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‘Being and doing’ in a new academic environment: challenges faced by seven Chinese post-graduate students at a South African university.

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

February 2008

DECLARATION

I, Chunyan Shen, declare that this research report is my own original work. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. I am submitting it for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Signed: _____

February 14th, 2008

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I accept responsibility for all the errors in this work.

Abstract

This research explores a range of academic and socio-cultural challenges faced by seven Chinese post-graduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand. The main aims of this study are to identify and understand any academic discourse challenges these students have been experiencing, together with any challenges in their new socio-cultural environment, such as financial or social challenges, and then to investigate the impact of these challenges on their studies and their identities as students. The study is based on data gathered from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven Chinese post-graduate students, from location 'maps' completed by each student and from some examples of the writing of three of the students. The findings suggest that these Chinese students are encountering great challenges in relation to English language proficiency and adjustments to new Discourses (Gee, 1996) – both academic and social. The data provide evidence that although these students feel socially disempowered in many respects, their attitudes toward academic study remain positive and each is making steady progress in his or her progamme of study and research. This finding indicates that there seems to be no explicit connection between positive social experiences and academic achievement and contrasts with findings from other research studies in which there is a correlation

between positive or negative socio-cultural experiences and success or failure in the academy.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 General introduction

Having been a student in the Department of Applied English Language Studies (AELS) at the University of the Witwatersrand for three years, I have experienced many challenges academically, socially and culturally. Language was the first crucial problem and one which I have struggled with for a long time. Spoken English has been particularly challenging. For instance, I have found it difficult to choose appropriate words and to organize a grammatically and situationally correct sentence in a short time in order to express myself clearly. In a conversation, the first thing is to understand other people's words then to give a quick response. Therefore, it requires high levels of competence in both listening and speaking.

A second crucial problem for me has been to learn appropriate behaviours in the department, including how to interact with classmates and lecturers in the seminar room and with supervisors. The new ways of 'being' (Gee, 1996) in this academic community are very different from those in my previous academic community in China. At the very beginning of my studies in AELS, I believed that my position in this community was as a student, a learner in the field, while lecturers are

academic authorities who have many years of experience; therefore it is not proper to question their opinions on academic matters. In addition, I found it challenging to understand the complex relationship between lecturers or supervisors and students. For example, should the communication with lecturers or supervisors be limited to discussing academic knowledge, or is other casual conversation also appropriate? How could I learn to understand their attitudes toward academic performance?

A third problem is that it is hard to integrate socially with local people. I always believed that the classroom was a place where we gain knowledge, but also one that was a place where we make friends. However, the reality is that because foreign students are linguistically and culturally different, the communication always stays at a surface level. In other words, we do not fully understand each other's cultures, and this has been a great challenge in my academic and social life in South Africa. I am interested in finding out whether other foreign students have had similar experiences, with a view to offering my findings to the university community, lecturers, students and in particular, the international office.

1.2 Aims and research questions

This study aims to explore the discourse challenges faced by seven Chinese postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. It also aims to explore their experience of being in a new sociocultural space. In this study, 'Chinese postgraduate students' refers to students from Mainland China who speak Mandarin as their first language. The schools and universities they attended before they came to South Africa mainly use Mandarin as medium of instruction. However, English was a compulsory subject for these students from elementary school to higher education.

The research questions are:

1. What academic discourse challenges do these postgraduate students from China face at the University of the Witwatersrand?
2. If they face any other challenges in their new socio-cultural environment, such as financial or social challenges, what are these and do they impact on their studies and their identities as students?
3. Do they receive any support from the University in addressing these challenges? If so, of what does this consist?

1.3 Rationale

According to findings from research conducted in a number of countries, many Chinese students face challenges when they enroll for postgraduate study in a foreign environment. These may include the challenge of being foreign language speakers of the language of the new institution, the challenge of participating in new socio-cultural contexts and the challenge of encountering new academic discourses. Gee (1996:131) defines discourses as 'ways of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting combinations'. What he suggests is that language is inextricably bound up with ways of being and doing. These differ in different discourse communities. The discourse community that foreign students join is in the first instance the discourse community of their disciplines. While postgraduate students are not new to these communities, in different social contexts, there may be different 'ways of being' in the discipline. It is therefore important to extend the research to include socio-cultural challenges in addition to linguistic challenges faced by these students at the University of the Witwatersrand.

It has been argued that cultural differences have a great impact on social practices, behaviour, and ways of thinking, which may result in students experiencing difficulties in learning when they move from one academic

environment to another. For example, their understandings of the requirements of academic reading and writing, and of ways of conducting research may differ from those of lecturers and students in the new environment. In South Africa, the very limited research that has been done with students from China has been with undergraduates only (See Ayliff and Wang, 2006). Therefore an investigation of Chinese international postgraduate students' perceptions of their difficulties might be of interest to the lecturers with whom they work and to the international office of the university in an era when South African universities are beginning to compete with those in Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA for students from Asia.

1.4 Overview of the report

In Chapter one I have outlined the focus of the research. Chapter two reviews literature that is relevant to the research project. Chapter three outlines the research methodology. Chapter four presents the data collected from location maps, interviews with students and for three students from examples of their writing. The data are analyzed in Chapter Five. Chapter Six offers conclusions and recommendations arising out of this case study.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The design of this research project has been informed by reading in the areas of academic difficulties of international students; discourse; discourse, power and identity; and culture.

2.2 Academic difficulties of international students

Academic difficulties have been foregrounded in the research on the experiences of international students in western higher education institutions. For example, the academic culture of a university community is regarded as a crucial challenge, particularly for international students in higher education. Chinese postgraduate students who are studying at South African universities are likely to be experiencing similar challenges to those described and analyzed in previous research on international students in western higher education

When McKenna investigated the academic difficulties experienced by a group of international students studying in a US university she found that these students had difficulty in the comprehension of 'situated speech' in lectures and seminars, and that they needed "to learn more about the ways native speakers of English speak and act in such discourse communities"(1987:187). She also found that foreign students have difficulty in asking questions in class because of lack of proficiency in such aspects of English as pronunciation or grammar. Similarly, Robertson (in Sawir 2005: 569) who researched the difficulties experienced by international students at an Australian university argues that:

> "staff and students emphasize language as a key source of difficulties in teaching and learning. The students manifest a lack of confidence with English. They have incomplete understanding of lecturers' spoken English, and feel unhappy with their oral performances in the presence of Australian classmates."

Sawir (2005) explored learning difficulties of a group of Asian international students at an Australian university. The findings suggest that those Asian international students' language difficulties, such as lack of confidence in speaking English in classroom, are associated with their prior language learning experiences. For example, these experiences

focused on reception rather than production.

Basturkmen & Bitchener's research on the difficulties postgraduate L2 students' experience with thesis writing suggests that in addition to lacking language proficiency in writing, the L2 students often experienced difficulties in "understanding and meeting the genre requirements of the theses", such as 'forms and structures', 'coherent ideas and argument', 'lexical choice', especially with 'levels of appropriateness and formality' (2006:5). They also faced "problems in organizing ideas and arguments, using the appropriate style of writing, and expressing their thoughts clearly in English" (2006:5). Ballard and Clanchy (1993:20) highlighted three problems that are commonly faced by tertiary ESL students in their writing: problems with English language, problems with the ways of constructing meaning and expressing their understanding, and problems with the difference between students' attitudes and understanding of knowledge and teachers' expectations.

In investigating the challenges faced by a group of Chinese MBA students studying at UK higher institutions, Choo (2007: 145) found that these students experienced difficulty in adjusting to the critical approach to management education that was adopted by their lecturers. Choo argues that "the problems seem largely attributable to students' cultural

diversity and learning styles that are incompatible with western pedagogical assumptions, values and critical intent, the professional roles of management teachers and institutional rules and procedures that are required to support critical learning" (2007: 145). Findings from these research studies could be important for my study given that some of the participants are enrolled in business and management programmes.

Deem and Brehony, who focused on international doctoral students in a UK university, argue that "the disciplinary cultures were more important than any notion of enculturation into the academic profession" (2000: 158). They found that the ways in which research students might gain access to disciplinary cultures include "discipline-specific research training, giving seminar presentations, writing for publication, and establishing academic networks"(2000: 149), and that the students in their study were particularly positive about each of these.

2.3 Discourses

Gee's notion of 'discourse' is relevant to my research. He defines discourse as

> "…a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a

> member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'". Gee (1996: 131)

In trying to understand the challenges faced by Chinese postgraduate students, particularly in their academic studies, I will use Gee's concept of 'discourse' to investigate how the participants in the study are trying to engage in the new institution in terms of their 'thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting'. Gee's conceptualisation of discourse is similar to Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" which Thompson defines as "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions, and attitudes which are regular without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any rule" (1991: 12). The dispositions acquired in early childhood through the process of training and learning are similar to what Gee (1996: 137) defines as 'primary discourses', which refer to varieties of languages, values, ways of acting and beliefs that are acquired in the family setting. For Gee, other discourses are 'secondary discourses' which are mainly acquired outside of the family, such as in school, churches, work places and other public settings. Gee argues that "discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse" (1996: 139). The habitus of foreign students is likely to include embedded educational practices that are

culturally different to those of students and lecturers in the new institution.

Van Dijk (2001) defines discourse as 'text in context', and argues that when we analyze a particular discourse we should also examine the specific context in which that discourse is situated. Context mainly refers to social environment, the specific community, or even the particular discipline. This 'context' influences the ways of using language and the forms of social interaction, and also the ways of interpreting and understanding. In the literature on academic discourse, the particular focus of this study, one of the most influential definitions is that of the writing theorist Zamel who defines academic discourse as "a specialized form of reading, writing, and thinking done in the 'academy or other schooling situations'"(1998:187). She also explains that "each discipline represents a separate culture community" (1998:187). She argues that when students enter into an academic community, they have to learn how to choose the right vocabulary and the proper expression in different contexts, how to behave in specific situations, and to understand the culture of the community.

2.4 Discourse, power and identity

Fairclough's influential work on discourse and power is particularly relevant to my research. In his view, discourse is inseparable from social practices or social conventions which "refer to the whole process of social interaction" (1989: 24). He argues that "different domains have different orders of discourse and different types of practices" (1989: 29). This suggests that each university and each department within a university has its own discourses and practices. An understanding of Fairclough's work is very important for exploring and explaining the power relations that exist when foreign postgraduate students enroll in institutions in South Africa. He argues that "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants* (1989: 46; italics in the original text). He believes that "it is useful to distinguish broadly between three types of such constraints—constraints on:

- *content,* on what is said or done;
- *relations,* the social relations people enter into in discourse;
- *subjects,* or the "'subject positions' people can occupy." (1989: 46).

In other words, the power relations in discourse are embedded in three aspects: content, interpersonal relations and subject positions. With reference to cross-cultural encounters, Fairclough suggests that there is

inequality of power when "the non-powerful people have cultural and linguistic backgrounds different from those of the powerful people" (1989: 47). Similarly, Kamler and Thomson (2006) argue that there is a close relationship among discourse, knowledge and power. They explain that "a discourse defines and produces what we know, what and how we talk about an object of knowledge, and it influences how ideas are put into practice" (Kamler and Thomson, 2006:11). Therefore, for students who do not feel competent or confident in using a foreign language, entry into new discourses and discourse communities is particularly difficult.

The work of Ivanic and Lillis on discourse and identity is useful for my research in terms of understanding how the Chinese postgraduate students are likely to engage in academic writing in the new institution, and how the new academic environment may impact on their previous identities. Ivanic's research was with a group of students who are not foreigners in terms of language, but who are working class students who entered higher education as mature students and who faced many challenges including adjusting to the academic environment after being out of the classroom for many years. They felt that the demands of the institution in terms of academic writing were a challenge to their identities. Ivanic believes that discourse means "something like producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped

representations of reality" (1997: 17). In other words, discourse is influenced by culture and ideology and thus needs to be considered in cultural context. Ivanic also argues that "discourse is the mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity" (1997: 17) which indicates that discourse plays a very important role in the identity construction process. In her view "if people entering higher education experience an 'identity crisis', it is not because of any inadequacy in themselves, but because of a mis-match between the social contexts which have constructed their identities in the past and the new social context which they are entering " (1997: 12).

Lillis's (2001) research on students' academic writing in higher education also indicates that there is a close relationship between students' writing and their social identity. She argues that student academic writing is a social act, which means that student academic writing is not an individual activity but a social practice, because "student writing takes place within a particular institution, which has a particular history, culture, values and practices" (2001: 31). In other words, student academic writing is a kind of meaning-making process that includes consideration of the culture, habits, beliefs and values that previously existed in the context where the writing occurs. For example, when students do academic writing they need to consider whether their writing is acceptable or unacceptable in

that particular academic space. Kamler and Thomson (2006: 16) argue that academic writing constructs 'scholarly identity', which is "embedded in a tangle of cultural-historical practices that are both institutional and disciplinary". In other words, the institutional and disciplinary culture or discourses are closely associated with the process of constructing academic identity. The Chinese postgraduate students who are the subjects of the research are entering new social contexts and new discourses in their academic field which may unsettle their previously established academic identities.

2.5 Culture

As the participants in this research are undertaking their studies cross-culturally, an understanding of culture as a concept may be important in explaining the challenges they are facing. Generally speaking, culture refers to "a way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time".[1] Scollon and Scollon define 'culture' as "any aspect of the ideas, communications, or behaviours of a group of people which gives to them a distinctive identity and which is used to organize their internal sense of cohesion and membership" (1995: 127). Also, they believe that culture affects 'intercultural communication' and the understanding of discourses. In

[1] Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Cambridge University Press, 2003

other words, different cultures shape ways of talking, behaving and understanding differently.

For Rollnick "culture refers to a social heritage – those characteristic behaviours which are transmitted from one generation to the next. While the notion of culture includes collective mental artifacts such as symbols, ideas, beliefs and aesthetic perceptions.it also embodies the distinctive forms of discourse" (2000:98). She argues that learning is a kind of social practice, which is inseparable from the social context and the culture in which it occurs.

These definitions suggest that cultures differ according to different historical influences on them. The higher education system in South Africa is influenced by its European colonial history. While the higher education in China is largely influenced by Confucianism. Therefore, it is possible that Chinese students in my study who are undertaking their postgraduate studies in a South African university will experience cultural challenges. One of the findings from research which has investigated the challenges faced by overseas students when learning in a different cultural environment such as the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA has been that cultural differences are recognized as one of the main challenges for international students in Western-style universities

with regard to dealing with homesickness, making friends and understanding the customs and 'rules'. (Furnham 1997, Brennan 1997, Cortazzi & Jin 1997, Burke & Wyatt-Smith 1996, Myles & Cheng 2003, Cadman 2000, Deem & Brehony 2000,). These differences have been found to directly and indirectly affect students' academic studies. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) suggest that the differences in culture that are embedded in higher education include differences in academic cultures, cultures of communication and cultures of learning. With reference to the supervision of doctoral research, Kamler and Thomson argue that it is the supervisor who "embodies and mediates institutional and disciplinary cultures, conditions and conventions" (2006: 144). Cortazzi and Jin (1997) make a detailed comparison of the expectations of academics in Britain and China to show that the academic cultures in these two countries are different. There are differences in the styles of speaking and writing in academic learning, and in the ways in which the overseas students and their teachers see each other's roles in the teaching and learning process. They argue that these differences are one of the reasons why the Chinese students' academic performance does not meet the academic requirements of British universities. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) suggest that the misunderstandings in communication between overseas students and their tutors or local students are caused by their different cultural backgrounds, behaviours and beliefs.

