FULL PAPERS

EXPLORING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY THROUGH THE LENS OF CRITICAL THEORY: MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS' EPISTEMOLOGICAL ADAPTATION TO STUDYING ON UK MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

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Abstract: The influence of China is looming large on global higher education. Chinese universities are beginning to break the Anglophone dominance of university rankings; there has been a vast increase in academic publications; and nearly 1 million Chinese students studying abroad. In all cases, questions of academic integrity, especially surrounding the concept of plagiarism, are prominent in the Anglophone discourse on Chinese learners and scholars. The UK provides a suitable case study for exploring this issue, as Mainland Chinese students (MCMS) make up over a quarter of all taught postgraduates there. This study uses focus group analysis of MCMS to explore the concept of academic integrity for this unique group of students in their transition to studying in the UK in terms of epistemological reflection (Baxter-Magolda, 1992) and communicative rationality (Habermas, 1981). It seeks to understand the reasons for the stereotype of the Chinese learner in the context of academic integrity. The findings show that the dominant monological examination focus in Chinese education has a serious impact on the epistemological development necessary for dialogic academic discourse, providing a connection between the development of criticality and understanding of plagiarism. The lens of Habermas's critical theory ties this connection to the use of reason and discourse in higher education. Consequently, the study provides a critical reflection on the influence of political ideology and economic imperatives on the lifeworld of universities. It highlights the impact of internationalisation, marketization and instrumentalisation of learning in the University as a communicative space. The findings are highly significant and transferable for considerations of academic integrity in international higher education.

Key words: Academic Integrity; China; UK; Higher Education; Epistemological Development; Critical Theory; Jurgen Habermas; Plagiarism; Critical Thinking

1 Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education, idealistically, is an opportunity to benefit from the synthesis of global perspectives on knowledge. Every year millions of students leave their home countries for a new experience studying abroad, and the majority have truly life changing experiences. A significant proportion of this migration has seen students from the global south seek education in more advanced, particularly Anglophone countries. The experiences of international students, and of the institutions at which they study, have been the focus of numerous studies. These

studies have exposed the reality of international education process that is fraught with numerous challenges, such as: intercultural understanding, post-colonial discourses, stereotyping, contrastive rhetorical styles and differing academics norms. One of the manifestations of these challenges is the discourse on academic integrity, and one of the emerging key players in international higher education is China.

This paper represents one of the theoretical approaches used in a larger research project aimed at understanding why Mainland Chinese students struggle with the norms of academic integrity in international higher education. By using a case study of Mainland Chinese Masters students in the UK, this paper explores the issue of academic integrity in internationalised higher education through the lens of JŘrgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*. Analysis of qualitative focus group data using Habermas's theory, building on analysis of the data using Baxter-Magolda's *Epistemological Reflection Model*, indicates that the students are transitioning between education systems with different epistemological approaches which are embedded in the power relations of the distinct cultures. However, both education systems are under increasing pressure and are resultantly corrupted by the influence of marketization in the increasingly competitive world of internationalised higher education, manifesting itself in threats to academic integrity.

2   Literature

2.1   *Integrity in the era of the internet and internationalisation*

The combined issues of academic integrity and the Chinese learner provide a window into the key transition faced by international academia in the 21st century. Research on academic integrity since the turn of the century has been placed in a context of significant cultural change in higher education. The first is the shift into the post-Gutenberg remix culture of the internet, which has had significant technological and social effects on society (Lessig, 2008). In broader society, the impact has translated into the overwhelming access to information and social connections which are straining the notions of copyright and even truth, such as the recent prominence of *alternative facts* and *post-truth society* (Peters, 2017). For academic writing and research, the concepts of authorship and plagiarism have been seriously challenged by the internet and the shift to computer based word processing (Becker, 1986; Howard & Davies, 2009; Sutherland-Smith, 2008).

While cheating has always been an issue in education across cultures, the internet era has seen significant technological and cultural shifts which have transformed educational approaches to ensuring integrity (Harp & Taietz, 1965; Park, 2003; Suen & Yu, 2006). In higher education contexts dependent on academic writing as the main form of assessment, the copy and paste function in combination with access to an overwhelming plethora of online resources of varying validity have changed the way scholars interact with and construct texts (Howard, 2007). Not only that, but the creation of text matching software, such as Turnitin, has meant that not only is copy and pasting more easy to detect but tracing the composition of texts(Lyon, Barrett, & Malcolm, 2006), particularly by novice and non-native speaking scholars

has become more complex (Pecorari, 2008; Sutherland-Smith, 2008). This has blurred the distinction between original authorship and deliberate plagiarism (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2003), providing significant challenges for the teaching and assessment of academic writing.

