International Student Adaptation to Academic Writing in Higher Education

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PREFACE

International Student Adaptation to Academic Writing in Higher Education has been nurtured by a doctoral study at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Setting

Within the current phase of neo-liberal globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, English medium institutions have developed strategic policies which aim to increase the proportion of international students. Currently there are more than 4.3 million mobile students globally.[1] In Australia the number of international student enrolments is around 497,458.[2] The sustainability of the education export sector depends largely on the extent to which international students' diverse needs are being adequately addressed by education providers and the country of education. Given the competition amongst host countries of international students on the education export market, the knowledge about effective approaches to addressing the learning needs and expectations of international students is an important asset to education providers and the international education sector. More importantly, this knowledge is integral to education providers' responsibility to fulfil their ethical commitment in ensuring adequate support and high quality education be provided for international students.

Effectively catering for the needs of international students is imperative partly because of the growing dependence of host institutions on international students' tuition fees, which is largely driven by the decrease in real funding from the federal government. This is more critical given the fact that potential international students have an increasing number of options for their higher education destinations. Major competitors to the current English speaking countries' share of international student market are coming from some Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Japan. This is evidenced in the campaigns of these countries to optimise their policies of internationalising higher education and become competitive Asian education providers in attracting

[1] OECD, 2013.
[2] AEI, 2012.

international students, who may currently see English speaking countries as their best option.[3] On top of this, other Asian countries such as China and South Korea have also focused more on developing their own higher education sector, which has the potential to stem the flow of students from these countries seeking to study overseas. A more and more competitive worldwide market is therefore developing and Australian tertiary education institutions need to understand where they are now and how best to respond to those challenges.

Various aspects of international students' needs and experiences have been explored in the literature over the past couple of decades. These include international students' learning and communication styles,[4] the impacts of students' prior literacy practices on their academic performance, their lived experiences and adaptation to the host university,[5] their identity[6] and their security needs.[7] Challenges facing international students in higher education in English-speaking countries have often been assumed to be largely related to students' language proficiency and cultural differences.[8] International students have been viewed mainly from a deficit frame. This frame tends to locate international students' challenges as emerging exclusively from their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Within this frame, their different ways of constructing knowledge are often seen problematic in the English-medium institutional context. Yet, international students' agency, their adaptive capacity and their transformative power are not adequately explored in relevant research. Furthermore, little has been documented about what is actually involved in the process or processes that these students must undergo to adapt to the academic culture of the disciplines they are studying.

Academic writing is a central practice in most English-medium higher education institutions. It is at the heart of students' academic success because the assessment of students' performance in higher education is largely based on academic writing. However, the specific requirements for academic writing vary in different disciplines and different higher education institutions. Student writing in higher education often involves

[3] Tran, 2011; Arkoudis & Tran, 2007.
[4] Cownie & Addison, 1996; Hellsten & Prescott, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Wong, 2004; Kettle & Luke, 2012; Bailey, 2012.
[5] Russell et al., 2010; McMahon, 2011; Tran, 2012.
[6] Koehne, 2005; Fincher, 2011; Kuo, 2012.
[7] Marginson et al., 2010; Marginson, 2012.
[8] Samuelowicz, 1987; Ballard & Clanchy, 1995; Robertson et al., 2000; Lacina, 2002; Holmes, 2004; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Sawir, 2005; Andrade, 2006.

the navigation of "hidden features" of academic writing,[9] a variety of rhetoric styles and personal preferences. International ESL students' views and experiences in writing academic texts in English-medium universities have been a common theme across various studies.[10] The focus of a great deal of research has mainly been on the impact of ethnic values on international students' writing and their struggles to accommodate the dominant conventions of academic writing in English-medium institutions.[11] In fact, the issues surrounding English as a Second Language (ESL) students' interaction with their disciplinary writing in an international and intercultural environment tend to be dynamic, multi-dimensional, wide-ranging and subtle. They depend on a host of aspects such as the students' personal preferences and identity,[12] cultural values and approaches to knowledge,[13] lecturers' beliefs, power relationship and the disciplinary assumptions of what counts as knowledge and good writing.[14] However, there has been an insufficiency of research that investigates ESL students' processes in exercising their personal agency, negotiating power relationships and mediating their academic writing in their discipline of study, which is conceptualised as a specific social context. This book responds to this gap in the literature on international education.