Myles and Cheng (2003) explore the social and cultural life of a group of non-native English speaking (NNES) international graduate students at a Canadian university, and provide informative suggestions from different perspectives. They argue that the main challenge for NNES international students is to become "acculturated into a new academic and cultural community" (p. 248). Also they suggest that "there may be a relationship between social contact with the host culture and the social adjustment of international students, which, in turn, can affect academic achievement" (p. 248). In other words, they recognize the importance of knowing the host's culture for international students' academic studies. However, awareness of international students' culture and cultural differences on the part of lecturers and supervisors is also essential in understanding their academic performance. As Myles and Cheng (2003: 252) point out:

> "if we do not recognize cultural differences, we assume that students from other cultures are just like us. As a result, we begin to judge individuals from other cultures by our own cultural norms, behaviours, and values. These sorts of judgments can lead to misunderstandings and potentially insulting remarks and behaviours".

The literature reviewed in this chapter will be used to inform the data analysis in Chapter Five.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by outlining key features of case study research before describing the subjects of this case study, different techniques of data collection, and the method of data analysis.

3.2 Case study

This research project is a case study which investigates the challenges experienced by seven Chinese post-graduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand. According to Wallace (1998), a case study focuses on "individual units: an individual student; and individual event; a particular group; a particular class; a particular school, etc." (p. 161). Therefore the findings of case study cannot be generalisable. Wallace (1998: 164) points out that "a case study approach may lead to studies that are more focused or specific, more accessible (especially to inexperienced researchers) and possibly also more interesting in human terms." Similarly, Knobel and Lankshear (1999) argue that case study is an 'intensive (in depth and detailed) study of a bounded, contemporary phenomenon' (p. 95). They suggest that a case study is useful for a

small-scale study which enables one to focus directly on particular individuals through undertaking an in-depth and detailed study.

Bassey (1999) outlines the key features of an educational case study. He describes it as an empirical enquiry which is:

- conducted within a localized boundary of space and time (i.e. a singularity);
- into *interesting* aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system;
- mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons;
- in order to inform the judgments and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers;
- or of theoreticians who are working to these ends;
- in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able

(a) to explore *significant* features of the case,

(b) to create *plausible* interpretations of what is found,

(c) to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations,

(d) to construct a *worthwhile* argument or story,

(e) to relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature,

(f) to convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story,

(g) to provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments. (Bassey, 1999: 58, italics in the original).

In a case study, the actual data gathered by researchers is specific to a particular context (Gillham, 2000:12), and thus the results are not statistically generalisable. However, I still hope that the study will provide an insight into the academic and cultural challenges faced by Chinese and perhaps other international post-graduate students in South African universities.

3.3 Research site

The research was conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand where English is the language of both undergraduate and postgraduate study. The majority of students are from South Africa, but the university has a large number of international students from other parts of Africa, and increasingly from Asia, Europe, and America.

Research data were gathered in the second semester of 2007.

3.4 Research participants

This research focuses on seven Chinese students who are registered for their first, second or third year of postgraduate studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. Three are from various engineering departments in the School of Engineering and the Built Environment; three are from the Business School, and one is from the School of Education. For the purpose of presenting and analyzing data, each has been given a pseudonym in order to preserve their anonymity.

The research literature suggests that different disciplines have their own academic culture, therefore by choosing participants from different Schools the research aims to explore whether students in these different Schools face similar or different challenges.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

In this case study, the main source of data is information from semi-structured interviews. These were conducted in Mandarin and were tape-recorded for transcription and translation into English. Due to the personal preferences of participants in the interviews, some interviews lasted more than 60 minutes while others lasted

approximately 25 minutes. Transcription of interviews was not difficult as both the interviewer and participants were speaking Mandarin which is my mother tongue. The translation process took a relatively long time, with every effort being made to preserve the participants' original meaning. However, it is likely that some nuances of meaning have been 'lost in translation'.

According to Wallace (1998:170), "if the case study relates to an individual learner, it will probably be necessary to know various personal details concerning the learner, including age, sex, status, mother tongue, number of years learning the target language, and so on." Therefore, prior to the set of questions which is addressed to each of the seven students, I participated in open-ended individual informal conversation in which I encouraged the students to tell me their "stories" of coming to Johannesburg and anything that they would like to share about 'being' in this new environment. I made notes during the conversation with the students' permission.

In addition, the students were asked to complete location maps or charts (Fotheringham, 2006) which provide a visual representation of self in the university in China and in South Africa. I anticipated that these 'maps' might help the students to represent aspects of their histories and

identities in forms other than language (Stein and Newfield, 2002). A few examples of student writing and lecturer or supervisor response to this writing, were also collected and analyzed.

3.6 Research ethics

Ethics clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities (Protocol 2007 ECE21).

3.7 Data analysis

As much of the data were collected from semi-structured interviews, I first transcribed the data and then provided a translation into English. I identified statements that particularly address the issue of academic discourses, and social and cultural challenges, and categorized them according to recurring patterns and themes in these statements in order to address the research questions.

3.8 Conclusion

In the next two chapters, I will present and analyze the research data.

Chapter 4: Presentation of data from seven case studies

4.1 Introduction:

In section 4.2 of this chapter, the data from seven case studies are presented. Each case begins with information about the student's background, and then continues with the presentation of data from the location "maps" and interview. Each student's location map is included in Appendix A. For three of the students (cases 2, 5, and 7) examples of lecturer or supervisor feedback on their written work is presented (see p60).

4.2 Presentation of data

4.2.1 Case 1: Lee

Background:

Lee is 28 years old. He came to South Africa in August 2006. He had already completed a Masters degree in chemical engineering at East China University of Science and Technology. This university is ranked in the top ten according to the Department of Education in China (2003). Currently, he is registered for a PhD in chemical engineering at the University of Witwatersrand.

Explanation of location map:

Lee drew two maps which compared the cultural environments in the university in China and in South Africa. He compared what he terms the monocultural environment at the university in China with the multicultural environment in the South African university. According to his explanation, it seems that the multicultural environment at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is an advantage and important for his academic study in South Africa. In discussing his "maps" he said:

"Coming together of scholars from many nationalities is good for academic studying".

"Academic communication among different cultures is better".

In the second map, he compares the architecture at the university in China and in South Africa. In the interview he explained that in the university at which he studied in China the architectural style is the same as Chinese traditional style while in South Africa the university's architectural style is European.

Interview Data:

Academic challenges

The first challenge for Lee when he enrolled at Wits was the challenge of language. As he said:

"It is pretty difficult for me to express myself clearly. I am still struggling in some social event discussions."

However, he is quite confident about his academic English when dealing with disciplinary study. He said:

"If you know basic foundation of English, your English proficiency will improve dramatically, like communicating with lecturers, studying, and academic studying, especially the terminologies in your subject. Like me, there is no problem for me to explain something in my subject to you in English."

However, Lee also mentioned the difficulty in understanding academic discourses in his study. He said:

"You cannot translate it(terminology) literally into English or Chinese. Most of the time, the meaning is different. For example, if my supervisor says 'organic' or 'inorganic', I know the meaning, but when he said 'permanent', I was confused at that time."

It seems that for Lee conversational English is more difficult than English for academic study. At the same time, he recognizes the importance of being competent in English when studying in South Africa:

"If you can not write (English) at all, you cannot read at all, or you cannot speak at all, then it is impossible for you to study here."

When discussing academic reading, his response suggests that he is sometimes aware of inaccuracies in the text but he does not directly challenge the authors:

"Sometimes when I read an English journal, I can figure out that his test process

has some problems, but I will not go further and find out what is exactly wrong. I just ignore it and leave it there."

Lee's attitude towards some of the academic reading seems to indicate that to some extent he has a critical orientation to this reading but that he does not act on what he notices.

As Lee is studying chemical engineering, the main part of his research involves experiments in the laboratory. Therefore, it was important to find out about his laboratory experience at Wits. When he was asked about the differences between doing experiments in universities in China and in South Africa, he mentioned:

"I know the equipment (at the university) in China has improved a lot, even better than South African universities."
(in South Africa) "…the problems and difficulties in experiment process sometimes cannot be solved immediately. Then you probably think 'anyway, just leave it like that.'"

Lee's response seems to indicate that the difference between doing experiments in China and in South Africa is to do with the facilities in the laboratory and the ways of dealing with problems, which is likely to cause some difficulties for his academic study at the university in South Africa. However, he has a positive attitude towards meetings and discussions with supervisors:

"I like the scholars and lecturers working cooperatively here and that they take their work seriously. I also think the supervisors and students have more communication compared with Chinese universities. In China, it is completely different. I could only discuss with my supervisor once every three months, sometimes even longer."

"…while in South Africa, I can discuss with my supervisor every week."

"… I do prefer the communication way in South Africa."

Lee's positive attitude towards new ways of learning can also be found in his references to group discussion.

"… On the one side, the group discussion stimulates you to report something. On the other side, during the meeting, you can find certain solutions for your study problems. You also can help other classmates to find the solution and have deeper understanding in each field, because you can exchange your ideas with others in different academic fields. It is a process for you to study. Generally speaking, there is no group discussion in China. Anyway, I prefer group discussion, when it is for an assignment, but I feel much better when I find the solution I need and I also feel proud that I can help others to solve the problems or give some useful advice to them. "

It is likely that his positive response to group discussion is an enabling factor in his studies in a new academic environment. Also, he believes that the interaction with supervisors or other students as well as supervisors' encouraging ways in the group discussion help him build confidence, as he said:

"In the group discussion, you can express your own opinion freely. I think the lecturers are quite democratic. If they were wrong, they will accept it, if you

were wrong and you insist on your position, they will not say anything. However, in China, you will never refuse the position of the lecturers. In South Africa, they accept diverse views of academic studies. The truth is either from you or from other people."

Supervision is a very important part of postgraduate study. Therefore, Lee was asked about his experience of supervision as well as how he sees his relationship with supervisors.

According to Lee, he is satisfied with his experiences of supervision from his supervisors in South Africa which is not only because of the help and support they provide, but also because of the trust they have in him. That is to say, for Lee, the help, the attitude, the recognition from supervisors are quite important and are likely to have a positive influence on his academic life in South Africa.

"Whenever you have problems, you can come to them, they will solve the problem for you. If you can't find a practical solution, she will explain to you in theories, or he will show you in practice."

"… both of them are very friendly. They also trust Chinese students…… These two supervisors make good comments on Chinese students … They think we are studious students, who work hard. I felt much better when I heard this."

"… it is difficult for me to explain something complicated in English, I have to use my poor English to explain to them. They never discriminate against me for my poor English, and they never feel bored or sick of my English. If one of them understands what I am talking about, they will try to explain to the other. They do have strict requirements on us, but they are not rigorous requirements. At

the beginning, they allowed us to attend the group discussions for 2-3 times without expressing our opinion. After that, we have to express our opinions in the meeting. Now, we can talk more and more. I really appreciate that they understand our Chinese students. I think we have a good relationship."

Social challenges

Lee referred to challenges in regard to transport and to making friends. Lack of transport is one of the problems that make his life inconvenient.

"… There are too many inconveniences in daily life. The South African public transport is not good, and people are scared to use the public transport. It is difficult to live in South Africa without one's own transport."

"… It is not easy for me to go out for a walk."

Making friends with local students is also a big challenge for Lee, in which he believes that cultural differences are the main barrier for him to interact with students from other countries.

"I almost have no local friends after I tried to make friends with them."
"In China, we are living in the same back ground of life, but South Africa is different. You have to make a friend with students from the Middle East, Indians, South Africans, and Zambians. This is more difficult than in China. Because, all of us do not live together and we have different cultural backgrounds, so we have different lives."

However, he also believes that trying to adapt to the environment is quite necessary and he is confident about it.

"I feel I can adapt to any environment, so I do not feel a lot of trouble in my daily life."

He claims that the lack of social activities makes his life simpler:

"… I do not have too many social parties or visits, therefore, I can focus on reading, doing experiments, and studying. In South Africa, I do not need to pay too much attention to the social environment and social communication. I think this is quite good for academic studying."

4.2.2 Case 2: Zhou

Background information:

Zhou is 32 years old. He finished his first degree at the University of Nan Chang in China. He came to South Africa four years ago and currently he is a MBA part time student of the Wits Business School. At the same time, he is also in full time employment.

Explanation of location maps:

Zhou has pictured differences in learning styles between Chinese and South Africa university students. A Chinese student is studying on his own, working till very late in the night, while two Wits students are engaged in group discussion in a pleasant environment, enjoying the studying.

Interview data:

Academic challenges:

Zhou highlights language as the biggest barrier for a Chinese student pursuing post-graduate study in an English-speaking country:

"At the very beginning of my study, I didn't even understand the basic communication. The class was more difficult. I didn't understand what the lecturers were talking about. Listening, speaking, and writing were very hard for me. Reading was better."

The learning environment and different learning styles have brought another challenge. Zhou stressed the centrality of group discussion to his studies at Wits:

"Chinese students like studying by themselves, while South African students like discussing and finishing work together."

However he has responded positively to this challenge:

"It (group discussion) is good because you get a chance to share others' ideas and experiences. You learn from them. They are all working, so they have their own special ways of thinking and dealing with problems, and discussion is a good chance for each one to exchange good ideas. It is not only helpful to my study, but also good for my work as well."

In an MBA programme, oral presentations are a requirement of the programme. Such presentations are also a challenge for Zhou:

"We actually have a lot of opportunity to present, either in the work place or in the class. For me, I am not feeling comfortable. But it is a good way to develop your ability."

A third challenge for Zhou is the sourcing and appropriate use of reference material:

"When you find resources, you need to think how to use them in your own article and you need to construct it. Here, I feel the lecturers or supervisors don't teach these aspects. In China, teachers teach you how to write and how to construct ideas. I think this is relevant to the education system. Here, teachers give you more space. They emphasize your own thinking and initiative."

The expectation of his supervisor that Zhou will be able to use his own knowledge and skills to solve research difficulties is a further challenge:

"Here, the supervisor gives you an idea, he doesn't give details. He doesn't say which part is wrong. I don't know how the research is done in China, but I know when I was doing course work, teachers always told students what was incorrect. Here, at Wits, the supervisor always gives you an idea, then leaves you to think how you would do that."

"I think the supervisor should provide more detailed guidance."

However, a good relationship with his supervisor has been helpful to Zhou:

"(We are) Like friends. He also wants me to graduate in time. My supervisor is really good. I feel relaxed when I stay with him. He is easy-going. Sometimes, I also feel nervous when I hand in my work. Because I am afraid my work is not

good enough and will be refused. But finally I have found that my supervisor will tell me how to improve if I am not doing well. So I tell myself "don't be nervous".

Another challenge is the different approach to assessment:

"Here, they look at your idea, your thinking, and no single answer. They also look at your team work, like discussion. The communication among classmates is really important. In China, there is no mark for team work."

Social challenges:

Zhou has found it difficult to adapt to South Africa society. He is also concerned about the security problem, but this does not appear to be very serious for him (and those staying on campus):

"The culture is different, so it is hard to get into society deeply. This is not easy to overcome. Also, the security problem makes me worried. But inside the campus is better, outside is not that safe."

4.2.3 Case 3 Yang

Background information:

Yang is 27 years old. She has been in South Africa for one year. She completed her Masters in chemical engineering at East China University of Science and Technology (the same university as Lee). At present, she is registered for a PhD in chemical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Explanation of location map:

Yang's maps shows the different ways of studying and teaching in universities in China and South Africa. In the drawing named "Studying In China", the lecturer is standing on a platform in front of the classroom and giving a lecture by himself. In the other picture about studying at Wits, students and teacher are sitting around a desk in discussion, one student is talking. As she explained:

"In China, the most profound memory for me is that most of the time teachers teach how to conduct research by means of lecturing... Most of the time I spent was in the classroom... At Wits, we don't have any lectures, but we have group meetings once a week and students will discuss their studies during the meeting."

