

## A cultural bridge for academic integrity? Mainland Chinese master's graduates of UK institutions returning to China

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### Abstract

Cultural and developmental perspectives (Flowerdew & Li, 2007) of plagiarism were explored through interviews with Chinese graduates of UK master's degrees after they have returned to work in transnational higher education in China. This allowed reflection on experiences of plagiarism in the context of the participants' educational history, life in the UK and their return to China. These accounts provided narratives of their development of academic integrity and a cultural comparison of the British and Chinese understandings of plagiarism. Interpretive repertoires (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984) identified the significant commonalities and inconsistencies within and between the participants' accounts. The findings suggest that the participants use UK institutional vocabulary and have developed a more strict approach to plagiarism and academic integrity during their master's course and in their subsequent educational career. Analysis indicates that rather than being equivalents, plagiarism and the corresponding Chinese terms are dependent on the particular assessment backgrounds in the UK and China. Having moved between and adapting to these educational contexts, the potential for these returning Chinese graduates to act as a cultural bridge for academic integrity within internationalised higher education is discussed.

### Introduction

International education has faced a perceived plagiarism 'epidemic' (Howard, 2004) as staff, students and institutions attempt to deal with the shift to the era of the internet and internationalisation (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). In this context, Chinese learners have been singled out for particular attention as a result of issues concerning learning style and cross-cultural conceptualisations of plagiarism (Bloch, 2012; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Leask, 2006; Pennycook, 1996). This attention is a symptom and side effect of the success of China's economic rise and ambitious educational reform. Consequently, a discourse on varying cultural approaches to education and academic writing has emerged, particularly focusing on plagiarism in Western and Eastern contexts (Pennycook, 1996). This study explores the intercultural (Gu, 2009) nature of plagiarism using a unique sample of the Chinese population who hold UK master's degrees and are employed in transnational higher education in China. The participants' knowledge and educational experience provide an opportunity for an informed comparison of plagiarism in Chinese and UK educational contexts and a reflection on the development of academic integrity.

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## Plagiarism and academic integrity in China

There are two common terms for plagiarism in Chinese; *chaoxi* (抄袭 /to copy or steal) and *piaoqie* (剽窃 /to steal writing) (Hu & Lei, 2012). These terms have not developed in the equivalent economic, educational, scientific and philosophical context as plagiarism has in English language usage (Sutherland-Smith, 2008). This divergence has variously been attributed to a Confucian opposition to profiteering, the Chinese legal system and, significantly for the purposes of this research, educational approach (Alford, 1997; D. Liu, 2005; Pennycook, 1994; Stone, 2008). Historically, education in China was dominated by imperial examinations, the *keju* (科举, until 1905), which required memorisation and analysis of the four books and five classics of Confucian literature (Miyazaki, 1981). As a result of this limited bibliographic base, citation was unnecessary and would even be interpreted as insulting to the learned reader (You, 2010). The absence of explicit referencing does not mean that plagiarism was historically acceptable in China but that textual and attributive practices differed in this educational context (Pennycook, 1996). This examination culture has a distinct influence on Chinese culture and modern education. The National Higher Education Entrance Examination, known as the *Gaokao* (高考) has improved equality and quality in Chinese secondary education since the 1978 post-Mao reforms. This has relied on didactic methods encouraging memorisation of declarative knowledge, which some claim is at the expense of the creativity and innovation needed for the modern Chinese economy (Gao, 2012). Significantly, this examination focus is continued at undergraduate level with little attention to intertextuality or attributive source training (Hu & Lei, 2012).

Higher education has a key role to play in China's shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy (World Bank, 2013). In addition to being the world's largest education market (Wang, 2009), and leading source of international students (Counsell, 2011), China's scientific publication output has overtaken the UK and reached second place behind the US (Clarke & Plume, 2011). Yet success has come at a cost to academic integrity. The consequences can be seen in the unattributed translation of foreign research articles into Chinese (X. Li & Xiong, 1996) and a lack of originality in Chinese research (Ye in F. Liu, 2009). In recent years, higher publication targets and policy driven targets in Chinese universities have led to a 'publish or perish' culture which in turn has led to plagiarism and rushed research (Yi, 2011, p. 502). As a result of this intense educational pressure, academic corruption and plagiarism have been reported in the national and international media (Baty, 2009; J. X. Guo, 2010; Osnons, 2010). Research emerging from China has shown the extent and proposed solutions to this problem (Li, 2013; Yi, 2011; Zhang, Sun, & Zhang, 2010). In reaction, the government has attempted to crack down on corruption and revamp postgraduate education, with the 2010–2020 Educational reform (2010) placing "a premium on integrating learning with thinking" (p. 25) to encourage creativity and innovation.

