

# Genrification of Performances in Personal Blogging

*Jianxin Liu, Charles Stuart University*

*This article presents a textual analysis of Chinese personal blogs to understand how social interactions and performances are enacted in this evolving genre. On account of the complexity of genre composition, the present analysis focuses on examining the organizational aspect of personal blogs. Data were collected from three Chinese A-list personal blogs and were analyzed through identifying major generic components of the blogs. The findings reveal that these blogs are organized in a complex composition of macro-units and micro-units to engender performances. Factors such as socio-cultural and institutional conditions, individual bloggers' literacy level, and personal preferences are at play. The personal blog entails temporal stability as it changes and remixes with other genres constantly in response to institutionalizing and acculturating dynamics.*

*Keywords:* personal blogs, performativity, genre, institutionalization, acculturation

## 1 Introduction

Genre provides various semiotic resources that can be utilized to enact social performances such as identity, desire, sexuality, and gender. Research in this direction has been focused on the content and functional planes of genre, with the structural plane left largely unattended. This deliberate neglect, as will be argued in the following sections, may be rooted in a misread of the post-structuralist concern that structural patterns are incongruent with the acclamation of diversity, and consequently performance. As such, through an analysis of Chinese personal blogs, this article will argue that when repositioned as semiotic resources, structural patterns are equally, if not more, capable of enacting performances and that understanding such processes is important.

On this note, the analysis of personal blogs is a deliberate choice. Knowingly, personal blogs are a cyber-genre that is neither “stabilized for now” nor ‘stabilized-enough’ (Schryer, 1994, p. 107) for a period of time. Whilst some of their generic units remain relatively constant (e.g., blog entries), personal blogs embody changes, transitions, and intersections that have been engendered by social contexts and practices (Miller & Shepherd, 2009; Nelson, 2002). Personal blogs in this regard serve as suitable candidates for exploring this new area of genre research. It should be noted here that unlike some quantitative

researchers' attempts to generalize patterns (e.g., Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004), this study takes a critical stance to explore the ways that organizational features of genre are exploited to engender social construct (Frow, 2006) and performance (Bauman, 2004; Butler, 1993). The research question that concerns this analysis is: in what ways do the organizational features of personal blogs enact blogging performances? The following sections first provide a review of the literature related to genre, blogs, and personal blogs, followed by a delineation of the data and the method, and finally, a discussion of the findings from the analysis in relation to genre institutionalization and acculturation.

## 2 Performativity and genre

Views on genre, though becoming coalesced over the past twenty odd years, are still rather divergent. In general, three approaches prevail. The systemic functional linguists, also known as the 'Sydney genre school' (Hylon, 1996, p. 697), see genre as "a staged, goal-oriented social process" (Martin, 1992, p. 13). The ESP (English for Specific Purposes) perspective (e.g., Swales, 1990) views genre as a type of communicative event, employed by specific discourse communities whose members share broad social purposes. A genre is locally recognized and used in relation to a particular context, situation, or community. The Rhetoric Genre Studies perspective (e.g., Medway & Freedman, 1994) considers genre a form of social action that extends beyond being just a matter of form and content (Miller, 1984) but rather as recurrent and significant, embodying aspects of cultural rationality that function both as an index to cultural patterns and as a tool for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers.

Devitt (2004) further argues that genre is not just a response to recurring situations but a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context. It is a reciprocal dynamic within which individuals' actions construct and are constructed by a recurring context of situation, context of culture, and context of genres. Genres are visible in classification and form, and also within the relationships and patterns that develop when language users identify different tasks as being similar. Most importantly, genres exist through people's individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, and genres. An understanding of genre, in Hyland's (2004) summarization, involves both "form and content, including a sense of what is appropriate to a particular purpose and context" (p. 51).

In spite of these contentions, recent years have seen increasing theoretical integrations and several new developments. Frow (2006) in particular argues that genre is "central to human meaning-making and to social struggle over meanings" (p. 11). He continues that genre creates effects of reality and truth. The semiotic frames within which genres are embedded implicate and specify layered ontological domains, implicit realities which genres form as a pre-given reference. The category of genre has to do with concurrent systems and with historical change ranging over every level of the symbolic order, of our social world and of every other social practice. Frow's view, to some extent, accords with Miller's (1994) claim that genres are not merely formational and constitutive but rather active and participatory, congregating typified social actions that can be mobilized for transforming social formations and realities. In

other words, genre can engender performances as well as enable actions and transformations at the same time.

A performative view on genre as such is linked to intertextuality (Bauman, 2004; Genette, 1997; Kristeva, 1986) in which texts are seen essentially as cultural objects that are durable, repeatable, classifiable, and linked to other texts by historical, cultural, and generic relationships. An individual text does not stand alone as the multitude of images that are delivered to an audience constantly refer to and build upon each other (Andersen & Gray, 2008). Fairclough (1995, 2001, 2003) also argues that genre itself is a result of intertextuality. His use of the term *interdiscursivity* to replace genre emphasizes the complexity of textual relations in a single text and genre as interrelated textual practice. These textual relations do not only have a temporary configuration, as governed by the form and functionality of a genre; they also have a history and a future. They reproduce the heredity from other texts in the past, and create new substances and features for upcoming texts.

The performative view on genre was further taken up by Tseng (2011) through revising Swales' genre metaphor—genre as speech acts. Pointing out that genre entails institutional, interpersonal, and personal struggle, Tseng argues that performance is a quality of discourse that is mobilized in the act of communication rather than being inherent in language. Tseng's performative view, instead of focusing on the types of functions that genres can perform, takes a cognitive and pragmatic approach to understand how genre can be used by its creator to realize acts such as self-promotion, persuasion, and promise. Tseng's analysis, however, largely relies on the content side of genre by borrowing Gibson's (1977) conception of affordance as he was still confined by the linguistic paradigm.