Interview data:

Academic challenges

For Yang, the first challenge is language:

"The first one (challenge) is language. It is not because I didn't study hard in China, but because we didn't have a good language environment. If I didn't have any problem with listening skills, I think I would be as good as others academically."

"Sometimes I want to borrow things from them, but I say I want to lend it. This makes them confused."

She also believes that her prior English language learning experience in China has impacted on her academic English proficiency. In addition, the

discourses in the discipline are also a big challenge for her.

"When the supervisor discusses with me about energy, I don't know what the meaning of that is. Then I will not understand what he is talking about. But when I look it up in a dictionary, then I get the meaning immediately and I will know what he is saying."

Anther challenge is the difference in pedagogy:

"In China the supervisor teaches you all the knowledge that might be useful to you, 1…2…3…4…, then you use it when you are doing research. While at Wits, you find a problem by yourself, and then ask your supervisor and your supervisor will give an answer. You learn from the answers."

"In China, the lecturer teaches you everything. Here, we start learning by ourselves, from specific questions, very practical. In China, Masters and PhD students have lectures. They spend half their time studying the theories while at Wits, PhD students don't have any courses."

Becoming accustomed to a different style of supervision is also a challenge:

"I think the way of supervising is different. Maybe it's because the culture is different. In China, when a supervisor gives you a research topic, he will discuss it with you actively. He will tell you the research direction according to his own experiences. While at Wits, on the contrary, you have to find the direction by yourself, then you ask your supervisor whether it is doable or not and he will give you an answer."

"… Later, I found there is a difference in ways of thinking. I need to find out questions first, because the supervisor will not come to ask me whether I have any questions or not. In China, the supervisor will ask you the process, like how is the research going. They even say: "I found this is interesting, can you help me to do research on it?" Here at Wits, this is impossible. Now I begin to ask my

supervisor, and he gives me some ideas and suggestions and then I do an experiment. If I meet any questions, I will ask other students."

These different ways of interacting with a supervisor may have affected Yang's progress in the new context.

"I had got used to the way of supervising in China, so when I came here, I didn't know how I was expected to behave. Sometimes I found I was wasting time. Only if you try to do it, can you find questions and ask your supervisor to help you."

Yang's responses seem to indicate that she is struggling to adjust to the new culture of supervision as well as the new learning style. As she is studying chemical engineering, most of the research is done in a laboratory where she faces further challenges:

"I always meet problems when I am doing experiments. Sometimes I feel lost. I want to deal with it by myself but I cannot solve it. Because of my character, I don't want to ask my supervisor, and I want to solve it by myself. Then I don't know where to start."

In addition to the difficulties she has in dealing with the problems of doing experiments, the requirements for assistance from her supervisor's side are also different from those in the university in China. Being an independent learner is also one of the challenges for her:

"The supervisor in China helped more on equipment than the supervisor at Wits."

"Occasionally, (in China) the supervisor will come to watch your experiment, and give you some suggestions. While at Wits, the supervisor goes to the laboratory once a month and he almost does not teach you how to use equipment. You have to depend on your own experiences. However, if you find out questions, you can go to him and ask. The problem is that he probably has not done this for 5 years, so he might not be familiar with this equipment as well, and probably knows less than you do. In this case, I have to learn from an instruction book. Everything depends on yourself."

Finding the relevant resources and literature for her research is also a problem:

"…I will find previous research, theses, and articles. But how to find the relevant resources is not easy. For example, maybe I can find this question when I read 100 articles. So it's like you are searching for something in the sea. You don't know which one you should choose."

It is not clear whether the problems that Yang mentioned already existed when she was in China or whether they have arisen in the new academic environment.

Yang has had positive experiences of group discussion and group supervision in South Africa but also sees value in the approach adopted by her lecturers in China:

"Group discussion is the most important part in the whole research process. In the discussion, I like this way of studying very much. I tell them my problems, they may not help my research a lot, but their ideas may help me to think further… So I can learn a lot from discussion… While in China, the teaching always happens in the class, this is also good… One is focusing on practice; the other is focusing on theory. So it's hard to say which one is good and which one

is not. But I think focusing on practice is more important, because when you meet more problems now, the better your ability of solving problem is in the future."

It seems Yang has quite a positive attitude towards group discussion in which she recognizes the benefit of discussing with other students and supervisors. At the same time, she also realizes the disadvantage of different ways of teaching in China and in South Africa. Finally, she believes that the way of teaching which focuses on practice is more important for her future. Yang also finds other aspects of learning very informative, as she said:

"We have a meeting every Thursday, and students report what they have done and what questions they have, so that supervisors can help them. For me this is also a learning process. When a supervisor answers one student's questions other students are also learning from that. I think the supervisor's expectation is that each student should summarize what they have done and be clear about what they should do next. It's the same in China on this point. Here, the supervisor expects you to find and solve questions by yourself. He tries to develop your ability. In China, when you report to your supervisor he will suggest to you which direction is better. In fact, there is no big difference, just one is English, and the other is Chinese."

It seems that Yang has a complex relationship with her supervisor:

"Because I am a foreign student, the supervisor doesn't speak fast to me. He will get a message from my face, like if I don't understand I will show my confused face, and then he knows I don't understand and he will repeat or speak simple words. I am happy with it. So I am satisfied with this way of learning. It seems all my worries have been solved now."

"We cooperate with each other very well. He is a very successful professor, and easy-going. Sometimes his way of talking makes me feel he is just like a friend to me. I am afraid of him as well, because he is still my professor and his position is higher than mine. In China, it is like this. A teacher's position is higher than students always. When doing academic work, he is very strict. So I am still afraid."

Social life challenges:

When responding to questions about her social life, Yang said:

"My social life is mainly based in the office. I socialize with students in the same group, and colleagues in the office. The security is bad here. I cannot go outside the campus, which is too complicated I think. Then we have a study group, we discuss once a week. For example, if I don't know terminology in the chemical field, I will ask other students in the group. They will explain and give me examples."

Yang believes that her limited social interaction outside the office is associated with cultural barriers that exist between her and local students:

"It is difficult to make close friends with local students. It's nothing to do with character; it is because our cultures are different. Sometimes you just feel that the way they are looking at you is strange, mysterious, just like the way we look at them is also strange and odd, because we don't understand the culture of each other."

For Yang, the cultural differences cause the greatest difficulty in making friends and socializing with local students. She believes that understanding local cultures is important for integration into the society here:

"I feel our cultures are different, so I will not try to find a friend actively because of my character, but the main problem is culture. Sometimes they are laughing and I totally lose what's going on, why and where it's funny."

"We cannot integrate into their society unless we know them very well. Anyway, I don't have local friends, just the students in our lab. They are good to me, but I still feel it isn't like staying with my Chinese friends… Sometimes, I feel it is hard to integrate into their circle."

"I don't have any social life here. Because I found it is hard to socialize with local people."

Yang believes that differences in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992) have an effect on social interactions:

"One thing is very impressive, once we went to a cinema at school to watch a movie. Everybody was laughing. At that time, I understood what they were saying in the movie, but I didn't understand why the audience was laughing. Then I asked the one next to me: "Anything funny?" I think it is because we have different cultures. The local people may know that story in the movie, but we don't know. Just like there are lots of stories on Chinese history, we know but they don't understand. So it is not easy to completely integrate into their society."

The problem of safety is another worrying one which might indirectly affect Yang's academic study in the new environment:

"Security is a serious problem here. Sometimes the experiment finishes very late, and I cannot go home by myself, so I have to ask somebody to send me home. My supervisor also told me not to go outside at night. Of course, we have robbery in China, but the difference is they don't threaten your life. So you must be really careful here."

4.2.4 Case 4: Liao

Background information:

Liao is 34 years old; he obtained his first degree at Hu Nan Normal University in China 10 years ago. He was sent by his company in China to work in South Africa four years ago. He is currently a second year part-time Master of Management (MM) student at Wits Business School.

Explanation of location maps:

Liao's drawings compared the campus environments of a Chinese and a South Africa university. Where in a Chinese university one sees tall buildings full of students everywhere, in a South Africa university there are grasslands and sparsely located buildings. Among the trees and flowers is the Wits Business School. He explained:

"Wits is more beautiful than my university in China. There are a lot of trees and flowers at Wits campus and my School, while in my university in China, the campus is full of buildings."

He also mentioned the importance of the international office.

"… International office is very important, because I am an international student. International office is like a bridge which connects me to the university as well as society."

Interview data:

Academic challenges:

Liao identifies language and cultural differences as the two major challenges as they cause problems in communication:

"Language, of course, is the biggest problem. Because in this country, I am a foreigner, I have to speak their language (English) to communicate with others; I am not a native speaker, so it's not easy. The second one, I think is cultural differences. We have different cultural backgrounds, so our understanding is not the same, which brings problems when we talk to each other. It's really hard sometimes, like when they speak to each other (local students), I really want to know what are they talking about, why they are laughing, but it is not easy."

Group discussion is a relatively new but very important study method for Chinese students at Wits, while cultural differences cause difficulties during discussion:

"Discussion is a good way of learning; of course, it is not easy as well. You have to use all the resources in your mind within a short time before you can speak out. And sometimes the idea you spoke out can not get any response. They don't understand, then you have to explain. The resources in my mind are limited as well. I mean the knowledge, the cultural background knowledge."

"It's the knowledge that you accumulate after many years. I was living in China before, the knowledge that I accumulated before is different from that of people who are living in South Africa. That's to say, I don't have experience of living here, or it is not long enough, so I am lacking that background. So sometimes I don't know what they are talking about, and they don't understand my meaning. It's common (often happened to him)."

Liao believes that oral presentation is an important way of improving one's English and he has enjoyed it more than group discussion.

"Presentation is fine, much better. I enjoy it, because I can prepare for it, and then I know what I will say. It's more active, and I can control it. It isn't like discussion, you don't know what they (classmates) are going to say, so you are in a passive position, you have to follow other people's thinking, then you can respond to that."

Different ways of assessing students' performances appear to be a challenge for students from China, but also to be a challenge which Liao enjoys:

"(work is assessed) partly from the performance in the class, like classroom discussion, and the group discussion after the class. Usually we have a small group, and we make an appointment with each other about meeting and discussion together. The other part of assessment is from assignments, usually three assignments for one course, the last assignment is equal to the test. ... In China we don't often have discussion, and we don't get a mark for that. Normally, everything is assessed by the final test. I like the way of doing assessment here, it's more fair I think. We have more chances to get good marks, like if you do not do well in this part, then you can do better in the other part."

For Liao, the relationship with his supervisor has been a positive one:

". I think our relationship is quite good. Whenever we meet, he not only discusses about study, or academic research, but also we talk about something else, like company management in China, or some interesting cases in South Africa. So we are friends. I personally believe so."

Social challenges:

Liao has found social experiences helpful with his study, in that these have provided him with a better understanding of the cultural background

to many of the lectures. Also, social interactions provide many chances for practising his oral English, which is so important for group discussion.

"I try to make friends with my classmates, they come from different countries. It's good, because it helps me to improve my language so that I would not feel too nervous when I discuss with them. And……it is also a good way to know the local culture and that helps me to understand the lecture better, because sometimes the lecturer gives us a lot of examples or cases that happened here (South Africa) many years ago, and I don't understand. I mean if I often stay with local students, we talk, we discuss, and then I can learn the culture from them. It is good for study."

Liao believes that cultural differences are the main reason for the great challenge in making friends.

"One thing that is really difficult is that it seems really hard to make a true friend, I mean good friend. You (I) always find that you (we) are different. It's hard for me to give up my habit, my way of thinking in order to get close to them. They don't want to either. We have different customs, habits, and way of thinking."

Liao did not mention security worries, while ironically, harassments from policemen were troubling him.

"Sometimes I will meet policemen when I come to school for class around 5 or 6pm. I have every legal document, they just stop me and ask questions, and sometimes they just want money. It's really bad."

One would be happier to find these officers in the place they should be, especially in a high crime rate country like South Africa.

4.2.5 Case 5: Wang

Background information:

Wang is a 30 year old PhD student in the Mechanical Engineering School at Wits. He came to South Africa in 2004. He obtained his bachelors and masters degree in Engineering at the University of Tianjin, China.

Explanation of location maps:

Wang's drawings show the difference in learning styles between Chinese and South African university engineering students. Where a Chinese student takes great pains to read a large number of books, Wits students enjoy the examination of a car's mechanical systems in a laboratory.

Interview data:

Academic challenges:

Wang pointed out that his first and biggest challenge is language. Interestingly, Wang believes the language challenge is more serious for liberal arts students than those in science and engineering, because of the different language usage requirement:

"The first challenge for me is surely the language. We know that this is always the biggest challenge for an Asian, not only Chinese, because the language structures are very different. I also think this is a more serious problem for students who major in arts, literature and management, and such courses, than

for students like me in engineering. We are dealing with equations a lot, which you can say is a common language anywhere."

Presentations provide a good chance to practice one's oral English. However, foreign students such as Wang may find them a challenge if they are not comfortable with their level of English:

"I often get nervous. I just feel I can't be very fluent, and I am sometimes not satisfied with my work."

According to Wang, the academic environment is the second biggest challenge. By this he means the teaching style of lecturers, requirements of independent study, academic writing, referencing and copyright, and how the supervisors provide guidance. In terms of writing, the expectations of his research supervisor have been different from what he had experienced in China:

"My supervisor would like to see me put the academic writing in a clear and simple way. This I really think is the right way. In China, my supervisor did not require too much. But generally students try hard to write in big volumes and use long equations to make it "look" more academic."

Unlike the other case study students, Wang has found few opportunities for group discussion, though he can often go to the supervisors for questions and problems:

"We don't have such discussion, as far as I know. Mostly, I discuss with my supervisors. I have two supervisors, sometimes I discuss with them together, sometimes I only discuss with one."

One of the differences between his previous and current study experiences is in the area of independent work:

"Maybe here at Wits we are given more space to use our own ideas. Students can do the work more freely, in the way they wish. In China, students will more closely follow the supervisor's instruction."

Social challenges:

Wang believes that he has been able to overcome many of the social difficulties that he has experienced:

"There are, of course, many other challenges, like the life style, food, weather, and so on. But we can get used to these."

Wang believes that too much social life is not good for a student:

"Social life helps to make friends and helps me to relax a lit bit, but it does not help much with my study. I prefer to stay quiet when I can concentrate on study. When you have too much social life, you have parties to go to, you deal with too many people, and then you may find you have spent too much time on socializing. And some times you do not come back to studying easily. It just takes time to concentrate again on study."

4.2.6 Case 6: Gu

Background information:

Gu is 36 years old. He did his diploma in politics in China around 10 years ago. Before he came to South Africa he was working in local provincial government for about eight years. He finished his Masters in Management at the School of Management at the University of Witwatersrand in the years 2005 and 2006. At present, he is a full time PhD student in Management at Wits.

Explanation of location maps:

Gu drew two pictures, one shows that the school or college he attended in China was isolated from the '*practical world*' (ten years ago), while the other 'map' shows that at Wits, his school, Graduate School of Public and Development Management, is always connected to the "*practical world*". In the interview, he described his pictures in the following way:

"*In the Chinese education system, there is no linkage between the practical world and the curriculum and text-books used in the school. Students cannot see the applicability and practicability of theories, concepts and exercises that they learn in the classroom. Text-books are rarely updated. Thus the students cannot access and learn the current technologies, theories, concept and debates. In South Africa, I have noticed that in our PADM (Public and Development Management) programme the course packs are always updated and adjusted according to the current situation and affairs. So the students are always aware of the current conditions and debates.*"

Interview data:

Academic challenges

English language is the most challenging problem for Gu, as he said:

"The first one (challenge) is the language barrier. I am never happy with my proficiency in English."

Lack of '*English proficiency*' creates difficulty for him in making oral presentation.

"I loved giving oral presentations in China, but not in South Africa, only because of language difficulties: I cannot articulate and debate in English fluently."

