

## Supporting Details in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese L2 Learners' Argumentative Writing\*

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This study compares L2 micro-level rhetoric of supporting detail in argumentative writing produced by learners from three East Asian countries. In order to answer the research question, three hundred TOEFL writing samples, one hundred from each country, were analyzed. In the overall use of supporting detail, the Korean and Chinese writers used *Mentioning Advantage (MA)* to the highest degree, while the Japanese writers used more *Personal Experience (PE)*. Differences are also found between the three countries in the use of supporting detail sub-categories. The Japanese writers preferred the use of personal expressions, accounting for approximately a half of their supporting details, combining *Personal Preference (PP)* and *Personal Experience (PE)*. A significant number of Korean and Chinese writers relied on *Citation (CIT)* and *Anecdote (ANC)* compared to the Japanese writers; the Korean writers were found to favor the use of objective facts, in that they used research data to support their main ideas, while the Chinese writers showed a greater dependence on traditional expressions such as proverbs. Although *Common Knowledge and Truth (CKT)* is rarely used by the East Asian writers in this study, the Korean writers displayed a tendency to present it to a greater extent than writers in the other two countries.

[second language writing/contrastive rhetoric/supporting detail/  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Kaplan (1966, 1972) argued that the style of Oriental writing is indirect and round-about, whereas that of Anglo-European writing is direct and linear:

Some Oriental writing is marked by what may be called an approach by indirection. In this kind of writing, the development of the paragraph may be said to be ‘turning and turning in a widening gyre (Kaplan, 1972, p. 46).

Since Kaplan’s pioneering research, many have believed that East Asian countries share the same rhetoric pattern by oversimplifying the rhetoric uniqueness of each country’s (e.g., Alptekin, 1988; Cai, 1999; Eggington, 1987; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hinds, 1990; Kobayashi, 1984; S. Lee, 1995; J.-S. Ok, 1991). Eggington (1987), for example, reasserted that the traditional East Asian rhetorical pattern is indirect and non-linear.

However, there has been some degree of controversy on the issue of East Asian rhetoric. Connor (1996) mentioned that Kaplan’s pioneering research had been criticized for the oversimplification of the concept of East Asian rhetoric as follows:

Kaplan’s “traditional” contrastive rhetoric has been criticized for several reasons: ... for dismissing linguistic and cultural differences in writing among related languages, that is, for including Chinese, Thai, and Korean Speakers in one “Oriental” group (p. 16).

The results of several other studies have supported this statement and demonstrated that the contemporary East Asian L2 rhetorical pattern has become quite similar to that of native English writers (e.g., Hirose, 2003; Y. Jeong & H. Choe, 2012; S.-J. Kang & S.-Y. Oh, 2011; S. Kim, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1997; 2002; Kong, 1998; Liu, 2005; 2007; Miao & Lei, 2008; Wu & Robin, 2000; Zhu, 1997).

Over a long period of time, Korea, China, and Japan have shared very similar cultural, religious and ideological characteristics. As a matter of fact, each country is related geographically, historically, culturally and racially (Taylor & Taylor, 1995). However, though the languages spoken in these countries all feature elements connected to classical Chinese culture, each of these three languages is distinct. In accordance with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, it is possible that different linguistic features have an influence on different patterns of rhetoric. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis implies that language factors at least partially determine the world view of speakers. Therefore, it is plausible to assert that different languages could shape the rhetoric styles used by their speakers. Bonvillain (2003) summarized this assumption as follows:

One summation of this theory, sometimes referred to as the “weak version,” is that some elements of language, for example, in vocabulary or grammatical systems, influence speaker’s perception and can affect their attitudes and behavior. The “strong version” suggests that language is ultimately directive in the process (pp. 49–50).

Taking this into account, different linguistic features can produce different patterns of rhetoric between East Asian writers who are native speakers of different languages. As Taylor and Taylor (1995) puts it, “Linguistically, Japanese is unrelated to Chinese; it is believed to be related to Korean, yet it is similar to Korean only in syntax, not speech sounds and native vocabulary” (p. 282).

Until now, relatively few studies have been devoted to a close examination of rhetorical patterns in societies sharing similar cultural backgrounds such as Korea, China, and Japan. Given that these countries are characterized by linguistic backgrounds that differ despite the high degree of similarity claimed to be found under the umbrella of “Oriental” culture, we need to confirm whether and to what degree such rhetorical differences exist. To put it concretely, in order to fill this gap, we will explore the micro-level L2 rhetoric of supporting details used by East Asian writers from Korea, China, and Japan, highlighting their differences.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Supporting Studies for Kaplan’s Hypothesis

Early contrastive rhetoric (hereafter, CR) research contended that the logical patterns of a culture influence the rhetoric styles of the culture (Kaplan, 1966):

Logic (in the popular, rather than the logician’s sense of the world) which is the basic of rhetoric is evolved out of a culture; it is not universal. Rhetoric, then is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture (p. 2).