International student adaptation to academic writing

International Student Adaptation to Academic Writing analyses how international students negotiate academic writing from an insider, or an *emic* perspective by giving international students the opportunity to talk about their own experiences in adapting to academic writing practices in higher education. By explicating and giving voice to student experience, this book offers insights into the hidden intentions influencing their decisions in constructing knowledge and their potential choices in meaning making. Drawing on case studies with international students from China and Vietnam and lecturers in Australian higher education, the book works through many unresolved issues related to international students' cultural, linguistic, intellectual and personal negotiations. The book also

[9] Street, 2009.
[10] Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Canagarajah, 2006; Fox, 1994; Green, 2007; Ridley, 2004; Wang, 2011; Bailey, 2012.
[11] Fox, 1994; Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Phan, 2011.
[12] Ivanic, 1997; Lillis, 2001.
[13] Connor, 1996; Fox, 1994, Green, 2007.
[14] Lea & Street, 2000; Lea & Stierer; Street, 2009.

reveals the complexities of international students' adaptation to academic writing through focusing on critical aspects including displaying critical thinking, communicating ideas in academic writing and transforming learning through negotiating academic writing.

Forms of adaptation

The book introduces new concepts that capture different patterns of international students' adaptation in higher education. These include *surface adaptation*, *committed adaptation, reverse adaptation* and *hybrid adaptation. Committed adaptation* occurs when students exercise personal agency and deliberately position themselves as wishing to accommodate what is required of them. In this case, the students value the new ways of constructing knowledge to which they have adapted and feel positive about their shift. *Surface adaptation* refers to the surface changes the students make in order to enable them to gain access to the conventions, which prevail in their academic discipline. Students who overall enact *surface adaptation* may exercise agency by disguising their personal beliefs about what academic writing should be and resort to accommodating only as a coping strategy. In this case, students often experience tension between what they personally value, which they often keep invisible in their writing, and their public response to the requirements of their discipline. Students may also display *surface adaptation* when they do not feel comfortable or positive about responding to what they think they are expected to write.

Some students engage in *hybrid adaptation* through their attempts to create a hybrid space for meaning making. Within this form of adaptation, students engage critically and creatively with the disciplinary requirements and treat their first language and culture as a resource rather than a problem. Their mediation of academic writing is embedded in their attempts to incorporate intentionally and strategically their understandings of the academic expectations in the host institution while still retaining some of their personal preferences rather than exclusively following the academic requirements. *Hybrid adaptation* differs from the other two forms of adaptation in that within this form, students attempt to integrate the ways of writing they personally find meaningful into their academic writing. *Reverse adaptation* occurs when students' interaction with the disciplinary convention in the host institution has led to a change in their initial habit of writing in their mother tongue. Within this case, students move towards internalising the preferred approach in their discipline as part of their writing style.

Drawing on these new concepts of adaptation, *International Student Adaptation to Academic Writing in Higher Education* provides readers with new and deeper insights into the complex nature of international students' adjustment to host institutions. The students' process of adaptation arises from their intrinsic motivations to be successful in their courses and to participate in their disciplinary community. However, where they differ is in their internal negotiation related to what they really value amongst the writing requirements and the writing patterns they adopt in constructing their texts. The book takes a critical stance on contemporary views of international students. It shows that international students' journeys of adaptation to academic practices appear to be much more complex than what is often described in the current literature as being largely related to language and cultural factors.

Through examining how international students mediate between different approaches to collective thinking and different patterns of displaying critical thinking in their written assignments, the book reveals that international students' negotiation of academic writing involves a complex web of factors. But these appear to be unrecognised on the surface of their writing. The students' journeys of adaptation illustrate the complexities of how cultural norms are meditated and reproduced in contested institutional discourse, which involves shifting relations of power and the complex web of international student subjectivity. Thus, although trends in their cultural writing traditions need to be acknowledged, placing too much emphasis on them as the only explanation for international students' writing can easily lead to ethnic or cultural stereotyping. This is important because national culture does not play a dominant role but instead was found to be inflected in these individual students' writing and interact with other factors that shape their writing.

The book focuses on different forms of adaptation emerging from the ways international students exercise personal agency and mediate between disciplinary writing practices, cultural writing norms and personal desires in meaning making. In this book, students' agency is understood in light of activity theory,[15] which draws on Vygotsky's theory on mediated learning in the zone of proximal development. Agency is defined as the intentional action of students as they position themselves in relation to academic expectations in the host institution. Also, students' mediation of meaning is referred to as the process of actively negotiating imposed positionings from their disciplinary requirements and making choices about ways to construct meaning.