Time management is a second challenge for Gu,

"… I always feel that I don't have enough time for my study, because I have to study many subjects within a short period…Last year when I was doing my Masters, I had to study 15 subjects within 10 months. So it was a lot."

Although Gu finds differences between the teaching styles in the two countries, he did not state whether these differences made his academic study difficult or not. Similarly, when he was asked about the differences between assessment in China and South Africa, he did not express a view. However, his comments indicate that he is currently experiencing a quite different academic learning environment where he needs to change his

learning style in order to adapt himself to the new requirements for academic study.

"In China they expected me to remember what I have been taught. If I knew about the theory, it was good enough to get high marks. At Wits they expect me to apply the theories that I have learned in my work. They also expect my understanding, my argument, my evidence that supports my view and my own analysis."

"In China if I gave answers which were the same as in the textbook, I was going to get high marks. I did not need to know the application of what I studied and how I could apply the theories. At Wits, most questions are about the application. We are asked to apply the theories or the concepts."

Reading plays an important part in academic research. According to Gu, the expectations of teachers in China and South Africa also turn out to be quite different:

"In China if I read all the textbooks, I did not need to worry about tests or exams. All the questions would come from the text book. At Wits, I have to read a lot of books besides the course-pack: my reading is never enough."

Gu has mixed feelings about group discussion:

"…I enjoy some discussions that I know very well such as in the area of leadership and economics. But I have not liked some discussions for which I have no experiences and where the topic was unfamiliar such as public policy and project management."

As Gu studied for a diploma in China, it is possible that his prior education in China did not provide experience of being supervised. It seems that he has been pleasantly surprised by his experiences of supervision at Wits:

"Before we met, I thought there would be some difficulties between us, especially in communication. I also thought that the research would be so tough. However when I started doing it, I saw it being quite simple. I had just to follow the steps systematically."

Compared with his experience in China, he is quite satisfied with the relationship with his supervisor at Wits. It seems the help from the supervisor makes his academic life easier.

"I think we have a very friendly relationship. There is no tension or uneasiness between us. We are like a friend and like a brother. He (my supervisor) tells me what I should/must do. I also discuss my views and opinions. If I cannot do what he instructed, he helps me how to do it or he gives me another option. In China, I didn't have such experiences. All the teachers are quite busy. They give lectures, and then leave."

Social life challenges

Living in a new country is never easy, especially at the very beginning. However, Gu's response is really positive in regard to socializing with people who share similar cultural backgrounds.

"Well, meeting some people who were kind and supportive made my studies less challenging. Also having a few students who were from our neighbouring countries and have similar traditions and customs helped make my studies very pleasant and enjoyable".

Challenges in his social life include financial concerns, the crime, and the inconvenience of transport. These challenges are likely to directly or indirectly impact on his academic life at Wits.

"Financial shortage. My scholarship cannot cover all the expenses, so I had to do some small jobs. I still feel I cannot afford to buy all the necessary books."

"The situation of crime and insufficient (rare) public transportation are the most difficult things for me. I dare not to go anywhere outside the campus and I always had to worry about my safety."

"China has not much crime or violence among the students as well as the public. But we, the students are always worrying about the crime and violence. Students in South Africa are full of freedom but amid loads of the crime and violence."

4.2.7 Case 7: Jiang

Background information:

Jiang is 26 years old and has been in South Africa for 10 months. She did her bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature at the

University of An Hui in China. Currently, she is studying for a Bachelor of Education Honours degree, with a specialization in curriculum design in the Wits School of Education.

Explanation of location maps:

Jiang's pictures show the different learning styles in South Africa and China. She explained:

"… In China, I was sitting at my desk and trying to memorize the content and knowledge in the text books. And it was very late, midnight. I was still reading, so many books to read."

"…at Wits, the student is going to the library to find resources by herself. So this is independent study. And this map shows the students are in a workshop, they are discussing in the group."

Interview data:

Academic challenges

For Jiang, mastery of the English language is the most challenging problem:

"…*the first one (challenge) is the language, including reading and writing. When you have a lecture, you have to understand what the lecturer is saying, the content. You also need to communicate with the classmates. As a student here,*

it is common to have group study, so speaking is very important. The language is quite a challenge."

Specifically, she finds that conversational language is very difficult:

"For basic communication I don't have any problem. But for expressing my feeling and talking technical terminology, it becomes very hard. Language is easy when it comes to lectures, because I read everyday, and I was already familiar with the vocabulary and sentences. But when I talk, it takes time to think and to organize the language, and I have to respond quickly."

Her response also shows that familiarity with specialist discourses is likely to be helpful for her understanding of lectures.

Jiang finds group discussions both challenging and helpful:

"Yes, I like it (group discussion). But my oral speaking is not good, this is the problem. My group members are from other African countries, they speak English but it seems they have a strong accent and they speak fast, so sometimes I don't understand at all. But group discussion is very important, and you can reference other students' ideas. They have important points that you have never thought of before. Also, when you speak out your own ideas, others can correct you or support your idea. You can exchange suggestions."

On the one hand, Jiang enjoys oral presentations because she believes they helps her study. However, on the other hand, she finds her English skills are not good enough, either because speaking English is difficult or it is not easy to get used to the different accents. The challenge of language can also be found in her response to presentations.

"If I do a good preparation, I will enjoy (presentation), but if not, I will become afraid…if I prepare it very well, I like it…"

Jiang spoke at length about the writing challenges that she has experienced:

"In China, the teachers ask you to write around the theories, only theories. You only need to write the theories in your own words; you don't need to include your own ideas. Because I was studying Chinese literature before, I only needed to study the theory, pure theory, and I didn't need to combine theory and practice. Here, it is different. My first assignment was not good. That is because I didn't write my own thinking and ideas, and I didn't combine the theory and practice. I wrote the same as I wrote in China, just copying other scholars' idea and reconstructing by using my own words. Also, in China, there is no strict requirement on your ideas, but on your standard of using language. Here, everything needs to be direct and precise. You need to express your thinking clearly. Long sentences are not necessary if short sentences can express everything. Besides, here, the writing needs to be really logical and also when you argue something you have to find evidence, either from your own experiences or reading from other books. This is very different."

"I prefer the writing style here. Because the aim of your article is to show what you want to say and to let people understand what you are saying, it is better to directly write down your own idea."

A particular challenge relates to the use of references:

" *When I was writing in China, there was no requirement for references, at least in my major. Or, you just listed the main theories you have referenced."*

"(in China) They don't pay much attention to that. They don't even look at it. But here, the references are very important. Teachers are very strict on that."

Although there are a lot of differences which Jiang feels she still needs more time to adjust to, she is very positive about the style of teaching and learning at Wits:

"I prefer Wits, because you can develop your independent thinking and critical reading."

The difference in assessment practices is mentioned, but Jiang has responded positively to her new experiences. Some of the terms that she uses suggest that she has taken up some of the 'assessment for learning' discourse used in the School of Education:

"In China, they only use summative assessment. For example, you will have an exam at the end of the year, and then you will get a mark for your whole year. And there is no feedback. Here, the lecturer focuses on individual improvement. So here it is more student-centered. In China, the teacher does not pay attention to solving individual problems. They just give you a mark. And this mark equals your whole year's performance. No other assessment."

"In China, teachers do not care about your learning after they assess you. They only care about the mark. They test your memory. While here, teachers try to help you through assessment and try to improve your learning. So the purpose of assessment is different. It's like in China the students learn for marks or assessment, but here, assessment is a way of learning."

In terms of academic reading, Jiang said:

"Here (at Wits), you cannot use or copy other people's ideas without contributing your own understanding. Lecturers like you to combine the theory

and your own ideas together. So independent thinking is highly regarded here, and also critical thinking, learner centered teaching."

At Wits, Jiang's interactions with her supervisor have been very positive:

"I think we have a very good relationship. My supervisor at present is very good to me. He always helps me in my study and my life as well. We exchange our opinions very frankly. He is interested in China, so we talk education, the culture, the economy, everything. We are like friends."

"The last year of my study in China, I had a supervisor when I was doing an essay. He was really strict with students, so we only talked about study. We were just teacher and student. Not a friend. And he was busy; I didn't see him often, maybe just twice."

Social challenges:

One challenge for Jiang is the challenge of self-reliance:

"you have to learn how to live independently, everything should be done by yourself."

In addition, making friends for her is not easy and as a result:

"I always feel lonely…"

"…I have many friends but it is hard to find a true friend, because I always find that there is a distance between me and my local friends. I don't have transport, so it is not convenient for us to have a lot of time together. Also, there are cultural differences. Language is one aspect, and the most important one is we have too many differences."

"…I found it is not easy to socialize with them, because we have different ways of doing things."

Security and transport problems are the two other reasons why Jiang has limited opportunities to socialize with local people.

"The security problem is really serious here, you know that, so I don't go to parties. And many clubs only open at night, I am really afraid to go by myself. Also, I don't have transport, no license, so I don't have many chances to go out and socialize with local people."

For Jiang, the unfamiliarity with the new environment also exacerbated the problems of applying for a study permit, finding accommodation, and dealing with financial issues.

"…The second one was to apply for a study permit. At that time…… I didn't know how to do that. Finally, the coordinator helped me to apply for an extension. I was very happy because I can study here. The last one was to find accommodation. I was late for registration, and I didn't know how to apply for accommodation at school. Thanks to my coordinator, he helped me to find a room here. Finances are a problem, It costs a lot here. Also, transport, I don't have transport and it makes everything inconvenient. There are a lot of problems here."

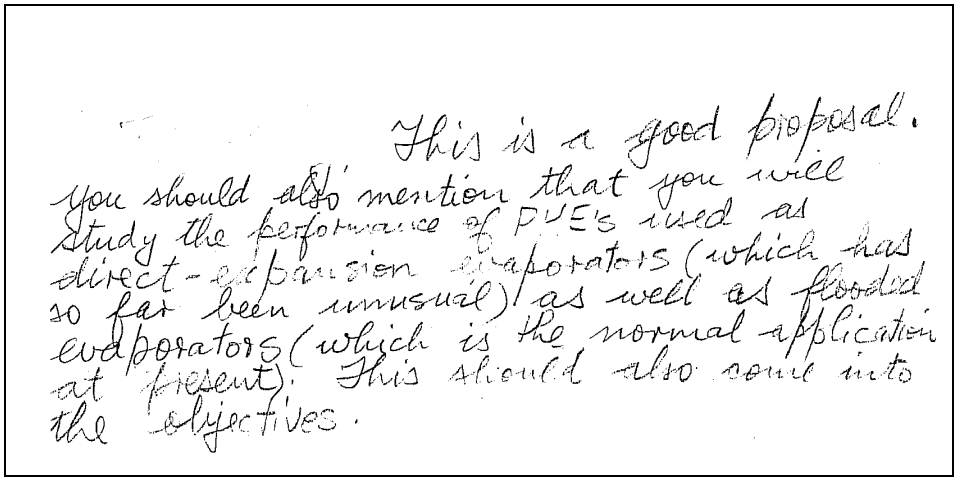
4.3 Examples of lecturers' or supervisor's feedback to students

Feedback is regarded as an important influence on students writing. As Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 377) state "responding to students' writing can

greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning."

As academic writing is a very important practice for post-graduate students, in particular for some of the participants in this case study who are studying in the School of Education or the Business School, it is important to find out how these students see the function of their supervisors' feedback in order to get a further understanding of their academic practices in the new academic community.

Wang, who is registered for a PhD in the School of Mechanical Engineering, has two supervisors. One has focussed on the ideas being explored in his proposal as indicated in the extract below (See Data Extract 5.1):

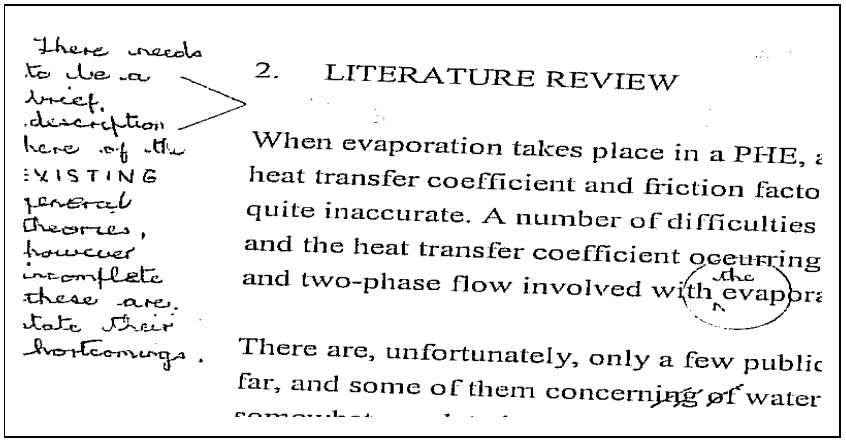

This is a good proposal.
You should also mention that you will
study the performance of PVE's used as
direct-expansion evaporators (which has
so far been unusual) as well as flooded
evaporators (which is the normal application
at present). This should also come into
the objectives.

Data Extract 5.1 Supervisor's feedback (Student Wang)

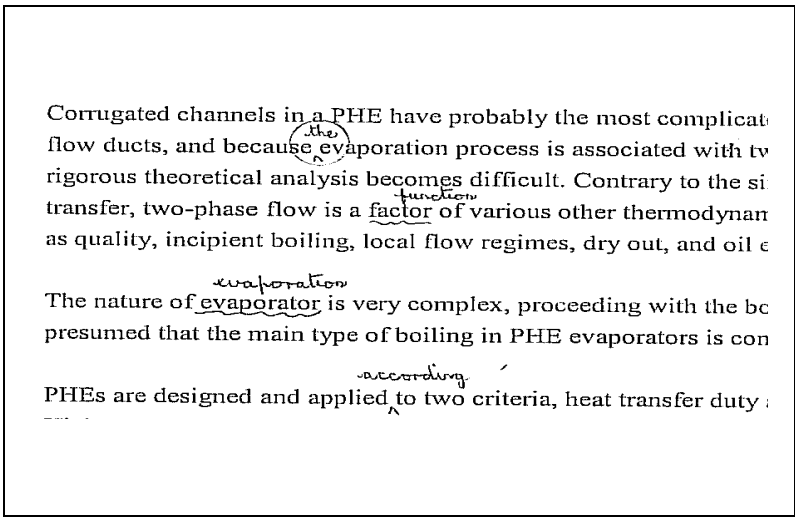
Wang's response was very positive:

"My supervisors' feedback is very helpful. I first propose my idea and the development of it. By the supervisor's feedback, I will learn his way of thinking, backed by his broad experience, so I see the shortcoming of my thinking and find the direction to where I should go."