## Mainland Chinese students in the UK

The UK higher education's (UKHE) reputation for innovation and quality education, as reflected in world rankings, has attracted increasing numbers of Mainland Chinese students (Counsell, 2011). This is a major revenue stream for UKHE (Gu & Brooks, 2008), with recent figures showing that Chinese students account for around 25% of postgraduates in the UK (HESA, 2013). Accommodating the unique global perspectives of this significant minority on British campuses provides a challenge to UKHE and it is vital that international students are not simply treated as 'cash cows' (Philo, 2007). Success in a new educational context, especially at master's level, requires a rapid shift to a contrasting approach to study (Gu, 2009). UKHE prioritises the dissemination of knowledge through research-based essay writing (Durkin, 2008). Due to Chinese students' examination focused background, the

adoption of attributive essay writing practices is a significant adjustment (Gu, 2009). In addition to the linguistic difficulties faced by non-native English speakers, cultural differences have been magnified by the significant presence of Chinese international students on UK campuses (Sowden, 2005). This has resulted in the perception of a 'Chinese problem' (Smith & Zhou, 2009, p. 133) and as a cumulative result Chinese students have gained a reputation for plagiarism (Gu & Brooks, 2008). The stereotype of the Chinese rote learner and plagiarist is unfortunate. As Gu and Maley (2008) note, Chinese students are successful in UKHE and a number of Chinese students excel in this educational context.

### **Returning to China with UK qualifications**

The intention of the Chinese government's policy encouraging students to study abroad has always been for international Chinese graduates to return with expertise for national economic development (Altbach & Ma, 2011). The opportunity for international study has, however, resulted in a 'brain drain' of Chinese talent (Huang, 2003) with only a quarter of those studying abroad returning between 1987 and 2005 (Mohrman, 2008). Government initiatives, such as the 2008 Thousand Talents programme (*qianren jihua*/千人计划) (Yi, 2011) are aimed at attracting returnee scholars with incentives. In response to these programmes, the recent global financial downturn and growing prosperity in China, more students have returned home (C. Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2012). With what Saxenian (2005) terms 'brain circulation', the knowledge and skills acquired by returnees abroad are now filtering back into the country (Gill, 2010). These returnees are expected to have an impact across Chinese society, particularly in education (Altbach & Ma, 2011).

### **Cultural and developmental theory**

Ten perspectives have been identified by Flowerdew and Li (2007) within plagiarism research, of which two are especially significant for Chinese participants in this study; the cultural and the developmental. The cultural perspective accepts that cultures are different and concentrates on studying Chinese perceptions of plagiarism. The developmental perspective acknowledges that cultures are not static and that perceptions and interpretations of plagiarism will change as a result of internationalisation. In this case, Chinese students must develop to bridge the gap between cultures, which Durkin (2008) names a "middle way", in order to successfully graduate from Western institutions (Gu, 2009; Gu & Brooks, 2008).

The cultural theory in respect to Chinese culture and plagiarism has developed since the 1980s (Matalene, 1985). The 1990s saw developments from scholars based in Hong Kong, such as Deckert (1993), Scollon (1995) and Pennycook (1994, 1996). With increased internationalisation of universities however, Pennycook (1996) noted that these cultural comparisons produced a "crude East/West dichotomy" which created Chinese stereotypes when studying abroad (see D. Liu, 2005; Sowden, 2005). As a result the developmental approach proved to be a more constructive theory to examine students and the concept of plagiarism in an international context (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Most recently, Guanghwei Hu and Jun Lei (2012; Lei & Hu, 2014) have explored the cultural and developmental dimensions of plagiarism in the Chinese national higher education context. The authors call for a raised awareness of Anglo-American intertextual practices in Chinese education, suggesting the issue is "pedagogically amenable" rather than deeply engrained in culture (Lei & Hu, 2014, p. 50).