[15] Lantolf, 2002.

The underlying objective of *International Student Adaptation to Academic Writing in Higher Education* is to challenge the way international students are viewed from the problem-focused vantage. It shows that international students self-position as embracing an aspiration to transform themselves and actually undergo significant moves throughout their engagement in higher education. The process of negotiating academic writing represents a dynamic interplay between challenges and transformative power: the removal from the comfort zones and the need to overcome challenges and navigate a plurality of academic demands actually create spaces for international students to undergo fundamental personal as well as intellectual changes. It is the challenging and complex nature of the adaptation to higher education that enables international students to mediate the shifting borders, discover their potentials and experience movements in their perspectives.[16] This process also provides the springboard for the emergence of newly-constructed self of international students. The book shows that international students are capable to reflect on their own personal experiences, appreciate the need for change and plot new strategies to transform themselves personally and academically.

Reciprocal adaptation

The study reported in this book exposes a number of mismatches in the display of disciplinary knowledge among the lecturers themselves and between the lecturers and international students. It reveals that the inconsistency and subtlety of the lecturers' explanations of the academic expectations makes it more challenging for international students to make sense of what is required of them in specific disciplines. Yet, in the relevant literature, what challenges international students is often attributed to such factors as English language, study skills and cultural norms, which arise from international students themselves. The lecturers in this research position themselves as being aware of the needs of their international students, yet struggle with how to best assist them with their work. The main strategies that the lecturers use seem to focus mainly on *what* international students should be demonstrating in their academic writing, but not on *how* international students can actually develop these skills. Some lecturers appear to struggle with explaining what "good academic writing" involves within their discipline. Also there appears to be little discussion with their colleagues that may lead to developing

[16] Tran, 2012.

shared understandings around this. The book also discusses how international student's agency impacts on lecturers' positioning of their views, which leads to the transformations in their pedagogic practices.

So far the responsibility of adaptation within academic faculties that host international students has been commonly placed on international students. Yet reciprocal adaptation between international students and lecturers is indeed crucial for the effective pedagogic practices that cater for international students and for the sustainable development of international education. Based on extracts from interviews with both international students and lecturers, the book reveals that reciprocal adaptation is a complex process that requires lecturers to mediate between their disciplinary traditions and the knowledge and skills that international students bring to the educational context. It also requires the commitment of the lecturers to open up the learning space in which students' different ways of constructing knowledge can be recognised and considered as an opportunity for learning rather than a disadvantage or limitation.

This book presents a dialogical pedagogic model for reciprocal adaptation that can be developed between international students and lecturers rather than the onus being on exclusive adaptation from international students. The model presented in this book offers concrete steps towards developing mutual relationships and changes of international students and staff to each other within the overarching institutional realities of the university. Such a dialogical model is viewed as an essential tool to enhance the education of international students in this increasingly internationalised environment. The book thus contributes to the current debate on the development of culturally responsive practices and internationalised curriculum that facilitate the emergence of valuable and shifting discourses in higher education where diverse dimensions of knowledge are incorporated and access to academic discourses is opened up in flexible ways.

A trans-disciplinary framework

A distinctive contribution of this book is the development of a trans-disciplinary framework, which draws on a modified version of Lillis' *heuristic of talk around text*[17] and *positioning theory*[18] for interpreting international students' and lecturers' perspectives within the institutional structure. The framework developed in this book enables an exploration of

[17] Lillis, 2001.
[18] Harré & van Langenhove, 1999.

not only the reasons underpinning international students' specific ways of writing but also their potential choices in constructing institutional knowledge, which Lillis refers to as "what the individual student-writers might want to mean in a transformed socio-discursive space".[19] T*alk around text* focuses on connecting students' specific instances of writing to their intentions and potential choices in meaning making, thereby revealing how they negotiate different ways of constructing knowledge. Positioning theory complements *talk around text* and offers an analytical tool to examine students' agency and personal transformations through their negotiation of the power relations and the imposed positionings in their disciplines. Positioning theory also provides space to interpret the lecturers' views on students' writing practices.