Similar to Tseng (2011), Butler's conceptualization of performativity is indebted to speech act theory proposed by Austin (1962). As Butler (1993, p. 13) explains, "within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names". A speech act can produce what it names, such as gender categories, by referring to the accepted norm, code, or contract. They are cited or repeated, and hence performed in the utterance. Butler's performativity with its origins in poststructuralism is essentially "anti-essentialist, anti-foundational, suspicious of grand narratives, opposed to the idea of history as linear and progress, and distrustful of metaphysics" (Lloyd, 2007, p. 11). Her conceptualisation of performativity makes it possible to approach every possible aspect of genre including the structural aspect, which is traditionally regarded as constraining. It concerns not only what is performed by an agent but also how it is performed in relation to space and time (Boucher, 2006; Lloyd, 2007). As such, what kinds of resources are employed in enacting a certain kind of performance under what kinds of circumstances resources is centrally important and will be explored in this study by a focal examination of the organizational aspect of personal blogs.

### 3 Personal blogs and genre

Genre has been widely used as an approach for describing emergent forms of social media. The rationale is such that new media may engender new forms of expression (content/substance) and social consequences (function or social action). The reality is, however, opposite. A new media may not always be new

but rather a reassembly or reconfiguration of the old form of media. In the case of blogs, it is noticeable that some of the generic traits are borrowed from navigation logs (offline), diary writing (offline), note leaving (offline), what's new (online) and bulletin board systems (BBS), and are formulated or collaged. However, the majority of genre-based blog research has largely looked at blogs as product rather than as process.

While examining the blog from a genre perspective, Miller and Shepherd (2004) point out that genre analysis has become important in understanding arenas of social interaction, since genres are the intellectual scaffolds on which community-base is constructed. They argue that technological potentialities, cultural patterns, rhetorical conventions of antecedent genres, and the history of participants have combined to produce a recurrent rhetorical motive that has found a conventional mode of expression in blogs. The emergence of the blog as genre, then, signifies social action such as the desire to participate. Other researchers (e.g., Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004), however, argue that the blog is hardly a recognizable genre. They argue that the uniform format of blogs may suggest genre conventions, whilst the diverse content of blog entries cuts across genre boundaries. Content in this sense should not be used as a criterion for classifying the blogs as a genre but rather as a new lens for examining blogs' generic complexity, including the macro and micro genres which make up these texts, and the genre systems of which they are a part (Bazerman, 1994; Martin & Rose, 2003).

In the age of new media where technologies and media instantly converge (Jenkins, 2006; Manovich, 2001), media representations have an impact beyond the intentions of individual authors and media makers and are understood by audiences depending on their own experiences and social positions. In effect, the ways that personal blogs relate to social norms for realizing performance can be an intertextual process. By recourse to semiotic resources, each blog relates not only to other texts for constructing personal blogs as a genre, but also to manifestations of social conventions of different layers in various different ways.

Van Dijck (2004) compares blogs and diaries from the point of view of genre. He argues that blogs are not outcomes but rather signifiers of cultural change, as both blogs and diary writing reflect and construct new epistemologies. Through blogs, intimate reflections and revelations about personal, intellectual, and artistic preferences are consciously shared with both known and anonymous audiences. The culture of reciprocity enables bloggers to connect to people with similar interests or preferences as well as to market their personal tastes and cultural choices for commercial profit.

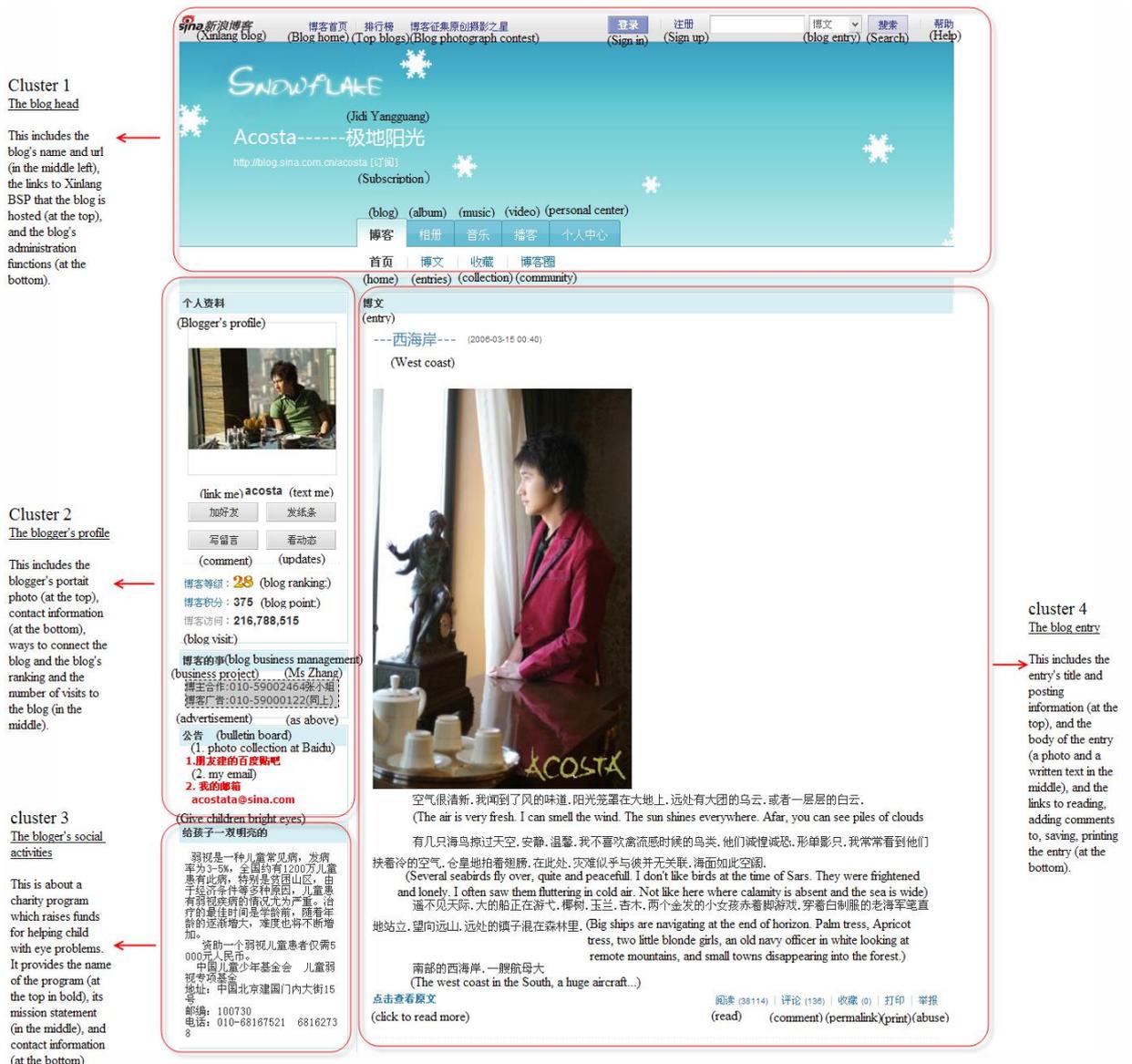
Different from diaries, however, privacy becomes an effect determined by the click of a mouse. Blogging itself becomes a construction of the self, mediated by tools for communication and expression (Rak, 2005). What many bloggers find most appealing about blogs is their ability to combine the immediately real and the genuinely personal. Blogs, as Sullivan (2005) emphasizes, are personal, imbued with the temper of the writer. The blog is then a genre that addresses timeless rhetorical exigencies in ways that are specific to its time (Miller & Shepherd, 2004).