The impact of the internet since the turn of the 21st century has run parallel to the processes of marketisation, massification and internationalisation of higher education. In the post-war period there has been a significant increase in participation in higher education around the globe (Delanty, 2001; McLean, 2006). Further challenges for academic integrity have resulted from influx of students from diverse, non-traditional backgrounds through processes of internationalisation and widening participation. As Schweisfurth and Gu (2009) note, universities have had to undertake a transformative approach to diversity in order to integrate "an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of academic institutions" (p.464). While the opening of higher education to diverse groups has been commended, increased maketisation has drawn criticism for portraying students as customers arousing fears that this approach could have an impact on academic integrity due to increasing instrumentality of the student body (Guilbault, 2016, p. 137).

In the UK these trends of internationalization and marketisation have been inter-connected. Since the early 80's, initiatives by Conservative and Labour governments to marketise and internationalise British HE have significantly altered the university landscape. These initiatives include: The Prime Minister's initiatives (PMI1 1999 & PMI2 2006), the 2001 target to widen participation in HE to over 50replace grants since 1998, with radical fee increases in 2012 (Brown & Carasso, 2013; McGettigan, 2013). The expansion of University participation is, therefore straddles seemingly contradictory purposes: the widening of participation aimed at a better educated public and an internationally diverse student body enriching the knowledge economy, versus the view of higher education as a business in an increasingly competitive global market (Brown & Carasso, 2013). As Jiang (2008) highlights, the latter approach is prevailing as "the internationalisation of HE has led to a 'bums on seat' approach to attract considerable private income from international students to compensate for the reduction in public funding under neoliberal state policies" (p.464). The result has been an increasing reliance of UK and other Anglophone institutions on students from Mainland China, where the rising middle class has significant income combined with a strong cultural respect for education (Hegarty, 2014; Martin, 2017).

2.2   *Chinese students in International Higher Education*

There are currently over half a million students from Mainland China studying abroad. This is the most significant student migration since the 1860s, when over 10,000 US scholars went on *educational pilgrimages* to Germany in search of the self-cultivation and the secrets of innovation (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Werner, 2013). The American students returning from Germany were able to lay the groundwork for the strength of US academia as it became a global superpower. In 1999, privately funded students from China were allowed to seek education abroad, ever since there has been a steady increase in students taking this opportunity with the majority going to Anglophone

countries. The UK is one destination favored by Chinese students due to its historic brand of prestigious education and comparatively cheap tuition fees. In 2015–16 alone, 91,215 Chinese students studied in the UK and this *majority minority* represent close to a quarter of all taught postgraduates in the UK (HEFCE, 2016; UKCISA, 2017). The effect on UKHE of this vast influx of Chinese students has been reflected in the literature and the approach of institutions to help accommodate international students (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007). This process of internationalisation and the transitional issues of the students have been magnified as this process has coincided with the cultural flux caused by marketisation and the impact of the internet.

Chinese learners have entered international education on a vast scale causing a culture shock which has resulted in regrettably simplistic stereotypes, paradoxes and unanswered questions for academic integrity (Kember, 2016). The first paradox is the historical significance of China's long tradition of education with the atrophy of scientific endeavour and rise of corruption at a time when Europe was experiencing Enlightenment (De Saeger, 2008). This view places the Chinese Confucian tradition of education, particularly the practices of rote learning from set texts, as a hindrance to China becoming a modern nation. The second paradox concerns the Chinese learner who on the one hand are seen as hard working, respectful students but on the other, lack independence, critical thinking and have a tendency for plagiarism (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Smith & Zhou, 2009). The common stereotype, often cited by academic staff confronted by Chinese students is that plagiarism is acceptable in Confucian culture, which is an unhelpful oversimplification at best, erroneous at worst and widely derided (Flowerdew, 2015; Liu, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Saravanamuthu & Tinker, 2008; Tian & Low, 2011; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). This Confucian stereotype is also paradoxical as China was the world's leading economy and extremely advanced society for thousands of years under the Confucian tradition (Elman, 2009; Needham & Ronan, 1995).