### **Research focus**

The main focus of the research was to examine intercultural differences in plagiarism within the context of academic integrity. The study achieved this through the

examination of participants' accounts of plagiarism and the relevance of this cultural concept to educational development. This involved comparing and contrasting the experience of plagiarism in Chinese and British educational contexts. The research aimed to extend the developmental and cultural perspectives to the new context of returning Chinese master's graduates from UK institutions. It was hoped that the study would uncover the extent to which returnee scholars transmit academic integrity and the concept of plagiarism when returning to work in transnational education in China. The hypotheses expected that the participants would describe a difference in the cultural concept of plagiarism in China and the UK. This understanding of plagiarism would be embedded within the participants' adaptation to academic integrity expectations in the UK, a process of educational development which would continue on return to China (Gill, 2010).

### **Participants**

The sample includes teachers from English for academic purposes (EAP), business, engineering and management, and a number of participants from administrative roles and student support. The researcher gained access to a criterion sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) of five participants at two joint ventures (total 10 participants). The participants were nationals of the People's Republic of China who had studied at secondary and undergraduate level in China. They must then have completed a master's degree at a UK university before returning to work at joint-venture institution in Shanghai. A joint-venture is a partnership between a receiving country (developing nation, e.g. China) and a providing country (developed nation, e.g. UK) (Rastall, 2009). The providing 'parent' university opens a branch campus in the receiving country to offer the 'parent' university's degrees or a joint degree between the parent and partner institution (Cao, 2011). Since the 2003 Sino-Foreign Higher Education Law a number of high profile joint-ventures have opened in China (Drew et al., 2008). The staff of the institutions usually require international experience and qualifications in order to work in the unique intercultural environment.

### **Interviews: Rationale, questions, key areas and ethics**

Active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) were chosen for their ability to engage the ambiguous and contradictory nature of participants' experiences while providing openness to new insights into the phenomena of plagiarism (Kvale, 1996). Due to the illicit (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) and cross-cultural nature of the topic, a familiarity with Chinese interactional dynamics (Shah, 2004) was significant in establishing a rapport conducive to in-depth discussion (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Having lived in China for five years, working in higher education, my familiarity with the context helped to carry out effective interviews. The English language (with Mandarin used to clarify terms) interviews (approx. 1 hour) took place at private locations in the institutions between April/May 2012. They were recorded and later transcribed in a simple format suited to phrasal and sentence level analysis (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984)

The overall purpose of the interview was to produce a comparison of the concept of plagiarism in Chinese and UK education. The semi-structured interview utilised open questions for the exploration of the sensitive issue of plagiarism, allowing the participants to reflect on the issue in terms of their own academic development. The interview schedule was divided into three stages: (1) experiences in Chinese education before studying abroad, (2) experiences in UK education, and (3) reflections on returning to China and working in a joint venture institution. This design allowed a chronological reflection on development of academic integrity and the concept of plagiarism through the participants' educational experience. As the interviews were semi-structured, the participant was allowed to explore the questions with a degree of freedom and the interviewer was able to direct the conversation to cover all the areas on the interview schedule.

The key areas of discussion were the definition and translation of the term plagiarism as encountered in China and the UK. This emphasised how the participants' understanding of the concept was shaped in the process of adapting to the contrasting educational expectations. Specific description of the formal and informal instruction on academic integrity and academic writing was compared between the two countries. Finally, the issue of returning to live and work in China was described, with particular reference to encounters with plagiarism in their work role and the perceived relevance of plagiarism to the broader context of originality in China. The interview was concluded with an overall explicit reflection on what the participants believed to be the differences between plagiarism in the UK and China.

The ethics of conducting the interview were carefully considered. Plagiarism is an illicit activity synonymous with cheating (Hayes & Introna, 2005) and concerns possible "guilty knowledge" (De Laine, 2000, p. 85). The research could have revealed embarrassing or damaging information concerning individuals or institutions, such as criticism or accusations (Stanley & Wise, 2010). The participants were given written and verbal reassurance of their right to withdraw at any time. The anonymity of all people involved and institutions has been maintained through the removal of identifiers. Numbers have been used (e.g. P1, P2, etc.) to reduce the risk of coincidental confusion of participants with other identities.

