

Report on educational practices in China

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Disclaimer:

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Under subproject A – the country visits to China, India and Greece – our intention was to compile information for staff in British higher education institutions to better understand and relate to the diversity in their classrooms, especially on taught postgraduate programmes in business and management studies that have come to enrol large number of students from overseas. The resources are designed specifically to help lecturers and other university staff appreciate student’s previous experiences and to support them in supporting their students.

During the country visit to China we sought to learn about the HE system primarily in terms of educational practices at tertiary level that would be relevant to those students that would continue their education in the UK. None of the outputs seek to represent and attend to HE systems in their entirety. The report on China refers to research conducted in Mainland China only.

Introduction

This report seeks to inform HE staff and senior managers in British universities about educational practices in China, especially on the type of courses from which students transfer onto taught programmes in business and management studies in British universities. Masters programmes in the UK are typically short (commonly between nine and twelve months) and it is crucial that students are adequately prepared for studying in a context that differs considerably from that in China. The report seeks to enable decision-making about the mechanisms by which students from China are introduced to their new higher education institution (HEI) in the UK - including recruitment, induction, teaching, assessment as well as issues relating to information literacy, academic writing and plagiarism deterrence as well as welfare.

The report is not intended as a quick 'how to' guide on 'best practice' induction for this is likely to differ between institutions, in line with their student profile and their recruitment criteria and mechanisms. However, the conclusion does suggest a number of areas and ways in which students from China might be supported.

Chapter one offers a short overview of higher education in China, outlining basic details about how students enter the tertiary sector, the length of studies and states the responsibilities and relationships between different governmental bodies and HEIs. It seeks to provide a brief orientation only. Chapter two explains the methodological approach taken and provides details of the research conducted in China. Chapter three reports on the research findings of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing Project, which are set in the context of the available literature on educational practices in Chinese HEIs.

Chapter three is divided into the following sub sections:

1. Section one briefly sketches the major influences on the historical development of higher education in China. Two periods are of particular relevance: Confucian ideas still reverberate within the Chinese learning context and socialist models have structured organisations and expectations of various participants. Both of these influences are briefly considered; the interplay with market forces is examined more closely in later sections. This section also provides an overview of the characteristics (and/or stereotypes) associated with 'Chinese learners' in the literature, especially in regard to 'rote learning'. Lastly, it offers some statistical information detailing the current transfer of students from China into British universities.
2. Section two explores in more detail the contemporary factors that shape HE in China. It starts off by looking at the national entrance exam and what it means for students to compete at that level. It moves on to consider recent HE reforms and summarises their effects in terms of the restructuring of institutions, HE funding and HE management. Moreover, it notes how it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between high status public sector institutions and their lower status private affiliates. Finally, it considers how the dramatic increase in students has led to graduate unemployment and how graduates and employers are adapting to this situation (and how this impacts on the final year of undergraduate studies)

3. Section three provides a detailed picture of daily lives within China's public universities. Originally set up according to the socialist model of a collective work-unit, the *danwei*, members of the university were not simply working or studying in an institution, they were also subject to political controls and developed social networks and benefited from a particular kind of social welfare system. This is to say, members' participation also produced identifications with a place and a particular group of people, and it generated a sense of belonging. Over the past decades the role of the work-unit is steadily diminishing, and the section also explores what that means for Chinese Universities and their members.
4. Section four looks at the actual teaching that goes on at undergraduate level. It also examines the special nature of staff student relationships and summarises assessment practices.
5. Section five focuses on the central status of libraries as a place for student learning (though not research, which is a crucial distinction) and examines the special role of the textbook at Chinese universities. Students' access to and use of a variety of study materials is investigated and levels of information literacy at undergraduate level are explored.
6. Section six provides an indication of what and how students write as part of their undergraduate studies. Throughout the academic year students are required to submit a large number of (unassessed) pieces of writing, few of which compare with a traditional essay in the UK context; though other types of homework are a common feature. The most substantial piece of writing is completed in the final year of study: the undergraduate dissertation. However, increasingly employability concerns and internships contribute to the erosion of students' engagement with research and writing in their final year.
7. Section seven looks at how a growing concern with plagiarism is increasingly being addressed by some institutions (though not all). The very top institutions are beginning to put plagiarism policies into place, but many students are receiving conflicting advice in terms of what is expected of them. There is no clear sector-wide response to the issues and it is probably naïve to assume that students who transfer from China onto UK graduate programmes will understand what is expected of them in terms of referencing conventions and appreciate the scale of (some) penalties applied in the British context.

Chapter four relates the findings from our research in China to the British HE environment, i.e. it highlights issues that UK universities might wish to address with newly arriving students from China – not only at induction, but in the way in which students are taught throughout the academic year – to ensure that they are equipped to handle the conventions and expectations within their new educational environment.

For a shorter and more general overview of undergraduate education in China (or India, or Greece), readers may wish to refer to the website of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing Project. It provides access to a number of short films (10-15 minutes) on educational practices in each of these countries as well as additional reports and resources. It also offers materials that might be used during recruitment and as part of induction of new students.

Prior to publication this report was read and commented on by other members of the team (and others). These comments are gratefully received. However, it is important to stress that this report is based on the personal interpretations of the author.

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1. Overview of Chinese higher education system

Since the late 1990s the Chinese higher education sector has experienced a doubling in student numbers. The fact that this happened in less than a decade attests to the continuing relevance of central political control and planning. Growth in the private sector has been sizeable also, but this is not simply a matter of rising numbers of private colleges – state-run institutions themselves are increasingly adopting market-driven strategies.

Chinese compulsory education extends over a nine year period (from age six to age 15). It is then followed by Senior Secondary education, which lasts three years. During this period of high school students are streamed into either *like* – sciences and maths – or *wenke*, i.e. arts and humanities (Turner & Acker 2004).¹ Aged eighteen students undergo the highly selective national entrance exams, the *Gao Kao*, which determines entry into university. Undergraduate degrees normally last for four years; longer in medical courses and some specialised engineering institutes.²

China has the largest HE system in the world. In 2004 there were 1,731 regular colleges and universities in China, which educate 13,334,969 undergraduates. In recent years many institutions have merged and / or diversified and new ones have opened (see section 3.2 below). On considering the student numbers at individual Chinese Universities it emerges that they are huge institutions – often with several large campuses spread across the city.

There is also a smaller adult education sector that has 505 adult colleges and universities, which enrolled 4,197,956 adult university students (Zhou, 2006, p.17). Other forms of HE, such as distance education, self-study examinations, online courses and lifelong learning initiatives have also become a government priority in recent years.

Mainstream university education (of the type described in this report) is still considered an elitist endeavour – largely due to the students' long and intense preparations for the national exams that govern entry (see section 3.3 below). Until 2001 China also operated age and marital restrictions for regular universities, i.e. students had to be unmarried, healthy and below the age of 25. Whilst a medical exam is still mandatory, the other restrictions have been lifted; greater provisions for part-time studies (alongside work) and loans have also been made centrally. Nevertheless, the majority of students in regular universities still tend to fit this profile: those who

1 Acker and Turner explain: "Final streaming depends on a number of factors: educational achievements to date and student preferences are taken into account. However, in general about 75% of students are streamed into like and 25% into wenke. In spite of this, a disproportionate number of women are streamed into the humanities area. This builds on a discriminatory set of admissions requirements for men and women where women are required to achieve higher marks to gain access to science subjects than men. It is also because humanities are viewed by male students and teachers as less desirable subjects for study. From the beginning of the PCR and especially during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, significant stigma attached to intellectuals who were pursuing humanities subjects." (2004, p.38).

2 The major fields of study offered in China are (in order of distribution of undergraduates): Engineering (almost 4,5 million students), Management (almost three million students), Literature (just over two million students), followed by Sciences, Medical Sciences, Economics, Education, Law, Agronomy, History and Philosophy (Figures and distribution are taken from Zhou (2006, p.15).

pass the exams go to university straight after finishing secondary school and they tend to study full time.³

The majority of students leave their hometown and family to attend university. They usually live in university dormitories where rooms are shared by students attending the same programme. Between six and eight students share a room throughout their studies and this means that students on the same course get to know one another extremely well; they learn to cooperate both in- and outside the classroom (see section 3.3, which explores this set up). During the first year all students take part in centralised educational provision for certain subjects, i.e. political education and English language courses. Traditionally the final year was taken up by the graduation thesis, but this is rapidly changing (see section 3.7). Alongside their academic programme, students take part in compulsory physical education which is conducted collectively on campus.

It is important to note huge geographical differences in wealth and development between the East of the country (especially the mega-cities located along the South Eastern seaboard: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou) and the North, West and interior of the country, which feature many impoverished rural areas. This distinction has also historically operated at the level of higher education institutions, which tended to cluster in the largest coastal cities (see section 3.2, which explains recent structural reforms to the HE sector).⁴

The HE sector is regulated through the Higher Education Law, which sets out the guiding principle, goals, nature, tasks and responsibilities, roles, training targets, etc. It came into force in 1998 and has meant greater autonomy for the individual HEIs. Higher education policy is formulated by the State Council in consultation with the Ministry of Education, which acts as the executive body in charge of education and is responsible for central administration and provides guidance with regard to national education planning and funding (section 3.2 provides further details). Responsibility for the running of institutions has been passed on to provincial governments, which now run their own education departments and which in turn are expected to grant institutions greater autonomy.⁵

Since the mid-nineties the Chinese government has been preparing a framework for private HE institutions and these have grown significantly: from 21 colleges in 1996 to 226 colleges – certified by the Ministry of Education – and enrolling 1,4 million students, i.e. around 10% of the total Chinese student population (Zhou, 2006, p.58).⁶

3 Part-time study is possible, but less so in regular colleges.

4 Students from the interior already struggle with the less good secondary school provision. Those who qualify through the national entrance exams travel eastwards to gain access to good institutions, but financially it is becoming increasingly difficult. Gender too is an important differentiating factor when it comes to access to HE (see Turner, 2008 for a summary). Turner notes that “Very few women in China today have the opportunity to participate in education beyond the most basic level.” (2004, p.29). Furthermore, women who do participate in HE are more likely to opt for private or overseas education.

5 The State Council still maintains direct responsibility for a small number of elite HE institutions, i.e. those that are considered of national importance, though their number has been reduced from 367 to 111 (Zhou, 2006, p.10). Some HE institutions are affiliated with central cities. Most universities, however, are administered by the provincial governments nowadays.

6 A multitude of additional private institutions exist outside the degree-awarding track.

In the past, participation in Chinese HE guaranteed employment opportunities: the government paid students' university fees and government personnel departments assigned jobs to graduates (Xiaohuan, 2002, p.81). This process operated in such a way that graduates had little choice in their careers (Min, 1999, p.13) but formed an integral part of higher education during the socialist period of the PCR. Since the reforms in the 1980s university fees have gradually been introduced and are now obligatory. Students' tuition payments account for approximately 15-20% of the actual education expenses incurred (Xiaohuan, 2002, pp.171). Fees are normally paid by the students' parents, though scholarships and loans are available also.

As educational opportunities have increased and alternative routes have been developed in recent years – through the private sector and students' ability to study abroad – graduates are increasingly struggling to find jobs and this is in turn effecting their choices and actions during and after their undergraduate studies (see section 3.2).

Provision for graduate studies in China has been low in the past, but has quadrupled since 1998/99. In 2004 there were 819,896 graduate students in China. Graduate student numbers are expected to increase further, according to Liu & Liu (2005). For Masters' degrees, access is again regulated through entrance exams, which are held internally (rather than on a national basis). As demand for postgraduate qualifications is rising in China (probably also as a way to gain an edge over competitors and / or to mask graduate unemployment), post-graduate pathways are undergoing a major transformation: study periods are changing and there is an increased focus on professional and vocational routes.⁷

⁷ Taught graduate degrees have historically taken very long and served as a preparation for doctoral studies, which took up a shorter time. Increasingly the structure of these programmes mirrors the format of Western programmes, i.e. shorter (two year) taught degrees are taken by larger numbers of students who then join the labour market. Others stay on to undertake three year doctoral studies.

2. Methodology for country visits

This report is one of three – the other two being about higher education in India and Greece. Some elements of the methodology are common to all three countries and these are reported first. The specifics of the visit to China can be found in the latter part of this section (for example, the number of institutions visited, mechanisms of access, etc.). All participants in the study were promised anonymity and hence data reported is not attributed to specific institutions, departments or individuals.

