

Language, Rhetoric and Culture: An Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract

This paper offers an intercultural perspective on Chinese/English language, rhetoric and culture, with specific reference to Chinese and English love poems. While the English poems examined are characteristically expository, topic-centered, direct, passionate, abstract, elaborate, infinite, philosophical, religious, reader-based, and repetitive, the Chinese ones are descriptive, correlative, indirect, subtle, concrete, simple, visual, metaphorical, nonreligious, writer-based, and nonrepetitive.

The social and cultural factors accounting for the English poems include (a) a high value on individuality, self-expression, and imagination, (b) Aristotle's rhetorical principle: "State your case and prove it," and (c) the role of Christianity in the life of western people. The Chinese poems find social and cultural explanations in (a) doctrines of Confucius that deny the importance of individuality and self-expression, (b) the rhetorical principle Yi2("use") Jing3("things") Su2("express") Qing1("feelings") (i.e., "to express one's feelings in terms of natural things"), (c) the rhetorical tradition of being non-repetitive, and (d) the goal of a man's life that centers on the attainment of official rank rather than belief in religion.

Keywords: English/Chinese Love Poems, Intercultural Analysis