

Chapter 28

Academic Integrity: Exploring Issues of Plagiarism Facing Chinese Students in New Zealand Universities

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ABSTRACT

Student plagiarism is a pervasive issue at all levels of study in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world. Plagiarism is considered as a cultural phenomenon and students from certain cultures are often stereotyped as ‘persistent plagiarists’. This chapter reports the findings of a research project and examines the issues of academic dishonesty reported by Chinese students in New Zealand universities. Four lecturers and six university graduates participated in the interviews and the focus group discussion. The study has identified seven forms of disguised plagiarism deriving from four interrelated variables: inadequate language proficiency, lack of discipline knowledge and conventions, issues of assessment, and situational variables. The university is morally responsible to teach the students the concept of Academic Integrity (AI) and plagiarism, discipline conventions and rules of games in academic writing, and develop their language, writing, and research skills to help them avoid the traps of plagiarism.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand is one of the top study destinations for international students. In 2014, 111,984 international students studied in New Zealand; over 80% of them were Asian students (Massey University, 2013). Chinese students accounted for 30% of the total. International education, the fifth largest export industry in the country, has contributed NZD \$2.6 billion to the New Zealand economy and created 28,000 jobs annually (Fishman, 2009).

In New Zealand, Chinese international students have been stereotyped and stigmatized by the media as ones without caring about Academic Integrity (AI), as cheats, plagiarists, and academic criminals (Hann & Bennetts, 2007; Ma, 2013; Van Beynen, Lee, & Dudding, 2013). This statement is illustrative

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of the academics' perceptions of Chinese students: 'Not all Chinese students cheat but most cheaters are Chinese.... This behaviour is insidious and corrosive' (Redden, 2007). In 2006, the University Waikato reported 222 cases of academic misconduct and 143 cases involved Chinese international students (Hartevelt, 2009). There was a drop in the number of international students found guilty of cheating at the university from 222 in 2006, to 200 in 2009; more than 40% of the academic misconduct was committed by Chinese students, and 22% by New Zealand Europeans (University of Waikato, 2009). Jones (2014) reported that in 2013, more than 540 cases of cheating, mostly by Chinese students, were dealt with by New Zealand universities, such as buying assignments and essays from ghostwriters, forging signature, and using phones to cheat in examinations.

In 2013, the New Zealand newspaper *Sunday Star-Times* revealed the startling outcome of its investigation of a long-standing company, Assignment4U run by a Chinese, that used tutors, lecturers, and specialists from inside and outside New Zealand to write assignments ordered by Mandarin-speaking Chinese at New Zealand Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Van Beynen et al., 2013). Many Chinese international students were involved in the academic misconduct. The report stunned New Zealand universities and the Ministry of Education. The company was forced to close down. Two reports by *The Press*, entitled "Chinese students 'biggest cheats'" (published on the front page on 28 February 2007) and "Cheating is an acceptable part of Chinese culture" (published on page A19 on 3 March 2007), caused a tremendous wrath in the Chinese community in Christchurch (Redden, 2007). A protest letter to the editor of *The Press* by the Chinese community in Christchurch (2007) stated,

The wording and the headlines of the two articles clearly conveys [sic] discriminatory and misleading messages which have unjustly inflicted much pain on local Chinese communities and international students. They have humiliated and insulted the entire Chinese community.

The letter demanded *The Press* to make a sincere apology to the Chinese community on the front page of the newspaper, stop insulting Chinese students and the community as a whole, and stop publishing any discriminatory and insulting articles in the future.

Academic misbehavior is not unique to Chinese students only; it has been an academic 'epidemic' and a global 'unresolved problem' (Gipp, 2014) among students of all cultural backgrounds at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Bista, 2011; Chapman & Lupton, 2004; Perry, 2010). It is considered as an uncontrollable 'pandemic' that threaten the reverence for AI and originality (Adler-Kassner, Anson, & Howard, 2008). It is unfair to single out Chinese students only (Dudding, 2013; Redden, 2007). The concentration of Chinese students in certain HEIs and certain countries may be an explanation for a high percentage of academic dishonesty. Ali (2016) described academic dishonesty in the UK as 'plagiarism epidemic'.

According to Ali (2016), almost 50,000 students from 129 UK universities, were caught cheating in the past three years, students from outside the EU being 'the worst offenders'. The number of academic misconduct rocketed compared to the figure reported in 2012 when 45,000 students were caught cheating at Britain's 80 universities (McCabe & Treviño, 1993). In a survey by Texas Tech University in 2010, nearly three quarters (74.2%) of the student participants admitted having engaged in one of the academic dishonesty behaviors (Michaels & Miethe, 1987). The data collected from 11 Canadian universities by Hughes and McCabe (2006) showed that 18% of undergraduates and 9% of postgraduates admitted serious test cheating, and 53% of undergraduates and 35% of postgraduates admitted serious cheating in written work. In Australia, Visentin (2015) reported that around 1,000 students from 16 universities

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