In order to understand Chinese students in the 21st century, one must not rely on Confucian stereotypes but must look at modern China. Development of higher education has been a major goal for the PRC since reform and opening up in 1978, with particular attention paid by Chinese and international scholars to academic writing and the concept of plagiarism in this process. The first rhetorical studies penned by scholars in the 1980's focused on Chinese learners of English emerged as Chinese universities attempted to catch up with international scientific developments (Hayhoe, 1996). These studies highlighted a lack of L1 (Chinese) writing practice in Chinese education (Mohan & Lo, 1985) and use of imitative learning styles as key factors in English writing development (Matalene, 1985) In the mid-nineties, the debate moved to the concept of plagiarism in a postcolonial discourse on English language learning particularly from the perspective of Anglophone scholars in Hong Kong in anticipation of the 1997 handover (Deckert, 1993; 1994; Pennycook, 1994, 1996). These numbers have been steadily increasing ever since and Chinese learners have continued to be singled for issues with plagiarism (Bloch, 2012).

The effect on anglophone institutions of this vast influx of Chinese students has been reflected in the literature and the approach of institutions to help accommodate international students (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Discussions of the concept of plagia-

rism, of cultural difference and learning deficits have given way to a developmental discourse aimed at accommodating students from varying educational backgrounds into internationalised institutions (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Flowerdew & Li, 2007). In the UK, researchers, such as Qing Gu, have looked beyond plagiarism (Gu & Brooks, 2008) at the success of Chinese students in acclimating to the different educational expectations. Durkin (2007) found that students use a "middle-way" between eastern and western approaches to learning in order to adapt to educational expectations while retaining their cultural identity. However, despite the success of Chinese students and scholars, the stereotype of the passive Chinese learner (Smith & Zhou, 2009) still persists particularly in media stories which commonly cite Chinese students as disproportionately represented in the misconduct statistics (Cheung, Wu, & Huang, 2016; Mostrous & Kenber, 2016; Qi, 2015). As Kaposi and Dell (2012) have highlighted, this is not helped by moralist and proceduralist approaches to plagiarism which often ignore the complex intertextual development that students must undergo in order to succeed. This indicates that the accommodation of Chinese and other international learners is an ongoing process in UK higher education.

In terms of internationalisation, the experiences of Chinese students abroad are also significant and correlate with the perspective of Chinese higher education. The initial research in the eighties regarding lack of essay writing and rote learning by students due to the pressures of high stakes testing are coming full circle in China. These debates include discussion of the concept of plagiarism and academic integrity in relation to Chinese learners, academics and institutions in China (Yi, 2011). Research in the past five years in Chinese universities by Guangwei Hu and Jun Lei, and also Yongan Li, highlight a lack of research-based writing practice resulting in a limited understanding of plagiarism and attribution by undergraduate students (Hu & Lei, 2012), postgraduate researchers (Li, 2012), and Chinese ESOL lecturers (Hu & Lei, 2016/2; Lei & Hu, 2014). These authors suggest studying Anglo-American citation and publication practices can help Chinese students and lecturers in Chinese universities to reflect on the process of knowledge acquisition. Bearing in mind the recent studies on this issue in China and internationally, as Flowerdew (2015) has noted, the relationship of academic integrity and culture is by no means closed and could benefit from qualitative research.

3   Empirical Approach and initial findings

3.1   Research aims and questions

The overarching aim is to understand why Mainland Chinese students struggle with the norms of academic integrity in international higher education. It aims to achieve this through a case study of Mainland Chinese Masters students' (MCMS) perceptions of their adaptation to studying in UK higher education. It explores how these perceptions correspond to the discourse of Chinese learners and academic integrity using qualitative analysis. This paper concentrates on the analysis of the qualitative data through the lens of Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*.

3.2   *Focus groups & Interviews: Sample and questions*

This research project is formed upon the empirical base of a qualitative study which uses thematic analysis of focus groups and interviews with Mainland Chinese participants. Mainland Chinese participants are distinct from the broader category of the Chinese learner, which includes people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. This is due to the distinct educational background and socio-political climate in the People's Republic of China (Zeng, 2016). The participants were either in the process of completing a taught Social Science Masters degree in the UK (with the exception of one computer scientist), or had recently returned to China after graduating. Masters students were specifically chosen as they make up the majority of Chinese students in the UK, where 1 year Masters programmes accentuate the transitional issues faced by students.

Eight focus groups were carried out in the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic years in the UK and a further three focus groups and three interviews were carried out in China in May 2016. In this process a total of 25 distinct participants were asked to discuss adapting to research practices and the concept of academic integrity in the UK from their educational experience in China. The focus group schedule was structured in a probing manner which would encourage bonding between the homogenous participants and lead to in-depth discussion (Liamputtong, 2011; Krueger, 2002). The group began with a surface conversation of the challenges faced living in the UK and then delved deeper into the adaptation to academic research and writing skills. Once a rapport was developed amongst the group, the issue of academic integrity either naturally arose or was elicited by the moderator. This included the discussion of citation, paraphrasing and plagiarism, and also the use of Turnitin, proof-readers and essay writing services.