2.1 Approach to fieldwork

The application for research funding for the SDAW project was based on a number of pilot studies. Focus groups had been conducted with groups of international students during the academic years 2003/04 (at the LSE) and 2004/05 (both at Lancaster and the LSE), by Niall Hayes and Lucas Introna, who were also leading the MSc programme at Lancaster. These sessions were taped and provided an early indication of educational practices in China, India and Greece.

With the beginning of the actual SDAW project in January 2005 the team (complemented by Edgar Whitley and Anja Timm) compiled a new schedule of questions for focus groups which were conducted in the academic year 2005/06. A second round of focus groups – with the same students – took place after they had submitted their first assessed essay and this provided more detailed pointers in terms of students' writing practices.⁸

In terms of research tools, several versions of the schedule of questions were put together for different groups of interviewees (students, staff, and other relevant parties involved in the transfer of international students to the UK or knowledgeable about students' transitions). The basic set of questions was asked during fieldwork in all three countries and by all researchers. Other questions were added as new and specific information emerged. For example, in Greece, the political context emerged as particularly relevant and in India we were trying to understand what it meant to operate with a centralized syllabus. And in the context of Chinese Universities, we enquired specifically into the role of class monitors (which turned out to be less important than originally assumed).

During the overseas visits we intended to conduct research only at the type of institutions which actually supplied students to the UK (and more specifically to universities such as Lancaster and the LSE). To identify those which most closely matched these criteria, we consulted current and past students' files (going back 3 years) on taught graduate programmes in business and management studies.⁹ In this way we established a concrete list of 'sending' universities as well as a list of the type

⁸ The revised schedule based on the focus group questions was piloted during the first visit to Greece (in March 2005). At the time we were also exploring the use of a questionnaire – both in the UK and during the country visits. The SDAW Project questionnaire was in part based on the Academic Integrity Survey produced by Don McCabe. A number of questions that were originally developed for the questionnaire were subsequently moved into the schedule of questions for interviews and focus groups.

⁹ Social science type business and management programmes were prioritised over those with a mainly quantitative focus (accounting, finance, economics) as issues of academic writing were less pronounced in these.

of subjects that would have been studied at undergraduate level (Note: these differed in the various countries).

The organisation of country visits drew heavily on the various prior contacts, i.e. former colleagues, former students, university friends, etc. We also sought the advice of the units of the two universities that might provide knowledge and or contacts (International Office, Alumni Office, Recruitment Office, Branch Offices) as well as the British Council. These contacts varied in utility and relevance for each of the three countries.

We began to set up the visits several weeks prior to our trips. Sometimes we had to write (cold) to the director, VC, or international Office; in other cases we had names of programme directors or lecturers who we contacted directly. All visits were timed so as not to interfere (and in turn be limited by) the busy start of the year, with religious or national holidays and / or with exam periods. We formally requested a visit to the institution and asked for interviews with teaching staff and officials (where necessary) and requested that we would be allowed to sit in on lectures and that focus groups with students be set up on our behalf. We also asked to be granted a tour of the campus, including the library.

Visits varied in duration and intensity: sometimes we would visit for several days, at other times we were in attendance for no more than a few hours. We sought to balance the organised programme (whenever there was one) with everyday type of activities, e.g. we ate in the canteen, used the campus photocopy shops, internet cafes, etc. to facilitate conversations with staff and students. We also sought opportunities for participant observation wherever possible, i.e. attending lectures *ad hoc*, visiting libraries independently (which allowed us to check out collections, access arrangements and student use). In addition we conducted interviews with the British Council teams, education agents, alumni and local colleagues. Some British Council offices kindly arranged focus groups for us. We also attended education fairs where possible in an effort to appreciate the diversity of students coming to the UK and their concerns about studying abroad.

Most of the interviews and focus groups that we conducted were tape recorded; though not all. Sometimes it seemed inappropriate to even ask, at other times interviewees were uncomfortable and sometimes there was simply no location that allowed for audio recording (noisy overhead fans, etc.). Research interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, i.e. based on our schedule of questions (at least at the outset). We also took photographs and collected hard data whenever possible, e.g. we photocopied exam questions, bought or photocopied books, journals and textbooks, collected instructions and lecture notes such as they were available to students as well as flyers, etc. The taped data was transcribed and analysed together with the other data.

2.2 Visits to China

We conducted two separate visits to China. Lucas Introna and Niall Hayes spent two weeks in Guangdong in September 2006 visiting three institutions (four person weeks).

Anja Timm spent six weeks in Beijing and Shanghai in March and April 2007; Edgar Whitley spent two weeks in Shanghai (together, eight person weeks). The two visits made up 12 person weeks in total. Through our enquiries to other researchers, we had anticipated that access to Chinese Universities might be quite complicated (these are fantastically large scale and complex institutions) and this turned out correct. Our enquiries were further limited by our lack of language skills. It was through personal contacts that the best opportunities for research arose. Whilst we are grateful for the access that was granted to us at several institutions – without which this report could not have been written – it should also be acknowledged that the most revealing conversations tended to be informal ones with people that we had met across different contexts, i.e. UK and China, on and off campus, etc.¹⁰

Our own efforts to represent educational practices at undergraduate level are supplemented by those of others, e.g. the fascinating rendition of Chinese university structures and educational practices by Huhua Ouyang (captured during the project conference on video and available at www.sdaw.info and exemplified by his publications), especially his PhD thesis (2004), which is available in English (see bibliography). We are also indebted to Yvonne Turner for her help and support throughout the project.¹¹ Her work on Chinese HE education and the integration of Chinese students into British universities is highly relevant to the project (see bibliography); her contribution to the project conference is available at www.sdaw.info.¹²

In total we visited 11 institutions in China.¹³ Niall Hayes and Lucas Introna visited three HEIs in Guangzhou. Anja Timm visited four institutions in Beijing and was joined in Shanghai by Edgar Whitley, where they visited another five institutions. Reflecting the intake of graduate students from China on to BMS subjects (in the UK), we investigated educational practices at undergraduate level in various subject areas: engineering & technology, banking, business administration and management studies, as well as social science and humanities programmes. Among the institutions visited were also several language studies universities.

All of the universities visited are located in the coastal mega-cities in the East, e.g. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou where we had some prior contacts. We had written to other universities – both other well recognised ones (in the somewhat ‘smaller’ cities) and those who were nearer the bottom of the *Project 211* list (section 3.2

10 Turner notes in relation to her own research: “Historically, within Chinese culture, the development of conditions of trust have been an important prerequisite for achieving openness in social interactions (Tsui, Farh and Xin, 2000). In addition, China’s recent political history has sensitized personal information-disclosure and its uses.” (2004, p.14).

11 Dr Yvonne Turner worked at Newcastle University Business School before taking up her current post at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

12 Another relevant set of project data is provided by a set of interviews conducted with newly arrived students from China about their experiences as undergraduates in Chinese HEIs. The videoed interviews were conducted and edited by two Lancaster media students, Chris Smithson and XiaoJing Min. These conversations were filmed whilst the Chinese students were undertaking pre-sessional English courses in Lancaster and area available on the project website, www.sdaw.info.

13 None of the institutions we visited were ‘pure’ private sector institutions – though we did visit private colleges affiliated to established public sector universities. See Turner & Acker (2002) for an in-depth study of this sector and its influence on mainstream HE in China.

provides a basic classification of Chinese HE and explains this term) – but these ‘cold contacts’ were ultimately unsuccessful.¹⁴

The establishments visited were exclusively drawn from the top 100 Chinese institutions according to the *NETBIG* ranking provided by the newspaper *China Youth Daily*. Those happy to grant us access were clearly confident that their practices would stand up to scrutiny. This is not to say that we suspect other educational institutions of being engaged in disreputable practices. Rather, less well known institutions are less likely to have encountered Western university representatives – as business partners and / or research collaborators – and it would have probably needed significantly more time, language skills and diplomacy on our part to establish a connection. Our findings are not meant to be representative of educational practices in Chinese Universities. Rather, they are intended to be indicative of the kinds of practices that students who transfer into graduate programmes in the UK are likely to have encountered previously.

¹⁴ It should also be noted that many of the top Chinese institutions are over-subscribed with Western visitors and have evolved very PR savvy and strategic international offices that deal with such contacts and vet visitors in terms of potential collaborations. We are not sure how these offices would have looked at our request for research access.

3. Thematic presentation of Chinese data

3.1 Introduction

Schools have been operating in China's territory for over 3,000 years. However, modern higher education was not implemented until the early 20th century. Since then major political developments, such as the collapse of the imperial system, subsequent fragmentation and partial colonisation and the founding of the People's Republic and its various periods have resulted in several major shifts in education policy and provision. According to Turner and Acker (2004), these changes affected fundamental principles such as the role of HE in society: from the maintenance of the imperial, moral order (with elitist access arrangements) to a mechanism to bring about equality and modernisation in the socialist period (with correspondingly wider student recruitment).

Two other aspects of Chinese higher education are often overlooked:

- Firstly, there have been several important periods of international involvement. Japanese, British, American and Russian ideas and models influenced Chinese HE at different points in time (Turner & Acker, 2004).
- Secondly, private education and private schools are "deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition of education" (Zhou, 2006, p.2). The current rise of private HE institutions is by no means a new phenomenon.

During the present reform period HE provision in China is expanding at an unprecedented speed and volume: with over 20 million students enrolled in various HEIs, China is the largest higher education system in the world (Liu & Liu, 2005). Moreover, the student participation rate (in the relevant age group) has risen from just below ten percent to almost 20 percent since the mid 1990s. The Indian HE system is somewhat similar in scale, though its participation rate of just about 10% compares unfavourably; total HE enrolment numbers in India are nearer ten million.¹⁵

This introduction sets up some contextual background factors that have an important bearing on the situations that we encountered during our fieldwork in China.

Confucian influences

This sub section provides historical background information on Confucianism, which remains highly relevant to contemporary pedagogical ideas and practices.¹⁶ It draws heavily on the work of Turner & Acker (2004) and Turner (2006). In the education context, China is often referred to as a 'Confucian heritage culture' (or CHC), i.e. as influenced by the ideas and writings of the philosopher and educator Confucius who lived between 551 and 479BC (this label is also applied to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea and Japan).

¹⁵ The figure of 20 million includes some six million students enrolled in continuing education at various levels (Liu & Liu, 2005). Non-degree students are not included in comparable Indian statistics.

¹⁶ The intention is to prepare readers for section 3.4, which explores Confucian influences within teaching today and for the teacher student relationship.

Turner explains that “Confucianism strongly equates learning and ‘knowledge’ – learning functions as the process of factual and tangible knowledge acquisition, within a cognitive taxonomy (..). A strong traditional value is placed upon ‘wisdom’, characterised as gerontocratic and male (..). Within this value system, education is part of a ritual progress through life, conferring a ‘social passport’ to adulthood.” (2006, pp.31). Historically, “The Confucian scholar-gentleman became the apotheosis of social success in the Imperial age” (Turner & Acker, 2002, p.13). At the time, however, teaching was informal – teachers (or tutors) were hired individually – in order to prepare the children of wealthy communities for the all important imperial examinations.

Turner & Acker go on to explain: “China was for several centuries, one of the largest and most powerful countries in the world, unchallenged and unthreatened either militarily or economically. The fundamentally inward-looking nature of scholasticism in the Confucian education system, however, contained inherent rigidities that came together to confound China’s ability to participate in the 19th century’s international industrial and economic developments. Inflexibility in curriculum, for example was linked with a meditative approach to achieving deeper learning that frequently emerged as rote repetition and memorization (various in Biggs and Watkins 1996). The marginalization of science and mathematics contributed to the nation’s lack of industrial and economic development. Within a few decades China was swept from its position as an economic and political super-power to become a colonized, fractured dependency.” (Turner & Acker, 2002, p.14).

In response to historical events – and perceived military and political humiliation – education was re-considered and the idea of a “modern-yet-Confucian” emerged which sought to incorporate some Western learning into its established framework. Following the downfall of the Empire China’s educational system became more outward looking and more formal educational provision was introduced. In addition, missionary schools added to the influence of Western ideas and pedagogy in China. The Japanese model of education also gained currency, partly because it had “successfully integrated the opposing philosophies of Western and Eastern...” (Turner & Acker, 2002, p.17). However, these philosophical and political influences were ultimately limited (none of the schools integrating non-Chinese ideas and practices became established within China). With the decay of the imperial system, there was a spiritual void left by the discontinuation of state Confucianism, although Confucian philosophy remained influential within the family-unit.

According to Zhou, in 1947 there were 207 universities in China. Just over half of these were government institutions (107), the remainder were either private ones (79) or church (missionary) colleges (21). There were 150,000 students at the time (Zhou, 2006, p.6). Following on from a period of social disintegration, conflict and chaos, China’s educational provision regained new impetus with the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949.