### Interpretive repertoires

Interpretive repertoires are a method of discourse analysis based on ethnomethodology which identifies global patterns in accounts of actions and beliefs (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). First used by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) to analyse discrepancies between biochemists' *empiricist* and *contingent* repertoires, the authors found that scientists required two repertoires to make sense of their empirical findings. This method is especially suited to exploring controversial and sensitive issues (Wetherell, 1998) such as plagiarism, as it explores representations of "recognizable themes, common places and tropes" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) known as *doxa* in discourse (Barthes cited in Wetherell, 1998). The repertoires are identified by the repetition of exact matches of phrases or similar descriptions embedded in the historical context (Edley, 2001). The commonalities and inconsistencies between participants and repertoires emerge through continuous, in-depth involvement in the design, interviews, transcription and reevaluation of the data (Edley, 2001).

### Findings

The analysis of the participants' discourse reveals five repertoires through which a sense of plagiarism and academic integrity in the UK and China is provided. The following section includes a brief description of these repertoires with key examples.

#### *Comparing plagiarism and chaoxi*

When asked directly to compare plagiarism and *chaoxi* (抄袭/to plagiarise), the common translation, participants repeated the notion that the 'interpretation' was the same yet the 'methods' were different. However, after closer questioning the participants began to describe the different educational contexts within which the term is used. Due to both their educational background in the UK and working in the joint-venture, they show a familiar usage of institutional vocabulary referring to plagiarism as an "academic crime" (P3, P10) or "academic dishonesty" (P2). In contrast, their Chinese experience with *chaoxi*, revealed a "lighter sense" of the phrase (P3). This referred to more general copying of answers in exams and homework starting in primary school, rather than in the relation to essays. There was a strong sense of "sharing" or "helping" fellow students rather than cheating, which at times received "silent approval" (P3) from teachers. As one participant mentioned, the teacher would "close one eye, open one eye" (P4). Once reaching undergraduate level in China,

*chaoxi* would be mentioned but formal instruction on the definition and avoidance of misconduct would not be offered.

#### *Assessment and referencing*

The participants frequently refer to different lecturers' expectations for assessments, particularly writing assignments. In the Chinese context, it seems that in many cases *chaoxi* or cheating is referred to in respect to exams. When written assignments were requested, such as dissertations, the participants referred to them being similar to a literature review without major referencing; this was a quicker and easier process than in the UK (P1, P5). One participant had never written an essay prior to studying in the UK and thus felt at a disadvantage to start with (P7). For more of the participants, the referencing system proved to be a confusing and time consuming task in the UK. In relation to paraphrasing and quotation, they had minimal experience in China; moreover it was not strictly enforced. The participants admitted to struggling or failing early assignments in the UK (P1, P5, P7, P10) or referred to having acquaintances who were accused of plagiarism (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8, P9), similar to findings by Ryan and Carroll (2005). Furthermore, the timing and requirements of the UK master's assignments confused the participants. In one case a participant was shocked to be assessed after three months, claiming she had not learned anything. This was reinforced by P1, who was surprised to be asked to brainstorm a topic about which she knew nothing, noting "you give me input and I'll give you output".

#### *Independence, responsibility and multiple perspectives on knowledge*

Independence dominated not just the participants' academic life, but also their social life in the UK. In China they noted that social activities, food, accommodation, opening bank accounts were all supported or clearly explained by a representative of their institution or fellow students. Many participants noted that they learned to cook in the UK out of necessity and also spent their first month busy, lonely and confused. There was a common view that "nobody will tell you anything" in the UK (P1, P4, P8, P10) with the responsibility being on the student to read the relevant documents and seek help themselves. This was reflected in comparison of the academic experience. In China "they will tell you everything...everything is in the book" (P1), this was repeated in one form or another by most participants. While comforting, this did not breed a sense of responsibility or choice in the educational process. Students would have little academic choice and considerably more classroom hours, including compulsory political courses. It seems the responsibility lay more on the teachers to teach and take care of the students, who have little option make choices. The contrast is clearly exemplified by P5:

*If you are sleeping [during class] or anything, I think he [the monitor or tutor] will call my parents.*

In contrast to the UK:

*You can come, or you can don't come [sic]. It's your personal responsibility.*

As a consequence the focus of the repertoires shifts from *they*, referring to the Chinese teachers and staff, to *self* in the UK. For example "push myself" (P2) or "push yourself...you need to study for yourself" (P5). This shift to self-responsibility leads to new conflicting perspectives of truth and authority. One participant refers to the time consuming process of the "switch from Chinese thinking to English thinking" (P4), others refer to changing habits (P10) and getting used to British thinking (P1).

