The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics

Studies in the History, Application, and Teaching of Rhetoric Beyond Traditional Greco-Roman Contexts

Edited by Keith Lloyd
The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics

The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics offers a broad and comprehensive understanding of comparative or world rhetoric, from ancient times to the modern day. Bringing together an international team of established and emergent scholars, this handbook looks beyond Greco-Roman traditions in the study of rhetoric to provide an international, cross-cultural study of communication practices around the globe.

With dedicated sections covering theory and practice, history, pedagogy, hybrids and the modern context, this extensive collection will provide the reader with a solid understanding of:

- how comparative rhetoric evolved
- how it redefines and expands the field of rhetorical studies
- what it contributes to our understanding of human communication
- its implications for the advancement of related fields, such as composition, technology, language studies, and literacy.

In a world where understanding how people communicate, argue, and persuade is as important as understanding their languages, The Routledge Handbook of Comparative World Rhetorics is an essential resource for scholars and students of communication, composition, rhetoric, cultural studies, cultural rhetoric, cross-cultural studies, transnational studies, translingual studies, and languages.

Dr. Keith Lloyd is Professor of English at Kent State University Stark and his research interests include promoting collaborative, innovative, and non-dualistic modes of political and cross-cultural communication. His work is published in Rhetoric Review, Rhetorica, Advances in the History of Rhetoric, Rhetoric Society Quarterly, and the Handbook of Logical Thought in India.
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Contributors

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Hui Wu is Professor of English and Chair of the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas at Tyler. Her research encompasses history of rhetoric and composition, comparative communication and writing studies, and global feminist rhetorics. One of her articles, “Lost and Found in Transnation: Modern Conceptualization of Chinese Rhetoric” won the 2010 Best Article Award by the journal Rhetoric Review.

Xiaoye You is Liberal Arts Professor of English and Asian studies at The Pennsylvania State University and the founding chair of the Conference on Writing Education Across Borders (CWEAB). His first monograph, Writing in the Devil’s Tongue: A History of English Composition in China, won the 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Outstanding Book Award. His second monograph, Cosmopolitan English and Transliteracy, arguing for ethical use of English in everyday life and for cultivating global citizens in literacy education, received the 2018 CCCC Research Impact Award.

Michelle Zaleski is a postdoctoral teaching fellow at Marymount University, where she teaches courses in writing and literature that engage students with the making of English in and around Washington DC. Her research, which has appeared in College English, accounts for the ways in which difference has affected the rhetorical past and present. Her current project traces the translingual practices of Jesuit rhetorical education in India during the early modern period.

Yebing Zhao is a PhD candidate in the rhetoric and composition program of the Department of English at Miami University. She holds two master’s degrees, one in English (rhetoric and composition) from Miami University and one in linguistics and applied linguistics (second language teaching and research) from Sun Yat-Sen University, China. Her research interests focus on comparative and cultural rhetoric, second language writing, translingualism, writing center studies, intercultural business communication, and systemic functional linguistics. Her current dissertation project compares the Euro-American writing concept of voice with the ancient Chinese literary theory of “wenqi.” Her preliminary
research outcome “Wenqi 文气 and Wende 文德: Ecological and Ethical Voice in Writing and Communication from a Comparative Rhetoric Lens” was published in China Media Research, vol. 15, no. 1, 2019.

Hua Zhu’s research lies at the intersection of non-Eurocentric rhetorical histories, comparative and cultural rhetorics, and transnational writing pedagogies and writing program administration. Hua has published in *Rhetorica, China Media Research, Composition Forum,* and *Contemporary Rhetorical Studies: Chen WangDao Forum Collection.* Hua’s dissertation research synthesizes political rhetorics in early China, ancient Greek rhetoric, and contemporary intercultural communication theories and proposes the rhetoric of according-with/yin (因). She argues the rhetoric of according-with is a mode of doing, thinking, and being that simultaneously uses and reinvents surrounding discourses and conditions. Such rhetoric addresses the paradox of conforming to and reforming discursive constraints and shines a new light on how disenfranchised rhetors subvert imbalanced power relations in global contact zones, such as the ways in which international teaching assistants accord with—navigate, use, and reinvent—their teacherly “authority” in American academia.
I am most indebted in this project to the Routledge representative who first contacted and met with me to see if I was interested in such a project, Felisa Salvago-Keyes. I greatly appreciate her guidance and patience as I began to approach authors and piece the collection together. I also want to thank Routledge representative Suzanne Richardson, who took over for Felisa when she took a leave of absence to have a baby, and for the help of Richa Kohli, who helped guide the project to the wise and helpful hands of Sukriti Pandey, who has proved invaluable in helping me tick off the boxes in terms of the details of bringing the book to print. Thank you also to Kevin Kelsey at Apex CoVantage for his patient and helpful guidance through the editing process.

I am also so grateful to every author in this collection, not only for submitting quality chapters, but also for quickly and patiently working with me to revise, edit, and format as the book took shape. Over the years I sought contributors, I am especially glad to have personally met and talked with every contributor. They have been truly inspirational.

I want to extend a special thanks to three individual colleagues, LuMing Mao, Tarez Samara Graban, and Iklim Goksel. To LuMing, for being such a remarkable embodiment of what it means to do comparative rhetoric, for his encouragement in this project, and for his wonderful contribution to it. To Tarez, for being one of the first “fans” of my work, for her support and kind words, and for her warm friendship over the years we have led the Comparative Global Rhetorics Special Interest Group at The College Composition and Communications Conference. To Iklim for being an inspirational visionary for this field of study, and for her kindness and encouragement through the long journey of getting this book to completion.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this book to the memory of my mother, June Lloyd. She taught piano for most of her adult life; she always kept learning and moving, changing with the needs of her students, attending classes on teaching and performance. She was an inspiring person and teacher, and I am most grateful for the gift she was to the world.
Abbreviations

**Chapter 1: Lloyd**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISHR</td>
<td>International Society for the History of Rhetoric</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASHR</td>
<td>American Society for the History of Rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Rhetoric Society of America</td>
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<td>RSQ</td>
<td>Rhetoric Society Quarterly</td>
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**Chapter 4: Katz**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Communications Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSA</td>
<td>Rhetoric Society of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIG</td>
<td>Special interest group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCE/CE</td>
<td>Before the Common Era/After the Common Era</td>
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<tr>
<td>G/d</td>
<td>God</td>
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**Chapter 12: Gellis**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Alpha Text</td>
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**Chapter 14: Diab**

Letter is abbreviated as L with a number to refer to one of 20 letters in a section of an anthology.

**Chapter 19: Engelson**

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICRS</td>
<td>Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies</td>
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**Chapter 20: Liu**

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NMET</td>
<td>National Matriculation English Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEPM</td>
<td>Middle school Chinese textbooks published by People's Education Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEPH</td>
<td>High school Chinese textbooks published by People’s Education Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEPHW</td>
<td>High school Writing textbook published by People's Education Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPM</td>
<td>Middle school Chinese textbooks published by Suzhou Education Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPH</td>
<td>High school Chinese textbooks published by Suzhou Education Press</td>
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Chapter 22: Canlas
GDP Gross domestic product

Chapter 38: Rashwan
AE Ancient Egyptian

Chapter 40: Rickert
SUNY State University of New York
1 Comparative World Rhetorics
The What and How

Keith Lloyd

1. Introduction

“Comparative rhetoric” began in earnest with George Kennedy’s 1998 book of that name, identifying a “turn” in the field similar to those in comparative religion and philosophy. His work was the first book-length study to expand upon Robert Oliver’s groundbreaking 1971 book, *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*. Both volumes are impressive in scope, and Kennedy’s idea that rhetoric is a kind of energy, discussed in detail by Thomas Rickert in this volume, was truly groundbreaking. Both authors desired to interpret each individual culture's rhetoric within the context of that culture, but both ultimately, and understandably, given the newness of the topic, used Greco-Roman framing for their interpretations.