#### 4 The data and the method

Three Chinese A-list personal blogs were selected for this analysis. In the analysis, A-list blogs refer to the most famous or popular blogs in a blog hosting portal or a blog service provider (henceforth BSP). They are not, however, synonymous with celebrity blogs as in other blog studies (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). The first blog is Muzi Mei's blog (*muzimei* 木子美) that was dubbed 'the mother of Chinese blogs' and the first de facto A-list personal blog in the Chinese blogosphere (Fang, 2003). The second blog is Liumang Yan's blog (*liumang yan* 流氓燕) that describes life transitions of a 'middle-aged' woman who divorced her husband and migrated from the countryside to the city to seek employment and ultimately a new life. *Liumang* (流氓) means hooligan, rascals, or rogues who have little respect for laws and rules. The third blog is Acosta's blog, a blog of a young man whose lifestyle is seen as iconic for young men of the emerging middle class in China and their pursuit of masculinity.

This analysis adapts Baldry's and Thibaut's (2006) coding conventions for the analysis of multimodal texts, that is, macro-coding of blogs, and micro-coding of blog entries and the semiotic components respectively. This kind of coding can accommodate different analytical approaches to analyzing genre and multimodal entries. The basic coding and segmentation unit is the cluster, which refers to a local grouping of items. The items in a particular cluster can be visual, linguistic, and so on and are functionally related to each other and to the whole to which they belong as parts. A blog can be identified with clusters such as blog head, blogroll, blog entry, photo collection, and so on, which are identifiable on its blogsite. In Figure 1, there are four clusters, namely, a) the blog head, b), the blogger's profile, c) the blogger's social activities, and d) the blog entry, each of which has its own function and position that help structure the blog.

As the major carrier of blogging content, blog entries from the three blogs were collected at a three-month interval from the first blog entry to the one when this data collection started and were labeled with a number, date and time of publishing, and entry title. Data were collected from June to September 2003 in Muzi Mei's blog, from February 2004 to May 2005 in Liumang Yan's blog, and from March to June 2006 in Acosta's blog. In total, 346 blog entries were collected: 32 from Muzi Mei's blog, 235 from Liumang Yan's blog, and 79 from Acosta's blog. For the purpose of the article, ten blog entries were selected from each blog's collected entries based on their readership and were labeled as, for example, in the case of Acosta's blog, Acosta e01, Acosta e02, etc. and so forth.



(Note: in brackets are translations of the Chinese text)

Figure 1. Clusters on blogs

A blog entry as a cluster is usually composed of micro-clusters which may be a text, a photo, a piece of music, or a video clip, which can be further divided into segments according to their semiotic attributes and analyzed under the multimodal discourse-analytic framework. Figure 2 shows that this blog entry is composed of four micro-clusters. Micro-cluster 1 is the entry title and posting information. Micro-cluster 2 is the photo of the blogger. Micro-cluster 3 is a text recounting the reason why the blogger turned to charity work. Micro-cluster 4 is the entry tail including permalinks, visit numbers, and comments on the entry. Each micro-cluster is constituted of segments (shortened as S in the analysis). For example, micro-cluster 3 is a written text composed of as many as 35 text segments. The segments, however, are not necessarily just sentences but also contain other semiotic elements such as images which have similar functions as a sentence does in a written text. For instance, micro cluster 2 as an image is

made up of three segments: 1) the background, 2) the human character (the blogger), and 3) the photo watermark Acosta, each of which may play a significant role in making meanings.