Socialist models and interventions

Turner and Acker explain: "During the early years, a new model of education was embedded in China, though still a model adopted from outside, from the Soviet Union. In Mao's view, the USSR had moved a long way along the path of industrial modernization and, therefore, had much to offer China, especially in terms of expertise and support. The USSR was also prepared to assist with financial aid and technical expertise." (2002, p.21). Universal primary education was introduced and universities became focused on providing vocational education for the workers that were to drive economic growth. However, despite the wholesale organisational reorientation towards new political and economic goals, "[t]he methods of teaching remained firmly didactic, working out the master-disciple relationships which had characterized the Confucian approach." (ibid., p.21). In turn the education system was seen as an obstacle to the egalitarian ambitions of the party. Hitherto, education in China had been a conservative, urban and intellectual pursuit and was increasingly considered antithetical to the socialist revolution that idealised peasants and factory workers (Turner & Acker, 2004, p.21).

The privileged and educated elite – and teachers and educators in general – were increasingly regarded as politically suspicious and eventually became a target of policy and action. During the Cultural Revolution (between 1966 and 1977) China's formal education system was disrupted. All university activities were suspended. Once the education system was reconstituted (in 1970) political credentials, i.e. a student's 'redness', determined entry into secondary and tertiary education and intellectual qualifications became sidelined. Eventually, however, the reforms of the Cultural Revolution were reversed and the national entrance exams for university resumed in 1977/8. Turner and Acker explain: "By 1980, the education system in China had reverted back almost completely to its pre-Cultural Revolution form." (2004, p.36).

As a result, "for many educators teaching practice adheres to the traditional didactic methods, rooted in pre-20th century Confucianism. In the main, educators are falling back on practices which they experienced in their own primary and secondary schooling. This is compounded by the fact that teacher-training programmes in China contain little in terms of teaching practice or pedagogic education (...) and focus primarily on developing intellectual expertise in subject disciplines. The traditional tension between academic freedom, intellectual enquiry and political activism remains uneasy. This limits the extent to which skills such as critical thinking, creativity and innovation, which are embedded into many international education traditions, can enter into Chinese practice." (Turner & Acker, 2002, p.27).

Socialist influences have given rise to the fact that "education is designed to be socially normative, a cornerstone of the country's economic modernisation policies (...). Political and civic education exert a strong influence on the curriculum, determining which subjects are favoured by students (sciences, not humanities) and how assessment and progression is managed." (Turner, 2006).

The central role of the teacher within Confucian ideas was outlined already, but within the context of over half a decade of socialism, teachers are expected to facilitate their

students' "formation of social and political character alongside cognitive development (...)" (Turner, 2006, p.31).

'Rote learning'

Students educated in Confucian heritage cultures are often seen as "brought up in a restrictive teaching/ learning environment, which commits them to a passive, uncritical and reproductive mode of learning and Western teachers of international students are advised accordingly.." (Biggs, 1998, p.724). However, Biggs points out that whereas "Western observers perceive fierce and overcrowded classrooms, filled with docile rote learners cramming for exams. The evidence is that CHC students use highly adaptive learning strategies and achieve better than most Western students in high level academic tasks." (ibid., p.725). Since the mid nineties - a whole range of academics have sought more closely to investigate what has come to be known as 'the paradox of the Asian learner'.

Critical of such stereotyping, Biggs and Watkins have been particularly influential in this debate (1996; 2001). Other prominent scholars are Marton and Kember – both have paid particular attention to cognitive processes. For example, Marton (1992; 1996; 2005) argues that differentiation is vital between 'mechanical memorising' and 'memorising with understanding'. Meanwhile Kember (Kember & Gow, 1990 and 1991; 1992; 2000) has explored whether Asian students' approaches to learning are essentially restricted to rote and surface learning; he concludes that they are not. Turner notes that "in Chinese learning conceptions an important contextual role exists for meditative, repetitive, memory-based approaches as vehicles to achieving deeper learning (Mok et. al, 2001 in Biggs & Watkins, eds)." (as quoted in Turner, 2004, p.32).

Our own position recognises the importance of the work done by Biggs, Kember, Marton and others to demystify some of the still prevalent assumptions about CHC learning styles, etc. However, most of these scholars are working within a psychological framework. In this report we seek to look more closely at the specific social and political context in which students in China study and how this changing environment impacts on educational practices in and around classrooms.

Chinese students abroad

Students from China make up the largest international student population globally. In 2006, there were 74,292 students from China studying in Japan, 62,582 studying in the US (where India is now the largest 'sending country') and in Australia, there were 65,543 students during the same year (Inside Higher Ed, 2007). The UK is the fourth most popular destination for students from China.

Within the UK higher education sector Chinese students represent the largest group of international students by far. In 2005/06 there were 50,755 Chinese students – compared to 19,205 students from India (statistics provided by UKCISA). The initial and rapid growth in the late 1990s was closely associated with the increasing wealth of the Chinese population and with the limited number of HE opportunities in China itself. However, over the last few intakes numbers are decreasing: they dropped by 4% between 2004/05 and 2005/06. With the increasing provision of graduate opportunities in China itself and the increased international competition for Chinese

students, it is expected that the numbers of Chinese students in the UK will decline further.

Chinese students attend a range of programmes in the UK. There will always be students who choose to go abroad because they desire an international education, due to the prestige that this provides. However, there are also concrete niche markets that the UK covers in terms of Chinese students, especially those undertaking undergraduate studies (or part thereof) outside of their home country.¹⁷ It is important to note that this report focuses on students who have graduated from Chinese universities and come to the UK to undertake taught Masters programmes in business and management studies.¹⁸

Explanation of the themes

Some of the themes outlined below are derived from the particular social, political and educational context in each of the three countries we visited and these are not necessarily comparable, i.e. they are not equally significant in each country. However, each of the themes is considered relevant in order to understand actual educational practices at undergraduate level (rather than merely the formal structures that exist). For the purposes of this project our considerations include curricular, extra-curricular and non-curricular aspects as well as the wider historical and political context.

Other themes derive from the particular research focus of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing (SDAW) Project, i.e. academic writing, information literacy and academic misconduct. These are explicitly dealt with across the three countries visited. The following list provides an overview of the themes covered by this report on undergraduate studies in China:

- Historical influences on higher education practices in China
- Contemporary background, i.e. national entrance exams, HE reforms, and employability issues
- The *Danwei* system and its ongoing transformation
- Teaching, learning and assessment in Chinese classrooms
- Library access, provision and use
- Academic Writing within the curriculum
- Misconduct policies and plagiarism

3.2 Contemporary background on Chinese undergraduate education

This section provides insights into the contemporary political and social context in which higher education institutions in China operate. It considers how the institutional landscape has been altered by recent reforms. It also seeks to classify Chinese

¹⁷ Firstly, many of those who are struggling with the national exams in China might come to the UK to sit their A-levels and will then pursue all of their studies in the UK. Other undergraduate students might attend joint programmes (2+2 or 3+1) provided by Chinese providers in conjunction with UK institutions – students study the first one or two years of their UG degree in China and then join a cohort in the UK, usually in the second year in order to gain a British qualification. When it comes to understanding or assessing Chinese student cohorts on graduate programmes overall this is likely to be an important distinction to take into account.

¹⁸ Business and management studies is the most popular subject for international students coming to the UK; it is followed by Engineering and Technology (statistics provided by UKCISA).

universities and notes the difficulties in differentiating between prestigious universities and their private affiliates. The section starts and ends with students' concerns: Firstly, it investigates what it means to compete for a university place at the national entrance exams. Lastly, it considers students increasingly uncertain pathways upon graduation.

National entrance exams

The Chinese National Entrance exams, the *Gao Kao*, is an annual event that takes place across China, in June over two days. Three subjects are mandatory: Chinese, Mathematics and a foreign language – usually English (see section 3.5). The others are chosen from either the sciences or the arts & humanities stream (as explained in chapter 1). The exams are graded on a scale from 100 to 900 points. Those who fail the exams can re-take the last year of secondary school and re-sit the exams in the following year.

According to Edwards & An, “the competition for university places in China is fierce: fewer than 10 per cent of those taking the national university entrance examination were successful before 1999 (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2004)” (quoted in Edwards & An, 2006, p.1). However, by 2007 some 10 million students participated in the exams and the number of available university places had doubled. The *Gao Kao* still serves as the determining criterion for university admission.¹⁹

Historically, the national exams in China have an important historical precedent in the Imperial examinations. China was the first country to develop entrance examinations into the imperial civil service. These exams were centrally controlled and functioned as the exclusive route for social mobility in the imperial era (Turner & Acker, 2004, citing Thomas, 1983). The imperial exams were extremely tough, required dedicated and lengthy preparation and became a model for various other countries. They were abandoned in 1905 and soon the imperial system itself collapsed.²⁰

It is no surprise then to find that in China, the chance to take part in higher education is valued very highly indeed. Two contributing factors stand out: Firstly, as noted above, higher education was discontinued during the Cultural Revolution. When the exams were reinstated, higher education was initially free (during the 1980s and 1990s). At the time central government departments were in charge of allocating jobs in the civil service or state run enterprises. This meant that students had little choice in deciding the context and nature of their work, but they did all enter secure and stable lifelong employment within the all powerful socialist state. Whilst this model of work organisation has changed significantly over the past decade (see section 3.3 on the transformation of the work-unit), graduates still have significant advantages in the labour market. A second contributing factor to the significance of the National Entrance Exam is the impact of the one-child policy which was introduced in mainland

19 Different arrangements apply to two groups of students. Firstly, a small minority of particularly high achievers at secondary school level are exempt. Secondly, some Chinese students who have studied abroad at secondary level are accepted with slightly lower grades. Anecdotal evidence suggests that increasing numbers of families are seeking to move abroad for a few years, i.e. prior to their child taking the entrance exams.

20 Whilst the content and format of the imperial exams were centrally determined, education and tuition were highly decentralised and informal: individual tutors were hired by rich communities or particular families. Confucian notions opposed the development of women and they were forbidden education (Turner & Acker, 1994, p.13). Formal education was instituted later and is now highly valued.

China in 1981. Chinese families have come to concentrate all their efforts on the advancement of their only offspring. Facilitating access to higher education commonly forms part of that and it is quite common for the years preceding the exams to become the focus of Chinese family life.

A recent BBC documentary, entitled *Chinese School* (first screened in early 2008), reported a rural family's involvement in their daughter's preparation for the *Gao Kao*. At great personal expense the family rented a school apartment for their daughter, so that no time was lost on commuting. It also showed how the mother gave up her job to concentrate on looking after her (one) daughter. This involved preparing food, bringing it to her at her desk and staying with her overnight in the room. This kind of support and care was considered necessary so that the daughter could spend long hours studying – staying up well into the night. Given this degree of parental involvement it is perhaps unsurprising that students tend to be under enormous pressures to reward their family's support. Turner notes that “[w]hen confronted with (...) college entrance examinations, which are extremely competitive, student suicides are not uncommon.” (2006, p.31).

On the campus of one highly prestigious university we spotted several small adverts pinned up. As we started chatting with a retired professor – still living in the university staff accommodation on campus – we asked for a translation of the notices. He explained that the advertisers were looking for a room for a secondary school student. Whilst the students were preparing for the national entrance exams they were hoping to stay on-site. Being on campus of one of the top ten universities in the country – and presumably living with university staff – was thought to be inspiring to the student.

In comparison with the university entrance regimes in Greece (where university entrance is regulated through the all important Pan-Hellenic exams), what was interesting in the Chinese context was that despite the importance of the entrance exams there does (as yet) not appear to be a significant number of commercial coaching or tutoring services. It seems that in China students are extremely diligent and hard working, they receive a high degree of academic and pastoral support from their teachers and their families get involved in the preparations as best as they can, too. Tutoring by previously successful candidates also exists – several of the students we spoke to were making some money on the side in this way, but it tends to be informal. Given that commercial study support exists in China for students taking international tests required for university entrance abroad it is probably only a matter of time until coaching develops commercially for the national entrance examinations.²¹

The examples cited above set the scene in terms of what it means to enter university in China: taking the national entrance exam is highly elaborate process that requires extraordinarily hard work on the part of the student who in turn relies on the support of parents, other family members and on the dedication of teachers. The exams are incredibly competitive and – given the potential benefits to the student and their

²¹ The majority of Chinese students do rely on commercial support in order to prepare for international tests, such as GMAT, TOEFL, etc. The most well known company, New Oriental, has been extraordinarily successful and is now listed on the stock market.

family – life-defining. Turner notes that “[c]ontemporary social progression is secured through education” (2006, p.33). Without a university education young people experience limits on their mobility (both social and spatial) and they will struggle to gain white collar employment. According to Min: “...recent studies on the Chinese labor market showed the rate of return of higher education in China for the younger generation is much higher than it was for the previous generation. The income of college graduates is substantially higher than that of those without higher education qualifications.” (Min, 2001). However, even with a degree, students’ transition into employment is no longer a certainty (see the discussion of employability concerns later in this section).