Despite this promising beginning, publications on comparative rhetoric as field of inquiry (the focus of this introductory overview) remained sparse. However, in 2003, LuMing Mao’s “Reflective Encounters: Illustrating Comparative Rhetoric” set coordinates for mapping our current understanding of comparative rhetoric. Mao has published extensive journal articles on comparative rhetoric – “Thinking Beyond Aristotle,” “Writing the Other Into Histories of Rhetoric,” “Doing Comparative Rhetoric Responsibly,” “Illustrating Comparative Rhetoric Through a Socratic Parable,” and “The Rhetoric of Responsibility” – shaping and defining the field. “The Rhetoric of Responsibility” responded to Scott Stroud’s pragmatic view of comparative rhetoric, “Pragmatism and the Methodology of Comparative Rhetoric.” Stroud offers that comparative rhetoric is less about historical accuracy than about discovering solutions for current problems in historical contexts. Mao warns that this pragmatic approach may be irresponsible in terms of the context and history of non-Western traditions.

Mao also edited a collection of comparative essays for *RSQ* (a stand-alone book as well), and he played a major role in the comparative rhetoric “manifesto,” discussed ahead. I am grateful for his encouragement for, and contribution to, this volume.

Another forerunner in the field, C. Jan Swearingen, reflected upon the nature of comparative rhetoric with Edward Schiappa in 2009’s “Historical and Comparative Rhetorical Studies: Revisionist Methods and New Directions,” in 2011’s “Plato and Confucius, Aristotle and Mencius – the Perils and Prospects of Comparative Studies in Rhetoric,” and 2013’s “Tao Trek: One and Other in Comparative Rhetoric, a Response.” In “Tao Trek” she describes comparative rhetoric as a journey: “Moving beyond sameness and difference, the One and the Many, making many stops along the way, we will often encounter the Stranger at the gate” (307). In another passage she prophecies the future direction of comparative rhetoric:

the virtue of cross cultural and comparative studies in rhetoric is that the dangers of preserving the Other as an other can be minimized by recognizing, or creating, common
grounds and common language, an objective that becomes increasingly important in the current climate of resurgent nationalisms and related polarized identities.

These words underscore the significance of this collection.

In 2009, Sue Hum and Arabella Lyon released a summary study of the field, “Recent Advances in Comparative Rhetoric,” for The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies. They raise issues this volume attempts to address: our definitions of, and approaches to, rhetoric, ethical questions surrounding comparative work, how we proceed when the discourse communities we study have no terms for rhetoric, and how anyone can understand another culture at all.

At first comparative rhetoric featured historical recoveries from ancient periods, most often those in China. However, in 2004 and 2009, Carol Lipson and Roberta Binkley expanded studies in comparative rhetoric in the anthologies Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks and Ancient Non-Greek Rhetorics. The first opened doors for Middle Eastern, Egyptian, Chinese, Biblical, and Alternate Greek rhetorics, studies continued here in the work of Diab, Özyeşilpinar and Jabeen, Vélez Ortiz, Katz, Gellis, Enos, Twal, and Rashwan.

Non-Greek Rhetorics included essays on Chinese rhetorics by authors featured in this book, Xiaoye You and Arabella Lyon. Steven B. Katz, also in this volume, explores Jewish rhetoric, extended here by Eliza Gellis’s erudite study of the Book of Esther. Non-Greek Rhetorics featured Japanese rhetoric, a topic continued here by Massimiliano Tomasi. It also featured Mari Lee Mifsud, included in this volume, and Scott Stroud on Indian rhetorics. I am indebted to their work in my own studies of Indian rhetoric, which began with “Rethinking Rhetoric from an Indian Perspective” in 2007.

The idea of a singular history of rhetoric beginning in Greece alone was challenged in Patricia Bizzell and Susan Jarratt’s 2004 “Rhetorical Traditions, Pluralized Canons, Relevant History, and Other Disputed Terms: A Report From the History of Rhetoric Discussion Groups at the ARS Conference,” published in Rhetoric Society Quarterly. This meeting of comparative scholars offered and agreed that rhetorical studies should consist of histories of “rhetorics,” the primary reason for the “History/Recovery” section of this book. Participants also lamented the lack of publications on teaching comparative rhetoric, and the lack of impact the field was having on coursework in universities, topics richly addressed here in Part V, Applying and Promoting Comparative Pedagogies.

In 2013, another meeting of stakeholders in the field published a piece in Rhetoric Review, “Manifesting a Future for Comparative Rhetoric”; its tenets excerpted here:

Definition: “Comparative rhetoric examines communicative practices across time and space”; Object of study: “communicative practices frequently originating in non-canonical contexts . . . often . . . marginalized, forgotten, dismissed as anything but rhetoric, and/or erased altogether”; Goals: to “promote and practice a way of doing, knowing, and being that moves away from defining/claiming a finite set of objects of study and that transcends borders, binaries, and biases”; Methodology: “Comparative rhetoric practices the art of recontextualization” [discussed below]

Every chapter in this book in some ways engages these tenets.

This Handbook begins with a discussion of what comparative rhetoric is; moves to innovative historical recoveries of World Rhetorics, including Chinese, Biblical, Japanese, Egyptian, Hindu, Islamic, Turkish, and Indigenous American; and moves on to studies related to Jesuits,
archaeology, feminism, and music. It brings into the discussion rhetorics of Indonesia, Africa, and the Philippines.

These pages lead the field of comparative rhetoric, and rhetorical studies in general, into fresh directions, unexplored histories and practices, new territories, unique and engaging terminologies, interesting blends and hybrids, smart pedagogies and methodologies, new connections.

The chapters in this book relate not only to comparative rhetoric but also its cousins cultural rhetorics, intercultural rhetorics, transnational studies, translilingual studies, rhetoric and composition, communications, intercultural communication, and more. Many of the chapters intersect these fields. The recovery sections will be of special interest to historians, anthropologists, and even scholars of comparative philosophy and religion. Contemporary studies and Part VI, New Directions, will also be relevant to political scientists. Xiaobo Wang and Mari Lee Mifsud's work interweave comparative rhetoric with feminist theory and transnational feminism. The collection as a whole illustrates the myriad possibilities in extending rhetorical study beyond Greco-Roman and Euro-American limitations.

2. How This Book Came Into Being

When I began studying rhetorical practices in India, comparative rhetors were rare, so I attended every relevant talk, scoured publications, sought new colleagues. The College Composition and Communications Conference welcomed comparative presentations, and its Special Interest Group, Non-Western Global Rhetorics, proved a gold mine. Tarez Graban (included here), Nicole Khouri, Adnan Sahli, and I collaborated to shape that organization, soon to be a standing group. Graban and Hui Wu (also included here) have been creating a collection of translations of key texts from non-Western contexts. Anne Melfi (included here) and Nicole Khouri continue the work of Graban and others to publish the first extensive annotated bibliography of comparative rhetoric.

In the meantime, the International Society for the History of Rhetoric (ISHR), the American Society for the History of Rhetoric (ASHR), the Rhetoric Society of America and their journals Rhetorica, Advances in the History of Rhetoric, and RSQ offered increasing opportunities for comparative scholarship, as did the journal Rhetoric Review. RSQ and Advances published special issues on the topic, and ISHR and ASHR each devoted a conference on related topics. Scott Stroud, currently president of ASHR, is developing web-linked specialized descriptions and bibliographies in comparative studies that will be available on the ASHR website.

So when Routledge approached me, I was already creating a list of contributors in my head and, inspired by the publisher's invitation, continued making connections by attending three to five conferences a year. As a result, I met with and/or shared meals with almost every author in the book. Word of mouth brought me to others and others to me, and I wrote invitations to scholars listed on a bibliography one of my students, Jason Sharier, created in a graduate course in World Rhetorics (which grew into the annotated bibliography just mentioned). Even as the book moves forward, I will continue to search for emerging work.

While editing this book I also sought to resist forces within the field edging emergent scholars toward the normalized discourse of Greco–Roman rhetoric. The comparative field is growing beyond even its own name, but many scholars, mostly, but certainly not all, of color or from underrepresented populations, or both, were telling me, and continue to tell me, that their well-meaning professors are steering them toward mainstream hot topics. They need jobs, true, but our field, as well as our universities, can no longer marginalize all but Western European and American perspectives. Shyam Sharma's chapter in this volume wonderfully illustrates the benefits of promoting comparative work in academia.
The beginning, emerging, and established scholars in this volume respond in rich ways to the issues just outlined – the need for expansion into new territories, the need to redefine the field of rhetoric from a global perspective, the need for comparative pedagogies. These scholars took a chance on me, and for that I am very grateful. Their work validates comparative rhetoric as not only legitimate but also as an emergent and significant next very fruitful phase for the discipline. The world is literally at our feet.

