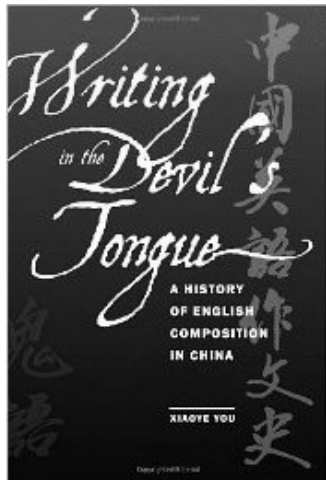


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<b>Writing in the Devil's Tongue: A History of English Composition in China</b>			
<b>Author:</b>	Xiaoye You (2010)		
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*Writing in the Devil's Tongue: A History of English Composition in China* is a book written for not only Chinese composition scholars and educators who work to improve English composition pedagogy in China, but also scholars and educators who come from other English-teaching communities across the world. The book title—a witty translation of a traditional Chinese expression—is indicative of the author's sense of humor. The author, Xiaoye You, takes a transnational perspective in examining the historical progression of mainstream English composition in the contexts of local sociopolitical changes in China. You showcases the modifications in scholars and educators' "rhetorical assumptions, pedagogical approaches and writing practices" (p. 9). Therefore, by looking through extensive historical data, the author explicitly claims that the English language in China has shifted from "the foreign devil's tongue" (p. 13) to our own tongue in accomplishing important social, political and cultural reforms.

The book comprises six chapters primarily in chronological order presenting the history of China. In Chapter 1, "Encountering the Devil's Writing," the author depicts a vivid picture of English composition development since its emergence in China in the

early 1900s. From You's interpretation of history, English emerged to serve political propaganda purposes to sharpen people's moral values and "engage them to state governance" (p. 45). When traditional ritualized Chinese education could not meet the needs of modernization, new forms of educational institutions such as Tong Wen Guan and foreign mission schools mushroomed. Under the influence of American composition pedagogy, English learners in China began to wrestle with the differences between Confucian rhetorical methods and the "devil's tongue." They began to incorporate Chinese "rhetorical and cultural nuances" (p. 44) in their composition.

In Chapter 2, "Writing and Decolonization," You mainly analyzes the sociopolitical changes and cultural reforms in Chinese society which facilitated the conflation of Confucian and Anglo-American rhetorical traditions. With the nation making collective efforts to decolonize, the New Culture Movement sought new pedagogy to work better, specifically in the Chinese context. With modified modes of written discourse such as narration, description and expository argumentation, a new generation had the freedom and tendency to express their feelings and attitudes—freedoms generally constrained by the traditional *bagu-ce-lun* system.

Chapter 3 reviews a unique period of Chinese history, from the establishment of the People's Republic to the Cultural Revolution. A drastic decline in English education occurred due to political reasons during the 1950s. English education, according to Tang Lixing (1985) became "distorted" (p. 44) because domestically designed textbooks primarily dealt with political issues. The Communist Party advocated that students make use of English, with heavy focus on the forms, to fight against capitalism. Localized English language education with domestication of textbooks emerged to promote socialistic views. Proletarian rhetoric gradually thrived after the Cultural Revolution.

In Chapter 4, "Writing and the Four Modernizations," You summarizes communicative teaching theory (CLT) and process writing pedagogy. With the Open-door Policy, English education flourished almost overnight. After the end of Maoist Era, education and social reconfiguration took place under the standard of the Four Modernizations: modern industry, agricultural, national defense and science and technology. English education, including composition, served the purpose of communication, while most students aimed at mastery of the language forms. Students' writing practices displayed a "noticeable socialistic undertone" (p. 130) to promote the Four Modernizations proposed by the Communist Party. At the same time, several domestically designed college English textbooks were widely used in classes based on the influence of Western applied linguistic theories such as Dell Hymes' (1971) "communicative competence" (CC) and Sandra Savignon's (2002, p. 3) interpretation of CC—learners' ability to interact with others, different from the ability to recite dialogues or memorize grammar rules. The revival of research in English writing was led by scholars such as Lu Funing and Ding Wangdao.

In Chapter 5, You examines China's new phase called "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (p. 12), when large-scale higher education as well as economic reforms took place in the era of globalization. The nation witnessed great prosperity of scholarship and research in writing. Compared to previously unified writing styles and political themes, creativity and individual elements of writers were encouraged in Chinese composition in order to meet requirements of the "well-rounded education" (p. 139). The national syllabus and assessment became more standardized and systematic. With separate foci, students who both majored or didn't major in English were trained to meet the needs in the market economy.

Recently, English has been perceived less as a devil's tongue, but rather a "neutral and technological frame" (p. 167), You summarizes the book with a final chapter, Chapter 6, "Writing in Our Own Tongue", pointing out the shift in understanding the ownership of English. Throughout history, from the fight against Feudalism, "alignment with bourgeois capitalism" (p.176), as well as the constant pursuit of modernity, English has always served as an indispensable part of the social changes in China just as western technology and science have. In other locales such as Philippines, India and "all major Pacific Rim countries" (Kaplan, 1995, cited by You, p. 176), English language participated as a part of the discourse of modernity. You advocates that scholars and educators discard English monolingualism and be aware that "all users of English are legitimate owners of the language" (p. 180)—and they use the language to serve their particular goals.

You argues for international perspectives that consider local needs when teaching composition. As such, he argues: "With an altered assumption of English language ownership, composition scholars and teachers will have to modify their rhetorical assumptions, pedagogical approaches and writing practices in the age of globalization" (p. 9).

Readers might be a bit overwhelmed by the huge amount of historical information in the book. However, through students' writing samples from different historical periods, You positions English learners in the central stage. Another aspect of this book that I enjoyed reading was that instead of talking about English composition history exclusively in China, You makes constant efforts to connect the Chinese context with the larger social and political environment in the world, with the argument that no writing occurs in a political and cultural vacuum. I enjoyed reading the book and garnered a significant amount of new knowledge; however, I do have a small suggestion. As a reader I would have very much liked to have seen some short excerpts from the various textbooks to which You refers

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