When the *Gao Kao* was first reinstated thirty years ago, only 1% of the test takers were able to move into higher education. Student numbers moved up incrementally initially. But as reported in the overview in chapter one, higher education has become an important focus of the recent government reforms, which has resulted in a significant increase in student numbers. The university acceptance rate reported in the BBC documentary was 50%. However, this figure belies the vast differences between institutions and it masks the different starting points for the students. For example, students from urban areas have much more ready access to good schools. Also, those competing for a place in the sciences apparently face much tougher competition than those wishing to study arts and humanities. The student featured in the BBC documentary had to perform better than half a million students to secure her place at one of China’s premier institutions (the exam requirements for a university place vary depending on the province in which the student is taking the national exam).The following section provides an overview of the recent reforms to the HE sector in China.

Recent reforms in Chinese university sector and administration

As part of the reforms from planned to market economy, the Chinese higher education sector has undergone far reaching reforms, which have affected the HE landscape, jurisdiction, institutional management and funding arrangements. As outlined above, the higher education system in China was established according to the Soviet model in the 1950s (Chen, 2001). Under the central planning each of the many different ministries (for railways, agriculture, public health, chemical industry, electronics industry, etc.) developed their own models for education and training and evolved specialized higher education institutions as needed within their sector (Min, 2001). The role of the Ministry of Education was relatively small – it was responsible for only 36 universities whereas more than 300 were run by the various other ministries. According to Min, “the Chinese higher education system was departmentalized and segmented” (2001).

As private companies began to take over state-run enterprises and the involvement of government lessened, industrial ministries were closed down and the many specialised education institutions were reassigned. According to Chen, this process was initiated as early as the mid-1980s, though essential steps were not taken until the 1990s. “The full scale restructuring movement started in 1998 (...). Institutions were required to detach from their originally affiliated departments and find their own means of

survival.” (Chen, 2001) – this usually required a merger with other institutions.²² According to Mok, “[a]ll the efforts (...) aim to eliminate the co-existence of small, specialized and duplicative disciplinary institutions, and to improve the economies of scale in the higher education sector. Rationalizing the distribution and utilization of resources and improving the quality of teaching and academic research are the most obvious imperatives...” (Mok, 2005, p.75).

Nowadays, the Ministry of Education oversees and regulates HE policy and is in charge of some 70 flagship institutions, according to Chen (2001). Meanwhile provincial level governments have not only had to assume additional responsibilities for the larger institutions, they are also increasingly expected to align educational provision with local economic development plans and priorities (Zhou, 2006, p.16).

Chen (2001) notes that by 2000 as many as 778 institutions had been restructured. There are a range of implications to this restructuring process: firstly, it can have important impacts on the institution’s position in the all important rankings. In this respect, merging with a prestigious institution might be seen as beneficial. However, Chen suggests that “mergers between larger and stronger universities tend to encounter difficulties caused by the fusion of campuses with disparate cultures and the pressure of managing large-scale universities. By contrast, the annexation of smaller and weaker institutions by bigger and stronger universities are relatively easy to carry out...” (2004). During our visits to China it emerged that institutions were entering complicated real estate sales and swaps to make sense of their dispersed campuses. The name changes that ensue from the many mergers can be confusing also (especially to outsiders).²³

Other elements of the structural reforms in the sector are related to the running of individual institutions and the competition between them. Chinese universities are now in charge of their own income streams – the state is no longer willing to assume overall responsibilities. One area of cost-recovery has been from students (as noted in section one). According to Min “In 2000, tuition at many Chinese universities was increased by about 20 percent” (2001).²⁴ Secondly, universities are setting up partnerships with private companies and with international education providers.²⁵ Dedicated central offices manage such activities and many people we spoke to mentioned the power and influence of their decisions. Manoeuvring the large Chinese HEIs through the current climate demands superior managerial cadres. Competition between the top Chinese institutions is alive and well – and as elsewhere – this is played out in the university rankings (Liu & Liu, 2005).

22 Chen goes on to note that some mergers have been more “perfunctory” than anything else, many are yet to be implemented.

23 Mok (2003, 2005) provides further insights into the drivers and dynamics of university restructuring in mainland China.

24 Yang notes that fee-paying doctoral students are becoming an important contributor – he also notes that “cash, power and influence become corrupting factors and compromise academic standards. One doctoral student at the Beijing University of Science and Technology completed an entire thesis within a week.” (Yang, 2005).

25 Yang (2004) provides insights into how one institution is reacting to the challenge of internationalisation.

Classification of Chinese HE institutions

Classifying Chinese HE institutions is no mean feat given that there are over 1,700 of them (this 2004 figure refers only to regular universities, it does not include adult colleges). As indicated in the previous sub section, in recent years the number of institutions has been shifting due to mergers and expansions and most have experienced a shift in jurisdiction. Given that this report concentrates primarily on the type of Chinese universities whose graduates might join Masters programmes in the UK, it concentrates on the more prestigious institutions.

Two Chinese government initiatives make a clear distinction between the top HE institutions and ‘the rest’:

- The 211 Project

In 1995 the Chinese State Council launched this project, which seeks to recognise and support 100 first class universities for the 21st century. By means of extraordinary financial and infrastructural support, the leading institutions in key fields of study are enabled to improve their overall conditions, are expected to improve their teaching, research and administration and must build research, technology and resource networks. The achievements of the 211 institutions are then expected to be emulated by the Chinese HE sector as a whole. Since the 211 agenda also foresees increased international cooperation, some efforts are made to increase English language websites and contact points; this means that these elite institutions are much more prominent within the Chinese HE landscape.

- The 985 Project

In 1998 another important initiative was launched. Project 985 signifies special government support for the top Chinese research universities that are capable and willing to operate and compete at the world-class level. Institutions in this group include Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Nanjing University, Zhejiang University, Xi’an Jiaotong University, University of Science and Technology of China and Harbin Institute of Technology. For these institutions support is available in terms of research grants, additional staff salaries, etc.

Competition between the institutions at the top is fierce, but they are all receiving special subsidies and government support. Overall the public university system is highly elitist – as evidenced by the national university exams. Turner & Acker report two further aspects:

- Women in particular often opt for private and overseas education instead (2004).
- Apart from separate private institutions, there are also so called “self-pay” classes that exist in parallel to the public sector provision (since the 1980s).

Differentiating between public and private educational tracks

The intersection between public and private education providers in China was illustrated to us during one of our visits to a prestigious University.

We were taken around by alumnae of that institution, who was on a short break from her research degree in the UK. As part of our tour of the campus (teaching rooms, library, etc.) we also met up with her cousin who was a current student. However, the cousin was not a student of the main institution (her marks had not been as good as those of her relative). Instead, she had entered the associated private college which was located within the parameters of the university walls and was accessed through a small bridge across a stream.

She showed us around the college, which consisted of newer buildings with better facilities – broader landings, newer equipment and dedicated rooms for each class, equipped with cable TVs. There were computer rooms and language labs. Again these were slightly newer and better equipped than on the main site. Their schedule was similar to students at the main site, i.e. similarly intense. Teachers were partly drawn in from the main college (which provided a much needed extra income to them), though not entirely. Library facilities were shared also. Students at the private college were paying higher fees than those who had gained a place at the main university (still restricted by national exam scores).

Had we visited the college on our own, we would have remained oblivious to the distinction between the two institutions – although it seemed that even our guide was not quite sure where her alma mater ended and this new institution began. As outlined above, the Chinese HE sector has been subject to major reforms – with mergers and name changes – the institutional landscape can be confusing. The blending (or affiliation) of less selective private colleges to high status universities is part of that mix; as a result uneven performance across institutions (and by students) may effectively be hidden.

In subsequent conversations with agents and other experts involved in the transfer of students to the UK it emerged that many top universities were branching out in this way. It allowed them to generate money for other developments and since the government is keen for institutions to diversify funding sources, this trend is set to continue. During our visit to China we were left wondering whether and how the distinction between established institutions and private associates was manifest, for example on students' transcripts and degree certificates. We were told that the difference was in many cases "not obvious" and that it required local expertise to assess from which outlet or stream a student had graduated.²⁶ For the purposes of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing Project, we did not specifically seek out private institutions (details and reasoning are provided in the methodology section).²⁷

Employability concerns

Given the enormous expansion of the HE sector in China, it is unsurprising to find that more and more graduates are facing a period of unemployment, at least initially. Min

²⁶ This might well have been a pitch for foreign clients on the part of the agents, but it nevertheless raises the issue of transparency and need for knowledgeable interpretation.

²⁷ For further information on private tertiary education in China, readers may wish to consult Mok (1999), Turner and Acker (2004), Lin (2005), Zhou (2006, especially pp 55-60) and the excellent OECD Report, "Thematic Review of Tertiary Education – Background Report for the P.R of China" (February 2007).

(2004) explains that this is down to a mismatch between the programmes offered by the universities (during the recent expansion, the less expensive subjects were apparently favoured) and what is needed in the private sector.²⁸ Min notes: “Among the hundreds of universities and colleges in China, only four had job placement rates of 95 percent. All four are engineering-oriented institutions.” (2004). Siming (2004) makes a related point about the need for graduates with practical skills, who are simply not educated within the university system “The labour market needed not only theorists, but also practitioners. The response of the degree system was slow and ineffective.” (2004, p.174).²⁹

For individual students the fact that students numbers have increased rapidly is highly alarming – there is not only a lot of competition for desirable employment (often urban and multinational) – increasingly graduates can’t find any jobs at all. When we spoke to students (and alumni from British Masters programmes) it turned out that employability was on everybody’s minds. It also emerged that in order to become more competitive many young people were having to work (initially for little or no pay) on so called ‘internships’. This did not only apply to new graduates (with Bachelor degrees), but also to those returning to China with international Masters degrees. Lengths of internships vary between three and six months, though twelve months are not unheard of. During this time, students are expected to acquire work place skills that oftentimes do not form part of the Chinese HE curriculum (contrary to recent official pronouncements).

Employers are increasingly unwilling to accept candidates without a prolonged trial. This growing emphasis on student’s being able to demonstrate their ability to function in the work place has important consequences not only in terms of their decisions and motivations as regards further studies – and whether an expensive foreign degree is ‘worth it’. Perhaps more importantly it is beginning to impact on the final year of Chinese undergraduate degrees, a period traditionally reserved for the undergraduate dissertation (see section 3.7). The following section outlines the set up, schedule and daily routines within a higher education institution in China and how the organisation of the unit relates to the relationships between members of the university.

3.3 The Danwei system and its current transformation

The term *Danwei* literally translates into the word ‘work unit’ in English. The distinctive Chinese concept emerged during the Maoist period when all forms of social groupings such as factories and farms were turned into standardised institutions. Work units were not simply sources of employment, but were characterised by a particular type of social welfare system. Under socialism, all workers were employed in state-owned enterprises. Members participated in the *danwei* as a fundamental social unit (rather than just as a workplace); this is to say, membership impacted on all aspects of worker’s lives.

²⁸ For example, Min notes that there was a dearth in technology and computer graduates – yet study places in this field only marginally exceeded those of history majors (2001)

²⁹ Siming goes on to explain that professional degree routes became available in 1991 and have experienced huge popularity since (2003).

Our rendition of the *danwei* system draws heavily on Ouyang's work (2004, especially chapter four), which specifically addresses one higher education setting – Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GUDFS).³⁰ The *danwei* concept is introduced here to facilitate a better understanding of how students live, study and cooperate, as well as to their expectations of higher education providers and their teachers. Our own observations from other institutions are added in where relevant and the final subsection provides an indication of how universities nowadays have come to differ from Ouyang's characterisation that is based on his own experience of the *danwei* – initially as a student and later, as a teacher and Professor.

