**Question 1B** (English 6310: Rhetorical History I): Are there problems in using a Western lens in order to analyze and recover non-Western rhetorics? Are there advantages? Illustrate by discussing three different non-Western rhetorics.

Viewing non-Western rhetorics through a Western lens is both important and problematic. The importance lies in making rhetoric in the West more inclusive and sensitive to the fact that there are important rhetorics that bare little or no connection to traditional Western rhetorical models and thinking. Problems lie in the fact that non-Western rhetorics can fall victim to simplification and misrepresentation and, at worst, devaluation, colonization, and oppression by those using Western models of analysis. Two terms can help us categorize the polar opposites in approaches to non-Western rhetorics: etic and emic. The etic approach uses a strong Western lens in viewing the non-Western, using Western rhetorical models and concepts to discuss these “othered” rhetorics and also attempts to find matches in non-Western rhetorics of Western rhetorical concepts (e.g. *ethos, pathos, logos*, rhetoric). In contrast, the emic approach “prefers[s] to study the ‘rhetoric’ of the Other in its own terms rather than [Western terms]” (Swearingen 213). Both models have been used by prominent rhetoricians, along with a mixture of the two, such as C. Jan Swearingen in “Song to Speech: The Origins of Early Epitaphia in Ancient Near Eastern Women’s Lamentations.” My focus here is on the division between etic and emic approaches (and at times a mixture of the two), and the advantage and disadvantages of each. To illustrate this I will be looking at the non-Western rhetorics of Confucius, Enheduanna, and the New World.

In Confucian rhetoric we get a rhetoric that both adds to the Rhetorical conversation in the West and which is also skewed at times by a Western lens. Two of the problems involve identity and language issues. For many in the West, Confucius is “cursed as an idealist [negatively], misogynist…and the cause of rigid traditions that handicap a society’s development” (Lyon 131) and is “depict[ed] as an authoritarian” (Ames and Rosemont 19). This negative view can skew interpretations of his writing and his message. Certainly not all in the West have negative views of Confucian rhetoric, but those that approach it with that lens can do harm. Another problem with using a Western rhetorical lens when studying Confucian rhetoric has to do with issues of translation, and more specifically, the translation of Western rhetorical terms. As Arabella Lyon discusses in “Confucian Silence and Remonstration: A Basis of Deliberation,” rhetoricians have struggled in finding the Chinese equivalent to “rhetoric” in the writings of Confucius (and other Chinese writers). Lyon writes that Xing Lu and David Frank suggest that the term “bian” is the term that best fits the Western notion of “rhetoric” but she makes an extremely important point about the attempt to force non-Western rhetorics into Western rhetorical models. She writes, “longing for a one-to-one correspondence, however, will not allow us to understand the rich differences that Chinese offers. Such a simple term…cannot provide nuance for communicative action” (133-34). The fact that our Western notions of rhetoric may be complexly different than non-Western rhetorics and create misinterpretation and blinders illustrates important pitfalls.

We see the harm of using strict Western rhetorical models and thinking in approaching Confucian rhetoric again in a mixture of grammatical and world-view issues. As discussed by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont in their introduction to *The Analects of Confucius*, “there are presuppositions underlying all discourse about the world, and beliefs, and about attitudes, which are sedimented into specific grammars of the languages in which these discourse take place” (20). As examples, the authors point to the terms “tree,” “dao,” and “thing” to show that the Western translation of each is ideologically and grammatically skewed. The West and, looking specifically at Rhetoric, Aristotelian categories “demand from us that experiences, [the focal point of Chinese rhetoric], be factored into things, actions, attributes of things, and modalities of actions—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs” (22). This “factoring” is symbolic of the West which differs from the Chinese world-view of “experiences” and of “eventful” grammar and ideology. Thus, using a strict Western model to analyze this non-Western rhetoric can account for subtle and grievous misrepresentation.

But, on the other hand, fitting non-Western rhetorics into Western rhetorical models makes this material more accessible to the West and helps make Western Rhetoric more diverse and inclusive. Rhetorics from Confucius, Enheduanna and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (discussed below), Neo-Assyria, Egypt, and beyond, are beginning to gain ground and legitimacy in Western rhetorical studies, and much of this is due to the fact that Western writers and rhetoricians have used traditional, Western rhetorical models to bring these rhetorics into the “mainstream” of rhetorical studies. And those that use an emic approach, or at least a more-emic approach, help expand Rhetoric in general by “looking for subtle differences in names for rhetorical genres, purposes, and ‘proofs’…[and] reveal[ing] the limits of our definitions, and enrich[ing] them with alternative understandings” (Swearingen 213). Thus, bringing non-Western rhetorics into the fray adds to our understandings of the metacritical use of language and discourse in a diverse number of places, times, and cultures. As contemporary rhetoricians, we should applaud this.