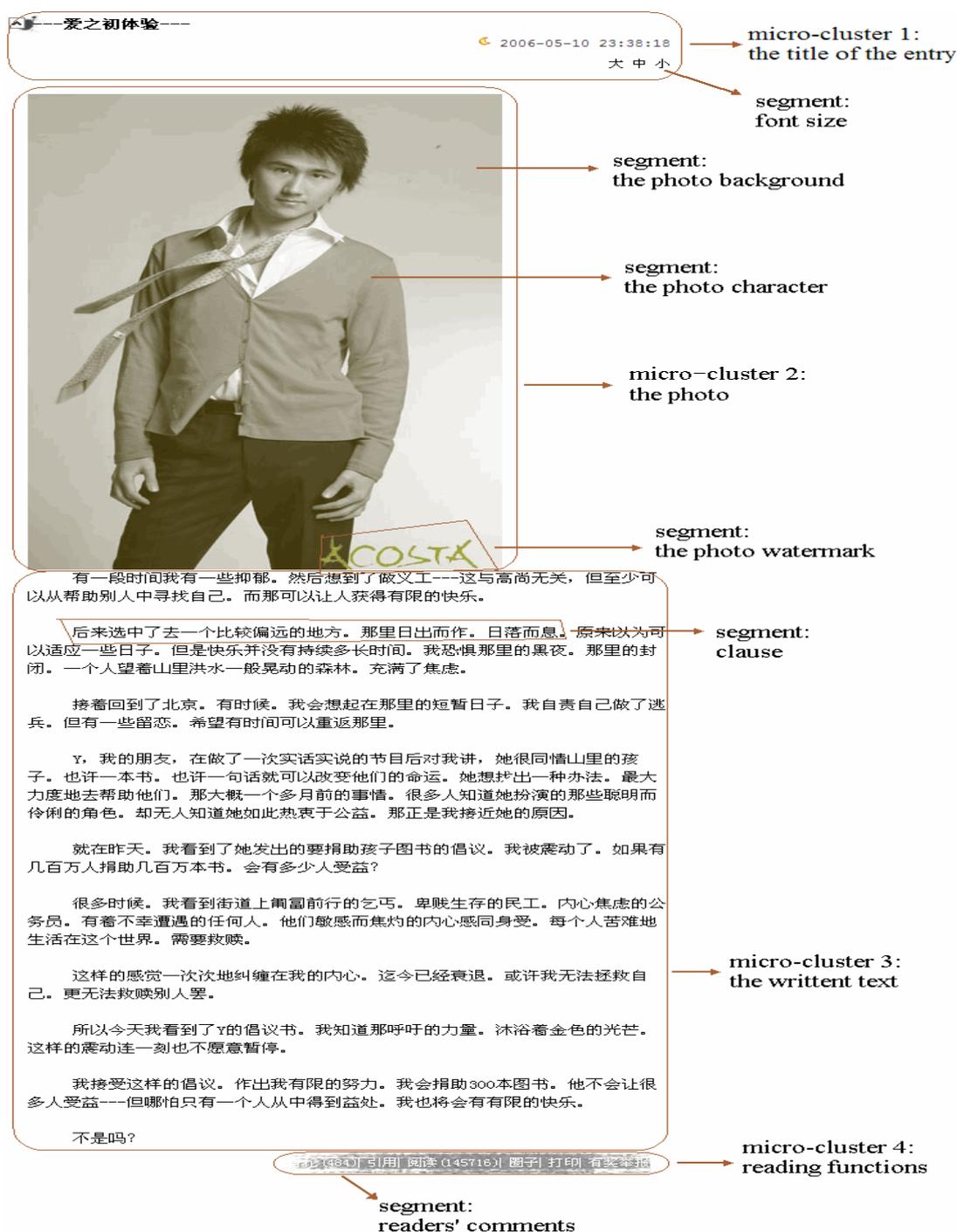


Figure 2. Micro-clusters and segments in a blog entry

Within a written text-based micro-cluster, identifying genre units is concerned with the categorization of the texts as instances of a particular genre; that is, the kinds of genre that are embodied and enacted by the texts. In order to describe the component parts of genres, this analysis uses macro-unit and micro-unit to address the assemblage or bricolage of the structural units in personal blogs. A

macro-unit refers to the dominant or overarching genre of a blog entry or sections of a blogsite and a micro-unit refers to smaller level textual units that are embedded in the macro-unit. In personal blogs, the blogsite can be constituted by several macro-units which are also composed of micro-units such as entry, blogroll, logo, etc. In the blogsite, a micro-unit can be constituted by a composite of segments such as the name of the blog, the web address of the blog, and the head image of the blog. Figure 3 is an example of how macro-units and micro-units may be identified in a blogsite. The macro-unit of this can be identified as a *blog profile*. The purpose of the macro-unit *blog profile* is to provide information about the blog and the blogger. It consists of clusters such as *blog head* (as the figure illustrates), *the blogger's profile*, and *the statistics of the blog*. These clusters that constitute the macro-unit *blog file* are recognized as micro-units, each of which may be composed of smaller segments. For example, the micro-unit *blog head* shown in the figure is composed of four segments which function as structural elements: 1) a flower image as the background, 2) written text which gives the name of the blog, 3) the web address to locate the blog's location, and 4) further written text which adds to the name of the blog. Among these four moves, the name of the blog is the one that is most indicative of the micro-unit; that is, *blog head*.



**Figure 3.** An example of a micro-unit containing segments

A blog entry, when viewed in a separate webpage, can also be regarded as a macro-unit composed of different micro-units. A micro-unit may also be composed of a photo or a number of photos, or several segments of written texts. For instance, the blog entry illustrated in Figure 1 can be regarded as a macro-unit of *proposal* in which the blogger advocates a particular charity program. This macro-unit is composed of seven micro-units: entry title, portrait photo, two recounts, two explanations, and viewer information. Note that the written text can be seen as a macro-unit composed of four micro-units or rhetorical types, as is termed in this analysis to avoid misunderstanding, each of which is made up of several written segments. The portrait photo is seen as an independent micro-unit which is composed of segments such as background color, brightness, a watermark, participants, and other entities.

