3. Comparative rhetoric has been criticized for its tendency to oversimplify non-Western rhetorics through the imposition of Western rhetorical concepts and theories. Consider a particular non-Western rhetoric such as ancient Egyptian or Confucian and give examples of problems involved in analyzing that rhetoric through a lens of Western rhetoric. Discuss methodologies rhetoricians can use to research and write about that rhetorical tradition while respecting its integrity and differences from Western rhetoric.

Traditional Western rhetoric is largely centered upon the golden age within Greece and is criticized for its monolithic nature which struggles to move beyond examining non-Western texts beyond a Western lens. Berlin (1994) describing the notion of revisionary histories, argues “that the formulation of a rhetoric is a product of the economic, social, and political conditions of a specific historical moment” and contends that revisionary histories, revisionary rhetorics must “locate the variety of rhetoric that exist at any particular moment and examine their interaction with each other and with the conditions of their production” (114-115). Examining non-Western rhetorics is a fundamental start, moving beyond the Western lens, moving towards a cultural/historical respective recontextualization is the challenge. Within the context of this course, Mesopotamian and ancient Chinese rhetorical contributions have led to differing notions and value systems surrounding non-Western rhetorics. More specifically, Binkley (2004) addresses the notion of the “other” within Enhenduanna, discussing Mesopotamian contributions before Greece, and Ding (2007) argues for a recontextualization of non-Western rhetoric for examination “in their own historical settings” to gather a more Chinese-centered understanding of Confucian rhetoric.

**Mesopotamia**

Binkley (2004), citing Glen, defines rhetoric as “inscribing the relationship of power and language” and argues that within the governing assumptions of the conceptualization of rhetoric as beginning with the Athenian Greeks, there exists “particular discursive conceptualizations of the Other—the Other of another period, place, culture, gender, and spiritual tradition” (47-48). Moreover, within the field of Rhetoric, she states “there exists the prevailing assumption that rhetoric was refined by the Greeks and that its definition by Plato and Aristotle, constitute the locus of its origins” (Binkley, 2004, p. 51). Yet, within Enhenduanna’s works, she documents the classic Greek notions of ethos, pathos, and logos and she discusses invention, noting that all of this occurred in Mesopotamia, “almost 2000 years before the ‘golden age’ of Greece” (Binkley, 2004, 48). Citing Van Di Miercoop, Binkley (2004) notes upon the challenges within the Mesopotamian body of writing: “‘it is because the discipline seems often stuck…and does not properly credit…what Mesopotamia has to offer…Mesopotamia is the East, the hostile other”’ (52). Along a similar vein, Said (1978) echoes this notion of “othering” stating, “this universal practice of designating in ones mind a familiar space which is “our” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary…because the imaginative geography of the “our land-barbarian land” variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction” (19-20). Geographical distinctions (i.e. Western and non-Western) a key contributor to “othering,” upholds and propagates preconceptions and/or misconceptions of cultural-geographic binaries thereby limiting perceptions and reception. Furthermore, citing Bahrani, Binkley (2004) elaborates upon the challenges within existing scholarship: ‘“[a]ny study of the Near Eastern past is hampered at the start by a number of preconceptions that have long since become embedded into the discourse as scientific or empirical facts”’ (52). Revisionary models must account for these preconceptions, move beyond their notion as “prerhetorical or protorhetorical” (Binkley, 2004, p 54) and address these non-Western rhetorics within their “unique economic, social, political and cultural conditions” (Berlin, 1994, p. 116). Swearingen (2009) presents an alternative approach to nontraditional rhetorics, arguing for an “emic rather than etic approach” which seeks “to study the Other in its own terms” (213). She states that with the “Greek enlightenment” came an “endarkenment of those who had for centuries been stage center in culture and religion” (223); an emic approach which values nontraditional texts, moving them beyond a “prerhetoric” position, would enrich an understanding of both traditional and nontraditional rhetorical devices while moving RWS beyond the limits of a monolithic Western lens.

**China**

Reflecting Berlin’s (1994) sentiment that revisionary histories “should never rest secure in any ahistorical, universal mode of thought” (127), Ding (2007) criticizes comparative rhetoric stating that “the field has [a] tendency to oversimplify and essentialize non-Western rhetoric through the imposition of Western rhetorical concepts and theories, for such practices assume other cultures share the same cultural assumptions and practices whereas in reality they may be very different” (142). He argues that the inclusion of nontraditional, non-Western rhetoric must be coupled with a recontextualization of non-Western rhetoric “in their own historical settings” in order to “conduct piece-by-piece analyses before putting them together into a larger picture” (143). Moreover, he creates a sense of urgency in field, stating, “it is impossible to overstate the danger of examining a work written in ancient China such as the *Analects* as if it were a work independent of its complex historical, cultural, or political backgrounds, for such practice decontextualizes the work and neglects the huge impacts such backgrounds had on its production and reception” (Ding, 2007, p. 144). In his study surrounding Confucian texts, Ding (2007) triangulates different methods (quantitative and qualitative) essentially, corpus linguistic and rhetorical analysis, in an attempt to address this very concern. Qualitative methodological models, like discourse analysis, are well suited for historical recontextualization, as Fairclough (2010) specifically argues that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can function towards the “recontextualization of discourses [to] show…how particular discourses become dominant or hegemonic, their dissemination across structural [and] scalar boundaries…and their recontextualization within different fields and at different scales (20). On a similar note, Wodak and Meyer (2009) state CDA “aims at revealing structures of power and unmaking ideologies; [is] interested in the way discourse (re)produces social domination; and closely attend[s] to intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses in various public spaces and genres” (8-10). Ding’s (2007) triangulation of research methods “introduce[ed] a rereading of one of the classical canons, the *Analects*” and brought forth a “more nuanced and comprehensive understanding if ancient texts when taking its historical background into consideration” (156) again, making the contribution of qualitative analysis, like CDA another viable methodology to address recontextualization.

**Conclusion**

Addressing the challenges of perception and limitations within histories of rhetoric, Royster (2003) argues: “What we choose to showcase depends materially on where on the landscape we stand and what we have in mind. The imperative is to recognize that the process of showcasing space is an interpretive one…We select, focus and develop, bringing more clearly and vibrantly into view particular features that we frame and foreground, while simultaneously disregarding or minimizing other features and dimensions that we might have selected, developed and showcased instead” (148). Revisionary historiography, reflextive studies, ethno-rhetorical emic approaches, recontextualization of rhetorics via mixed methods, CDA included, attempt to recognize and address a Western footing in Royster’s (2003) disciplinary landscape and offer viable options for moving beyond recognition, towards selecting, focusing, and showcasing non-Western rhetorics, not as “alternative” or “prerhetoric” but rather as Rhetoric.

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