Merging together, *talk around text* and *positioning theory* can offer an interpretive framework to help explore the key aspects which the study reported in this book aims to capture. This book demonstrates the value of employing such an analytical model for investigating the broader range of students in participating in institutional practices in higher education. Such a conceptual framework is likely to be applied in different settings in the emerging field of scholarship and research on international students' diverse need, adaptation process and international pedagogies.

International students and institutional practices

An emergent stream of literature has problematised the common stereotypes about the cultural learning styles and experiences of Asian students.[20] Highlighted in these studies is the need to avoid simply attributing learning styles to cultural backgrounds. Instead, these studies suggest the significance of exploring more adequately the complexities in students' processes of unpacking, interpreting and adapting to various disciplinary practices. The research on which this book draws attempts to contribute to this growing area of knowledge. This research acknowledges that international students bring distinctive cultural resources and literacy backgrounds with them into their courses in Australia. It also highlights the complex factors which affect how international students exercise personal agency in mediating academic writing and gaining access to their disciplinary discourse. By focusing on the **"**personal agency" of international students, the study offers a change from the dominant

[19] Lillis, 2001, 51.
[20] For example, Volet & Renshaw, 1996; Biggs, 1997; Rizvi, 2000; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Doherty & Singh, 2005a; Jones, 2005; Kettle, 2005; Koehne, 2005.

approaches on "problems", plagiarism and policing of standards often circulating about international students.

It is significant to acknowledge the contested nature of terms such as "Asian"; "Western", "Oriental". In using the term "Asian students", I am not essentialising students from different Asian countries as a homogenous entity. In the literature, however, this term is in general use. As a matter of convenience, therefore, I will use the term with the acknowledgement of the diversity and variety of Asian students encompassed by this descriptor. The terms "Western way", "Asian style" and "Oriental style" have been used quite often by both students and lecturers involved in this study. These terms have been presented in the study as the participants have said them. Also, the term "international students" is used in this book to refer to students who are pursuing a degree in a foreign country but are not citizens or permanent residents of that country. As this research is concerned with international students undertaking their Masters by coursework, disciplinary writing is used to refer to the course assignment writing for coursework students in a specific discipline.

A discourse which locates Asian international students' challenges as emerging from language and cultural differences largely influences the current teaching and learning practices of Australian higher education. This discourse determines preferred methods of learning and values that Asian students may bring with them into Australian institutions. Such a way of positioning international students and their needs does not seem to match with the "wider context of changing cultural traditions and the accelerating mutual entanglements of globalising times".[21] Furthermore, within the current global world, relying too much on the link between cultural factors and images of Asian students may limit the possibility of exploring the complexities, variables as well as invisible aspects in international students' processes of participation in institutional practices.

In particular, this discourse has led to various attempts from universities to provide support services for international students which focus predominantly on language and learning skills to help them transit to the new environment. Thus, this practice, based as it is on changing international students to fit the environment, does not appear to take into account the transformative capacity of international students and to respond adequately to the diverse needs of international students, which may go beyond aspects of language and learning skills.

A growing focus of the research literature is concerned with the need to challenge the mono-cultural assumptions in teaching practices and to explore the role of "authentic Western" pedagogy in English-speaking

[21] Ang, 2001, 87, cited in Doherty & Singh, 2005, 2.

institutions.[22] According to Vandermensbrugghe, there seems to be a trend to spread the education practices of "Western Anglo-Saxon countries" (mainly the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia) since internationalisation is fostered widely in these countries.[23] Hellsten and Prescott argue for inclusive practice and the accommodation of diversity in the process of internationalising university curricular.[24] Based on a study of foundation programs for Asian international students, Doherty and Singh critique the current internationalised curriculum, which tends to privilege the "purity" of "Western" pedagogy. They argue that "these retrospective discourses work to create/reassert a cultural script of an authentic, pure and essential pedagogical tradition, in active denial and suppression of any emerging hybridity".[25] Although Doherty and Singh imply that such practices seem to treat international students as "Other", their study does not elaborate on the complexities of what is going on in this process within the current institutional realities.

International students' challenges in engaging with dominant discourses in education have also been described in some research studies.[26] However, there seems to be insufficient literature on how international students themselves actually accommodate, negotiate or resist specific requirements and expectations embedded in specific disciplinary discourses. To respond to this gap, the research this book relies upon is concerned with investigating how Vietnamese and Chinese international students mediate between different interpretations of academic writing in their process of gaining access to their disciplinary community.