3. The “Rhetoric” in Comparative Rhetoric

As C. Jan Swearingen noted previously, comparative rhetoric is especially needed at this historical moment; we see daily examples of mis-communication between nations, ethnic groups, language groups, etc. For instance, I once looked at how the Obama administration framed a terrorist attack and compared it to an explanation released by the terrorists responsible. The US interpretation focused on the terrorist’s hatred of freedom and democracy, while the terrorist account focused on hundreds of years of Western oppression and occupation, the need for recognition of the terrorist’s complaints, and the desire for the US and Europe to stop interfering. Peoples of the world not only speak different languages, but also employ different rhetorics. We ignore this reality at our peril. As these chapters illustrate, some knowledge of the rhetorics of “non-Western” peoples can ensure all are more conversing with than talking at.

To know what comparative rhetoric is, we need some sense of what rhetoric is. Every chapter in this collection provides its own definition, and I defer to their work for a complete picture. For me, Arabella Lyon’s (one of the authors in this collection) “Tricky Words: Rhetoric and Comparative” from Mao et al.’s “Manifesting a Future” provides a perfect starting point. Lyon wisely notes, “Words bring confiscations, hierarchies, and histories. Rhetoric has a deep archive, even if one seeks to circumscribe its definitions.” She remarks that her only reason for continuing to use the term is because other scholars caused her to see that it may be “an acceptable placeholder, if only because it is so loose in meaning” (244).

That looseness offers an open door. Although traditional Aristotelian rhetoric defines rhetoric as an art of persuasion, in considering a more overarching view, I return to my introductory writing course definition: Rhetoric is the shaping of What and How. Though different, the words are interrelated. Brits actually say, “How do you mean? where someone in the States would say, “What do you mean?” How and What arise together, similar to linguistically converse antonyms, like husband/wife, parent/child, and even teacher/student, “opposites” that come into existence together and cannot exist without one another. For explanatory purposes, we can describe a What, a message that we wish to convey to ourselves or another. However, we cannot relay that message without creating it within a How, within a variety of tones, vocabularies, languages, dialects, idiolects, media, registers, conventions, conscious and unconscious motives, etc. The How shapes the message, even as the message shapes the How. Rhetoric, from this point of view, is the active shaping of the What and How in any communicative act.

This may seem a simplification of Aristotle’s logos, ethos, and pathos, the so-called rhetorical triangle. However, the intent of this model is to create a space for rhetoric as a global phenomenon, not to define it within a persuasive framework. Beings shape what they say or do not say, what they depict or not depict, what they embody or do not embody – for a variety of purposes. This shaping, both conscious and unconscious, is what I believe rhetoric to be. It is not a tool but an activity. To the extent such shaping is conscious, rhetoric is what Aristotle calls a “teche,” a learned art, a discipline. But to the extent this shaping is conventional, traditional, habitual, or unconscious, it functions inherently, an inheritance from the worldviews, languages, and communities to which the speaker adheres or finds herself. Comparative rhetoric brings a heightened awareness of both of these aspects of rhetoric.
As Lyon mentions, the word rhetoric is fraught with connotative and historical baggage, but as a shaping of how and what, we may still employ it. First, this definition fits even the most negative examples of the use of the term rhetoric – false rhetoric, rhetoric vs. reality, fake news. People use the shaping power of rhetoric to frame falsities, unrealities, and lies, but the definition remains unaffected. From the earliest times, rhetoric was feared for this ability to present untruth as truth, yet no discourse community on planet earth is immune to deception. Ironically, it is the study of rhetoric that lessens the chance a deceiver will get away with it.

The what and how definition, however, does not sidestep the issue of truth. Some say the new normal is a “post-truth” reality, but I find that phrase ridiculous for its naivety as to the realities our relation to the environment, to wars and refugees, to each other as human beings. We need to employ the what and how to resist ridiculous and hateful analogies, such as “invasions” of “our” borders. We need to shape the difference between political correctness and correctness. We need to pick our fights. These truths remain: each of us lives for only a brief time; we thrive given the opportunity to freely make choices; we get the most good done for all if we work together; all human beings deserve respect. We need an alternate narrative that resists the self-fulfilling prophecy saying we are divided and “tribal.” The pages of this book attest to a different narrative, which is nonetheless experientially real. Rhetorical studies and comparative rhetoric need to move center stage in a world drifting closer and closer to total absurdity.

Second, the what and how definition reminds us that “rhetoric,” unlike many Latin phases, like pro bono, ad hominem, and quid pro quo, is truly an English word (though that opens up another Pandora’s box). True, the popular connotations of the word irk most scholars of rhetoric, but it is a familiar term, especially in the political realm, occurring in over 89,000 Google hits. It is no more Greek than “pajamas” is Hindi, or “boss” Dutch, or “honcho” Japanese, or “whisky” Irish, “rodeo” Spanish, or “treasure” French.

English is now spoken by about one and half billion people on the planet, and rhetoric is a common English word. The field of rhetoric needs to recognize that it is not the domain of Ancient Athens. As Richard Leo Enos marvelously points out in this volume, even our focus on Athens has been to the detriment of rhetoric’s embodiments in Syracuse, Sparta, Rhodes, and Asia Minor. Ultimately, the word rhetoric is not even British or American “English.” It is part of the vocabulary of many emergent “Englishes” around the world.

Third, though the what and how definition applies to Greco-Roman persuasion, it also aligns with some of the most innovative recent studies in rhetoric. For instance, it fits with Thomas Rickert’s Ambient Rhetoric, where he notes that “rhetoricity is the always ongoing disclosure of the world shifting our manner of being in that world so as to call for some response or action” (xii). (See also Rickert’s chapter in this collection.) It fits with James Crosswhite’s Deep Rhetoric, in which he notes, “Rhetoric is not a debased kind of communication; it is the reality of all communication, and it leads us to experiencing the world in some particular ways” (17). Lisbeth Lipari’s Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement, like the previous work of Cheryl Glenn, explores listening as a type of communicative action (see Glenn, Rhetorical Feminism 4). Lipari frames listening and speaking much as I frame the how and what; for Lipari, listening is not just a receptive act; both speech and listening occur arise together. What Glenn herself says about rhetorical feminism also fits with the what and how, this time as a “reshaping” of what has been shaped before in traditional rhetoric: “rhetorical feminism shows us ways to reshape the rhetorical appeals, including reshaped logos based on dialogue and understanding, a reshaped ethos rooted in experience, and a reshaped pathos that values emotion” (4). Xiabo Wang’s chapter in this volume suggests innovative ways rhetorical feminism and comparative rhetoric may work together.

Many important factors shape the What, such as genre, media, relevance, reality, truth, significance, etc., and many shape the How, such as imagined, perceived, and actual audience,
framing, conventions, language, customs, time period, worldview, age, race, ethnicity, discourse community, relationship, etc. All affect each other. Though definitions of rhetoric and comparative rhetoric differ in this collection, all fit within a What and How umbrella, even the innovative work of Richard Leo Enos and Erin Cromer Twal, who posit that the spaces in which humans live shape their practice of rhetoric, and so the spaces in which they live or lived can and should be studied rhetorically.

4. The “Comparative” of Comparative Rhetoric

Expanding the meaning of rhetoric to a global scale, the term comparative becomes less problematic. Rhetoric is the study of the shaping of the relation of the what and how of communication in human (and animal) environments. Comparative rhetoric focuses on rhetorics outside of, or neglected by, the Greco–Roman tradition, including also rhetorics of postcolonial environments (see Anyango-Kivuva, Dadugbor, Romney, and Rashwan). Boundaries between rhetoric and comparative rhetoric begin to dissolve.

Nevertheless, the term comparison implies that one is judging the unknown in the light of something previously known. For Oliver and Kennedy, comparative rhetoric involved relating Greco–Roman perspectives to understudied and/or non-Western communicative practices. The danger in this approach is to create misleading equivalences and misinterpretations. Oliver and Kennedy were both aware of these issues, and they tried to nudge us away from them as much as they could. Miles Coleman’s well-researched archaeological dig into the word’s history, featured in this volume, offers some ways out of this history.

