors write the review in a perfectly formal way. The intended audience is the research people with psychological background, and by using scientific jargon, the author was able to convince...". Though the analysis writing was not complex, given this was her first attempt at writing a rhetorical analysis, Caiqin recognized the imperative to move from summarizing content to analyzing the author's rhetorical choices, such as formality, audience, language use, and such. Later on, Caiqin had more exposure to this genre such as when the class did a close reading of a scholarly rhetorical analysis on hedge words used in a set of psychology

reports. By the time of the mid-FYC interview, Caiqin had much more to say about rhetorical analysis: *“There are a lot to analyze, like the structure and language. Although they are all empirical reports, different authors may use different languages and tones. Some are more informative; some are more tentative, meaning using hedging words.”* Caiqin had become much more comfortable with this genre and she seemed much more confident when discussing it. Caiqin had shown a clear writing development, from not knowing what rhetorical analysis is to understanding there are many aspects of writing that can be analyzed in this genre.

A short while later, Caiqin felt upset again when starting Paper 2: a literature review. More so, she was intimidated by its eight- to ten-page length requirement. To Caiqin, this was another unfamiliar genre and also the longest essay she had ever been asked to write. This time, the fear did not last long. The next day, the English 299 instructor brought to the class a scholarly literature review sample; students discussed it in class and were given an assignment to write about it. Caiqin remembered, *“After these, I had a general idea of the structure, how it works, and what should be included in a literature review.”* Caiqin appeared to adapt to this assignment more quickly than the previous one. Looking back at this experience during the mid-FYC interview, Caiqin said, *“Now I know everything [about literature review], so I am very happy.”*

It was delightful to watch Caiqin grow through this course, not only in terms of writing, but also in her writer identity. When the mid-FYC interview began, Caiqin excitedly shared some good news with me: Her Paper 1 received a 3.9 out of 4.0, with a class average at 3.2. When asked how she felt about it, Caiqin responded, *“I was first very excited. Then I looked at the average score: 3.2. I felt very proud of myself. I think I might be the only Chinese student in the class.”* Here, Caiqin emphasized her Chinese student identity. Much can be interpreted from this emphasis of her origin in her comments: first, she reminded herself how challenging it was to receive such a high mark. Second, the comparison to her American classmates who are native speakers of English and who might have been exposed to this new genre prior to the class made Caiqin realize she could also do well, and perhaps even do better than her American counterparts. The strong grade appeared to trigger Caiqin’s sense of pride and she appears to have experienced a boost in confidence. Caiqin’s writing development also fostered a change in her writer identity from an outsider to a respected peer.

### **Caiqin's Writer identity**

Before ending this interview, Caiqin was asked again about her relationship with writing. In her Pre-FYC interview, Caiqin did not answer this question directly. Rather, she described what it was like when writing in English: putting most of her effort into perfecting the language or searching for accurate expressions that she had had little exposure to. After writing Paper 1 and preparing for Paper 2, Caiqin told me, *“I think writing is much more related to my interests, like related to psychology. I started to see how writing can help me understand psychology and learn about others’ ideas.”* It seems that Caiqin had gotten closer to writing by applying it to the field she is passionate about. On one hand, writing helped her understand or make sense of disciplinary concepts and scholarly arguments in psychology, which is an important step to entering the discourse community of any given discipline. Furthermore, Caiqin expressed her enjoyment of contributing to and receiving feedback from this discourse community, when she said, *“I think it’s a very good experience to let others know my ideas and to comment on my papers.”* Clearly, she enjoyed scholarly conversations in psychology through writing; in a sense, writing helped Caiqin start to develop a new identity--as a scholar in psychology.

When asked how she saw herself as a writer again in the mid-FYC interview, Caiqin started with, “*I think writing is very interesting and exciting experience.*” Then with a shy smile, she said, “*I think I should be very proud of myself as a writer.*” Besides a high grade of 3.9 in her linked class, Caiqin offered another finding related to reading and writing, to help explain what made her proud as a writer (emphasis added):

*I think a person is always both a reader and a writer. And these two identities will give me very interesting experiences. I collect information from others and also pass information to others.... [This] is a totally new experience to me. Before, I never used to think about the fact that reading is so...I know reading is important to writing because reading can help me improve writing...I thought these are two totally different roles, but actually when I experienced them at the same time, they can totally be combined together.*

Caiqin was very excited about her coming to realize this intertwined reader-writer identity. Based on her first interview, Caiqin tended to think that reading serves writing. For instance, as a reader, she used to read to comprehend, to learn new vocabulary, to imitate strong sentence structures, or to copy sample essay templates. Writing was then a place to apply those (e.g., vocabulary, sentence structures, and the like). In a sense, as a reader, in her focus on English learning in the past, the reading process involved more passively receiving information. During the mid-FYC interview, especially after doing intensive rhetorical analysis, Caiqin had also shown some changes as a reader (emphasis added):

*When I read psychology writings before..., I never doubted anything about the writers or the authors.... but then when I learned how to do rhetorical analysis of empirical studies and reports, I found that sometimes their methods or their ways to present data cannot be so perfect, especially in Psychology. I felt like I started to have a critical mindset, which has increased my interests in psychology.*

The fact that Caiqin started to actively engage with reading has made her a much more critical reader. Her writing then became a tool to express those critical thoughts as a form of exchanging ideas. And when she writes, she constantly bears in mind the questions her readers would potentially pose, so, as a reader of her own writing, she was able to anticipate different or opposing ideas to advance her argument. In our mid-FYC interview, Caiqin further explained the simultaneous reader-writer identities.

### **Lufang’s English 131 Experience**

Lufang took a regular English 131 course, as opposed to a multilingual one, and expected college writing to be similar to TOEFL writing. However, after working on Short Assignment 1 (SA1) and 2 (SA2), Lufang found the writing was “*not similar at all.*” By the end of our first interview during the third week, Lufang brought up her struggle participating in class. She emphasized her struggle was not due to being shy or because she didn’t know the importance of class participation in terms of final grades; it was due to a cultural word association. According to Lufang, most of the whole-class participation discussions were based on an article titled “Is the phrase 'basic bitch' just another excuse for casual sexism?” Lufang felt strongly that the word “bitch” was deeply rooted in American culture, and she explained, “*I don’t have any background or experience about that word, so I can’t join that conversation.*” Lufang did not feel she had the

knowledge or understanding of this culturally dense term to intelligently participate in class discussions.

However, Lufang showed a strong interest in writing SA1--a personal piece that explores one's language use in different settings, and SA2--making an argument in a letter to the author of one of the class readings. She started with, "*I didn't feel lots of pressure from [writing] them.*" Then she got excited sharing her SA1:

*I talked about the difference in speaking two different languages when I am in different countries. I never thought [about] it before, but I found it very interesting. The interesting thing is that I feel more confident and more comfortable when I speak English in China. Very weird but it's very true. The reason I think is, when I was in China, my English speaking is a little above the average level so I have that kind of feeling, that kind of confidence. But when I am living in the States surrounded by native speakers, I don't have that kind of confidence. I feel nervous. I am afraid of making grammar mistakes.*

Lufang seemed to be captivated with the topic of SA1. First, it is closely related to her real-life choices of language use as an international student who is studying in the US for the first time. In a sense, the assignment provided a channel to deeply ponder important questions she had not previously considered at a conscious level. Secondly, since it is a personal piece with no restrictions on format or structure, Lufang was able to focus on the content without feeling intimidated by its genre, which happened to the other three participants in this study. Thirdly, this assignment allowed Lufang to communicate her initial concerns about speaking up in class, which proved successful based on her instructor Norbert's comment:

*I'm also happy that you shared how you feel with respect to Chinese versus English listeners; recognizing how these feelings play a part in speaking (as well as writing) will serve you well in class....I believe you should have confidence in your writing and speaking abilities in English, and I hope this class will serve you well as a space for practice and reflection.*

Lufang had been overtly expressing her appreciation of the instructor's open-mindedness and encouragement throughout the research. Compared to all other participants, Lufang was very fortunate to have such an understanding instructor who made time to listen and express empathy regarding the unique language challenges international students face.

### ***Exploring the course theme.***

Entering the writing of Major Paper 1 (MP1), a five- to seven- page argumentative essay that explores a profane word or words, Lufang expressed her concern over its length, a concern expressed by all participants. However, as she landed on the topic of "Chinglish" and as she dug deeper into it, Lufang began to be more and more grounded. I had an interesting observation with respect to her growing understanding of the course theme "profanity." Apparently, before this course, Lufang had never heard about the word "profanity," nor could she grasp the concept of that word. At our first interview, when asked about what the word meant to her, Lufang got perplexed: "*It's just about something...just something about language.*" During our mid-FYC interview, Lufang remembered looking up the word in a dictionary and summarizing that "*Profanity basically means swearing or bad words that are used when people are anger about something.*" Later when writing MP1, Lufang began to expand the concept of profanity. She

explained, *“I feel ‘profane’ can be a kind of value thing. And there isn’t any specific range of profane, depends on how you explain this word.”* According to Lufang, profanity is something that is based on the interpretation of the speaker and the listener. This broadened definition of profanity first allowed her to include Chinglish into MP1 conversations. Secondly, by emphasizing the value of profane language, Lufang pointed out Chinglish could be *“the cultural signal of Chinese people,”* in order to legitimize this language form. Reflecting on the way that Lufang dealt with a similarly cultural-dense initially incomprehensible word association of “bitch,” it appears Lufang had become much more active, thorough, and sophisticated in her approach to tackling the word “profanity.” Through writing, she found a new way to learn about foreign terms that allowed her to break through the barrier of understanding Western culturally specific words and was able to apply this learning to something that matters to her (i.e., Chinglish). This progress of making the incomprehensible comprehensible demonstrates Lufang’s writing development growth.

### ***Small Talk.***

By the mid-FYC interview, Lufang had found a unique way to demonstrate that class participation matters to her, as she explained, *“I don’t want my instructor to think that I don’t care about this class or I don’t have any thought about this class. I need to...want to show myself I really want to be involved in this class.”* Lufang was self-motivated. Since Norbert’s office hours conflicted with her math class, she proposed a participation method and Norbert accepted it. As part of class participation, she would send weekly email correspondence she called Small Talk. Every week, Lufang emailed Norbert the answers and thoughts she was unable to present during class. In addition, Lufang included some questions covering all aspects of this class, but mostly her goal was to seek clarification and confirmation.

For instance, in her first Small Talk email sent on January 25, during the third week of the quarter, Lufang first expressed appreciation for the opportunity to utilize Small Talk, then responded to a voluntary discussion post on Canvas with great detail. After that, she asked about the differences between paraphrasing and quoting. Since she had read a textbook chapter on integrating quotations and both paraphrasing and quoting involve “replacing some words,” Lufang got confused and was not sure when to use which. Thirdly, after completing a course reading, Lufang made a personal connection with the text. She shared it in the email and asked if she could use it in her SA3. Finally, she asked if she could use some newly learned phrases from the textbook (e.g., “In particular”, “As...point out,...”) and wanted to make sure it wasn’t “seen as cheating or copying others work.” Though Lufang claimed she lacked confidence in her English, through the first Small Talk email, I observed a very elaborative and communicative Lufang. On the other hand, when seeking confirmation, Lufang displayed a sense of insecurity about her own thoughts, but she overcame this insecurity with diligence, self-motivation, as well as trust and encouragement from her instructor. Many of the questions she raised here are real to many international students or even American students, and Lufang seized an opportunity through Small Talk to address them.

Norbert’s responses to Small Talk varied. Sometimes he replied to the email or talked to Lufang briefly after class. Other times, he inserted a brief response along with the end comments he provided in each assignment. When asked to share her thoughts about Small Talk, Lufang used the word “encourage” several times. For instance, *“And most of the time, he is encouraging me. He said ‘oh, the small talk is awesome. I know there is a lot of interesting thoughts in your mind.’ ...So I feel like in this course, the most of time, I am being encouraged.”* Clearly, Norbert’s

encouraging comments on her interesting thoughts helped her to gain the confidence necessary for her to move forward with the demands of the course.

### Lufang's Writer Identity

In terms of writing identity changes that occurred, those are best captured in an overt satisfaction Lufang expressed at the very beginning of the mid-FYC interview. Lufang said, excitedly, “*There is a huge improvement from the assignments.*” To illustrate her point, she described how she wrote about 1000 words for her last assignment in just one night, whereas in the past, she would struggle with a 500-word piece for several days.

With the same excitement, Lufang further shared a newly developed interest in reading. Lufang described how she used to avoid any outside-of-class English reading; however, just a few hours before the interview, she found herself indulging in a book about Keats. She randomly picked up this book when doing research in the library. Despite it being a complete distraction from her research, she enjoyed reading it. More so, she was delighted to find out English reading is no longer “*torture.*” Rather, it can be stimulating, as she described (emphasis added):

*When I am reading, I feel I am receiving some kind of new messages which I have never thought about before. And I feel thinking starts at the same time with reading. I feel this is so good. I feel I am a college student, I need to think about more things. So I just enjoy reading.*

Here, Lufang identified herself as “*a college student*” who ought to be a thinker; and she gladly realized that reading not only opened doors to new ideas, it also provoked her own thinking.

When asked how she came to this realization, Lufang referred to a large volume of texts recommended by her instructor. These readings are mostly related to language use and its social implications. When reading these texts, she found herself constantly pausing at new ideas with fascination, trying to connect to and reflect on her own experience using Chinese and English. Though some vocabulary in these academic articles could still be challenging, the action of reading to Lufang had gone beyond mere comprehension. Rather, it had become an exchange of ideas between the text and herself as the reader.

Another prominent moment reflecting Lufang’s writer identity change is when she talked about her tutoring experience at the CLUE writing center. Two weeks into the quarter, Lufang had her first tutoring session at CLUE writing center. I observed this session. During this session, the tutor and Lufang worked on a first draft of Major Paper 1, specifically on organization and topic sentences. During the mid-FYC interview, Lufang recalled this tutoring while contrasting it with her past tutoring experience (emphasis added):

*From my previous experience, it’s just about me and my teacher sitting there and the teacher would speak more. But now, I need to express my own opinion. It’s more about my choice, my decision. It’s like both of us are doing this process. We are both thinking, not just someone feeding [it] to me.*

Lufang captured the differences between her tutoring experience in China and US: first, the former focuses on grammar and editing while the latter emphasizes structure and organization. Her role in the former experience was more of a passive recipient of information.

Indeed, in China, working with a tutor is the equivalent of being able to present information received and being fed with correct grammar. This is quite contrary to how the tutor at CLUE handled the session, making certain Lufang understood the ownership of the writing was her responsibility, requiring her to express her own opinion and make her own decisions. Though Lufang initially found the experience confusing and uncomfortable, her excitement in understanding the tutoring differences and discovering she was able to freely express herself allowed Lufang to start enjoying active decision-making in her writing.

Lufang shared another discovery related to the same session. Apparently, the tutor suggested deleting a paragraph that appeared irrelevant to Lufang's MP1 main idea. Lufang agreed with the tutor but ended up submitting the original draft because she *"wanted to see what she can do about this without any help."* When her instructor Norbert showed great interest in the sub-idea in that paragraph and suggested that she elaborate more instead of removing it, Lufang was very surprised and she came to a conclusion that, ***"So I noticed that for writing, there's never been a right answer. Most of time, it's about personal preference."*** Seeing writing as a personal preference rather than a right/wrong dichotomy demonstrates writer identity evolution. When asked whose suggestion she would adopt in the revision, Lufang explained her dilemma: if it is for grading purposes, she might choose the instructor's; but she also saw the reasoning of the tutor's suggestion. So she avoided a definitive answer and focused on the future: *"After I finish this course, I need to finish writing by myself and I need to choose, to make decision [by] myself. I can ask as much as possible suggestion from others, and then choose from my own preference."* Lufang seemed more excited about writing ownership than the actual choice. Here I see Lufang claiming her writer ownership in a much more comfortable manner. I was also very surprised at her development of critical thinking: from a reader/writer who seeks confirmation of and feels insecure about her thoughts to a writer who thinks beyond the black-and-white dichotomy and who is excited to make her own writing choices.

### **Yanjin's English 131 Experience**

In high school, Yanjin took a basic English literature class rather than AP or Honors English because she surmised her interests were in science, not English. Entering college, she chose English 131 because her research indicated it was the easiest English course at the university. Yanjin expected writing in this class to be the same as it was in high school. However, Yanjin very quickly realized, when the first sequence was introduced in English 131, that there was a huge difference between high school and university English courses and said in our first interview that, *"One essay every week is very intense."* By our second interview when asked how she was doing in class, Yanjin responded, *"I'm doing great!"* She then went on, explaining that students in this class had come to each other well thanks to the extensive amount of group work, including peer reviews, group discussions and a group presentation. Yanjin gave credit to her instructor, Rachel, for rotating group members each time, so by our mid-FYC interview, she felt she had probably worked with everyone in the class at least once. She also appreciated some relationships she made in this community. This resonates with Rachel, who mentioned during our first interview that since this class has more international students than usual (almost half), she created more group work to make sure they felt less intimidated.

Interestingly, Yanjin distanced herself from Chinese students in class. Though I did not pay attention to classroom seating, Yanjin brought it up during the mid-FYC interview when discussing problems in another Chinese student Patrick's (pseudonym used) SA2.2. Patrick and

Yanjin were paired up to peer review SA2.2 during my second observation. Yanjin said (emphasis added),

*I don't know. 'Cause, uh...When I see some international students, especially Chinese, **they** don't even know me. **They** don't even think I am Chinese; I don't know them very well. I don't know, I just didn't sit in that area....I heard them talking in Chinese between the break, but I never joined **them**.*

Using third person pronouns such as *they* or *them* indicated Yanjin's separation from other Chinese students. She seemed to imply that other Chinese students did not consider her an international student, but thought she was probably a domestic Chinese student who was born here or immigrated here at an early age. She also seemed to imply that this might have resulted from either her native-like English fluency or her active class performance. Or perhaps, it is because she did not join them to speak Chinese during break, so they did not know she could speak Chinese. Regardless, Yanjin seemed to have made an intentional choice to not interact with international students, especially Chinese students. When asked why, she explained because her high school in Michigan did not have any other Chinese students. This coincides with an account in our first interview where she saw herself standing in between domestic students and international students.

Yanjin struggled with writing essays in Sequence 1 and said, "I hate personal essays." Having written rhetorical analysis on literary texts for three years in high school, Yanjin felt pressured to write something personal knowing it would be shared with others in peer review. Starting with SA1.1, which asks students to write about their own personal mother tongue, Yanjin had a hard time recognizing the uniqueness of her mother tongue, Chinese. As she put it:

*I mean, people are curious about your background, but I feel like that's not something I really feel, like, so strong about it. I feel like, yeah, it's so common that as an international student; **we** come from China, but what else should I write about? It's like everybody has similar stories so I don't really ... I don't really know how to make it unique.*

Here it seemed like Yanjin was drawing on a cultural norm that people in China are generally not accustomed to looking into individual uniqueness of their language use, or their cultural background. She seems to imply that China is a homogeneous society where "*everybody has similar stories.*" Interestingly, here is the first time Yanjin actually aligned herself with other Chinese international students especially when she used the pronoun *we*, whereas previously, Yanjin either announced her position in between domestic and Chinese students or tried to distance herself from Chinese students. To further explain why she struggled with writing about her mother tongue, Yanjin said in another quote that showed an indifferent attitude as she said, "*I'm okay with anybody speaks to me in Chinese or English. I don't care. It's just a language that you use to communicate with people.*"

It is interesting to note when required to write about a similar topic of language use, Yanjin and Lufang showed very different perspectives. For instance, while Yanjin focused on Chinese, Lufang discussed the differences between using English and Chinese. While Yanjin struggled to find anything unique about speaking Chinese, Lufang got excited about the discovery that she felt more comfortable speaking English in China than the US. In addition to a difference in attitude, the discrepancy between the two ways the topic was presented in the

classes could have in part resulted in the different outlooks between Yanjin's and Lufang's first assignment. A close examination of prompts will be presented later.

### *Peer review.*

As mentioned previously, Yanjin's composition class stands out among others due to an intense amount of in-class peer review discussions. Every assignment required a group or pair peer review. All three classes I observed between the first and mid-FYC interview included a peer review as a large portion of class time. For the last class, I observed Yanjin's group peer review on a rough draft of Major Paper 2 (MP2), "a research paper on a topic of your choice" (MP2 Prompt). Yanjin's MP2 main argument was that marijuana should not be legalized. She was grouped with Max, Susan, and Alex (pseudonyms used). Max is a male Chinese international student, Susan is a female domestic student with Vietnamese origin, and Alex is a male Caucasian domestic student. The next day at the mid-FYC interview, Yanjin and I spent the first half of our time recalling this peer review experience.

Based on my observations, Yanjin, unlike other participants, was not shy to speak up in class or engage in conversations with her American peers. Sometimes, she could be very critical when reviewing their papers. For instance, she was not hesitant to point out that Susan's arguments "*didn't attract my attention...but I think her evidence was very strong though.*" She also suggested that Susan add a sub-claim that could call for action (e.g., calling for Barbie doll companies to introduce more appropriate dolls). In addition, Yanjin called out a common sense statement that Susan put in her MP2: "Pretty women are more popular." During peer review, Yanjin challenged this statement and suggested introducing more trustworthy evidence to back it up. During the interview, Yanjin elaborated on this comment and provided an anecdotal case from her high school in Michigan to counter Susan's "common sense" generalization.

When it comes to other's reviews on her MP2, Yanjin's reactions varied based on who the commentator was and what was commented on. For instance, when Susan pointed out that Yanjin listed much evidence and sources in bullet points, yet these bullet points did not seem to be organized with a clear line of inquiry, Yanjin completely agreed with Susan and explained that she ran out of time to complete that step. Also, Yanjin appreciated Susan's attention to grammar: "*She is pretty in detail. I looked at her review sheet. She gave me, like, lots of grammar stuff, issues.*" Yanjin thought those grammar reminders were very helpful.

Interestingly, Yanjin seemed to be less receptive to Alex's comments. For instance, during peer review when Alex made a suggestion with a careful tone to improve her stake, "*How is it important to the society?*" Yanjin did not respond. When I followed up in the mid-FYC interview and asked about her thoughts on Alex's suggestion, Yanjin replied, "*Well, the society wise, I thought I mentioned it a little bit in the essay already, but like...well, probably not in a bigger picture that marijuana as whole humanity wise, but I don't know...I thought...I didn't really...*" Seemingly, Yanjin did not completely disagree with Alex, neither was she willing to accept his suggestion as she did with Susan's.

Alex also pointed out a logical fallacy in Yanjin's MP2 first draft/outline when Yanjin made an argument that, "Second-hand smoke influences people surrounding them, including children who are not over twenty-one," (MP2 Outline). Alex questioned why it is specifically children under 21 for physical harm. Again, Yanjin did not respond but explained more at the mid-FYC interview:

*I never realized that, 'cause I feel like that's pretty obvious, since the law says, people under 21, they cannot smoke, whatever. But I feel like people would get it, but obviously as readers they didn't get it, and I know [it is] probably cultural barriers I think, 'cause Max in my group, he's a Chinese, and he's totally fine with those issues. And he gave me a couple "outstanding", I was like "Whoa."*

There are few things worth pointing out here. First, Yanjin defended what she considered an “obvious” logic that children under 21 are prohibited from smoking marijuana, therefore, they are more vulnerable to consuming a substance they should not be via secondhand smoke. It was unclear whether she became defensive because of the logic itself or because it was brought up by Alex. Secondly, as a form of engaging with the writing issue, Yanjin brought Max into the picture to draw on shared cultural standards as part of her defensive strategy. It is worth noting that this is the second time Yanjin aligned herself with Chinese international students, insinuating if WE Chinese students can understand it, then there must be a cultural barrier when American students cannot. Her final move was to bring in Max’s evidence of approval, “*a couple 'outstanding',*” to further make a case for this cultural barrier.

This identity alignment interestingly contrasts with the following comment from Yanjin when she referred to Chinese students as “they” again. Prompted by my observations of Yanjin’s changes in attitude towards different students during peer review discussions, I asked Yanjin at the mid-FYC interview if she perceived any difference in working with domestic students and working with international students in peer reviews, Yanjin answered (emphasis added),

*I think I can get more good advice from domestic students. But about Chinese students, I'm not talking about **their** grammar or whatever, the critical thinking ability is lacking there. ...I think Max attended high school in states as well, so, I can see his essays have the rhetorical ... critical thinking processes there, and pretty well developed.... I mean, I don't mind working with Max,...but working with Patrick, I feel like I didn't really get really good advice from him besides "Oh you did good job" ... I don't know. **They** probably don't see what **they** [are] lacking of. I mean, it's not **their** fault, but-*

Here, Yanjin acknowledged that she valued receiving review input from domestic students more than she did from Chinese students because she reckoned the former had more critical thinking ability. Using the pronoun *they*, she also drew a clear line between Chinese students like Max and herself, who had studied in American high schools, and other Chinese students like Patrick who came to US directly for college. Clearly, she considered the former more advanced than the latter in terms of writing and critical thinking, if not purely grammar. Unlike the previous cases when she aligned herself with all Chinese students, here, she put herself in the same camp with Max and other American high school-trained Chinese students. In terms of writing ability, Yanjin seemed to have a hierarchical map in her mind, which is quite understandable, but it also seemed to have limited her learning opportunities, preventing her from learning from all kinds of feedback that she could have potentially benefited from.

### **Yanjin's Writer Identity**

When asked to summarize her peer review experience, Yanjin said, “*I feel like people are doing a better job than me.*” Yanjin explained that she felt time-pressured because she had to finish her assignment early so others could have time to review it; meanwhile, she had to review

the work of three other peers. To Yanjin, peer review “is more like homework.” It also did not help when she saw herself as a slow writer and kept admiring others who can write faster. On the other hand, she regretted not devoting as much time as needed for this process, and referred to it as an attitude issue that, “*I didn’t take it that seriously.*” Apparently, Yanjin had never had productive peer reviews before. She thought her high school peer reviews were ineffective compared to the current class because, “[*in high school*] we knew each other well, [*so*] we talked about other stuff, like we chit-chatted.” Although she was not able to see the value of peer reviews as she entered the class, after an intense amount of peer reviewing in English 131, Yanjin started to change her mind and said, “*I wanted this peer review to work. If I was doing this next time, I would do a better job so that I can get real advice from them.*”

To end the mid-FYC interview, I also asked Yanjin what her relationship with writing was like at that current time, she told me that, “*I feel like practice made me more comfortable with writing. I am not afraid of [writing] two pages any more. Practice made me more comfortable and also it is more systematic.*” When asked to clarify what she meant by “systematic,” Yanjin referred to assignment scaffolding that helped her prepare for longer major papers. She also mentioned that this FYC course gave her a “*brand new critical thinking idea*” but she was not able to provide further details. Still, Yanjin claimed that she did not enjoy writing that much. When she was asked about writer identity, Yanjin put, “*I realize I’m really not a writer.*”

### Sucheng English 131 Experience

During Sucheng’s first quarter in the US, she took Informatics 200, a foundational research course for her intended Informatics major. Sucheng lost many points for improper citations on the major research paper she had written for that class, so she “*felt disadvantaged (吃亏)*” and wished she had taken English 131 earlier. The following quarter, she managed to get a spot in one of the few available English 131 sessions, expecting to learn how to better write a research paper.

