Problem-Solution in English vs. Qi-cheng-zhuan-he in Chinese: Are They Compatible Discourse Patterns?*

YANG Yuchen & YANG Zhong
Northeast Normal University

Abstract

The aim of the paper is twofold: to discover if a minimum basic discourse pattern of English, the Problem-Solution, is workable for Chinese texts, particularly those written in a typical Chinese rhetorical convention (i.e., the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern); to compare move structures of the two basic discourse patterns, the Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuan-he, to see the differences and similarities between the two patterns. Through sample analysis, it is found that the Problem-Solution pattern seems to work well with the Chinese texts, though sometimes the problem move does not appear. Analysis of move structures of the two discourse patterns seems to suggest that the problem is not always necessary in Chinese texts, resulting in a kind of cause-consequence discourse frame in topic occurrence and development, whereas in English, the problem move seems obligatory, forming an opposition relation in text construing and idea organization. Despite the distinctions, however, the paper argues that the Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuan-he patterns could possibly be regarded as two realizations of the same underlying cognitive discourse construction and that the motivation for writing in “spiral” or “indirect” ways, as complained by some native English teachers in China, might not be solely from the traditional Chinese rhetorical conventions. Factors such as social and educational norms, therefore, might be areas worthy of future exploration.

Key words: contrastive study; minimum discourse pattern; Problem-Solution; qi-cheng-zhuan-he

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1. Introduction

Controversial ideas have been found in contrastive rhetoric since Kaplan (1966) mentioned the negative influence of students’ L1 rhetorical conventions on their second language writings (cf. Connor, 1996). Kaplan’s spiral-linear distinction (1966) between Oriental languages and English seems to be supported by Hinds (1990), who claims that Japanese, Chinese and Korean prefer quasi-inductive and delayed introductions. Cai (1993), likewise, suggests that the Chinese delayed topics might be caused by the traditional Chinese discourse organizing pattern of Baguwen (i.e., eight-legged essay) or the four parts (i.e., the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern). On the other hand, however, Mohan and Lo (1985) believe that the Baguwen styled writing is only one of the varieties of Chinese rhetoric. Kirkpatrick (1997) argues that the prescriptive advice given in contemporary Chinese textbooks on composition reflects contemporary “Anglo-American” rhetorical style more than traditional Chinese style. Cahill (2003) and Yang and Cahill (2008) claim that there are greater similarities in essayist literacy across languages (i.e., English and Chinese or Japanese) than previously supposed. Chen (2007) reviews the comparison of the Chinese qi-cheng-zhuan-he model and the Western Problem-Solution schema, concluding that the two patterns are similar in some ways but differ in where the problem is likely to occur and what function it plays in text. Enlightening as it seems, Chen’s argument, in fact, is still speculative as found with most research on the same issue.

This paper intends to explore further the relationship between the two discourse patterns by examining if the Problem-Solution pattern (e.g., a basic minimum discourse pattern in English as proposed by Winter, 1976; Hoey, 1983; 1994) is workable for Chinese texts, particularly texts written in the traditional Chinese rhetorical pattern, qi-cheng-zhuan-he. Through analysis of move structures and realizations of the two discourse patterns, the paper concludes that the English Problem-Solution seems to some extent applicable to the interpretation of Chinese texts (at least to simple narratives and expositions) and that the underlying principles or cognitive structuring of the two discourse patterns from Chinese and English might not differ as greatly as supposed. Therefore, the authors believe that causes for the dichotomy of linearity and circularity which suggest that English writing is characterized by directness and Chinese writing by indirectness need careful reconsideration.

Below we will first look at the Problem-Solution pattern and its realizations in English texts, as well as its feasibility in analyzing the Chinese text written in the assumed typical qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern. Move structures and realizations of both Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuan-he patterns will be compared, leading to a conclusion with speculations for possible future research.