As LuMing Mao admits, “we have to begin somewhere” (“Reflective Encounters” 417), yet comparison may lead the comparer to find the “other” deficient. The solution, as Mao and others point out, is to immerse oneself as much as possible in the Other’s world, to describe as best we can their practices in their own terms, within their own contexts. As he notes, “we may not have any choice than to articulate other rhetorical traditions first by seeking out frames and terms found in our own tradition. But . . . our larger goal is to study these traditions on their own terms” (“Reflective” 417; see also Rashwan). During this process, however, one must reflect upon, and reexamine, one’s own positionality. Mao continues, we study other traditions in order to develop “an ongoing dialogue between these other traditions and Western rhetorical tradition” (“Reflective” 418). These “reflective encounters,” the practice of which is an “art of recontextualization,” expand our understanding of the field of rhetoric, of ourselves, as well as the other under study. The chapters in this book reflect those common motives.

However, many scholars in this volume, and many interested in comparative rhetoric in general, grew up in “non-Western” environments. They enter tangentially from a Greco-Roman perspective, reentering their home discourse much differently than a Westerner. Mao recognizes this reality in “Reflective Encounters,”

For rhetoricians whose rhetorical traditions are the “other,” and whose representations of the “other” . . . reflective encounters can yield a willingness to complicate their representations even though they are already considered “native.” . . . the process of studying (one’s own) rhetorical and cultural experiences is always a process of recontextualization, no matter how intimate they are with these experiences.

Many of the authors reflect these kinds of perspectives, and offer fresh extensions of such positionalities.

Conversely, no one was born a rhetorical scholar, so in many ways even Westerners trained in Greco–Roman rhetoric have complicated relations to it. As I began my rhetorical education,
my relation to Greek rhetoric was deeply affected by my desire for a feminist framework from which to interpret and teach it. In addition, I had adhered to evangelical Christianity as a youth, but as I began my career in teaching, I found I identified with perspectives found in the Hindu writings Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. My positionality interwove strands of rhetoric and composition, feminist studies, and Hindu perspectives, which coalesced in my study of Nyaya, an ancient Hindu philosophy that reframed rhetoric in communal and metaphysical terms. I began to publish on both feminist and Indian rhetorics. As many of the chapters in this collection illustrate, in many of us in the supposed West, the binaries of West and East are already dissolved, simply not helpful.

Mao also recognizes this side of the story,

For rhetoricians nurtured in Western rhetorical tradition . . . reflective encounters can lead to a productive interrogation of their own (often dominant) tradition, their own (often privileged) position, and their very (often well-meaning) representations of the other. In this manner there will not be much room left for the logic of Orientalism.

(418)

Additionally, as my studies in rhetoric in India have shown me and others, the idea that the ancient Greeks were “Westerners” is inherently problematic. As C. Jan Swearingen observes,

Contemporary discussions of the Other increasingly invite us to reconsider these ancient discussions of the One and the Many, and of a hidden order and harmony in the universe that was perceived in strikingly similar ways by ancient Indian, Chinese, Near Eastern, and Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers.

(“Tao Trek” 303–304)

Both Aristotle and Plato believed in reincarnation, and the Greek and Roman gods had more in common with Middle Eastern, Indo-Iranian, South Asian, Chinese – even gods in the Americas – than the later monotheistic (Middle Eastern) God associated with the “West” – not to mention their similarity to ancient Germanic and Celtic deities. Many Greek concepts, especially ones like xenia, the expectation that one should see to the needs of strangers and outcasts without question, have many parallels in the so-called East (see C. Jan Swearingen, “Tao Trek” 307; Guler and Anyango-Kivuva in this volume). In reality, the supposed rational and empirical West plastered over a “pagan” culture similar to other ancient cultures that still underlies its language and customs; four days of the week are named for Anglo-Saxon gods, and Easter and Christmas are especially rife with customs associated with “pagan” deities. The opposition of East and West not only relies on what Edward Said referred to as Orientalism, it also relies on a very one-sided interpretation of Occidentalism. Again, Mao anticipates this conflict between Orientalism and Occidentalism, from a slightly different positionality:

the process of studying (one’s own) rhetorical and cultural experiences is always a process of recontextualization. . . . As a result, the danger will be greatly diminished of reverting to the logic of Occidentalism, a derivative of Orientalism – a logic that perpetuates the same kind of ethnocentrism, dogmatism, and dualism as does the logic of Orientalism.

(418)

The study of comparative rhetoric brings both of these fictional perspectives – Oriental and Occidental – into question. Even the idea of “the rhetorical tradition,” a straight line from the Greeks to the democratic West, is under deep scrutiny (see Bizzell and Jarrett, “Rhetorical Traditions”). The binaries of West and East are dissolving. As this book
wonderfully illustrates, Greco-Roman rhetoric is only one of a myriad of ways humans have expressed what and how.

5. Comparative Rhetoric Revisited: Comparative World Rhetorics

As the studies in this book illustrate, comparative rhetoric involves a kind of immersion into at least two or more discourse communities, our relation to both of them in flux, their identifications emerging from a process of engaging and shaping What and How. These immersions might naturally evolve from one’s place of birth, or simply from interests, opportunity, and life experience. The relationships between self, home discipline, place of birth, etc., is always in play in these “reflective encounters.”

Though “tricky words,” the terms comparative and rhetoric express and highlight the roots of this discipline, which has most often been referred to as “non-Western” comparative rhetoric. In the meetings of our Non-Western Rhetoric special interest group, part of College Composition and Communication, participants rightfully complain about all three terms. Thus, the compromise decision to add the word “World” to the title of book, and “Global” to the special interest group’s name. To emphasize that our interests is in practices all over the globe that cannot be subsumed under a Greco-Roman model, we added the S to rhetoric. The world in the title is also a reminder that Greco-Roman rhetoric is a valuable part of the global picture; we have no wish to depart from its study; we do, however, wish to expand beyond its limitations, to add new concepts, new perspectives, and new histories. The title then reflects who we have been, and who we are becoming.

This Handbook is for those of us who wish to begin or extend an immersion into neglected, forgotten, or less explored rhetorical practices, but just as important, each chapter brings to light fascinating aspects of human realities and histories that have the potential to change any reader’s conceptions of others, of rhetoric, and especially of themselves as citizens of this planet. This book is for anyone interested in rhetoric, anyone interested in the human shaping of the what and the how.

6. About This Book

My goal as editor was to present an array of perspectives that may raise more questions than they answer. I did not press the authors to say everything possible about their topics, nor did I press them for absolutely flawless Standard English, because that seems a bit at odds with the tenets of this book. I focused on clarity, coherence, and uniqueness of perspectives.

The book is divided into six sections. “What Is Comparative Rhetoric?” features six scholars. LuMing Mao situates and defines the present and future of comparative rhetoric “in dialogue” with contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, and cultural rhetorics. Xing (Lucy) Lu adeptly traces the nature of comparative rhetoric by relating it to the field of intercultural communication. Steven B. Katz suggests possibilities for comparative rhetoric based in the example of Jewish rhetoric. Lance Cummings continues the discussion by examining the history of comparison, suggesting ways we can disassociate it from that history. Joshua DiCaglio rounds out Part I by extending and reframing a debate between LuMing Mao and Scott Stroud on doing comparative rhetoric responsibly (see Stroud, “Pragmatism and the Methodology of Comparative Rhetoric” and “Useful Irresponsibility?”).

Most of the early studies of comparative rhetoric featured historical examinations of non-Western and/or understudied discourse communities and/or cultures. Part II, History/Recovery, widens and extends this discussion in fascinating ways. Arabella Lyon continues her thoughtful examinations of Chinese rhetoric in “Confucian Deliberation: A Rational Reconstruction of Themes in the Analects.” Hui Wu admirably constructs an “Overview” of
Chinese classical rhetoric. Richard Leo Enos offers a well-constructed “Plea for Rediscovering the Lost Centers of Classical Rhetoric” in his exploration of the ancient Halicarnassus. Elif Guler provides a fascinating glimpse into the understudied Turkish rhetoric in her study of the concepts of kut and töre.