However, three weeks into the quarter when we conducted the first interview, Sucheng was somewhat disappointed. “*I realized it didn’t teach research paper writing; it teaches how to debate,*” Sucheng said. Indeed, unlike a typical English 131 which usually begins with understanding texts through genre analysis or rhetorical analysis, Sucheng’s class went straight forward with debate in its first sequence. This sequence requires participants to argue about a hotly debated issue from positions of both a supporter and an opponent. Though Sucheng had formal debate experience in high school, she had never had to argue from both sides and felt it was very challenging to switch sides. In addition, out of the three classes she was taking that quarter, Sucheng expressed the most concern about this composition course: she had a hard time catching up with class discussions, as she put, “*I haven’t even figured out the question, they have already answered it. I feel so pressured.*” Sucheng noticed that all her classmates were native speakers and she was the only international student, which made her very nervous.

The pressure on Sucheng soared when her instructor provided a one-sentence comment on her SA1 that it was off-topic. Sucheng thought she did a fairly good job and it was completely out of her expectation to receive such a comment. It certainly affected her, as she said (translated), “*I did a bad job for my first assignment, I was very conflicted (纠结) about whether I should drop this class.*” For the first time, Sucheng went to office hours to find out more about the assignment, only to realize that she had been confused about the teacher’s requirements.

Apparently, she thought she was supposed to write about interrogation in general; however, the instructor was expecting arguments on a specific type of interrogation, e.g., waterboarding. Sucheng agreed with the instructor that she had misunderstood; meanwhile, she shared her concerns with him, *“I told him, because I am an international student, I might not be able to follow this class.”* Sucheng also suggested the instructor write instructions on the blackboard in larger letters. This office visit only lasted for 10 minutes, Sucheng recalled. Though she did not get to ask any of the questions she had regarding SA2, Sucheng was glad she took the opportunity to express her concerns as the only international student in class. It seemed very important for her to remind the instructor of this unique identity of hers, hoping to receive some extra support and understanding. Though intimidated, Sucheng actively sought avenues to improve her writing and to communicate with the instructor, a trait also seen in another participant, Lufang, whose instructor, though, seemed much more elaborative when commenting.

Though the misunderstanding of SA1 was resolved, Sucheng became even more nervous when writing the second short assignment. SA2 is a 500-/600-word letter responding to a peer’s SA1, using tools of Toulmin analysis and logical fallacies to help improve his or her claims. Both analyzing tools were new to Sucheng, so she requested a one-on-one tutoring with me after our writing studio session. Sucheng recalled this tutoring experience in our mid-FYC interview. Below is a translated extract (emphasis added):

*Sucheng: After the 115 [writing studio] class, you taught me how to write the Letter to the Editor, explaining to me every logical fallacy with examples. You showed me what possible fallacies my classmate might have in her writing. At that time, I felt like...It’s like, all of a sudden, I felt like actually **there can be so many flaws in Americans’ writing**. These flaws can be found. Before that, I always thought, **it was very weird (奇怪) to have me as an international student teach an American how to write better.***

*Dan: It seems you have some preconceptions about American’s writing.*

*Sucheng: Yeah. I thought after all, this is their mother language, so their writing must have very strong logic. There might be flaws, but it is less likely for me to spot them.*

This conversation marked a crucial turning point in Sucheng’s writing and writer identity. First, her previous view of good writing seemed to be associated with nativeness of the author’s language, thus, she believed American students’ writing must be stronger. After SA2, she shifted the focus of writing from language to logic, realizing that even native speakers could write arguments with problematic logic. Second, there was also a confidence boost in her as a writer, knowing that she now had the tools and the ability to *“teach an American how to write better.”* These changes contrasted sharply with Sucheng’s previous concerns about her own writing during our first interview.

Three weeks into the quarter at the first interview, when asked about her expectations of this class, Sucheng answered (emphasis added), *“Not much...but after reading my [American] peer’s SA1, I **felt so lost (失落)**...I felt like their writing was so deep, whereas mine reads like written by a kindergartner, especially in terms of sentence structures and language to present thoughts.”* At this early stage of the class, Sucheng paid more attention to aspects of language, such as “sentence structures” or “language to present thoughts,” compared to her focus on logic

and arguments at the mid-FYC interview. Also, Sucheng felt “lost” when comparing her own writing with that of an American peer, whereas during the mid-FYC interview, she started to embrace the possibilities of finding flaws in American peers’ writing. Here, Sucheng’s identity change is evident. Overall, it is noticeable that the composition of Sucheng’s writer identity has constantly been in juxtaposition to her American counterparts. In other words, Sucheng’s evolving writer identity seemed to be reflected by the change of how she perceived her American peers’ writing. In a sense, there seemed to be some sort of external comparison in order to showcase how she had improved internally as a writer.

Another observation indicates the instructor’s comments might have played a crucial role in the changes in Sucheng’s writer identity. Sucheng seemed to be greatly affected by the one-sentence teacher comments she received. For example, when she was told that her SA1 was off-topic, she expressed her disappointment and anxiety during the first interview. In contrast, when she received the second one-sentence comment that, “I hope that the concerns you expressed in my office hours the other day will be relieved - you did exactly what you needed to do here [in SA2],” Sucheng sounded more relaxed and hopeful during the mid-FYC interview, as she said, “*Oh, this assignment must be really good. I should save it for the final portfolio.*” Indeed, Sucheng seemed to be relieved. When asked whether she was still anxious about the class, she said, “*Not too much. Not as much as before!*”

Starting the second sequence, Sucheng experienced another bump on the road. Major Paper 2 is a research paper with a self-selected topic. To prepare for MP2, the instructor assigned a prospectus, a literature review, and an outline. Sucheng tiptoed around all three genres. Prior to the mid-FYC interview, Sucheng asked if I could spend part of our interview time discussing her prospectus and upcoming literature review. I agreed and ended up walking her through some assignment requirements in the course syllabus. Sucheng was unfamiliar with “prospectus” as a genre at all, so she turned to the sample provided by the instructor. Apparently, this 17-page prospectus sample was written for the instructor’s own dissertation which is around the issue of teaching intelligent design to high schoolers in the rural town of Dover, Pennsylvania. With no clue of its content, Sucheng managed to imitate the genre of “prospectus” based on the introduction in the sample. Sucheng did well, as shown in instructor’s comment, “Hi there, you have an excellent outline of a very interesting and important question. I appreciate the preliminary research that you've done and I think this will be a very good project. Just let me know if I can answer any more questions for you.” What stood out in the process was that though she was struggling to understand the concept, Sucheng did not turn to the assignment prompt detailed in the course syllabus to better understand what was expected’ rather, she focused on the only sample provided. Sucheng explained toward the end of the mid-FYC interview that, “*Before I write, I am used to first consulting what other people have written.*” Here, according to Sucheng, *consulting* means getting ideas from others on the same topic or imitating a structure in the same genre.

With respect to helping her with the literature review, I had her read out loud the assignment requirements on the syllabus. This part was also recorded and transcribed verbatim. Apparently, Sucheng struggled reading the very first paragraph, which starts: “The look on your old rival’s face when the department approved your prospectus was priceless. He had lobbied every major department committee and even the institutional review board of the university to have your project denied.” Sucheng struggled with pronouncing several words and paused quite a few times. Clearly, this writing style adopts a language mode unfamiliar to Sucheng and sets the

context as graduate school may also be inaccessible to Sucheng. Starting from the second paragraph, which also has the key instructions of this assignment, I had Sucheng pause after reading a few sentences, in order to summarize key messages and connect them back to the topic in her prospectus. After a few rounds of close reading as such, Sucheng quickly understood what was expected in this literature review. It seemed she left the meeting feeling more grounded. Looking back, it appeared to me that Sucheng did not read through the prompt, which could be partially due to her difficulty in reading and understanding the introductory paragraph in the assignment prompt.

### **Sucheng's Writer Identity**

Having spent some time working on Sucheng's literature review assignment, we were unable to cover all of the interview questions such that her relationship with writing and how she perceived herself as a writer at the time of the mid-FYC interview was not discussed. I believe the two stories above, Sucheng's experience getting help from her instructor and her experience approaching an unfamiliar genre, were indicative enough to show that Sucheng's writer identity had evolved and her confidence in writing had increased.

### **Overarching Themes**

After a recapitulation of each participant's unique writing stories, I would like to conclude this chapter with some overarching themes that emerged from all participants' FYC experience. By the mid-FYC interview, all participants had had some interactions with their instructors and peers, in various forms. In the following section, I synthesize these experiences and highlight some knowledge they gained, through the lens of their interactions with the instructor and with peers.

### **Interactions with the Instructor**

Participant's interactions with the instructor can be represented through prompts, course design, email correspondence, comments, office hours, and such. The first topic addressed below is students' varying responses to prompts. With respect to course design, this section addresses scaffolding, a particularly powerful influence on Caiqin's writing. The subsection on Teacher Comments focuses on formal comments on papers, which was shared by all students and was seen to have a powerful effect on students' sense of themselves as writers, occasionally referencing less formal forms of interaction.

#### ***Prompts.***

Different instructors adopted different prompt formats. Some prompts were more concise. For instance, most of Yanjin's prompts were one-sentence long, such as "Your first major paper assignment is a personal essay on a topic of your choice." Some prompts follow a standard format, such as Caiqin's first major paper prompt, which included overall expectations, brainstorming questions, and grading rubrics. Some could be very unique, like Sucheng's aforementioned prompt, which invited students into different writing stories with various writer roles. For example, the instructor set the writing context as a graduate student approaching a prospectus assignment; others could be more elaborative, which usually went beyond a standard format to create a conversation with students and offered concrete scenarios for brainstorming. A good example of the latter would be one of the five scenarios in Lufang's SA1 prompt, which said, "Do you recognize when you are talking or writing to someone differently? Few people

would address a firefighter the same way they would address their pet cat (or maybe you do—that would be an interesting assignment). Why is this the case and what are the differences you notice?” This scenario clicked with Lufang and she ended up writing about an interesting finding on this topic for SA1.

Participants received these prompts differently as well. Overall, it seemed that regardless of the topics of the prompt, the elaboration, scaffolding exercises, as well as relevant examples have worked well with most students. For instance, Yanjin was particularly sensitive to cultural appropriateness for her. She argued her MP1 prompt included a list of well-known personal essays; however, these samples were not quite applicable to her. For instance, she pointed out that Amy Tan, the author of “Mother Tongue,” has a Chinese American background that is very different than her experience as someone who grew up in China, which partly explains why Yanjin struggled with finding something deep to write about in her personal essay for MP1. For similar reasons, Yanjin found it challenging to explore her cultural identity and mother tongue for SA1 and SA2.

Compared to Yanjin, Lufang’s first sequence prompts also explored one’s language and identity, but with a more specific focus on profane language. Lufang succeeded by working with the instructor and altering the prompt so that it met her needs. For SA1 and SA2, Lufang was able to probe very specific aspects of her language use (e.g., using English in China versus in the US) and landed on very interesting findings. In addition to a more focused prompt, Lufang took advantage of Small Talk to brainstorm and exchange assignment ideas with her instructor. For instance, in an example Small Talk email shared above, Lufang shared the possibility of discussing Chinglish as her SA3 topic, and her instructor encouraged her to do so. Lufang’s actively involving her instructor in the process of approaching prompts and planning assignments seems to have worked very well for her.

### *Scaffolding.*

It seemed that all students had strong needs for scaffolding in terms of understanding a new genre, a new writing strategy, or a new class format (e.g. peer review). I would like to highlight Caiqin’s class because it did exceptionally well in scaffolding for understanding new assignments. Caiqin claimed she mostly benefited from assignment scaffolding and class structure. For example, to prepare for her Paper 1, Caiqin had to write eight homework assignments that helped dissect the core readings Paper 1 was essentially based on. First, these assignments provided extensive work on reading and writing strategies, such as annotation, summary, synthesis, rhetorical analysis, critical reflection, intertextuality, and so forth. She felt more prepared by the time of writing Paper 1. Second, at the end of each assignment, a quote and a question were required for the next day in-class group discussions. Caiqin found these group discussions helpful in narrowing down her Paper 1 topic. Third, before the final paper, Caiqin was required to submit an outline and a half draft, to receive both written and verbal feedback from the instructor and peers. According to Caiqin, the multiple rounds of “checking-in” made writing a three- to four-page essay much less intimidating.

In each subsection below, I pull out certain examples to focus on rather than describing every student’s experience in full. Each student had moments that were especially relevant for particular topics. Thus it proved more effective to present a single illustrative focal experience and then contrast the experiences of the other participants in this context. For example, after an initial introduction. Lufang’s experience will center the discussion of teacher comments.

***Teacher comments.***

Instructors' comments seem to have had great impact on participants' writing and writer identity. As mentioned before, Sucheng's confidence in writing significantly changed over the instructor's one-sentence comments. For instance, when she was told her SA1 was off topic, she became anxious and fell back on her international student identity. When the instructor confirmed she was doing well in SA2, Sucheng was relieved and seemed empowered to provide critical assessment of American students' writing.

Likewise, Caiqin received mostly one-sentence comments, with an additional final grade received with the comments. For instance, for Paper 1, her instructor commented, "Core values and beliefs could have been emphasized more in relation to your well-chosen and effectively-analyzed examples." During the mid-FYC interview, Caiqin referred to this comment and emphasized that it was accurate in capturing the weakness and strength in her Paper 1. When asked how she felt about writing Paper 1, she reiterated the challenge of finding strong evidence relevant to her argument, and showed how proud she felt about herself while referring back to the comment itself.

Contrastively, Yanjin's instructor's comments were mostly reader responses handwritten in margins. Some comments summarize a section; some echoed Yanjin's thoughts; some asked to clarify a certain point; others provided guidance for deeper topic exploration. For instance, Yanjin made a connection with Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue" in SA1 in that she witnessed her parents' thoughts not valued due to the language barrier when they visited her in the US. Rachel, Yanjin's instructor, commented on this thought connection that, "Disconnected between form and content and its effect on agency & power dynamics in a social environment." This comment pointed out a direction for Yanjin to take her narrative into a deeper discussion, which she had claimed challenging to achieve in both interviews. While this comment could have had a positive effect on Yanjin's writing, it seems to have been a lost opportunity. When asked about her thoughts on this comment during the mid-FYC interview, at first, Yanjin did not seem to understand its meaning. Afterward, perhaps because of this lack of comprehension, it appeared to me Yanjin was not satisfied with her SA1 writing performance, so she was not planning to use it in her final portfolio, thus, she did not feel an urge to pay closer attention to the comments made on the paper. Thus, we see that teachers' comments can have a powerful effect, but this effect is not always positive, even if intended to be so.

***Lufang's teacher comments.***

Comments from Lufang's instructor, Norbert exemplify a particularly successful commenting strategy. Norbert's end comments were usually one-paragraph long with 150 to 200 words. They read like Norbert was conversing with the student; taking SA1 end comment as an example:

*Lufang,*

*I'm surprised about the switch you make when moving from China to Seattle, but it matches up with a lot of what we have been discussing in class. I wonder if Anzaldua's status as a "border" citizen means more to students like yourself than it would for others. I'm also happy that you shared how you feel with respect to Chinese versus English listeners; recognizing how these feelings play a part in speaking (as well as writing) will serve you well in class. I notice that*

*you commit several errors within your writing regarding punctuation, syntax, and other mechanics. All of these are minor, and because you've told me that you want to make an effort in this class, I've marked some of them here not to correct you, but to allow you to try to correct them yourself. You can always come talk to me about these little mistakes or visit the Writing Center for assistance if you feel like you need it. I believe you should have confidence in your writing and speaking abilities in English, and I hope this class will serve you well as a space for practice and reflection. Thank you for sharing!*

*-Norbert*

This comment included various moves to interact not only with Lufang's writing, but also with Lufang as a writer and English speaker. First, Norbert provided several reader responses on what she did well in the paper and confirmed she was on the right track for this class; then he made a suggestion that Lufang should consider drawing on another concept from the course reading. After that, Norbert communicated grammar corrections based on Lufang's stated preferences, followed by offering outside resources for writing support. In the end, Norbert reassured Lufang's writing and speaking abilities and encouraged her to view this class "as a space for practice and reflection." The comment overall is well thought-out and very personable, which could partially explain Lufang's confidence and positive energy. Though Lufang had some concerns at the beginning of this class, such as not being able to understand culturally intense topics like "bitch" or "profanity" or making grammatical mistakes, she was grateful that Norbert's comments like the one above helped ease many of these concerns. More so, Lufang felt that Norbert valued her ideas that she thought would sound strange to others and that he encouraged her to bring forth these ideas in writing. In fact, processing these ideas through writing helped Lufang dive deep into her own language and cultural identity, which Lufang found fascinating, or in Lufang's own words, "*I had a lot of passion on this topic!*"

### **Interactions with Peers**

By the mid-FYC interview, all participants had had some interactions with peers in one form or another, such as peer reviews, group work, whole class discussion, or communication outside of class. These interactions can initially be experienced as uncomfortable and intimidating, affecting a participant's self-perception and self-confidence; however, they are also proven to allow participants the ability to grow in their writer's identity.

#### ***Peer reviews.***

Peer reviews were introduced at different stages of the courses and were also organized differently in each of the classes. For instance, Lufang's class had not introduced peer review by the time of the mid-FYC interview. Sucheng's class assigned SA2 as a formal response or "Letter to the Editor" to a peer's SA1, which involved some interaction with her peer's writings if not the peer herself. Caiqin peer reviewed her Paper 1 with a group of three, and finally, Yanjin's class peer reviewed all four assignments. Most of her group peer reviews were done outside of class with designated class time to exchange review results, while pair reviews were usually done in class.

These peer review experiences also impacted each participant differently. For instance, with no previous peer review experience, Sucheng at first felt very "lost (失落)" when noticing

more sophisticated word choices and sentence structures used in her American peer's essay. Yet, she bounced back after writing a thorough and formal response that critically analyzed the logical fallacies in her peer's essay. On the other hand, Yanjin entered her FYC class with very low expectations due to unproductive peer reviews experience in high school. Yet, after peer reviewing every paper, she started to realize the value of peer review and stated that "*I can get real advice from them [peers]*" if she had taken it more seriously or put more time into the process. Overall, it seems the great amount of routine in the peer review process had gradually changed her perception and helped her value the learning opportunities in peer reviews.

### ***Caiqin's peer review.***

Caiqin benefited greatly from peer review, as shown in her own words in Chinese (translated), "*Without peer review, this entire class would be especially difficult for me. I would have panicked.*" I observed Caiqin's Paper 2 peer review the day after our mid-FYC interview. Caiqin was paired with an American male student, Daniel (pseudonym used), and the peer review was performed during class. Caiqin and Daniel were reviewing each other's Paper 2 abstract, introduction, and outline. The next day, I conducted a follow-up interview, towards the end of which Caiqin asked to switch the conversation to Chinese. The interview was transcribed verbatim and its Chinese section was translated into English.

Overall, Caiqin thought this was a productive peer review. After reviewing Daniel's strong abstract, Caiqin realized that her own abstract was lengthy and not concise, so she cut out some framing questions. Daniel also suggested Caiqin move her main idea sentence from the end of the paragraph to the beginning, which Caiqin thought was very helpful too. When asked what made this peer review work, Caiqin referred to the peer review sheet which she believed had provided great guiding questions, as she explained in Chinese (translated), "*This peer review sheet would remind you that: you should look at roadmap, main idea, structure, and things like that. And when you read your partner's work, you are actually reflecting on your own paper.*" Here, Caiqin pointed out a metacognition skill she gained through peer review: by reviewing her peer's work with key writing strategies in mind, she was reminded to apply these strategies in her own paper. In addition to a well-designed peer review sheet, Caiqin's instructor also required everyone to submit peer review results and then pre-set a conference with the group to discuss peer review comments. This conference served as a means to hold peer reviewers accountable and made them take this exercise seriously, which might have resulted in much more effective peer reviews than other participants' classes.

Behind the success in Caiqin's eyes, there also seemed to be some challenges, although these did not derail the value of interacting with a peer's writing. First, Caiqin noticed that the discussion was a bit awkward and she explained, "*I think I can type fast, but [in conversation I can be very slow]; Daniel is also shy and he didn't want to talk much.*" While they both seemed pretty reserved during the conversation, being closely observed in class by a third person like me could have made the situation more challenging for them. Second, Caiqin seemed to be very uncertain about the language in her comments, and I observed her switching several times between phrases such as "I think you could mention..." or "I think it might be better...". Caiqin elaborated on this switching behavior in a follow-up interview that (translated), "*I wanted to point out some issues [in Daniel's paper], but I was afraid of not being clear or 'tactful (委婉)'.*"* While Caiqin was tiptoeing in her comments, these comments did not appear to be very well-received by her peer. For instance, when Caiqin suggested adding a roadmap towards the*

end of Daniel's introduction paragraph, Daniel responded by framing it as a personal preference in which he prefers to put a roadmap in the beginning instead. Daniel's resistance to Caiqin's suggestion further reinforced an uneven power dynamic between the two and finally silenced Caiqin. She explained in the follow-up interview that she could have pointed out for Daniel that both the instructor herself and sample articles provided by the instructor suggested putting a roadmap towards the end of an intro, but Caiqin chose not to argue any further, in Caiqin's words (translated), "*I felt like there was a wall between the two of us (感觉我们之间隔着一层什么).*" With no further explanation, this "wall" could be interpreted in many ways. Regardless, it had stopped Caiqin from sharing her true thoughts or contributing to the process, which made this peer review a less than mutually beneficial experience.

Toward the end of our follow-up interview, when asked about her overall gains from the peer review process, Caiqin emphasized in Chinese that getting to see American peer's writing through peer review helped her the most, as she explained (translated and emphasis added):

*At the beginning of this class, I was very worried, thinking: "How could you compete against Americans? How could you compete against them in English writing?" However, through peer review, I realized that the gap was not that big because the class does not evaluate how nativelike your English language is, or how authentic your word choices are....Rather, **it looks at your content.** Taking this paper [Paper 1] as an example, it looks at how you present primary resources, compare them, and add your own evaluation. In these aspects, I actually think international students, whose mother tongue is not English, won't necessarily do less well than American native speakers.*

Similar to Sucheng, Caiqin entered her FYC with a competitive mindset, which seems to be common among Chinese students who grew up being ranked in schools. Being the only international student in class, Caiqin also perceived herself competing and being judged against her American counterparts. In other words, Caiqin's initial writer self was juxtaposed with her native-speaking American classmates. Through peer review, Caiqin was able to shift this "judging against" mentality to a new one that allowed her to learn from and to write alongside her American peers. With that shift, Caiqin seemed to be more comfortable with the new writing environment. Secondly, peer review helped Caiqin shift her writing focus from *language* to *content*, which was also found in Sucheng's account after she was told she did a good job pointing out logical fallacies in an American peer's writing. Putting language aside, their relationship with writing changed from the goal of finishing an assignment to entering a conversation and doing an intellectual exchange of ideas between the writer herself and academic readers.

In addition to a competitive mindset, Caiqin disclosed another aspect of writer identity in regard to peer review with American counterparts, based on this quote (translated and emphasis added):

*For me, since I am an international student or **multilingual** student, peer review is very effective for me, because I can know whether I am on the right track, or how American students think about their writing, or how **American students are used to writing scientific papers.** And at the very beginning of this quarter, I am*

*very worried about...like...like, will the teacher and my peers think my paper is very weird or strange?*

Here, as Caiqin pointed out, peer review is not merely a means to boost confidence, rather, it helps students respond to a sense of insecurity that is common among the three participants (Caiqin, Sucheng, and Lufang) who did not attend high school in the US. Caiqin felt insecure about her writing due to a lack of knowledge about writing practices in the US.

She also seemed to hold an assumption that American students had been trained in how to write scientific papers in high school so that all students must share the same expectations on academic writing with American instructors in college. Her anxiety decreased when she learned that her American peers were at a similar knowledge level and going through the same struggles in this exploration process, which afforded Caiqin the confidence she needed in learning the necessary skills to succeed in the writing course. When the application of those skills resulted in a high score on her paper, it increased her belief that she could do the work and overcome the next challenges the class would present.

### **Whole class discussion**

Whole class discussion was a challenge for all participants except for Yanjin. By the time of the mid-FYC interview, I had observed most participants in their classrooms; Yanjin three times, Lufang once, and Caiqin once, Sucheng's not at all as her instructor did not respond to requests to do so. Among all four participants, Yanjin seemed to have been the best adapted to the western classroom culture so that she had no constraints in sharing what came to her mind. On the contrary, Lufang did not speak up at all, nor did Caiqin even though she claimed, "I have forced myself to participate at least once in class." During the mid-FYC interview, Lufang, Caiqin and Sucheng shared the same anxiety for not being able to participate in the whole-class discussions. As Lufang explained towards the end of her first interview, "*It's not because that I am too shy or because I am not willing to.*" A perceived language barrier remained a major concern across the board. For instance, Caiqin explained that two of the outspoken American classmates spoke very fast, and she had trouble recognizing some particular words in spoken English; however, later on she recognized them in written form. Sucheng said she could not catch up with her classmates' thoughts because it took her a really long time to process them. And Lufang described, by the time she came up with an answer in English, the conversation had moved on to several questions after the one she was crafting an answer for.

#### ***Lufang's class discussion.***

My observation of Lufang's class revealed some findings other than a language barrier. First, there seemed to be a gap between her preconception of class discussion and the classroom reality. Specifically, Lufang would come to class prepared with answers to post-reading questions, only to realize that class discussions would usually deviate from the original questions and evolve into spontaneous conversations among Norbert and some American students. Like many other Chinese students, Lufang was expecting an answer from the teacher with authority and the classroom reality of free discussion failed to meet that expectation. Sometimes, when a conversation went beyond her prepared answers, Lufang tended to hesitate, as she described in the mid-FYC interview, "*Maybe I got some thoughts, but then my peers getting another thoughts which I think it's deeper than mine.*" Lufang's hesitation reveals a sense of insecurity in her own ideas, which could be another obstacle for speaking up in class.

At one point, I observed Lufang looked very lost when a discussion went a bit too far away from what she was familiar with. In order to illustrate an important claim of a key course reading, Norbert asked students to share their favorite novel. One student proposed *The Catcher in the Rye*, a popular read among adolescents here in the US but one which Lufang had no knowledge of. The class then spent about ten minutes on this novel, and finally Norbert nicely routed the conversation back to the claim of the course text. During that time, Lufang looked very lost and she appeared to play with her cell phone. Later on, during our mid-FYC interview, Lufang explained she was trying to search for the novel but could not capture its full name. Even though it appeared to me Norbert's key message was well-delivered at the last moment when he rerouted back to the assigned text, Lufang missed this message due to her urge to find out about this novel so that she could catch up with the discussion. In a sense, participating became more problematic when she got nervous about and distracted from something unknown or when she tried to understand everything rather than looking for key message cues.