Kaplan noted that classical Chinese culture had a great impact on the East Asian countries of Korea, China, and Japan for quite a long period of time. In his view, classical Chinese culture definitely spawned the specific rhetorical patterns of East Asian writers. He also analyzed writing samples by East Asian students and concluded that Oriental rhetoric patterns were spiral, and characterized by an indirect manner. He gave

us his own brief view on Oriental rhetorical styles as follows:

In this kind of writing, the development of the paragraph may be said to be “turning and turning in a widening gyre.” The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are (p.10).

Several studies on the rhetorical patterns of Korean writers have supported Kaplan’s hypothesis (e.g., Eggington, 1987; S. Lee, 1995; J.-S. Ok, 1991). Eggington (1987) demonstrated that the traditional rhetoric of Korean EFL learners was indirect and nonlinear, while the rhetorical pattern of Korean ESL academic writers tended to be similar to that of the Native English writers. Eggington (1987) argued that the *ki-sung-chon-kyul* pattern was dominant in the rhetorical pattern of Korean writers and reported, “The Koreans do have more difficulty recalling information after a period of time when that information is presented in a linear rhetoric styles” (p. 166). He also found that rhetorical patterns used by native speakers of English influenced Korean ESL academic writers who had studied abroad, in that the rhetorical patterns of Korean academic essays were similar to those of native English writers.

S. Lee (1995) and J.-S. Ok (1991) compared the rhetorical patterns of Korean writers and native English writers. S. Lee (1995) investigated the essays of Korean and American college students, and concluded that the native English readers would consider the general Korean rhetoric pattern (*ki-sung-chon-kyul*) inappropriate. It was argued that since these readers were unfamiliar with this rhetorical pattern, it interfered with their understanding of the texts written by Korean writers. J.-S. Ok (1991) closely examined newspaper articles in Korea and in the United States, and claimed that the *ki-sung-chon-kyul* pattern was frequently found in Korean newspaper articles yet was not identified at all in North American newspaper articles, supporting Kaplan’s hypothesis.

Many more studies on the rhetorical development of Chinese writers have also supported Kaplan’s hypothesis (e.g., Alptekin, 1988; Cai, 1999; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Liu, 2005; 2007; Matalene, 1985; McLuhan, 1989). For instance, Matalene (1985) revealed that Chinese writers showed an “indirect” pattern, and claimed that native English readers would have difficulty in the comprehension of these writers’ main ideas because native English writers show a tendency to clearly reveal their intentions in written discourse.

Some studies have explored the roots of East Asian indirectness and attributed the indirect Chinese rhetorical pattern to elements of classical Chinese literature such as the *eight-legged essay* and the “four move pattern” *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* (prepare the reader

for the topic, introduce and develop the topic, digress from the topic and turn to a related subject, conclude the essay), their world view, and their mental faculties (Alptekin 1988; Cai, 1999; Connor 1996; Hinds, 1990; Kaplan 1972, 1995; McLuhan, 1989).

Confucianism emphasizes four moral principles: affection between parent and child, righteousness between ruler and ruled, differentiation between older and younger, and trust between friend and friend (Connor, 1996). It is argued that these principles have long influenced East Asian logic as well as traditional life, and have resulted in the characteristically indirect rhetorical pattern. In addition, Cai (1999) claimed that Confucianism influenced the *eight-legged essay* form, mastery of which was required for civil service examinations in ancient China: *poti* (opening up), *chengti* (ampliation), *qijiang* (preliminary exposition), *qigu* (first argument), *xugu* (second argument), *zhonggu* (third argument), *hougu* (final argument) and *dajie* (conclusion). The civil service examinations required citizens to maintain the standards of society, which resulted in their implicit expression in society and in written discourse. Alptekin (1988) also found this indirect pattern in the Chinese expository samples, and reasoned that their world view induced Chinese writers to show non-linear patterns: “the movement of the human world in a cyclical pattern,” “the universe devoid of a fixed starting point,” “valuing of synchronicity instead of causality,” and “the harmonization of dualism” (Cited from Liu, 2005, p. 4). Interestingly, McLuhan (1989) assumed that the rhetorical differences between native English writers and Chinese writers would be related to their mental faculties. He asserted that the rhetoric directness of native English writers could be attributed to the linear and visual properties of the left brain, while the rhetoric indirectness of Chinese writers reflects the simultaneous and acoustic properties of the right brain. In sum, it has been previously argued that the traditional moral principles, world views and mental faculties of Chinese writers cause them to avoid self-reflection in written discourse.

Several studies on the rhetorical patterns of Japanese writers have also found indirect and non-linear patterns in their L1 and L2 written discourse similar to those found in Korean and Chinese rhetoric (e.g., Hinds, 1983a; 1983b; 1984; 1987; 1990; Kobayashi, 1984). Kobayashi (1984) closely investigated the rhetoric patterns of Japanese and North American college students using 676 writing samples from Japanese learners, and found that the *general-to-specific* (direct and linear) pattern was the most frequent to appear in the North American essays. In contrast, the *specific-to-general* (indirect and non-linear) pattern was largely found in the Japanese compositions. In other words, Japanese writers did not clearly state their main ideas at the beginning, but put them at the bottom of their essays.