2. The Problem-Solution Pattern and its Realization in English Texts

Discourse pattern refers to the combination of relations organizing a discourse and this
interrelationship between non-adjacent sentences may be stronger than that between adjacent ones (Hoey, 1983: 31-32). According to Hoey (1983), language resources, either clues or inter-sentential clause relations, are finite but the possible patterns built out of these resources are infinite. Thus it seems rather impossible or “a fool’s errand” to describe all discourse patterns of a language. What we can do is to describe some typical or commonly used patterns as well as their variations if we want to do anything with discourse patterns. One pattern, which can be applied to the understanding of those less discussed patterns in English, is the problem-solution pattern.

The Problem-Solution pattern, according to Hoey (1983), consists of four elements: situation-problem-response-evaluation, where, roughly speaking, situation refers to the sentence(s) that can provide situation to the discourse, sometimes with (often implied) connectors when, while, and answers the question like what happened or what is the situation. The problem is not a real world problem, but rather that aspect of the situation requiring a response. Response can work in two directions: one is cause-consequence or stimulus-response (working regressively); the other is response-evaluation (working progressively). Unlike the other three elements of the discourse pattern, whose assumed questions are to elicit a statement of fact, the evaluation tends to answer the question of how successful was this, which elicits an opinion. Therefore, the minimum discourse pattern can be recognized (a) through certain connectives (or by inserting connectors into the text) or (b) changing the monologue text into a dialogue by supplying the implied questions the text intends to answer. Below is a fabricated example (Winter, 1976; cited in Hoey, 1983; 1994), followed by a diagram, showing its discourse patterning and related clause relations, as well as the interpretation of how they are formed and processed.

I was on sentry duty.
I saw the enemy approaching.
I opened fire.
I beat off the attack.

Figure 1. Discourse patterning and text relations by Hoey (1983: 43)
The diagram indicates that the global structure of the text is composed of four parts: situation, problem, response, and evaluation, while cause-consequence and instrument-achievement are two inter-sentential relations between the move structures, illustrating the realizing processes of the pattern. By adding relevant connectors, the Problem-Solution pattern in this text emerges.

(1) While I was on sentry duty, I saw the enemy approaching. Therefore I opened fire. By means of this I beat off the attack.
(2) I was on sentry duty when I saw the enemy approaching. So I opened fire. Thereby I beat off the attack.

By adding assumed questions initiated by a potential reader, the following dialogue might be obtained:

Q: What is the situation?
A: I was on sentry duty.
Q: What happened?
A: I saw the enemy approaching.
Q: How did you respond?
A: I opened fire.
Q: How successful was it/what was the result?
A: I beat off the attack. (Hoey, 1983; 1994: 28)

This analysis seems to suggest that the Problem-Solution is the underlying discourse pattern in English narrative texts. In terms of other text types, Hoey (1983) claims that this pattern also works well with texts like exposition or argumentation. He examines a text from the New Scientist Technology Review, and finds a similar pattern as well.

Balloons and Air Cushion the Fall
(1) Helicopters are very convenient for dropping freight by parachute, (2) but this system has its problems. (3) Somehow the landing impact has to be cushioned to give a soft landing. (4) The movement to be absorbed depends on the weight and the speed at which the charge falls. (5) Unfortunately most normal spring systems bounce the load as it lands, sometimes turning it over.

(6) To avoid this, Bertin, developer of the aero-train, has come up with an air-cushion system, (7) which assures a safe and soft landing. (8) It comprises a platform on which the freight is loaded with, underneath, a series of “balloons” supported by air cushions. (9) These are fed from compressed air cylinders equipped with an altimeter valve which opens when the load is just over six feet from the ground. (10) The platform then becomes a hovercraft, with the balloons reducing the deceleration as it touches down. (11) Trials have been carried
out with freight-dropping at rates from 19 feet to 42 feet per second. (12) The charge weighed about one and half tons, (13) but the system can handle up to eight tons. (14) At low altitudes freight can be dropped without a parachute. (p. 68)