The focus group schedule produced multiple themes of discussion for in-depth inductive thematic analysis of the participants' views (Boyatzis, 1998). The large quantity of rich data was transcribed for analysis. Transcription is "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005, p. 227) and helps to review the focus groups, write memos and develop initial coding. A simple orthographic transcription, with small indicators for laughing or overlapping responses, was necessary to capture the data for thematic analysis. After initial pen and paper coding identified 6 key surface themes, the transcripts were uploaded into the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software for in-depth analysis. The 6 initial themes were stored and highlighted as nodes in an easily manageable and navigable format (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). This enabled analysis to move deeper into the data, beneath the words and phrases, to the latent meanings of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3   *Baxter Magolda's Epistemological Reflection Model*

The initial findings of the study, related to the epistemological development of the participants using Baxter-Magolda's *Epistemological Reflection Model* (ERM). The ERM is the result of Baxter Magolda's longitudinal study of US college students over a period of 16 years (Baxter Magolda, 1994). This simple model of epistemological development provides a useful framework to assess the focus group data. The ERM is effective

Table 1
Epistemological Reflection Model

Ways of knowing	Description
Absolute Knowing	Knowledge should be acquired. It is quantifiable, inflexible, and unquestionable and comes from higher authorities.
Transitional Knowing	Starting to understand knowledge as a process. Less certain of the absolute authority of facts.
Independent Knowing	Open-minded approach to knowledge as uncertain. People have the right to hold different perspectives.
Contextual Knowing	Context defines knowledge, admits the uncertainty and relativity of information. Uncommon among undergraduates

(Baxter Magolda, 1992)

in demonstrating the epistemological influence of assessment practice on students, regardless of their nationality.

The key finding of this first stage of analysis explored the participants' perceptions of their academic development charting a journey from "absolute knowing" to "independent" and "contextual" approaches to knowledge. From this perspective, a monologic, "right and wrong" examination background in China poses a significant epistemological obstacle to the understanding of plagiarism, citation and research. As Jude Carroll (2008) has highlighted, there is a significant transition for students to make from high stakes assessment to the dialogic, research-based essay assessment in the UK. The participants must not only deal with multiple, unfamiliar academic texts in a second language and then construct essays of thousands of words, they must also switch their approach to knowledge in line with the ERM model above. The participants reflect that this rapid transition from one set of expectations to another which leads to problems with the practicalities of academic writing, leading at worst to plagiarism, or low grades due to a descriptive approach and a lack of critical thinking. Baxter-Magolda's ERM was useful to analyse the perspectives of the Chinese students in the study, however it raised more questions about the differences between the education systems in China and the UK. Further reading lead to the work of Ruth Hayhoe (1989), who advocated using JŘrgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* to "bring a new dimension to a study of international educational relations", particularly in order to understand China's integration into international research practices.

4   Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

Jürgen Habermas is a German sociologist, philosopher and critical theorist who since the 1960s has been considered the leading light of the second generation of the Frankfurt School. Habermas emerged in the post-war period aiming to reassess the *Enlightenment* and the modern origins of the democratic tradition from the perspective of knowledge and how it is communicated (Terry, 1997). As Thomassen (2010)

highlights, this manifests itself in the red thread which runs through his work: the public use of reason. His work has been used in educational research, most notably by Mezirow (1997) in his *transformative learning theory* and McLean (2006) in her critical approach to University pedagogy. In his landmark work, the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas explores his main question: "how is social order possible?" (Finlayson, 2005). He achieves this through the analysis of how reason or rationality are used in modern society through particular actions in two distinct ontological spheres (*lifeworld* and *system*). This paper concentrates on the distinctions between the concepts of *communicative* and *instrumental* action, and between *lifeworld* and *system*. The research uses these concepts to explore the participants' perceptions of their adaptations to academic integrity in the UK context.

4.1   Lifeworld and System

In simple terms *lifeworld* refers to a person's culture, personality and integration into society (McLean, 2006). The lifeworld is an informal place of shared meanings and understandings. It is a complex web that unites a culture yet also provides space for individuals to exist through personality traits and social contexts. The lifeworldis an implicit place where the reproduction of culture is achieved through communicative action and discourse, in which participants partake in genuine communication to reach understanding, share knowledge and create social cohesion through reasoned consensus (Finlayson, 2005). In the lifeworld, validity of expression must be achieved in order to find mutual understanding; therefore statements must make a claim to truth, truthfulness and rightness. In other words, communication must have *integrity* for the lifeworld to be reproduced through mutual understanding or eventually social cohesion will break down. The significance of communicative action and discourse is that truth is an intersubjective consensus, rather than an objective fact, which is important for later considerations of academic writing and referencing.