The rhetorical type is the way in which various segments of a text are interrelated textually and, hence, argued. In order to analyze rhetorical patterns,

Bateman and Delin (2004) use a framework known as rhetorical structure theory (RST), which provides a set of concepts and a notation to express the way in which segments of text are hierarchically related to one another in the presentation of a coherent text (Mann & Thompson, 1988). Rhetorical structure theory distinguishes between the part of the rhetorical relationship that is core, central or nuclear, and the peripheral, additional part that is referred to as a satellite. Such relations are also helpful in determining within multimodal texts (Matthiessen, 2007) which mode may serve as the anchor, or, anchorage (Barthes & Heath, 1977).

Identifying a macro-unit depends largely on the content and the intention of a text (cf. Martin, 1992; Miller, 1984; Swales, 1990); that is, what a text is 'about' and the social purpose of the genre. Identifying a micro-unit, apart from that feature, requires identifying key structural components other than the overall segments or moves that contribute to the structure of the text. For example, the segment *the name of the blog* in Figure 1 is the essential structural component for identifying the micro-unit *blog head*; other segments such as *the web address* are optional. A micro-unit may be composed of segments such as photos, hyperlinks, background music, and written textual segments. The configurations of both macro-units and micro-units of a blog may not necessarily follow a linear or sequential order; rather, they may be dispersedly arranged.

## 5 Organizational patterns of personal blogs

This section presents an analysis of the generic complexity of the three personal blogs in relation to macro- and micro-unit occurrence and composition.

### 5.1 Patterns of macro-unit and micro-unit in the three personal blogsites

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of macro- and micro-units in the three personal blogs at the blogsite level. In general, three major macro-units can be identified: *blog profiling*, *blog viewing*, and *BSP connect*. *Blog profiling* presents relevant information of the blog and the bloggers. *Blog viewing* consists of a number of different micro-units. *BSP connect* shows the connection of the blog to its service provider. Here it needs to be pointed out that it seems that even just among three blogs, some macro-units can become optional such as *BSP connect* in Liumang Yan's blog. Each macro-unit is composed of several micro-units. Moreover, the types of micro-unit in the same macro unit can vary with consistent appearance of several key micro-units. For example, the three blogs shared three similar micro-units in the macro-unit *blog profile*: *blog head*, *blogger's information (or resume)*, and *blog statistics*. The number of the micro-units also varies in the three blogs. Micro-units of the macro-unit *blog profile* in Liumang Yan's blog, for instance, clearly outnumber those in the other two blogs. It is also interesting that the same micro-unit may be incorporated in different macro-units in different blogs. For example, *blog administration* appears in the macro-unit *blog viewing* in Liumang Yan's blog but in the *blog viewing* in Acosta's blog.

Each of these micro-units, further, consists of a number of segments. Some of these segments are repeated in different micro-units such as *album*, *video clips*, and *archives*, which may be the result of the blogger or the BSP intending

to draw audiences' attention to them. It is noticeable that each of these macro-units is constituted by a number of micro-units that are located in different places on the blogsite rather than being arranged in a sequence. Besides, a micro-unit of a macro-unit may become a segment in another micro-unit. For example, in Muzi Mei's blog, *blog entries* as a micro-unit of *blog viewing* is reformulated as a segment *archive* that constitutes the micro-unit *blog head*.

**Table 1.** Macro-units and Micro-units used in the three blogs

Blog	Macro-unit	Micro-unit
Muzi Mei's blog	Blog profile	blog head ^ blog navigation ^ blogger's resume ^ blogger's friends ^ blog statistics
	Blog viewing	blog entry categories ^ blog entries ^ recent visitors ^ blog entry comments ^ messages on the blog
	BSP connect	BSP registration ^ BSP service
Liumang Yan's blog	Blog profile	blog head ^ blog calendar ^ blogger's information ^ blog administration ^ blog friends ^ blog tags ^ background music friend links ^ blog statistics ^ blog administration ^ trademark
	Blog viewing	blog entry categories ^ recent updates ^ recent entry comments ^ recent messages on the blog ^ blog archives
	BSP connect	BSP registration ^ BSP commercials ^ BSP service
Acosta's blog	Blog profile	blog head ^ blogger's information ^ blogger's activity ^ personal connections ^ blog statistics
	Blog viewing	recent updates ^ background music ^ my podcasting ^ blog navigation ^ blog administration
	Blog connect	BSP registration ^ BSP commercials ^ BSP service

## 5.2 Macro-unit and Micro-unit variety and complexity in blog entries

Table 2 shows three examples from a summary of the occurrences of macro- and micro-units in 30 blog entries posted in the three blogs. It reveals that macro- and micro-units vary differently under the overriding category of personal blog entries. Macro-units range from autobiography, discussion, travelogue, reflection, memoir, telephone conversation, to book prologue, embodying and contributing to the very formation of the personal blog entry. To some extent, identifying the macro-unit of each blog entry depends not only on the content but also on the title of the entry, which summarizes its content or highlights what is intended in the entry. These macro-units of the Muzi Mei's blog entries can be rephrased as 'private' considering their attendance to the personal experience and empathy in developing the genre. Each blog entry examined is comprised of more than one micro-unit that is realized by rhetorical types as all the selected entries are written texts. The entry Mzm e07, for instance, is made up of six rhetorical types. A rhetorical type such as recount may recur several times in the same entry, even though most of them were neatly developed spanning over two or three segments. Among them, recount is the most dominant (15), explanation the second (7), exposition (5), description (4), and

commentary (2), other (2). The prominence of recount may confirm the blog entry's generic links to diary writing. The frequent appearance and recurrence of the other four categories of rhetorical type may also indicate the transference of local Chinese writing practice into the blogger's entries. It is a common feature in Chinese essay writing that narratives are intermittently accompanied by discussions or expositions (Liu, 2000; Zhao & Li, 2007).