This text is believed by Hoey (1983) to have the following moves:

Situation: (1)
Problem: (2)-(5)
Response: (6)
Evaluation: (7)
Response: (8)-(10)
Basis for evaluation: (11)-(14)

By lexical repetition, we find that the word *system* in S2 can be understood as an anaphoric usage to what has been mentioned in the preceding clause, denoting S1 as some kind of *situation* or status. In S2-5, the verb *has to* and the adverb *unfortunately* signal that the speaker is talking about something not very optimistic or something causing unhappiness. Again, the same point is demonstrated in the following clause S6, where the infinitive phrase *to avoid this* indicates that what is mentioned previously is a *problem* and what follows is the *response* or solution to the problem. The word *assures* symbolizes the *evaluation* or *result*. S8-14 is further elaboration of the *evaluation* or details of how successful the invention is. Of course we can change the monologue text into a dialogue by adding questions initiated by a supposed reader. In this case, a possible skeleton of the dialogue would be like this:

Q: What is the *situation*? A: Helicopters are convenient for dropping freight by parachute.
Q: What is the *problem*? A: Normal spring systems bounce the load as it lands…
Q: What is the *response*? A: Bertin has come up with an air-cushion system.
Q: What is the *result*? A: It assures a safe and soft landing…

Hoey, therefore, believes that the *Problem-Solution* is a basic minimum discourse pattern and “arguably the most common pattern of all” (2001: 123) accounting for the majority of English texts.

3. The Applicability of *Problem-Solution* Pattern to Chinese Texts

Actually, Hoey’s idea concerning the application of the *Problem-Solution* pattern in discourse organization was strengthened by Flowerdew (2008), who claims that “this pattern functions as the main organizing principle of many different kinds of written and spoken texts ranging from advertisements to workplace reports” (p.1). However, is the pattern also applicable to the analysis of Chinese texts, or do Chinese speakers follow more
or less the same cognitive structuring, especially in presenting stories and ideas? Next, we will look at two Chinese texts: one is a short narrative given by Li Ao (2005), a Phoenix TV talk show host, and the other, a short exposition used by a web writer as an illustration of the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern. Both seem to fit well with the Problem-Solution pattern.

In a T.V. program Li Ao Talk Show, Li Ao was telling people why he sold 100 precious articles he had cherished for years to help those Comfort Women (sex slaves for Japanese soldiers) in the Second World War. Preceding the following text, Li Ao says, “If you ask me why I’ve sold one hundred long-cherished precious articles of mine to help those Comfort Women? I can tell you why.”

The text can be literally translated as follows:

(1) During the Second World War, the Japanese forced some women to be Comfort Women for the army. (2) However, the Japanese, in order to enter the Security Council of the United Nations, secretly gave those women each 5 million Japanese Yen to bribe them not to tell the truth. (3) To resist this indecent act of the Japanese, I donated one hundred articles which I had cherished for years, (4) and used the money to help those poor women and call on them to stand up to oppose the conduct of the Japanese government.

Li Ao. Li Ao Talk Show. Phoenix T.V. (12/05/2005)

The four sentences in the text seem to fall neatly into the four componential parts of the Problem-Solution pattern: S1 is situation, answering the question of what was the situation, S2, the problem, implying what happened, S3, response, and S4, evaluation. Using the technique of changing the monologue into a dialogue by adding potential questions, we get the following:

Q: What was the situation?
A: During the Second World War, the Japanese forced some women to be “Comfort Women” for the army.
Q: What happened?
A: The Japanese secretly gave those women each 5 million Yen to bribe them not to tell the truth in order to join the Security Council of the United Nations.
Q: How did you respond?
A: I donated one hundred articles I have cherished for years and use the money to help those women.

Q: What was the result/evaluation?

A: To call on them to stand up to oppose the conduct of the Japanese government.