We then turn to ancient Egypt in Melba Vélez Ortiz’s engaging study of Ma’at. Traveling a bit north, Eliza Gellis offers a very insightful reading of the Book of Esther in “Hadassah, That Is Esther”; Anne Melfi shifts our focus toward India in her rich study of Vedic rhetoric, “Foundations in Vedic Rhetorical Culture.” We return to the Middle East and Rasha Diab’s much needed study in Arabic/Arab-Islamic rhetorics focused on epistolary rhetoric, followed by Eda Özyeşilpinar and Firasat Jabeen’s wonderfully adept analysis of how Orientalist dichotomies still lurk beneath even well-meaning film depictions of Muslim peoples. Nepalese scholar Sweta Baniya models egalitarian comparative rhetoric in her study of the Hindu God Krishna and Plato. Elizabeth Thornton explores aspects of Sanskrit rhetoric that imply a fresh understanding of the relation between rhetoric and stylistics. We return to Turkish rhetoric at the end of Part II in Iklim Goksel’s insightful study of Turkish ceremonies of grief.

In Part III, Contemporary Comparative Studies, various scholars exemplify comparative methods applied in modern settings, illustrating and complicating cultural assumptions and rhetorical responses to them. Amber Engelson continues her pioneering studies in Indonesian rhetorics in her case study, “I Have No Mother Tongue.” Donghong Liu offers a well-researched empirical study challenging dominant, but erroneous, beliefs about modern Chinese formal writing. Leonora Anyango-Kivuva traces the roots of the African concept of Ubuntu, a communal basis for rhetoric, as it finds expression in various African languages and cultural settings. She offers Ubuntu as a way forward, not only for postcolonial Africans but also for the whole planet. Daphne-Tatiana T. Canlas (Data) rounds out the discussion in a very interesting and at times humorous study of “Filipinoness” as expressed in YouTube videos and reactions to them. Each chapter illustrates rich potentialities in the field of comparative rhetoric to help us interpret and respond to current rhetorical practices around the globe.

Part IV, Hybrids, expresses comparative rhetoric’s potentialities in conjunction with other disciplines and points of view. Tyler Carter carefully studies how modern meditative rhetorics blend ancient and modern perspectives. Stephen Kwame Dadugblor describes how postcolonial Africans can blend old and new rhetorics in a marvelous concept called “usable presents.” Massimiliano Tomasi astutely and succinctly explains the interesting relationship of Japan and rhetorical studies, as Japanese scholars adopted and adapted Western rhetoric to their own contexts. Michelle Zaleski continues her excellent work on historical interactions between Jesuits and Hindus in the 1600s in “Recontextualizing Comparative Rhetoric.” Abraham Romney creates a hybrid approach to rhetoric in the Americas, blending comparative and cultural rhetorics as an interpretive framework. Erin Cromer Twal continues Richard Leo Eno’s emphasis on how places both shape and express the rhetorics of the peoples that live in them. She takes us to the intriguing ancient city of Petra, offering a very memorable portrait of the rhetorical architecture and creativity of its inhabitants. Xiaobo (Belle) Wang, whose chapter could also fit in the pedagogical and hybrids sections, offers a fascinating look at “Nüshu, the Unique Female Rhetoric in the Chinese Rhetorical Tradition” which blends Cheryl Glenn’s rhetorical feminism, transnational feminism, and comparative rhetorics with discussions about teaching literature, symbol use, and modern filmmaking. Mari Lee Mifsud closes Part IV with “A Feminist Praxis of ‘Comparative’ Rhetoric,” extending in very interesting ways what Mao refers to as doing comparative rhetoric responsibly. She reminds us that this responsibility extends into exposing injustices and gender inequalities in the discourse communities we study, making them a central part of our encounters with them. Her chapter weaves beautifully with Wang’s just before it.
Part V, Applying and Promoting Comparative Pedagogies, opens with Tarez Graban and Meghan Velez’s reflection on teaching comparative rhetoric based in separate courses they developed. Rather than isolated histories related to cultures, they approach comparative rhetorics through studies in histories of literacy and textual production. Xiaoye You writes honestly about his attempts to teach comparative rhetoric; his chapter directly addresses difficulty teachers have in teaching comparative rhetoric to students who may not yet be fully familiar with Greek rhetoric, issues related to covering multiple global rhetorics, and even issues related to focusing on just one or two non-Western traditions. Hua Zhu and Yebing Zhao explore ways we can incorporate comparative pedagogies in a variety of courses, making it part of the common core curricula—a fantastic idea. Shyam Sharma steps back a bit and discusses some of the biggest problems comparative rhetors face—resistance from within and without the discipline of rhetoric. He rightly proposes that we need to bring administrators and fellow faculty along with us by focusing on the benefits inherent in a comparative perspective.

The book closes with Part VI, New Directions, a space for scholars with comparative perspectives to discover the possibilities inherent in its positionality. Miles Coleman suggests alternative roles for technology surprisingly outlined in an ancient Indian mythological story. I feature the rhetoric of India(n) dissidents interpreted through Indian and political science lenses to suggest ways we can address current divisive political discourses. Damián Baca exposes misguided and erroneous perspectives embedded in the composition studies assumption that literacy equals Western alphabetic literacy, reminding us that Indigenous peoples in the Americas invented their own symbol and writing systems that have potential to change our concept of literacy itself. Hany Rashwan dismantles the notion of a unified European comparative literary and rhetorical “tradition,” and explores implications found in adopting indigenous historical concepts such as Arabic/Egyptian bâlāghah to understand non-Western modes of communication. Trey Conner and Richard Doyle offer a reflective study of the musicality of rhetoric, challenging our notions of “academic” writing along the way. Thomas Rickert closes both Part VI and the book with an engaging return to Kennedy’s rhetoric as “energy.” Though seeking rhetorical “universals” can lead to false equivocations, Rickert’s study reminds us that there must be something inherently human, even animal, in the idea of rhetoric. This brings us back to Lyon’s question: if we look for rhetoric in places that did not have a specific “rhetorical” tradition, what are we looking for?

I once met a very accomplished scholar, who confessed that he does not read anything not directly related to his own research. In my experience, however, it is in reading essays and attending talks not directly related to my research that really perspective-changing moments often occur, ones that ironically shape my research later. No matter your background, each one of these chapters represents an opportunity for those kinds of moments.

Note
1. For fuller discussions of this history, consult the chapters of LuMing Mao and Xing Lu, featured in this volume, who offer thoughtful reflections on this, and other related, fields.

Works Cited

Books


**Journal Articles and Chapters in Collections**


Part I

What Is Comparative (World) Rhetoric(s)?

Comparative rhetors need to make theoretical and pragmatic decisions about how to approach rhetorical practice in non-Western and/or understudied cultures. What does “comparative” mean, and how can we avoid the implications that one must always decide between two unequal elements? What terminologies do we use? How can we comprehend an “other” in relation to a traditional knowledge of rhetoric? Who is qualified to do comparative work? What does rhetoric mean? Where do we begin?

In addition, we must even question the assumptions we make about the structure of the world and our knowledge of it. We ask how our work problematizes and calls into question concepts like culture, nation, tradition, language, trans-languaging, borders, contact zones, translation, intercultural communication, etc. For this reason, the first section of this collection moves the field toward a clear understanding of what comparative work is, and what it can contribute to the field of rhetorical studies.

Part I begins with LuMing Mao’s careful reflection on the history and future of the study of comparative world rhetorics, not only in terms of the field of rhetoric but also in relation to related disciplines. Xing Lu then continues the discussion with her reflection on the relation between comparative rhetoric and the field of intercultural communication. Steven B. Katz offers a case study in Jewish rhetoric to explore how comparative rhetoric works in action. Lance Cummings traces the history of the word “comparison” to explore both how it can hem us in and how it might be defined more effectively. Joshua DiCaglio takes the conversation a whole different direction by following up on the Mao/Stroud interaction on doing comparative rhetoric responsibly. Focusing on the idea of contemplative rhetoric, he reexamines when and where context is important in the study of comparative rhetoric.
2 Redefining Comparative Rhetoric

Essence, Facts, Events

LuMing Mao

What is comparative rhetoric in the twenty-first century? How should comparative rhetoric scholars go about defining and advancing it in spite of or because of the contested nature of both terms “comparative” (Hayot; Friedman) and “rhetoric” (Garrett; Lyon, “Tricky Words”)? In what ways can our definitions overcome dangerous simplifications or abstractions and transform our understanding of the world as well as ourselves? How does one study non-Euro-American rhetorical practices like Chinese rhetorics comparatively? These are some of the questions I wish to address in this chapter. By way of responding to these and other related questions, I aim to develop a new terministic screen for comparative rhetorical studies in the present. Specifically, I first put contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, and cultural rhetorics in dialogue with one another in order to articulate and further complicate the cultural turn these different rhetorics have each made and embraced. Second, in light of the fact that every cultural rhetorical performance is equal in its impurity to every other cultural rhetorical performance, I redefine comparative rhetoric by moving away from facts of essence and toward facts of usage and facts of nonusage, toward events or relationalities. Following that, I provide a rereading of Robert Oliver’s work to help identify, and draw lessons from, the key moments and gaps both revealed in his work and still relevant in our own time. Finally, I conclude this chapter with some brief observations about the future of comparative rhetorical studies.