At her mid-FYC interview, Lufang shared another explanation as to why she hesitated to participate in class. She recalled a time when one outspoken Chinese student got laughed at in class: "*When the boy is talking and he is talking slowly and he is so nervous. Two American boys is kinda laughing at him. When I saw this, I just feel so uncomfortable.... Yeah...*" Lufang went silent for a few seconds. I then asked whether this incident affected her, and Lufang responded, "*Yes, it affected me, because he was just like me, just trying to show how much he care about this class.*" Lufang admired the Chinese student who bravely put himself out there and made every effort to participate, but also expressed her fear of being treated the same way. By this point, Lufang seems to have realized the risk of speaking up, so she changed her mind and said, "*I am kind of shy to participate in class.*"

### ***Group discussion.***

Group discussion is another form of peer interaction that is worth exploring. While Lufang's and Sucheng's class placed little weight on group discussions, Yanjin's and Caiqin's had extensive in-class group work. By the mid-FYC interview, Yanjin had already completed several group peer-review discussions and a group presentation, and Caiqin had group discussions about the questions and quotes from assigned readings almost on a daily basis. According to Yanjin, group work on the presentation was easy but not necessarily useful, because her group only spent two hours outside of class on this presentation, which I thought was actually quite impressive when I observed it. I also noticed that Yanjin tended to ask logistic questions during whole-class discussions (e.g., ways to submit peer review results) while keeping most content-related questions to group peer-review discussions. For instance, she asked the group about some terms in rubrics and the difference between "stakes" and "central point." In a sense, Yanjin was treating group discussion as a space for support, even though she did not even realize it. Her approach actually achieved exactly what her instructor Rachel had set out to do: to assign more group work for a class with a much larger international student population so that they could find support in a less intimidating environment. Interestingly, it turned out that everybody in the group was giving a different answer and nobody seemed to have a convincing understanding of the concept of "stakes," so they waited to ask the instructor as a group. When asked to comment on this observation during the mid-FYC interview, Yanjin responded, "*I am glad it was not just me who didn't know it.*"

***Caiqin's group discussion.***

Caiqin did very well in articulating the merits of group discussion in her experience as an international student. Every time there was an opportunity to discuss readings in a group, Caiqin noticed that her American classmates would always begin with criticism, or as Caiqin put: “*to find something wrong.*” Caiqin perceived this reading habit as a part of American students’ critical thinking. She contrasted this habit with her own and described, “*As a Chinese student, my first idea is: oh, the teacher gave this (article) to us, so it must be a good example or I must find something useful for my own paper.... This is very different, like a kind of cultural difference.*” Here, Caiqin referred to a typical method of learning English writing in an EFL setting such as China, where students are used to “worshiping” writing samples provided by the teacher. Doubting these samples could also mean challenging the authority of the author and the teacher. When asked which she would prefer now that she has seen both ways, Caiqin responded: “*I will do both,*” and further indicated that she would always begin with the “good” and then look for places for improvement. Here, Caiqin made a deliberate decision: she was not going to abandon her original reader self to fully adopt a new way of reading. Rather, she embraced both and created a new reader self; one that begins to cultivate a critical mindset. This progress cannot be achieved without routinized group discussions that allowed Caiqin to see differences in reading and to make her own decisions on the kind of reader she aspires to become.

***Peer interaction outside of FYC classroom.***

Peer interactions outside of the FYC classroom seemed rare for all participants, interestingly, not even between peers who spoke the same first language. Caiqin’s class appeared to be an exception, since her instructor assigned everyone a partner in the beginning of the class. Partners were to provide support to each other, for example, to answer each other’s questions over the weekend. According to Caiqin, her partner Kyle (pseudonym used), an American female student, did not talk much but was very kind and helpful during class. Kyle was also her peer review partner for the Paper 1 outline. Though it was a bit intimidating, Caiqin managed to email Kyle approximately twice a week for some quick questions, such as whether a reference section was required in the Paper 1 outline. Apparently, Kyle only replied to her once when she emailed Caiqin her Paper 1 for peer review. While this might sound a bit disheartening, there also seemed to be a lack of expectation-setting when partners were assigned. It seemed that Caiqin was expecting to get quick answers from Kyle during non-work hours when the teacher was not accessible, while Kyle might not have held the same expectation. It might simply be because Caiqin misperceived the role of peer review partner as someone who was also responsible to answer questions. It could also just be Kyle wasn’t interested in answering questions that were answered in class or could be found in the prompt. Regardless, after Paper 1, this partnership fell through as Caiqin became more familiar with the course structure and more independent in finding support somewhere else.

**Conclusion**

Overall, midway through their FYC course, all participants had gone through similar challenges. For instance, all had fears about their first time experience of writing a five- to seven-page paper, and for most participants it was an emotional rollercoaster ride when they first encountered a new genre of writing. To cope with these challenges, they turned to writing samples from the teacher or some they found on the internet; they went to office hours; they relied on the writing studio; they utilized Small Talk to check in with their instructor, and more.

Interestingly, all three participants who came directly to the US for college expressed concerns over language accuracy and authenticity and showed an insecurity in their writing ideas. Their writer self was initially juxtaposed with their native-speaking American counterparts whom they imagined had already been well-versed with academic writing conventions. When these beliefs were proven untrue via peer reviews or group discussions, the participants felt less insecure and more grounded. One way or another, they each found themselves being able to complete the task they previously seemed to find very challenging. Some even did exceptionally well, reflected by a high grade or a positive teacher comment. These successes helped to further decrease concerns over language use and temporarily shifted the participants' focus to exchanging authentic ideas as a scholar or a writer. In other words, when confidence was instilled, participants were more comfortable in taking ownership of their writing, and consequently their self-perception as a writer improved.

A close examination of participants' interaction with instructors also revealed that a focused, relevant and elaborative prompt can help students better explore unfamiliar concepts, such as culturally specific terms, understanding expectations, or identifying differences. Meanwhile, well-scaffolded assignments allow students to take baby steps when grasping concrete reading and writing strategies (e.g., synthesis, critical reading) that are oftentimes unfamiliar to students that have not previously experienced these writing techniques. In addition, instructor's comments can have a great impact on students: well thought out and personal comments can create positive student experiences and increase individual confidence while generic comments with minimal explanation could increase confusion and cause a period of unnecessary stress. On the student's end, making an effort to actively involve instructors in clarifying concerns or the planning process can be helpful. Checking in with instructors utilizing spaces like office hours or Small Talk can help ease the writing process and minimize anxiety in what might otherwise be a very intimidating experience. These "check-ins" can further facilitate maximizing course understanding and increase the opportunity of a successful outcome.

Lastly, peer review interactions, though well intentioned and often productive, can also be problematic. Although domestic students and international participants are 'peers', international students tend to perceive themselves at a disadvantage in English classes where domestic students have a language and cultural understanding that they do not. This belief commonly creates "awkward" if not adverse situations in peer reviews, seen from Caiqin's less responsive, or perhaps less receptive and understanding peer, to the Chinese student who was laughed at in Lufang's class when attempting to share his ideas. Some participants experienced an uneven power dynamic while interacting with domestic students inside, and outside, of the classroom. While the intention of pairing students from the two different groups seemed to be beneficial overall, failing to foster an open and judgement-free space for peer interaction sometimes undermined the expected outcomes and prevented the mutually beneficial intent of peer review from occurring. Often, students remained silent because as Caiqin put it (translated), "I feel there is a wall between us." Overcoming that 'wall' requires participants to understand that the purpose of peer review is to improve and clarify their thoughts in an exchange with others that is mutually encouraging, fostering creativity, and supportive of ideas and identities so that no one feels a need to be silent.

**Appendix**  
**Sample Mid-FYC Interview Questions: Yanjin**

Opening: How have you been doing so far in your current composition class?

**1. Recall first sequence writing experience**

Let's recall all the work you have done for your first sequence:

- What was your Major Paper 1 topic?
- How does the teacher scaffolding different assignments to lead to this major paper?
- What did you learn from writing this assignment?
- What outside resources did you turn to, such as writing centers, peers, writing studios, etc.?

**2. Big Group Peer review (Observed)**

What do you get out of this peer review in the following aspects?

- Can you recall some memorable moments on individual paper reviews, starting from when others reviewing your own paper?
- What do you think of the review rubrics?
- What was it like to work with domestic students and other international students?
- What is your comfort level, comparing peer review, whole class discussion and other class forms?
- How would you rate the effectiveness of this big group peer review, compared to other ones I observed including MP1 with three other members; SA2.2 closing with another international student Patrick; and MP2 with three other new partners.

**3. Group Presentation on A Selected Outcome (Observed)**

- How was the topic/video decided? How was the work distributed?
- What role did you take in this group presentation? What roles did others play?
- How does this presentation help you understand this course, esp. outcomes and writings?
- What else do you learn from this presentation? How would you do it differently if you have another chance?

**4. Major Paper 2 progress:**

- What is major paper asking for? What are the expectations?
- How far are you into this assignment? Why do you choose this topic? What do you think you can do very well in this assignment? What do you find challenging about this assignment?
- If time allows, ask a few specific questions on the submitted outline and its teacher comment

**5. Concluding questions:**

- Compared to your writing experience before (such as high school English writing, TOEFL, SAT etc.), has your understanding of writing changed? If so, how? Has your way of writing changed?

- What do you find exciting about writing now? What do you still find challenging in writing?
- In your background survey, when asked your relationship with writing, you mentioned that writing is just homework, not for fun. Has this relationship changed at all? If so, how will you redefine or re-describe it?

## CHAPTER 7 POST-FYC: *RETROSPECT*

### Introduction

Chapter Four covers post-FYC interviews conducted within weeks of participants completing their respective FYC courses and receiving course grades. The interviews followed the example questions found in Appendix I. Each interview consisted of four parts. Part one examined the last stage of the course, specifically participants' experiences regarding writing on their second sequence, such as researching, revising, or composing reflections for their final portfolios. The second part covered participants' recollections of and reflections upon personal improvements and what, in retrospect, they might have done differently. The third part presented participants' self-evaluations of their writer identity development. Lastly, part four covered the impact the FYC experience had, or had not, had on subsequent course choices made in that current spring quarter for participants who chose to provide that information.

For most English 131 courses, the second half of the course entails a second sequence of writings that typically includes two assignments of two to three pages and one major research paper of five to seven pages. Toward the end of the course, students are required to compose a final reflection or cover letter to showcase how well they have mastered each of the four EWP outcomes—audience awareness, referencing texts, making arguments, and revising—citing evidence from four self-selected demonstration papers. Students then submit the reflection or cover letter along with all the papers they have written during the quarter in the form of a portfolio. Some instructors prefer paper portfolios (e.g., Yanjin's class), while others favor an e-portfolio on Canvas (e.g., Lufang and Sucheng's class). These portfolios are evaluated holistically, utilizing grading criteria shared across EWP. In other words, students do not receive a grade until after their final portfolios is graded. Instead, throughout the quarter, students receive feedback from their instructors and peers to inform them of revisions and improvements, which reflects a process-oriented approach adopted by the university's EWP program.

### Participants' Writing Development and Writer Identity

#### Caiqin's Writing Development

In the case of Caiqin's Link class, offered by the Interdisciplinary Writing Program (or IWP), there was no reflection or portfolio. Instead, the class focused heavily on research, peer reviews, and academic arguments within the field of psychology. Typically, this class assigned three major papers of seven to ten pages along with scaffolding exercises and half drafts. In addition to comments from the instructor and peers, each paper received a final grade after submission. For instance, the second half of Caiqin's Link class focused on Paper 2 and Paper 3. The Paper 2 assignment was to write a literature review piece on studies related to a topic in psychology selected by the student. Caiqin chose the topic of Visual Perception. For Paper 3, students were required to turn Paper 2 into a different genre (with multimodal genres encouraged) addressing a different audience group and to reflect on writing choices and why changes were made. Having incorporated feedback from her instructor, Caiqin decided to explain visual perception to high school soccer players in a Powerpoint format.

According to Caiqin, Paper 2 was the paper she struggled the most with but also the one that she felt the most confident about, whereas Paper 3 was the piece she actually had the most fun writing. Caiqin's writing development can be captured in her explanation of her deliberate

writing choices between Paper 2 and Paper 3, both in the writing itself and in the interview. For instance, Caiqin shared that out of the many psychology experiments she referenced in Paper 2, she had to select only one to make relevant and straightforward in order to convince the new audience in Paper 3. Caiqin decided that high school athletes would not be able to pay attention to any lengthy research unless it was visually attractive, simply explained, and relevant to their daily sports practice. Accordingly, Caiqin presented the concept of visual perception as “what you can see” and paid great attention to visual presentation and structure in the Powerpoint production. She also made changes to tones: as she put it in the interview, *“Language in Paper 3 should be more subjective, using more emotional appeals to attract high school students. While in Paper 2, what can be used to convince the reader is the data, the statistics.”* Thus, in Paper 3, she appealed to high school soccer players’ desire to be great soccer players by providing an understanding of how visual perception works to increase performance in soccer games. Throughout this part of the conversation, Caiqin not only showed a strong understanding of genre awareness but also that she was very well versed in discussing genre differences. Comparing Caiqin’s Paper 1 (titled “APA as Epistemology?”), which she indicated had caused her to panic over grasping academic jargon in psychology, to Paper 2 (titled “Biopsychology that Matters to You: A Literature Review”), with which she indicated she initially struggled but eventually learned to mimic by using jargon in her own writing, and finally to Paper 3, where she felt comfortable replacing jargon with something else for the task at hand, shows an evolution whereby Caiqin seems to have liberated herself as a writer. At minimum, her writing development demonstrates an enhanced writing experience: from the fear of Paper 1 to the joy for Paper 3.

Another aspect of Caiqin’s writing development can be seen in her accounts regarding critical thinking (or CT). Caiqin believed that this FYC course helped her gain CT skills. Caiqin pointed out that *“you could say that the data is very convincing, or the data is not accurate. This is critical thinking.”* It is worth noting that Caiqin defined CT as a practice of **evaluating** information. This is worth mentioning, as it contrasts with her mid-FYC interview perspective, where Caiqin observed her American classmates’ behavior and defined critical thinking as mostly involving criticism, or, in Caiqin’s words, *“find[ing] something wrong”* in assigned readings. Moving from **criticizing** as a way to interact with a text to **evaluating** what the text presents and claims, Caiqin’s understanding of CT grew as the quarter proceeded. Not only did Caiqin come to understand CT, she had the opportunity to practice and apply it often, as she stated: *“During the English class, I practiced critical thinking very much. Rather than just believe in a theory, I begin to look at what supports this theory, for example, data, the supporting ideas, the experiment.”* Here, Caiqin was referring to the reader self she brought to the FYC, one that believed in what was presented in the text because it was written by experts and assigned by an instructor. With a significant amount of practice through homework, essay writing, and especially writing literature reviews, Caiqin acquired a variety of tools to question claims, evaluate evidence, and analyze language choices in texts. In other words, Caiqin formed a habit of CT that enabled her to engage with texts and create meaningful conversations through writing. Consequently, Caiqin believed that this newly learned CT skill broadened her understanding of, and increased her interest in, psychology. She had seen psychology as a social science since it dealt with human behavior; however, the rigorous scientific process involved in conducting experiments and evaluating reports to form opinions had opened her eyes to viewing psychology as a natural science. Knowing that many human behaviors can be linked with different brain

activities fascinates Caiqin, and bringing a CT mindset to psychology reinforced Caiqin's choice of psychology as her major.

### **Caiqin's Writer Identity**

Another identity Caiqin brought into the FYC class was one of a competitive and talented debater. In high school, she had led her school's debate team, which competed in both Chinese and English. Caiqin indicated in both the first and last interviews that she enjoyed the experience of debating very much. However, she also shared that she felt she did not have an opportunity to demonstrate her debater-self until the very last class, for which I was present and able to observe. During that class, her instructor organized the students into three teams for an informal debate with each team tasked to defend the importance of one type of appeal among pathos, ethos, and logos. Caiqin was assigned to the logos team. During team preparation discussions, Caiqin looked very active and excited, but she was not selected as the speaker for an independent statement. The debate then entered a free-exchange section, and Caiqin still did not contribute or participate in the exchange. Finally, when both pathos and ethos team had wrapped up their concluding statements, Caiqin bursted out smiling and said, "*Aren't you both using logic and evidence to convince others right now? Didn't it just show the magic of logos?*" With that, Caiqin ended the debate with laughter and applause from her classmates and the instructor.

During the post-FYC interview, Caiqin referred to this debate as the most memorable moment of her FYC course, as she explained: "*I was very upset, because this is my first time to debate these Americans.*" Clearly, Caiqin was very eager to show off her talent in debating; however, she was held back by a self-perceived inability to think quickly in English. According to Caiqin, she was almost internally "tormenting" herself for not being able to say anything throughout the debate. Finally, when everything built up to the last moment, or, as Caiqin called it, "the perfect moment," Caiqin struck back with a quick verbal boxer hook. With one witty and humorous sentence, she ended the competition. Caiqin was relieved, as she described it, "*I was happy that the instructor was very impressed by this sentence.*" Caiqin felt very good about herself when she was finally able to use and display her debater-self in an English composition classroom even though it took her almost a quarter to do so!

Caiqin's relationship with grades changed as well. During the mid-FYC interview, Caiqin was very excited about receiving a 3.9 for her Paper 1. She associated this far-above-average grade with a sense of pride by pointing out she was the only Chinese student in the class. She also indicated that she needed this grade to boost her confidence, especially after she struggled writing the rhetorical analysis piece. However, her Paper 2 Literature Review received a 3.2, a grade "lower than I expected," according to Caiqin. When asked whether she was discouraged by it, Caiqin answered, "*Actually not.*" She explained that "*I can accept that. This is the first literature review I have ever written.*" She believed that, if given more time and more practice, she could do better. Caiqin even considered visiting the instructor to learn how to improve the paper, but she said the start of spring quarter added additional workload that impacted her available time. Compared to her response to her first paper, where Caiqin panicked that she might receive a poor grade on her first rhetorical analysis paper at the beginning of her FYC, she appeared very calm in receiving a lower-than-expected grade on Paper 2, indicating Caiqin had grown considerably during her FYC course, starting to view writing as a process that can be improved over time with practiced and guidance rather than merely a grade for completed work.

The extrinsic motivation of grades evolved into an intrinsic one that propelled her to strive for improved presentation of written information.

Toward the end of this post-FYC interview, Caiqin was asked to revisit the question of her relationship with writing. She responded (emphasis added):

*I think writing is **broader** than I thought before. It can be a task; it can be a tool; it can also be a friend....Before, in high school or middle school, besides instructor's assignments, I only wrote diary. I thought writing was like a friend to help express my feelings. Now, writing is **more complex** to me. It can be anything. Something I hate or something I like. It's decided by myself. **It's still a tool, but I can decide how I want to use it.***

Here, Caiqin recalled the only pleasant feelings associated with writing prior to FYC: a diary in high school that helped express her feelings. It is interesting to note that during Caiqin's pre-FYC interview, when she was asked about her relationship with writing, her thinking went to both ends of the spectrum: "pleasant" like a friend or "painful" like a task. However, after completing her FYC, Caiqin seemed to have redirected her focus from the emotions the act of writing caused in her to a more objective presentation of information that she had control over. She also appeared to understand writing as a valuable asset, a skill she was no longer afraid of but instead has come to know and utilize to make a powerful difference. In other words, Caiqin started to own her writing.

### **Lufang's Writing Development**

The second sequence in Lufang's English 131 was centered on a five-to-seven-page Major Paper 2 (or MP2). Two options were offered for this MP2: to write a letter addressing a dictionary committee regarding eliminating, including, or changing the definition of a self-chosen word; or to write an open-topic research paper having to do with a course theme, "profanity." Having invested greatly in the word "profanity," Lufang chose the second option. She quickly selected the topic of equality between humans and animals, being inspired by an art exhibition titled: *Ann Hamilton: the Common S E N S E* she had seen. Lufang attended the exhibition the Sunday before our mid-FYC interview and spent fifteen minutes at the end of this interview excitedly sharing her experiences at the exhibition and how it inspired her choice of MP2 topic. According to Lufang, this exhibit created very strong visual impacts and utilized images, written texts, and other artifacts (such as clothes made of animal fur and skins) to make an effective argument that humans should stop harming animals that are essentially equal to us.

Lufang was also excited by her experience because she felt that her MP2 could help expand the parameters of existing discussions on profanity: as she explained, "*For profanity, there is a lot of arguments about gender, class or race. But this is about a group of human killing another group of human (Dan corrected, "Or another group of creatures or species?"). It's another kind of profanity that treats humans as higher than animals.*" What Lufang was trying to say was that common critiques associated with profanity look into stereotypes, discriminations, and inequalities through the lens of gender, class and race, yet are limited to humans only. In Lufang's mind, her MP2 could break through this limit and draw attention to the untouched domains of species other than humans—that is, to inequalities between human and animals. Here, Lufang demonstrated a strong desire to go beyond existing literature and seek ways to contribute to academic conversations regarding the theme of profanity. From never having seen

the word "profanity" before to applying it in an analysis about Chinglish in MP1 and finally attempting to expand the definitions of the word in MP2, Lufang was able to demonstrate being a quick learner and creative thinker.

Lufang continued to share her vision on MP2 subclaims during the interview, one of which was to argue that humans and animals are equal by nature. For instance, she said, monkeys use language and some elephants can draw, which makes animals as intelligent as humans, and therefore, they are equal. I myself have taught in the EWP program for several years and sensed there were some inherent logical fallacies in this argument as well as foreseeable challenges in the overly wide scope of her research. I urged Lufang to discuss the topic with her instructor, Norbert, as soon as possible. Lufang did so, and Norbert suggested she narrow it down to something more specific. Lufang said in the final interview that she was not able to make it specific enough to present a strong MP2 due to time constraints. However, when grading, Norbert acknowledged the risk-taking aspect of the writing, which is considered a determining factor for an outstanding score according to EWP's grading criteria. In the end, Lufang received a 3.9 for this class. Interestingly, during our last interview, she did not focus much on the grade itself. Instead, she stated, *"This is the first time I got very excited about writing."*

Lufang claimed another significant gain from writing MP2: the research process. Prior to MP2, Lufang used online search engines such as Google or its equivalent in China, Baidu, to find information. At one point, especially during the previous three weeks, she had gotten upset about internet resources and information: *"How could the editors just comment on something without any details or any research basis or experiment?"* Being frustrated with her online search results, she rushed to the library and spent an afternoon working on the paper and finding a book that supported her MP2 claims. She shared, *"This is the first time I used library that way."* In the past, Lufang had always treated libraries as quiet study spaces without considering the value of their contents. According to Lufang, taking this class made her realize the *"power"* of reliable resources because she wanted to be responsible for the evidence presented to her readers, or, in her own words, *"I want to take it seriously."* Lufang then contrasted this newly-gained pursuit of being a trustworthy writer with TOEFL or SAT writing, during which she had always relied on made-up personal stories or common-sense examples as evidence. In other words, the focus of preparing for standardized writing tests was to impress graders to gain a high score rather than forming trustworthy relationships with readers, as Lufang expresses in her final reflection: *"In that situation, the goal of my writing was getting more grades in a limit time...I did not think much about rhetorical awareness...I did not need to write for different audiences and contexts."* On the contrary, writing for FYC then means to *"demonstrate my real thoughts and become responsible for what is presented to the readers."*

Lufang also seemed to be more relaxed with grammatical errors. During the interview, she acknowledged that there were still many grammar issues in her writing, but with Professor Norbert's help, Lufang was able to identify some error patterns (such as misused parts of speech) and correct them herself. What seemed more exciting to Lufang was a new perspective on grammar and language use. Lufang noticed that even her native English-speaking classmates would raise questions in class about grammar issues (such as use of commas). She noted that they were not worried about grammar because others understood the content of their writing despite grammatical confusion. Lufang thereby came to the conclusion that *"English language is a kind of tool to communicate with people. As long as you can achieve communication with*

*people, a little bit of grammar mistake may not matter as much.*” It is notable that Lufang tended to shift her focus in writing from technically correct language use to other aspects, such as interesting ideas, reliable evidence, or getting those ideas across to the readers effectively. Also, she seemed to become less anxious and more comfortable with making grammar mistakes.

Finally, Lufang emphasized an improvement in her reading skills. In her portfolio final reflection, Lufang wrote (emphasis added), *“The exciting thing was that I even enjoyed reading in English more than before, because as my reading and analyzing skills developed, I enjoyed the moment that there was a storm in my brain.”* Lufang provided some examples of how she could read articles from her psychology and economics classes in a much faster and more engaging way. For example, she would sometimes pause at an interesting point when reading with an urge to connect it to her own real-life experience. Overall, Lufang was very excited about how she could now have a conversation with the text in her mind while reading. In other words, she no longer read only to capture new vocabulary; she also started reading to process ideas and thoughtfully consider their impact. When asked about the reasons for this new reading habit, Lufang referred to the large amount of reading she had practiced during FYC. She also mentioned that writing a letter to Noreen Malone about the term “basic bitch” in Short Assignment 2 helped because it forced her to go beyond comprehension in order to be able to engage with the author on ideas. She felt that being offered the opportunity to critically analyze claims of established authors encouraged a high level of reading engagement. It is safe to conclude that, thanks to writing, Lufang started to build increased confidence, improved engagement, and elevated critical reading skills.

### **Lufang’s Writer Identity**

Lufang entered FYC with self-doubt that was primarily due to being an international student and non-native speaker. She mentioned this in both her pre- and post-FYC interviews and also wrote about the same doubt in her final reflection (emphasis added):

*I am an international student. English is not my mother language. I was not so comfortable with writing in English before. My main experiences about writing in English before this course were writing short essays for TOEFL and SAT tests. I knew that I did not get a high score in those tests, so **I naturally believed that I was a failure writer in English.** When I took this course, I was worried that I would struggle in this course badly.*

Lufang labeled herself as a “failure writer” and linked this label with standardized writing test scores. In her post-interview, she said that the label overshadowed her when she began the FYC course. She was concerned that she would make numerous grammar mistakes and imagined that would make the instructor “get crazy” because she or he would not be able to understand what she was trying to communicate in her writing. Lufang also imagined the other students would be more fluent in English, which would allow them to write properly in English and therefore have fewer struggles than she had, which made her even more nervous. This self-labeling, along with the imagined scenarios, demonstrated Lufang’s sense of insecurity in expressing herself in writing.

Lufang added that encouragement from Instructor Norbert helped her gradually overcome her preconceived ideas and, knowing Norbert to be a very understanding instructor, brought Lufang great relief. She recalled that Norbert encouraged her to “get her thoughts out” and urged

her not to worry about grammatical mistakes as long as they did not interfere with comprehension. The two of them also established an agreement that if Norbert got confused about a certain part, he would put a marginal comment for Lufang to clarify later. Norbert further assisted by adding clarification comments with varied interpretations rather than simply asking her to clarify. That approach helped Lufang see exactly how she was confusing the reader and practice phrasing her meaning with improved clarity and authenticity. Lufang appreciated Norbert's extra efforts to capture those teachable moments intended to improve her English to minimize potential embarrassing or uncomfortable situations during class. Further, Lufang asked Norbert to highlight grammatical errors in her writing. Norbert did so and encouraged Lufang to take them to the Writing Center for further improvement.