This analysis seems to suggest that the Problem-Solution pattern is also applicable to Chinese narratives. However, is the pattern workable to the typical text written in the traditional argumentative style of *qi-cheng-zhuan-he*, a common and powerful discourse frame, as proposed by Cai (1993), for many types of Chinese writings at both text and paragraph levels? According to *A Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs* by Tang (2000), *qi* means introduction (or topic raising), *cheng*, continuation (or development with positive interpretation), *zhuan*, changing (or further development with other interpretations) and *he*, result (or conclusion). These four steps can be seen as moves, move being a term borrowed from Swale (1990) and Bhatia (1993), and moves are realized by different rhetorical strategies and serve the typical communicative intentions subservient to the overall communicative purpose of the genre (Bhatia, 1993). The four moves are so coincident with the four elements (i.e. situation-problem-response-evaluation) of the English Problem-Solution pattern that it seems worthwhile to compare how far they differ and to what degree they share common characteristics.

The following Chinese text (coupled with its English translation by the writers of this paper), written by an anonymous web writer who is trying to explain what *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* means in Chinese traditional rhetoric, is used as another sample to analyze the applicability of the Problem-Solution in the interpretation of Chinese texts.

学贵有恒

Persistence is important for learning
(1) Learning has to be persistent in order to be successful. (2) Otherwise nothing can be achieved. (3) For instance, a child who starts school diligently but later loses interest in learning will fail in the end, (4) because he is not persistent. (5) However, Wang Yunwu, a successful self-taught scholar, worked very hard from his childhood and never stopped learning. (6) In the end he succeeded. (7) To take another example, Mencius did not like learning (8) when he was a child, (9) but his mother forced him to learn by cutting off the
cloth on the loom, and (10) he succeeded as the “Second Saint”. (11) Persistence leads to success; without persistence learning can never happen. (12) Therefore, we can conclude that the most important condition for successful learning is persistence.

The text might be analyzed in the following way.

Situation: (1)
Problem: (2)-(4)
Response: (5)-(10)
Evaluation: (11)-(12)

S1 could be taken as situation that successful learning has to be persistent, while S2-4 raises the exception or the problem, as the word otherwise is a signal for problem-raising and words like nothing, lost interest, fail, not persistent, are in contrast to the key words persistent and success in the previous sentence. S5-10 is the response, where the writer proposes different examples to respond to the problem. S11-12 evaluates the instances by reiterating the argument that persistence leads to success, without persistence learning can never happen, and the most important condition for successful learning is persistence. Problem-Solution pattern, in fact, occurs in all the hierarchies of the discourse, e.g. in response (5)-(10), there is another Problem-Solution pattern, with (8) situation (out of order), (7) problem, (9) response and (10) evaluation (Result).