Hinds (1983a; 1983b; 1984; 1987; 1990) conducted the most extensive CR research on Japanese rhetorical patterns. Hinds (1984) investigated Japanese newspaper articles

translated into English, and noted that types of organization such as “unity,” “focus” and “coherence” were relatively insufficient and seemed incoherent to the eyes of native English readers. In another study, Hinds (1987) reported that the written discourse of Japanese writers was not “personal-focused” but “situational-focused.” In the “situational-focused” context, the reader has the responsibility to comprehend the written context and infer what message the writer wants to convey. In contrast, in the “personal-focused” situation, the writer has the responsibility to clearly state the main idea and supporting details for the reader to effectively appreciate the written context. He also claimed that the “typical” rhetorical pattern of Japanese writers was indirect and non-linear, and that it was therefore necessary for the reader to endeavor to find the intention of the writer in Japanese written discourse.

## 2. Studies Disputing Kaplan’s Hypothesis

As previously mentioned, the CR hypothesis which claims that East Asian rhetoric patterns are inductive and non-linear has been supported by numerous studies. At the same time, it has been strongly criticized by several studies (e.g., Kamimura & Oi, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Liu 2005; Mohan & Lo, 1985). These studies have argued that the CR hypothesis lacks appropriate comprehension of current East Asian rhetorical development. H. Ryu (2006) provided a clear explanation of this position as follows:

These studies contended that there were many similarities between the contemporary Oriental and Western rhetoric, which obviously came from the recent Westernized writing instruction in Oriental countries. They also pointed out that Kaplan’s explanation of Oriental rhetoric was too simplistic to explain process of determining text structure in different rhetorical situation (p. 6).

Recent studies have argued that Kaplan’s early CR model has been overly generalized. As Hirose (2003) puts it, “Recent studies have pointed to not only differences but also similarities between L1 and L2 writing pattern” (p. 1). Many other studies have supported this observation, demonstrating that the rhetorical pattern of East Asian writers is deductive and linear (e.g., S. H. Cheong, 2012; Y. Jeong & H. Choe, 2012; Kamimura & Oi, 1998; S.-J. Kang & S.-Y. Oh, 2011; S. Kim, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1997; 2002; Kong, 1998; Kubota 1998a; 1998b; Liu, 2005; 2007; Miao & Lei, 2008; Wu & Robin, 2000; Zhu, 1997).

Several studies on Korean L2 rhetoric have revealed that it is similar to that of native English writers (e.g., Y. Jeong & H. Choe, 2012; S.-J. Kang & S.-Y. Oh, 2011; S. Kim, 2005; H. Ryu, 2006). S. Kim (2005) closely investigated samples written in both English

and Korean by Korean ESL writers and showed that more than half of the participants clearly expressed their main ideas at the beginning in L1 writing. Moreover, almost all of participants located their main ideas in initial position in L2 writing. H. Ryu (2006) found that most Korean college students clearly expressed their main ideas initially. He argued that many features such as linguistic factors, writing ability, socio-economic background, and learning experiences with writing might have contributed to the directness of the participants. Nevertheless, it was reported that most of the participants did not develop the overall rhetoric pattern fully, except for the placement of the main idea.

Interestingly, a few studies have argued that L2 rhetoric patterns influence L1 rhetoric patterns (e.g., Y. Jeong & H. Choe, 2012; S.-J. Kang & S.-Y. Oh, 2011). S.-J. Kang and S.-Y. Oh (2011) compared L1 and L2 essays written by 52 undergraduate students in Korea, which were divided into two groups based on L2 language proficiency. They revealed that the advanced students clearly put their main ideas in the introduction to a higher degree than did the low-level students. More noteworthy is that the L2 rhetorical patterns of the high-level students seemed to influence their L1 writing. They also gave us a noticeable remark as follows:

With regard to argument indirectness, it seems that this study's results contradict Kaplan's (1966) claim of culture and language specific patterns in that the L1 to L2 rhetorical transfer was not as dominant as he claimed... They also preferred the initial location when placing their main ideas regardless of the language they used (p. 22).

Y. Jeong and H. Choe (2012) closely examined the argumentative essays composed in L1 and L2 by 40 Korean ESL students in the United States. Contrary to S.-J. Kang and S.-Y. Oh (2011), they claimed that regardless of their L2 proficiency level, almost all of the participants clearly expressed their main ideas at the beginning and showed directness as well as linear patterns in their argumentative essays.

Since the late 1990s, numerous studies have also demonstrated that the rhetoric patterns of L2 writing by Chinese learners have become quite similar to those of native English writers (e.g., Kirkpatrick 1997; 2002; Kong, 1998; Liu, 2005; 2007; Miao & Lei, 2008; Wu & Robin, 2000; Zhu, 1997). Of these studies, some (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1997; 2002; Liu 2005) have shown that L2 writing instruction in China has changed Chinese L2 rhetorical patterns and organization. Educational resources for L2 writing such as textbooks and on-line materials have started to stress the use of native English rhetorical patterns.