Freed from the fear that making grammar mistakes equated to being a "failure writer," Lufang was further encouraged by Norbert's expressed appreciation of the ideas she presented. Before writing each of her earlier papers, Lufang would communicate via Small Talks what she was planning to write and ask Norbert if she could proceed with these ideas. Partially, she was unsure if her ideas would meet the instructor's expectations. Also, she was concerned her Chinese perspective would sound "too weird" to her American instructor and peers. Norbert was very responsive to Lufang's questions: according to Lufang, "*He always responded to every question I asked him and every email I sent to him.*" Having been very insecure about her English writing, Lufang needed someone with authority to confirm and to validate her thoughts. Professor Norbert's prompt responses helped to provide the exact sense of security Lufang was seeking. Lufang stated, "*He thinks that my thoughts are very unique. He enjoyed reading them. He encouraged me to bring this kind of stuff to him.*" Not only did Lufang feel secure, she also felt that her perspectives were valued. She went beyond "getting her thoughts out" to making a contribution. For instance, Lufang recalled writing MP2, which calls out an inequity between humans and animals through the lens of profanity, and was very excited to point out that this claim could help expand the understanding of profanity in existing literature. Despite a few major flaws in the execution of MP2, Lufang felt empowered to bridge a knowledge gap and felt an urge to contribute to the scholarly conversation. Overall, Lufang was able to put aside fears of making grammar mistakes or sounding alien in a scholarly discourse community and started to own her ideas, gradually becoming more secure about her writing and more confident about her writer self.

When asked what she gained from this course, Lufang made a list of strategies she learned with regard to writing academic papers, such as organizing and making arguments, and then continued (emphasis added):

*And the other thing is about an attitude to face my academic life. For example I start to use the library. I feel like when writing a paper I feel that I **need to response for the information I use in the paper.** So I'm becoming **more serious about** this kind of thing. It's not just for assignments. For an assignment maybe once I've completed it I will never look at it again. But now I feel like **I really need to be responsible for my writing, especially when I was writing a summary for the class case.** I felt like this was going to be read by a lot of people so I really need to be responsible for it. So I really need to treat it seriously.*

For the first time in the research process, Lufang conveyed a sense of responsibility and seriousness towards writing. Her understanding of a writer's responsibility to readers went

beyond merely presenting information in accurate English to focusing on researching and communicating trustworthy evidence. Her writer self was no longer defined by nativeness in the English language, but instead centered more on authorship credibility. To further showcase this newly learned responsibility, Lufang drew a distinction between “an assignment” and “a summary for the class case,” suggesting that the former is usually read by the instructor or others within the context of the composition course while the latter “*was going to be read by a lot of people*” in the real world. Here, “the class case” refers to a computer science engineering class Lufang took prior to the quarter when this research was conducted. As it is critical to showcase Lufang’s writer identity evolvment, it seems necessary to provide the context of this class and class case to which Lufang referred.

During the previous quarter, Lufang had been enrolled in CSE 142, an introductory course to computer science engineering and also a prerequisite for her intended major of informatics. Lufang thought she did very well in the course. However, during her winter break, when she returned to China, Lufang received a candid email from the course administrator, Mr. Lukas (pseudonym used), with the subject line “CSE 142 Academic Misconduct.” In this email, Lufang was informed that high-ranking similarities (73%) were identified between an assignment of hers and that of another student. Though the email encouraged the student to make an appointment with Mr. Lukas to discuss the case, it also indicated in the end that “[i]f we do not hear from you in 10 days, we will assume that you want to have the case sent forward to the college committee that handles academic misconduct cases.” Being thousands of miles away from the US campus and surrounded by parents and friends in China who had little knowledge about academic misconduct in American higher education, Lufang felt helpless, as she recalled this story in the post-FYC interview. Additionally, Lufang was afraid of being sent to the academic misconduct office, so she quickly replied to Mr. Lukas’s email and admitted that she had shown her assignments to another student.

After Lufang returned to campus the following quarter and was enrolled in FYC, the incident still haunted her, as she wrote in an email reaching out to me and an academic support center staff member, Rokas Brown (pseudonym used), (emphasis added): “*I am really struggling in this for a long time. At first I really felt **shame** and **regret** about the **stupid** thing I did. I was afraid about letting any others know that. But the negative mood is keeping me so long time.*” Lufang expressed continued internal conflict. On one hand, she was aware of the course’s Policy on Collaboration, that “[y]ou may not show another student your assignment solution.... Under our policy, a student who gives inappropriate help is equally guilty with one who receives it.” The fact that she did share her code with this classmate made it an obvious violation of course policy regardless of the circumstances, and that should have been the end of the story. However, Lufang felt deceived by a classmate who initially approached her to discuss a topic and then later copied parts of her code without her knowledge. This made Lufang feel she was being unfairly punished for her own good intentions and the other student’s less than ethical action. What seemed to be really bothering her was her blaming herself for not reading course policy carefully or taking it seriously, and more importantly, for not even trying to get a chance to explain herself as an international student, especially how the process was perceived from the perspective of a Chinese student. These negative emotions had been haunting her much more than losing assignment points, and she wanted resolution to the situation.

After learning about her struggles and motivations, Rokas and I strongly encouraged Lufang to make an appointment with Mr. Lukas, who responded by asking what it was that

remained unexplained, since Lufang had already admitted to the violation. Lufang wrote back that:

*I want to explain the cultural thought I had when I received the email during the past winter break. According to my cultural background, when one receives an email as such from higher up, such as an official department or an authority, s/he is believed to be involved in a very serious case. Things would just get worse if s/he tries to explain. This belief has further led me to a misreading of your email. I highly appreciate the opportunity to explain more. This is not only important to me, but also important to other international students with a similar background, because I believe this can be a good learning experience for them as well.*

In this email response, Lufang eloquently explained a cultural aspect of this case: that in some cultures, such as China, such emails are viewed as a top-down communication means from authorities to the informed party (usually at the bottom of the power hierarchy) for the mere purpose of conveying already finalized decisions of violation, misconduct, punishment, and so forth. Room for explanations or individual rights is usually not allowed in this one-way top-down communication. In a school setting specifically, attempting to explain is usually seen as making excuses, which can result in being threatened with more severe consequences such as leaving a negative comment in one's permanent record. As such, a response of admitting is usually recommended as safe and wise. Therefore, when Lufang received Mr. Lukas's initial email, especially the very last section that reiterates and highlights "to have the case sent forward to the college committee that handles academic misconduct cases," Lufang's immediate response was to admit to wrongdoing in order to avoid more severe consequences. In this explanatory email, Lufang demonstrated the urge to describe an important cultural difference, specifically, how the email was received by others from a culture where student rights do not exist. Lufang's second move in this email was to draw out a strong stake that goes beyond serving her own self-interest, that "[t]his is not only important to me, but also important to other international student with similar background." Also, Lufang did not end this email with a request to recover points on the assignment. Rather, she focused on helping others learn from her lesson, a purpose that was much more noble and convincing than negotiating tangible grades.

Lufang was able to meet with Mr. Lukas the next week. I was also invited to the meeting as her moral support. At the beginning of the meeting, Lufang sounded nervous, and she had a shaky voice when speaking in English. But she became more calm as she started to describe her fears from when she received Mr. Lukas's initial email and presented the cultural reasons why she acted in certain ways and why she needed to meet him to explain. Being present at the meeting, I witnessed Lufang confronting her own fears and conveying her inner conflicts to a person of authority other than her instructor Norbert. On the other side of the desk, Mr. Lukas was very patient and encouraging. He also reassured Lufang that here in the US she had the right to explain herself to school officials. Lufang seemed very excited about this newly-learned-of student right, as indicated in a thank-you email she sent to Rokas and myself after the meeting: "Thank you for encouraging me. Let me have the brave to fight for the right for myself." Toward the end the meeting, Lufang stated that she was planning to write up her case and asked Mr. Lukas if she could share it with future CSE 142 students. Mr. Lukas seemed surprised at this gesture. He wrote it down on a sticky note and promised to forward her request to the course professor. It is unknown whether this request was eventually forwarded. However, as soon as

Lufang finished a higher-level CSE 143 course, achieving a high grade, she was contacted by an advisor from the CSE department, citing Lufang's meeting with Mr. Lukas and asking her if she was interested in applying for this quite competitive major at the university. Lufang decided to become a CSE major during her sophomore year and, a year later, she accepted an offer from a well-known e-commerce company for an internship opportunity in the summer of her junior year and received a return offer to work there full time upon her graduation in June, 2018.

Lufang kept her word and wrote up her CSE case during that spring break, several weeks after her meeting with Mr. Lukas. During spring break, I received an email from Lufang with the story written on Google Docs, requesting revision recommendations. In this piece (see Appendix II), Lufang recorded the case and summarized the meaningful lessons she had learned as she underwent the experience as an international student. As this piece also reveals some changes in Lufang's writer identity, it is worth a close read. In this piece, Lufang's main purpose was to convince her fellow international students to learn from her academic misconduct case. To appeal to this specific audience from the start, she drew on a shared identity of international students that (emphasis added):

*As an international student learning and living in another country, I had a hard time to fit in this new environment. I was struggling with using second language and with problems of culture background differences every day. Dealing with these problems was hard, but they were still within my expectation. I found as many chances as possible to improve my English skills and to get to know more about American culture, but when the "surprise" came, my mind just shut down.*

In this opening statement, Lufang first depicted a sentiment common among international students, that of "having a hard time to fit in." Second, Lufang acknowledged struggles such as using English as a second language and adjusting to cultural differences are inherent constituents of international student identities. Therefore, she embraced these struggles and took for granted the extra efforts required from international students in order to overcome challenges such as these. Meanwhile, Lufang contrasted these expected challenges to set the stage for an unexpected one, or, as she put it, "the surprise," revealing how unprepared she was when encountering an academic misconduct issue. In this specific case, Lufang also discovered other aspects of her international student identities. For instance, when explaining why she initially admitted to the violation, Lufang wrote (emphasis added):

*The culture difference made me misunderstand these messages totally. Obviously, they gave me a chance to explain myself and they were willing to do so, but from my cultural background, when the word "college committee" appeared, I naturally thought that it would be the worst situation to communicate with an official department. I was so afraid of authority. I thought that if I tried to argue with them, they would be very likely to give me a negative record that might even influence my visa for US. My parents and all my friends had never been through this either, so nobody could give me any advice. I felt that I was somehow threatened, and I should just admit that I showed my assignments to someone and a "0" score would be the best result for me, so I did that.*

Compared to previous situations where Lufang had discussed cultural differences as disadvantages that motivated her to work even harder in order to fit in, here Lufang leaned on them to explain a mistake she made and to make sense of this difficult experience. In this explanation, Lufang revealed that being an international student, especially a Chinese student, could also mean being afraid of authority figures and fearing that arguing with authority could lead to increased punishment. Also, being an international student is a privilege dependent upon with a legal status granted by a F1 visa that requires maintaining a positive academic performance in order to legally study in the US. In other words, for international students in general, with regard to academic misconduct, there is an extra layer of fear that can prevent them from coming forward: legally staying in the US. Finally, what may not be obvious to a US readership, is the implication of losing support from her parents and friends in China because they are far away. For the first time, these other aspects of international student identity were articulated in Lufang's writing. In a sense, through writing, Lufang was able to explore those aspects of her international student identity, which might have helped her deal with those negative feelings that had been haunting her. As she put in this piece, *"this thing had never got out of my mind. ... I felt so upset about this every day."*

Contrary to these initially negative feelings, what comes out of this writing is instead a strong presence of positivity. For instance, when introducing the support she received from Rokas and myself, Lufang wrote (emphasis added), *"One of the **awesome** parts of this university is that there are always people who are willing to support you to face challenges like this."* In addition to a touch of gratitude, Lufang also tried to encourage her fellow international students to seek help. There is also evidence of empowerment: as she wrote, *"By consulting them, I was encouraged to explain my situation to the CSE department. **It was my right to do so.**"* Initially, she hoped she could meet Mr. Lukas to explain herself, mostly because she needed to let go of some negative feelings. Contrastingly, here, she perceived her request to meet and explain as an exercise of her right as a student. In other words, in moving from an emotional appeal to a rightful request, Lufang indicated a clear agency change. She was no longer an international student begging for understanding from an authority figure. Rather, she became an agent of her own who sought a conversation with a school official that supported the student's right to do so. Lufang reiterated this newly-found agency in the section where she recalled her meeting with Mr. Lukas (emphasis added):

*This conversation not only cleared all my questions, but also **gave me the confidence to face the rest of my college study.** He [Mr. Lukas] appreciated my courage to initiate **this conversation** with him, and told me that I always have the right to explain myself to anyone in this university when I feel confused or being treated unfairly. **There was no reason to be afraid of doing so.***

Here, Lufang no longer saw this as an explanation. Rather, she called it a conversation. She no longer saw herself on the lower end of the power hierarchy. Instead, she focused on the encouragement and appreciation received from Mr. Lukas. Once her action was appreciated and her point valued, she was no longer afraid. And as soon as Lufang shifted her standing points and claimed ownership, she gained confidence--a confidence that was significant enough "to face the rest of [her] college study," according to Lufang.

During our post-FYC interview, Lufang also brought up her CSE case. When asked what it was like to write this piece, Lufang recalled (emphasis added):

*I just spent the whole afternoon in front of the table and typing. I feel like I was not writing for assignments, because when I wrote for assignments, I would work about three hours and write about six hundred words....But when I was writing this story, writing **what I really wanted to say**, I didn't realize I wrote that much. I wrote about two thousand words but I felt no difficulty in writing that many words....**When I really want to express something**, I feel like the word count does not matter....I am definitely **motivated to write** this piece, which makes writing much easier.*

It seemed that Lufang had a very different writing experience this time than before. First, she felt effortlessness when writing the story, highlighting the feeling of when “the word count does not matter.” It can be argued that Lufang found it easier to write because she was writing a narrative based on her own lived experience. However, compared to Lufang’s panic over writing her first 5–7-page paper, the change to effortlessly writing a 2000-word essay was still a considerable improvement. Second, Lufang distinguished this piece from writing assignments, emphasizing that this writing was about “what [she] really wanted to say” and “when [she] really wanted to express something.” These two statements can also be interpreted as: when she used to write for class assignments, she was not necessarily expressing her genuine thoughts or revealing genuine feelings. There was always a prompt to guide her and, on the other hand, to limit her. Even after she established a trusting and encouraging writing relationship with her actual reader (in this case, the instructor) via Small Talks, which led to a stronger sense of security and confidence towards writing, there still seemed to be a lack of real-world meaning associated with assignment writing. In other words, when the stakes of assignment writing are either abstract or missing, students can be less motivated to produce genuine writing.

Contrastingly, by the time she wrote this case summary, Lufang had a concrete audience in mind: fellow international students taking the CSE 142 course in the future. She anticipated that her audience might not read the course policy carefully or take it seriously, or might misinterpret course policies and misread communications and correspondence due to cultural and linguistic barriers, just as she had. Given the emotional struggles she went through, Lufang’s purpose for writing the case was to help others avoid the same mistake she made, as shown at the end of her first paragraph: “*I just solved an exciting case and I had a great passion to share this story with you to tell you how to avoid getting in to unnecessary troubles, and how to find a purpose way to face unexpected challenges, if you have to do that.*” Lufang felt a strong sense of writer responsibility for this audience group and sensed the potential real-world impact this writing could carry. Lufang grew excited and her writing became more intrinsically motivated as she viewed writing as a powerful tool to make real changes. Thus, she was also very invested, as she actively reached out to FIUTS, ASP, and Mr. Lukas, hoping to reach a larger international student audience.

### **Sucheng’s Writing Development**

Similar to her previous interviews, Sucheng chose Mandarin as the language for her post-FYC interview conducted at the beginning of the subsequent spring quarter. This interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim in Mandarin. For the purpose of analysis, segments of the transcription were selected and translated into English. The translation was double-checked and perfected by another Mandarin-English bilingual scholar in a related field of international student

studies. In the analysis below, a few key words are kept in both languages to ensure the authentic meaning does not get lost in translation.

In Sucheng's English 131 class, Sequence 2 centered on Major Paper 2 (or MP2), an original argumentative research paper. To prepare for this major paper, students were required to produce a research prospectus, a literature review, and an outline. When asked about her overall experience working on Sequence 2, Sucheng stated, "*If the feeling towards the first sequence can be described as being struck down and then climbing upwards step by step, the second sequence, then, was much more flat (比较平淡).*" According to Sucheng, the instructor's comment on her SA1 was short and negative, which said that her SA1 was off topic. This comment intensified her anxiety, which was initially caused by being the only international students in the class. Then the instructor's positive comment on Short Assignment 2, though only one-sentence long, really helped her release that anxiety. However, when she later entered Sequence 2, Sucheng encountered another setback. As mentioned in the previous chapter, she struggled terribly with the new genre of prospectus, especially after reading the instructor's 17-page sample. She recalled this experience in this postFYC interview:

*Back then, I treated the prospectus too seriously.... At that time, I was not familiar with this genre, then I became very nervous.... Later on I realized the required prospectus is completely different from a professional one. He (the instructor) just wanted to see our thoughts on Sequence 2. I was just scared by the prospectus sample he provided. Then I came to talk to you, you helped me sort through how to approach a research paper.... You helped me analyze every requirement, then connect it back to my own research point by point. Then I felt I was good.... It (the syllabus) was very clear. It's just that I didn't read it carefully line by line. When you did that with me, I felt much more grounded.*

Similar to all other participants, Sucheng feared new genres. Unlike Lufang, though, Sucheng's initial coping strategy was to rely on writing samples provided by the instructor rather than reach out to the instructor or peers. In her pre-FYC interview, Sucheng mentioned this same habit of consulting online examples started in her high school English classes. When this writing sample brought her more fear instead of guidance, she reached out to me, a Chinese-speaking instructor for the writing studio. As a matter of fact, I did not find out about Sucheng's struggle from her initially. It was her close friend, Caiqin, who mentioned it to me at the end of our writing studio session. Caiqin stated that she was concerned about Sucheng and asked if I could look at Sucheng's new assignment. I was considering whether I should reach out to Sucheng or wait until she was ready to reach out to me when, later that day, she emailed and asked if I could change our scheduled mid-FYC interview into a tutoring session. I gladly agreed; however, the next day, while I was gathering more materials from her to prepare for this tutoring session, I learned that the instructor had unexpectedly moved the due date for this prospectus assignment two days earlier. As a result, she ended up submitting a MP2 proposal as the prospectus assignment, mimicking the introduction section of the sample prospectus. Sucheng was apparently very insecure about this submission, as she wrote in the email correspondence to repurpose our meeting again: "After I receive your advice from our upcoming meeting, maybe I can re-write my prospectus and hand it in to my instructor again." Four days later, when we finally sat down for the tutoring, Sucheng had actually already received the instructor's comment, which described the submitted prospectus as "an excellent outline of a very interesting and important question." Sucheng seemed relieved upon seeing the comment. Consequently, at

our meeting, Sucheng seemed to have moved past her fear of approaching the prospectus as a new genre and insecurity about her submission and instead started to concentrate on the next new genre: literature reviews. Overall, according to the account above, looking back at this breakdown when writing a prospectus, Sucheng learned well of the consequences of not carefully reading assignment requirements and of not reaching out for help. Sucheng was able to apply these lessons when writing a literature review, another genre new to her.

In her post-FYC interview, Sucheng recalled her first experience in writing a literature review. First, she re-emphasized the importance of reading and understanding the instructor's requirements on the syllabus. For instance, she stated, "*In the syllabus, there are all kinds of explanations in the introduction to the sequence. There is also explanation on writing context for this literature review assignment.*" Sucheng sounded like an expert on syllabus reading and recited quite a few key elements required for this assignment. More noticeably, Sucheng turned to Caiqin for help. Sucheng and Caiqin were recruited for this research at the same time. They were high school classmates and friends. Both came to the UW and became roommates after arriving in the US. They never used the word "sister-like" to describe their relationship, but they had always looked out for each other. For instance, as previously presented, when Sucheng was struggling with writing a prospectus, Caiqin asked me to help Sucheng. In return, when Caiqin was pressured by her father's unrealistic expectations of an expedited graduation, Sucheng expressed her concerns and tried to comfort Caiqin. They seemed inseparable, yet Sucheng hesitated to seek help from Caiqin until after writing the prospectus. In this post-FYC interview, Sucheng described Caiqin's contribution to her writing improvement (translated and emphasis added):

*I was thinking that writings from her [Caiqin's] link class should be similar to writing in my class. The themes are different, but forms of writing, for example, literature review, should be similar. For example, I thought writing a literature review is mainly to summarize others points of view and then analyze them. But she told me that, "No, you also **need to** (要) add your own views. You **need to** (要) present this person's point of view, then how another person disputes it, and then how others dispute what's disputed. You also **need to** (要) add your own opinion and your own analysis."... So, I had a paragraph with my own opinion and analysis in the end.*

Apparently, Caiqin had just submitted her literature review of psychology studies on vision perceptions when Sucheng started hers, which addressed the issue of the gender gap in STEM fields, for MP2. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Caiqin was also offered sample literature reviews by the instructor. However, unlike in Sucheng's class, where samples were merely shared on the Canvas online course management system, Caiqin's class required students to critically analyze these samples in homework assignments and allotted class time for both group and whole-class discussions on these samples. Caiqin benefited greatly from these scaffolding activities and in-class discussions, so by the time she finished her literature review, she was very confident; as she stated, "*Now I know everything about literature review, so I am very happy.*" Caiqin then passed her knowledge of literature reviews on to Sucheng, as seen from the quote above. Sucheng used the word "要" (or need to) multiple times to emphasize the key components of a literature review. What Sucheng described here is essentially the strategy of building conversations between texts, which is also called "intertextuality" in EWP's course

outcomes. This particular outcome requires a writer to draw on multiple resources to incorporate different voices and perspectives on a similar if not the same issue in a dialogical manner. Sucheng described this dialogical feature of a literature review vividly in the quote above: “*how another person disputes it and then how others dispute what’s disputed.*” In addition, by inserting her own opinions and analysis, Sucheng also demonstrated an awareness of joining scholarly conversations. From her own account above, Sucheng’s understanding of the literature review genre has evolved from summarizing others’ arguments to building scholarly conversations with a critical eye. At the heart of this change was Sucheng’s writer agency to enter those conversations with her own opinions.

Sucheng also consulted Caiqin for the next assignment, an outline for MP2, in which Caiqin recommended Sucheng break down subclaims into smaller subpoints and make supporting evidence more explicit. As Sucheng became more comfortable receiving guidance from Caiqin, she also became less dependent on the instructor’s comments. Apparently, according to Sucheng, the instructor never left feedback on her outline submission, which would have made her feel more comfortable proceeding on her MP2. When asked how she felt about it, Sucheng said, “*I just didn’t feel anything back then.... I followed what she (Caiqin) said. The instructor didn’t say anything in the end. I took that as a yes. He didn’t give any comments. Nothing at all.*” Between the lines, there is a clear presence of disappointment; interestingly, this sentiment barely emerged in her previous interviews but only in this post-FYC interview. One explanation could be that, when seeking help from Caiqin, Sucheng had a chance to compare and contrast the two different teaching styles, during which she acquired a preference for that of Caiqin’s instructor, a style that values scaffolding and prompt feedback. The same account could also be evidence of Sucheng’s writer identity change, especially in her statement that “I just didn’t feel anything back then.” As she became more confident and secure about her writing, she became less sensitive about instructor comments. In other words, she no longer needed to rely solely on instructor comments as a security net for her writing.

Sucheng values reviews and revision. She quoted a Chinese idiom to describe the importance of reviews from others: “An outsider sees better” (旁观者清). Though she missed the only peer review opportunity in class due to illness, she referred to the valuable feedback she received from Caiqin and me. When asked about her overall thoughts on feedback and revision, Sucheng stated, “*Others’ comments and suggestions help me see more clearly. After revision based on these reviews, I can feel that my essays have clearly become deeper and deeper.... To improve English writing, it mainly depends on revision.*” In other words, Sucheng acknowledged that writing is a process of continuous revising and improving with input from readers and reviewers. As an outsider observing her as she wrote for the entire quarter, I was able to see how much Sucheng opened up by inviting others into her writing process.

As for peers from her own class, Sucheng recalled a small group activity during the last class of her FYC course. During this class, students were put into small groups of four to write a letter about course outcomes for future English 131 students. The purpose of the activity was twofold: first, for current students to familiarize themselves with the course outcomes, and second, to practice adjusting writing choices to appeal to different audiences. Sucheng and another student were each assigned to interpret two out of the four big outcomes, while the other two wrote or presented. In her post-FYC interview, Sucheng explained how much she cherished this interaction with her American peers. Asked how she did, she said, “*I stuttered. When I spoke English in front of American students, I had a ‘big tongue’. I became nervous, because this is the*

*first, as well as the last group work in this class.*” Sucheng’s anxiety about speaking English reminded me of the first time she interacted with an American peer through writing. For her SA2, Sucheng was asked to respond to a peer’s SA1 by pointing out fallacies in the writing. Sucheng initially felt very sad and lost (失落) when contrasting her “childish English writing” with the sophisticated arguments from her native-speaking peer. She then gained confidence after she received support in better understanding the content (in this case, fallacies), and especially after she received a positive comment from the instructor. In other words, practice seems to have removed her fear and anxiety. In the case of English speaking, perhaps if given more practice in class and more content preparation time prior to class, Sucheng would have gained confidence in English speaking just as she had with English writing.

When asked about her overall gains from English 131, similar to Lufang and Caiqin, Sucheng made a long list of writing strategies, including identifying logical fallacies, making strong arguments, tackling a variety of new genres, and accomplishing the longest paper she had ever written. Finally, emphasizing the importance of fully understanding assignment requirements, she stated, “*Point by point, you should dissect all of (his) requirements and expectations, and then respond to each point in your writing.*” Apparently, Sucheng took to heart the lessons learned from her struggles writing a prospectus. Apart from these gains, Sucheng also pointed out areas for future growth, such as grammar and research. In terms of grammar, similar to Caiqin and Lufang, Sucheng was glad to find out that English 131 was less focused on grammar than on content, meaning grammatical errors were less likely to incur severe punishment. However, while Lufang and Caiqin were both empowered to put ideas and communication above grammar, Sucheng was still very much affected by it; as she stated, “*I was actually still very concerned about grammar.... When I wrote, I was still very cautious. After I finished writing, I would check, again and again, for typos, tenses, etc.*” In a sense, Sucheng was not as freed from grammar fears as the others.

In regard to research, Sucheng reported that she benefited from a library research workshop that taught her how to play with search keywords and how to do citations. However, she still lacked the skills to effectively use English search engines (e.g., Google Scholars) and sometimes felt overwhelmed by a long list of search results in English. Instead, she had a habit of turning to online Chinese resources, specifically Badu Docs, an equivalent of Script.com in the US, where anyone can upload anything without citations. Sucheng’s explanation was that sometimes it was much easier for her to understand a complex concept or argument in Chinese. Meanwhile, she seemed to be aware of credibility issues when citing sources. She said, “*I would stay away from those resources that are ‘very narrow minded’ (钻牛角尖) and I would only cite published work.*” When asked about considerations of possible meaning loss in translation, Sucheng sounded less certain and said, “*I would do an approximate translation. In this respect, there is not much I can do,*” signaling that there is room for growth in her future learning.

### **Sucheng’s Writer Identity**

Sucheng entered English 131 with fears about writing in English. As she put it in her final portfolio reflection, “*I had been a person who was afraid of writing for such a long time.*” Coming out of her not very successful high-school English-writing experience, Sucheng had long understood writing as “*just writing what I feel like,*” with less focus on making a logical argument. When asked how she perceived writing now, Sucheng contrasted English 131 with a previous course and stated, “*When taking the Informatic intro class during my first quarter at*

*UW, writing an essay each week felt like 'being put to torture' (上刑). But now, for sure, writing is much more relaxing.*" From fear to relaxation when writing, Sucheng gained confidence along the way, and this confidence was key to Sucheng's writer identity development.