The second ontological sphere, according to Habermas, is the *system.* As opposed to the lifeworld, which is orientated towards understanding, the system is formed by the economic and bureaucratic subsystems which are steered by the mediums of money and power. Where the lifeworld enables social integration through communicative action and discourse, the system is maintained through instrumental action orientated towards success. Habermas theorises that while traditional societies are contained within the lifeworld, post-traditional societies become too complex resulting in the uncoupling of money and power from the lifeworld into bureaucratic and economic sub-systems. The uncoupling of system serves a purpose to support the material reproduction in a more complex society because it relies on norm-free, impersonal, instrumental action which is able to achieve aims more efficiently than the lifeworld (Outhwaite, 1994).

4.2   Colonisation of the system

These two spheres exist in a "fragile equilibrium" where the system supports the complexities of post-traditional societies to assist where the lifeworld has become unable to successfully coordinate activities alone (Finlayson, 2005). There is, however,

the danger that the lifeworld may be *colonised* by the system, in that the imperatives of the systems "turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself" (Jurgen Habermas, 1981, p. 189). Here Habermas is drawing on his Weberian roots and the fear of an iron cage of rationality in which an instrumental, means-to-an-end approach to reason results in people using the most effective method to achieve their goals. This is opposed to value-rational action aimed at using ethical means within societal norms to achieve goals (Ritzer, 2008). Thomassen (2010) provides a poignant example of the impact in UK higher education, when imperatives of the economic sub-system start to colonize the academic lifeworld:

> Increasingly, the market logic is being rolled out across universities and education more generally. Universities must make money and the bottom line matters for their future. As a result, more and more things are measured in terms of time and outputs... Teaching and research increasingly look like the commercial production of goods to consumers...This also influences the relationship between students and professors. Whereas this relationship may have been communicative, it risks becoming increasingly strategic. . . (p. 77)

Thomassen is implying that once the student-staff relationship becomes strategic or instrumental, agents become more orientated towards a means-to-an-end approach to learning. If we consider the issue of academic integrity, particularly plagiarism and the use of contract essay writing companies, these can be understood as the impact of the colonisation of the academic lifeworld by instrumental action orientated towards success, regardless of ethical norms.

5   Findings: Colonisation of the Academic lifeworld

The findings from this research indicate that the combined impacts of the internet, massification, internationalisation and, especially, marketisation, are threatening to colonise the academic lifeworld. This has resulted in significant challenges to academic integrity. Students from Mainland China represent one of the most significant groups in this discourse as they are transitioning through academic lifeworlds in a state of flux. The focus groups and interviews created a communicative space to reach understanding and to explore their lifeworld, shedding light on the issue of academic integrity in their transition.

5.1   The Chinese educational background

As the participants are transitioning from China to the UK, their experience in Chinese education forms the *normative context* for the expectations of education. The focus groups produced a consensus on the impact of high stakes examination focus on their educational experiences, to the extent it has dominated their young lives. Due to the large population in China, the state has created the administration of examinations as a system to support the reproduction of the lifeworld. The system has been successful in:

- standardising education
- examining large numbers of students

- assuring integrity as students are in a closed exam
- providing equality of opportunity
- fairly rewarding hard working students
- achieving ideological orthodoxy and homogeneity

The success of this education system since the reopening of the universities in 1978 should not be overlooked. In this way, the system established by the government was orientated towards catching up with international academia and educating the population. The *National College Entrance Examination*, better known as the *Gaokao* (), is being held up as a success as Shanghai's schools top the PISA rankings for schools and Chinese universities are rising up the world rankings (OECD, 2015; THE, 2016). As Habermas warns, the system can become too successful, resulting in the colonisation of the lifeworld.