The other supervisor commented on the ideas but also engaged with the academic literacy requirements of the genre of a research proposal and corrected grammatical errors as indicated in the extracts below (See Data Extract 5.2 and 5.3):



Data Extract 5.2 Supervisors' feedback (Student Wang)


Corrugated channels in a PHE have probably the most complicat
flow ducts, and because evaporation process is associated with tv
rigorous theoretical analysis becomes difficult. Contrary to the si
transfer, two-phase flow is a factor of various other thermodynan
as quality, incipient boiling, local flow regimes, dry out, and oil e

The nature of evaporator is very complex, proceeding with the bc
presumed that the main type of boiling in PHE evaporators is con

PHEs are designed and applied to two criteria, heat transfer duty

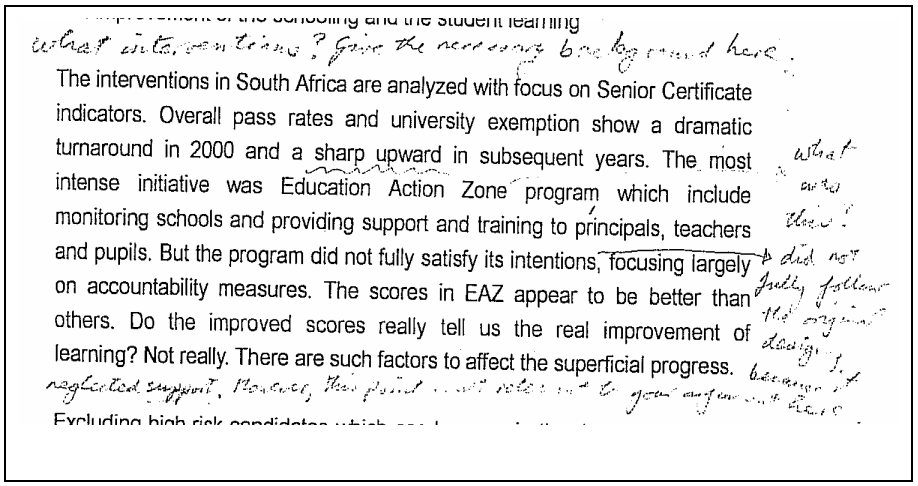
Data Extract 5.3 Supervisors' feedback (Student Wang)

Wang's response to this feedback was equally positive:

"They (supervisors) also correct the spelling mistakes,grammar mistakes, and sentence structure, which help me improve my writing greatly."

Student Jiang, who is studying in the School of Education, states that detailed feedback can help her to understand better whether her writing meets the required standard. (see Data Extract 5.4):

"I like the lecturer giving me detailed feedback, such as pointing out my grammar mistakes, structure problems, and inaccurate meaning, so that I will know what corrections I should make. In this way, I can improve my academic writing."

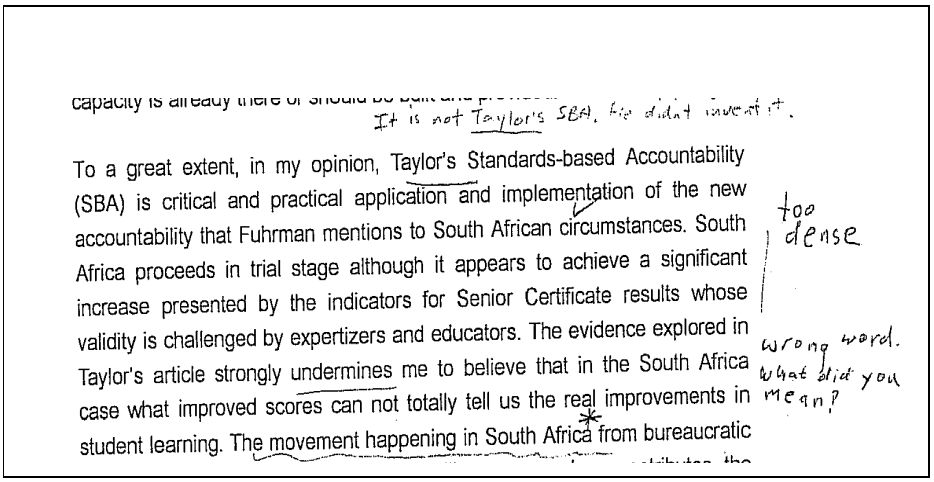


The interventions in South Africa are analyzed with focus on Senior Certificate indicators. Overall pass rates and university exemption show a dramatic turnaround in 2000 and a sharp upward in subsequent years. The most intense initiative was Education Action Zone program which include monitoring schools and providing support and training to principals, teachers and pupils. But the program did not fully satisfy its intentions, focusing largely on accountability measures. The scores in EAZ appear to be better than others. Do the improved scores really tell us the real improvement of learning? Not really. There are such factors to affect the superficial progress.

Data Extract 5.4 Lecturer's feedback (Student Jiang)

However, she also stated that feedback without clear suggestions makes her confused (see Data Extract 5.5):

"Sometimes the feedback is not clear, and I cannot get the full understanding, then I don't know how to correct it. For example, my lecturer commented: "too dense". I didn't know exactly what that means, and I didn't make any changes to that. "



To a great extent, in my opinion, Taylor's Standards-based Accountability (SBA) is critical and practical application and implementation of the new accountability that Fuhrman mentions to South African circumstances. South Africa proceeds in trial stage although it appears to achieve a significant increase presented by the indicators for Senior Certificate results whose validity is challenged by expertizers and educators. The evidence explored in Taylor's article strongly undermines me to believe that in the South Africa case what improved scores can not totally tell us the real improvements in student learning. The movement happening in South Africa from bureaucratic

Data Extract 5.5 Lecturer's feedback (Student Jiang).

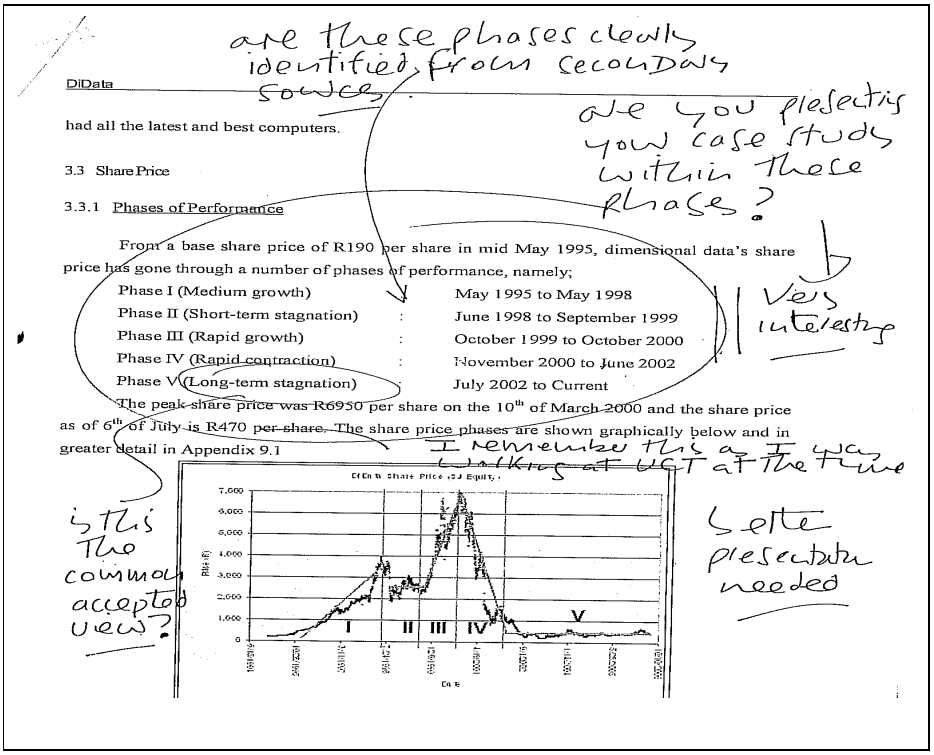
Feedback is a means of communication between a teacher and a student. However, Jiang's response seems to indicate that sometimes the lecturer imagines her to be familiar with aspects of an academic literacy discourse (such as 'too dense') into which she has only just become apprenticed (Gee, 1996). In this case, it is likely that the lecturer's feedback does not achieve the purpose of providing help. As Hattie and Timperley (2007: 104) argue "to be effective, feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge and provide logical connections." In other words, to be effective, the feedback must take into account the student's background and prior experience. For non-native English speakers like Jiang, more detailed and clear feedback might be more helpful.

Zhou commented on feedback on assignments and on his research proposal. He made the following comment on feedback on his assignments:

"For assignment feedback, if I pass, I don't look at it. But if I don't pass, I will look at it and ask the lecturer."

For Zhou, the feedback is not regarded as a way of helping him to improve his writing. Although the lecturer gives clear feedback using a

conversational register (see Data Extract 5.6), Zhou's response suggests that for him the mark is more important than the feedback.



Data Extract 5.6 Lecturer's feedback (Student Zhou).

Zhou makes critical comments on feedback on his proposal:

"The supervisor gives little feedback. He always has different suggestions on the same point this time from last time. I don't know which one I should follow. Everytime we meet each other it is for no longer than 15 minutes…… He doesn't give me detailed suggestion, only glance at it and say: "Your proposal is fine, carry on!"…… He gives me suggestions orally. He even didn't finish reading my proposal when I handed it in."

It seems that Zhou is not satisfied with his supervisor's way of giving feedback, as well as the attitude towards his proposal.

These few examples of feedback and the students' comments on this feedback suggest that where the student finds the feedback clear and useful he or she will be responsive to it (as in the case of Wang), where the feedback is considered to be confusing or insufficient (as in the cases of Jiang and Zhou) it does not assist students to move forward. There is also some evidence of different attitudes to feedback with Zhou seeming to value it less than the other students.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the location maps, the interview data, a few examples of student writing and lecture or supervisor feedback have been presented. In the next chapter these data will be analyzed.

Chapter 5 Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on an analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter. The analysis is offered in terms of themes which emerged from the data. In section 5.2 academic challenges experienced by the students are discussed. In section 5.3 challenges students face in their social life are discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the main findings from this research project.

5.2 Academic Challenges

The following themes emerged from analysis of data across the seven cases: language competence, academic discourses, group discussion, supervision style, sourcing and using literature, assessment, and challenges in social life.

5.2.1 Language competence

There is a considerable research literature which indicates that English language is likely to be a great challenge for non-native English speakers studying in an English-speaking country. For example, Robertson et al.

(in Sawir, 2005: 569) researched learning difficulties experienced by international students studying at an Australian university and report that "language is a key source of difficulties in teaching and learning. The students have incomplete understanding of lecturers' spoken English, and feel unhappy with their oral performances in the presence of Australian classmates." Similar responses can be found in this case study. All seven students mentioned problems in regard to using English in their academic studies at Wits. For them, reading is relatively easier, than other aspects of language such as listening, speaking and writing. This may be due to the emphasis in Chinese high school and university English education on reading and grammar. Speaking and listening receive little attention in these courses because the English teachers are not native speakers and thus are not confident in their own speech in English and because the media (TV programs, radio broadcasting, and newspapers) are almost all in Mandarin. Therefore, the students are rarely exposed to oral English. While Chinese university students may find it necessary to be able to read in English, speaking and listening skills are not very important. The lack of these skills, despite many years of learning English, is common to all the students interviewed:

"It is pretty difficult for me to express myself clearly. I am still struggling in some social event discussions."(Lee)

"At the very beginning of my study, I even didn't understand the basic communication. The class is more difficult. I don't understand what the lecturer is talking about. Listening, speaking, and writing are very hard for me. Reading is better."(Zhou)

"The first one (challenge) is language. It is not because I didn't study hard in China, but because we didn't have a good language environment. If I didn't have any problem with listening skills, I think I would be as good as others academically."(Yang)

"Language, of course, is the biggest problem. Because in this country, I am a foreigner, I have to speak their language (English) to communicate with others; I am not a native speaker, so it's not easy."(Liao)

"The first challenge for me is surely the language…… I often get nervous. I just feel I can't be very fluent …" (Wang)

"The first one (challenge) is the language barrier. I am never happy with my proficiency in English."(Gu)

"I loved giving oral presentations in China, not in South Africa only because of language difficulties: I cannot articulate and debate in English fluently."(Gu)

"*…the first one (challenge) is the language…… When you have a lecture, you have to understand what the lecturer is saying, the content. You also need to communicate with the classmates…… so the speaking is very important. The language is quite a challenge."(Jiang)*

Compared with group discussion, two students mentioned that oral presentation is easier. Their response indicates that in advanced preparation it is very important for them to be more confident in doing presentation.

"I have a lot chances to do presentation. Sometimes I have a lot of assignments to do, so I don't have enough time to preview for my presentation, then I don't know what to say. I feel nervous. But if I prepare it very well, I will like it……" (Jiang)

"Presentation is fine, much better. I enjoy it, because I can prepare for it, and then I know what I will say. It's more active, and I can control it. It isn't like discussion, you don't know what they (classmates) are going to say, so you are in a passive position, you have to follow other people's thinking then you can response for that." (Liao)

Limited exposure to different varieties and accents also creates problems for Jiang in the classroom.

"Yes, I like it (group discussion). But my oral speaking is not good, this is the problem. My group members are from other African countries, they speak English but it seems they have a strong accent and they speak fast, so sometimes I don't understand at all. (Jiang)

5.2.2 Academic discourses

Zamel defines academic discourse as "a specialized form of reading, writing, and thinking done in the 'academy' or other schooling situations" (1998:187). She also explains that "each discipline represents a separate culture community" (1998:187). She argues that when students enter into an academic community, they have to learn how to choose the right vocabulary and the proper expression in different contexts, how to behave in specific situations, and to understand the culture of the community. Language requirements differ across disciplines. For

example, the students in this case study who are registered for post-graduate studies in business and education are required to complete a greater volume of reading and to produce more extended pieces of writing than these who are registered in engineering. However, the mastery of specific academic discourses is important no matter in which discipline students are registered.

"You cannot transfer it (terminology) literally into English or Chinese. Most of time, the meaning is different. For example, if my supervisor says 'organic' or 'inorganic', I know the meaning, but when he said 'permanent', I was confused at that time."(Lee)

"When the supervisor discusses with me about energy, I don't know what the meaning of that is. Then I will not understand what he is talking about. But when I look it up in a dictionary, then I get the meaning immediately and I will know what he is saying." (Yang)

5.2.3 Group discussion

Group discussion is a new way of learning for the seven Chinese students in this case study. Interestingly, all of them recognize the value and importance of participating in group discussion. They believe that by discussion they receive help from others regarding their academic problems. At the same time, they feel able to provide support to other students.

"… on the one side, the group discussion stimulates you to report something,

on the other side, during the meeting, you can find certain solution for your study problems, you also can help other classmates to find the solution and have deeper understanding in each field, because you can exchange your ideas with others in different academic fields. It is a process for you to study. Generally speaking, there is no group discussion in China. Anyway, I prefer group discussion, even if is mostly like an assignment, but I feel much better when I find the solution I need and I also feel proud that I can help others to solve the problems or give some useful advice to them. " (Lee)

"Group discussion is the most important part in the whole research process. I like this way of studying very much. I tell them my problems, they may not help my research a lot, but their ideas may help me to think further… So I can learn a lot from discussion… While in China, the teaching always happens in the class, this is also good… One is focusing on practice; the other is focusing on theory. So it's hard to say which one is good and which one is not. But I think focusing on practice is more important, because when you meet more problems now, the better your ability of solving problems will be in the future."(Yang)

"… Group discussion is very important, and you can reference other students' ideas. They have important points that you have never thought of before." (Jiang)

It seems that Zhou (and the other Chinese students) has enjoyed group discussion, as it turns out to be a very helpful study method. Not only can he practice his oral English in group discussion, but also ideas are exchanged. Social experience is important for management students. The social knowledge necessary for their lectures and also for their research can sometimes be gained from group discussion:

"It (group discussion) is good because you get a chance to share others' ideas and experiences, you learn from them. They are all working, so they have their own special ways of thinking and dealing with problems, and discussion is a good chance for each one to exchange good ideas. It is not only helpful to my study, but also good for my work as well."(Zhou)

Group discussion provides opportunity for Chinese students to interact with supervisors, in which the differences in attitudes toward authority in China and South Africa are also embedded.