**Table 2.** Examples of the distribution of macro- and micro-units in the blog entries of the three blogs.

Blog	Blog entry	Macro-unit	Rhetorical types
Muzi Mei's blog	Mzm e01	autobiography	recount ^ explanation
Liumang Yan's blog	Lmy e01	advertisement/parody of advertisement	recount ^ exposition ^ exposition
Acosta's blog	Acosta e01	Travelogue	portrait ^ description ^ recount ^ description

Macro-units in Liumang Yan's blog entries are ambiguous and not clearly patterned. Liumang Yan seemed to be more interested in the topics of her blogging than in the form. Identifiable macro-units include advertisement, criticism, confession, and debate; the rest are difficult to categorize. Recognizing the macro-unit of an entry mainly depends on the content each entry presents and the topic on which it elaborates. For instance, the entry Lmy e01 is labelled as an Internet advertisement for a blind date as it gave details of the blogger's plan to seek a suitable husband. Yet, the same entry can also be seen as a parody that Liumang Yan created to defend her feminist standings. Labelled as statement and declaration respectively, the two entries Lmy e06 and e09 can also be viewed as interrogations. In this entry, Liumang Yan listed biases other bloggers and BBS users held against her and countered with her explanations and reasons. It resembles a macro-unit that mixes questions with arguments. The occurrence of macro-units in Liumang Yan's entries is situated, simultaneous, and flexible, and the borders between macro-units and their classifications are blurred. Each entry in Liumang Yan's blog consists of more than three rhetorical types. Rhetorical type variation in total is up to 12 types. Among them, recount is the most common (8), exposition the second (5), and explanation the third (4). Other types include definition, argumentation, statement, response, description, commentary, narrative, and instruction. The diversity of rhetorical types may be another factor that makes identification of macro-units difficult.

A variety of macro-units were employed in Acosta's entries ranging from travelogue (Acosta e01), (auto) biography (Acosta e02, 04, 07, 09), response (Acosta e03), commentary (Acosta e05), review (Acosta e06), critique (Acosta e08), to confession (Acosta e10). This composition might have to rely on recognizing several key elements of a text structure in that blog entries may not tend to follow structural conventions of either Chinese or English strictly. For example, in entry Acosta e01, only two key features (orientation and complication) together with an optional unit (comment) are recognizable elements of a travelogue. The rest, strictly speaking, cannot be defined as a travelogue. A quick reading of entry Acosta e08 would mistake it for a travelogue but a close reading reveals it as argumentative writing intermixed with movie reviews and narratives.

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

As the above analyses have revealed, whilst the organizational features of these three personal blogs are largely identical with other blogs, variations and differences are visible. The discussion that follows will focus on two aspects of genre, namely, institutionalization and acculturation, to discuss how the organizational features of the personal blogs are employed to enable blogging performances. To begin with, the blogging technology is undeniably an important factor that has homogenized and differentiated personal blogs' representations. Unlike traditional print-mediated genres as well as other precedent web-genres (webpages in particular), the three personal blogs that have been examined were constantly reformulated by technologies. The impact of such technology has been frequently seen in the configuration of genre, which has led Miller and Shepherd (2009) into a revised view that the blog is not a genre but a technology or a composite of technologies. Yet, from an affordance point of view (Hudson, 2008), Miller and Shepherd's revision is questionable in that it is in effect the technological innovations and adaptations that continue to reshape the representation of the blog as a genre or genres. Emerging new features such as tags, widgets and permalink, have been added only to make blogging multidimensional, multimodal, and multifunctional (Burger & Henderson, 2006), ultimately extending the user's freedom of choice as well as interactions between the blogger and the audience (Marlow, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004). Personal bloggers are able to stage individualized, often concerted performances, which may incur high cost in conventional media.

At a structural level of blogging, personal bloggers need to acquire a deeper understanding of the technical infrastructure that can enable them to either reconfigure or resist the norms preset by the blogging technology. Such efforts can be complemented by seeking external expertise via networking or collaborations. Acosta's choice of using soundtracks as background music instead of blogging about music and Liurang Yan's reworking of her blog into a website for promoting the rights of female sex workers are typical examples of such manipulation of blogging performances, which are much subtler than that at the levels of content and functions of blogging.

Further, as universal as they are in effecting changes, technologies are not the sole reason for genre changes as technological determinism would insist (McQuail, 2005; Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Rather, so-called blogging technology has to comply with the physical institutions of blogs. In the Chinese blogosphere, as the first instance, physical institutions specifically refer to BSPs and their associations, which are capable of exerting power that can shape personal blogs. Contrary to the general perception that these new media institutions are virtual compositions rather than having physical existence (Thurlow et al., 2004), they are operated in essentially the same way as other physical institutions are and can be more pervasive, proactive, and pragmatic in implanting power and control.

Take, for instance, the Xinlang BSP on which Acosta's blogsite is hosted. Although Xinlang BSP is not an officially authorized mass media entitled to news reports, interviews, and correspondence, apart from providing the blogging technology, it is capable of manipulations in such ways as aggregating news, reports, and comments that relate to the blogs, conducting surveys that are related to the blog, placing the blog in a noticeable location on its front page, and enlisting opinion leaders to create and lead trends. The incentives for taking

these measures are certainly rooted in Xinlang's desire for profit as well as the blogger's desire for fame. In consideration of this point, the blogger may not be a common person but a person with extensive social capital or even a group of people working together to produce a role model for an audience to admire and copy. For instance, some people claimed to have found out that Acosta was a fashion model and a film actor in real life whose family enjoyed a high social status. On this note, Xinlang is not only a BSP. Rather, it is a composite of technology, where a kit of tools for blogs are developed and provided for the consumers, whilst also functioning as an institution that imposes its regulations, ideologies, and culture on its participants as consumers, contributors, and victims.