Examinations have deep roots in Chinese culture. The Imperial Examinations (keju/) dominated education for centuries before it was abolished in 1911. One of the reasons it was abolished was what De Saegar (2008) describes as the *epistemological obstacles* which the examination placed in the way of China's development of a modern scientific approach. With the implementation of the *gaokao,* the modern equivalent of the *keju*, the domination of examinations and this epistemological obstacle is still in place, even at the majority of Chinese universities attended by the participants. The domination and efficiency of high stakes examinations as a mechanism for achieving orthodoxy, whether Confucian, Marxist or even of modern scientific knowledge, has drawbacks:

- students becoming focused on grades and success rather than understanding
- a loss of independent thinking due to monologic approach
- method of studying is individual, students learning the knowledge by rote from the set-texts
- students have limited discourse about how knowledge is created
- didactic approach of teachers
- results in lack of criticality and creativity
- results in indoctrination

The criticisms of the *keju* and modern examinations in China have similarities, however the historical comparisons are not appropriate in all cases. While the *keju* concentrated on the orthodoxy of Confucian texts it was in fact more essay based than the current system in China. As the ERM demonstrated above, the current exam regime encourages an absolute, monologic approach to knowledge by students, looking to learn the "right" answers in official textbooks. As a result the students take an instrumental rather than communicative approach to their studies, as illustrated by this exchange between two participants:

> *P4 I think this is the problem, we don't need to read in China.*
> *P5 Yes, I cannot remember whether I've read something.*
> *P4 The teacher will not give us a reading list, we have a textbook, the reading is in the textbook, so do some preparation work, read chapter 1, then in class we will, the teacher*

will explain chapter 1, then after you look back to chapter 1. The next class chapter 2. So we don't have extra reading.

This implies that they do not engage with texts in a communicative manner when studying for the examinations. This is a common reflection by the participants and indicates the orientation towards success rather than understanding in their studies.

A further issue which heightens the instrumental approach, is the immense pressure students are under. One of the participants described the pressure during Gaokao on students, particularly as in his province for nearly a million students taking the examination, there are only 30,000 top University places:

Because every year between my high school years, every year we have people commit suicide. That's true, I don't think foreigners can understand this. Or even other people, so it's really hard. It's not only the education problem but everything combined.

As Bregnaebank (2016) has highlighted, suicides are also a problem at China's top universities. The discussions with participants suggest the examination focus in combination with the pressures of rapid economic growth on the job market for graduates (Pang & Plucker, 2012), have resulted in bureaucratic and economic colonisation of the students' lifeworld. In Habermas's TCA, the colonisation of the lifeworld results in *systematically distorted communication,* which when taken to an extreme can lead to deception and disregarding of ethical norms as a result of a means-to-an-end approach (Gross, 2010). In recent years there have been well organised attempts to cheat in the Gaokao for example, resulting in arrests of offenders and police monitoring examination halls and schools during the exams (Campbell 2016). One of the reasons examinations are preferred over open assessments, even at university level, as stressed by one of the interviewee's who is now teaching in China, is that the pressure is so great students cannot be trusted to complete assessments unsupervised.

5.2 Decision to study in the UK

Due to the immense pressure on top university places in China, one option is to study abroad. It is currently more common for students to do this after they have a completed an undergraduate degree in the China, however increasing numbers of Mainland Chinese students are completing the first degree or even high school qualifications internationally, particularly in the US (ICEF, 2015). As Gu (2016) has pointed out, Mainland Chinese students who study abroad only form a small percentage of the Chinese population and these fall into two distinct groups: the educational and socio-economic elite. A minority of these students are the educational elite on government scholarships, the majority are privately funded students from the middle class. The participants in this study were from the latter group and an overriding reason for studying abroad is to improve job prospects in the highly competitive job market and provide a *gap year* of sorts for travel.

It should be highlighted that the participants in the study demonstrated positive reasons for studying in the UK, such as an interest in British culture and the prestige education system. There were also instrumental factors. In particular a Masters degree in the UK is only 1 year, compared with 2–3 years in China or 2 years in

alternative locations abroad such as the US or Australia. There were participants who had failed the entrance requirements for studying in other countries, such as the US. Furthermore, the IELTS requirement to study in the UK, usually between 6 and 7, was deemed as relatively easy compared to the requirements for entry to Chinese Masters programmes. Finally, the choice of course was another factor chosen for instrumental reasons to maximise the opportunity for employment on return, rather than any specific specialism or interest in the topic.