International students and academic writing

Participating in English medium host institutions, Chinese and Vietnamese international students may bring with them different interpretations and expectations of academic writing from their distinctive academic writing traditions. In addition to the expectations shaped by their own educational and cultural settings, most international students also have their personal preferences and concerns that they wish to see reflected in their disciplinary writing. Academic writing is a central practice in teaching and learning in higher education. Therefore,

[22] For example, Morris & Hudson, 1995; Vandermensbrugghe, 2004; Doherty & Singh, 2005b.
[23] Vandermensbrugghe, 2004, 418.
[24] Hellsten & Prescott 2004, 349.
[25] Doherty & Singh, 2005, 69.
[26] Fox, 1994; Lacina, 2002; Ridley, 2004; Wong, 2004.

international students may naturally attempt to write in accordance with the academic practices which are valued in their academic discipline within the host institution. However, the literature seems to show that the challenges students encounter in disciplinary writing appear to go far beyond simply acquiring study skills and language forms in writing. These challenges include the gaps and tensions between students' own interpretations of approaches to academic writing and the specific requirements of a distinct discipline.[27]

An important trend in the literature on student writing in English-medium institutions has been devoted to bringing to the fore the deficiencies of treating writing as simply a set of skills or a "transparent" medium of meaning representation.[28] It argues for the need to see writing at the discursive and social level. In an attempt to avoid making surface assumptions about student writing, these authors typically explore deeper aspects involved in the nature of student writing within institutional practices. These include power relations, the issue of epistemology and identity. These diverse and deeper aspects addressed in the existing scholarly work suggest that research on international student writing in higher education needs to be embedded in such broader issues of writing and its institutional and social contexts. A focus on such complex issues underlying the practice of student writing can also be seen as a recognition that student writing in tertiary education appears to be a site of contested and changing discourse.

Student academic writing in a discipline tends to operate in a particular social context with its own traditions, practices and values.[29] It is necessary to explore the ways in which a given disciplinary discourse communities position student academic writing and whether and how students can reshape those positionings through their writing in the discipline. This relationship can on the one hand be viewed in the ways students as language producers with their own values, interpretations and experiences of academic writing negotiate ways to respond to the disciplinary requirements and have some influence upon the written discourse practices. Such an approach in turn links to how international students, through their negotiations of ways of participating in the

[27] Lea & Street, 1998; English, 1999; Hermerschmidt, 1999; Jones, 1999; Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999; Lea & Street, 2000; Lillis, 2001.
[28] Fairclough, 1989, 1992b, 1995; Ivanic, 1995; Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1997; Lillis, 1997; Lea & Street, 1998; English, 1999; Hermerschmidt, 1999; C. Jones, 1999; C. Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999; Lillis, 1999; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street, 2000; Lillis, 2001; Street, 2009.
[29] Fairclough, 1995; Liddicoat, 1997; Lillis, 2001; Matsuda, 2001a.

disciplinary community, could contribute to reproducing, reshaping or creating new possibilities for lecturers to transform disciplinary practices. This aspect is on the other hand related to how lecturers, who to a certain extent represent the disciplinary structure and practices, perceive what counts as good academic writing as well as reflect their beliefs in their responses to student writing. Thus, in order to gain insights into Vietnamese and Chinese students' academic writing experiences, it is valuable to investigate lecturers' comments on students' written texts and their perceptions of disciplinary writing practices. The students' and lecturers' views on their practices can offer insights into the conditions for promoting richer reciprocal relationships and even mutual transformation within the institutional context. This is one of the main focuses of the study on which this book is based.

Although attention has been increasingly focused on problems facing international students in adapting to the new academic environment, little has been done to explore in detail postgraduate overseas students' actual experiences of studying in general and their academic writing in particular. This would seem critically important if we are to avoid making "surface" assumptions about students' writing and "to search for deeper understandings"[30] of their adaptation process. This view highlights the need to go beyond the routine in studying student writing, which is mainly based on researcher's analysis of students' texts, to identify new ways to gain insights into students' actual writing experiences and struggles in producing their own texts. Within this study, these principles recognise the value of listening to individual students talking about the experience of writing their own texts, which is at the centre of Lillis' framework for interpreting student writing in the institutional context[31].