1. Complicating the Cultural Turn: Contrastive Rhetoric, Intercultural Rhetoric, and Cultural Rhetoric(s)

In his now well-known “Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-cultural Education” published in 1966, Robert Kaplan applied rhetoric and culture to the teaching of reading and writing to ESL (English as a Second Language) students. Through his analysis of the organization of individual paragraphs in approximately 600 international student compositions, he identified rhetorical differences in their writings and further contrasted them with rhetorical characteristics in English paragraph development. His pioneering study thus began an area of study that has been known as contrastive rhetoric.

Specifically, Kaplan identified, with graphics, five types of paragraph development for five cultural groups, and he suggested that each type reflects a corresponding culture’s unique thought patterns. These graphic representations are now known as the Doodles in the literature. For example, paragraph development in Anglo-European expository writing follows a linear path, whereas speakers of Semitic languages construct paragraphs based on a complex series of parallel constructions. Oriental writing, which only refers to Chinese and Korean, meanwhile, can be characterized by an indirect approach as its paragraphs are “turning and turning in a widening gyre” (10). Such a characteristic would be seen as “awkward and unnecessarily indirect” (10). Similarly, in Romance languages and in Russian, paragraphs
allow for a degree of digressiveness – one that could be overbearing to a writer of English (15). In light of these discoveries, Kaplan called for developing a better understanding of paragraph constructions from different cultures and for further comparing these constructions with those in English so that appropriate pedagogies to teach English to our ESL students can be developed and deployed (16).

Since the publication of this essay, many studies have appeared that focus on discourse patterns across cultures in order to better understand different rhetorical practices from different cultures and address the needs of individual learners for whom English is not their first or home language. As expected, these studies have rightly challenged Kaplan’s ill-conceived characterizations regarding these five types of paragraph development both because they were based on limited data and questionable methodology and because they have since been invalidated by an overwhelming number of empirical studies. In fact, one cannot help wondering whether these characterizations are a result of Kaplan’s own projections or inferences or whether they are influenced by those myths and stereotypes regarding these discourse patterns. Other problems about the essay have also been identified, including that it depends on a monolithic notion of culture (Atkinson); it privileges the native English speakers (Matalene); it lumps Chinese, Thai, and Korean speakers in one “Oriental” group (Hinds); and it conflates rhetorical patterns with thought patterns (Severino). It must be noted, too, that Kaplan himself has since modified some of the claims made in the 1966 essay (“Cultural Thought Patterns Revisited”; “Foreword”).

To rehearse this brief and perhaps familiar history about the birth and rise of contrastive rhetoric here is not to dwell on the obvious but to appreciate Kaplan’s insight that discourses across linguistic boundaries differ not only in grammatical features but also in generic and rhetorical patterns, in expectations between readers and writers, and in authorship and authorial authority. These differences, Kaplan rightly tells us, can be attributed to differences in cultures, leading to the need to study these differences in relation to their own cultural contexts and through a multidimensional perspective. It is this insight that has served as the definitional foundation for contrastive rhetoric and also spawned much of the ongoing debate over objectives and methodologies of contrastive rhetoric and over the concept of culture itself (Li 13–15).

In her more recent work on contrastive rhetoric, Ulla Connor further discusses the challenges facing Kaplan’s original argument, noting, for example, that rhetorical differences may stem from multiple sources and that the concept of culture, construed as homogeneous in Kaplan’s case, needs to be complicated and localized (“New Directions” 503–507). To respond to these challenges and to foreground the dynamic and socially constructed nature of writing, Connor has proposed the term “intercultural rhetoric” to replace “contrastive rhetoric” or “cross-cultural rhetoric.” She defines intercultural rhetoric as “the study of written discourse between and among individuals with different cultural backgrounds” (Intercultural Rhetoric 2). For her, the new term promotes the multimodal, interactive models of research on writing across languages and cultures and further allows for a much more dynamic, situation-specific interpretation of culture in the analysis (“Introduction” 272–273). For Connor, the prefix “inter-” in intercultural rhetoric helps to underscore the fact that “all cultures and social practices are deeply infused and penetrated by other cultural practices,” thus shining a new light on “the connections rather than the cultural and rhetorical differences (“Mapping” 312; emphasis original). 2

At least three points are worth elaborating here regarding the move from contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric. First, one of the major criticisms leveled at Kaplan’s original thesis has to do with his concept of culture or, more precisely, the absence of complexity involving his concept of culture. Within Kaplan’s model, culture is monolithic, unified, and unchanging, and such a conceptualization is obviously untenable. Related, Kaplan made no
effort, either theoretical or methodological, to articulate how culture, however defined, actually informs and influences our writing and how different cultures within the boundary of a nation-state interact with and influence one another. The move to intercultural rhetoric aims to respond to this absence and to complicate the concept of culture by recognizing its dynamic characteristics and challenging the assumption that there is internal consistency and consensus within cultures.3

To further foreground culture’s dynamic characteristics, I take a cue from John and Jean Comaroff’s definition of culture. In *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, they take culture “to be the semantic space, the field of signs and practices, in which human beings construct and represent themselves and others, and hence their societies and histories.” Further, culture always is “a historically situated, historically unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action, signifiers at once material and symbolic, social and aesthetic” (27). Seen from this definitional perspective, culture, an “unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action,” is always being consolidated or contested and its underlying unequal power relations safeguarded or challenged or subverted. As a semantic space or what I tentatively call “a collective of competing discursive fields,” culture also represents a productive site for invention, intervention, and transformation. It is this definition of culture that I will appeal to when I move to define comparative rhetoric shortly.

Second, the move from contrastive rhetoric to intercultural rhetoric represents a growing recognition that our communication has gone global and the boundaries between language and culture are becoming increasingly blurred, conlated, and/or redrawn altogether. Such a recognition enjoins us to study interactions through a lens of interconnectivity and interdependence. Meanwhile, intercultural rhetoric has yet to heed and take into account fully another important development. That is, the current stage of globalization – transnational corporations and technoglobalism – is “creating the condition for and enacting the relocation of languages and the fracture of culture,” and it has led to “the uncoupling of the ‘natural’ link between languages and nations, languages and national memories, languages and national literature” (Mignolo, “Globalization” 42).4 Because of this kind of relocation or decoupling and recoupling, any effort to make sense of rhetorical and other cultural differences can no longer be confined to places defined by physical or nation-state boundaries. Rather, it must be linked to and informed by spaces populated by exigencies our rhetorical performances aim to respond to, by experiences they aim to convey and transform, and by communities of practices they aim to build and become part of. In other words, any study of rhetorical practices by individuals with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds must pay attention to this relocation process – that is, to how rhetorical practices can become disassociated from their home contexts and how they develop new affiliations, punctuated with discursive incongruities and ruptures, with their host contexts. Further, the same study must be attentive to how the blurred boundaries, say, between past and present or between indigenous and exogenous can create a third space for the production of new knowledge, new relationships, and new forms of engagement. The “natural” link Mignolo talks about exists only in theory or becomes irrelevant in this new space where terms of interdependence and interconnectivity, rather than terms of provenance and essence, become our modus operandi.

Calling attention to how and why rhetorics travel and to what they leave behind and what they intersect with in their new discursive environment is aimed at harnessing and further conceptualize the disruptions or ruptures brought about by this relocation process. It better prepares us to recognize and negotiate more productively the perpetual tension, if not the confusion, between the level of importance and relevance we want to attribute to a given rhetoric because of our own rhetorical exigency here and now, on the one hand, and the level of importance and relevance that accrued to the same rhetoric because of what it did or represented there and then, on the other. If not appropriately dealt with, such a tension can
hamper our overall understanding of the other as well as ourselves. Worse still, it can send us down a slippery slope, potentially mistaking coincidence for importance and allowing expediency to trump ethical responsibility.