4. Move Structures and Realizations of Qi-cheng-zhuan-he and Problem-Solution

The analysis is interesting in the way that the Problem-Solution works fairly well with the typical qi-cheng-zhuan-he Chinese text. However, are the four moves of the qi-cheng-zhuan-he functional equivalents to the four moves in the Problem-Solution (i.e., situation, problem, response, evaluation)? In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different? In the following (see Table 1), the Chinese text is presented again with move structure illustrations of both the Problem-Solution (analyzed by the writers) and the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern, as analyzed by the web writer, where S1 and S2 is qi, S3-4, cheng, S5-9, zhuan, and S10-12, he. The structural segmentations based on qi-cheng-zhuan-he seem to agree with those of Problem-Solution except for the end of the first move or the beginning for the second move. The qi takes part of the problem, while the problem includes both the cheng and part of qi. For details, please refer to Table 1, where micro-clause relations for the realizations of the four move structures are also given in brackets in side columns.
Table 1. Move structures and realizations of Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuan-he in the Chinese text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qi-cheng-zhuan-he</th>
<th>Text entitled Persistence is important for learning</th>
<th>Problem-Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qi (topic)</td>
<td>(1) Learning has to be persistent in order to be successful.</td>
<td>Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(elaboration)</td>
<td>(2) Otherwise, nothing can be achieved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng (evidence)</td>
<td>(3) For instance, a child who starts school diligently but later loses interest in learning will fail in the end, (4) because he is not persistent.</td>
<td>Problem (topic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(evidence)</td>
<td>(5) However, Wang Yunwu, a successful self-taught scholar, worked very hard from his childhood and never stopped learning. (6) In the end he succeeded.</td>
<td>elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuan (evidence)</td>
<td>(7) To take another example, Mencius did not like learning when he was a child, (8) but his mother forced him to learn by cutting off the cloth on the loom and (9) he succeeded as the &quot;Second Saint&quot;.</td>
<td>Response (solution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(another evidence)</td>
<td>(10) Persistence leads to success; (11) without persistence learning can never happen. (12) Therefore, we can conclude that the most important condition for successful learning is persistence.</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He (conclusion)</td>
<td>(1) We are dependent, for understanding and for consolation and hope, upon what we learn of ourselves from songs and stories. (Cheng) (2) From this statement, we can know that through songs and stories, people realized themselves, humanity and their societies. (3) The literacy—mastery of language and knowledge of books—is the essential factor that enlarges people’s knowledge, and improves mutual realization of people, and then creates the smooth society. (Zhuan) (4) From kindergartens to colleges, from homes to offices, we learn how to interact with someone and how to realize ourselves and our societies. (5) The literacy helps us to accustom and realize them. (He) (6) Hence, literacy is not an ornament, but a necessity. (Cai, 1993)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The description in the table seems to suggest that the basic discourse patterns of the two languages have something in common in terms of both macro-structures and inter-clausal relations. However, the Problem-Solution pattern seems to suggest that English topics are most likely to be introduced through the problem, which comes out of the situation and triggers the response, while the Chinese topics, according to the traditional model of qi-cheng-zhuan-he, should occur at the very beginning followed by elaboration and evidence. The problem, therefore, might not be important, as suggested in this particular example. This revelation could find another illustration in the example of G. Cai, a Chinese scholar working in the United States, who used this to suggest that the qi-cheng-zhuan-he is still a popular discourse pattern with contemporary Chinese students. He believes that in the following text S1 is qi, S2-3, cheng, S4-5, zhuan, and S6, he.

(Qi) (1) We are dependent, for understanding and for consolation and hope, upon what we learn of ourselves from songs and stories. (Cheng) (2) From this statement, we can know that through songs and stories, people realized themselves, humanity and their societies. (3) The literacy—mastery of language and knowledge of books—is the essential factor that enlarges people’s knowledge, and improves mutual realization of people, and then creates the smooth society. (Zhuan) (4) From kindergartens to colleges, from homes to offices, we learn how to interact with someone and how to realize ourselves and our societies. (5) The literacy helps us to accustom and realize them. (He) (6) Hence, literacy is not an ornament, but a necessity. (Cai, 1993)
realize ourselves (4), realize them (5); songs and stories (1) and (2), societies (2), society (3), societies (4); literacy (3), literacy (5), literacy (6); etc.), we might interpret the story in the following way.

Situation: We learn about ourselves from songs and stories.
(Problem implied:) Songs and stories might not be enough.
Response: Literacy is essential. That is why we learn literacy to realize ourselves from kindergarten to college life.
Evaluation: Literacy is a necessity.

If questions are inserted, we might get the following dialogue:

Q: What is the situation?
A: We learn about ourselves and the society from song and stories.
Q: What is the problem?
A: Songs and stories are not enough.
Q: What is your response?
A: Literacy is essential.
Q: How do you evaluate it?
A: It is a necessity.