The book is therefore concerned with exploring how Vietnamese and Chinese international students mediate their disciplinary writing in the country of education. It examines not only their general perceptions of disciplinary conventions and expectations of academic writing but, more importantly, their real accounts of how they produced their own texts. That is, students' written texts, their potential choices and their intentions in making meaning through writing their own texts are placed at the heart of the study presented in this book. By involving students in talking about their first texts at the Australian university and reflecting on their experience in writing these texts, the book aims to offer a grounding to unpack issues of agency and potential choices embedded in Chinese and Vietnamese students' adaptation to disciplinary academic culture.

[30] Jones, Turner & Street, 1999, xvii.
[31] Lillis, 2001.

The Research

This book draws on an investigation involving international students and lecturers from an Australian university.[32] The research explores the journey of adaptation to academic writing practices of eight international students from China and Vietnam undertaking Masters courses in Economics or Education at an Australian university. It also investigates the perspectives and expectations of student writing from four academic staff in these disciplines.

This research focuses on Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Education and Economics due to a number of reasons. China is currently the leading source of international students for Australian institutions.[33] At the university where this was conducted, international students from China comprise the largest proportion of international students. In addition, recent analysis has revealed that at this university, there has been an emerging postgraduate student growth from Vietnam. Chinese and Vietnamese students from two disciplines, Economics and Education, were selected for the study. Economics is the biggest faculty and it has the largest enrolment of international students at this Australian university. Education is one of the disciplines in the university which has recently seen a rising trend in the international student cohort.

The students in this study were required to meet the cut-off IELTS score of 7.0 and 6.5 in order to gain the entry to their Master course in Education and Economics respectively. These eight students have been selected because they meet the research criteria of this study. They are Chinese and Vietnamese students enrolled in Masters of Education or Economics. They volunteered to participate in the study and were willing to reflect on their experiences of writing their first text at the Australian university as well as on how they participated in disciplinary practices as they progressed through the course six months later. The lecturer participants selected are those who lectured in the disciplines in which the student participants were enrolled and who volunteered to participate in the study. There is no one to one correspondence between individual lecturer and individual student involved in this study. The students' perceptions of lecturers' expectations are mixed.

A summary of lecturer and student profiles is presented in the tables below.

[32] Tran, 2007.
[33] AEI, 2012.

Name	Gender	Discipline	Teaching experience	Ethnic background
Anna	Female	Education	13 years	Australian Native speaker of English
Kevin	Male	Education	16 years	Australian Native speaker of English
Lisa	Female	Economics	16 years	Dutch Non-native speaker of English
Andy	Male	Economics	> 16 years	Australian Native speaker of English

Table 1.1: **Lecturer Profile**

Name	National background	Gender	Educational background	Previous Experience
Xuân	Vietnamese	Female	B.English, M.Ed student	Teacher of English
Wang	Chinese	Female	B.English, M.Ed student	Teacher of English
Bình	Vietnamese	Female	B.English, M.Ed student	Teacher of English
Lin	Chinese	Female	B.English, M.Ed student	Interpreter
Hao	Chinese	Female	B.Admin Man., M.FM student	Human resource officer
Ying	Chinese	Female	B. Law, M.FM student	Human resource officer
Vỹ	Vietnamese	Female	B.Eco M. FM student	Marketting officer
Lan	Vietnamese	Female	B.Eco M. FM student	Finance officer

Table 1.2: **Student profile**

The data collected was a combination of students' assignments, the lecturers' comments on these students' texts, two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the students and two rounds of interviews with

the lecturers. All respondents presented in this research have been given pseudonyms.

Data	Method of collection
1. Talks around texts with students	Semi-structured interviews about students' practices in writing 1st texts at the Australian university; Audio-taped and transcribed
2. Positioning interviews with students	Semi-structured focus-group interview and individual interviews Audio-taped and transcribed
3. Students' essays	Photocopies of students' essays
4. Individual interviews with lecturers	Semi-structured interviews about lecturers' expectations of student writing Audio-taped and transcribed
5. Individual lecturers' comments on students' texts	Semi-structured interviews about lecturers' comments on student writing Audio-taped and transcribed
6. Lecturers' written comments	Photocopies of lecturers' comments on students' texts
7. Lecturers' teaching and assessment documents	Photocopies of lecturers' teaching and assessment documents
8. Institutional guidelines	Photocopies of institutional guidelines on assessment and academic writing

Table 1.3: **Summary of data collected**

Data were analysed using a trans-disciplinary framework to interpret students' adaptation and lecturers' views on student practices. The conceptual framework drew on two interpretive tools, a modified version of Lillis' heuristic for exploring student meaning making[34] and positioning theory.[35] The integration of these two analytic models represents a trans-

[34] Lillis, 2001.
[35] Harré & van Langenhove 1999.

disciplinary approach for social analysis of students' practices, lecturers' views and discourse. Further discussion of the development of this framework is included in Chapter 5.