The second non-Western rhetoric I will discuss is that of Enheduanna, a Mesopotamian priestess and poet living ca. 2300 B.C. As with Confucian rhetoric, the rhetoric of Enhaduanna provides problems *and* advantages in discussing the use of a Western lens in analyzing non-Western rhetorics. Advantages include the fact that Enhaduanna complicates rhetorical history and research, and “it also illuminates the particular embeddedness that shapes and formulates the Eurocentric tradition of rhetoric (Binkley 47). Enheduanna thus adds to the diversification of Rhetoric. As a poet, she expands the traditional forms of rhetorical writing which today focuses mainly on prose. As a woman, she challenges the male-centered history of prominent rhetoricians. As Roberta Binkley writes, “she stands at the beginning of written tradition, a notable exception to the early western canonical tradition in which women are virtually non-existent” (47). And as a rhetorician writing in 2300 B.C., long before Plato and Aristotle, she challenges the origins of rhetoric. Thus, a scholar like Binkley, studying Enheduanna while “using the traditional conceptual terminology of Aristotelian rhetoric” (48), adds to the complexity and history of rhetorical studies, making them more kaleidoscopic in nature.

But this doesn’t mean there aren’t some problems in analyzing Enhaduanna’s rhetoric through a Western lens. First off, Enheduanna’s rhetoric was developed and important in a culture rather alien to that of Ancient Greece, the traditional locus of Rhetoric’s beginnings. This Mesopotamian culture is even more alien to rhetoricians of the late 20th Century and beyond. Attempting to look at Enheduanna’s rhetoric emically would create highly speculative scholarship considering scholars are dealing with a very different context. We must not be naïve and think that we can be “in” a Mesopotamian mindset of four thousand years ago when analyzing Enheduanna’s rhetoric. This seems to indicate that, in some cases, especially when scholars themselves are Western and were trained in Western rhetoric, the only option is to analyze and recover non-Western rhetorics on Western terms. As with Confucian rhetoric, this may lead to misrepresentation and a “colonization” of non-Western rhetorics and the perpetuation of thinking that sees non-Western rhetorics as unable to stand on their own ground/terms. But, once again, approaching these rhetorics with a Western lens allows those rhetorics to achieve a larger audience and adds to the richness of the field of Rhetoric. As C. Jan Swearingen puts it, using a Western lens to view and present non-Western rhetorics “builds on the familiar and brings into the domain of an already defined rhetoric a group of cultures and languages that had heretofore been excluded from rhetorical analysis” (213). We must celebrate the new voices but be aware of the limitations of using our Western lens.

A final rhetoric I would like to discuss is that of the “New World,” more specifically that of Colonial Spanish America of the 16th and 17th centuries. This is an interesting example considering the flourishing of classical Western rhetorical theory at the time in Europe which coincided with the colonization of New Spain (Mexico) and Peru by Spanish forces. While the earlier sections of this essay, on Confucius and Enheduanna, focused on more contemporary scholarship which has attempted to use either an etic or emic approach (or a mixture of both) in analyzing non-Western rhetorics, this section looks mainly at work done in the 16th and 17th centuries. The works presented here are highly etic in that approaching non-Western rhetoric, that of the natives of “New Spain,” through a strictly Western lens was the norm. While there was an attempt to understand the natives, and even in some cases value their way of life (a rare occurrence), there was very little attempt to view, approach, recover, and analyze the rhetorical practices of the natives on their own grounds/terms.

Specific examples of rhetorical work done by European/Western rhetoricians include Luis de Granada’s *Breve tratado* and José de Arriaga’s *Rhetoris Christiani*. Other works, which “modified traditional doctrine as a result of…New World experience” (Abbott 3), though influenced by and highly structured around Western rhetorical theory, include Diego Valadés’ *Rhetorica Christiana* and Arriaga’s *Extirpación de la idolatria en Peru*. While much can be said of these works, and others, let me address the specific question at hand—the advantages and disadvantages of viewing non-Western rhetorics through a Western lens.

This approach’s dangers and pitfalls are exemplified in the work of missionary José de Acosta who “regarded the Indians as inferior to Europeans” (Abbott 4). His elitist Western lens rhetorically oppressed the natives and labeled their rhetoric as inferior and simplistic—the worst an etic approach can do. On the other hand, rhetors such as Garcilaso de la Vega and Felip Guaman Poma de Ayala represent what using an etic approach (mixed with an awareness of non-Western concerns/issues) can do to affect positive change. Vega, a mestizo, and Pomo, an Indian influenced by Spanish/Western rhetoric, not only respected native discourse but incorporated Western rhetorical models to help the natives. Vega wrote *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, “a document directed to the Spanish Crown, [which] employs the themes and techniques of classical rhetoric, in an effort to influence Spanish colonial policy in Peru” and Ayala also employed “[Western] techniques on behalf of his people” (4). Europeans also preserved native rhetoric as was the case with Bernardino de Sahagún’s *General History of the Things of New* Spain, which helped preserve the oral rhetoric (huehuehtlahtolli) of the native Aztec/Mexica people (3). Thus, in the case of applying a Western lens to the rhetoric of Colonial Spanish American, we once again see that there can be positives and negatives—the possibility of respect, preservation, and positive change along with the more common occurrences of misrepresentation, devaluation, and colonization of a people and their rhetoric.

As we see in the examples discussed in this essay, viewing and presenting non-Western rhetorics through a Western lens has its advantages and disadvantages. We must always be aware that using Western models can “obscure what is uniquely there by foregrounding western assumptions and so distort and colonize” (Lyon 133) but be intellectual, courageous, and self-reflexive enough to ethically analyze and recover non-Western rhetorics which will undoubtedly and importantly add to the complexity and diversity of rhetorical studies.

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