The above analysis seems to suggest that the move structure of problem in qi-cheng-zhuang-he might not be very important; or the Problem-Solution pattern works well with a qi-cheng-zhuang-he text on the condition that the problem is inserted. A brief analysis of the text in both qi-cheng-zhuang-he (based on Cai, 1993) and Problem-Solution is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Move structures and realizations of Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuang-he in student essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qi-cheng-zhuang-he (lexical signal)</th>
<th>A text by a young Chinese student</th>
<th>Problem-Solution (lexical signal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qi (learn of ourselves)</td>
<td>(1) We are dependent, for understanding and for consolation and hope, upon what we learn of ourselves from songs and stories.</td>
<td>Situation (learn of ourselves from songs and stories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng (From this statement)</td>
<td>(2) From this statement, we can know that through songs and stories, people realized themselves, humanity and their societies.</td>
<td>Problem-implied Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhituan (Exemplification)</td>
<td>(3) The literacy—mastery of language and knowledge of books—is the essential factor that enlarges people's knowledge, and improves mutual realization of people, and then creates the smooth society.</td>
<td>Exemplification (Literacy is essential)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He (Hence)</td>
<td>(4) From kindergartens to colleges, from homes to offices, we learn how to interact with someone and how to realize ourselves and our societies. (5) The literacy helps us to accustom and realize them.</td>
<td>Evaluation (Necessity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Hence, literacy is not an ornament, but a necessity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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According to Hoey (2001), the situation in the Problem-Solution is, in fact, optional, but the problem seems to be required. It is the aspect of problem requiring a response. Thus the Problem-Solution might be condensed into a tripartite pattern as is often found with the stereotypical college writings in regard to the raising of the topic, supporting ideas and natural conclusion. So coincidently, qi-cheng-zhuang-he is often reduced into a three-part pattern as well: viewpoint (论点), basis for the viewpoint (论据), and proof for the viewpoint (论证). The strong resemblances between the two tripartite patterns of Chinese and English misled some Chinese students to conclude that qi-cheng-zhuang-he is transferable to writing in English, particularly when coping with written tests like CET 4 and TEM 4 in Chinese colleges and universities.

5. Relation Between Qi-cheng-zhuang-he and Problem-Solution

Despite the similarities and resemblances between the two discourse patterns, it still seems arbitrary to regard qi-cheng-zhuang-he as the same discourse pattern as the Problem-Solution. How do we understand the relation between qi-cheng-zhuang-he and the Problem-Solution? It is of course inappropriate for the current research to answer such complicated questions right now with so few samples and sporadic instances. However, the analysis seems to have led us to the following speculations, which might intrigue future investigations.

Structurally, the two patterns could both be condensed into tripartite patterns as mentioned previously. However, the three parts in the two patterns might function differently. The Chinese presupposes qi (i.e., the introduction of the viewpoint), cheng (i.e., elaboration or continuation of the viewpoint) and zhuan (i.e., supporting ideas for the viewpoint). On the other hand, the three parts in the English pattern can be understood as the problem (i.e., the raising of the topic), response (i.e., answer to the problem or supporting ideas to the topic), and evaluation (i.e., the result). The correlation and distinction between the two tripartite patterns and their relations to qi-cheng-zhuang-he and the Problem-Solution can be summarized as shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Chinese discourse pattern</th>
<th>Basic English discourse pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move</td>
<td>Tripartite pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Basis for topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Supporting ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(optional)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table seems to suggest that the most obvious distinction between the basic Chinese and English discourse patterns (at least with exposition and argumentation) lies in
how the topic is raised. In English, the topic is triggered through a problem, while in Chinese, a problem is not always necessary, but the basis (or the elaboration) for the topic is important. Therefore, in English introductions, we often find adversatives e.g., however, but, nevertheless, on the other hand, used to realize the move structure of the problem, forming a concessive macro discourse relation; however, in Chinese texts, we have therefore, so, as a result, etc. (Yang, 2003; 2005) to lead to evidence, forming a cause-consequence macro discourse relation. Another distinction we might make out from this is that the beginning part of a Chinese text tends to be longer than an English text, as cheng (or basis for the topic) will make the text beginning lengthy. These findings seem to cohere with Liu’s (2005) observation that both Chinese and English agree on the purpose, tripartite structure and the use of formal logic, but differ in the discussion of some fundamentals for argumentative writings. Specifically, the American group of instructional materials investigated by Liu (2005) considers anticipating the opposition a must while the Chinese group demonstrates epistemological and dialogical emphases and highlights the need to use analogies.