Kirkpatrick (1997, 2002) and Liu (2005) argued that the new approach toward L2

rhetoric instruction has led Chinese rhetorical patterns closer to those of native English writers. Kirkpatrick (1997) examined five Chinese textbooks and writing instruction methods, and concluded that these Chinese textbooks never emphasized traditional Chinese *eight-legged essays* or the traditional Chinese rhetorical pattern. It was argued that contemporary writing instruction has started to emphasize writing similar to that of native English writers. In addition, Kirkpatrick (2002) analyzed argumentative essays in Chinese English textbooks, and demonstrated that Chinese writers were encouraged to use deductive and linear patterns in their L2 writing, referring to the L2 writing instruction advice that they had received. Liu (2005) investigated the on-line teaching resources of North America and China and demonstrated that the general structure in on-line L1 samples consists of introduction, body and conclusion, moving from the general to the specific. The organizational and the rhetorical patterns of native English writers have greatly influenced those of Chinese writers.

Other studies have demonstrated that both L1 and L2 rhetorical patterns of Chinese writers share many similarities with those of native English writers (e.g., Kong, 1998; Liu, 2007; Miao & Lei, 2008; Wu & Robin, 2000; Zhu, 1997). For instance, Kong (1998) and Zhu (1997) analyzed business letters written in English and in Chinese by Chinese writers. Interestingly, they found that direct and linear patterns were found to a high degree in both written languages. Wu and Rubin (2000) examined argumentative essays written in both English and in Chinese by Taiwanese students, and found that inductive and non-linear patterns could still be identified in their L1 essays, but that deductive and linear rhetorical patterns appeared dominant in their L2 essays.

Several recent studies on Japanese rhetoric have revealed that the Japanese rhetoric pattern has become identical to that of native English writers, which contradicts early CR research. Kobayashi (1984) found that Japanese writers shared a rhetoric similar to that of native English writers, with advanced Japanese ESL students in the United States showing the deductive rhetorical pattern and preferring the “general to specific” pattern. Though differences in rhetoric were found between L1 and L2 in the study, Kamimura and Oi (1998) compared writing strategies such as organization pattern, rhetorical appeals, diction, and cultural influences between Japanese argumentative texts and American argumentative texts. They demonstrated that most Japanese writers express their main ideas clearly, and concluded that Japanese writers appear to be deductively oriented. Kubota (1998a) closely investigated Japanese argumentative and expository essays, reporting that although many traditional rhetoric patterns were found in the expository texts, the overall rhetorical patterns of the argumentative essays were similar to those of the native English writers, which means that rhetorical patterns vary depending on the writing genre. Hirose (2003) examined argumentative essays written in both L1 and L2 by Japanese writers, and demonstrated that the rhetoric pattern was



direct and linear, regardless of the language used. It is, however, noteworthy that the scores for L2 writing were lower than those for L1 writing, which means that except for the placement of the main idea, the quality of L2 writing did not correspond to that of L1 writing.

### 3. Influencing Factors in L2 Rhetoric

Some previous studies (e.g., Hirose, 2003; Kubota, 1998b; Matsuda, 1997) have mentioned that several factors could influence L2 rhetoric development. Hirose (2003) explored the relationship between L1 and L2, arguing that “L1 and L2 writing background in terms of writing conventions, instruction, and experience as well as L2 proficiency level” could shape L2 rhetoric patterns” (p. 182). Matsuda (1997) noted that the three factors of linguistic, cultural, and educational explanations could also contribute to L2 rhetoric. Kubota (1998b), moreover, alluded to the possibility that “various factors such as previous English instruction, strategies specific to L2 writing, L2 proficiency, and L1 writing ability” (p. 75) could play a factor in the development of L2 rhetorical characteristics.

As reviewed above, the East Asian countries of Korea, China, and Japan share similar cultural backgrounds. A long time ago, many aspects of Chinese culture, including Confucianism, were introduced into Korean and Japanese society. These countries have been closely tied to China in many ways, such as through religion, ideology, and culture (e.g., Taylor & Taylor, 1995). However, since modernization has taken place in East Asia, different sociopolitical conditions have come to bear, with many other factors such as educational systems (including writing instruction) and social climate being dramatically developed in each nation, which, needless to say, could have had some influence on the writing conventions among and between these countries. Therefore, considering the possibility that these differing social and educational factors within countries that share similar cultural backgrounds could be reflected in L2 written discourse, it is predicted that rhetorical differences and similarities will both be found.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

### 1. Data Collection

A total of three hundred argumentative essays, one hundred for each country, were collected. Compared to structurally flexible genres such as narrative and expository essays, the argumentative genre is generally composed of a definite text structure

consisting of introduction, body, and conclusion. The argumentative essays for this study were written for the independent task in the TOEFL writing section, in which writers are required to complete an opinion-stating essay, generally including two types of question: (1) Agree-Disagree Type and (2) Preference Type. The scores of the three hundred essays are from 3.0 to 4.0, either 3.0, 3.5, or 4.0, which means that they were written by mid-advanced EFL writers.