Besides a confidence boost from positive instructor comments after SA2, Sucheng also demonstrated another representation of confidence in writing. When asked whether her self image as a writer had changed after taking English 131, Sucheng said, very certainly, "Yes!" She explained, "*When I wrote essays before, I would always consult others' writing first. As for now, I start with my own ideas.*" When further questioned about what she meant by "consult," Sucheng gave examples of searching for sample arguments on waterboarding using Google and Baidu or reading samples of the prospectus provided by the instructor or online. In other words, she was used to starting with others' ideas. She also explained that it was very difficult not to, because she felt that reading other's arguments tended to sway her easily. "*Contrastively,*" Sucheng said, "*now, I would be more actively brainstorming my own ideas at first, and then do research to look for evidence and examples to either support or refute these ideas.*" Embedded in this change is Sucheng's development of critical thinking skills. Instead of being easily convinced by other's arguments, by practicing analyzing fallacies and debating contrasting perspectives in Sequence 1, Sucheng learned to read critically, which prompted her to think more broadly and deeply in order to look at all sides of a topic or an issue. While the importance of providing a proper sample writing was emphasized early in this chapter, Sucheng also revealed the potential danger of presenting writing samples to someone with little critical thinking. As she put it, "*Sample arguments can easily 'set a fixed mindset' (思维定式) that easily sways a writer.*" For Sucheng, being able to apply critical thinking to argument writing prompted her to generate her own ideas, which also granted her a stronger ownership of her writing.

When we discussed the revision process, Sucheng compared college application essays to English 131 assignments. She summarized that the former is about pleasing admissions officers, so its revision focuses on approximating the content to the values and characteristics they favor. On the contrary, according to Sucheng, "*Revision in English 131 focuses on writing strategies and improving one's writing ability, rather than please anybody; therefore, it is more meaningful for future writing.*" Sucheng specifically differentiated the purpose of **writing to please** versus **writing to convince**. She felt that English 131 taught her many useful strategies to convince an audience with well-rounded evidence, unlike the college application essays she practiced writing in high school, which were "*constraining*" according to Sucheng. She felt that writing strategies she learned from English 131 freed her from a predefined writing direction so that she could choose her own topics and evidence or be actively involved in the planning and revision processes. In other words, her English 131 experience provided her with the necessary tools and empowered her to take ownership of her writing.

This notion also reminded me of Sucheng's pre-FYC interview, when she shared a high school lecture that left her feeling enlightened. In this lecture, a college admissions expert differentiated "I-learned-a-lesson" essays common among Chinese students from favored college essays that tell an applicants' unique stories. By the post-FYC interview, Sucheng seemed to have developed her own preference in writing styles through English 131. For instance, when asked how prepared she felt to write a personal statement in order to apply for a very competitive major, Human Centered Design and Engineering, Sucheng stated:

*I haven't thought about how to write it, but I have confidence to write it well....I wouldn't write it the way I used to write essays. I would write what I desire. I think when it comes to applying for a major, it is not like when you want to please him/her [the admissions officer], you can actually just succeed. You will still need to write something that you desire, to show your true heart.*

Though a college application essay and a personal statement for a major application share a similar purpose, that is, to seek approval for admission, there is a clear demonstration of difference in terms of how Sucheng approached this genre in the past and how she would in the future. Specifically, in the past, she had been inspired by an expert and followed his advice to present her own unique stories. In other words, the focus was on choosing something the audience wanted. Now, she had a different focus: “*I would write what I desire.*” The ultimate goal was still to gain approval for admission to the major. However, she would decide what it was that would represent her “true heart,” and then convince the audience with proof. The writer’s role in this choice-making process is much more proactive and genuine. Also noticeably, Sucheng emphasized her confidence in writing. Contrary to the fear Sucheng previously had every time she encountered a new writing assignment in Sequence 1 of English 131, Sucheng now claimed confidence in this new piece, though she had not yet had a chance to think about how to write it. Fear of the unknown was replaced with self-confidence once Sucheng felt she was a better equipped writer.

When asked what she would have done differently if given a chance to retake the class, Sucheng hesitated for a good twenty seconds before asking with a shy smile, “Can I change an instructor?” I was shocked at her answer and encouraged her to explain. Here is a verbatim translation of our conversation (emphasis added):

Dan: If you were given a chance to retake this class, what would you have done differently?  
 Sucheng: Hmm, hmmm (a 20-second silence). Can I change a instructor? (shy laughter)  
 Dan: You want to change an instructor? Can you tell me why? Do you want the instructor to improve in certain aspects?  
 Sucheng: First, he always did not reply emails. He would always say, **“If you have any needs or questions, you can email me.” Then when I sent him emails, he did not reply any of them.**  
 Dan: Maybe he did not receive them?  
 Sucheng: Actually he read them sometimes. Once when I visited his office hour, he mentioned the first email I sent him long while ago. He said he read it.  
 Dan: Did you ask him why he didn't respond?  
 Sucheng: I didn't. I was too shy to ask.  
 Dan: Have you thought that, maybe if you ask, he might start to respond?  
 Sucheng: Hmmmm, well, because I was thinking, **maybe I sent him too much nonsense** (We both laughed). Maybe he thought there was not much to respond to. For instance, there is once when I had diarrhea so I had to miss the class. I emailed him to ask for some key points or important notes I might have missed. He did not respond, so I thought maybe there was no important points [from the class].  
 ...  
 Dan: What about office hours?

Sucheng: He had always been there during office hour, and I would always go. However, sometimes I felt very awkward to be in the room with him. (Dan: Why?) Sometimes, I couldn't find my words. For example, some American are nice, so they would lead the conversation for a little bit and help carry on. [But with this instructor], **sometimes when I couldn't come up with the right English expression or when I stuttered, he would just stare at me. It's very awkward!** Then there is another thing. Every time when I went to his office hour, he told me that he did not read my essay. He could have emailed me beforehand. For instance, for our last office hour on portfolio. I created the portfolio and sent him the link a few days before our meeting, but I forgot to make it public. When I met him during office hour, he told me he couldn't read it and asked me to repeat what I wrote. With such dense content in a portfolio, it was very difficult to clearly explain all that I wrote. It could have been much easier if he had read over it.

Dan: Sometimes, people might think it can be more efficient when you summarize it?

Sucheng: But the conference is only 20-minute long. I spent 10 minutes repeating my portfolio, and he only allowed me another 10 minutes to ask questions. But he read other students' portfolio beforehand, so their entire 20 minutes was saved for suggestions and exchanges.

Dan: How did you know [about other's conferences]?

Sucheng: I was sitting next to the other students in the room. It was a group conference. My time was very tight, so I couldn't accomplish anything.

Dan: If, ideally, the instructor had responded your email promptly, provided comments promptly, and helped you carry on with conversations a little bit during office hour, do you think that would have helped you?

Sucheng: Yes. I think I would have had more opportunities to ask more writing-related questions. Maybe I would think more deeply, and I would have sought for feedback when I had ideas. **But sometimes, even when I did have ideas during office hour, I would stutter, and then I just stopped asking.**

Dan: Interesting. Have you compared this instructor with other instructors?

Sucheng: Mainly, Caiqin kept telling me how nice her composition instructor is. Caiqin described that her instructor is amicable and he would also smile at her when talking. On the contrary, my instructor just stared at me the whole time, expressionless. Caiqin said it was very easy to speak with her instructor so Caiqin won't stutter. But when I spoke with my instructor, I would always be nervous. Then her instructor was also always on top of email responses. As long as it was not weekends, basically if an email was sent in the morning, Caiqin would usually receive a response in the afternoon. For instance, once Caiqin missed a class, so she emailed to ask about grouping. The instructor put her in a group and informed her right away.

During this conversation, Sucheng first pointed out the instructor's non-responsiveness both in emails and in person during office hours. When email communication did not go through, Sucheng took advantage of his office hours. However, this in-person communication was not as easy as Sucheng had expected either. Stuttering in a conversation could be the result of anxiety, and being stared at could further disfranchise Sucheng from participating in the conversation. The instructor may have wanted to allow Sucheng additional time to put her words together without realizing this only intensified Sucheng's feeling of awkwardness and increased her anxiety. The instructor did not provide input for this research; therefore, his perspective on his

interactions with Sucheng was unknown. What was clear, though, was that Sucheng had a preference in communication styles that differed from her instructor's, especially when she had a comparison with Caiqin's instructor, who was amicable and responsive. What was also clear was that, when Sucheng did not receive the response she hoped for, she started to doubt herself by thinking "maybe I sent him too much nonsense" or maybe "my English is too bad." These doubts can easily destroy the confidence needed to express information to someone in authority and silence international students from a fear that saying the wrong thing is worse than saying nothing at all, such as when Sucheng indicated, "*Sometimes, even when I did have ideas during office hour, I would stutter, and then I just stopped asking.*"

Additionally, Sucheng's experience reveals an issue regarding the criteria of informing and meeting expectations: when one specifically asks others to write emails if they have needs or questions, they will expect responses, whether by email or other means. Also, for scheduled office hour meetings for the purpose of discussing specific assignments, both the instructor and the student are expected to be prepared. When circumstances impact preparation, the unprepared individual should promptly inform others to ensure effective use of everyone's time. In the case of Sucheng's final portfolio conference, it was unfortunate that she had not made her portfolio public and that the professor did not indicate he was unable to access what she had sent. Had he done so, she could have resent the link or brought a summary of her portfolio to the meeting and avoided being put on the spot to summarize, which impacted her ability to ask all the questions she had prepared.

Finally, Sucheng observed how the instructor treated her and other students differently at the group conference. In Sucheng's mind, the instructor had a bias against her based on her observation that the instructor was prepared for other students but not her. The fact that Sucheng perceived a bias shows the experience mattered to her and impacted her writer identity. The fact that she chose to call it out also demonstrates that she now felt empowered to speak up. Compared to the Sucheng in Sequence 1, who was overwhelmed with figuring out classroom norms, greatly affected by the instructor comments, and trying to understand assignment expectations, she had evolved into an individual who was no longer too shy to speak up. The confidence she had gained working through writing challenges had empowered her in other areas as well. An additional benefit could be the gained knowledge of norms for college instructors after Caiqin expressed her supportive instructor's actions.

Nonetheless, Sucheng also acknowledged her instructor's strengths. At the beginning of this post-FYC interview, when asked to comment on the debate design in Sequence 1, Sucheng noted that "*his sequence design is very comprehensive and especially logical. It took me step by step, very organized.... I felt 'grounded' (脚着地).*" Though Sucheng struggled with a communication style that was incompatible with hers, she appreciated the instructor's course design and stated this fact at the beginning of the interview. Though the instructor was not verbally communicative, he put a great deal of thought into designing the debate, which might have helped to instill critical thinking for Sucheng early on in this course. Sucheng expressed her gratitude in the final portfolio reflection: "Mr. Marx's (pseudonym used) assignment sequences made perfect sense for me about how to build a complete debate and how to accomplish a complete research paper."

I am glad that Sucheng came out of English 131 as a confident writer. I also admire her resilience in continuing to go back to the office hour meetings that made her feel awkward. Her desire to learn and to succeed lent her the strength to endure anxiety and a feeling of bias, and

she did not let those negative feelings or experiences get in the way of improving her writing skills. Her experience should inspire instructors, and institutions, to ask some very important questions: Are our international students getting the support they need to succeed in FYCs? Are our FYC classrooms welcoming and encouraging to all, including our international students?

### Yanjin's Writing Development

Yanjin is the only participant who completed three years of high school in America. Her post-FYC interview was conducted towards the beginning of spring quarter in a lobby cafe outside of the university's business school building. Like her pre- and mid-FYC interviews, Yanjin preferred English for this post-course interview. The conversation was light and fun. Though Yanjin's English 131 grade was not as high as the other participants', she was very content with it, as were the others.

Sequence 2 in Yanjin's English 131 allows two paths for students. The first path begins with an editorial as SA2.1 which eventually leads to writing a literary criticism essay for MP2. Or students can also choose to write a research paper with a topic of their choice for MP2 and write an opinion piece as SA2.1 to explore MP2 topic. Yanjin chose to write a research paper, partially because she had experience writing one in high school. The topic she decided on is the legalization of marijuana. So in her SA2.1, she wrote an opinion piece titled: Why Marijuana Should Not Be Legalized? In the post-FYC interview, Yanjin explained that she chose this topic because it was well debated and researched, so she could easily Google search for personal opinions, researched resources, as well as government websites and policies in regard to this topic. Compared to Sequence 1, Yanjin seemed to favor Sequence 2 much more, as she stated in the post-FYC interview:

*The first sequence is about personal essays. It's more personal. There is an intimacy required for the first sequence. I didn't even use Major Paper 1 in my portfolio, because I didn't like the topic that was too vague. I'm very bad at personal essays. I tried to do an advising paper, but it didn't work out. But the second part is like research. Nothing is related to you, so you are more free. ... I think I like more research paper better.*

Yanjin's expressed her disfavor towards personal essays in both pre- and mid-FYC interviews, and she restated that sentiment in her post-FYC interview for similar reasons: they are *too personal* and *too vague*. Also, the fact that she had to share the essay with others via peer review made it even more difficult, as being forced to share private stories with others she was not close to seemed to challenge Yanjin's comfort level. Yanjin ended up drafting an advising piece titled: How to Achieve a Meaningful Life in College, to avoid *intimacy*. For instance, her first subclaim was about staying constantly motivated as an ingredient to balance college life. To support this claim, she shared her own strategies, such as writing down goals on her phone to motivate herself; she also shared bad examples from her own life, such as procrastinating by staying up all night. However, there was little description of what she had done or how she felt while staying up all night. Neither of these examples or stories included her deep emotions or feelings or analysis of the actions and the suggestive tone she adopted, further distancing the audience from her inner self. According to Yanjin's account above, "*It didn't work out.*" Compared to samples of personal essays they had read in this class such as Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue," Yanjin's MP1 did not read like a personal essay. It read more like the "I learned a

lesson” essay described by Sucheng previously. When the real person is taken out of a personal essay, it loses its genuinity and touches no one. Not surprisingly, in her instructor Rachel’s (pseudonym used) comments, she suggested Yanjin “go deeper.” I agree with Rachel’s assessment that Yanjin would benefit from additional writing practice and engaging in the deeper topic analysis essential to personal essay writing.

SA2.2, according to the one-sentence description in its prompt, was a stand-alone assignment that required students to “perform a close read on one passage of their choice.” Yanjin chose one paragraph from a course text titled “Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott. Initially, Yanjin found SA2.2 very challenging. When observing her SA2.2 first draft peer review in class, I noticed that Yanjin was puzzled at close reading as a genre, as was her Chinese partner Patrick. They both ended up paraphrasing and interpreting ideas in the chosen text, which Yanjin described as “stating the obvious” in the peer review. They also both struggled creating their original argument. Both issues were pointed out later in instructor Rachel’s end comment: “Good general discussion of main idea, but what interpretive argument are you beginning to build?” Yanjin was puzzled by the term “interpretive argument,” and she struggled with close reading, so she came to my office hours. Together we looked at the SA2.2 assignment prompt for the answer.

The prompt provided little information about close reading expect for some background requirements for the assignment, such as text choice, quotation use, and formatting (see Appendix III). The only part that suggests a writing direction reads below (emphasis added):

*Your paper should build to some kind of **interpretive argument**. No need to crystallize that interpretation into a traditional “complex claim,” but in order to make a successful argument, be sure to include--either explicitly or implicitly--each of the 5 major components of a “complex claim” in some way: argument, evidence, concession, stakes, roadmap.*

Based on this text, it is neither clear how “interpretive argument” is defined nor how it is different from a “traditional complex claim,” except that the former should still include the major components of the latter. It is also left implicit whether this “interpretive argument” should be located in the content (e.g., echoing, challenging or extending the main idea or a particular subidea from the text) or analyzing the writing itself (e.g., pointing out fallacies or warrants or analyzing effective use of rhetorical devices to convince the audience). Or was it intentionally left vague so that students would not be limited to one way or the other? Without further information, it is challenging for students, both international and domestic, to determine what is expected from them. After this office hour visit, Yanjin decided to shift analysis from content to writing strategies. In her cover letter, in the section for the last outcome, revision, Yanjin explained her decision making: “I focused more on the strategies she (the author Lamott) used, and how did they help her to convey her points more successfully.” Quoting from her own revised work, Yanjin seemed very proud of the final product, even though initially, at the peer review stage, Yanjin asserted she was not going to include SA2.2 in her final portfolio.

For international students with limited exposure to these genres, it can be very challenging to write a piece of close reading or rhetorical analysis. From my own MLL classrooms as well as the writing studios for international students, I have observed them going through different stages approaching these genres. First, they need to understand the text. For instance, when Chinese students were asked to close read “A Letter from Birmingham Jail” (or

“Letter”), many of them tried to search online for a Chinese translation. After understanding the words, they need to comprehend the meaning by determining social, political, and local context. Understanding certain references in the “Letter” requires having some background knowledge of the American civil right movement as well as some historical stories associated with it. Usually, international students search for online study guides. After completing these things, they might be ready to go beyond ideas and content to analyzing writing strategies. Most students stay at the stages of understanding meaning and context unless they are explicitly asked and taught how to analyze the writing itself. Otherwise, a simple task, such as analyzing tone, could be very challenging. In the writing studios, I observed students struggling to find specific words to describe tones that are beyond “happy,” “dissatisfied,” “angry,” and other such simplistic terms. When a list of tone vocabulary (e.g., compassionate, reminiscent) with brief definitions was shared prior to a group activity on tone analysis, students' performance was greatly improved. I remember Caiqin's sincere appreciation for the tone vocabulary guide. She commented that, even though she recognized all the words on the list because she learned them in TOEFL preparation, she had never applied them in real-meaning contexts. It had also never occurred to her that those TOEFL conversational vocabulary lists that she mostly learned in Chinese could be useful in writing.

Unlike other international students, who came to a US college directly, Yanjin actually practiced rhetorical analysis for three years in her American high school's English literature classes. In the post-FYC interview, Yanjin compared this with SA2.2 in FYC. She explained that, for high school rhetorical analysis essays, “*We were told to do the analysis, and we were given the stuff he (the instructor) wanted us to argue about.*” In Yanjin's first interview, she explained that, in her English literature classes, students were usually given a list of rhetorical devices to analyze, such as symbols, emotions, storylines, or plots, so students would not have to worry about running out of ideas. “*We just need to find evidence to back it up,*” said Yanjin in the post-FYC interview, “*do it was kind of hard for me to come up with my own argument, like, what to argue about [in SA2.2].*” This situation appeared to indicate Yanjin had challenges with independent or creative thinking in writing, a highly valued attribute in FYC, and also revealed that her English writing experience in an American high school may have impacted her college writing expectations. When the expectation set by her previous American writing experiences was met with a college prompt with little guidance, Yanjin struggled greatly.

When asked what she gained from English 131, Yanjin answered, “*I would say, the composition skills in general.*” When I pressed her for specifics, she did not go on with a list of writing skills or description of any particular skill, as other participants did. Instead, she briefly mentioned revision: “*I never revised any of my papers before. When I am done, I am done.... With MP2, it does take a lot of time to write a good essay. It takes revision after revision. Every revision, I feel like my essay gets better.*” This shows that Yanjin's attitude towards revision had changed and that she valued revision now. But again, she failed to provide specifics, such as what exactly she learned from the revising process. So I turned to Yanjin's cover letter, hoping to find more accounts that showcased her writing development. To note, unlike Lufang's or Sucheng's English 131 electronic portfolio, which usually required a final reflection with each of the 17 sub-outcomes individually analyzed, Yanjin's English 131 class, instead asked for a hard-copy portfolio that included a cover letter where the main outcomes were holistically analyzed. I could not help but wonder if this difference made Yanjin sound less well versed with the specific writing strategies described in the outcomes.

Zooming in on Yanjin's cover letter, I did find a small handful of writing strategies. For instance, she discussed audience in the Outcome 1 paragraph by providing two examples of a counterclaim. The next one that stood out to me was "line of inquiry," as she put it (some irrelevant information deleted): "I discussed the legalization problem from more obvious to less obvious. I first discussed..., then I went to.... After that,...Good line of inquiry and structure as a whole are well exemplified in this essay." This section of the cover letter reminded me of a MP2 outline peer review I observed when her classmate pointed out that she had a whole list of ideas and evidence, but none of them were connected. After that, Yanjin came to my office hours again to find a solution. I remember introducing to her the concept of "line of inquiry" as a means to address the issue and helped her sort out a line of inquiry that could connect most of the idea points well. While I was very glad Yanjin had been able to revise accordingly and had included the revision in her cover letter, I was also a little surprised by how quickly she seemed to have forgotten about it. In the post-FYC interview, when I specifically asked what kind of writing strategies she thought she had developed through her MP2 compared to her MP1, Yanjin responded, "*Major Paper 2 is basically the research skills, I think, the most important. Second important is being able to analyze and connect your ideas.*" When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by connecting her ideas, she failed to provide more details, only mumbling, "*Well, you don't want to leave a gap in your ideas.*" Arguably, some students may desire to quickly forget their English 131 experience because of the intensive writing and significant time involved. However, having seen Caiqin, Lufang, and Sucheng each list and articulate the key strategies they gained from FYC in their post-course interviews, it is difficult to determine how Yanjin has developed her writing skills and how much of the information she retained.

I also interviewed Yanjin's instructor Rachel after grades were posted in the beginning of spring quarter. She praised Yanjin's much more successful revision on SA2.2 and MP2. However, she also pointed out some issues in MP2: "*Much much more success in terms of details and backing up arguments. I still think there is kind of holes in the argument and assumptions that are being made.*" Rachel then found an example in her MP2 and read it out loud: "The most obvious consequence of marijuana is that it's physically harmful to the body." Here, Rachel tried to help Yanjin understand that she could not assume that all of her readers were immediately going to agree with her on this statement. Rather, Rachel said, "*It doesn't matter what side the audience is on before they read this, you just have to assume that you have to prove all these points and back it up with evidence.*" Yanjin may have argued that she did include a great deal of research to back up every point she was making. The bigger issue was the diction used. When using phrases like "the most obvious," a writer's credibility is negatively impacted, making it less likely the audience will listen or be convinced.

Besides diction via a phrase, setting a tone is also very critical. Rachel brought up another example: when Yanjin opened her MP2 first draft with a personal experience, writing, "This is my first time I smell the stinky smell of marijuana on the street in Seattle." She then went on depicting how much she was disgusted with this smell before she introduced her main claim that marijuana should not be legalized due to various reasons. By setting the tone of her subjective observations being the basis of fact, Yanjin reduced her credibility to speak on the legalization of marijuana. The comment comes across to the audience as the writer having already arrived at a conclusion (out of a smell she could not handle); regardless of what well-rounded facts may support her position, the audience is no longer 'listening'. Understanding the nuance of diction and proper application of words is a common challenge for international students. It is often

difficult for international students to capture and comprehend diction unless it is explicitly taught or discussed in class or applied in homework practice.

I also believe this same MP2 draft revealed another important issue in Yanjin's writing: a bias against marijuana, related to the "assumptions that are being made" Rachel referred to in a previous comment. As Yanjin presented in the opening paragraphs, "In Michigan or in China that I have stayed in, I have never smell the marijuana smell on the street, and the majority of people's views have always been against non-medical marijuana to be legalized." Yanjin disclosed that she grew up with the norm that marijuana is bad and people around her believed non-medical marijuana should be illegal. In Yanjin's mind, presenting this norm could help her easily slide to her main claim, that marijuana should not be legalized. Following this logic, the purpose of writing then becomes coming up with a list of reasons marijuana should not be legalized, and the purpose of research accordingly becomes finding evidence that favors these reasons. Indeed, students usually approach TOEFL writing in this manner. However, in the FYC setting, this one-sided style of argumentation is not enough. Rather, FYC encourages students to bring in multiple viewpoints, to examine their own norms and assumptions, and to challenge themselves to go beyond black-and-white dichotomies in order to become open-minded and well-rounded citizens. Rachel saw little such effort in Yanjin's MP2, which might help explain her comment during our interview that "*[i]t is lacking in complexity and critical thinking a little bit. There is nothing really out of the box here.*" Arguably, Yanjin did introduce one counterclaim in MP2, where she noted the tax benefit of selling marijuana and then she countered this with more research that showed "[t]he cost of marijuana sales actually outweighed the tax revenue generated from it." However, this counterargument-rebuttal still stayed within the black-and-white dichotomy and failed to bring more complexity to the issue. It appears the process of writing and researching MP2 did not really help Yanjin grow in critical thinking skills. Arguably, Yanjin chose what FYC instructors usually call "a dangerous topic" because it is well debated, making it difficult to come up with unique personal ideas not previously heard. Again, Yanjin thought she had chosen an easy topic but also missed a great opportunity to truly practice argumentation and develop critical thinking skills.

### **Yanjin's Writer Identity**

While Lufang labelled herself "a failure writer" and Sucheng highlighted her fear of writing in their final reflections, Yanjin opened her cover letter with "I have never considered myself as a good writer especially in my second language, English." In her pre-FYC interview, Yanjin stated that "*I am good at academic writings.*" Explaining academic writings, she referred to lab reports and rhetorical analysis essays she practiced in U.S. high school. In other words, though she did not see herself as a good writer, Yanjin entered FYC with a certain level of confidence in writing and certain expectations on academic writings as well. By the time she exited FYC, Yanjin had gained more confidence, as she stated in her cover letter: "By the end of this class, I have never been this confident to write an essay from all the intense writing practices we got from this course." In the post-FYC interview, Yanjin also expressed a sense of achievement and relief, recalling the moment she turned in her thick portfolio, looking back to the challenges she had gone through over the ten-week course. Indeed, Yanjin struggled greatly, starting from writing MP1, a personal essay that she felt uncomfortable writing. Yanjin also worked hard, especially on SA2.2 and MP2, though she still wished she could have put more effort into weekly assignments.

When asked to describe some memorable moments, Yanjin brought up her group presentation. Of all the participants, discounting Caiqin's quick in-class debate that required minimal preparation, Yanjin's class was the only one that included group presentations as a main course component throughout the quarter. The guideline for these presentations stated: "In groups of three or four, create a 20- to 30-minute class presentation on a text corresponding outcome of your choice." Yanjin's group presented on Outcome 3, about arguments, towards the second half of the quarter, while I happened to be observing that class. The group included two American students, another Chinese student, named Patrick, and Yanjin. The presentation was precise and entertaining. They included a short, funny video that mocked Outcome 3 while drawing out its core messages, which helped capture the audience's attention. Judging from the audience's laughter and engagement, the presentation was very successful. Yanjin appeared to be very relaxed, though afterwards she told me she was actually very nervous.