Practically, however, when we examine closely the writings by contemporary Chinese writers, we find that qi might not always be the topic itself, as supposed by the Chinese rhetorical convention. The seemingly topical word (i.e., “literacy” in the foregoing sample) does not appear until in cheng. Preceding the real topic (i.e., Literacy is not an ornament, but a necessity) are plenty of examples and elaborative interpretations. In this case, the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern seems to have changed into one in which qi is the loosely-connected social background to the topic, cheng, continuation (or narrowing of the general topic), zhuan, supporting ideas (often examples) and he, discourse topic, forming a rather inductive reasoning in discourse organization, as is suggested in many writings by modern Chinese writers (see Kaplan, 1966; Cai, 1993; Chen, 2007; Yang, 2005). Therefore, we could possibly say that contemporary Chinese might not write the way as suggested in qi-cheng-zhuan-he, which, in fact, share much with the Problem-Solution in terms of the basic discourse organization and construction.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Brief as it is, the previous analysis seems to suggest that, on the one hand, the two discourse patterns, qi-cheng-zhuan-he in Chinese and the Problem-Solution in English, share much in terms of how ideas are raised and supported. The basic minimum discourse pattern, the basic principles of the Problem-Solution, as claimed by Hoey (1983), could possibly be applied to the interpretation of both English and Chinese narrative and expository texts. On the other hand, examination of the Chinese texts does reveal some distinctions between the Problem-Solution pattern and qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern in that the problem seems not always necessary in Chinese texts, but in English in principle it is. In addition, writings by contemporary Chinese display variations from the conventional qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern; the reasons for the changes might be related to the particulars of
the modern Chinese culture and educational system, which might be an interesting topic for further exploration.

Finally, the authors would like to initiate the following ideas in regard to the relation of the two basic discourse patterns in Chinese and English, which the authors hope would arouse interest in further exploration or argumentation.

1) Possibly the Problem-Solution and qi-cheng-zhuan-he could be regarded as two varieties of the same discourse pattern, as cause-consequence and concession are two macro discourse variations of the Problem-Solution, in accordance with Hoey (1983).

2) The English Problem-Solution seems to work well with Chinese qi-cheng-zhuan-he texts, especially of narration and exposition, suggesting that both Chinese- and English-speaking people share much in construing experience into text. This however needs further validation; the accumulation of evidence from corpus studies might yield a more coherent account of this (cf. Flowerdew, 2008).

3) The surface realizations of text through the two discourse patterns seem to differ in that the move of the problem in English text is obligatory but in Chinese it is optional or sometimes implied. This again needs further investigation especially when genre and social issues are taken into consideration.

4) The two discourse patterns have different focuses, with the problem and the response central to the English text and qi and cheng to the Chinese, resulting in seemingly abrupt English beginnings to the Chinese reader and rather lengthy and irrelevant Chinese details at text beginnings to the English reader.

5) Contemporary Chinese writings sometimes deviate from the traditional qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern to a lesser or greater degree, especially in terms of the inductive tendency in text organization. The reasons for such a change might not be rhetorical but social or educational, which needs further exploration.

This analysis suggests that the Chinese rhetorical tradition Baguwen or the four parts might not be solely to blame for the “spiral” or “indirect” pattern (Kaplan, 1966) frequently adopted by the Chinese students while composing English texts. Qi-cheng-zhuan-he resembles the Problem-Solution in many ways, particularly in terms of the position of topic occurrence or the sequence of ideas. Therefore, it might be necessary to look into other factors (e.g., social, political and educational particularities) for explanation.

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