Two different sources were used to collect the Korean samples. First, one private TOEFL academy in Korea gathered 40 samples from Korean EFL learners who were preparing to study abroad and sent them by e-mail. Second, 60 samples were collected from a group of 60 college students who were taking an essay writing class. Two different sources were also used to collect the Chinese samples. A Korean-American who had previously taught TOEFL writing to Chinese students contacted a former colleague at a private institute in China, who sent in 40 samples via e-mail. And, a TOEFL scoring website ([www.findscore.com](http://www.findscore.com)), where anyone can get access to scored TOEFL sample essays, provided 60 writing samples written by Chinese writers. All Japanese samples were collected from the same website.

## 2. Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question, it is essential to closely examine what types of supporting details the writers use to illustrate their main ideas. Unfortunately, very few studies have explored the types of supporting details. Four decades ago, Meyer (1975) suggested three types of supporting details in his discussion of rhetorical predicates. We adapted his categorization because we found them widely used in the TOEFL samples. We also designed our own seven supporting details after a close examination of the samples. Therefore, a total of ten supporting details was used as our coding schemes: (1) Exemplification (EX), (2) Citation (CIT), (3) Common Knowledge and Truth (CKT), (4) Question and Answer (QA), (5) Anecdote (ANC), (6) Personal Experience (PE), (7) Mentioning Advantage (MA), (8) Personal Preference (PP), (9) Current Phenomenon (CP), and (10) Imagination (IMG).

Exemplification (Ex) is used to present a definite example to support the main idea, especially in the case that a writer specifies a distinct discourse marker to represent an example such as “for example” and “for instance.” Second, Citation (CIT) is used to legitimize writers’ opinions by supporting them with remarks from experts, research, proverbs, elders, celebrities, and the mass media. Third, Common Knowledge and Truth (CKT) is used to call the reader’s attention to common misconceptions and present the truth, including the writer’s main idea. Fourth, Question and Answer (QA) is used to call attention to a question and then to respond to this question with the writer’s idea. Fifth,

Anecdote (ANC) is used to refer to stories about family, friends, acquaintances or celebrities concerning their circumstances, fictional stories or historical facts. Sixth, Personal Experience (PE) is used to describe an individual event experienced by the writer to clarify the main idea. Seventh, Mentioning Advantage (MA) is used to present a potential benefit of the main thesis to the reader in order to foster positive belief toward the main idea. Eighth, Personal Preference (PP) is used to show the preference of the writer to support an opinion. Ninth, Current Phenomenon (CP) is used to reflect up-to-date news and recent events related to the main idea to alert the readers toward an opinion. Tenth, Imagination (IMG) is used to make the reader create a mental image of some situation. We examined all samples, identifying and sorting each supporting detail based on the categorization of ten supporting details provided above. In the data coding, there were occasional cases in which no visible features could be discovered. Such cases were classified as *obscure*.

## IV. FINDINGS

### 1. Use of Supporting Details

Table 1 below shows the numbers (percentages) of the micro-level rhetoric development between three East Asian countries. The Korean writers used *Mentioning Advantage* (20.25%) to the highest degree, followed by *Personal Experience* (15.61%), *Current Phenomenon* (14.78%), *Citation* (10.56%), *Anecdote* (9.70%), *Common Knowledge and Truth* (8.86%), *Personal Preference* (6.31%), *Exemplification* (5.92%), *Question and Answer* (5.06%) and *Imagination* (2.95%).

The Chinese writers used *Mentioning Advantage* (31.25%) the most, followed by *Personal Experience* (19.27%), *Current Phenomenon* (13.02%), *Anecdote* (8.85%), *Citation* (8.33%), *Question and Answer* (6.25%), *Personal Preference* (5.21%), *Exemplification* (3.65%), *Imagination* (3.65%) and *Common Knowledge and Truth* (0.52%).

The Japanese writers used *Personal Experience* (24.54%) to the greatest extent, followed by *Personal Preference* (21.47%), *Exemplification* (13.50%), *Mentioning Advantage* (12.28%), *Current Phenomenon* (7.46%), *Imagination* (4.91%), *Anecdote* (4.29%), *Citation* (2.45%) and *Common Knowledge and Truth* (2.45%).

In sum, it is found that the Korean and Chinese writers prefer to use *Mentioning Advantage*, *Personal Experience* and *Current Phenomenon* the most, while the Japanese writers prefer to use *Personal Experience*, *Personal Preference*, and *Exemplification* to support their main ideas. Distinct differences were also found in the use of *Personal*

*Preference, Personal Experience, Citation, Anecdote and Common Knowledge and Truth* between these countries.