"*In the group discussion, you can express your own opinion freely. I think the lecturers are quite democratic. If they were wrong, they will accept it, if you were wrong and you insist on it, they will not say anything. However, in China, you will never refuse the position of lecturers. In South Africa, they accept diverse views on academic matters. The truth is either from you or from other people*."(Lee)

Group discussion is regarded as very important for academic study. However, there are also challenges when participating in discussions. For example, the requirement for language competence and cultural background knowledge as well as the familiarity with the topic:

"Discussion is a good way of learning; of course, it is not easy as well. You have to use all the resources in your mind within a short time before you can speak out. And sometimes the idea you spoke out can not get any response. They don't understand, and then you have to explain. The resources in my mind are limited as well. I mean the knowledge, the cultural background knowledge."(Liao)

"…I enjoy some discussions on topics that I know very well such as leadership and economics. But I did not like some discussions where I had no experience and was not familiar with the topic, such as public policy and project management." (Gu)

5.2.4 Supervision styles

5.2.4.1 Support from supervisors

Dong (in Braine, 2002:64) highlights "the importance of a hands-on approach by the advisor on the students' research and writing, such as in providing careful guidance in the selection of a research topic and help with writing the thesis." Students in Dong's study found this guidance "was more effective than probing in the dark and learning from mistakes", which they resorted to without adequate guidance from supervisors. In other words, the educational assistance from the supervisor plays a positive role in improving student's academic work. In this case study, three students' responses show that their supervisors provide adequate support for the problems they face in their research. Also, the understandings of their limited English language skills from the supervisor's side helps students build confidence in practising English:

"Whenever you have problems, you can come to them, they will solve the problem for you. If the practice cannot solve, she will explain to you in theories, or he will show you in practice."(Lee)

"… It is difficult for me to explain something complicated in English, I have to use my poor English to explain to them. They never have discrimination on my poor English, and they never feel bored or sick of my English……I really appreciate that they understand our Chinese students. I think we have a good relationship."(Lee)

"Because I am a foreign student, the supervisor doesn't speak fast to me. He will get a message from my face, like if I don't understand I will show my confused face, and then he knows I don't understand and he will repeat or speak simple words. I am happy with it. So I am satisfied with this way of learning. It seems all my worries have been solved now." (Yang)

5.2.4.2 Perceptions of supervision

The different understandings of supervision in universities in China and South Africa create a great challenge for the seven students in this case study. In China, the supervisor is regarded as a guide, and the one who is an expert in the field. Supervision should always be detailed so that the students can easily follow. While at a western-style university like Wits, the supervisor's work is to assist students to conduct and complete the research. The main idea and direction are determined by students themselves. Although the student gets a few initial ideas from the supervisor, this does not necessarily mean that no guidance is offered, since the supervisor is open for any discussion and strict on research standards. Although the Chinese students have found the approach of their supervisors at Wits to be quite challenging, some of them recognize that it leads to independence:

"Here, the supervisor give you an idea, he doesn't give details. He doesn't say which part is wrong. I don't know how the research is done in China, but I know when I was doing course work, teachers always told students where they were incorrect. Here, at Wits, the supervisor always gives you an idea, and then lets you to think how you would do that."(Zhou)

"I think the way of supervising is different. Maybe it's because the culture is different. In China, when a supervisor gives you a research topic, he will discuss it with you actively. He will tell you the research direction according to his own experiences. While at Wits, on the contrary, you have to find the direction by yourself, then you ask your supervisor whether it is doable or not and he will give you an answer. I had got used to the way of supervising in China, so when I came here, I didn't know how I was expected to behave."(Yang)

"Occasionally, (in China) the supervisor will come to watch your experiment, and give you some suggestions. While at Wits, the supervisor goes to the laboratory once a month and he almost does not teach you how to use equipment. You have to depend on your own experiences. However, if you find out questions, you can go to him and ask. The problem is that he probably has not done this for 5 years, so he might not be familiar with this equipment as well, and probably knows less than you do. In this case, I have to learn from an instruction book. All depends on yourself."(Yang)

"Maybe here at Wits we are given more space to carry out your own ideas. Students can do the work more freely, in the way they wish. In China, students will more closely follow the supervisor's instruction." (Wang)

On the other hand, one student suggested that more guidance would be welcome:

"I think the supervisor should provide more detailed guidance."(Zhou)

5.2.4.3 Supervisor / student relationship

Myles and Cheng (2003: 252) argue that "close advisor/student collaboration using an apprenticeship approach to learning can lead to positive outcomes for NNES graduate students when it comes to

communication, academic literacy, and thesis writing." It is interesting that although there are different traditions and cultures of interaction with supervisors in China and in South Africa, the seven students in the study claim to have adjusted to this new culture in a very short time and they seem quite satisfied with the current relationship with their supervisors in South Africa.

"I think our relationship is quite good. Whenever we meet, he not only discusses about study, or academic research, but also we talk about something else, like company management in China, or some interesting cases in South Africa. So we are friends. I personally believe so."(Liao)

"I think we have a very friendly relationship. There is no tension or uneasiness between us. We are like a friend and like a brother. He (my supervisor) tells me what I should/must do. I also discuss my views and opinion. If I cannot do what he instructed me to do, he helps me or he gives me another options. In China, I didn't have such experiences. All the teachers there are quite busy. They give lectures, and then leave." (Gu)

"(We are) like friends. He also wants me to graduate in time. My supervisor is really good. I feel relaxed when I stay with him. He is easy-going."(Zhou)
"I really appreciate that they understand our Chinese students. I think we have a good relationship."(Lee)
"I think we have a very good relationship. My supervisor at present is very good to me. He always helps me in my study and my life as well. We exchange our opinions very frankly. He is interested in China, so we talk education, the culture, the economy, everything. We are like friends." (Jiang)

Myles and Cheng (2003: 253) explain that "the informal, friendly behavior of a supervisor or professor toward his or her student can be

disorienting to a student who is more comfortable keeping a professional distance". One student's response seems to support this claim:

"We co-operate with each other very well. He is a very successful professor, and easy-going. Sometimes his way of talking makes me feel he is just like a friend to me. Sometimes our group takes photos together; he just poses some funny faces and looks like a child. I am afraid of him as well, because he is still my professor and his position is higher than mine. In China, it is like this. Teacher's position is higher than students always. When doing academic work, he is very strict. So I am still afraid."(Yang)

5.2.4.4. Expectations in regard to academic writing

Expectations of academic writing are different in universities in China and in South Africa. One student comments:

"My supervisor would like to see me put the academic writing in a clear and simple way. This I really think is the right way. In China, my supervisor did not require too much. But generally students try hard to write big volumes and use long equations to make it "look" more academic."(Wang)

Of course a "clear and simple" way of writing should not be regarded as an "easy" way. This is true especially in the fields of science and engineering, where a "beautiful" writing style may not be of great interest to the intended readers. (Style and format should not be, in any case, more important than the content.) Students used to the requirement of "great volume" writing may find it a challenge when required to write their reports in a limited number of pages.

For some of the students in the case study learning to write concisely and to a prescribed page limit has been a significant challenge.

"In China, the teachers ask you to write around the theories, only theories. You only need to write the theories in your own words; you don't need to include your own ideas…… My first assignment was not good. That is because I didn't write my own thinking and ideas, and I didn't combine the theory and practice. I wrote the same as I wrote in China, just copying other scholars' idea and reconstructing by using my own words. Here, everything needs to be direct and precise. You need to express your thinking clearly."

5.2.5 Sourcing and using literature

It is commonly recognized that different academic disciplines, even within the same institution, have different academic practices. The Chinese students in this study face several challenges in adapting themselves to meet the requirements of the new institution. Two of these challenges relate to finding relevant resources for their research, and adjusting to new referencing conventions:

"It is difficult to find relevant resources, and time consuming. There are plenty of articles and books, but if you want to find one that is particularly relevant to your topic, it is really hard." (Zhou)

"…I will find previous research, theses, and articles. But how to find the relevant resources is not easy. For example, maybe I can find this question when I read 100 articles. So it's like you are searching for something in the sea. You don't know which one you should choose."(Yang)

"(In China) they don't pay much attention to that. They don't even look at it. But here, the references are very important. Teachers are very strict on that…… you can not use or copy other people's ideas without including your own understanding. Lecturers like you combining the theory and your own ideas together."(Jiang)

5.2.6 Different approach to assessment

In China, the assessment is mainly summative assessment, and the lecturer's focus is on the final mark. Formative feedback for guidance is rarely given. By contrast, in South Africa, assessment is integral to the learning process. In other words, these Chinese students are experiencing a completely different approach to assessment, and also a different culture and tradition behind assessment, which includes both the teachers' and students' attitudes toward assessment.

"(works are assessed) partly from the performance in the class, like classroom discussion, and the group discussion after the class. Usually we have a small group, and we make an appointment with each other about meeting and discussion together. The other part of assessment is from assignments, usually three assignments for one course, the last assignment is equal to the test. … … In China we don't often have discussion, and we don't get a mark for that. Normally, everything is assessed by the final test. … I like the way of doing assessment here, it's more fair I think. We have more chances to get good marks, like if you do not do well in this part, then you can do better in the other part."(Liao)

"In China they expected me to remember what I have been taught. If I knew about the theory, it was good enough to get high marks. At Wits they expect me to apply the theories that I learned in my work. They also expect my understanding, my argument, my evidence that supports my view and my own analysis."(Gu)

"In China, they only use summative assessment. For example, you will have an exam at the end of the year, and then you will get a mark for your whole year. And there is no feedback. Here, the lecturer focuses on individual improvement. So here it is more student-centered. In China, the teacher does not pay attention to solving individual problems. They just give you a mark. And this mark equals your whole year's performance. No other assessment."(Jiang)

"Here, they look at your idea, your thinking, and there is no single answer. They also look at your team work, like discussion. The communication among classmates is really important. In China, there is no mark for team work."(Zhou)

5.3 Challenges in social life

5.3.1 Social integration

Braine (2002: 65) argues that for non-native English speaking students "in order to succeed in graduate studies, they not only need a high level of proficiency in English and the ability to use appropriate learning strategies, but also sound social skills." Similarly, Myles and Cheng (2003: 250) found that "social contact with local people and prior foreign experience were the two most important factors involved in the coping process of students in a foreign university." In other words, the socialization with native English speakers is an important part of academic life for non-native English speaking students studying in English-speaking countries. However, as Bennett (in Myles and Cheng, 2003: 258) argues, "people are different and asking them to transcend

traditional ethnocentrism and to explore new relationships across cultural boundaries may be asking for behavior that is not ‘‘natural’’.” For the participants in this research, living in a new culturally and linguistically different context, has presented a number of challenges.

“In China, we all have a similar cultural background, but South Africa is different. You have to make a friend with students from the Middle East, India, South Africa, and Zambia. This is more difficult than in China. Because, all of us do not live together and we have different cultural backgrounds, so we have different lives.”

“The culture is different, so it is hard to get into society deeply. This is not easy to overcome.”(Zhou)

“I don't have any social life here. Because I found it is hard to socialize with local people, and we have different ways of doing things.”(Yang)

“… I do not have many social parties or visits, therefore, I can focus on reading, doing experiments, and studying. In South Africa, I do not need to pay too much attention to social environment and social communication. I think this is quite good for academic studying.”(Lee)

“One thing is very impressive, once we went to a cinema at school to watch a movie. Everybody was laughing. At that time, I understood what they were saying in the movie, but I didn't understand why the audience was laughing. Then I asked the one next to me: “Anything funny?” I think it is because we have different cultures. The local people may know that story in the movie, but we don't know. Just like there are lots of stories on Chinese history, we know but they don't understand. So it is not easy to completely integrate into their society.”(Yang)

5.3.2 Making friends

Myles and Cheng (2003: 250) argue that "forming and maintaining friendships, taking the initiative in conversations and a willingness to converse with native speaking students are all important to social adjustment." For the foreign students, "if they want to feel more like ''insiders'', they need to participate in the host country's cultural milieu in order to acquire new cultural knowledge, cultivate greater emotional and aesthetic sensitivity and expand the range of their behavioral repertoire" (Kim, in Myles and Cheng, 2003:258). Therefore, making friends with local students is an important way to help the seven Chinese students to adapt to the new environment. However, this has proved challenging for all of them:

"It is difficult to make close friends with local students. It's nothing to do with character; it is because our cultures are different. Sometimes you just feel that the way they are looking at you is strange, mysterious, just like the way we look at them is also strange and odd, because we don't understand the culture of each other."(Yang)

"I feel our cultures are different, so I will not try to find a friend actively because of my character, but the main problem is culture. Sometimes they are laughing and I totally lose what's going on, why and where it's funny." (Yang)

"I almost have no local friends after I tried to make friends with them." (Lee)

"One thing that is really difficult is that it seems really hard to make a true friend, I mean good friend. You (I) always find that you (we) are different. It's hard for

me to give up my habit, my way of thinking in order to get close to them. They don't want to either. We have different customs, habits, and way of thinking."(Liao)

"I always feel lonely…" (Jiang)

There are a lot of differences between the Chinese students and the people they encounter in their new environment. It seems that most of the students in the case study prefer to socialize with students from the same linguistic and cultural background, or the same ethnic group:

"……having a few students who were from our neighbouring countries and have similar traditions and customs helped my studies to be very pleasant and enjoyable". (Gu)

"We cannot integrate into their society unless we know them very well. Anyway, I don't have local friend, just the students in our lab. They are good to me, but I still feel it isn't like staying with my Chinese friends… Sometimes, I feel it is hard to integrate into their circle."(Yang)

Myles and Cheng (2003: 258) found that "people join others in social situations when they have things in common. Their mutual interests, preferences and attitudes will drive the conversation." They also suggest that "international students who spend most of their leisure time with host nationals have fewer problems with cultural, academic and social adjustments at the university" (p.258). For the seven students in this research, their academic studies are the dominant part of their life in

South Africa. However, some expressed a desire for social contact with local students in order to practice and improve their English, and increase their knowledge of local culture. As one student comments:

"I try to make friends with my classmates, they come from different countries. It's good, because it helps me to improve my language so that I would not feel too nervous when I discuss with them. And……it is also a good way to know the local culture and that helps me to understand the lectures better, because sometimes the lecturer gives us a lot of examples or cases that happened here (South Africa) many years ago, and I don't understand. I mean if I often stay with local students, we talk, we discuss, and then I can learn the culture from them. It is good for study."(Liao)

5.3.3 Social security /Transport / Finances

Social security is a serious problem for everyone in South Africa. In addition, many international students have experienced robbery, therefore, the participants are particularly concerned about their safety.

"Security is a serious problem here. Sometimes the experiment finishes very late, and I cannot go home by myself, so I have to ask somebody to send me home. My supervisor also told me not to go outside at night. Of course, we have robbery in China, but the difference is they don't threaten your life. So you must be really careful here." (Yang)

"China has not much crime or violence among the students as well as the public. But we, the students are always worrying about the crime and violence. Students in South Africa are full of freedom but amid loads of crimes and violence."(Gu)

"The security problem is really serious here, you know that, so I don't go to parties. And many clubs only open at night, I am really afraid to go by myself."(Jiang)

"Also, the security problem makes me worried. But inside the campus is better, outside is not that safe."(Zhou)

In South Africa, the private car is the main form of transport, while in China, people use a well-developed public transport system. For these Chinese students, adjusting to using private transport is quite difficult.

"I don't have transport, no license, so I don't have many chances to go out and socialize with local people." (Jiang)
"… There is too much inconvenience in daily life. The South African public transport is not good, and people are scared to use it. It is difficult to live in South Africa without private transport."(Lee)

"I don't have transport and it makes everything inconvenient."(Jiang)

Finances are another problem for two students, as they mentioned:

"Financial shortage, my scholarship can not cover all the expense. So I had to do some small jobs. I still feel I can not afford to buy all the necessary books."(Gu)

"Finance is a problem, it costs a lot here……" (Jiang)

5.4 Findings from the research

5.4.1 Engaging in new discourses

The discussion in the first two parts of this chapter indicates that there are several factors that affect the seven participants' engagement with their new academic environment. These include language competence, mastering of academic discourses as well as interacting with supervisors. All the participants suggest in different ways that language is the main barrier which constantly creates problems for understanding the content of lectures, participating in group discussion, giving oral presentations and communicating with local students, which are typical academic requirements in different disciplines at the University of the Witwatersrand. In their view their lack of competence and confidence in using English is one of the reasons that these students cannot completely engage in new discourses. As noted in Chapter Two, Gee argues that discourse is:

> "……a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'" Gee (1996: 131)

Similarly, Kamler and Thomson (2006) argue that there is a close

relationship among discourse, knowledge and power. They explain that "a discourse defines and produces what we know, what and how we talk about an object of knowledge, and it influences how ideas are put into practice" (Kamler and Thomson, 2006:11). Therefore, for students who do not feel competent or confident in using a foreign language, entry into new discourses and discourse communities is particularly difficult. As one student mentioned:

> *"Because in this country, I am a foreigner, I have to speak their language (English) to communicate with others; I am not a native speaker, so it's not easy."(Liao)*

Liao identifies himself as a 'foreigner' because he believes that the language he is trying to speak is not his own language but 'their language'– English. Compared with 'native speakers' he feels himself to be disadvantaged.