5.3   *Transition to studying in the UK*

The transition to studying in the UK represents an epistemological shift for the students into an educational lifeworld based around communication. As Kvale (2007) stresses, the epistemological approach is embedded in and shapes the educational culture and assessment types. As academic writing is the main form of disseminating knowledge, this forms the main type of assessment, especially as the majority of participants were in the social sciences. They depict the challenge of having to write extended essays when they have limited experience of this assessment:

> *I think maybe we are just too focused on exams and if we, if we Chinese people, student I mean, are marked only on essays, I think we will make a big progress because I think she is quite right, we are quite lack of practice. We, I think the biggest word extent we write, I think is 250 to 300 words, I think the small essay. I think we are quite used to this pattern but when it comes to thousands of words of writing, we don't quite familiar with that…That's it, when it comes to the longer part, we cannot handle it.*

While there is the quantitative difference in the essay length, the essays that students are composing are geared towards understanding based on discourse. In Habermas's TCA, discourse is the reflective form of communicative action, which is called upon when validity claims (truth) of shorter interactions (speech acts) are questioned leading to rational and critical discussion (Bohman & Rehg, 2014). Boucher (2014) clarifies the significance of this; "[r]ationality is seen as grounded in the intersubjective process of reaching agreement through dialogical justifications" (p.195). As noted earlier, this intersubjective consensus of truth is reflected in the process of academic writing and referencing. As the students are used to the instrumental approach, shifting to a communicative approach is a challenge not just in assessments but in the whole approach to study.

As Habermas emphasises universities should be "rooted with the lifeworld" (Habermas & Blazek, 1987, p.8), i.e. geared towards understanding and the reproduction of the lifeworld. In China, it appears that while the education system has been successful, the previous educational experience of the participants is not geared towards understanding but to the assimilation of orthodox knowledge. Consequently, the university lifeworld differs greatly; take the use of the library for example:

> P_3 *I think the key thing in China is that we have our textbook, textbook, so we don't need to borrow books from the library.*
> P_2 *Yeah that's a good point.*
> P_3 *Yeah, yeah, yeah, and in here, in the UK you don't have a textbook and mostly you borrow from the library, so the library research is better than the Chinese,*

M *Ok, so do you think, do you think that affects the way you study then? Does it change the way you study?*
P₃ *Yeah, I love it, no textbook*
M *Really?*
P₃ *More freedom*

As the UK academic lifeworld is shaped around discourse, the university acts as a communicative space for scholars. This can be in the library (physical and online) with its multiple sources of knowledge; the seminar, where students can engage in discourse; the lecture, with its (hopefully) reasoned perspective on knowledge; or through the major form of assessment and dissemination, academic writing. The aim of this discourse is to share and test the validity of specialist, empirically tested knowledge. Ingram (1989) clarifies this process in the context of Habermas's theory: "Theoretical knowledge is born of the conversion of practical experience into propositional information for purposes of cultural transmission—a transition that presupposes an intermediate phase of understanding" (p. 117). The university provides the communicative lifeworld for the cultural transmission of knowledge and shapes the pedagogy of higher education.

The transition manifest itself in problems with academic integrity for practical and epistemological reasons. On the practical side, the participants describe adjusting to searching for sources, reading them, making notes, writing their essay and referencing appropriately. Searching for resources, assessing their validity, understanding the argument and then answering their own essay question is grounded in rational discourse and very different from the participants' experiences in China:

> Also, the critical thinking and how to develop the argument, because if you want to develop the argument you need to read many books to get two sides of opinions, the pros and the cons. And then, cite other references to make a conclusion about what opinions you are supporting, you support and it is difficult because in China, for me, I did not do such things in my essay writing.

Referencing in particular highlights a seemingly simple, albeit annoying practical task. In a way it can be seen as where the bureaucratic system (libraries) has acted to help the communicative lifeworld through an administrative task which makes identifying sources used by other authors more efficient. This makes explicit the intersubjective nature of academic discourse.

On a deeper level than the practicalities of studying, the participants describe struggling with criticality, rather than integrity. This is due to the epistemological shift from a monologic approach, to a dialogic approach. Within the dialogic approach the students must develop rational accountability in order to achieve autonomy in the intersubjective process of reaching agreement, Cooke (Cooke, 1992) highlights the significance of this within Habermas's thought:

> ...communicative rationality, the autonomy of a person would be measured against her or his ability to support what she or he says with reasons, as well as against her or his willingness to enter into argumentation and against his or her openness to criticism. We might refer to this as autonomy in the sense of rational accountability (p. 279)

This is a key finding in terms of the stereotype of Mainland Chinese students' passivity, lack of criticality and reputation for plagiarism. It appears that in adapting

to the intersubjective, communicative lifeworld of the British university, they are undergoing a process of self-determination. This process is not easy, as illustrated by one participant:

> *I just think why did I write this bulls**t, I think it's not that useful and it's also just like copying ideas from the famous scholars, and I was just rephrase a little bit, so I don't want to read my assignment.*

The common sentiment is that as students develop their own sense of self within the discourse, they at first struggle with questioning authority