**TABLE 1**  
Supporting Details Used by Each Group

Rank		Korean		Chinese		Japanese
1	MA	48 (20.25%)	MA	60 (31.25%)	PE	40 (24.54%)
2	PE	37 (15.61%)	PE	37 (19.27%)	PP	35 (21.47%)
3	CP	35 (14.78%)	CP	25 (13.02%)	EX	22 (13.50%)
4	CIT	25 (10.56%)	ANC	17 (8.85%)	MA	20 (12.28%)
5	ANC	23 (9.70%)	CIT	16 (8.33%)	CP	12 (7.46%)
6	CKT	21 (8.86%)	QA	12 (6.25%)	QA	11 (6.75%)
7	PP	15 (6.31%)	PP	10 (5.21%)	IMG	8 (4.91%)
8	EX	14 (5.92%)	IMG	7 (3.65%)	ANC	7 (4.29%)
9	QA	12 (5.06%)	EX	7 (3.65%)	CIT	4 (2.45%)
10	IMG	7 (2.95%)	CKT	1 (0.52%)	CKT	4 (2.45%)
Total		237 (100%)		192 (100%)		163 (100%)

*Note:* MA (Mentioning Advantage), PE (Personal Experience), CP (Current Phenomenon), CIT (Citation), ANC (Anecdote), CKT (Common Knowledge and Truth), PP (Personal Preference), EX (Exemplification), QA (Question and Answer), IMG (Imagination)

#### 1) Differences in Personal Preference and Personal Experience

Referring to Table 1, it is found that many of the Japanese writers used *Personal Preference* and *Personal Experience* more than the L2 writers in the other two East Asian countries. Liebman (1992), in a comparative study between Arabic and Japanese learners, demonstrated that Japanese writers revealed their personal feelings to support their ideas in the persuasive writing. This implies that Japanese writers focus on their own personality to support their main ideas. Furthermore, she added, “When the Japanese students did write, their instruction tended to emphasize what Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) called the *expressive* function of writing (writing done about and for the self)” (p. 11). Unlike Japanese writers, Korean and Chinese seem to avoid talking about their personal preferences, though they do speak about their personal stories in L2 argumentative essays. Referring to Table 1 again, we can see that each percentage of *Personal Preference* of Korean and Chinese writers is ranked in the seventh position of all classified supporting details. In the following, one sample written by a Japanese writer is presented, illustrating the use of *Personal Preference* to support the main opinion:

Excerpt 1: Japanese Argumentative Essay #1

[... First reason is I don't like apartment building, (PP 1)... Second reason is I like Tatami.(PP 2)... Third reason is I like Japanese traditional life.(PP 3)...]

In sum, the Japanese writers in this study used *Personal Preference* to support their main ideas more than any other East Asian writers. In addition, it is also found that the Japanese writers used much more *Personal Experience*, despite the fact that many East Asian writers used *Personal Experience* to support their main ideas.

## 2) Differences in Citation

Referring to Table 1, it is also found that the Japanese writers used much less *Citation* than the Korean or the Chinese writers. It seems that Korean and Chinese writers are more accustomed to using *Citation* in their L2 writing to support their main ideas than Japanese writers. Matalene (1985) pointed out that Chinese writers had a tendency to depend on socially appealing knowledge such as *proverbs, idioms, maxims, literary allusions, and analogues*. Wu and Rubin (2000) also revealed that many Taiwanese EFL writers employed *proverbs* in their L1 writing to support their opinions. Compared to the other East Asian writers, many of the Japanese writers used *Personal Preference*. Taking this into account, we can say that the Korean and Chinese writers are likely to evade expression of personal feeling but to depend more on shared knowledge in society. Regarding this point, Connor (1996) discusses remarks from Cai (1993):

Chinese students seem to avoid free expression of personal views, and feelings... Instead they resort to poetry, quotations, and references to the past. According to Cai (1993), quoting from old, even ancient, texts is considered cultured as well as respectful of authorities. To accept traditional values and social norms is considered polite behavior (p. 40).

It seems that the norms in Korean and Chinese society lead to conformity of the citizens within society, resulting in the avoidance of personal expression. In spite of the fact that Japan belongs to the traditional Chinese cultural area of influence, the Japanese writers in this study seemed to be accustomed to expressing their preferences and experiences rather than appealing to socially shared knowledge in composing argumentative essays in L2.

More notably, differences in how the writers in this study used *Citation* to support their main ideas were also found. We closely examined each citation used by the learners, classifying them into six types: *Expert, Research, Proverb, Senior, Celebrity* and *Mass*

*Media*. Table 2 below demonstrates each number (percentage) of six different sources of *Citation* used by the Korean, Chinese and Japanese writers.

First, when a writer borrows any remark of an expert, it is classified as *Expert*. Second, in case that a writer refers to objective research, it is classified as *Research*. Third, if a writer mentions any proverb, it is classified as *Proverb*. Fourth, if a writer listens to any remark from his or her elders such as grandparents, parents, elder brother or sister, uncle, aunt, or any other older friends or teacher and cites his or her remarks, it is classified as *Senior*. Fifth, when a writer borrows any remark from a well-known celebrity, it is classified as *Celebrity*. Sixth, in the case that a writer listens to something from any mass media source, and cites it, it is classified as *Mass Media*.