On another note of the Chinese blogosphere, the Xinlang BSP itself is governed by the national and local industry and media regulations, as well as by censorship in addition to its corporate interests. On many occasions, the BSP have to initiate actions such as self-censorship as well as projects that are in alignment with the authority's overarching vision of social media spaces; e.g., maintaining social stability, coordinating social emotions; providing modelling for socially acceptable online behavior. Acosta's blogging, for instance, as has been argued elsewhere (Liu, 2010), might have been the Xinlang BSP's response to the Communist Party's call for remodeling the Chinese young men and their masculinities.

Personal blogging in this regard would be best seen as a genre that has been institutionalized technologically and socio-politically. Institutionalization in Flew's view touches upon "the processes through which social relationships take on the qualities of an institution" (2007, p. 43). Institutions have been the dominant organizational form of modern societies, existing both as formal legal entities (such as corporations) and more informal mechanisms for combining individuals and organizing their relationships with others. They have regulative elements (such as setting rules, establishing routines, and offering rewards for compliance), normative elements (such as expecting those within an institution to accept a set of broadly shared values, ideas, and commitments), and cognitive elements that confer identities and provide conditions. In this sense, the BSPs as virtual institutions with which the personal blogs are affiliated share the same characteristics.

In another sense, personal blogs as a genre are governed by the global configurations endowed by their original creators, which are mediated in the English language and other cultures including organizational features, content, and other aspects. That said, global norms of written discourse in various genres have been shown to drift towards universal English-based rhetorical patterns (Sterkenburg, 2008). However, when introduced to other cultures and other blogospheres, it seems that the local revision, adaptation and even mutation of digital genres, or in Machin's and van Leeuwen's (2007) term, 'indigenisation', is inevitable. These terms, however, are not suitable as they seem to connote passivity of the other cultures and languages; or they seem to show a victimized complex of the other languages with the English language as the oppressor (Crystal, 2003; Tam & Weiss, 2004). Canagarajah (2007) points out that a contextualized analysis of globalized and localized texts views underlying cultures as in principle, hybrid and dynamic, and text production as subject to negotiation and accommodation processes.

Genre acculturation then would be exploited as a useful notion proper to describe and understand the changes of personal blogs in a particular context

(such as the Chinese context). It highlights the complex reciprocal process in which the blog has been recognized and accepted by Chinese Internet users. A quick return to the analysis of the three personal blogs can instantiate such complexity. For instance, Muzi Mei and Liumang Yang were keen to modify their blogsite while Acosta was interested in selecting from the themes and templates provided by the BSP. Muzi Mei and Liumang Yan were loyal to one BSP at a time in that they were capable of negotiating with their BSPs with the help of their experience and influence. Acosta, on the other hand, was adaptive while experimenting among BSPs in order to see which one was more suitable for him and his viewers. That was one of the reasons that he published the same blog entry on different BSPs at the same time. Genre acculturation in this respect establishes that users (bloggers or a group of people behind blogs) are not only learning to use personal blogs as a genre but are also able to incorporate this newly emergent genre into their own culture (Myers, 2010). This kind of genre acculturation is not one-sided or one-dimensional but rather is an interactive and dialogical process in which Chinese blog users are making efforts not to master this genre but to recreate genres that speak to the sociocultural context of China.

In genre acculturation, generic remarking or remaking is a common strategy that realigns emergent online genres with traditional genres which prevail in both classical and modern Chinese. For instance, Liumang Yan's question and answer blogging is not common in personal diaries and other forms of print genre but is a basic pattern in BBS posting where a new post either comments on or extends some of the previous posts (Taboada, 2004). The rhetorical organizations of her blogging were influenced by her long time immersion in online forums: posting, commenting, and some times, flaming. In Muzi Mei's blog, a great number of her blog entries are her creative writing that was written long before her contact with the Internet and the blog; others originated from her previous diaries and writings offline. Such blogging practice makes generic transference from the traditional genres to the personal blog an inevitable feature, which to some extent is visible in current Chinese school literacy practices where both classical and modern literary texts are juxtaposed (Kirkpatrick, 1997).

To conclude, structurally, personal blogs are unable to remix other genres fluidly and freely to establish genre recognition as might have been expected by some early blog researchers (e.g., Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005) but are rather constrained by institutional and technical factors (Miller & Shepherd, 2009) such as the technologies being used, hosting services, the purpose of blogging, and bloggers' awareness of their readership. Performatively, however, personal blogs embody the complex dialogical and reciprocal process of socio-technological institutionalization and acculturation. The emergence of the blog as a genre, besides its global circulation and impact, has been interacting and negotiating with local cultures, languages, ideologies, and social situations, which may provide unprecedented opportunities for exploring connection and infusion among genres.