In addition, the differences of culture also have great impact when distinguishing one specific group of students from others in terms of their "thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting". In the interview, the Chinese students described in different ways how the differences in culture are the greatest challenge:

"I mean the knowledge, the cultural background knowledge. It's the knowledge that you accumulate after many years. I was living in China before, the knowledge that I accumulated before is different from people who are living in South Africa. That's to say, I don't have experience of living here, or it is not long enough, so I am lacking that background. So sometimes I don't know what they are talking about, and they don't understand my meaning. It's common (often happened to him)."(Liao)

"I feel our cultures are different. Sometimes they are laughing and I totally lose what's going on, why and where it's funny." (Yang)

The unfamiliarity with aspects of local culture is one reason why these students have difficulty in participating fully in conversations and integrating into the context in which they are studying. Gee argues that "discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse" (1996: 139). It seems that for the students in this case study such enculturation is particularly difficult.

While the students' comments about their supervisors were mainly positive, Yang's response to a question about the relationship with her supervisor indicates that not all the interactions with supervisors are comfortable:

"I am afraid of him as well, because he is still my professor and his position is higher than mine…… When doing academic work, he is very strict. So I am still afraid." (Yang)

As “different domains have different orders of discourse and different types of practices” (Fairclough, 1989: 29), each institution and each discipline within an institution has its own discourses and practices. According to Fairclough, there is inequality of power when “the non-powerful people have cultural and linguistic backgrounds different from those of the powerful people” (1989: 47). Yang is a foreign student who feels culturally and linguistically disempowered, while her supervisor is a professor with status in the department. He is also a culturally and linguistically empowered native English speaker. Therefore, Yang is ‘afraid’ of her supervisor in relation to both her academic and social position.

With regard to academic writing, two students mentioned that they prefer the writing style in South Africa compared with that in China:

“Well, in China, it is not necessary to express your point and idea very directly, it can be included in your sentences and meaning. Here, your idea must be directly and clearly written. They prefer you to write your thinking at the very beginning of the article, so that they know your point of view. I prefer the writing style here.” (Jiang)

“My supervisor would like to see me put the academic writing in a clear and simple way. This I really think is the right way. In China, my supervisor did not require too much. But generally students try hard to write in big volumes and using long equations to make it “look” more academic.” (Wang)

We know that academic writing is one of the important academic practices in higher education institutions. Chinese postgraduate students like Jiang and Wang try to change their previous writing style in order to meet the new requirements for academic writing and in order to engage in the new academic community in South Africa. In other words, academic writing is no longer a personal activity but a social practice, because "student writing takes place within a particular institution, which has a particular history, culture, values and practices" (Lillis, 2001: 31). In addition, Kamler and Thomson (2006: 16) argue that academic writing constructs 'scholarly identity', which is "embedded in a tangle of cultural-historical practices that are both institutional and disciplinary". In other words, the institutional and disciplinary culture or discourses are closely associated with the process of constructing academic identity. Thus, student academic writing is a kind of meaning-making process that includes consideration of the culture, habits, beliefs and values that previously existed and currently in place in the context where the writing occurs. This means that when students do academic writing they need to consider whether their writing is acceptable or unacceptable in a particular academic 'space'. When students such as Jiang and Wang do academic writing in South Africa, their previously established academic identity in China (their habitus) is challenged in these new social contexts and new discourses in their academic field in South Africa.

5.4.2 Towards academic empowerment

Analysis of data from the seven cases indicates that all of the students felt challenged academically after enrolling at the University of Witwatersrand in terms of English language proficiency, the different approaches to learning and teaching that they experienced, and the differences in supervision style. However, their responses to the new have been mainly positive. For example, they see both academic and social value in group discussions which enable them to practice oral English with native speakers, exchange ideas with other students, and acquire what might be termed social knowledge. They position themselves as needing to learn how to adapt to the new and in only a very few instances do they offer any critical comment on their experiences of new Discourses.

With reference to their academic writing, the challenge of adopting a different orientation to knowledge is a recurring theme in the data. These students were not used to inserting their own voice:

"In China, the teacher asks you to write around the theories, only theories. You only need to write the theories by your own words, you don't need to put your own idea. there is no strict requirements on your idea, I only need to study the theory, pure theory, and I don't need to combine theory and practice. Here, it is different. My first assignment was not good, that is because I didn't write my own thinking and idea, and I didn't combine the theory and practice." (Jiang)

They were also not used to the detailed and accurate referencing of sources which is required in a 'western' university:

"When I was writing in China, there is no requirement for references, at least in my major. Or, you just list the main theories you have referenced." (Jiang)

"I feel that in Wits, students are much more strictly forbidden to use any resource without acknowledgement than in China… we read many books and articles without proper acknowledgements in them." (Wang)

However, as with their positive response to new ways of learning, their responses to new demands on them as writers have been mainly positive. It seems that they value the opportunity of being apprenticed into a new kind of 'literacy club' – that of the international academic community. As Singh and Doherty point out "Asian international students typically travel to Western universities to acquire Western credentials and expertise because these offer greater workplace flexibility and geographic mobility in the global occupational marketplace" (2004: 10).

In any university post-graduate students are likely to encounter a range of supervision styles (Kamler and Thomson, 2006).While some of the seven students have found the emphasis on independent work very challenging, the majority of their comments on the supervision experience suggest that they feel valued and supported by their

supervisors. For example, Lee values the approach to communication as well as supervisor's attitudes toward academic studies:

"I prefer the way lecturers and students communicate in South Africa." (Lee)

"In the group discussion, you can express your own opinion freely. I think the lecturers are quite democratic. If they were wrong, they will accept it, if you were wrong and you insist on it, they still will not say anything… they accept different views of academic studies. The truth is either from you or from other people."(Lee)

5.4.3 On-going social disempowerment

The seven students' responses to questions about the challenges they have experienced in their social life indicate that there are certain difficulties in integrating into a culturally and linguistically different society. Most of them mentioned that they have experienced loneliness and have found it difficult to make friends with local students. In addition, the inconvenience of transport (Interviews with Lee, Gu), financial difficulties (Interviews with Gu and Jiang), as well as worrying about crime (Interviews with Gu, Zhou, Lee, Yang and Jiang) were also foregrounded in the interviews. Therefore, it can be argued that these seven students remain disempowered to various degrees in terms of their social life in the new society. However, there seems to be no clear relationship between their unhappy social life and their academic

progress. They claim that they prefer to spend more time on their studies than on social activities. As some of them state:

"… I do not have many social parties or visits, therefore, I can focus on reading, doing experiments, and studying. In South Africa, I do not need to pay too much attention to the social environment and social communication. I think this is quite good for academic studying."(Lee)

"Social life helps to make friends and helps to relax a little bit, but it does not help much with my study. I prefer to stay quiet when I can concentrate on study." (Wang)

"It sometimes troubles me. I mean when you have too much social life, you have parties to go to, you deal with too many people, and then you may find you have spent too much time on it. And some times you do not come back to study easily. It just takes time to concentrate again on study." (Wang)

"I don't have any social activities. And I think it would waste my time. Because I want to get a good mark for my studies, and I have to spend more time on them. In this case, I don't have time to attend any kind of party or club. Nothing helps my studies."(Jiang)

The data suggest that for these students there is a gradual movement from disempowerment to empowerment in regard to academic work as they take on a new academic identity. However, there is no corresponding shift in regard to social identity. What is of interest is the students' claim that 'social belongingness' is not necessary for academic success as this contradicts the findings of research in a number of other contexts (e.g.. Braine, 2002; Myles and Cheng, 2003).

Chapter 6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This research aimed to provide an understanding of the academic and social challenges faced by seven Chinese postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand. While there are only seven research subjects, the fact that they are based in different disciplines and are both male and female gives some breadth to the research.

The findings suggest that all seven students have faced challenges in adapting to their new academic environments. Firstly, lack of proficiency in 'academic English' creates many difficulties in relation to incomplete understanding of lectures, participating in group discussions, giving oral presentations, and interacting with native speakers or additional language speakers from other socio-cultural contexts. Secondly, the students have had to be apprenticed into new Discourses (Gee, 1996) which have required them to behave in new ways as students. Though these challenges have been daunting for all of them, the majority have responded positively claiming that this new academic environment is equipping them to be internationally acknowledged academic researchers.

The second set of challenges relate to social life. These include lack of intercultural contact with local students, the difficulties of integrating into the society as a result of cultural differences, as well as dealing with problems of transport, finances, accommodation and crime. Interestingly, while these Chinese students face great challenges in their social lives, none of them indicated that these challenges make their studying and research difficult. On the contrary, they claim that lack of social activities helps them to concentrate more on their academic work.

6.2 Contribution of the findings

At best, findings from a case study enable researchers to make 'fuzzy generalizations (Bassey, 1999) because of the limitations of data collected in a specific context. .However, I would argue that these findings are of some interest for two reasons. Firstly, they confirm findings from research in other contexts about the challenges faced by international students, and specifically by Chinese students, studying in western-styled higher education institutions in relation to English language proficiency and adjustments to new Discourses – both academic and social. Secondly, the data provide evidence that although these students feel socially disempowered in many respects, their attitudes toward academic study remain positive. Therefore, there seems no

explicit connection between positive social experiences and academic achievement. This finding challenges findings from previous research which claim that positive experiences of social life contribute significantly to academic success and conversely that negative social experiences contribute to academic failure.

6.3 Recommendations

Further research is needed to find out how the Chinese postgraduate students interact with both local students and their supervisors. Data could be collected through interviews with lecturers and supervisors, observations of lectures and group discussions and observations of interactions between students and supervisors. A more in-depth investigation of Chinese postgraduate students' experiences of and adaptation to academic discourses in specific disciplines would be useful, as each discipline has its own academic culture.

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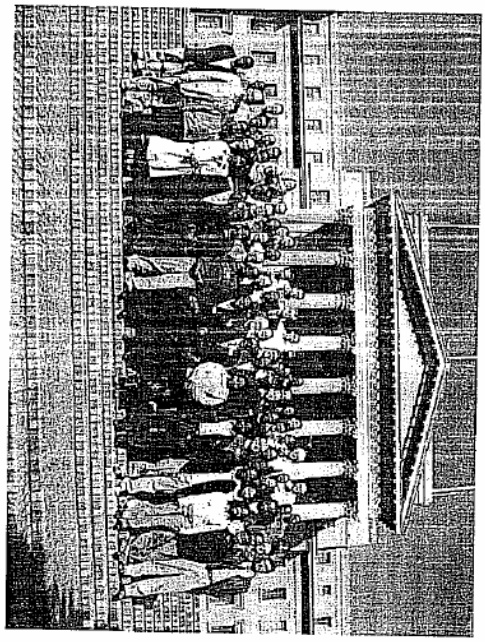
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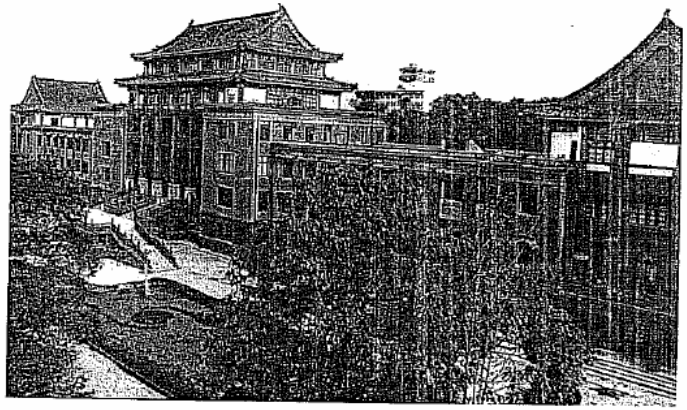
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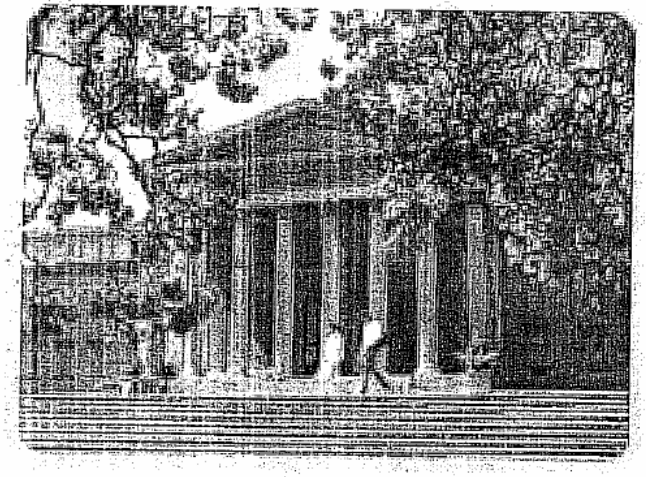
Appendix A: Students' location map