**TABLE 2**  
Numbers of Six Sources of Citation in Each Group

Source	Korean	Chinese	Japanese
Expert	2 (5.88%)	1 (5.89%)	0 (0%)
Research	12 (35.30%)	2 (11.76%)	0 (0%)
Proverb	8 (23.53%)	9 (52.94%)	1 (20%)
Senior	10 (29.41%)	3 (17.65%)	3 (80%)
Celebrity	1 (2.94%)	2 (11.76%)	0 (0%)
Mass Media	1 (2.94%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	34 (100%)	17 (100%)	4 (100%)

Interestingly, differences between Korean and Chinese writers were found. First, the Korean writers used *Research* (35.30%) more than any other type of *Citation* to support their opinions, followed by *Senior* (23.53%), *Proverb* (23.53%), *Expert* (5.88%), *Celebrity* (2.94%) and *Mass Media* (2.94%). In contrast, the Chinese writers used *Proverb* (52.94%) to the highest degree, followed by *Senior* (17.65%), *Research* (11.76%), and *Celebrity* (11.76%). Looking carefully at the differences in the use of *Citation* between the two countries, it is found that the Korean writers generally used *Research* the most, while the Chinese writers used *Proverb* to the highest degree. For a detailed comparison between the two countries' writers, two samples are presented below from a Korean and a Chinese writer, respectively:

Excerpt 2: Korean Argumentative Essay # 11

[... According to a recent research conducted by the Seoul National University, 75% of the successful celebrities in their field are the person who chased his dream since he was young. (CIT – Research) ...]

Excerpt 3: Chinese Argumentative Essay #52

[... And as the saying goes: "Example is better than precept." (CIT 1 – Proverb)...  
Just as the saying goes: "There is no place like home." (CIT 2 – Proverb)...]

S. Lee and H. Choe (2012) mentioned that Korean EFL raters considered objective data appropriate to support their main ideas. They also noted, “Just as a writer writes on the basis of writing conventions in her culture, a rater may rate based on the writing convention in his culture. Thus, the culturally entrenched writing convention may become standard by which the rater grades an essay” (p. 27). Based on this idea, it can be conjectured that despite the fact that Korea shares many cultural similarities with China, Korean writers are more accustomed to using objective data than Chinese writers. According to Urimal (2002), Korean writers seem to have been educated to use *objective data* to support their main ideas in secondary school, since many Korean universities require argumentative essay writing. It is likely that their previous writing instruction at secondary school leads Korean writers to use *Research* to a greater extent in order to guarantee objectivity, compared to the other types of *Citation* in L2 essays as well as L1 essays. In contrast, it is also found that many Chinese writers used *Proverb* quite frequently, compared to the other types of *Citation*. We can therefore say that proverbs have traditionally been considered the typically socially shared form of knowledge in Chinese written discourse. In sum, it appears that modern Chinese writers still prefer to use proverbs to support their main ideas.

### 3) Differences in Anecdote

Referring to Table 1, it is also found that the Japanese writers used less *Anecdote* than the Korean and Chinese writers. In fact, compared to the Japanese writers, no big difference was found between the Korean and the Chinese writers. However, looking carefully at the sources of *Anecdote*, we can find that slight differences can indeed be found between the Korean writers and the Chinese writers.

To see the differences, we sub-classified the sources of *Anecdote* in Table 3 below. First, if a writer tells any story about their family, friends or acquaintances, it is classified as *Family, Friends, and Acquaintance*. Second, when a writer speaks about their life circumstances, such as their home, school life, work place or neighborhood, it is classified as *Circumstance*. Third, in the case that a writer mentions a story about a celebrity, it is classified as *Celebrity*. Fourth, when a writer uses a fictional story, such as a movie, novel or fairy tale, it is classified as *Fictional Story*. Fifth, if a writer conveys a historical fact, it is classified as *Historical Fact*.

**TABLE 3**  
Numbers of Five Sources of Anecdote in Each Group

Source	Korean	Chinese	Japanese
Family, friend and acquaintance	19 (82.61%)	7 (41.18%)	2 (28.57%)
Circumstance	1 (4.35%)	3 (17.65%)	1 (14.29%)
Celebrity	3 (13.04%)	3 (17.65%)	2 (28.57%)
Fictional story	0 (0%)	2 (11.76%)	2 (28.57%)
Historical fact	0 (0%)	2 (11.76%)	0 (0%)
Total	23 (100%)	17 (100%)	7 (100%)

The Korean writers mostly used stories of the category *Family, Friends, and Acquaintance* (82.61%), followed by *Celebrity* (13.04%), and *Circumstance* (4.35). In the meantime, less than half of the Chinese writers employed stories of the type *Family, Friends and Acquaintance*, though this was the highest category, followed by *Circumstance* (17.65%), *Celebrity* (17.65%), *Fictional Story* (11.76%) and *Historical Fact* (11.76%). Referring to Table 8, we can say that the Chinese writers seemed to use a wider variety of anecdotes than did the Korean writers. For a detailed comparison of Korean and Chinese writing illustrating these points, two samples are presented below:

Excerpt 4: Korean Argumentative Essay # 60

[...For instance, my friends, Min hi who traveled Japan last month alone lost her luggage. However, she had no one to help her such as friends or family. If she travels with companions, she can overcome her difficulty more easily. In summary, there are several reasons why traveling with companion is more preferable ...](ANC)]

Excerpt 5: Chinese Argumentative Essay #29

[... In Chinese New Year, my father will play poker card with child. And the loser will give the winner one dollar. But my father always wins the game, and we have to give him one dollar. So we feel it's boring because we always lose. (ANC 1) Secondly, if you pretend to lose in the game, maybe will make people feel funny. I have a friend, she is very intellectual, and sometimes we play bingo, she know the best method and let her can win the other people. But sometimes she will pretend to lose, and make the people feel good, because he win her. And the other people will be surprised that she lose. (ANC 2)...]



As previously mentioned, the Japanese writers used *Anecdote* far less than the Korean and the Chinese writers; they employed it only when describing their personal experiences.

#### 4) Differences in Common Knowledge and Truth

It has been shown that, overall, the East Asian writers in this study used *Common Knowledge and Truth* less than the other supporting details. It appears that *Common Knowledge and Truth* is an effective strategy for generalizing the main idea. Surprisingly, referring to Table 1, we can see that the Korean writers displayed a tendency to present *Common Knowledge and Truth* to a greater extent than writers in the other East Asian countries. Several Korean writers (8.86%) used *Common Knowledge and Truth*. In contrast, the Chinese writers (0.52%) and the Japanese writers (2.45%) used *Common Knowledge and Truth* least of all the supporting details. Considering that, as discussed above, the Korean writers are generally accustomed to generalizing their supporting details for their main ideas, it can be assumed that the Korean writers attempted to generalize their argumentation by using *Common Knowledge and Truth*. One sample essay, which shows *Common Knowledge and Truth* in one of the Korean argumentative essays, is presented as follows:

##### Excerpt 6: Korean Argumentative Essay #39

[*There are a lot of people out there insisting that a job does not matter as long as it pays you a lot because it can guarantee a high quality of life. They believe they are going to be happy by possessing or consuming valuable goods and services. However, I strongly believe that it is more important to be happy with the job since being happy is not something that you can purchase or possess (CKT)...*]

In the case of the Chinese writers, it is suggested that the communist ideology in China might have prevented these writers from expressing common knowledge. Communism emphasizes conformity to society, which may consequently influence L2 rhetoric development. In a communist society, individual expression including common knowledge seems to be limited. In the case of the Japanese writers, given that they generally expressed themselves in the written discourse mostly by mentioning their preferences and experiences, it does not seem that the Japanese writers would have had any need to generalize their main ideas using *Common Knowledge and Truth*.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study has closely explored the micro-level rhetoric of supporting detail in L2 argumentative essays of East Asian writers from Korea, China, and Japan. The data analysis revealed that the Korean and Chinese writers generally preferred similar supporting details, in that they all used *Mentioning Advantage*, *Personal Experience*, and *Current Phenomenon* to high degrees. On the other hand, the Japanese writers preferred to use *Personal Experience* and *Personal Preference*; more concretely, a total of 46.01% of their supporting details was personal expressions, which is a combined number of *Personal Preference* (21.47%) and *Personal Experience* (24.54%).

Some differences are also observed between the writers in the three countries in the use of supporting detail sub-categories. First, despite the fact that a significant number of Korean and Chinese writers relied on *Citation* and *Anecdote*, they tended to use different sources within these categories to support their main ideas. The Korean writers were found to favor the use of objective facts, in that they used research data to support their main ideas. On the other hand, the Chinese writers showed a greater dependence on traditional expressions such as proverbs, idioms, maxims, literary allusions, and analogues; these tendencies can be interpreted to mean that particular aspects of Confucianism may have been observed under communist ideology, in contrast to Korea, and may continuously contribute to the higher usage rate of these expressions. On the contrary, very few Japanese writers preferred *Citation* or *Anecdote*. This is suggested to show that the Japanese writers focused mainly on personal expressions instead of favoring socially appealing expressions such as proverb and maxims. In the meantime, the East Asian writers in this study used *Common Knowledge and Truth* less than the other supporting details; only a few Korean writers employed it to generalize the main idea, and the Chinese writers and the Japanese writers used it least of all the supporting details.

The findings of the present study also suggest directions for future research. First, it would be revealing for other genres such as expository and narrative writing to be explored. Second, groups of East Asian learners of different proficiency levels could be compared to identify and examine any possible differences. Third, it is also necessary to compare the L1 writing of native English speakers with the L2 writing of East Asian writers, focusing on the different categories of supporting details. Last, writing should be carefully examined to see whether the various types of supporting details are reflected in the evaluation of both L1 and L2 writing assessment.

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**Examples in: English**

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