Ouyang (2004) draws particular attention to 'paternalistic' and 'maternalistic' aspects of the *danwei*. In the first instance, the *danwei* organised its workers and held a personnel file that contains wide-ranging information on each individual, including bio data, education and work history, including transcripts, notes on mistakes and special recognitions, political memberships, personal relationships and personal ethics as well as background data on family and associates. Once the *danwei* granted a contract of employment a worker could not take up a new job without its explicit permission for this would imply cancellation of one's qualifications. "One person's dossier is used by the administration, leaders, head-teachers, or student leaders when they make decisions, such as punishment or reward that concerns the individual. It functions as a kind of history of the individual who is thus held accountable for their own behavior, for no matter where one could move to or with whom-soever one works, one's background and past are always available..." (Ouyang, 2004, p.103).

Ouyang continues to outline the functional and administrative structure of the *danwei*, which had a fully developed integrated system of committees, unions and leagues that formally dealt with the running of the quasi self-sufficient unit – in this case, the university. He points out: "Without the approval from these organizations, one could not get married, or divorced, give birth..." (ibid, p.103).

At the same time, the *danwei* also provided for an individual's socioeconomic needs. Membership involved "permanent employment, wages and coupons, substantially free housing, health care, pension provision, retirement benefits, nursery, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools for the staff's children, staff transportation, campus security, in-house telephone network, broad-casting, cable TV, markets, dining halls, clinics, sports grounds, entertainment and so forth. The services are so comprehensive that [the university] is actually a miniature self-sufficient society." (Ouyang, 2004, p.103). Once members were formally accepted into such a unit, the issue of movement or transfer tended not to arise during the socialist period. Retired members continued to be recognised – honoured even – and provided for in terms of housing and leisure activities. The *danwei* thus presented the Chinese version of the socialist ideal and quite literally involved the provision of social welfare from cradle to grave.

New academics joining the *danwei* were absorbed into its stable structures. Indeed, it was common for universities to recruit their own best graduates. According to Ouyang, departments were split into teaching and research groups of up to ten members. Apart from new recruits these normally contained two other generations: they are led by

³⁰ The concept has also been explored by a series of scholars and in a variety of other contexts (Lu & Perry, 1997; Bray, 2005).

those who are in their prime, have an excellent record in teaching and research and work experience of approximately 20 years. Secondly, they included older members rich in class room experience – potentially less qualified academically, due to the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution – and nearing retirement. These three groups “cooperate as if in a family business, a farming or army brigade...” (2004, p.110). The group engaged in parallel teaching (classes at the same level are taught the same material and often at the same time) and collective lesson preparation. They agreed lesson plans, decide on the teaching schedule, design quizzes and set up marking criteria. These decisions were then implemented by each teacher in their teaching of their assigned cohort.

According to Ouyang, this way of working allowed younger members of staff to learn from their seniors and they become socialised into normative practices. “Keeping a humble attitude towards one’s senior and a low profile are always sensible things for the juniors because it is they who need to ask the seniors for tips and gain experience.” (2004, p.111). What is noteworthy is that, new academics received no formal training in how to teach; by Ouyang’s reckoning the period of apprenticeship to become a competent university teacher takes eight to ten years under this system.³¹

Within the *danwei*, shared interests and cooperation were all-important. Most university campuses in China are surrounded by huge walls, which physically separate the institution from the outside world. There are several access points in addition to the symbolic main gate (always an elaborate architectural statement), but during the socialist period, members would have been able to meet the majority of their needs within the campus walls. Under the *danwei* system, staff and students both lived on site. Members of the universities ate in the university canteens and shopped in stalls and markets located on campus. Everyone saw the same doctors and staff children attended the same nursery and schools. All inhabitants shared the use of cinemas, sports fields and parks. Hence, lecturers and students came across one another also outside the class room – they lead observable and mutually intelligible frequently intersecting lives as members of a collective. The next section indicates how *danwei* principles reverberated at the level of the class.

Ban activities

The notion of cooperation and the principle of inter-dependence that exist at the level of the *danwei* were replicated in the smaller constitutive units (although these are not self-sufficient); this included the classes to which students are assigned on entering university. In Chinese the word *ban* refers to the class collective (Ouyang, 2004). As noted in chapter one, the *ban* remains as a stable unit for the entire period of study, which is four years in most cases. Class sizes partly depend on the subject. China has several prestigious foreign studies universities – like the one Ouyang describes – where

³¹ Moreover, peer observation happens rarely because of its close association with assessment by managers, i.e. in response to complaints. “Rarely would a novice teacher be allowed to observe a senior teacher’s teaching by sitting in on their class.” (Ouyang, 2004, p.137). He continues that “young teachers have to learn to sacrifice their opportunities of success and excellence out of concern for maintaining a harmonious relationship with their seniors. The institutional practice in many ways restricts or suppresses the young to ‘outshine’ their superiors or their former teachers. Egalitarianism between the more capable and the less so, and respect for the seniors or old-timers in the community, does not favour such competition based on individual talents and capacity. In a word, stability and harmony are more important than problem solving and efficiency enhancement.” (ibid., p.139).

students are taught in English (although they may in fact do joint degrees such as English with Business studies or English and Law). Where language teaching is involved, class sizes are small, each enrolling around 25 students. Some HEIs we visited provided a fixed class room for each *ban*, though given the increasing pressure on space, this custom appears to be waning.

In other disciplines, such as business studies, engineering, law or medicine, cohorts may be much bigger – large lecture theatres for several hundred students existed in all institutions we visited. Class sizes reported to us varied between 25 in language universities, 41 students doing business studies and 50 students in accounting. In some lectures that we sat in, multiple classes were taught together, i.e. there might be sixty, eighty or well over a hundred students in the room for straightforward lecture format. But we also sat in on teaching sessions that were quite intimate – where staff knew each student – and where there was much scope for interactivity.

As noted above, students from the same programme are usually placed in the same dormitory and classmates share rooms. Size of rooms varies between institutions and dormitories, but six to eight students' sharing is quite normal.³² Student dormitories are usually located in multi-storey buildings. They are often prefabricated and come in large clusters with different architectural periods clearly distinguishable. Bathrooms are shared at the level of the corridor. Running water is provided, but it is cold only; students fetch hot water from a central allocation point with a large flask. The actual dorm rooms that we saw were friendly, but also quite cramped. Students sleep in bunk beds and each person has a small desk and a narrow wardrobe. Male and female students normally occupy separate buildings. If friends of the opposite sex are brought in they must be registered with the caretaker who occupies a booth at the entrance.

The dormitory setting is intimate. Whatever working hours and company each student keeps, their room mates will know about it. Cooperation, mutual support and tolerance could almost be said to form part of the curriculum – they certainly are required within this close-knit set up. Open conflict and hostility, are rare. Ouyang notes: "The roommate-ship, like classmateship, lasts for four whole years. Special change within such an arrangement is extremely rare. Students joke about this sharing as 'watching each other grow up'. They come in mostly as 18- and leave as 22-year-olds." (ibid, p.107). Within these stable groups students attend university and take part in a range of highly structured and regulated activities. Or, as Ouyang puts it: "There is hardly any place for privacy or secrets with each other. The knowledge built on in this intensive four-year period of co-study and co-living usually lasts well into the years after their graduation." (ibid, p.108).

An ordinary day for Chinese students is full of routines and rituals. According to Ouyang (2004), it might look like this:

At 6.30 am the university wide loudspeaker system provides instruction for the morning's exercise classes. Breakfast is taken in large communal dining halls. Students then prepare for classes – usually on their own, reading aloud – where possible – or

³² On taught post graduate programmes, the numbers tend to be smaller.

reading to themselves, sitting in the classrooms, prior to the first lesson. From 8am students have their morning lessons (within the *ban* collective), followed by lunch. These are normally structured into two periods – 8-10am and 10-12noon. Again students flock to the huge dining halls (there are several), followed by a 90 minute nap (back in the dormitory or in the library) and then more classes. From 4.30pm students engage in collective sports activities, followed by an early supper at 5.30pm. Afterwards students might fetch hot water and have a shower. Further private study takes place in the library, in the dormitory, the parks, or in an empty classroom (if one can be found). Lights are switched off centrally: at ten o'clock in the teaching and academic areas and at 11pm in the dormitories.

Within the *ban* there are further sub-divisions: students cooperate in study groups, for example to complete homework assignments or small projects or to study together prior to exams (Ouyang, 2004). A class monitor may function as the administrative head, in charge of keeping the classroom in order (in those institutions where such a room is still supplied) and procures textbooks for the whole class, at a discount. Most importantly – according to Ouyang (2004) – there is also a class committee, which deals with the *ban's* social and academic functions. Decisions made by the committee include: “who should get what kind of stipend, scholarship, the candidature for other kinds of rewards or CCP membership; whether the class is satisfied with the teaching of their teachers and how to deal with it, when and how to organize extra-curricular activities such as outings, matches with other classes, parties, or visits to ill classmates or teachers. They cooperate with the head-teacher, the political instructor, the Youth League, the Students' Union, in making various social and academic activities successful. Every term the class committee gather together to give a formal evaluation to each individual in the class, and the result is written down and kept in the dossier of that particular individual for many years to come.” (Ouyang, 2004, p.109).

The above summary provides an overview of the kind of social organisation in which students and lecturers in China participate. To some extent this representation is limited: much of the detail refers to a single case only and, as outlined above, language universities are different to 'ordinary' universities, i.e. they tend to be high profile and highly selective (more so than perhaps other arts and humanities subjects).³³ In practical terms the provisions in language universities tend to be better and class sizes are smaller.

Moreover, this account draws heavily on an insider's account - Ouyang has studied and worked at GUDFS for almost two decades. It seeks to communicate the principles and practices of such a set up to a Western audience. What is crucial to note is that the *danwei* conferred community membership; it provided for its members not only materially, but with a sense of identity and social belonging. In recent years the

33 For example, the English textbooks produced by these universities were used across the country. Also, graduates from these schools have a long association with studies abroad (even prior to the boom in the 90s). Hence, students and graduates from these institutions have long fulfilled a representative function for China – they were probably selected accordingly. Perhaps most importantly members of these language universities have played an important role in translating between China and the West, quite literally. Language institutions were also the first universities that have had foreign language instructors. See Chen (2002) for a more detailed account of English language higher education in China.

danwei's role and importance is weakening. The following section presents what are mostly our own observations (and analysis) of these changes.

Recent transformation to the *danwei* system

For Chinese universities major changes are not only driven by increasing liberalisation, privatisation and internationalisation. They have also been subject to administrative reforms to the higher education sector as outlined in section 3.2, i.e. mergers and changes in jurisdiction and funding. According to the literature, the *danwei* has lost its centrality and has lessened its grip on individuals – it is both less paternalistic and less controlling (Lu & Perry, 1997; Bray, 2005).

Perhaps one of the most visible signs of the waning *danwei* is the fact that staff flats are being sold off and / or sites are dedicated for different purposes. Sleepy campuses – always partially residential in the past – are becoming building sites; flats are replaced by flashy new commercial premises. This is particularly apparent in the established universities in the large cities – the centrally located campus is now perceived in terms of the real-estate value that it represents. Many universities are entering close relationships with private companies and several campuses that we visited were being re-developed in a business-facing (or embracing) manner.

For example, Fudan University in Shanghai has developed its School of Journalism with an adjacent media company, including on-site television studios. Company employees are receiving training within the prestigious university and the university's students are gaining access to corporate facilities as part of their education and to gain insights into private sector working patterns.

As staff housing becomes less of an institutional priority, academics are moving away from the campus – especially the younger ones. Since 2003 members can marry and divorce without *danwei* authorisation. This means that new lecturers are leading lives with much less public scrutiny and control. Also, since wages in the public universities are so low compared with the private sector, (especially newer) members of staff often have several teaching jobs alongside their prime affiliation (Min, 2001). Such extra work is taken on with permission from the administration, but it still weakens the link with the *danwei* and is likely to decrease the contact with students, especially serendipitous encounters that rely on co-presence.³⁴

As mentioned earlier, universities have been re-organised across different campuses – this means that staff may be based on one site, but are also expected to travel to teach at others. Taken together with the fact that staff no longer live in close proximity, this means that the apprenticeship model of learning is coming under threat. Moreover, the academic workforce is becoming more casual and more disparate within the climate of rapid expansion. Serious concerns over faculty quality have been noted (Min, 2001).

³⁴ According to Ouyang, in 1997 "an ordinary Chinese lecturer could earn 800 RMB from the assigned job and another 2,000 or 3,000 from doing extra teaching (and this has become a regular income in most of the Chinese universities as the decentralization of the planned economy has been implemented nation-wide)." (2004, p.93).