Third, part of the original insight associated with contrastive rhetoric was the introduction of rhetoric to the learning and teaching of language beyond the sentence level in that discursive patterns are informed by their corresponding rhetorical traditions. The subsequent critiques of contrastive rhetoric scholarships appear to be centered more on the meaning of “contrastive” or on what it foregrounds and less on the meaning of “rhetoric” or on what potential affordances rhetoric can provide for contrastive rhetoric. The rhetorical dimension lent to contrastive rhetoric has thus far been primarily directed toward textual arrangement or organization. Not much attention has been brought to other areas, be they seen either within or outside the confines of the Greco-Roman rhetorical paradigm. The question of how rhetoric enacts a process of discursive invention, intervention, and transformation and of how it can help to bring about effective communication and to effect new discursive alliances and new forms of inquiry and discovery has not been adequately taken up or sufficiently addressed. The question, for comparative rhetoric scholars then, is not so much about who can offer a more comprehensive definition for rhetoric or culture for contrastive rhetoric, or intercultural rhetoric for that matter, as about the kinds of affordances our definitions can provide and the kinds of thick descriptions they may engender.

The cultural turn initiated by contrastive rhetoric and further embraced by intercultural rhetoric has also led to the emergence of “cultural rhetoric” in recent decades. Prominent among those advocating cultural rhetoric is Steven Mailloux, who defines “cultural rhetoric” as the study of “the tropes, arguments, and narratives of its object texts (whether literary or nonliterary) within their sociopolitical contexts of cultural production and reception” (Reception Histories 186) or the critical, pedagogical, historical, and theoretical study of “the political effectivity of trope, argument, and narrative in culture” to encourage “a practical and theoretical preoccupation with making sense of the political dynamics of cultural conversations at specific historical moments” (Disciplinary Identities 40, 129). For Mailloux, cultural rhetorical study foregrounds both the political nature of rhetoric and the study of language use in close connection to the questions of power and to how language use shapes and is being shaped by cultures. As he puts it, cultural rhetoric “attempts to establish meanings and values for texts and their results, analyzing the effects of cultural performances in general and language use in particular” (Disciplinary Identities 40). As a result, it embodies an unmistakable comparative orientation as it studies such effects in different cultures and encompasses the productive and interpretive aspects of the rhetorical tradition, embracing classical and modern invention in spoken and written rhetorics and including modern and postmodern hermeneutics applied to oral, print, and digital media as well as various cultural technologies, whether aural, visual or kinetic.

It is clear, however, that his model of cultural rhetoric remains Euro-American-centric and is closely tied to Euro-American canonical texts and practices. Others who are committed to the project of privileging and harnessing the mutually reciprocal relationship between cultures and rhetorics have not only advocated a broader focus or orientation, turning cultural rhetoric into cultural rhetorics, but also called for more situated scholarly practices in which the particularity of rhetorical practices within specific communities informs how culture and rhetoric emerge (Bratta and Powell). The change from the singular to the plural in the word “rhetoric” thus recognizes, and calls for studying, specificity, fluidity, and plurality in rhetorical performances within and across specific cultural
communities, and it reflects the importance and indeed necessity for deliberative self-reflexivity and for timely intervention and transformation. For example, Powell et al. define cultural rhetorics as the study of meaning-making as “it is situated in specific cultural communities” (3) and “as made within and among multiple contexts, histories, and knowledge systems” (17). For them, rhetorics are “always already cultural” and cultures “persistently rhetorical” (3). Further, cultural rhetorics draws from “a set of intersecting, shifting, and variable methodological and theoretical frames and relationships” (7), including, for example, rhetoric and composition studies, postcolonial studies, decolonial studies, gender studies, performance studies, so as to build “relationships between multiple traditions, multiple histories, multiple practices” (7). Storytelling, building relationships through an intense reexamination of one’s place and space in history and in the present moment, and theorizing “a constellated web of systems, discourses, communities, and indeed, paradigms alongside those of Western imperialism” (7) become central to cultural rhetorics for the building and development of meaningful theoretical frames from the inside particular culture. In “Introduction to the Special Issue: Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversation,” Bratta and Powell reinforce and further elaborate these methodological characteristics: decolonization, relations, constellation, and story. They call them “four points of practice that are generally worked together in order for cultural rhetorics scholars to begin building that frame.”

It must be noted, though, as Peter Simonson reminds us, that the importance of culture to the study of rhetoric emerged as early as the late 1960s and 1970s with our field beginning to turn its attention beyond concrete texts and speeches and toward symbols, myths, ideologies, socio-historical contexts, and broader ways of life. Not by accident, it was also during the same period that a few scholars began to study non-Euro-American and Native American rhetorics through a cultural and comparative lens. One of the prominent examples was Robert Oliver’s work, which served as a precursor to, and in fact constituted an early example of, comparative rhetoric. I must acknowledge, too, that the idea of invention, intervention, and transformation shares a strong affinity with the social constructivism that emerged out of the rhetorical studies during this period as the latter emphasizes that “language, symbols, discourses, cultural practices, and texts constitute the world for humans, providing the meanings for phenomena that have no inherent meanings of their own” (Simonson 107).

The cultural turns enacted respectively by contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, cultural rhetoric, and cultural rhetorics all share one basic orientation. Namely, language and other symbolic practices are intricately tied to, if not determined by, political, socio-cultural, and material underpinnings, and their diversities across time and space and theories developed to account for them defy easy generalization and demand careful and grounded studies. Thanks in part to these cultural turns and in part to the collective pivot toward local and everyday practices, it has become abundantly clear that cultures are connected to one another in more ways than one and that every cultural rhetorical performance is equal in its impurity to every other cultural rhetorical performance. The central question then becomes this: How do we go about studying these diverse, impure or integrated rhetorical practices comparatively while knowing full well that our own ideologies and positions might be lurking not far behind? To state the matter another way, if the main purpose of our comparative rhetorical study is to effect reflective encounters, what forms should such encounters take, through whose agency, and for what purposes? To these questions, and more I now turn.

2. Essence, Facts, Events: A New Terministic Screen

In early June 2013, a group of rhetoric and composition scholars gathered in Lawrence, Kansas, to take part in a comparative rhetoric seminar, part of the 2013 Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute. They spent a week together reading scholarships on comparative
rhetoric, evaluating the trends and counter-trends, and charting out possible paths for future comparative rhetorical work. At the end of this week-long seminar, the participants composed “A Manifesto: The What and How of Comparative Rhetoric.” The drafting of the manifesto marks an important moment in the young history of comparative rhetoric as it embodies for the first time a collective effort to both articulate the goals, objectives, and methodologies for comparative rhetoric and map out an inspiring and inclusive future.

Drawing on this manifesto, I redefine comparative rhetoric as both a practice and a methodology. As a practice, comparative rhetoric studies discourses and composing traditions across time and space with a singular focus on their historicity, specificity, and incongruity. Corollary to this focus is an unyielding commitment both to studying those discourses and traditions that have been marginalized, underrepresented, or altogether forgotten and to intervening in and re-forming dominant rhetorical paradigms, perspectives, and practices, which are, after all, historically contingent and continuously being recontextualized. This commitment makes it possible for us not only to apply comparative stance to all rhetorics but also to develop a more nuanced understanding or a thick description of resonances and fluidity among different rhetorics and their histories and traditions.

As a methodology, comparative rhetoric champions a way of meaning-making that is predicated on, to borrow a term from Hall and Ames, “a language of deference” (229). By that I mean a meta-language that rejects any external principle or overarching context to shape and determine any other context and defers to local terms and frameworks for pursuing comparative rhetorical undertakings. Drawing on the double meaning of “defer” in connoting both “differ” and “defer” or “yield,” comparative rhetoric foregrounds the need to learn to recognize and value, rather than flatten or diminish, multiplicity, fluidity, and singularity in rhetorical practices. It respects, rather than relegates to the margins, local histories and traditions as co-equals with the dominant or the already-recognized. Further, comparative rhetoric yields to, and seeks to cultivate, the development of terms of interdependence and interconnectivity to constitute and regulate representation of all discursive activities and to bring one’s own ways of knowing and being and those of others into critical simultaneous view, into the process of decontextualization and recontextualization (more on this point shortly).