With this newfound responsibility, the participants had to adjust their perception of a teacher as a sole authority to a lecturer as a research guide. This shift was preferred by certain participants who positively note that the lecturers have office hours (P4, P5) and the value of one-on-one sessions (P4, P6, P10). The British lecturers were also

more likely to relate information to the real world than to textbooks or exams. Contrastingly, two participants (P3 & P5) faced problems with busy dissertation advisors; this was a situation the students were responsible for resolving.

As a result, an independent, critical self-identity was created within the group of students. Although strange at first, the multiple, often conflicting perspectives in research, group and class work started to form a critical dimension to participants' thinking (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P10) and also improved their communication skills (P1, P2, P3, P10).

*The more you do it the more you will get used to it, the teacher will ask you questions and you will think independently and critically and so gradually you will get used to that. (P1)*

As opposed to communal studying in China, where the students learned the same facts together, in the UK the participants were able to appreciate different perspectives in reaching group objectives and assessing sources, a highly valued skill (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7):

*The best benefits from the UK, is actually how you work in the team and how you look at things differently. And how you say ok, you've always got a solution because you, it depends on your perspective and nothing should be so absolute. (P3)*

#### *Strictness and seriousness of plagiarism in the UK*

The role of tutors and independence are contrasted with the strict and serious attention in matters of attribution of knowledge. In the British context, the participants describe both written and oral warnings about committing plagiarism. All participants made a distinct reference to this, here are two representative examples:

*Everything academically is very serious....Formality and seriousness. Strictness and formality...Academic seriousness...In the UK I found plagiarism is more strict. (P2)*

As opposed to:

*Chinese won't check it, time and money.... maybe for postgrad they will check it.... Even if you plagiarise you will be allowed to graduate. We do not focus on plagiarism according to Chinese culture... if no one finds it, it will be ok. (P5)*

As a result of this strictness, the participants focused on the mechanics of citation and avoiding plagiarism, with P5 mentioning "you just write the bibliography and quotations". However, this simplistic description seems to overlook the process of adaptation to different educational expectations. Additionally, the role of the teaching staff provides a paradox. On the one hand the Chinese teachers are watchful over students at all times (P5) and timetables are full (P4, P10), yet on the other hand teachers are "too busy" (P1, P5), or even lazy and complicit (P4), in seeking out and finding plagiarism. This is contrasted with the relaxed or uncaring description of the British tutors who switch to enforcers at the sight of plagiarism.

#### *Plagiarism when returning to China*

The UK qualification was seen as playing a major role in their ability to work in the joint venture institution. The participants felt that their experience in the UK had led them to be more open-minded and flexible (P10, P7) and that they benefited from research (P4), multi-tasking, communication, and group work skills (P3). The role of plagiarism in the participants' jobs was more significant for English teaching staff and

personal tutors than subject teachers and administrative staff. Poor language skills and the use of copy-paste were viewed as sources of student plagiarism which had been highlighted by the use of software, such as *Turnitin* (P1, P3, P4, P6, P9, P10). This contrasted with the holistic, cultural experience and development of their own narratives, implying that they viewed their students from a strict teaching perspective rather than from a sympathetic angle having been through the experience themselves.

A broader perception is of the difference in the standard of education provided by UK and Chinese institutions and the issue of academic corruption. A proportion of participants (P2, P3, P6, P10) reflected general concerns about academic plagiarism at Chinese universities. The publish or perish culture and political nature of universities (P6, P10) is identified as a cause, as are the lower standards of certain Chinese universities compared to the UK's trusted high standards (P2). These concerns are reflected in local media stories and also the government's educational reforms. These educational implications were also reflected in a general concern in society for intellectual property and copyright issues. The participants saw the short-term benefits of plagiarism and copying for economic development, such as research, counterfeit products and imitative internet sites, one common example was Facebook compared to Weibo (P3, P4, P5, P7). Yet, there is a clear desire shown by the participants for China to innovate rather than follow in the future (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10).