Yanjin appeared to enjoy working with her group, as she recalled this presenting experience in her post-FYC interview (emphasis added): "*I think that one went pretty well. **We** only put two hours into it, but **we** did it pretty well. It's kind of the time for **us** to really show off ourselves. I don't mind presentations, but it depends on who you work with. I think my peers in that presentation, they did a great job.*" From her use of pronouns such as *we*, *us*, and *ourselves* here, Yanjin was viewing herself as part of a team and demonstrating a sense of belonging when working with peers in the group. Compared to previous in-class peer reviews, where discussions were focused on each individual's work, here the group shared a goal of showing their skills to their peers and instructor, according to Yanjin. It was also very productive work, as the group only spent two hours practicing outside of class in preparation for what became a high quality presentation. Finally, compared to early peer reviews where Yanjin could be a little defensive when others pointed out issues in her writing, here Yanjin gave credit to her peers for the group's success. She had become humble and appreciative in group work.

Yanjin's sense of belonging is also evident in her cover letter. In the opening and conclusion of her cover letter, Yanjin used many first person plurals such as *we*, *us* and *our* to describe English 131 course content. For instance, she wrote (emphasis added):

*Unlike the English courses I had in high school, English 131 has clearer goal and themes of writings. The goal was able to demonstrate four outcomes in **our** 131 essays to future help **us** build an essay. I really likes there were two themes included in the course. The first theme was personal essay where **we** can dig deeper and explore in **our** unique identities, which I barely wrote any before. In the second theme, **we** started to write argumentative pieces and rhetorical analyses where **we** need to use more factual tone and more objective perspective. These two different themes add on top of each other to give **us** more varieties and perspectives, which build **us** into better overall writers. Although **we** had set themes for this course, the specific topics were still greatly depending on **our** own which I liked a lot.*

Yanjin's intense use of these terms further indicates her sense of belonging in this class. It appears Yanjin went through a difficult journey with her class, and as a group they achieved much. Contrastingly, Lufang and Sucheng both concentrated their final reflections on personal learning and growth; they literally never used a single "we" or "us" in these reflective pieces. I speculated that this might be a result of a genre difference between cover letters and final

reflections, depending on how they were introduced. This speculation led me to examine the three sample cover letters Yanjin had consulted when writing hers. These samples, uploaded on course files, were from Rachel's former English 131 students. I determined that all samples only used first personal singulars, exactly like the instructions Lufang and Sucheng received for their final reflections. This indicates that Yanjin made a choice, intentional or unintentional, to refer to her English 131 experience as a collective memory from a group she felt she belonged to.

Besides presentations and discussions, there were also eight in-class peer reviews in Yanjin's class, some done in groups of four and others in pairs. Rachel also shifted groups around each time so that, by the end, everyone had had a chance to work with all the other students. When asked to comment on peer reviews, Yanjin said she was initially very stressed and explained that even though she had no problem raising her hand and answering questions, she still found it very stressful to do peer reviews. She also described the peer pressure she felt at earlier peer reviews, when she often thought, "*Well, they are doing a great job, but my essay sucked!*" This initial insecurity about one's own work when compared with one's American peers is very similar among all the participants. Peer pressure during group work is also felt by all participants, mostly due to a language barrier or observed discrimination. Yanjin's answer to the question of whether she would be confident doing peer reviews in the future offered a somewhat different explanation: "*It depends....If it's science and I know my stuff, I can tell my peers what to do or give them suggestions, then of course. [But,] if I don't know anything about the class, when we do a peer review, if it is basically others tell me how to do things, there would be a lot of pressure.*" According to this notion, Yanjin's understanding of peer reviews is that one subject-matter expert one-sidedly tells the non-expert others what to do, rather than mutual discussions or explanations among members. The purpose of peer reviewing would then seem to be limited to sharing expert writing knowledge. This narrow perception of peer review could create issues that may prevent students, especially international students, from engaging and participating in group activities and would be good to flush out and correct early in any course utilizing peer reviews as a learning tool.

Yanjin did share a change in attitude towards peer review: "*I thought I was not so into the peer review thing. But later on, as this class progressed, we know each other better, I know a couple of kids in that class. I got more comfortable in the peer review.*" Yanjin made some friends and indicated that better relationships with her peers allowed her to become more open to peer reviews. Compared to her initial pressure, in the post-FYC interview, Yanjin said she felt more relaxed about peer reviews. I am not sure whether Yanjin's perception of peer review has completely changed, but, according to her instructor Rachel, Yanjin has clearly become more relaxed about seeking advice from peers. During Rachel's post-course interview, she detailed an observation of Yanjin's final peer review for MP2, when Yanjin pressured her American peer for more revision advice by asking, "Can you say more about this point? How would you revise it?" Overall, Yanjin seemed to have greatly benefited from those intense peer reviews and shared her appreciation at the very end of her cover letter, addressing Rachel:

*You "forced" us to stand out of our comfort zone through the peer reviews. However, the peer reviews really helped in our writings. Through looking for strategies and components in other peers' essays, peer reviews helped me to consciously include them in my own essays when I was writing them. It has been intense but brand new, great writing experience. Thank you a lot!*

In this final note, Yanjin admitted that peer reviews helped to push her out of her comfort zone and stretch herself. She appreciated this “push” and gave credit to the instructor. While Yanjin was able to get out of her comfort zone in terms of interacting with and learning from peers, when it came to her writer identity change, Yanjin still hesitated. When asked how she saw herself as a writer now that she had finished English 131, Yanjin answered, “*I still don't think I would consider myself as a writer. I think I'm more comfortable as researching, research, or writing research paper. But doing a personal essay, I would never be into that.*” By saying this, Yanjin was very clear about what she was comfortable writing. With little elaboration, I can quote the very first sentence in her cover letter: “As one of many pre-engineering students, English 131 was just my prerequisite to apply for my major.”

### Conclusion

This chapter primarily centered on post-FYC interviews that provided a space for all four participants to reflect on the second half of their FYC experience and what they learned about writing development and identity growth related to writing. One trend in several aspects of writing development and writer identity that participants emphasized in their mid-FYC interviews was an initial fear about new or unfamiliar genres followed by an increased confidence in writing. These statements might indicate the struggles they experienced on their first major paper taught them the biggest lesson of their FYCs, helping make the second sequence a more stable experience even though they were still learning new content and strategies. This appeared to be especially the case by the time they finished their final portfolio, where they reported being much more comfortable and accepting of various writing requirements, for example, building conversations among different texts. They had matured in terms of their attitudes toward writing, and they were less emotional about external factors, such as grades or instructor comments.

Specifically in regard to writing development, most participants were able to articulate the strategies they developed through their FYC such as performing genre analysis for Caiqin, creating intertextuality for Sucheng, doing responsible research for Lufang, and making substantial revisions for Yanjin. Most prominently of the writing essentials, critical thinking emerged as a common theme even though it was described in different forms by participants. For instance, Caiqin emphasized the importance of critical reading and evaluating information in psychology, Sucheng described building scholarly conversations for women's equity in STEM fields by bringing in multiple perspectives with a critical eye, and Lufang described expanding conversations around the theme “profanity” as facilitating her ability to think outside of the box for her MP2 idea. On the other hand, Yanjin’s significant struggle with grasping the concept of challenging biases left her instructor a little disappointed that the ten-week time frame of the class was not long enough for Yanjin to develop the powerful tool. The struggle to apply critical thinking to personal assumptions appears to be a common struggle for many Chinese students.

In terms of individual writer identity, every participant gained some confidence in writing. Their relationship with writing had changed. For instance, Caiqin enjoyed crafting a multimodal text for Paper 3, and, after her finishing FYC, she saw writing as a broad and complex tool she controlled. Lufang got excited about her MP2 idea and emphasized the need to be a responsible writer for her readers. Sucheng learned two valuable lessons about success in class, the first being to ensure one understands assignment requirements and the second to ask peers and professors for assistance. Sucheng began reviewing course prospectus information more closely and became more open to seeking assistance from Caiqin and the writing studio.

She abandoned her old habit of beginning a writing process by consulting other's ideas and learned to start with her own ideas and then research information. Sucheng also enjoyed writing MP2. Yanjin's relationship with writing also changed as she came to understand that, rather than simply completing a paper, quality writing requires multiple revisions. However, she claimed that she still did not see herself as a writer and, as an engineering student, was more comfortable writing research papers.

This chapter also captured some anecdotal stories that I hope shed light on our understanding of some unique aspects of international students in general and Chinese international students' writing and writer identity specifically. For instance, Caiqin's Link class helped us to see the benefit of choosing a discipline-specific composition class for international students. Lufang's summary piece on a plagiarism case showcased how an international student writer can be empowered to write a powerful piece when writing is given real-world meaning. Sucheng's less than optimal experience opportunities for FYC classrooms to provide more preparation for international students' needs and make the class more inclusive. Finally, as the only student who generated a sense of belonging in her class, Yanjin's group work experience, especially her intensive peer reviews, may highlight inclusion opportunities through peer review. This research is not meant to draw generalizations based on the experience of a limited number of participants. Rather, it relies on each participant's unique stories to productively bring Chinese international student writing experience into light. The final chapter will revisit these topics with classroom and research implications.

**Appendix I**

Post-FYC Interview Questions for Caiqin: 4/3/2015, 3:30pm

1. Can you talk about in general your experience writing Paper 3, compared to Paper 1 and paper 2? (Note: Paper 1 is an argumentative essay titled APA as epistemology? Paper 2 is a literature of research on your chosen topic: visual perception; Paper 3 is genre adaption that requires creating a genre to specific audience, communicating the concepts/ideas of paper 2.)

Follow up question: It seems like Paper 2 includes a broad range of research articles, while you only picked one in your paper 3. What was your consideration? And what do you think of this process of deduction?

2. Now look back at the course, what have you learned and gained? Can you flash back and describe any memorable moments from this class? It can be a moment of success or struggle.
3. If you have a chance to retake this class, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?
4. How do you see yourself as a writer now? Follow up question: What has made you a stronger writer? It also seems like you have gained more confidence towards the second half of the quarter, what do you think is the turning point for you?
5. How do you think what you have learned from this writing class can benefit your future writings or writing outside of the class? For example, writing in Psychology? Or writing in contexts other than Psychology?

## Appendix II Lufang's CSE Case Summary

As a freshman, I had so much expectation and hope after getting into this university. I knew that I was going to spend the most colorful four years in my life here, becoming a better person. Of course I wished everything would be smooth and nice, but life is not always perfect. Meeting challenges is an important part of college life. Even though some of those are totally out of my expectation, I still have to face them. In fact, after going through these challenges, I really learnt something that I would never learn from classrooms. People may never read these in any textbooks, but people could learn these from other's experiences. This is why I wrote this article. I just solved an exciting case and I had great passion to share this story with you to tell you how to avoid getting into unnecessary trouble, and how to find ways to face unexpected challenges, if you have to.

I started my college life in the fall of 2014. As an international student learning and living in another country, I had a hard time to fit in this new environment. I was struggling with using second language and with problems of culture background differences every day. Dealing with these problems was hard, but they were still within my expectation. I found as many chances as possible to improve my English skills and to get to know more about American culture, but when the “surprise” came, my mind just shut down.

The “surprise” came to me in December when I was enjoying my winter break with my families in my hometown in China. One day I received an email from CSE department which says that two of my assignments were highly similar to another student's. They wanted an explanation from me. I remember that during the fall quarter, I sent my assignments to a classmate who asked me some questions about the assignments and later asked to take a look at my assignments. His reason was that he had already finished his coding work, but his code did not work, so he wanted to compare my assignments with his. I trusted him and sent my assignments to him, but I had absolutely no idea that he would just copy my assignments. Honestly, at that point I had absolutely no idea that I had already violated a course policy, as stated in the course syllabus that, "students in CSE 142 are to complete programming assignments individually and are prohibited from providing or receiving assistance." Though this had also been emphasized by the instructor of this course, I panicked when I received that e-mail, especially for these sentences in the e-mail:

If a violation of the course Policy on Collaboration has occurred, we might decide to settle the case informally if you will accept a score of 0 on the assignment. If we resolve the case this way, no record of the incident will appear on your permanent record. After talking with the instructor, you or we may decide that your case should be sent to the college committee that handles academic misconduct. If you select this option, you will have an opportunity to present your side of the story to the committee. Information about the academic integrity process and your rights can be found by asking Pim Lukas and from the following URL.

The culture difference made me misunderstand these messages totally. Obviously, they gave me a chance to explain myself and they were willing to do so, but from my cultural background, when the word “college committee” appeared, I naturally thought that would be the worst situation to communicate with an official department. I was so afraid of authority. I thought that if I tried to argue with them, they would be very likely to give me a negative

record that might even influence my visa for US. My parents and all my friends had never been through this either, so nobody could give me any advice. I felt that I was somehow threatened, and I should just admit that I showed my assignments to someone and a "0" score would be the best result for me, so I did that. The result is that my course grade was turned into 3.0 from a 3.7.

For the next month or so, I believed that was the end of the story. I thought I could work hard on other courses to recover from this mistake GPA wise, but this thing had never got out of my mind. I knew how much effort I put into this course. I was trying to help others nicely. I was also afraid this might affect my future in a long term. I felt so upset about this every day. Finally, I decided to ask for help.

One of the awesome parts of this university is that there are always people who are willing to support you to face challenges like this. Approaching them for help is much easier than you might have thought, because they are just waiting for you to ask. I met these awesome people from CLUE, the Academic Supporting Programs at UW. I attended their Conversation Group sessions to practice my English-speaking skills, and I made friends with two instructors: Dan Zhu, a composition instructor from English Department and Rokas Brown, the program manager of UW's Academic Support Programs. Spending fun time with them during Conversation Groups, I believed that they really care about international students, and they have the ability to give me trustworthy advice. I told them what happened and why it upsets me. I also showed them the email. After they explained it to me, I realized that I totally misunderstood the email. By consulting them, I was encouraged to explain my situation to the CSE department. It is my right to do so! Rokas and Dan did not only encourage me, but also really helped me to deal with this step by step. They gave me advice on the email to CSE Department course coordinator Mr. Lukas.

After simply introducing my case through e-mail, I was able to make an appointment with Mr. Lukas. At that time, my purpose of meeting him was not only for myself, but also for getting experiences for more international students who share the same culture background with me. Three people attended this conversation, Mr. Lukas, Dan and me. I led the conversation, explained my situation and asked questions. Mr. Lukas answered every question patiently, and Dan attended this conversation for supporting me in language and confidence, and getting experiences for helping more international students. We discussed about why this happened. I concluded that from my educational background, I was always encouraged to share my work with others, but of course we are not encouraged to copy other's work. However, I cannot control other's behaviors. In this case, the core of learning is about learning by oneself. Because of this difference in education background, I cannot really understand the meaning of 'do not share work with other students. Instead, I understood it as 'do not copy others work, but you can share your work with others for discussing', but the true meaning of these words should be 'you cannot share your work with anyone in any form.'

Having learned from this case, I think the best way to avoid making mistakes due to culture differences is to ask help from people who can give you responsible answers, but do not just guess or assume. Even a few weeks ago, someone asked me to send an assignment to her. She promised that she would not copy it, but I said that 'Rules are rules. As long as I send it to you, I break the rules. Students are supposed to finish assignments independently. If you

get any extra help from me, this is unfair to other students. No matter you copy my work or not, and no matter they catch you or not, this is wrong.'

During the same meeting, we talked about rest of my college study. Yes, an unexpected trouble happened, but I should not be struggling with this for a long time. By focusing on the future, people can see that I did not mean to break the rules deliberately, and I really learnt a lesson from this experience. I could take other CSE courses to show my coding skills. Mr. Lukas even said that from my course record he could see my talent in this field, and he encouraged me to apply for this major in the near future. This conversation not only cleared all my questions, but also gave me the confidence to face the rest of my college study. He appreciated my courage to initiate this conversation with him, and told me that I always have right to explain myself to anyone in this university when I feel confused or being treated unfairly. There was no reason to be afraid of doing so.

From this experience, I learnt how to find help when I run into trouble. I learnt that communicating with professionals who have a title was not that terrifying. I learnt that in the university people might make mistakes, but learning from these mistakes is an important part of college life too. I could see how much effort I put in order to prove that I would not make this mistake again. Hope you can learn something with me from my case without actually running into similar trouble yourself. However, if you do so, try to you find the confidence and the ways to solve it from this too!

At last, hope all of us can enjoy our college life, here will be the start of our colorful life!

**Appendix III**  
**Yanjin's SA2.2 Prompt**  
SHORT ASSIGNMENT 2.2

*Close Reading*

**Due date: Wednesday 18th February**

*Perform a close read on one passage of your choice.*

Some guidelines:

- Please choose a passage from **a text we have studied in the course**.
- The text should be **no longer than 1 paragraph or 1 stanza**.
- The paper should make ample use of direct **quotations**. You may want to block quote all or part of the passage early on (after introducing and setting up the context) and then use short integrated quotations during your analysis. Nothing should be quoted if it will not be sufficiently analyzed (as a general rule, any analysis should be *at least* twice the length of the quote to which it corresponds; i.e. if you quote 1 full sentence, you should spend *at least 2* sentences analyzing it).
- **Quotes should be properly formatted** according to MLA guidelines.
- Your paper should build to some kind of **interpretive argument**. No need to crystallize that interpretation into a traditional “complex claim,” but in order to make a successful argument, be sure to include--either explicitly or implicitly--each of the 5 major components of a “complex claim” in some way.
  1. Argument
  2. Evidence
  3. Concession
  4. Stakes
  5. (Roadmap)

Your paper should be **2-3 pages**, double-spaced, 12-point Times font, with 1-inch margins.

Bring **2 copies** to class on Monday.

All short assignments should meet a length requirement of 1-1.5 pages single-spaced (this means minimum of 1 FULL page). Papers should be single-spaced, in 12-point Times font, with 1-inch margins. Include your name, the assignment (“SA1.1” for example) and an original title. Use page numbers and staple if there are multiple pages. Failure to meet length requirements and/or format specifications on any assignment will result in an “incomplete” assignment grade. Please print double-sided if you are able.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: CONNECTING THE DOTS

This study examined the development of four female Chinese students' writing and writer identities during their FYC classes in winter quarter 2015, which was also the second quarter of their university experience in the US. Adopting qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and text analysis, this research set out to explore these three questions: What writing experiences, identities, and needs do these international students bring as they enter the university? How has their writing developed, and how has their writer identity evolved? What implications does this have for meeting the needs of international student writers?

This concluding chapter is intended to connect the dots of findings from previous chapters in order to paint the trajectories of each participant's writing development and any writer identity change each may have undergone. It also notes implications of these findings for students and instructors, followed by a reflection on the research. Given that the work of this study is based on a limited number of Chinese students, findings and trends presented here can by no means be generalized to all international students' writing experiences. The hope is that, by diving deep into each participant's writing stories and their composition classroom, we may learn something valuable about what resources they each bring into FYC (their "incoming" knowledge), how they each evolved due to FYC, and finally how these insights can inform us about the possibilities of FYC.

#### Findings on "Incoming" Knowledge

The four participants came to this university through different pathways: Caiqin and Sucheng went to the same international school in Southeast China, Lufang went to a public high school in Beijing and took private English test preparation courses, and Yanjin studied in an American private high school in Michigan for three years. Prior to college, they all had over ten years of English language study and a few years of English writing training. Before high school, these students' English language exposure was rote and limited. English writing was embedded in English language learning. Therefore, writing was more associated with constructing sentences and paragraphs as a way to practice new vocabulary, phrases, or sentence structures than with communicating arguments. Consequently, their pursuit of English writing in that period was focused on grammar and language accuracy. Furthermore, making a grammar mistake had real consequences. For instance, Sucheng's abiding memory of English writing in middle school was the red marks all over her 100-word paragraph on an English test. Similarly, in her background questions, Lufang expressed a fear of making grammar mistakes. She carried this focus on grammar into her first few FYC essays, in which she specifically asked her instructor to point out grammar issues.

Moving on to high school, English writing was still grammar-heavy, but with an additional focus on "nativeness" of language use. According to Caiqin, writing for her IB class was about putting most of her effort into perfecting the language and searching for accurate expressions that she had had little previous exposure to. At the same time, the process of writing had become more stressful, and the learners were trained to be more practical, especially when preparing for high-stakes tests such as the TOEFL, the SAT, or the IB Writing Test. Using the TOEFL as an example, all participants had to take it multiple times to get an ideal score. Lufang mentioned that she had to take the test six times. She broke down before taking it the last time due to the stress of believing her applications could be greatly impacted by a one-point

difference. Lufang recounted that “*the pressure was suffocating.*” Though she came out of this experience with strong self-confidence and resilience, this painful experience clearly did not help her build an “English self.” Nevertheless, according to the participants’ collective memory, accomplishing an adequate result on the TOEFL symbolized an end to time-pressured English writing and marked a necessary milestone in achieving their goal of being accepted to attend an American university.

Another critical English writing experience during high school was participants’ college application essay writing. Though all participants were not very familiar with this particular genre, and some of them were not very comfortable with it because it requires applicants to “brag” about themselves, they all seemed to have learned a great deal through this writing process. For instance, Lufang started to consider a writer’s own feelings and readers’ values (e.g., what does an American admission officer value?), which exemplifies a genre awareness of college essays developed among the participants. Also, at a college application counseling lecture, Sucheng learned about the importance of presenting stories that are unique to the applicant and avoiding the “I-learned-a-lesson” essays typical among Chinese students. She called it an “enlightenment moment” in her English writing. Overall, writing college essays seemed to be their first exposure to thinking about and reflecting on who they were and what they aspired to be if accepted into American universities. Though it could be uncomfortable, preparing for college essays was the first time most participants started to engage an English self.

### **Findings on Writing Development**

Entering FYC, Yanjin seemed to have a less challenging transition than the other three participants. She appeared to fit into the class immediately. First, she did not hesitate to raise her hand to ask or answer questions during whole-class discussions, which was rare among the other participants. Her confidence in class participation was also evident from her interactions with peers during paper peer reviews. Yanjin’s class adopted intense peer reviews—almost all six papers in this class required a peer review in pairs or in groups. Unlike other participants, who initially either thought peer reviews were unproductive or questioned the value of peers’ opinions, Yanjin seemed open to the large amount of in-class peer reviews and later actively sought ways to benefit from and contribute to this unique class setting. Yanjin’s comparatively smoother transition into FYC can be explained by her natural individual confidence. Her three years’ experience in an American high school might also have prepared her well for classroom styles in college.

In contrast, upon entering FYC, Caiqin, Lufang and Sucheng had a more challenging time adjusting. In small classes of twenty-three students taught by native English speakers, Caiqin, Lufang, and Sucheng identified themselves as minorities. Caiqin, for example, believed she was the only international student in her class. With little knowledge about what college writing entailed, these participants became nervous and each had somewhat less satisfying experiences during the first few weeks of their respective FYC classes. For instance, Caiqin was dissatisfied with the large amount of class time spent on group discussions, which did not “teach much.” Caiqin expected more lecturing and teaching from the instructor so that she could learn from the one with the right answers in the classroom. As another example, Lufang had a hard time comprehending her course topic and thought the key words discussed in her class readings—“bitch”, for example—were deeply rooted in American culture. She also hesitated to participate in whole-class discussion because she felt she lacked the knowledge or understanding of this culturally dense term required in order to intelligently participate in class discussions.

Similarly, Sucheng struggled to follow the thread of her instructor's questions and class discussions, let alone participate. She entered her English 131 expecting to learn how to write a research paper so that she would not have to make the same mistakes (e.g., inadequate citations) as she had in a previous Informatics research course. When she learned that the first sequence of her FYC assignments was to write a debate series rather than a research paper, Sucheng was disappointed.

These initial dissatisfactions were quickly overshadowed by each individual's anxieties as course writing intensified. First, most participants had a difficult time adjusting to writing papers every week. Furthermore, these papers were much longer than what they were used to writing in English. For instance, all participants had fears their first time writing a five- to seven-page paper. On top of a workload of course readings and other forms of assignments such as peer reviews or research, writing a paper every week was intimidating and overwhelming.

In addition, all participants started to encounter new writing jargon (such as "genre," "claim," and "line of inquiry") and new genres (e.g., "rhetorical analysis," "personal essay," and "literature review"). Anxiety was evident in most participants when they were introduced to these new concepts, especially during the first sequence of the course when they were still figuring out course logistics and teacher expectations as well as class dynamics. For most participants, it was an emotional rollercoaster ride when they first encountered a new genre of writing. As a few examples, Caiqin struggled with rhetorical analysis and literature review of published psychology articles, Yanjin had a hard time filling up a five-page "personal essay" to deliver a deep, meaningful message, and Sucheng had no clue how to identify and analyze logical fallacies in her peer's work for SA2 and became very nervous for not knowing how to write a prospectus.

During the first half of the course, the three participants who came directly to the US for college overtly expressed concerns over language accuracy and authenticity in writing. Some were worried about making grammar mistakes, and others were concerned that they were not able to articulate their thoughts to instructors or peers in native-like English expressions. These concerns were evident in the aftermath of the grammar-heavy and language-learning-focused style in which English writing is typically taught in China. Such concerns deepened for Sucheng after she read her American peer's SA1: as she put it (translated), "*I felt like their writing was so deep, whereas mine reads like written by a kindergartner, especially in terms of sentence structures and language to present thoughts.*" In addition to insecurity with using the English language, participants also seemed unsure about their writing ideas. They habitually sought confirmation of their ideas from instructors before putting them in writing. For instance, Lufang would utilize Small Talks to share her ideas with her instructor, Norbert, and ask him to confirm if she *could* use them in her writing.

It was also delightful to observe that, despite feeling overwhelmed, these participants proactively sought support to overcome the aforementioned challenges. During this first stage of their classes, they turned to writing samples provided by their instructors or found on the internet, they went to office hours and writing center tutoring sessions, they utilized the writing studio, they took advantage of Small Talks to check in with their instructor, and so on. In one way or another, they each found themselves able to complete the task they had previously found very challenging. Some even did exceptionally well, reflected by a high grade or positive teacher comment. These successes helped to further decrease concerns over language use, shifting the participants' attention to exchanging authentic ideas as scholars or writers. In other words, when

confidence was instilled, participants were more comfortable with taking ownership of their writing, and consequently their self-perception as a writer improved.

Achieving successes when writing papers in their first FYC sequences marked a turning point in participants' writing identity, which in turn likely resulted in substantial writing development in the remainder of the quarter. These aspects of writing development were well captured in their mid- and post-FYC interviews. Some were shared by all participants; others were idiosyncratic. The intention behind presenting these writing improvements here in the concluding chapter is by no means to sketch out certain trends in all international students' writing; rather, it is to showcase the range of learning that these participants reported they achieved through their FYC experience in the hope of informing readers of what can be achieved in FYC classrooms and what can be done to facilitate this learning. In what follows, I would like to present four aspects of their main writing achievements: the confidence to write in new genres, a shift from grammar to higher-order writing concerns, a refinement of critical thinking, and a display of intrinsic motivation to think and write independently.

### **Confidence to Write in New Genres**

Firstly, in comparison to the common anxieties about new genres during the first few weeks of FYC classes, there was an observed increase in confidence from all participants when tackling new genres in the second sequence. They seemed less anxious about lacking knowledge of the writing genres assigned to them, but instead became more focused on learning about both the genres' characteristic features themselves and the reasons behind them. For instance, when Caiqin was assigned a literature review as her second major paper, instead of panicking as she did with the first, rhetorical analysis piece, she trusted her homework exercise and in-class discussion, which helped to dissect the literature review genre. She learned that she needed to summarize and evaluate the readings. However, according to her instructor's comment on her half draft, these steps alone were not enough for a literature review. To further engage scholarly audiences, she would also need to identify a knowledge gap by putting the readings into conversation and finally to introduce her own claims to address that gap. Caiqin finally understood that the significance of a literature review is to create something new by stepping on the shoulders of others. In Caiqin's case, it took significant scaffolding to establish the beliefs that a new genre is learnable and it takes skills and efforts to learn. In a sense, this faith in her own capacity to learn took away her fear of the unknown.