## References

- Andersen, R. & J. Gray 2008. *Battleground: the media*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Baldry, A. & P. J. Thibault 2006. *Multimodal transcription and text analysis: A multimodal toolkit and coursebook with associated on-line course*. London: Equinox.
- Barthes, R. & S. Heath 1977. *Image, music, text*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bateman, J. & J. Delin 2004. Genre and multimodality: Expanding the context for comparison across languages. In D. Willems (Ed.), *Contrastive analysis in language: Identifying linguistic units of comparison*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 230-266.
- Bauman, R. 2004. *A World of others' words*. Cambridge, MA: Backwell Publishing.
- Bazerman, C. 1994. Systems of genre and the enactment of social intentions. In P. Medway & A. Freedman (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 77-99.
- Boucher, G. 2006. The politics of performativity: A critique of Judith Butler. *Parrhesia*, 1(1), 112-141.
- Burger, J. D. & J. C. Henderson 2006. An exploration of observable features related to blogger age AAI 2006 Spring Symposium on Computational Approaches to Analysing Weblogs (AAAI-CAAW): AAI Technical report
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, A. S. 2007. The ecology of global English. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 1(2), 89-100.
- Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Devitt, A. 2004. *Writing genres*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Fairclough, N. 1995. *Media discourse*. London: E. Arnold.
- Fairclough, N. 2001. The dialectics of discourse. *Textus*, 14(2), 231-242.
- Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
- Fang, X. 2003. Shifu shihuo women gai ruhe pingshuo "muzi mei xianxiang". *Muzi mei "fengbo" zhuan*. Available at <http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2003-11-17/20262153370.shtml>
- Flew, T. 2007. *Understanding global media*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Frow, J. 2006. *Genre*. London: Routledge.
- Genette, G. 1997. *Palimpsests* (C. Newman & C. Doubinsky, Trans.). Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gibson, J. 1977. The concept of affordances. In R. Shaw & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Perceiving, acting, and knowing: Towards an ecological psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc, pp. 67-82.
- Herring, S., L. A. Scheidt, S. Bonus & E. Wright 2004. *Bridging the gap: a genre analysis of weblogs*. Paper presented at the the 37th Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-37), Los Alamitos.
- Herring, S., L. A. Scheidt, S. Bonus & E. Wright 2005. Weblogs as a bridging genre. *Information Technology & People*, 18(2), 142-171.
- Hudson, D. L. 2008. *Blogging*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Hylon, S. 1996. Genre in three traditions: Implications for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(4), 693-722.
- Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. 1997. Traditional Chinese text structures and their influence on the writing in Chinese and English of contemporary Mainland Chinese students. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(3), 223-244.
- Kristeva, J. 1986. *The Kristeva reader* (edited by Toril Moi). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- Liu, J. 2010. Gendered performances and norms in Chinese personal blogs. *Gender Forum*(30). Available at <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/de-voted/gendered-performances-and-norms-in-chinese-personal-blogs/>
- Liu, S. 2000. *Zhongguo zhonggu wenxueshi jiangyi*. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.
- Lloyd, M. 2007. *Judith Butler: From norms to politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Machin, D. & T. Van Leeuwen 2007. *Global media discourse: A critical introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Mann, W. C. & S. A. Thompson 1988. Rhetorical structure theory: Toward a functional theory of text organization. *Textus*, 8(3), 243-281.
- Manovich, L. 2001. *The language of new media*. London: MIT Press.
- Marlow, C. 2004. *Audience, structure and authority in the weblog community*. Paper presented at the The International Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.
- Martin, J. R. 1992. *English text: System and structure*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Martin, J. R. & D. Rose 2003. *Working with discourse: Meaning beyond the clause*. London: Continuum.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. 2007. The multimodal page: A systematic functional exploration. In T. D. Royce & W. L. Bowcher (Eds.), *New directions in the analysis of multimodal discourse*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 1-62.
- McQuail, D. 2005. *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5th ed.). London: SAGE.
- Medway, P. & A. Freedman 1994. *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Miller, C. 1984. Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 151-167.
- Miller, C. 1994. Genre as social action. In P. Medway & A. Freedman (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 23-42.
- Miller, C. & D. Shepherd 2004. *Bloggng as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog*. In L. Gurak, S. Athnizevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff & J. Reyman (Series Eds.), *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*. Available at [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/bloggng\\_as\\_social\\_action.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/bloggng_as_social_action.html)
- Miller, C., & D. Shepherd 2009. Questions for genre theory from the blogosphere. In J. Giltrow & D. Stein (Eds.), *Genre in the Internet: Issues in the theory of genre*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 263.-290.
- Myers, G. 2010. *Discourse of blogs and wikis*. New York: Continuum.
- Nardi, B. A., D. J. Schiano & M. Gumbrecht 2004. *Bloggng as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary?* Paper presented at the Computer Supported Cooperative Work 2004.
- Nelson, E. S. 2002. *African American autobiographers: A sourcebook*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Papacharissi, Z. 2004, May. *The blogger revolution? Audiences as media producers*. Paper presented at the the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, New Orleans.
- Rak, J. 2005. The digital queer: Weblogs and Internet identity. *Biography*, 28(1), 166-182.
- Schryer, C. F. 1994. The lab vs. the clinic: Sites of competing genres. In P. Medway & A. Freedman (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 105-122
- Sterkenburg, P. G. J. v. 2008. *Unity and diversity of languages*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Swales, J. M. 1990. *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taboada, M. 2004. The genre structure of bulletin board messages. *Text Technology*, 13(2), 55-82.
- Tam, K.-k., & T. Weiss 2004. *English and globalization: Perspectives from Hong Kong and Mainland China*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Thurlow, C., L. B. Lengel & A. Tomic 2004. *Computer mediated communication: Social interaction and the Internet*. London: SAGE.
- Trammell, K. & A. Keshelashvili 2005. Examining the new influencers: A self-presentation study of A-List blogs. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(4), 968-983.

- Tseng, M.-Y. 2011. The genre of research grant proposals: Towards a cognitive-pragmatic analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(8), 2254-2268.
- van Dijck, J. 2004. Composing the self: Of diaries and lifelogs. *Fibreculture Journal*, (3). Available at <http://journal.fibreculture.org/>
- Zhao, Y. & X. Li 2007. *Zhongguo fenti wenxueshi: Sanwen juan*. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.

Received July 15, 2013  
Revision received May 12, 2014  
Accepted October 3, 2014