These days staff recruitment and management is changing. Staff is still often selected from within, but those who have studied abroad are being recruited in ever larger numbers and often on much more favourable terms. They can expect higher pay and less control as long as they continue to keep up their international profile. Performance-related pay has been introduced in some institutions; research qualifications (not mandatory in the past) and research output have gained in importance. Younger academics might be appointed on temporary contracts with renewal subject to satisfactory publication records. Increased mobility, differential pay and contractual rather than life-long membership are likely to impact on the *danwei* type relationships and especially the principle of seniority. Staff members who have participated for longer in the collective are no longer perceived as the authoritative fount of all knowledge. In a market driven context respect and patience might be running out: one interviewee reported that established professors were now being poached!

Lately, students too are moving out from the campus – one academic explained that the lives of some of her students were hugely different to her own – some wealthy students are provided with private flats by their parents (rather than sharing with others).³⁵ Even more surprising to her – apparently – was the fact that some students were beginning to co-habit with their partners prior to graduation.³⁶

Meanwhile more and more international students and academics are joining Chinese universities. Most of the universities we visited had several hotels to accommodate visitors. International students have their own (flashy and new) dormitories typically with better facilities (without occupants having to share rooms and bathrooms). Historically – and especially for language courses – international students used to be taught separately. But even this model is changing: as postgraduate courses start to be taught in English, this gives rise to mixed cohorts.

Overall university campuses in China are much less insulated and inward looking, they are still subject to central government planning and control, but they are also becoming international and private players in their own right. Even within universities, the market has become a force: different faculties or units have become more and more entrepreneurial; they have even begun to compete with each other, e.g. for executive education and international affiliations.

As noted above, students are now paying for their studies and this gives rise to different expectations on their part. Ouyang reports in an update section: “Since they were paying and the cost was dear, students felt they were entitled to quality teaching. They felt that it was their right to demand any poor and unwanted teacher be replaced by better ones. (...) The economic basis for their former patience and endurance in receiving what was offered or prescribed from teachers had now disappeared since the government had stopped offering tertiary-education for free to

35 Ouyang notes that self-financing students are in any case excluded from living inside the *danwei* walls, i.e. they usually live outside the campus in shared accommodation (20004, p.146)

36 Whereas previously, sexual relationships were taboo (and only unmarried students were admitted), increasingly sex education and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases are becoming topics for discussion on Chinese campuses.

them. So although we still saw the traditional practice of students' respecting and conforming to teachers' prescriptive teaching as a common case, we now had this new and challenging situation where students were complaining loudly with full legitimacy if they were not supplied with what they needed." (Ouyang, 2004, p.95). Both Confucian principles and some socialist practices (as outlined in the introductory section 3.1) persist within higher education institutions in China today – but as this section has shown – they are increasingly under pressure from those that govern the market and foster individualization (on the part of teachers and students). The following section looks more closely at what goes on in Chinese university class rooms.

3.4 Teaching and assessment in Chinese classrooms

This section seeks to illustrate educational practices in Chinese university class rooms. It is divided into sections dealing with teaching delivery, staff student contact and assessment. Later sections of the report deal with issues relating to information literacy, i.e. the importance of textbooks (section 3.5) and academic writing (section 3.6) and should be read in conjunction.

In focus group and interviews students reported that they received class room or lecture theatre instructions for approximately 20 hours per week (more in some subjects such as sciences). Teaching hours meant in most cases straight forward delivery of lectures – no seminars or tutorials took place at undergraduate level. In most cases the structure is formal, teacher-centred and didactic (similar to how it was outlined in the literature cited in section 3.1). All students take part in English language training and during year one and two they receive political instruction. The later years are entirely focused on subject specific teaching, though (as section 3.6 highlights) the final year – traditionally occupied by the undergraduate dissertation – is undergoing significant changes due to the changing nature of recruitment into the labour market.

Historically curricula have remained relatively stable. This enduring quality of fixed knowledge content is also manifest in the textbooks that have undergone a stringent vetting process (political and pedagogical) and there appeared little need to review the process once it had been completed. However, high status institutions are increasingly using internationally educated staff (see below) and international textbooks (translated into Chinese) – especially in business studies subjects. Lecturers might add other materials such as their own presentation slides, but rarely are undergraduates expected to read (or find) original sources or academic journal articles to supplement the materials provided. The class collective normally buys the required number of books at the beginning of the year; at a discount.

Turner argues that "in China today, learning tends to focus on knowledge content, remains mainly teacher-centred, is competitive, exam-focused, elitist and largely male-gendered." (2006, p.33). During the lectures students normally take detailed notes, either separately, or by scribbling in the margins. Particularly diligent students might compare their notes with those of friends and with students from previous years. Notes and textbooks are used to prepare for lectures, which is often done by going over the last lecture and reading ahead into the new material. It indicates a highly

structured approach to preparation that might work well within a discrete body of knowledge, i.e. in relation to a single authoritative source that is mastered with the help of a guide (the teacher).

During fieldwork in China we spent much time on campus and could often see students sitting in lecture theatres, by themselves, reading quietly. Libraries were also very busy and full with students reading and taking notes.

During lectures, however, not all students were paying attention. Some might be cross referencing across different textbooks and notes, but in almost every lecture theatre – especially the larger ones – some students were distracted too. For example, laptops were out and students seemed to be engaged in assignments or surfing the net, texting on their mobiles and occasionally even using discrete head phones. Some students were asleep during lectures.

This illustration serves to underline that educational practices vary widely – some students will be incredibly hard working and disciplined, but others are seeking to maximise their opportunities for a good life (following the gruelling and lengthy preparation for the national entrance exams). Whilst the literature often stresses the diligence of students, this was not always borne out by our observations.

In interviews and focus groups students characterised their university workload as quite manageable and none of them could remember a student having to leave university due to under-performance (illness and criminal behaviour were cited as reasons). Students' failing exams was a rarity too, apparently. This might indicate that the national exams are indeed a good indicator of students' success at university. When we asked students about the minimum and maximum efforts they had to make to succeed in their course, there appeared considerable consistency in terms of the essential requirements.

Students noted that they would attend lectures in order to suss out the difference (if any) between the book and the teachers' core argument. During lectures students also picked up copies of presentation slides (where available) and made notes, which might be shared with others who were not attending that session. Class notes and textbooks represented the 'basic knowledge' that was required in the exams and students learned most of this by heart.

For a higher grade – or in the electives they chose for themselves – students reported spending more time to understand the teacher. They paid close attention to the teacher's particular interests and preferences (sometimes down to their preferred writing style). Again they would pay attention to the reproduction of the 'basic knowledge' but took clues from the professor as to the degree of accuracy, or the type of argument they might want.

Only very occasionally did students mention having to do wider reading so as to produce more creative results or more striking arguments that were based on their additional research.

It seems that students' ability to commit large amounts of material to memory and to reproduce appropriately at exams are as relevant at secondary school as they are at undergraduate level.

Delivery of teaching

University lecturers that interviewed as part of our research had an official workload of 8 teaching hours per week (although as noted above, many moonlighted and did additional teaching elsewhere). Section 3.3 explained that teaching was historically a collective task – undertaken by groups of individuals. Ouyang noted: "...[t]here is little room for being individualistic and autonomous in decision-making about teaching, choice of materials, common evaluation standard, effort correction, or teaching styles (...) With the collective group making preparation for lessons as an in-house tradition – which is believed to work well in guaranteeing the teaching quality – making one's teaching dramatically different from others would carry a lot of implications. It could suggest one's arrogance, disrespect for both the group and the seniors, ignorance about the history and expectations of the institution..." (Ouyang, 2004, p.112)

In some of the universities we visited, this type of collective teaching was still taking place), but some places were changing rapidly – oftentimes in line with Western HE practices, imported through academics who received part of their education abroad.

At one prestigious university in Shanghai we were set up with a group of young Chinese academics who had recently returned from the USA and the UK. They had experienced teacher training and teaching in those contexts and explained that this was the main influence on their current teaching style. This group had been pre-selected by a senior manager, who thought that their explanations were (or should be) representative for what was going on in his institution.

In an interview with one foreign educated and recently returned academic – who taught accounting – we were told:

"I use exactly the same textbook that I used in [name of university in the UK]. Here [shows the book]. It is from an American publisher. We used the international edition then [as opposed to the American edition]. Now I use the Chinese language edition – otherwise some of my students here would be struggling... with English. But apart from the edition there is no difference in the materials. I teach in the same way, I use the same lecture materials... just translated the slides..."

This second interview had been set up through private contacts and there was no way that this academic's superiors would have know that it had taken place. This is to say that teaching practices clearly are changing – at least in the metropolitan centres, in the top institutions.^{37 38}

³⁷ How successful younger academics are in bringing in these changes remains to be seen – Ouyang, with his longer term experience in the sector notes that many academics left the danwei frustrated that their efforts were hindered rather than rewarded. The main focus of his book (2004) is on English learning teaching and how foreign teachers were and are invited in to reform ELT in China, but at the same time, how their efforts are being frustrated and defeated and why.

Staff student contact

Within the context of Chinese higher education, the teacher is sought to occupy multiple roles: educator, mentor and disciplinarian (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). Ouyang explains it thus: “Chinese teachers usually play an authoritarian figure in class when lecturing and prescribing, with a serious face, focusing only on academic matters, but they would balance this cold-face, father-like figure with a much more humanistic, egalitarian, mother-like figure after class, when interactive with students in private settings (...). It is the good teacher’s responsibility to approach their students (subordinates) to find out what help they need in private visits and contacts). It is natural for the students therefore to wait for the teachers to approach them and offer help to them outside the class. (...) Since all the teachers and students live on campus, students usually expect teachers to visit them in their dormitories where more egalitarian and friendly interactions take place... (Ouyang, 2004, pp.70). Turner (2006) also stresses the “friendly extramural relationships” (p.31) that students have with their teachers outside of the classroom.

In several interviews this multi-faceted relationship between students and teachers was affirmed. Various lecturers told us that they kept an eye on their students and discussed potential interventions in the teacher conference (this is not to say that Chinese classrooms appeared particularly crisis-ridden). Where class collectives had an assigned class teacher, it fell to these individuals to investigate students’ problems. In our discussions with students, several mentioned Teaching assistants (TAs) as a point of call for academic issues. In their teaching and assessment duties lecturing staff are often assisted by TAs who are Masters or PhD students (less so in social science subjects). TAs take on marking of homework assignments and seem to act as a ‘bridge’ between academic staff and student cohorts. Meanwhile each department also has a political tutor who is in charge of dealing with student discipline and ensuring that the party line is communicated and adhered to.

Asked about contact time with students one lecturer told us that her students were trying to stay under the radar as much as possible. He thought that students didn’t want to be noticed (or “appear stupid”); they just wanted to get through. They were staying away from their teachers – apart from clarifying questions after the lecture – and hence their teachers were leaving them alone too. She had office hours (in her department this was expected), but students were rarely making use of these.

At the same university students explained the difference between younger and older lecturers. They thought that younger lecturers were under a lot of pressure. Here is an excerpt from a focus group:

“...And no matter how good you are teaching, and how devoted you are to your students, nobody really cares, I mean other than the students themselves. But about the people who um – who have the power to promote you, or who have the power to say, who have a vote power as to whether you will be a professor, or (senior tenure)

38 Despite the reluctance to facilitate and engage with peer observation noted by Ouyang (cited in footnote 32 above) we were able to join various teaching sessions – both organised ones via senior manager gatekeepers and by simply slipping into class rooms unannounced. We were frequently surprised by how closely the lectures observed in China mirrored teaching in British lecture theatres.

professor, the vote is more on how – your research abilities. So I mean it's a little bit hard for young professors to promote in the system here.”

Students were somewhat undecided about the role of older professors, one student remarked:

“And for old professors, maybe they will care more about the growth of the student, and their future, they care more about them, and it's a big difference.”

Meanwhile others students explained:

“...I think the major work they [the older professors] have to do is to interact, and they interact with other teachers, or the officials in government to contribute their work on the change of policy or other things...”

Clearly teaching roles are in flux and different interpretations of the role of an academic exist simultaneously in Chinese institutions. Most of the students we spoke to were sympathetic to and understanding of their teachers' position – rather than complaining – although Ouyang reminds us (outlined in section 3.3) that students' complaints about their teachers are becoming increasingly frequent within Chinese institutions.