It also helped that, by the second sequence, participants had already learned what was expected in the classes and where they could receive support. For instance, Sucheng learned to carefully read assignment requirements in the course syllabus, which allowed her to focus her mind on understanding expectations from the detailed requirements rather than letting her fear of the unknown take over. During the process of tackling a new genre, many participants also learned to reach out for help. They relied on writing samples, peer reviews, office hours, the writing studio, and other such resources. Though not every source of support was helpful—for instance, a doctorate-level sample prospectus made Sucheng even more desperate—each participant was driven from source to source until they received what they needed to accomplish the task of writing in a new genre. In other words, their determination, as well as the accessibility of resources, made it possible to overcome their challenges.

### **A Shift from Grammar to Higher-order Writing Concerns**

Secondly, when asked what they gained from FYC, participants mostly listed higher-order writing concerns, in contrast to their original focus on grammar and English language ability. For instance, Sucheng learned that to build powerful arguments one needs to bring in multiple perspectives. When sharing her experience writing a strong literature review, Sucheng expressed that (translated) “[y]ou need to (要) present this person’s point of view, then how another person disputes it, and then how others dispute what’s disputed. You also need to (要) add your own opinion and your own analysis.” Here, her writing’s purpose was to strategically put ideas from different texts into conversation and, ultimately, to enter this conversation with her own opinion. In Caiqin’s case, she built a strong sense of genre awareness which freed her to make deliberate writing decisions to replace psychology jargon with words and pictures that were more applicable to a PowerPoint format targeting high school athletes. Lufang demonstrated creative thinking and risk-taking when she attempted to expand the parameter of the term “profanity” by using the lens of this term to look at human and animal relations in Major Paper 2. Essentially, she discovered that arguments centered on “profanity” had traditionally been associated with inequality between groups with different genders, races, social-economic statuses, and so forth. However, little attention had been paid to inequality between humans and animals. Therefore, she tried to address this inequality through the lens of “profanity,” especially the ways in which language was used similarly between human and animals, to expand and contribute to the understandings of “profanity.”

To conclude, various evidence can be found to demonstrate that participants shifted from language accuracy and authenticity to higher-order writing concerns such as strong arguments, genre awareness, or in-depth exploration of course themes. It seemed that all four classes achieved the goal of not further punishing multilingual students for or stressing grammatical errors but instead helping to shift the focus onto their original ideas and the effective communication thereof. The extra room to allow this focus shift seemed to have made students feel more secure about their ideas and more comfortable engaging in classroom activities and writing practice. It is also important to point out that this focus shift did not indicate that participants had fully overcome language issues. As a matter of fact, some grammar issues remained. For example, Lufang still spelled “college” as “collage” and had a few run-on sentences. However, it also seemed that when confidence in communicating ideas through writing was instilled, participants were more willing to actively deal with language issues. For instance, Caiqin reported that she always did her own grammar check before submitting her essays. Sucheng utilized writing centers quite often during the revision phase of FYC to identify grammatical error patterns. Lufang specifically asked Norbert to point out grammar issues in her essays. In her post-FYC interview, Lufang particularly expressed her appreciation towards Norbert’s effort to help her with grammar in a comfortable manner.

### **A Refinement of Critical Thinking**

Thirdly, most participants reported that they had developed critical thinking skills. For instance, during her mid-FYC interview, Caiqin stated, “*I felt like I started to have a critical mindset, which has increased my interest in Psychology.*” Though some of them (Caiqin and Yanjin) claimed to have gained critical thinking skills from high school English classes, most encountered challenges when asked to critically engage with others’ writing. For instance, during the first few weeks, Caiqin was shocked to notice that, when discussing assigned readings in

groups, her American peers would always start with criticism of these peer-reviewed, published articles in Psychology. “*Before FYC,*” Caiqin explained, “*I never doubted anything about the authors.*” Similarly, in her Short Assignment 2, Lufang had to write a letter to Noreen Malone, the author of “What Do You Really Mean When You Say ‘Basic Bitch’?” Lufang found it challenging to think of issues with this well-regarded piece, let alone to directly address its author. In Sucheng’s case, when she was asked to identify logical fallacies in her American peer’s Short Assignment 1, she said, “*It is less likely for me to spot them.*” In her mind, native speakers of English exuded an authority that she found difficult to challenge—as she put it, “*After all, this is their mother language, so their writing must have very strong logic.*”

All three aforementioned cases helped to reveal a barrier participants encountered when practicing critical thinking in FYC: they were not used to challenging established authors or native-English-speaking American peers—in other words, those with perceived authority. In the context of China, where citizens are used to not having the right to challenge authorities without fear of punishment, it is understandable for one to be afraid of doing so, even when away from China. Also, this habit of not challenging authority can be traced back to China’s K-12 education system. For instance, in a typical Chinese language arts class, students are often asked to analyze how well rhetorical strategies are utilized in a chosen text for the purpose of stimulating analytical thinking and teaching rhetorical strategies. Seldom would Chinese students be asked to question anything from a sample text or challenge a well-established author. When it comes to English writing, there is also an extra layer of linguistic authority added to this habit of mind, as explained in Caiqin’s mid-FYC interview: “*As a Chinese student, my first idea is: oh, the teacher gave this [article] to us, so it must be a good example or I must find something useful for my own paper.*” Here, Caiqin referred to a typical method of learning English writing in an EFL setting such as China, where students are used to worshipping writing samples provided by the teacher or textbook. A common practice in English classes is to have students extract and memorize new vocabulary and phrases in order to enrich their own English writing, a typical “from input to output” method common in China’s English teaching; doubting these samples could also mean challenging the authority of native English speakers and the teacher. In a sense, many years of this type of “sample worshipping” exercise could have reinforced a habit of heavy focus on rote language learning and cultivated a mindset of conforming rather than critically engaging with texts.

It is worth noting that, after participants were given permission or encouraged to challenge texts through class discussions or writing practice in FYC, they were able to grasp critical thinking fairly quickly. Three of the four students reported that they had developed critical thinking skills and were able to apply them in reading and writing during their time in FYC and beyond. For instance, Sucheng described building scholarly conversations for women’s equity in STEM fields by bringing in multiple perspectives with a critical eye. Lufang recounted that expanding conversations around the theme “profanity” facilitated her ability to think outside of the box for her MP2. More strikingly, their understanding of critical thinking had evolved beyond “criticizing” and landed on something broader and deeper. For instance, Caiqin concluded in her post-FYC interview that, “*During the English class, I practiced critical thinking very much. Rather than just believe in a theory, I begin to look at what supports this theory, for example, data, the supporting ideas, the experiment, and more.*” Here, Caiqin exemplified a reader self Chinese participants brought to FYC, one that believed in what was presented in the text because it was written by experts and assigned by the instructor. Ultimately, Caiqin also demonstrated the possibility of achieving new understandings of critical thinking

through FYC and acquiring a variety of critical thinking tools (e.g., questioning claims, evaluating evidence, and analyzing language choices in texts).

There were also other barriers to participants' development of critical thinking. For instance, participants seemed to struggle with arguing from both sides of an issue. As an example, when Sucheng was assigned to write about a hotly debated topic—the legality of waterboarding—in Short Assignment 1, she chose to go against it because she was personally inclined to take this stance, which she believed would make it easier for her to research evidence to support her stance. Then, in Major Paper 1, she was required to drop her previous position and defend the opposite—to argue that waterboarding should not be considered torture or made illegal. During her pre-FYC interview, Sucheng described coming up with evidence to support an argument she did not personally believe in as an immense challenge. It was clear that arguing for the sake of debating rather than out of one's mind and heart was something she was not used to and with which she lacked practice. Despite the challenge, Sucheng practiced and practiced, and she learned quickly. This is demonstrated in the following example of her defending waterboarding despite not personally believing in the practice in response to her peer's argument:

*Additionally, you mentioned that we should focus on evolving the technologies of electronic surveillance in interrogating, but if you considered waterboarding as torture and harms the right of terrorists, electronic surveillance also deprives their right of freedom thus should be made illegal as well....Once terrorists do not take care of even the most basic obligations as a square john and threaten other's lives, they automatically give up their rights. Also, electronic surveillance does not have the function of deterrence just as waterboarding....*

However, not all attempts at critical thinking development were successful. Yanjin failed to become aware of her own bias when writing Major Paper 2 on marijuana legalization. To provide an example, Yanjin's MP2 began with a description of the "stinky smell" of marijuana on the street in Seattle and went on to state that the writer was "bothered" by marijuana use. These introductory lines came across to the audience as the writer having already arrived at a conclusion out of a smell she could not handle, revealing the writer's pre-existing bias against marijuana. In the same paragraph, Yanjin wrote, "In Michigan or in China that I have stayed in, I have never smell the marijuana smell on the street, and the majority of people's views have always been against non-medical marijuana to be legalized." Here, the writer disclosed that she grew up with the norm that marijuana was bad and people around her believed non-medical marijuana should be illegal. First, this norm itself is based on a personal experience, as well as an assumption that was not backed up. Second, it further disclosed the writer's deeply rooted bias against marijuana—a bias that she admitted she grew up with. Failing to recognize this bias harmed the writer's credibility and made it harder for the writer to stretch her thinking and bring complexity to the issue. Then, the writer devoted the rest of this paper to presenting evidence of the side effects of marijuana use, including health, cost, and so forth. The entire paper read one-sidedly and stayed within a black-and-white dichotomy. To borrow her instructor Rachel's comment: "*It is lacking in complexity and critical thinking a little bit. There is nothing really out of the box here.*"

I found similar issues of struggling to recognize or challenge one's own bias in a few other Chinese students' writing through the composition classes and writing studios I taught.

This appeared more frequent when students chose a politically debated topic in the western world, such as waterboarding, the legalization of marijuana, gun control, or the balance between privacy and government surveillance. Growing up in a homogeneous society like China, where the views on certain topics are seldom challenged and people are rarely exposed to any alternatives, students usually struggle to open themselves up to views that are different than what they are familiar with and end up in a black-and-white dichotomy with little in between. This does not, however, mean it is impossible to practice critical thinking through these topics. Rather, many of our students are flexible enough to stretch their thinking and capable of developing critical thinking by diving deep into these topics if they are given room to surface writers' existing biases and learn about what is on the other side of the issues. The debate sequence offered in Sucheng's class is a good example of such room. To clarify, the goal here is not to persuade any students to change their views; rather, it is to expose them to views they are not even aware of and challenge them with views that are different from those they are familiar with, then to offer them tools to evaluate what they know and what they have researched, and finally to hand over the liberty to make writing decisions for themselves.

### **A Display of Intrinsic Motivation to Think and Write Independently**

Besides critical thinking, participants also became less dependent on external stimuli such as writing samples, grades, or instructor comments and began to discover the importance of independent thinking. At the beginning of FYC, there were many external factors that affected participants well-being and writing performance both positively and negatively. For instance, Caiqin was encouraged by a far-above-average grade for Paper 1, which boosted her confidence to tackle other writing tasks. For Sucheng, her instructor's one-sentence comments on the first two assignments (a discouraging one in Short Assignment 1 and an uplifting one for Short Assignment 2) put her on an emotional rollercoaster and greatly affected her well-being.

Later in the course, as participants figured out the expectations of the classes and places to seek support, and also as they developed critical thinking skills, they became less affected by those external factors and more independent in thinking and making writing decisions. For instance, as Sucheng described (translated), "*When I wrote essays before, I would always consult others' writing first. As for now, I start with my own ideas.*" Sucheng was also able to confidently accomplish writing MP2 in the absence of feedback from the instructor and said, "*It [the lack of instructor feedback] does not affect me anymore.*" Also, while Lufang initially often felt insecure about her ideas and had to ask Norbert for confirmation during Small Talks, she too later discovered that "*[f]or writing, there's never been a right answer....After finishing this course, I need to finish writing by myself and I need to choose, to make decision [by] myself.*"

Behind the possibilities these participants showed us, especially their confidence to tackle new genres, a shift in focus to higher-level writing concerns, a critical thinking mindset, as well as an independent thinking habit, were their diligence, persistence, and resilience, as well as a change in their writer identity. In the next section, we will be closely examining the unique identities each participant brought to FYC and how they evolved over the course of FYC.

### **Findings on Writer Identity**

As the interview data indicates, each participant brought to the university a unique self, reflecting either their family upbringings or pathways to an American university. They also entered FYC with distinctive writer selves, reflecting their previous writing experiences in

Chinese, in English classes, and in high-stakes tests. In this section, I would like to connect some dots between these unique personal identities and writer identities in order to address questions such as: What personal and writer identities did these Chinese international student participants bring to FYC? How did they evolve over the course of FYC? In what ways could these “incoming identities” and their evolutions inform FYC classrooms? In this section, I would like to focus in turn on a “hero” figure at home, an identity juxtaposed with American peers, a strong and cultivated resilience, and a renewed relationship with writing.

### **From “Hero” at Home to “Hero” in K-12, and then to “Hero” in FYC**

To start with, all participants seemed to have had a hero at home. They looked up to this hero figure, either their mother or father. For instance, Sucheng aspired to become someone as confident and strong as her father. She admired her father as the head of household, who would always take care of his wife and daughter and was courageous enough to fight for his rights. Yanjin, on the other hand, was proud of her father’s success as a lead engineer and emphasized that her father’s success had secured a comfortable life for her and her stay-at-home mother. She also saw her father’s engineering blood in herself, which was her reason for applying to the Material Engineering major. Caiqin looked up to her hardworking and resilient mother, who worked her way up from a villager to a thriving professional in the city. Caiqin also appreciated her mother’s parenting style, which had kept her own happiness independent from her daughter’s success, allowing room for Caiqin’s growth. For Lufang, her parents switched place as hero. They always challenged her to be better and held her accountable for her responsibilities as a student and as an individual. Whenever she needed it, they offered a “harbor” for her to heal until she was ready to take on the next challenge. What seemed common to all the above was that they all had a role model at home who was nurturing and understanding. Still more importantly, this hero figure was also someone they could always trust and depend on, especially during circumstances of uncertainty and challenges. For instance, Yanjin’s father was always there when important decisions were made, no matter whether the decision was for a one-year exchange in the US or a last-minute change of plans from a one-year to a three-year high school exchange.

A hero role, someone who is nurturing, understanding and dependable, is also common in China’s K-12 education system, not solely within the family unit. Every class in China, from kindergarten to senior high, has a class teacher (班主任). A class teacher in China is one of the group of teachers involved with a class. He or she plays a central role in monitoring and supporting the academic and social development of each student. This teacher plans and organizes class schedules and extracurricular activities, coordinates home-school communication and collaboration, and deals with any other student affairs, such as mental health and safety. Typically, a class teacher follows the same class for consecutive years in primary, junior high, or senior high school to ensure consistent development for each student, unless the student transfers to another school or the current school has significant personnel changes. A class teacher is expected to be nurturing, understanding, and dependable, so that students can feel comfortable approaching them with problems and issues. On the other hand, this role also comes with a tremendous amount of authority. In addition to the wide range of responsibilities mentioned above, a class teacher also has the power to appoint students to leadership positions and to decide who receives the opportunity, for instance, to study abroad or to join the Communist Youth League. In other words, students who grew up in China tend to see the class teacher as a double-edged sword: they heavily depend on this teacher, who is more invested in them as a person

rather than mere academic success, However, at the same time, they have to learn to obey his or her authority by doing whatever the class teacher tells them to do.

Observations of these participants' heroes at home as well as explanations about similar hero figures from pre-college schooling, may help us understand participants' expectations for their FYC instructors. First, for many first-year students at the university, FYC classes are the only major-entering prerequisite classes that offer small class sizes of less than twenty-five students. Many other prerequisites, such as introductory courses or the math course series, are lecture-sized classes with hundreds of students. From students' points of view, small-sized classes such as FYC allow more interaction with and support from the instructor, which might add another explanation for some participants' heavy reliance on their FYC instructors. For instance, Lufang always checked in with her instructor Norbert via Small Talks regarding all aspects of the class, including asking him to point out grammar issues, asking questions about readings she had trouble comprehending, confirming that she could use a certain idea for her writing, and more. In other words, Lufang's expectation to depend on the instructor was satisfied. Sucheng's reliance on her instructor took a different form. When she could not get her questions answered during or after class, Sucheng emailed him continuously. When she did not receive a response, she went to his office hours multiple times. And when she did not get much out of the office hours, she let his one-sentence comments deeply affect her. Regardless of what they received from their instructors in the end, Lufang and Sucheng entered the classes expecting that they could rely on the instructor, just as they relied on the hero at home and the class teacher at school.

Also, the instructor's response to this expectation could make a great difference in participants' FYC experience. For instance, Norbert was very attentive to Lufang's needs from the start of the class. He honored his promise to communicate with Lufang through Small Talk emails and responded to these emails promptly and in an encouraging tone. As a result, Lufang had a comparatively less confusing and stressful time in this class. Multiple times, Lufang expressed her deep gratitude towards Norbert, both in the interviews and in the final reflection of her course portfolio. She appreciated that Norbert accommodated her extra needs as an international student and encouraged her to explore her own ideas without letting grammar get in the way. In other words, when Lufang's expectation to depend on the instructor was met and surpassed, she gained encouragement and confidence and consequently had a more satisfying FYC experience. In a stark contrast, Sucheng experienced much more anxiety in her FYC class, especially during her first two assignments, when she was still struggling to figure out class norms and initially finding her own voice as a non-native English speaker. First, her instructor did not respond to any of her emails even when he asked the class to email him with questions. Second, he provided no further elaboration in his comment on Sucheng's SA1 than that it was off topic. The fact that Sucheng quickly sought help from the writing studio and later on turned to her roommate, Caiqin, indicated to Sucheng that she was not going to be able to depend on her instructor. In her post-FYC interview, she eventually expressed her disappointment. When asked what she would have done differently in this class if given the chance to retake it, Sucheng responded (translated), "*Can I change the instructor?*"

The intention of pointing out the participants' expectation that they would be able to depend on the instructor, or their projected "hero" in FYC, is neither to justify nor to judge. Rather, by bringing to light their hero at home and a hero from pre-college schooling, this study attempts to draw on participants' previous experiences to explain an observed strong dependence

on their FYC instructors. Admittedly, it can be argued that, with only four participants in this study, it is difficult to draw any conclusion about the existence of home and school heroes for all international students or about how it impacts their college experiences. On one hand, this opens up opportunities for future studies in this regard, potentially on a much larger scale. On the other hand, this study argues it is still important for an FYC class to provide room for students, especially international students, to surface and communicate their expectations. The key here is not to accommodate whatever they are expecting; rather, it is important to check the alignment between their incoming expectations (e.g., based off of their previous classroom experiences and their knowledge of the classes from others who had already taken them) and what they can realistically expect from the FYC instructor. Failing to align the expectations of the students and the instructor can cause confusion and frustration. Sucheng, for example, was expecting to get answers directly from the instructor, while it became clear that the instructor did not intend to answer every question for her, which made Sucheng feel anxious and helpless. Instead, setting norms for what students can expect by surfacing what they hope for can encourage proactive communication and cultivate independence in learning.

Also, it is not the intention of this study to favor Norbert's response to Lufang's dependence over that of Sucheng's instructor. While Lufang was very fortunate to encounter an instructor who was willing to go above and beyond to support her needs, it is also not practical to ask every instructor to pay this especially detailed attention to the needs of a single student, given that there could be ten other international students in each FYC class and needs from other students as well. Furthermore, by having Norbert as a crutch from whom Lufang could get all the answers, it could be argued that Lufang also missed opportunities to practice becoming a collaborative learner. Thanks to Norbert's full support, Lufang seldom had the need to reach out to her peers unless it was required by an assignment, such as for a peer review. However, even for her in-class peer review with an American peer, I observed missed opportunities for her to exchange thoughts or to engage different opinions. While her hesitance to engage in this peer review can be partially explained by her fear of communicating with American peers, she also knew that she could always turn to the instructor, who was responsive and always had the final correct answer in the class. In other words, this hand-holding approach is not necessarily the most feasible solution in FYC or other college learning environments.

On the other hand, though Sucheng seemed less fortunate than Lufang for having a less responsive instructor, Sucheng learned a profound lesson in becoming an independent learner. After her panicked experience writing a prospectus, Sucheng realized through our one-on-one tutoring, where I basically had her read the course syllabus line by line, that all assignment requirements were in fact already well explained. All she needed to do was to read the syllabus! Sucheng took this lesson to heart and applied it to her Informatics course the quarter after FYC, during which she carefully followed writing requirements in the course syllabus and ended up writing a very successful piece used by the professor as a sample for the entire class. From expecting to depend on the instructor to learning to find answers in the syllabus, Sucheng seemed to have gained an independent learning skill and an important lesson as a college student.

Other helpful expectation-setting practices can be found in Caiqin's class. For instance, Caiqin was aware that she could always get an answer from her instructor through email, except on weekends. Furthermore, if she did have an urgent question over the weekend, she could also turn to her assigned partner; she was also expected to provide the same help for her partner. Though her partner was not as responsive as Caiqin had hoped, the expectation of where and

when to find answers for this class was well established for Caiqin, so she was not as anxious as Sucheng. Besides clear expectations about communication, Caiqin's FYC class also offered step-by-step scaffolding homework assignments to help students understand expectations on each paper. For instance, to prepare students for Paper 2, a literature review, the instructor assigned a total of ten pieces of homework, including exercises to refine research questions, to critically read each core article, to draw an outline, and to submit a half-draft. Each homework practice asked students either guiding questions or more specific practice questions. For instance, to refine a research question, the homework assignment first asked questions like, "What drew you to this topic in the first place? Why is it important to you/to others?" The second part of this exercise then guided students on how to do close reading by asking them to "select a quote from either article and explain why it stood out to you (how it was intriguing, confusing, aggravating, persuasive, etc.)." Not only were students expected to complete these exercises and submit them before class, but the instructor also offered opportunities to thoroughly follow up on these exercises either on the Canvas discussion board or during in-class group discussions. Such extensive scaffolding was well received and appreciated by Caiqin, as she expressed in her interviews. It also clearly helped her understand what was expected when writing papers for this class, which might explain why Caiqin seemed more independent and confident when writing her last paper.

To conclude, participants in this study were observed to rely heavily on their instructors at the beginning of FYC. This reliance might be traced back to their "hero" at home and explained by the role of class teacher in China's K-12 system. Understanding this reliance is meaningful, as it shows the importance of setting clear expectations (both in spoken communication and writing) with international students such as these participants, so that they can practice becoming independent learners and effective writers.

### **A Writer Identity Juxtaposed against American Counterparts**

This study also observed that each participant entered FYC juxtaposing their own writer self against their native-speaking American counterparts due to their insecurities about their commands of the English language. For instance, Sucheng at first felt very "lost (失落)" when noticing the more sophisticated word choices and sentence structures used in her American peer's essay. This caused her to question her writer identity (translated): "*How could you compete against Americans? How could you compete against them in English writing?*" This juxtaposition also rested upon an assumption that their American peers were well trained in high school and therefore must both be well versed in academic writing conventions and share the expectations of writing of their college instructors. These disadvantages perceived by the participants further resulted in a lack of confidence and an increase in anxiety at the first stage of FYC, as Caiqin wondered in fear (translated), "*Will the teacher and my peers think my paper is very weird or strange?*"

As the courses proceeded, participants started to interact more with American peers and their writing through forms such as peer reviews, paper responses, and group discussions. Some of these interactions reinforced the juxtaposition between their peers and themselves, worsening their anxieties. For instance, during an in-class pair peer review, Caiqin suggested to her American partner that he add a roadmap in his introduction paragraph. When he became fairly defensive about his writing choice, Caiqin silently dropped the topic. Feeling dismissed, Caiqin stopped sharing her true thoughts or contributing to the process, which made this peer review a

less mutually beneficial experience. She described in a follow-up interview that (translated) “*I felt like there was a wall between the two of us.*” Besides perceiving unequal power, the participants also observed discriminatory behavior. Lufang recalled a time when one outspoken Chinese student got laughed at by two American students during class. She expressed her fear of being treated the same way, and from then on, she seldom raised her hand in class. Both Caiqin’s and Lufang’s interactions with American peers revealed an uneven power structure in FYC classrooms. As they perceived themselves at the lower end of the power dynamic and being seen as “less,” the divide between them and their American peers widened.

As participants became more focused on writing, especially on ideas and content, they seemed less inclined to compare themselves with others. In other words, the aforementioned juxtaposition became less significant. For instance, when Caiqin reflected on writing Paper 1, which received a grade that was well above the average, she commented (translated and emphasis added):

*Through peer review, I realized that **the gap was not that big** because the class does not evaluate how natively like your English language is or how authentic your word choices are....**Rather, it looks at your content.** Taking this paper as an example, it looks at how you present primary resources, compare them, and add your own evaluation. In these aspects, I actually think **international students, whose mother tongue is not English, won’t necessarily do less well than American native speakers.***

Understanding that FYC courses value writing content and writing strategies more than language nativeness, Caiqin felt less insecure about her non-native-English-speaker self and appeared to be more confident about her English writer self. Also, when the belief that American students knew more about academic writing was proven untrue through interactions such as peer reviews, Caiqin seemed to become more grounded in her FYC class. It seemed that the juxtaposition was still present. In Caiqin’s case, however, it had evolved from a “competing against” mentality to a new one that allowed her to write alongside her American peers. Gradually, the juxtaposition became less significant and affected Caiqin’s writing and writer identity development less and less.

Sucheng’s Short Assignment 2 (or SA2) put her in a direct conversation with her American peer’s writing. Through this response paper, which required Sucheng to identify and analyze logical fallacies in her peer’s SA1, Sucheng was given an opportunity to engage with the writing of a native English speaker. Initially, it was an intimidating task for Sucheng. After she and I worked through definitions and examples on a list of fallacies during one-on-one tutoring, Sucheng took the challenge and eventually wrote a strong response piece that was well received by her instructor. Not only had this experience boosted Sucheng’s confidence in writing, but it also afforded her an opportunity to debunk her perception that American students would always write better than she. This was made possible by the assignment design, which “forced” her to engage and to evolve. More importantly, this assignment put Sucheng and her American peers on equal ends of the power dynamic and allowed her to focus on the content of writing rather than the power gap resulting from different writers’ possession or lack of native-speaker status.

Lastly, Yanjin’s intensive peer review experience showed another possibility when making sense of participants’ juxtaposition against American peers. Yanjin entered FYC with low expectations due to unproductive peer review experiences in her American high school. She

also juxtaposed herself with her American peers, as she recalled the first few FYC peer reviews: “*Well, they are doing a great job, but my essay sucked!*” Yet, after performing peer reviews of every paper, often with different peers each time, she started to realize the value of peer review, that “*I can get real advice from them [peers].*” Unlike in early peer reviews, where Yanjin was sometimes a little defensive when others pointed out issues in her writing, Yanjin eventually learned to be receptive to and appreciative of others’ feedback.

