

CIS 160: Introduction to East Asian Studies
Fall 2003 M,W,F 9:30—10:20, Chambers 305

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Writing a strong thesis statement

The thesis statement:

The thesis statement provides the structural framework for expository prose – like making a good first impression, a well-stated thesis is crucial in shaping how the reader will interpret the remainder of the text. A good thesis statement is stated in the form of an argument; it should be stated early and strongly. In a 15-page essay, the thesis statement should be stated before the end of the first page so that your reader will have a sense of the direction that you plan to take. Here are two introductory paragraphs from papers written by “real Davidson students” that address similar issues – which do you think is stronger? Why?

To fully understand contemporary Chinese society, one must understand its very foundation: the concepts of *guanxi*, or networks, and “face.” These concepts have changed over the course of the country’s history, yet continue to possess a strong influence on the everyday lives of the Chinese people. Even within the post-socialist period, the concepts changed depending on differing social groups and the politics of the region. These concepts lead to an understanding of contemporary Chinese society because they deal with the very foundation of a society, its people, for no society could exist without its people.

As Americans, we typically view “connections” as playthings of the wealthy or upwardly mobile. Our country clubs, prep schools, and newspaper society pages are ways of categorizing people into an “in” and “out” crowds. Many high school students work tirelessly to be accepted to Ivy League schools, where upon graduation they expect to have careers virtually handed to them by successful older alumni. Still, most Westerners trust that in the vast world outside of cocktail parties and Junior Leagues, (and Ivy Leagues) their merit, intelligence, and hard work will be what end up shaping their destinies. Though the Chinese people may possess these same qualities, indeed may surpass us in many of them, they tend to place much more faith in *guanxi*, or networks between individuals or corporations. **In fact, this reliance on *guanxi* has become a major mobilizing force in post-Mao China, and being able to understand these networks is essential in comprehending the political, commercial, and social worldview of the modern Chinese people.**

My perspective: Both thesis statements are OK (I’ve highlighted in bold what I see as the thesis statement), but I see the second example as containing a thesis statement that is stronger than the one in the first example because of the *specificity* of the second thesis statement example; “understanding Chinese society” is too broad, as compared with the more detailed examination of how *guanxi* mobilizes people in post-Mao Chinese society. That said, the second introductory paragraph is more “wordy” and less direct than the first (everything prior to “though the Chinese people...” can be edited into a more concise summary of typical Western attitudes). Nonetheless, because the argument is clearer in the second example, I find that the second introductory paragraph is stronger than the first. Assuming equally strong use of evidence in a coherent expository narrative in what follows for both papers, I would grade the first paper as a “B” and the second as an “A-.”