### **Discussion: Plagiarism and academic integrity**

The narratives and resulting interpretive repertoires provide a cultural comparison of academic integrity in the British and Chinese educational contexts. It was expected that the participants' unique intercultural experience would help to produce a clear explanation of a difference between plagiarism in the UK and China, however the result is more complex. A problem seems to arise in that *chaoxi* (or *piaoqie*) is used as a translation for plagiarism, therefore discussions of concept in isolation do not produce an explicit difference in the definition; plagiarism means *chaoxi* and vice versa. The disparity emerges in the comparison of the concept within the educational contexts. The initial impression is that academic integrity is explicitly enforced in the UK and not in China. The use of institutional vocabulary, teaching of referencing skills and repeated claims of the strictness and seriousness of plagiarism in the UK seem to support this. However, while enforcement of academic integrity policies is of course vital, simply concentrating on the rules and punishments overlooks the underlying approach to knowledge and resulting forms of assessment at equivalent educational levels in the two countries.

The majority of the participants (some had attended pre-session courses in China) had limited experience of extended writing or exposure to academic texts when they arrived in the UK. Although they did write a dissertation at Chinese undergraduate level, this appears to have been more of a symbolic act within their examination dominated educational background, as indicated by Hu and Lei (2012). The Chinese students' main goal was to learn declarative knowledge from the teacher and textbook in order to reproduce facts or apply formulae. In the majority of cases, the participants described instances of *chaoxi* involving copying from other students in examinations or homework. As a result *chaoxi* resembles the dictionary definition of plagiarism i.e. "passing someone else's work, idea off as your own" rather than the explicit academic definitions based upon academic integrity pedagogy (e.g. Carroll & Appleton, 2001; Howard, 1999). In this context, copying from another student bypasses effort (Tweed & Lehman, 2003) and learning but does not pose a threat to the body of knowledge as the student is not claiming credit for the creation of the knowledge. In contrast, the British experience of plagiarism in higher education is embedded in writing critical research essays. From undergraduate level, university students in the UK are not only learning declarative knowledge but also the research cycle; secondary research,



primary research, analysis and synthesis. Writing fully referenced research essays is not simply towards the ends of improving writing but to develop and display proof of academic reading, analytical skills, thought process, intertextual awareness and appropriate use of attributive practices (Howard, 2007). This is with the ultimate goal of the extension of knowledge (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

The participants' narratives describe a clear focus on independence in this challenging developmental process. While the Chinese educational context provided the participants with knowledge, skills, a solid work ethic, conformity and a deep respect for authority, the static nature of knowledge within the examination culture creates a dependence on the teachers and textbooks (Hu & Lei, 2012; Stone, 2008). The participants' development of independence in the UK and transition from 'Chinese thinking' to 'British thinking' is an implicit description of a shift in their approach to knowledge. As P3 mentions; in the UK "nothing is absolute" and this new approach requires an active engagement with knowledge. Independence and awareness of the construction of knowledge is developed through researching and writing essays. This affects the institutional relationships, for example the UK tutor acts as a liberal guide to the body of knowledge but must switch to a strict police officer in regards to plagiarism to enforce students' independence, protecting the body of knowledge and academic community. This is contrasted with the Chinese teachers who reportedly were strict on attendance to class and conformity yet seemingly lenient on plagiarism. A strict approach to plagiarism and referencing in the UK helps the author and audience to acknowledge the multiple perspectives which have contributed to the work. The resulting shift to independent, active interaction with knowledge and appreciation of multiple perspectives results in the perceived benefits of UK education. These include open-mindedness, taking the initiative, group work, presentation skills, criticality and self-awareness. In combination with the knowledge learned, these are highly valued skills in the international and Chinese job market (Gill, 2010).

### **A cultural bridge?**

The participants provided a unique study for academic integrity due to their role in national, international and transnational educational contexts. In this way they act as a cultural bridge for academic integrity on a number of levels. In accommodating Chinese students into UKHE, the British institutions must learn not only about the students' backgrounds but also reflect on its own educational culture in order to teach academic integrity effectively. This has resulted in the continuing development of academic policies and pedagogical approach (Macdonald & Carroll, 2006). The students themselves must undergo a transformation, what Durkin (2008) defines as the 'middle way' between their own educational culture and the UK academic culture. Returning to their home country, the graduates continue this process of development (Gill, 2010) as they position their approach to knowledge and resulting new skills within Chinese culture and vice versa. Although this could be viewed as a postcolonial influence (Pennycook, 1996), the Chinese government is inviting returnees with the hope that their knowledge and ability can contribute to Chinese scientific, technological, economic and educational development (World Bank, 2013). While the number of Chinese students abroad may be insignificant on the scale of China's vast population, they are incredibly significant to UKHE. Moreover the careers, which these graduates pursue in China, may have considerable impact on the development of China's knowledge economy. This is especially true for the reform of education as Chinese institutions seek to rise up the international rankings and encourage creativity and innovation (Educational reform, 2010).