The Book

The Book consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 1 provides a context for understanding international students' adaptation to academic writing practices in the host institution. It addresses the purposes, the significance and original contributions of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the distinctive Chinese and Vietnamese writing traditions. This is followed by a discussion of different approaches to academic writing in higher education in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 provides a review of the key issues around student writing in disciplinary discourse community, and aspects of students' subjectivity and agency in academic writing. Chapter 5 focuses on the development of the trans-disciplinary framework for conceptualising student writing and lecturers' perspectives in the academia. Then, the different forms of adaptation that Chinese and Vietnamese international students draw on in their process of negotiating academic writing in the host institution will be addressed in Chapter 6. How international students demonstrate critical thinking in academic writing in response to the disciplinary requirements is explored in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 discusses the communal approach to constructing knowledge that Chinese and Vietnamese students have adopted in their journey of meaning making. Chapter 9 captures lecturers' perspectives on disciplinary academic writing of international students. Chapter 10 draws out implications and conclusion including the model for mutual adaptation between international students and lecturers.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND DISTINCTIVE CULTURAL WRITING TRADITIONS

Research on writing across cultures, contrastive rhetoric and intercultural learning has shown that international students' writing experiences are influenced by their distinctive writing traditions into which they were socialised during their previous schooling in their home country.[1] The discussion in this chapter will thus include a review of the key factors of the wider context which forms the beliefs and principles underpinning Chinese and Vietnamese writing traditions. The review suggests the need to look at the context shaping these written discourses in interpreting instances of Chinese and Vietnamese students' writing rather than relying only on cognitive and linguistic factors.

The discussion in this chapter also shows that even though international students may have preferred ways of writing, which are to some extent shaped by their distinctive writing tradition, their writing in the host institution may also depend on a web of personal variables. That is, international students' writing practices can vary as these are affected by individual students' values, their strategies in locating themselves in the new academic context and their language proficiency even though most need to meet the cut-off IELTS score of 6 to gain entry to most of Australian universities. With respect to the above aspects, the discussion in this chapter is informed by research concerning issues of writing across cultures, contrastive rhetoric, Chinese and Vietnamese composition traditions, intercultural communication and teaching international students.

The first part of this chapter will focus on how international students' writing is characterised by their distinctive academic writing traditions, including particular ways of constructing their arguments, interacting with the audience and positioning themselves in writing. Next, a review of Chinese and Vietnamese writing traditions will be presented in order to highlight what may constitute Chinese and Vietnamese students' prior

[1] Fox, 1994; Connor, 1996; Cadman, 1997, 2000; Ryan, 2000; Connor, 2004; Wang, 2011

writing practices and how these may offer clues in interpreting students' negotiation of disciplinary writing in Australian higher education. The third part of the chapter will discuss how and why culturally preferred ways of writing should be seen as fluid and variable amongst individual writers.

International students from distinctive writing traditions

Entering the new context of higher education in English medium institutions, international students often bring with them different expectations of academic writing from their distinctive academic writing traditions. Their different interpretations of the approaches to writing are marked by a host of factors including the ways they have learnt to see the world, the ways of valuing and constructing knowledge, the ways of communicating with the audience and organising discourse.[2] Therefore, analytical, descriptive or reproductive approaches should perhaps be viewed as different logical ways of making sense of the world and making meaning in writing in different cultures. In the same vein, Ryan recognises that as international students come from different cultures, they may prefer different cognition and learning styles.[3] From this perspective, international students have been brought up with particular ways of interpreting and describing the world and of reflecting this in their writing. There are, therefore, particular approaches to knowledge in different cultures which may have impact on international students' interpretation of the ways to construct an argument in writing.