Pursuing comparative rhetoric as both a practice and methodology helps to combat biases, binaries, and boundaries that have continued to handicap our efforts to engage non-Euro-American rhetorics productively and contribute to a richer and more integrated understanding of rhetorical histories and practices around the world. At the same time, I argue that comparative rhetoric has no interest in developing any grand narrative that names a universal norm or a General Theory of Rhetoric that can be applied to all societies as suggested by George Kennedy (1). At best this kind of narrative or theory would face daunting challenges in addressing both the multiplicity and singularity in rhetorical theory and practice within and across cultures. At worst it perpetuates what Robert Solomon calls the “transcendental pretense” (qtd. in Hall and Ames xiv), a pernicious form of Western ethnocentrism that treats its own (provincial) principles or precepts as constituting universal norms or standards and the rest as in want of “normalization” or “standardization.”

Neither does comparative rhetoric, as I am developing here, have any interest in claiming utility or efficacy for every discursive event or practice imaginable. This may seem like an obvious point but there are a number of ways to obscure it. One is to imagine that comparative rhetoric is a self-contained enterprise with forces and purposes of its own, as culture has often been conceptualized as such in the past (Geertz 10–11). Now reified as a theory, it can be infinitely extended and applied. As a matter of fact, comparative rhetoric closely aligns itself with, for example, feminist rhetorics, African American rhetorics, indigenous rhetorics, ethnic rhetorics, and postcolonial studies. Another is to claim that since the act of comparison represents the basic cognitive, sociocultural, and epistemological imperatives
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(Friedman 755–756), comparative rhetoric as a practice, now reduced, should be observed or practiced in any meaningful rhetorical work that we do. Reification or reduction betrays an essence-bias or -orientation, and either move makes us further removed from relationality and interdependence that comparative rhetoric aims to cultivate and promote in the first place.

To combat the essence-bias, we must begin by cultivating a creative understanding for comparative rhetoric. Following Eric Hayot, comparison is not simply a pairing of two or more pre-existing textual or other symbolic artifacts driven by cognitive, sociocultural, or epistemological imperatives. It represents an attempt “to determine their natures, to solidify their outlines, to locate them in some social, political, or historical space” (88). Moreover, comparison also constructs a theory of comparison so that what it compares becomes comparable (88). The act of comparison, in short, creates both its objects of inquiry and its own theory as it listens to, speaks with, and inhabits diverse communities and a diverse world (Layoun qtd. in Friedman 758–759). Therefore, if there were any essence to be had for comparative rhetoric, it would be multiplicity (because there are an infinite number of acts of comparison) and singularity (because every act of comparison is unique and occasioned by its own context of situation).

Because of its multiplicity and singularity, comparative rhetoric must be conceived of and put to practice as a performative, functioning, to quote Diana Taylor, as “a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world” (15). Seen as a performative with force and effect in its total speech situation, comparative rhetoric engages in a process of decontextualization and recontextualization. That is, on the one hand, it denaturalizes, through the performative of comparison, one’s own paradigms and rhetorical frames of reference by bringing to light their constructedness or contingencies – hence, decontextualization. On the other hand, it puts them in dialogue with other rhetorics, including the dominant, and with their cultural, no less constructed, matrixes so that the norms and standards of the dominant can no longer be unveiled and celebrated as universal, as essential to all rhetorics – hence, recontextualization. In the process, comparative rhetoric, like any other comparative project, “sets in motion a dynamic, irresolvable paradox” where commensurability and incommensurability are placed into “a dynamic interplay reflected in the slash that separates and connects: in/commensurability” (Friedman 758), and it has “the capacity and the potential, depending on which powers are backing the project, to supplant a prior epistemological object with a new one” (Radhakrishnan 457).

For comparative rhetoric to succeed, to engage productively discourses and composing traditions across time and space with a singular focus on their historicity, specificity, and incongruity, it must part company with this essence-bias or with this perennial yet parochial longing for a proper or exclusive set of objects for others’ rhetorics. It must maintain and, better still, enrich and expand the connection to culture and to the total speech situation. The central question for comparative rhetoric to confront then is not “What is rhetoric in/for the cultures being studied?” but “What do users in these cultures do in/with rhetoric, and how do they do it?” Or what Schiappa calls “facts of usage” (7).

According to Schiappa, inquiries into definitions typically seek two kinds of facts. Inquiries that take the form “What is X?” are asking what X really is rather than how X is used. Schiappa calls the definitional facts sought through this sort of question “facts of essence” or “real” definitions (6). On the other hand, inquiries that ask how X is used are interested in how individual speakers and writers use X in specific situations. Schiappa calls the definitional facts sought in this kind of inquiry “facts of usage” (7). For him, the “natural attitude” toward definition, which he aims to denaturalize, elides the distinction between these two types of definitional facts and assumes that the two amount to the same thing. The more pragmatic approach treats facts of usage as “value (ought) propositions,” distinct from “fact (is) propositions.” It sees definitions as “rhetorically induced” and engages definitional disputes by uncovering the persuasive processes that definitions inevitably involve and enact (9–10).
The question “What is rhetoric?” gestures toward the definer’s frame of reference as one organized around facts of essence and the existence of an objective reality free of incongruities and ruptures. By contrast, asking “What do users do in/with rhetoric, and how do they do it?” moves us a step closer toward a commitment to facts of usage, to the multiple ways in which the users enact their discursive inventions, interventions, and transformations, and to interrogating what Steven Mailloux calls “effects of texts.” Mailloux defines texts as “objects of interpretive attention, whether speech, writing, nonlinguistic practices, or human artifacts of any kind,” and the effects as the political dynamics of cultural conversations at specific historical moments and power-and-knowledge relations in the rhetorical rethinking of the human sciences. He promotes the study of “the political effectivity of trope, argument, and narrative in culture” (Disciplinary Identities 40; also see my earlier discussion of cultural rhetoric). Mailloux’s notion of effects of texts resembles Schiappa’s facts of usage as both highlight not only the mutual entailment of culture and rhetoric but also the effectiveness or ineffectiveness, intended and unintended, of our discursive practices.

It must be emphasized that effects of texts or the persuasive processes that definitions inevitably involve and enact are never fixed or stable and they are always in the process of being realized and contested. They have to be repeatedly negotiated or calibrated as they get experienced and circulated. More crucially, textual forms and effects and persuasive processes that have been erased or elided have to be openly and systematically remembered, recovered, or restated. Just as the excess of meaning or of the signified over the signifier calls on us to both state what has been said and restate what has never been said (Foucault xvi), so texts’ effects and their excesses and absences (i.e. the contested, the concealed, the excluded, and the erased) require that we frequent places where rhetoric or objects of interpretive attention have not been recognized and are evidenced only by barely acknowledged traces and gaps and we uncover the reasons behind, or the conditions that have contributed to, their absence or invisibility. Our failure to do so hampers our understanding of rhetorical performances and power-and-knowledge relations. It further obscures the dynamic, mutually entailing relationship between beliefs and practices considered to be importantly present and those that have been marginalized, silenced, and/or forgotten altogether at a specific historical moment – as though the importantly present or facts of usage were never contested nor susceptible to instances of discursive incongruities and ruptures.

Therefore, as comparative rhetoric turns its attention to facts of usage or effects of texts, it must address or restate instances of erasure or elision and resurrect rhetorical knowledge that has been buried, disqualified, or ruled out of order. In a word, it must make every effort to seek a third kind of usage or what I call facts of nonusage.11 By facts of nonusage I mean facts sought through such questions as: What are users not doing in cultures being studied, and why? Is their silence or nonaction caused by extreme emotion or passion, by immediate contexts of situation, or by the larger sociocultural matrix that has helped to anoint facts of usage?12 Could what they are doing be examples of the importantly present or the merely present? Could what they are not doing be due to the blind spots we have developed or the “passionate attachments” we have accumulated or inherited? What are the questions with which users are concerned and to which the answers are thought by them to be the right answers?13

What does it exactly mean for comparative rhetoric to pivot for and mobilize facts of nonusage? First, it means collapsing the underlying binary that pits them against facts of usage and shuns them as undesirable or unacceptable. If both facts of nonusage and facts of usage result from and further perpetuate the force of the social, cultural, and linguistic norms, facts of nonusage should no longer be viewed as the antithesis or the shady side of facts of usage. Nor should facts of usage be taken as natural, uncontested, or arising ex nihilo. If truth be told, facts of nonusage actually embody or conceal conditions that have led to their own exile