> P$_2$ *Yeah, your paraphrase and the, or they will think, they, she will say,* you use too much reference and where's your own opinion "it's quite confusing about that!"
> P$_3$ *Yeah, I feel the same way.*
> P$_2$ *It's like don't use your own opinion, you are not a professional. You are not a specialist.*
> P$_1$ *They always say the article say, the article have. . ..*
> M *Yeah, so you're always just reporting*
> P$_2$ *Yes, it's quite confusing about what should I do, should I use the reference or not, either too much or too less.*
> P$_3$ *For me it's like (laughs), what is the point you know? We were asked to do, you know, read the books and make the references and at the same time we're not allowed to give your own opinion. What we do, it's more like a research, right? It's not really a piece of essay where you can build up your own argument.*

One of the participants stresses the communicative aspect of this process and the contrast with the approach he was used to in China:

> *In the essay you don't have to be right, you don't have to be wrong, just like, you can **convincing the marker, the supervisor**, you can say it's right, it's wrong, but **you have to prove it by yourself**. In your, you have some reason, you have some idea to support your point, that will be ok but in my undergraduate study exams there is only one right answer. You have to answer this question like this then you can get your score and if it is different from this, it's zero, just like this.*

As Amy Allen (2013, p. 100) has pointed out, Habermas's theory is therefore "extremely useful for thinking through how subordinated individuals can achieve critical and reflective distance on the power relations to which they are subject." (p. 100)—in essence critical thinking. The implication for participants is that the development of an individual perspective on knowledge is vital to partake in the discourse on knowledge. The development of rational accountability therefore socialises the students in criticising authority in order to ensure validity but also to create new perspectives on knowledge. This implies that plagiarism by students from China may be less a case of the stealing of others' ideas and more the denial of self in the knowledge process.

5.4   Reproduction and colonisation of the academic lifeworld

The implications of transitioning to an academic lifeworld based on rational discourse from a monologic examination based education are more complex than simply writing essays. Although the participants reported the positive aspects of adapting the different educational context, many reported having issues with plagiarism and all struggled

with the concept of criticality. The research indicates that understanding of these issues is connected in the development of rational accountability and autonomy. In order for this to be reproduced, the university must maintain the normative context of the lifeworld. According to Brunkhurst (1996) "the normative social context must be internalized in process of socialization and become the core personal ego-identity in order to become effective for coordinating action. Habermas names the paradigm of the coordination of action by the life-world 'social integration'" (pp. 101–102).

Social integration of such a large number of students from an instrumental and authoritarian educational background is a challenge to the reproduction of the life-world, and consequently academic integrity. The participants describe their surprise at the large number of Chinese students on their courses, and the difficulty of talking English and finding other nationalities to communicate with. Indeed, the participants reflect positively on their friendships with other international students to practice English and also discuss different perspectives on knowledge. The overwhelming sense, however, was that the ghettoisation of the students on courses with large numbers of Chinese students had a limiting impact on their development and opportunities for communication. This indicates the danger of treating international students as 'cash cows' to fill in for the reduction of public funds, as highlighted by Jiang (2008). While it is difficult to find hard evidence of this, the plagiarism issues faced by Chinese students could be an indication of systematically distorted communication as they struggle to transition to an internationalised higher education system which has been colonised by the imperative of the financial gain. In other words, the economic integrity of institutions becomes more important than academic integrity.

6   Conclusion

The academic lifeworld, therefore, is undergoing significant changes. The internet is without doubt having a huge impact on the approach to and evaluation of knowledge in society. The importance of the rational accountability and the validation of knowledge are more important than ever for social cohesion. It is apparent through this study that UK universities provide a context in which students learn advanced communicative competence and the ability to engage in discourse aimed at reaching an intersubjective consensus on truth. Mainland Chinese students are more than capable of adapting to studying in the UK but they must be given time, support and a communicative environment. Indeed, the Chinese government's policy to attract returnee scholars from abroad and the impact of these scholars on reproducing the academic lifeworld is having success in China's top universities. In this way, the returnee students are acting as cultural bridge for the academic lifeworld in China, however, this is not without its challenges in terms of academic freedom and integrity (Yi, 2011). The danger in the UK is that in trying to accommodate increasing numbers of Mainland Chinese students in the increasingly competitive marketised HE context, is that the lifeworld is colonised by economic and bureaucratic sub-system. The result of colonisation will be an increasingly instrumental approach from students and staff, where the communicative academic space is threatened. If the "fragile equilibrium" of the lifeworld in not maintained, there may be more challenges for academic integrity.

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