What is remarkable in terms of the contrast with the UK is that the individuals who are in charge of teaching discuss individual students on a regular basis and will take action if they feel that this is needed. The onus is not on the student to seek help (to expose their struggle or embarrassment) but on the benevolent ('maternal' – to use Ouyang's term) teacher to ensure that students are ok. In the Chinese system, it seems there are multiple persons who might take such a step.³⁹

Assessment

Student assessment varied across the institutions we visited though it remains exam-centred everywhere. Exams take place at the end of each semester and exam marks account for between sixty and seventy percent of students' grades.⁴⁰ Students also receive marks for attendance and participation (10-20 per cent) – though some students told us that attendance was not compulsory in their institution. The remainder of the grade is apportioned to course work. In one or two cases we were told that coursework was not a requirement, though all students reported having to hand in (formative) homework frequently. Turner notes: “In spite of high levels of unassessed homework, written examinations comprise most formal assessments, with large set-piece assessments marking educational progression. Student class rankings and class streaming according to ability derive from exam marks. Assessment is predominantly individual.” (2006, p.31).

A wide variety of unassessed assignments were used throughout the year. For example, students were performing multiple choice tests, quizzes, calculations, short question and answer assignments. Some students might have to conduct projects and or experiments – either individually or in groups – followed by presentations. In one

³⁹ Meanwhile, in the UK, support systems are often distributed across the institution and different parts do not necessarily feel that it is their job to check on students' welfare or to communicate their concerns to those whose job it is.

⁴⁰ If students failed an exam, they had one chance to retake it, which might involve having to re-take the entire year.

case we were told that students had a mid-term open book exam. On the whole students do not have automatic access to past exam papers, though they might be given sample papers by individual lecturers.

Students reported that coursework and or homework was graded or scored, though detailed feedback was rare. When we asked students further about feedback they conceded that they probably could go and discuss their mark with a Teaching Assistant, though most would choose not to; they preferred to stay under the radar. Lecturers acknowledged that TAs received little or no training and that their work was checked in terms of whether it had been performed, rather than in to double-mark or in terms of quality control.

This section sought to summarise teaching, learning and assessment practices at the universities we visited in China. As mentioned above, textbooks play an important role in Chinese universities. Further details on textbooks and other types of materials students were required to consult and work with is provided below. Section 3.6 deals more specifically with academic writing.

3.5 Library access and use

At every university we visited we also went to the library. The vast majority were incredibly well stacked and well looked after. On the whole we had no difficulty in gaining entry and in each and every university the libraries were clearly well used and oftentimes quite crowded. In the more open areas near corridors students were studying in peer groups (judging by the greetings and the quiet banter). Elsewhere even individual students were having difficulties finding a seat. In one library students seemed to have set up semi-permanent places for themselves, separated out by hefty volumes.

Overall, our sense was that university libraries in China were clearly an integral part to students' university lives (it was a remarkable contrast to libraries in India and Greece). What became noticeable over time was that students appeared to study in the library, rather than conduct research. This is to say, the reading rooms were full, but the stacks of books and journals were empty and there were few queues at the lending counters. The vast majority of students brought their own books into the reading rooms, found a place and sat there studying for hours at a stretch. This involved reading and writing notes, copying notes (borrowed from someone else?), and apparently, learning by heart. Students also used the library to nap before resuming their studies.

As mentioned in section 3.4 in China there is an overwhelming emphasis on the textbook, which exists as a single authoritative source. Ouyang compares their role to that of "manuals for novice car drivers. A unified textbook has social implications. Firstly, teaching has to be conducted as a collective rather than individual action. Secondly decision-making is not the business of ordinary teachers but top central authorities. Thirdly, Chinese textbooks have to go through a strict censorship (...). Lastly, standardization of a textbook makes it easy for standardized testing and centralized evaluation." (Ouyang, 2004, p.64).

As long as students follow the assigned textbook and ingest ‘the knowledge’ set for a particular course – as explained by their teachers – they are always going to be prepared for the exams. The emphasis is on passive reception of established content rather than on the application or critique of established theories. This was also mirrored in our focus groups: we asked students how they prepared for exams and they responded that they studied the textbook, often by heart, for they were expected to be able to reproduce it. Interpretation was not expected, apparently.

Within this context it became clear why students were treating the library as a reading room rather than a place for research. From our fieldwork it emerged that in most courses students were not expected to venture beyond the textbook – not for assignments and not for exams. Indeed, reading lists were the exception rather than the rule. For projects, occasionally students were adding in news items, company reports, or official statistics, but on the whole they were not expected to venture beyond such materials, or simple updating mechanisms. Students would procure such materials from the internet which was readily available in all of the institutions we visited.

Other materials that they could have used were harder to access:

- Several university libraries we visited had fetching systems for their books. Students would identify the desired source on electronic catalogues and note the reference, which they submitted to the counter. Library staff would then go and collect the volume before handing them out to students. This made browsing impossible and hence deprived students of the opportunity to learn how topics and subject areas are related
- Some of the libraries we visited did not provide access to electronic journals – or any academic journals.

It emerged from our own research that students had mixed feelings about academic journal access.

One student that we met during a focus group organised by the British Council complained about it: Yes, his (well known) university was good, as were the teachers, but the lack of electronic sources was seriously hindering the research that he was undertaking for his undergraduate dissertation on Oscar Wilde. He was managing to gain access at other libraries, but he considered it a major drawback that his own library could not provide it.

In a focus group we spoke to students about their internet research strategies without asking specifically about journal access, but after the third question about how they were following up links, one student got frustrated.

“What are you asking about? You are asking for something, but I don’t understand what it is!” In response we explained the concept of the electronic access to academic journals. The students – all were attending a reputed top 100 institution – had never heard of academic journals. The student who had asked originally immediately replied: “That’s great. I need that. How can I get to the one for marketing [her speciality]?”

In some of the very top institutions we were running a mixed focus group with undergraduate and postgraduate students – the latter knew all about academic journals and made extensive use of them as part of their courses. Meanwhile, the undergraduates were puzzled. The library provided access to all students, but for them academic journals had never come up – not as a requirement and not as an option. As undergraduates, they weren't expected to use them. When their elders explained, they were still puzzled – it sounded complicated...

When we did use the term 'journals' students often confused it with commercially available magazines like *The Economist* or *Time Magazine*; when we asked about their use of academic journals they responded that there was no need to go to the library for that, they would simply buy the relevant ones.

As part of our research we also looked at textbooks, other books and journals produced in China, so that we could see for ourselves whether referencing was used and to what extent. It emerged that referencing was common in all types of publications, though in-text citation was quite rare. Chinese journals – of which there are many – are often produced with English abstracts, and this helped us to understand better how they worked. Few seemed to focus on a particular subject area, rather, the majority of Chinese journals were published by individual universities and with each department or unit submitting an article.⁴¹ However, judging by the focus groups it seemed undergraduate students were not using Chinese journals instead of international ones; the majority weren't using any – they were focused on their textbooks with some updated materials freely available on the internet.

Chinese university libraries are currently undergoing an enormous transformation, mainly through the introduction and development of technology. Internet searching and electronic resources have become available in libraries since the late 1998, based on the introduction of the China Education and Research Network (CERNET). Priority was given to the universities in the 211 project (see section 3.2), but the transfer to the lesser HEIs has been relatively slow.⁴² "Acquisition, cataloguing, serials, circulation and reference are [still] the most important departments in these libraries." (Wang, Niu & Hubbard, 2004, p.105). Information literacy is only slowly emerging as an important area for development. According to Wang, Niu & Hubbard's research, almost a fifth of the 211 project libraries had no user education programmes (2004, p.109).

Only in one university that we visited did students mention that the central library ran some courses to help them with their research skills and how to find academic sources online. The students who told us about this course were Masters students, which further goes to highlight the difference in expectations and practices at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The next section explores students' writing practices at university.

41 When used to subject or issue driven journals, this made it harder to understand the subject specific context of each contribution.

42 Sun and Rader reported in 1999 that the use of computers was "still not prevalent" in the majority of HEIs (Sun & Rader, 1999, p.70).

3.6 Academic Writing

For many students in China academic writing does not form an integral part of their studies, at least not in terms of the kind of essays and reports that are expected from undergraduates at British universities. This observation is supported by Ouyang who writes, “[u]ntil the last semester in the four-year undergraduate program, most students have had no chance to learn about writing an academic assignment independently, including selecting a topic, searching in the library for references relevant to it, presenting supportive evidence and critically arguing for or against one’s thesis.” (Ouyang, 2004, p.63). He connects this situation with the socialisation process – in the home and at secondary school – and the concept of filial piety that encourages “passive, uncritical and uncreative orientation toward learning” according to Ho (Ho, 1986, p.162 cited in Ouyang, 2004, p.63). At university, undergraduate students are expected to closely follow the textbook and the instruction of their teachers. The position taken by the book and the teacher is then closely replicated in any written work. Given that both student and lecturer’s know the original text intimately referencing is probably rarely a priority for either group (see section 3.8, which explores ‘plagiarism’).

When we spoke to students about the type and lengths of writing that they were expected to submit as part of their studies, answers varied widely.

One group of students sounded slightly impatient – a new lecturer was giving them assignments every week (2-3 pages each). Others told us that homework essays might be due three times a semester (each consisting of 5-6 pages). Another group told us that they had to complete one to two assignments per course, each 2,000-5,000 characters long.

As outlined in section 3.3 on assessment, lecturers were using a wide variety of assessment methods and formats, though essay writing was rarely mentioned. One lecturer who had qualified and taught abroad complained that student’s writing was often ‘hollow’.

Turner (2006) explains that within a Confucian context learning is equated with labour, i.e. cognitive abilities are thought to be secondary to hard work. Thus, students who concentrate and work diligently one small step at a time are expected to succeed. “Accompanying this specific, incrementalist construction of learning, critique is not privileged. Given the central-role of teacher as sage and the concept of wisdom gained step-by-step, critique is reserved as an activity for those who have already completed the learning journey rather than for students embarking upon it.” (ibid., p.32).

As noted in the previous section, 3.6, the textbook reigns supreme in students’ preparation for exams and assignments and students are not generally expected to bring in additional sources. Specific instruction in how to write was left up to individual teachers and few of them claimed to provide any. Given that academic staff is not instructed in how to teach, it is perhaps unsurprising that they would not provide skills training to their students either. None of the institutions we visited had writing tutors or central writing support. Training in how to write (or complete other assignments)

was not part of the overall framework. Skills training is not what Chinese universities do (Siming, 2003, p.173); historically, they are focused on the provision of theoretically-oriented subject knowledge.⁴³

Academic writing conventions differ and British or American ideas about essay writing are not generally shared or disseminated into the Chinese education context. Students studying at a language studies university are probably the exception. This is to say that the majority of students from China who are continuing their studies in the UK they are likely to struggle with both the language and the writing conventions, or the fact that they are required to research and write an extended piece.

The undergraduate dissertation

The largest and most important piece of academic writing for all Chinese students is the final year dissertation. Number of words / characters expected for the dissertation depended on the specific institution and subject. When we asked students for an indication of the lengths they quoted figures between 5,000 and 15,000 characters (the number of Chinese characters is usually smaller than the equivalent in words). Dissertations are usually written in Chinese, though students in language universities might write in English. All students that we asked reported that they were expected to provide references though the amount varied: some students told us that they might use four or five sources in their bibliography; others responded that their references took up one to two pages.

The undergraduate dissertation is usually researched and written by individual students throughout the final year, though most of the work is done in the last semester. Our second visit to China took place in March and April 2007 and we encountered many final year students in our focus groups.

Initially we asked about their dissertation as an icebreaker, but it soon emerged that students were not spending anywhere near the time or effort that was traditionally apportioned to the dissertation, i.e. at least six months.

Even in April quite a few students told us that they hadn't started. In fact, many of them didn't even know what their dissertation was going to focus on. We asked whether it wasn't due very soon and students acknowledged that this was indeed the case. But it wasn't a problem for them, they were confident that they would get it done within a two week time frame and that it would be ok.

We were surprised by this apparent 'disappearance' of the dissertation and enquired in more private settings whenever we could. One final year student explained that basically the dissertation period had been seized by more pressing employability concerns. Students were so desperate to find work that they essentially spent all of their final year on this one quest. She herself had managed to find a very good job with multinational employer early on. This meant she could relax and did not need to worry

43 This point also applies to work place skills, as highlighted in section 3.2. Siming reviews the introduction of professionally-oriented degrees in 1991 and their popularity among students and employers (2003).

about the dissertation too much – she was set up already. Some of her classmates, however, were struggling with no place of work in sight. Finding a job was a major issue – in comparison, the dissertation simply didn't matter.

When we explored the issue with Chinese academics, they did not condone students taking time out, but they acknowledged the imperative for students to compete for employment as best as they could. Staff felt compassion for the students who were desperately trying to work out how to enter the job market. They acknowledged that the final year of studies was being usurped by job applications, assessment centres, interviews and student internships. Forcing students to concentrate on the dissertation instead was thought to seriously disadvantage students. Students had no choice but to go along with potential employer's stipulations and staff had become complicit with the situation.

