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### Chinese Poetry and English Essays

“I look up to see the bright moon and look down to reminisce about my hometown.”

This sentence is from a famous Chinese poem called “Thought in the silent night.” Every Chinese student is familiar with this poem since it is taught to us in elementary school. When I was a pupil, I began to learn the beauty of Chinese poems. I still remember that there were morning poetry reading activities in my elementary school. I enjoyed the voice of birds and the golden sunshine in the morning together with me. Chinese poems are vivid because they always show the emotions of the writer. “Here we part with each other, and you set out like a lonesome wisp of grass, floating across the miles, farther and farther away” shows the friendship between the writer and his friend. “Cut it, it does not sever. Sort it, as entangled as ever” shows the sadness of the writer. “When heaven and earth mingle, not till the will I part from you” shows the power of love. Every poem tells the reader a story and encourages me to further explore the beauty of literature.

Upon entering high school, the nightmare came. In high school, there is an essay required at the end of each Chinese exam. We were required to write a 600-to-700-word essay in 40 minutes. Although there was not a required genre, there was a fixed template for students to get high scores. For example, if the question is “How do you think about the challenges you face in your life?” then, according to the template, I need to describe the

challenges in the first paragraph, talk about how I am defeated them in the second paragraph, how I find a way to solve the problem in the third paragraph, and how I become stronger in the last paragraph. If I missed one of these parts, then probably I would lose some points. I always saw my classmates scribbling quickly in the exams, completing the essay in time, and getting high scores. However, I just wrote a first sentence and erased it in a minute. I always felt sad and helpless because I was not good at creating stories and using templates. As a result, I started to feel bored about writing.

As I entered college, I began to take the UWP series courses. In my first UWP course, UWP7, I met Dr. Kurzer. He made a brief introduction to academic writing. Before I entered this course, I always invented stories to finish my essays to get higher pointers. However, Dr. Kurzer displayed a new way to approach essays—using writing tools to synthesize several scientific research papers and find trends among them.

*This is amazing*, I thought. I did not need to make up any story. Everything I wrote, cited, and paraphrased was based on other research papers. Everything I wrote could be supported with evidence. Everything I wrote could be used to persuade others. I began to learn to write a synthesis essay to prove some thesis statements.

Moreover, in my Chemistry class, the professor taught me how to write a lab report. In that quarter, when I finished my Chemistry lab, I collected all the data in a form. Then I tried to use formulas to analyze the data. I enjoyed writing the conclusion of the lab report because I was happy that I could use my own data to prove some difficult Chemistry principles. However, I believe writing should not only be the display of data, formalized through sections called “discussion” and “conclusion.” I remember some Chinese poems.

They are so beautiful and vivid with rhetoric and scenes. I feel helpless because I cannot find a way to write these wonderful sentences in English without inspiration.

As I understand English composition more, I find it is not hard to write some narratives in English. On my way to campus and home, I ride a bicycle through downtown Davis. When I first came to Davis, it seemed like any other boring town. There are just roads, cars, and busy working people like what I saw before. However, as I become more familiar with Davis, the views become dynamic. I remember what Chinese poetry taught me and carry it over into my new life. Suddenly, the beautiful town cannot wait to tell me something. I see roses blooming as spring comes; I can hear students discussing what's for lunch; I can feel the wind stroking my face as my mom, and faraway a train is coming under the sunset glow. I start to feel that everything is alive, and writers just need to talk to all the beauty around them. In the essay exams, I felt no ideas because writers without observations cannot write vivid sentences. If you really want to dig into the beauty of the world, everything can be an idea. Just like what Chinese poet Lu You wrote, "There are so many mountains and with the way the river twists, you think there is no road. And then, dark willows, bright blossoms, another village appears."

Now I am sitting in my bedroom before the desk and working on my essay. I seldom write a narrative in English. However, as Anne Lamott writes, a "shitty first draft" does not mean it will never be a good essay. The more I learn and write the better I can write. Even though there can be a large difference between Chinese and English, having access to the lessons of Chinese poetry and English essays means there are more possibilities for me to explore.