Contrastive rhetoric is concerned with the preferred cultural patterns of thinking and writing amongst students from different cultures.[4] Kaplan highlights the different rhetorical organisations of ideas in different writing traditions. Indicated in his "doodles" article in 1966 is the transfer of first language writing conventions to second language writing practice. Kaplan's research offers insights into how second language texts are constructed.[5] His article has, however, been disputed for generalising the writing approach of different language groups, for example all Asians as "Oriental" who use an "indirect approach".[6] Also, Kaplan's argument about culture-specific patterns of writing appears to place much emphasis

[2] For example, McKay, 1993; Fox, 1994; Connor, 1996; Cadman, 1997; Wang, 2011
[3] Ryan, 2000, 11.
[4] Kaplan, 1966; Purves, 1988; Connor, 1997.
[5] Kaplan, 1966.
[6] Hyland, 2003a, 46.

on rhetorical styles while leaving the influence of the culture-situated factors on forming these rhetorical styles unexplored.[7] Thus, it is necessary to explore how student writers learn what counts as good and sophisticated writing in different cultures.

Contrastive rhetoric tends to rely on the analysis of actual finished texts to explore writing practices of students from multicultural backgrounds. However, it seems insufficient to base the study of written discourse on only the surface of texts. In the past two decades, research into the area of academic writing has recognised the significance of the process involved in writing texts.[8] Hence, in addition to the written product, internal and external factors which affect the writing process which student writers have gone through are worth being studied. Furthermore, early contrastive rhetoric, which made generalisations about the first language "thought patterns" of students based only on the examination of their second language writing, reveals the deterministic view of the writers' cultural backgrounds.[9] Such generalisations alone, which do not draw on evidence about students' reflection on their intentions in constructing texts, may not be considered reliable information for teachers.[10] This view offers the grounding for the selection of *talk around text* model in the research design of this study. This framework enables the students in this study to reflect on the process and practice involved in writing their own texts. Thus, it offers an insightful interpretation of student writing, which looks beyond the surface of the texts and the generalisations about student-writers' cultural backgrounds to account for the complexity of the diverse factors that may affect students' writing.

When international students learn to write in a specific discipline in the host institution, they may encounter challenges which go far beyond the level of study skills and language forms in writing. The challenges may lie in the mismatches between their own culture-situated interpretations of approaches to knowledge and academic writing and the specific requirements of a distinct discipline in the English medium host instituion. This proposes that Chinese and Vietnamese international students' negotiation of disciplinary writing appears to be related to the mediation of the ways of writing into which they have been socialised and the disciplinary requirements embedded in the whole system of ideologies in the new institutional context. International students' academic writing is at the same time the endeavour to mediate between the different sources of

[7] Connor, 1996.
[8] Raimes, 1983; Zamel, 1987; Caulk, 1994; Jordan, 1997; Badger & White, 2000.
[9] Leki, 1991; Matsuda, 2001b; Hyland, 2003a.
[10] Matsuda, 2001b.

identities rooted in their personal experiences and the academic writing requirements in their new institution.

The ways one conceptualises knowledge and constructs arguments in writing appear to influence their approaches to building up their own position and nurturing their identity in writing.[11] Cadman recognises international students' identities as learners are shaped by the epistemological orientation of their own culture.[12] Her research illustrates the challenges facing international research students which come from "the ways in which the students as researchers approach their projects and the sense of identity which informs their approach".[13] Thus, international students may cherish in their disciplinary writing multiple identities which are embedded in their different approaches to knowledge or in the different epistemologies of the educational system and culture they were previously familiarised with. As a result, multiple identities as student-writers have led to the characterisation of international student writing in higher education as being complex and diverse.

As discussed, different attitudes towards the construction of knowledge and the discourse structure with which students have been brought up during their prior schooling and socialised in their current academic context may help to build up their different interpretations of academic writing. Thus, the study of international students' mediation of academic writing in the host institution is associated with not only what the conventions and expectations of the academic discipline in the new context are but also what constitutes their prior academic writing traditions. These values should be investigated from the perspectives of both international students and lecturers in their discipline since they may be differently interpreted by individual international students and lecturers representing a specific discipline. The issue of Vietnamese and Chinese international students' mediation of different writing values will need to be explored in relation to Vietnamese and Chinese writing traditions, which will be the focus of the following section.

Chinese and Vietnamese writing traditions

This section will discuss features of Chinese and Vietnamese writing traditions and the underlying factors from which these features emerge. It will be argued that Vietnam and China belong to unique culturally, socially and historically based writing traditions. The review indicates the

[11] Fox, 1994; Connor, 1996; Cadman, 1997, 2000
[12] Cadman, 1997, 3.
[13] *Ibid*, 8