Thus it appears that the undergraduate dissertation is slipping in importance; it was no longer taken as serious as it had been just a few years ago. Given that it still represents – for many students – the only substantial piece of writing and often the only one that is based on original research, this is a serious matter, especially because it serves as the only blueprint for academic writing that Chinese students might have before they join Masters programmes in the UK, where such assignments are routinely expected.

As an aside it should be noted that Masters dissertations and PhD thesis are usually available in the university libraries in China (similar to UK HEI practices, undergraduate dissertations are not accessible to the public). During our research we viewed these whenever possible and it became clear that in the institutions we visited, work done at postgraduate level involved criticality and did contain some sophisticated arguments. The theses we saw were often written in very good English, included an extensive literature review based on a wide variety of sources. Most academics clearly differentiated between undergraduate and postgraduate work – neatly underlining Turner's point that "there is an emphasis on ritual progression through stages of learning" (2006, p.32). At Masters and PhD levels students are expected to engage critically with other writers. And they have achieved a level where they are systematically taught to perform academic writing in a particular style. Meanwhile, undergraduate students who receive information literacy and academic writing skills training in China are the exception rather than the rule and where it does happen it tends to be ad hoc.

In summary, for regular undergraduate homework and assignments the majority of undergraduate students probably rely on their textbook and their lecture notes. Since these sources are known intimately – through hours of reading, re-reading, memorisation, etc. – it is likely that students quote ideas and words in their writing without explicit acknowledgement. Within this context the notion of 'deceiving' or 'stealing' does not arise. Lecturers also trust and know the same books: (as noted in section 3.3) textbooks are carefully produced, carefully selected and carefully taught. Where, when and what students quote from these well known texts is in most cases transparent – to the writer *and* the marker – though as noted earlier, the vast majority of homework assignments are formative. Thus, the question arises as to why Chinese

academics would insist on students stating the obvious. It is probably a tall order for the Chinese education system to adopt wholesale to the conventions that Western universities subscribe. Students' lack of concern with referencing makes sense within the context in which they have previously participated.

Meanwhile, top tier universities are likely to be more sensitised to Western conventions in terms of in text-quotations, etc. They are more readily aware of how Chinese ways of doing things might be interpreted, i.e. through their own international contacts and recent academic hires. These universities are well set in terms of preparing their students. However the majority of Chinese HEIs probably are not as aware.

The lack of students' practice in the type of writing tasks that British Universities routinely expect (especially in social science subjects) is often compounded by students' difficulties in switching to a new language. There are two major points to make in this respect:

- Many British universities still recruit students with relatively low language scores in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Work by scholars such as Viv Edwards, Diane Schmitt (see bibliography) has highlighted again and again that many students are likely to struggle with their assignments, even with an IELTS score of 6.5 or 7, depending on the subject they intend to study, which may or may not be different to their undergraduate degree. At this level the vocabulary of many students may not be sufficiently large to allow them to paraphrase, which in turn sets them up to fall foul of plagiarism regulations in the UK.

As part of the process of language acquisition (and subject specific jargon) students might initially rely on 'patch-writing', which is a form of scaffolding process that students might rely on whilst struggling with interpreting with the meaning of texts (Howard, 1995; Pecorari, 2003).⁴⁴ Whether they move on to more independent use of language crucially depends on the support and feedback they receive for their writing.

- Students might also be experiencing basic communication problems. When this is the case the offers of help – through in-session English language support, for example – are likely to be met with incomprehension. Many students are simply too busy – just trying to cope with the vast amount of reading – to appreciate that help would be readily available (albeit not from their lecturers). In turn this often leads to the continuation of reading, studying and writing practices that are incompatible with British style of higher education.

3.7 Academic Misconduct & plagiarism

This section raises the issue of academic misconduct and especially plagiarism in Chinese HEIs. All of the universities we visited had academic misconduct policies

44 Howard's and Pecorari's work has been hugely influential in this area – both of them also contributed to the project's conference and their presentations are available on video (www.sdaw.info). Another important scholar from linguistics who has looked carefully at the language and translation issues in the plagiarism debate is Pennycook (1996).

regarding exams. Students and staff were very clear that cheating and dishonesty resulted in severe penalties, which included expulsion in severe cases. Regulations were distributed to all students and their seriousness was highlighted practically when the transgressions of individuals were publicly exposed. Plagiarism, however, was a different matter. At the time of our visits (2006 and 2007) it was much less established as an 'offence' and the willingness to actively detect it varies among Chinese academics (this situation also applies to many UK institutions).

Top institutions visited had relatively recently put in place penalties for using the work of others without attribution. We were told that there are (at least) two Chinese characters relating to 'plagiarism' – one relates to the practice to copy-paste, the second invokes university regulations and wrong doing. Given our research bias towards the prestigious institutions, we cannot comment on what goes on in other HEIs. It is likely that less highly ranked institutions are recruiting fewer foreign trained academics (if any). In turn this means that institutions and students are probably not sensitised to the expectations and practices in Western institutions – or how their own writing practices might be interpreted by them.

Students we spoke to in these highly prestigious HEIs were clearly aware of the concept of plagiarism, though regulations varied widely:

- Some students were told that if a quote was longer than three lines it had to be acknowledged.
- Elsewhere, copy-paste of more than 40% of an assignment would result in a warning.

The way in which students were expected to attribute the work of others varied also, i.e. often students were told to put in the reference into the bibliography, but they were less clear about the use of direct quotation and in-text citation.

Despite the existence of regulations in some places, students admitted freely that they did copy large parts of their assignments and that this was generally tolerated. Sometimes they were told not to do it, but this seemed to be a matter of negotiation rather than regulation. One lecturer also told us that he preferred to deal with the matter unofficially; he thought the regulations were too harsh. Two other issues emerged in our discussions with staff: firstly, collusion and distributed marking, i.e. with a large number of markers similarities in scripts are not necessarily spotted and secondly, the level of training of those involved in marking (often TAs, especially in larger courses) and their commitment is crucial.

According to Yang (2005) a number of extremely high profile cases involving senior academics (members of the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Engineering) have been reported. However, despite the fact that they were "found to have committed 'serious cheating' (...) these academics have all successfully maintained their high positions." (Yang, 2005).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Yang argues that corruption in relation to academic research in China is also related to the handling of research funds: "In order to encourage research, the different levels of government and universities allow a substantial percentage of the grant money to go directly into researcher's pockets." (2005).

4. Conclusion

The aim of this report is not to judge the Chinese higher education system as either better or worse than the British one. Moreover, our intention is not to portray students from China in a position that sees them as 'deficient'. Rather, we are concerned with the notion of transition and transfer from one HE system to another. Indeed, the short period of instruction on taught postgraduate programmes in the UK (sometimes as short as six months) inevitably raises the issue of how conventions, expectations and practices differ and how they are communicated to those who are newcomers. This is where this report seeks to enter the discussion.

Students who have succeeded at undergraduate level in one higher education system may assume that similar strategies will lead to success also for an advanced degree. Even if students explicitly state that they are seeking out a different kind of educational experience, in practice they often return to tried and tested methods. Those who face additional pressures due to a new language of instruction and the shift to a new subject area may struggle particularly, and as pressures mount (due to impending coursework and the all-important exams), considerations of new ways of learning probably recede into the background. British institutions may wish to consider what it means for their international students to join their institution and they may wish to find out more about the educational practices in the largest sending countries of international students. The idea here is not to stereotype students, or to plead for an ever more specialised provision for different student groups ('Chinese learners', 'Indian learners', etc.). Rather, we seek to provide the kind of information is sometimes hard to come by – because neither students nor lecturers cannot necessarily be expected to compare systems – especially when their previous experiences are limited to one and without any insights gained (as yet) from the transition. It has taken us a long time to understand the intricate relationships between language issues, academic writing, research practices and information literacy.

Our research on educational practices at undergraduate level in Chinese universities has highlighted the following issues that we consider to be of particular interest to academics and other members of UK universities that recruit students from China:

One of the most important differences between the university set up in China and the UK is probably that students in China tend to be much more embedded within particular social structures – both fellow students and staff (and especially teaching staff) share a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. This means those who are seen to be vulnerable or struggling are supported proactively (in ways that transcend Western sensitivities around privacy). For example, staff might seek out students in their dormitory if they feel that a confidential conversation might be of help. In contrast, British universities tend to operate a distributed support system where various units may be ready to support students, but are unlikely to do so proactively.

We found differing models of what it means to be a teacher in China – some students are clearly experiencing the traditional academic who is not only a knowledgeable scholar and teacher, but also a friend and example of moral conduct. It seems to be a recent development in China that students and staff appear to enter in more distant and seemingly superficial relationships (due to the new pressures and opportunities for both). Nevertheless, students can expect staff to be respectful and sensitive to their problems and questions and it is the time immediately following on from lectures that provides crucial opportunities for exchange and clarification that is not public (in this context the act of revealing difficulties does not result in ‘losing face’, apparently).

Within UK HEIs, staff are sometimes surprised when they find students from China cooperating closely and preferably with co-nationals. Based on our research such units appear to be recreations of previous experiences rather than testament to students’ unwillingness to integrate with mixed nationality cohorts (although language ability can be an additional factor). Across the universities that we visited in China students were part of close-knit groups that combined study and practical support, the *ban* (as outlined above). Students get to know – and trust – each other as they literally spend all day and all night together (studying in a small class formation and living on campus in dormitories). For students from China such a tight cohort is a tried and tested method for getting through university from beginning to end and beyond.

Language competency is quite obviously a key factor in any international students’ experience of a British university. It is surprising then to find that some universities in the UK are willing to accept students with a level of English language that is so low that they are likely to struggle throughout their taught master’s programme. Students who cannot understand basic information about expectations, practices, conventions and regulations are more likely to stick with the methods used previously, and this can land them in trouble.

- Struggling with basic communication might mean that students do not understand the kinds of study support provision that is available to them and how it might help them.
- They may not appreciate the information literacy training that is available and might potentially miss out on the privilege of a good library stacked with excellent online resources and full of academic journals.
- In turn they might as well miss the induction session that explains the differences between sources and the way in which students are expected to read these (skimming vs. memorisation).
- With little or no experience of discursive writing (and without ever having taken any notes) students are likely to struggle with their first written assignment.
- Accusations of plagiarism are not that far off then – for students who tend to memorise few sources and who are unaware of the need for in-text citation are likely to struggle without help and guidance about appropriate forms of acknowledgements (a handbook in this context is fairly useless to the student) who is struggling to meet basic requirements.

- As outlined earlier, an IELTS score of 7 does in no way guarantee a student's ability to paraphrase. Without this, they are likely to struggle with written assignments, especially essays (which are expected in the social sciences).

Our research indicates that without being able to communicate – and hence the ability to appreciate differences between educational practices – students can get lost on their transition between operating the Chinese higher education system and learning about British (and subject specific) conventions.

Perhaps a basic conversation between a UK programme director and a new mixed cohort needs to be about differing models of learning and what constitutes concepts such as knowledge and research. Sometimes it is important not only to tell students, but also to provide models (of note taking, for example) and to explain why some specific arguments, or essays, are better than others. Students who have never been expected to produce independent research, and whose university experience did not include teachers (who also do research) probably need to be told about journal articles and bibliographies – how the work of academics builds on one another, of the benefits of peer review and why drawing on original theory might be preferable to a 'textbook'.

Once students understand those differences and have realised what help is available to them – at the library, in the language centre, in terms of welfare support – they are much more likely to succeed and enjoy their course. And academic misconduct becomes much less likely too. It is safe to assume that international students do not travel half way around the world and spend a fortune in order to cheat. But often plagiarism is couched in these terms, i.e. almost as an accusation, which is unhelpful. A thorough and early period of preparation for any type of assignment – focused on how to do it and making sure students have the time and the support to practice new skills – is more likely to enable them to do well. More so – anyhow – than the usual compulsion to sign (ultimately meaningless) plagiarism disclaimer forms and the threat of expulsion, which has a tendency to scare rather than enable learners that are new to UK conventions.

Even with advanced IELTS scores there is no certainty that students will have ever written an essay prior to entering a UK university. Moreover, it is illusory to expect even the shortest of pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to include such important aspects. Rather, language competency must be established early on in the academic year (in the first couple of weeks the latest) so that students can get the help that they may need and in time.

British business and management schools concerned with the overall 'Chinese student experience' are encouraged to consult Turner's thought provoking account (2006), which provides invaluable insights into the limitations of (and potential remedies to) the prevalent approach taken by many UK schools.

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