Working in the joint venture, these returnees have a distinct environment for their intercultural knowledge and skills, particularly the transmission of academic integrity. As the joint ventures are partnerships between Chinese universities and international partners, the returnees act as a bridge between the institutions. Explicitly, the

participants do not simply convey the seriousness of plagiarism but also the idiosyncrasies and advantages of the British educational experience, acting as successful exemplars for Chinese students and staff. Working with international colleagues they act as linguistic and cultural interpreters, promoting institutional relationships. By championing the benefits of UKHE (also true of other Anglophone institutions), such as criticality, flexibility, independence, self-awareness and collaboration, they are implicitly supporting academic integrity, which is essential to the development of these traits. In the joint venture context, they have the advantage that the educational expectations and forms of assessments are based on the parent institution. This supports the more strict approach to academic integrity they have brought from the UK. In this manner, returnees in a national university may have differing experiences and more difficulty enforcing academic integrity.

As internationalisation continues and increasing numbers of students arrive on campuses and return home, this cultural bridge is in a constant process of development and renewal. Indeed, by taking part in this research, the participants were reflecting on and analysing their educational experiences, helping to further intercultural knowledge. The key implications for academic integrity research are of use-value for those teaching Chinese students and also for those involved in international and national academia. Academic integrity is not simply a case of enforcement of referencing practices and a strict approach to plagiarism. It is embedded in the assessment process which is aimed towards the construction of knowledge. Consequently, academic integrity should not be treated as explicit knowledge which can be easily transferred to students. It is tacit knowledge upon which students must be given repeated opportunities for instruction and guidance, and also time to develop. A complex concept such as plagiarism cannot be explained in isolation but should be embodied within a positive discourse of the educational objectives. These include the approach to knowledge, the academic community, and the academic and transferable skills these provide for graduates. This process involves a continuous and evolving cycle of academic integrity instruction of staff and students as part of the holistic approach. Recent research supports these findings in that students need to be taught *what to do* as well as *what not to do* and be given time and freedom to explore and develop sensitivity to the notions of academic integrity (Bretag et al., 2013; Howard, 2007; Lei & Hu, 2014; Macdonald & Carroll, 2006).

### **Further investigation**

This paper covers a select but unique sample of returnee graduates in a special context. There is scope for further investigation of the impact of returnees on academic integrity in national institutions. Returnees' wider effect on approaches to intellectual property and innovation in Chinese society would also be of use-value, as indicated by the participants' references to copyright and imitation. Furthermore, establishing the differences in assessment criteria, academic integrity instruction and misconduct policy at equivalent international degree levels, for example between postgraduate qualifications in the UK and China, would provide an interesting and useful study. Citation analysis by Bloch and Chi (1995), Shi's (2002) examination of publication practices by Western trained scholars in China, and Yongyan Li's (2013) recent work have shed light on academic integrity and publication practices in China. With the growing success and development of Chinese higher education, future research may indicate an increasing Chinese influence on international academic practice.

### **Conclusion**

The interviews produced reflective narratives on the educational experiences of a unique but select sample of the Chinese population who have received a UK master's degree and returned to work in joint-venture institutions in China. This gave the opportunity to explore the intercultural differences in the concept of plagiarism and the

development of academic integrity. From a cultural perspective, plagiarism and the Chinese equivalents are dependent on the approach to knowledge, dominant forms of assessment and enforcement of academic integrity within the different educational contexts. In terms of development, while learning to write essays and referencing practices are explicitly identified, academic integrity plays a key but implicit role in what are seen as the key advantages of UKHE. In successfully moving and adapting between the two education systems, in the role of students and then as staff, the participants in this study act as a cultural bridge for academic integrity. Their experiences imply that while they have successfully achieved this development, there is still more to be learned to strengthen the cultural bridge for the benefit of internationalised higher education. This includes making explicit the link of academic integrity to a positive and holistic discourse of academic development, in addition to its strict enforcement.

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