Yanjin also treated peer reviews and group discussions as spaces for support. For instance, during in-class group time, she asked others to help clarify writing concepts such as “stakes” or “line of inquiry.” When it appeared that no one had a solid understanding, they turned as a group to the instructor for help. Reflecting on group acts such as this, Yanjin joked, “*I am glad it was not just me who didn’t know it.*” The notion that “I am not the only one who did not know” put Yanjin at the same level of knowledge as others in the group. It helped to close the perceived gap between American peers and herself and created a sense of “us” in the process.

As a matter of fact, Yanjin was the only participant who revealed a sense of belonging to her FYC class. In the introduction paragraph of her cover letter, she used phrases such as “we”, “our,” and “us” many times, referring to her FYC experience as a collective memory from a group in which she felt she belonged. For instance, she wrote (emphasis added),

The goal was [to be] able to demonstrate four outcomes in **our** 131 essays to future help **us** build an essay.... The first theme was (a) personal essay where **we** can dig deeper and explore in **our** unique identities, .... In the second theme, **we** started to write argumentative pieces and rhetorical analyses where **we** need to use more factual tone and more objective perspective.

Yanjin referred to this experience as if she had gone through a journey with her classmates as a unified entity. Together, they had achieved a lot. It is unknown to what extent Yanjin’s sense of close community influenced the changes in her writing and writer identity, yet it was evident that she managed to debunk an imagined juxtaposition by treating group settings with American peers as spaces for support and by finding a sense of belonging through group work. The implication of this for FYC teaching is that with some thoughtful arrangements, it is possible for an FYC instructor to provide a sense of close community in FYC classrooms for all students, including our international students, despite challenges and demanding writing tasks.

### **Strong Resilience**

From a highly competitive K-12 environment in China to a highly stressful preparation process for American college admission, the four participants had already overcome much adversity before they entered university. These experiences clearly helped them develop a strong sense of resilience, or the ability to “bounce back.” For instance, when choosing her previous schools, Caiqin had endured enormous pressure resulting from intense school competitiveness and still managed get into her dream schools. It is important to point out that going through those competitive and stressful experiences did not inherently lead to the development of resilience; rather, the support the participants received from their “heroes” at home seemed to have played a critical role in forming positive attitudes to help them finally overcome these challenges.

For instance, Lufang felt stymied when it was recommended that she take the TOEFL a sixth time. Looking back, she expressed gratitude for her parents’ encouragement, saying, “*I was grateful that my parents and others had pushed me to pursue a little further.*” In other words, it took adversity, as well as support from “heroes” at home, for these participants to build true

resilience. It is also important to be aware that not all Chinese students are as fortunate as these four participants, who had “heroes” at home. Some students can have parents who set high or unrealistic expectations but offer little support or guidance. Students can be pressured to meet those expectations as a way to “pay back” their parents or make the family proud. Students from such environments can falsely perceive pride as resilience and try to “power through” things on their own, which can sometimes lead to burning out and even to mental health issues.

When they encountered new challenges in FYC where “heroes” at home were beyond reach, the participants except for Lufang initially struggled to find new “heroes”—individuals they could trust and depend on. Support at home was given, yet, at an American university, especially in FYC, they needed to ask for or seek out additional support. Admittedly, students can go to office hours or send emails to get answers for specific questions; however, deep down, needs beyond answering questions (e.g., emotional needs, like sharing their struggles) are sometimes left dangling. The four participants seemed to find the writing studio or conversation group a place they could depend on. In these places, students were specifically taught about the importance of asking for help and the kinds of help they could receive at different places (instructors, Targeted Tutoring, writing centers, and the like) as well as how to ask for help effectively in each place. For instance, after Sucheng learned that her instructor was not responsive to emails, we discussed ways to effectively communicate with her instructor during office hours, including crafting questions beforehand or sharing her concerns as an international student. As another example, Lufang leaned on other participants at the Conversation Group, who helped her come up with a Small Talks strategy to effectively receive help from her instructor.

Understanding the complex nature of these participants’ resilience offers us some tangible teaching tools for FYC classes. Sometimes, the importance of proactively seeking support needs to be explicitly communicated to students. It cannot be assumed that all students already accept the notion that “it is okay to ask for help.” Sometimes, students need to know what other places they can turn to if the instructor or the FYC classes themselves prove insufficiently helpful. Sometimes, they also need to be taught to not take it personally if they do not receive help from one particular person or place; they could simply ask, “Can you advise me on where I can get help for this, then?” Other times, they need to be challenged to think independently and to solve problems proactively, including such simple tasks as reading a syllabi in order to understand assignment requirements, as in Sucheng’s case.

The key to resilience in FYC is to help international students create a support system where they can feel safe and trusted to own their unique experiences as international students, non-native English writers, or members of other minority groups in the classroom. Owning these experiences is a process of self-learning and empowerment that puts students in the driver’s seat to actively tackle issues and ultimately take ownership of their own learning and belongingness. Building this support system first requires students to shift their perception of FYC from competitions to growth opportunities. FYC should neither be a competition against domestic peers or other international students nor a competition for grades; rather, FYC should focus on individual growth in writing and thinking. A growth mindset will be more likely to encourage international students to let down their guard, learn from others besides authority figures (such as instructors), and become part of a community.

Building this support system will also mean creating an inclusive, non-judgemental space where international students not only feel comfortable asking about things they do not know, but

also feel that their “incoming” knowledge adds value to the classroom. For instance, Yanjin was very comfortable asking her group about unclear terms such as “stakes” or “line of inquiry.” When it seemed that her group did not have solid answers, she turned to the instructor on behalf of her group. Here, Yanjin was trusted to learn together with the group. In contrast, Caiqin’s peer review partner became very defensive when Caiqin suggested a road map for his introductory paragraph. Sensing her opinion was not valued, Caiqin chose to give up. Here, Caiqin did not feel trusted to contribute. Achieving inclusivity in the FYC classroom demands that instructors facilitate open conversations in order to nurture a learning environment where everyone can be seen as capable of bringing something to the table. It is also necessary for instructors to model the behavior of respectfully pursuing understanding when disagreements occur or stereotypes surface, such as by asking, “Can you please help me understand why you believe X, Y, Z?”

Lastly, it would be ideal for the FYC class to become the support system where students have the opportunity not only to learn from the instructor but also to lean on each other. Becoming part of the class community creates a sense of security and belonging. In addition, international students can hopefully become part of the broader campus community through this as well, so they do not have to feel like “guests” on campus. If, for any reason, the FYC class cannot become that support system, then it becomes critical to point students to other places, such as Targeted Tutoring (small group tutoring at the writing center), writing centers, writing studios, conversation groups, class Wechat group chats, and other resources. Teaching resilience for FYC also involves guiding students to become more intentional about building a support system. For instance, during office hours, we can ask them how and where they seek support when they have FYC-related questions or issues. We can even connect them with former students who share similar backgrounds or went through similar challenges.

To conclude, learning from the four participants’ presentation of strong resilience before FYC, this study observed that what helped them overcome competitive schooling in China and the stressful process of American college admission was support from the participants’ families. When encountering new challenges during FYC where support from home was out of reach, participants managed to find their own support systems—their instructors, the writing studio, or peers. This section further explains and exemplifies what is necessary to help international students like these four participants build a support system.

### **From “Writing as a Task” to “Writing as Something More”**

As shown in Chapter 5, Pre-FYC Writing Life and Writer Identity, none of the participants had fully developed writer identities in English before they entered FYC classes. They all viewed English writing as “*a task*,” “*an assignment*,” “*homework*,” or “*something they would usually procrastinate doing till the last minute*.” Overall, participants initially shared a lack of confidence in English writing due to deep concerns about grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, or native-like English expressions. Seeing English writing as a task could be a byproduct of a competitive school system in China (as shown by Caiqin and Lufang); therefore, English writing was associated with tangible grades and practical concerns (e.g., school entrance requirements). Though they all had intensive writing practice before FYC, none of this study’s participants enjoyed writing in English.

During FYC, every participant gained some confidence in writing. For instance, Sucheng abandoned her old habit of consulting others’ writing before she began her own brainstorming. She gained self-confidence by recognizing her own intellectual ability to approach topics and do

research. Meanwhile, participants' relationships with writing had evolved to seeing it as something beyond a mere task. For example, during the second half of FYC, Lufang started to view writing as a way to communicate ideas, leading her to the realization that writing is not about being right or wrong but rather the writer's preference about what to communicate with readers and how to communicate it. For Sucheng, writing had to do with making strong arguments by analyzing both sides of an issue and then contributing her own thoughts with researched evidence. Similarly, according to Caiqin, writing is about creating an academic dialogue with scholars, for her in the field of psychology. Through writing, she not only gained the tools to critically analyze published articles in psychology but also was able to enjoy sharing her own voice by putting the authors of those articles into conversations in her literature review essay. In the end, writing reinforced her interest in majoring in Psychology.

The evolution of these three participants' writer identities indicated a success of FYC classes offered through the University's EWP (English Writing Program) and IWP (Interdisciplinary Writing Program) in that these programs helped to shift participants' focus from grammar and language issues (or lower-level concerns) to content and meaning (higher-level concerns). This is shown in EWP's outcome description: during winter 2015, when the participants took their FYC classes, grammar and other micro issues were only mentioned once, as the very last item of its list of 17 outcomes: "Errors of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics are proofread and edited so as not to interfere with reading and understanding the writing." In other words, on paper, students received a message that grammar was only valued as a small part of the evaluating process. In class, a focus on higher-level concerns, such as arguments and organizations, had been infused throughout FYC, including in TA training, teacher feedback, peer reviews, revising, and other instructional materials. Seldom would students in FYC receive grammar corrections in their instructors' comments unless the content was incomprehensible or a student requested the instructor to do so, as in Lufang's case.

This institutional emphasis on higher-level writing concerns had greatly freed international students such as the participants of this study from anxiety over making grammar mistakes as well as a deficit mindset associated with a relative inability to produce native-like expressions. What it also did, as was observed among all three participants, was to activate a true writer self that went beyond the mechanics of the English language and interfaced with the real world. A powerful example of this was Lufang when writing at the end of FYC about her academic misconduct case. In that piece, Lufang sophisticatedly drew on linguistic, cultural, and emotional (e.g., her fear of her visa being taken away) appeals to help her fellow international students see the issue's complexity and avoid making similar mistakes. Although grammar errors still existed in this composition, and some expressions certainly still needed polishing, these concerns did not prevent Lufang from passionately sharing her story through writing, as shown in her own words: "*I just solved an exciting case and I had a great passion to share this story with you.*" The potential real-world impact Lufang perceived motivated her to write, thus allowing her true writer self to emerge naturally and robustly.

It is relieving and encouraging to learn that writing programs in the university's English Department prioritize content and meaning rather than harshly punishing students for grammar or language issues. At the same time, though, this raises questions such as "What about outside of the English Department?"; "Do other places share the same policies?"; "To what extent do grammar and language matter, and to whom?"; and "If grammar and language matter, then where should they be taught if not primarily in FYC?" Such questions require a university-wide

conversation, ideally led by writing programs, writing centers, the TESOL program, and other bodies working with multilingual/international student populations. Otherwise, students' futures could be put at risk when, for example, they may be rejected from entering a major or denied a particular job because their personal statement contains grammar errors and not very natural language.

Lastly, we also learned something from Yanjin, the only participant who even by the end scarcely felt like she was becoming a writer, as she stated in her post-FYC interview: "*I still don't think I would consider myself as a writer.*" Yanjin's answer when asked what she learned from her FYC class was more general than the others' as well. Her instructor also echoed my observations, noting a lack of depth in Yanjin's writing and wishing Yanjin had stretched her critical thinking more. Many reasons could have contributed to this, including perhaps her personality, upbringing, American high school experience, or goals. While it could take another study to have a clear sense of the reasons, Yanjin's FYC class experience certainly helped us demystify a common perception that international students who complete high schools in Western countries can potentially succeed more easily than others who do not. Judging by these four participants, there seemed to be little correlation between academic success in FYC and high school status. On the other hand, Yanjin was also the only participant who gained a sense of community with the class, which can prompt future studies to look at the differences between these two groups of students when it comes to community building.

In conclusion, this section has laid out four distinct sets of observations on participants' identities, especially writer identities: having a "hero" at home, an identity juxtaposed against American peers, strong resilience, and an evolution of writer identity. For each group of observations, I have also offered some explanations and understandings by connecting the dots between all four participants' experiences before, during, and after FYC. In addition, this section has addressed the implications of understanding these four identity-related discoveries, seeking to connect them back to the FYC classroom by responding to the question, "What does it suggest for FYC?"

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Studies**

The limitations of this study first lie in its small sample of four female Chinese international students, which may prompt questions about its representativeness and the appropriateness of using it to draw conclusions about the broader international student population. However, this study was not intended to generalize international students' experiences and identities because each of them stands as a unique individual whose life trajectory and identity development could be completely different from others even if they were born and grew up in the same city, studied in the same high school, and came to the same university in the U.S., as did Sucheng and Caiqin. Rather, this study incorporates the beauty of qualitative methods to share the richness of the four participants' stories by diving deep into their family stories, classrooms, group work, and reflections. Having learned about the four female students' "incoming" knowledge and identities and how these impacted their FYC experience, it will be interesting for future studies to look into similar aspects from male Chinese students or international students from other cultures, as well as more students in general. Due to its volunteer-based nature and limited research time, this study did not succeed in recruiting other international students to represent a diverse population.

In addition to weaknesses of representativeness, this study also relies heavily on

participants' own accounts of their writing development. Though instructors' accounts and class observation also offered valuable insights, the main arguments concerning participants' writing development were based on participants' own verbal evaluation in one-on-one interviews. Second, though this study occasionally draws on participants' writing (e.g., their reflections), it would be meaningful to zoom in and rhetorically analyze all participants' writing pieces. For example, future studies can look for textual evidence, such as from class assignments, to show how participants' writing has or has not improved. One could even bring these pieces of textual evidence into interviews to learn about participant's decision-making processes when writing. Due to limited time and a potential danger of subjectively evaluating one's writing, this study did not take that approach. However, a careful design can help avoid the danger and bring more insights into our understanding of international students' writing development.

Thirdly, it is important to reflect on the multiple roles I played during this research process. First, I share similar identities with these four participants: female Chinese nationals who grew up in China and speak Mandarin. These shared identities brought a sense of comfort and eased conversations involving difficult or sensitive concepts in composition. For instance, during interviews, participants sometimes inserted Mandarin words that we both knew (e.g., 中考 for China's high school entrance examination). Sometimes, Lufang would ask me in the middle of a sentence, "How would you say that in English?" There was little observed reticence during these conversations thanks to the shared identities between participants and the researcher. These shared identities also brought me rich insider views that would have otherwise been missed. For instance, when Caiqin was discussing a dismissive peer review experience where her American peer became very defensive, she asked if she could speak Mandarin during this part of the interview, which led to the quote that (translated) "*I felt like there was a wall between the two of us [her American peer and herself]. (我感觉我们两个之间隔着一层什么)*" However, some distortions may also result from the participants' viewing me as an insider who understands them. Thus, they might tend to juxtapose themselves against American peers or others as a way to please an insider like me. One cannot know precisely how these dynamics influenced participants' responses, but there is a potential dilemma that is worth mentioning here. In other words, by positioning the researcher as an insider, the participants could potentially position others involved in the conversation but not sharing the same identities as outsiders. Therefore, their views could be distorted by this insider-outsider dynamic. Overall, gaining an insider view made it easier for participants to discuss complex concepts and helped ensure their voices could be heard and their rich stories shared, which I hope outweighs its potential drawbacks.

Also, though my roles as a writing studio teacher and a conversation group facilitator have brought me closer to the participants (seeing as they were all recruited from these two places), these roles also inherently carried a repertoire of my beliefs and assumptions about FYC and international students. For instance, in a writing studio, other instructors and I might discuss common mistakes among international students (more specifically, Chinese-speaking students) or what office hour strategies are commonly effective for a certain type of writing. These subject positions could potentially be carried into my researcher role, thereby posing potential risks including leading questions and circumscribed conversations. In this study, I intentionally attempted to avoid my writing studio and conversation group as research sites as I did not want to see myself being distracted from teaching or facilitating just because I had a research agenda. However, it could very well be meaningful for future studies to examine these international

student support spaces outside of FYC classrooms and writing centers.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Drawing on four female Chinese international students' writings, interviews, and observations during their FYC classes in winter 2015, this study attempted to provide some answers to questions including: What writing experiences, identities, and needs do international students bring as they enter the university? How has their writing developed and how has their writer identity evolved? What implications does this have for meeting the needs of international student writers? This conclusion chapter responded to those three questions in three sections: Findings on "Incoming" Knowledge, Findings on Writing Development, and Findings on Writer Identity.

The contribution of this study first lies in depicting what participants brought into FYC, or their "incoming" knowledge, including their family upbringing, and the pathways they each took to get here, a competitive K-12 schooling system, as well as a stressful preparation process to get into an American university. They also underwent intensive English writing training that focused on rote learning rather than meaning-seeking. Through college admission essay writing, they all—for the first time—engaged a writer self by asking questions like "What would a Western audience, like admission officers, want to know about me?" and "How do I showcase the unique me?" These participants might seem more privileged than those whose families are less able to offer finances and emotional support; however, their desire for a more meaningful education overseas also had a price. Some had to challenge family expectations; others had to bear social stigma or educational inequity. And Yanjin, who came to the US at an earlier age, found herself grappling with social, cultural, and ideological clashes. Regardless, they all struggled hard in order to achieve the dream of a better education and better life, not unlike many others on campus.

All participants (though maybe Yanjin somewhat less so) reported tremendous writing development through FYC. Some began FYC classes with a sense of dissatisfaction, citing issues such as too much group discussion and too little instructor teaching, in contrast to pedagogical norms in China. As they started their weekly writing routine, all participants became overwhelmed and anxious about unfamiliar topics (e.g., Western-culture-specific topics), new writing jargon, new genres, and new essay length requirements. A turning point away from these struggles came when they succeeded in their first paper that received positive comments or a high grade, especially relative to their peers. In other words, a taste of success can lead to acknowledgement, defeat insecurity, and result in confidence. From there, participants also started to shift their focus from grammar and language issues to content and meaning. They further reported a refined understanding of critical thinking that had transcended criticizing to weighing and evaluating information and making informed writing decisions. To gain critical thinking, however, many of them had to overcome a fear of challenging the authority that is associated with well-established authors or native-English-speaking peers. By the end of FYC, there was also often a display of intrinsic motivation to think and write independently. These four participants' insights demonstrate what is possible in FYC classes if international students are understood and their needs taken into consideration.

In terms of writer identity development, this study identified four distinct features based on the four participants' FYC experiences. First, each participant's hero at home helped explain an observed reliance on their instructor in FYC classes. Understanding participants' home

support informed us of the importance of setting and clarifying realistic expectations and modeling proactive support-seeking. Second, participants tended to juxtapose themselves against their American peers, potentially because of a competitive habit inherited from Chinese schooling or a self-perception of knowing less than native-speaking peers. Third, the participants also had strong resilience. Understanding the complexity of this observed resilience requires us to teach students to build a support system so that adversity and challenges in writing (and in life) can actually lead to resilience rather than discouragement/deterioration/despondency. Finally, three participants reported a renewed relationship with English writing, seeing writing either as a set of communication tools or as a means to enter scholarly conversations. Meanwhile, Yanjin's less well-established writer identity shows that American-high-school-trained international students do not necessarily succeed more than others.

As I was wrapping up this study in spring quarter 2019, more than four years after all participants took part in the study during their second quarter at the university, they all had graduated from the university and become successful in their post-college careers or graduate life. Caiqin, majoring in Psychology, has been working as a recruiter in a large consultant company in the Bay Area. She has just got accepted into a Master's program in a prestigious university in California. Sucheng entered a competitive major, Human Centered Design & Engineering, and found a UI/UX designer job in a local gaming company. Lufang entered the extremely competitive Computer Science & Engineering major and landed a full-time job at a well-known e-commerce company, where she told me she enjoyed working. Yanjin majored in Bioengineering and managed to get into the Master's program of Engineering Management in a prestigious university on the East Coast. Though it is unclear whether or how much their success was influenced by their FYC experiences or this research, these participants' intelligence, diligence, and resilience observed in this study could be a strong prediction of their future successes.

As enrollment in US universities by international students in general and Chinese students in particular continues to increase, I hope this study can offer a closer look at who these students might be, what they may have been through, and what they are capable of. With all the successes and struggles detailed in this study, we still see classrooms divided between domestic and international students, challenges to creating a truly welcoming and inclusive space in FYC classes, as well as missed mutual-learning opportunities from both sides. Until it addresses and engages in concrete conversations about these issues, the university can only be called a university with many international students, not yet the global university promised in its mission statement.

## REFERENCES

- Atkinson, D., & Ramanathan, V. (1995). Cultures of writing: An ethnographic comparison of L1 and L2 university writing / language programs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 539-568.
- Atkinson, P. & Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera's immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3: 304-325.
- Bamberg, M. (2006). "Stories: Big or small. Why do we care?" *Narrative Inquiry* 16 (1), 139–147.
- Bamberg, M. (2011). "Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity." *Theory & Psychology*, 21(1) 3–24.
- Braine, G. (1996). ESL students in first-year writing courses: ESL versus mainstream classes. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 5, 91–107.
- Clavarino, A. M., Najman, J. M., & Silverman, D. (January 01, 1995). The Quality of Qualitative Data: Two Strategies for Analyzing Medical Interviews. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1,2, 223-242.
- Costino, K. A., & Hyon, S. (2011). Sidestepping our "scare words": Genre as a possible bridge between L1 and L2 compositionists. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20(1), 24-44.
- Cox, M., Jordan, J., Ortmeier-Hooper, C., & Gray Schwartz, G. (2010). Reinventing identities in second language writing. *National Council of Teachers of English*.
- Cox, M. (2016). Identity construction, second language writers, and the writing center. *Tutoring second language writers*, 53-77.
- DasBender, G. (2016). Liminal space as a generative site of struggle: Writing transfer and l2 students. *Critical transitions: Writing and the question of transfer*, 277-302.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 20(1), 43-63.
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Fina, A. Schiffrin, D. & Bamberg, M. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter: Mishler, E. G. (2006). Narrative and identity: The double arrow of time. (pp. 30-47).
- DePalma, M. J., & Ringer, J. M. (2011). Toward a theory of adaptive transfer: Expanding disciplinary discussions of "transfer" in second-language writing and composition studies. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20(2), 134-147.
- Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2005). *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Ferris, D. (2009). *Teaching college writing to diverse student populations* (Michigan series on teaching academic English in U.S. post-secondary programs). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2013). *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*. (3rd ed.). Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Ferris, D, Jensen, L, & Wald, M. (2015). Writing Instructors' Perceptions of International Student Writers: What Teachers Want and Need to Know. *CATESOL Journal*, 27(2), 55-72.
- Friedrich, P. (2006). Assessing the needs of linguistically diverse first-year students: Bringing together and telling apart international ESL, resident ESL and monolingual basic writers. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 30(1-2).
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York: Routledge.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co.
- Harklau, L. (1994). ESL versus mainstream classes: Contrasting L2 learning environments. *TESOL quarterly*, 28(2), 241-272.
- Hsieh, M. H., (2006). Identity development of East Asian female international students with implications for second-language higher education. *Education*, 127 (1), 3-15.
- Jie, G., & Lederman, M. J. (1988). Instruction and Assessment of Writing in China: The National Unified Entrance Examination for Institutions of Higher Education. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 7(1), 47-60.
- Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. *Language Learning*, 16(1-2), 1-20.
- Kim, E. (2012). An alternative theoretical model: Examining psychosocial identity development of international students in the United States, *College Student Journal*, 46 (1), 99-113.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkman, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. LA and London: Sage.
- Labov, W. (1997). Some further steps in narrative analysis. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7 (1-4): 395-415.
- Leki, I., Cumming, A. H., & Silva, T. (2008). *A synthesis of research on second language writing in English*. New York: Routledge.
- Leki, I., & Silva, T. (2004). Family matters: The influence of applied linguistics and composition studies on second language writing studies--past, present, and future. *Modern Language Journal*, 88, 1-13.

- Liao, M.-T., & Chen, C.-H. (2010). Rhetorical Strategies in Chinese and English: A Comparison of L1 Composition Textbooks. *Foreign Language Annals*, 42, 4, 695-720.
- Matsuda, P. K. (1999). Composition studies and ESL writing: A disciplinary division of labor. *College Composition and Communication*, 699-721.
- Matsuda, P. K., Saenkhum, T., & Accardi, S. (2013). Writing teachers' perceptions of the presence and needs of second language writers: An institutional case study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(1), 68-86.
- Matsuda, P. K., & Silva, T. (1999). Cross-Cultural Composition: Mediated Integration of U.S. and International Students. *Composition Studies*, 27, 1, 15-30.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2015). Identity in written discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 140-159.
- McLachlan, D.A. & Justice, J. (2009). A grounded theory of international student well-being. *Journal of Theory Construction and Identity*, 13(1), 27-32.
- Motha, S. (2014). *Race, empire, and English language teaching: Creating responsible and ethical anti-racist practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Nakamaru, S. (2010). Lexical issues in writing center tutorials with international and US-educated multilingual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(2), 95-113.
- Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28 (2), 163-188.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re) construction of selves. *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*, 155-177.
- Reid, J. (1998). "Eye" learners and "ear" learners: Identifying the language needs of international students and US resident writers. *Grammar in the composition classroom: Essays on teaching ESL for college-bound students*, 3-17.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seidman, I. (2012) *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, 4th ed. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shapiro, Shawna, Cox, Michelle, Shuck, Gail, & Simnitt, Emily. (2016). Teaching for Agency: From Appreciating Linguistic Diversity to Empowering Student Writers. *Composition Studies*, 44(1), 31-52.
- Shen, F. (1998). The classroom and the wider culture: Identity as a key to learning composition in English. In V. Zamel & R. Spack (Eds.), *Negotiating academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures* (pp. 123-134). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Silberstein, S. (2010) Constrained but not determined. *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, 274.

- Silberstein, S., & Anwar, M., Burt, R., Guirca, M., Malcolm, K. (2019). *International and Multilingual Student Academic Survey* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/uw-s3-cdn/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2016/01/07233539/FINAL-REPORT-International-and-Multilingual-Student-Academic-Survey-2019-2.pdf>
- Silva, T. (1994). An examination of writing program administrators' options for the placement of ESL students in first year writing classes. *Writing Program Administration*, 18, 3743.
- Talmy, S. (2010). 'Qualitative interviews in applied linguistics: From research instrument to social practice,' *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 30: 128–48.
- Talmy, S. (2011). The interview as a collaborative achievement: Interaction, identity, and ideology in a speech event. *Applied Linguistics*, 32 (1), 25–42.
- Talmy, S. & Richards, K. (2011). Theorizing qualitative research interviews in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 32 (1), 1–5.
- Tseng, W-C. & Newton, F.B. (2002). International students' strategies for well-being. *College Student Journal*, 36(4), 591-597.
- Weidman, J. (2006). Socialization of students in higher education: Organizational perspectives. In Conrad, C.F. & Serlin, R.C. (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Zimmerman, D. H., & West, C., (1975) Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation, *Language and sex: Difference and dominance*. pp: 105- 129. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.