Student Name : Lee



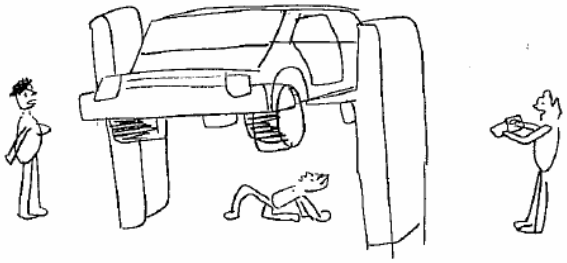




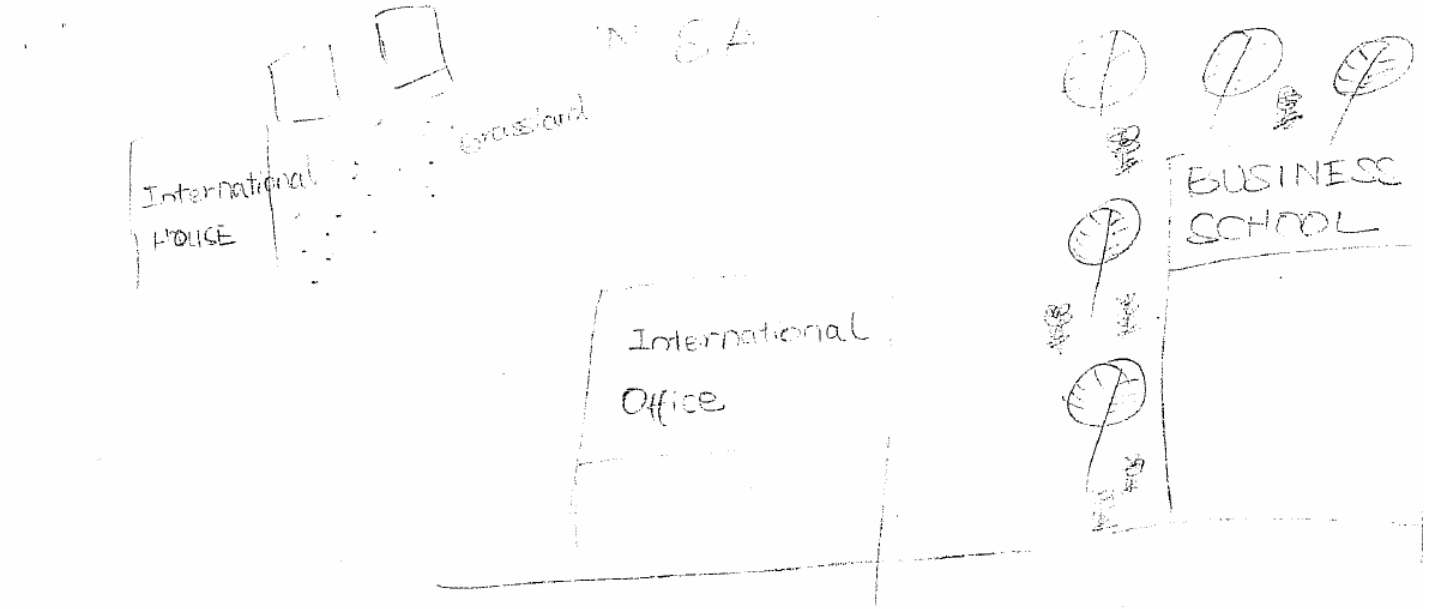


Student Name: Lee

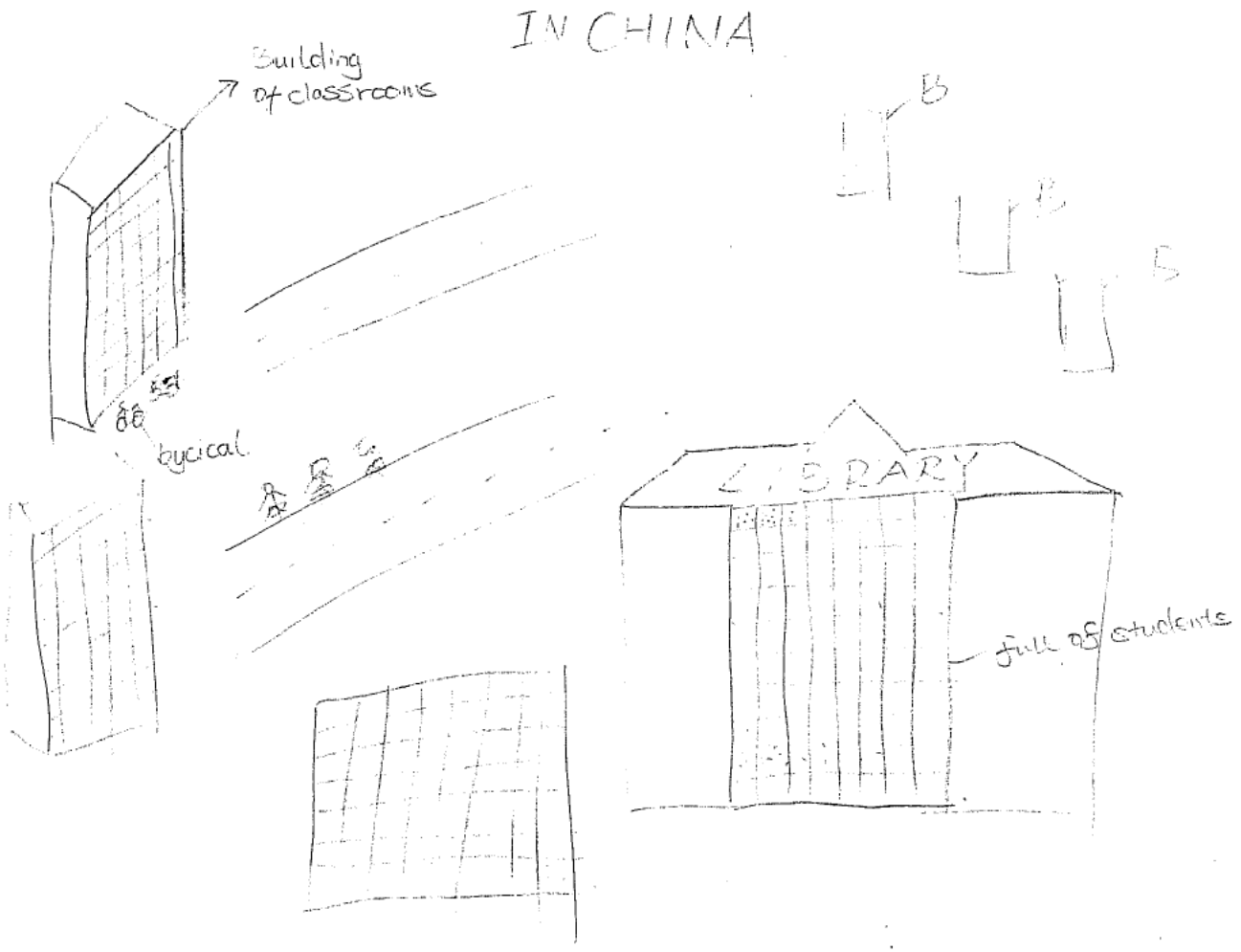




Student Name: Wang

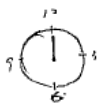


Student Name : Liao



Student Name : Liao

When I was in China:





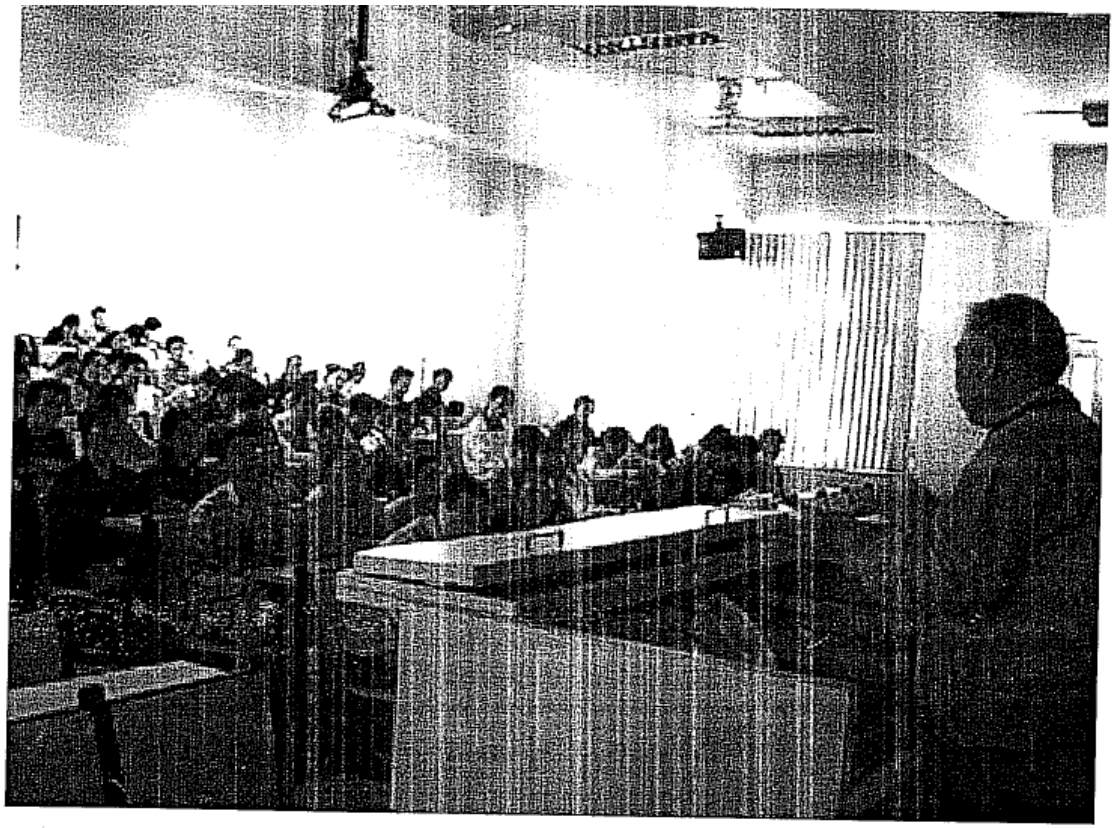
When I am in Wits.



Workshop
(discussing group)



Student Name : Jiang



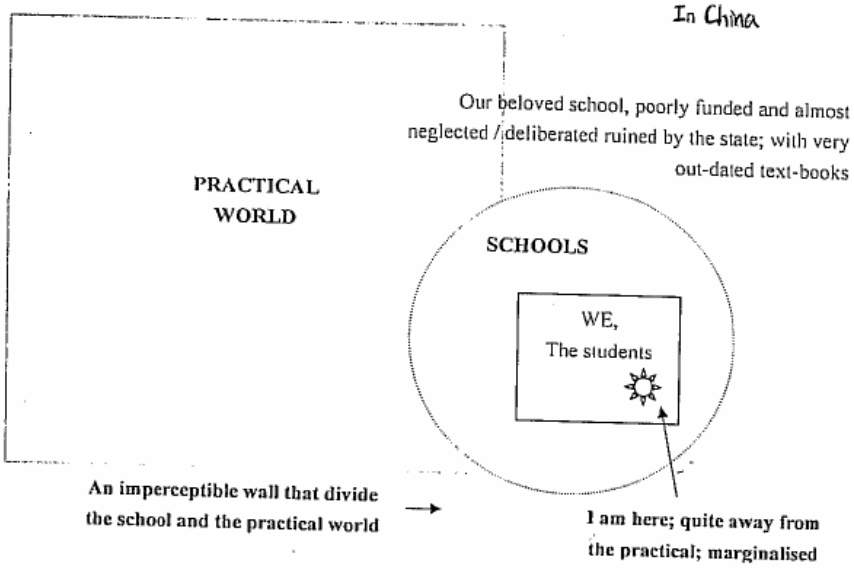
STUDYING IN CHINA

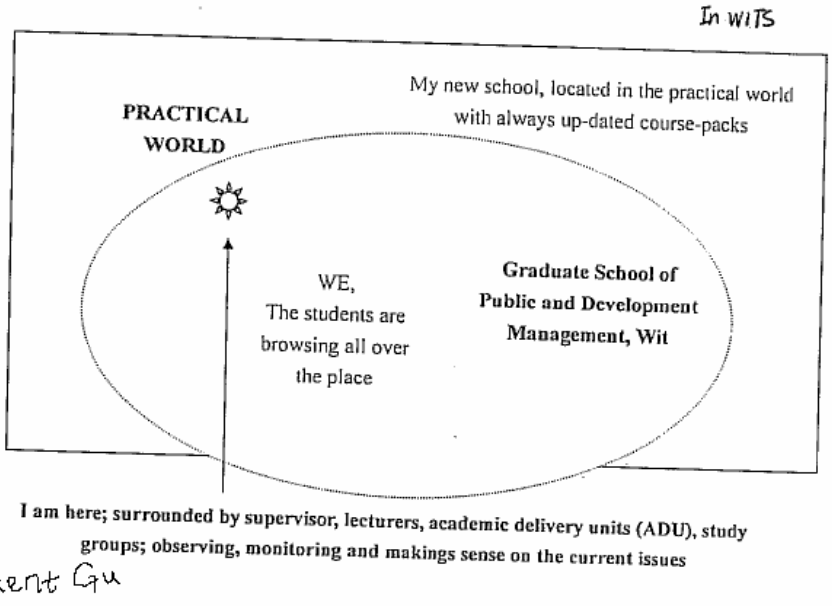
Student Name: Yang



STUDYING AT WITS

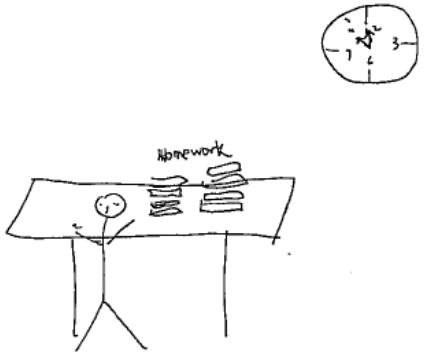
Student Name : Yang


In China
Our beloved school, poorly funded and almost neglected / deliberated ruined by the state; with very out-dated text-books
PRACTICAL WORLD
SCHOOLS
WE,
The students
An imperceptible wall that divide the school and the practical world
I am here; quite away from the practical; marginalised


In WITS
My new school, located in the practical world with always up-dated course-packs
PRACTICAL WORLD
WE,
The students are browsing all over the place
Graduate School of Public and Development Management, Wit
I am here; surrounded by supervisor, lecturers, academic delivery units (ADU), study groups; observing, monitoring and makings sense on the current issues

Student Gu

In China



In SA



Student Name : Zhou

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. If you were to make a list of the challenges you have faced as a post-graduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand, which two would you consider the most important?
2. What other challenges would you list?
3. In terms of writing, are the expectations of your lecturers or research supervisors similar to or different from the expectations of your lecturers in China? Please explain.
4. If you are doing course work, how is this work assessed?
5. Are these forms of assessment similar to or different from the forms of assessment used in China? Please explain.
6. Is the way in which you are expected to use your reading of books and journal articles similar to or different from your experiences in China? Please explain.
7. Do you enjoy participating in class discussions? Why or why not?
8. Do you enjoy giving oral presentations? Why or why not?
9. Please compare research supervision in China and at Wits.
10. These questions have mainly focused on your academic work. In terms of your social experiences at Wits, has anything helped you with your studies? Has anything been difficult for you?

Appendix C: Permission letters and consent forms

Permission letter to participant (1)

Wits School of Education
Department of Applied English Language Studies
University of Witwatersrand
Johannesburg-South Africa

Date: _____

Dear respondent

My name is_____ I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a Masters degree in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. The aim of my study is to investigate academic and cultural challenges that are experienced by Chinese postgraduate students in South Africa.

I am writing to you because you are from Mainland China and doing postgraduate study in the University of the Witwatersrand and can speak and understand Mandarin. I wish to invite you to participate in this research by taking part in an interview. The interview is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed from the recording. Your responses will be treated confidentially and your anonymity is guaranteed. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary, and that you may withdraw your consent at any time.

If you choose to participate in this study, please fill in the attached informed consent forms. For any further information, you can either e-mail me: shenchunyan2000@hotmail.com, or call (+27) 84-2365010 _____.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Chunyan Shen
MA in English Language Education

Permission letter to participant (2)

Wits School of Education
Department of Applied English Language Studies
University of Witwatersrand
Johannesburg-South Africa

Date: _____

Dear respondent

My name is_____ I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a Masters degree in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. The aim of my study is to examine academic and cultural challenges experienced by Chinese postgraduate students in South Africa.

In order to conduct this research, I request your permission to photocopy examples of your course work assignments and examination papers, and examples of the writing that you undertake for both course work and research purposes. Your written work will be treated confidentially and your anonymity is guaranteed.

If you give me permission to analyze your written work in this study, please fill in the attached informed consent form. For any further information, you can either e-mail me: shenchunyan2000@hotmail.com, or call (+27) 84-2365010 _____.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Chunyan Shen
MA in English Language Education

Interview consent form

I hereby agree to participate in an interview with Chunyan Shen. I understand that:

- She will be enquiring about the challenges that I may have experienced as a post-graduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand, with particular reference to academic discourse challenges.
- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Tape recording consent form

I _____ consent to my interview with Chunyan Shen her study on *'Being and Doing' in a New Academic Environment: Challenges Faced by Seven Chinese Post-graduate Students at a South African University,* being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person other than her supervisor at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Consent form for photocopying of texts

A) I hereby agree that Chunyan Shen may photocopy examples of the assignment and examination tasks that have been set for the course work components of my post-graduate degree and examples of my writing in response to these tasks.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

B) I hereby agree that Chunyan Shen may photocopy examples of the writing that I have completed for the research towards my post-graduate degree.

Signed: _____ Date: _____