"I only cited some of his words": The dilemma of EFL students and their perceptions of plagiarism in academic writing

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There is a reported substantial increase in academic misconduct by students in Chinese universities. This study explores the processes involved in EFL students' academic writing, in particular how they incorporate source material in their English academic writing. Their perceptions of plagiarism and the factors influencing the EFL writing process are also investigated. The study draws on semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys triangulated with the students' academic papers. The student group was found to know very little about academic writing conventions though they used summarising and rewriting strategies in drawing on source texts. Their inappropriate use of text is attributed to their limited training and experience in academic writing and their lack of understanding of accepted academic conduct.

Key words: plagiarism, dilemma, perception, Chinese university students

INTRODUCTION

Some 70 papers by two Chinese scholars have been withdrawn from the journal Acta Crystallographica Section E in 2009 due to their fabrication (Qiu, 2010). Since 2000 hundreds of high-profile academic frauds have been exposed by biologist Fang Zhouzi. In an interview he stated that: "[academic

fraud] is more common [in China] than in any other country and more common than in any other period in Chinese history" (Mooney, 2010). He also observed that plagiarism and cheating were widespread among university students. Such academic corruption has threatened the international reputation of Chinese research and "Chinese universities are facing the crisis of credibility" (Ford, 2009). Adequate attention to this issue is needed so as to regain the long-held tradition of honesty and trust in Chinese academic circles.

There are numerous definitions of plagiarism (Pecorari, 2001). For the purposes of this study it is operationally defined as using others' work as one's own with/without intention. As Yamada (2003) has observed, plagiarism is a topic in international literature that has engaged many researchers in a heated debate in recent years. Four dichotomies are evident when examining the processes underlying plagiarism: a culture-specific vs. a universal concept of plagiarism, intentional vs. nonintentional plagiarism, a negative vs. positive attitudes to plagiarism and lack of language proficiency vs. lack of critical thinking ability. In what follows, these four dichotomies are explained in detail.

Culture-specific Concept vs Universal Concept

Some studies (Abasi & Graves, 2008；DeVoss & Rosati, 2002; Matalene, 1985; Pennycook, 1996) revealed the complexity of issues relating to plagiarism which was seen as a concept rooted in western culture. Bloch and Chi (1995) agreed that cultural traditions shaped preferred writing styles. Thus in their study of Chinese students' use of citations in academic writing they noted that "each form of rhetoric reflects the cultural traditions in which it is developed" (p. 271). Hence Swoden (2005) argued that because the cultural values of students from different cultural backgrounds differ substantially from the assumptions of Western academic writing, it is necessary to "respect and make use of the students' own tradition" (p. 226). However, Liu (2005) and Phan Le Ha (2006) denied that plagiarism was

allowed in Chinese and Vietnamese culture, and suggested instead that it was a universal concept. Wheeler's (2009) survey also indicated that "Japanese students do not accept plagiarism as readily as has often been suggested" (p. 17). The potential risk for the argument regarding plagiarism as a culture-specific concept is that plagiarism may be easily excused merely as cultural difference and second language learners may use this cultural sensitivity to mask their own performance problems (Pecorari, 2003, p. 319).

Intentional vs. Unintentional

Some mixed messages about the intentionality of plagiarism are contained in the literature (Park, 2003). For example, Carroll (2002) suggested that students should not be blamed for plagiarism because they did not intend to plagiarise with the intention to deceive. Bugeja (2001, p. 22) observed that while "a student who honestly did not intend to plagiarize may still be held legally liable …. from an ethical perspective… absence of intent is a mitigating factor." In practice, teachers are said to characterize plagiarism as deliberate or deceptive acts of copying, such as downloading papers from commercial websites while other unintentional acts are unpunishable offences (Sutherland-Smith, 2005). According to Flowerdew & Li (2007), borrowed fragments are not treated severely in the science community on the condition that they do not affect the originality of the work reported. However, Fialkoff (1993) insisted that "there's no excuse for plagiarism" and Perin (1992) argued that "carelessness is almost as great a sin in writers as deceit."

Although plagiarism is unacceptable, it is necessary to distinguish between intentional and nonintentional plagiarism (Flowerdew & Li, 2007). Some students plagiarize unintentionally when they are not familiar with proper ways of quoting, paraphrasing, citing and referencing and when they are unclear about the meaning of "common knowledge" and the expression "in their own words." In other words, students need to be trained to know what plagiarism is. I have deleted the note in the above line.

Negative Attitude vs. Positive Attitude

Plagiarism is usually defined in negative terms such as "crime", "vice", "theft", "unethical", "cheating", "learning dishonesty", "humiliation", "fraud", "kidnapping" and "sin", while researchers (Howard, 1993; Pennycook, 1996) who hold a positive attitude usually prefer to use "borrowing", "patchwriting", "writing as experimentation, as mimic" instead of plagiarism. Howard (1993) defined patchwriting as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes" (p. 213). He pointed out that second language writers used patchwriting as a composing strategy, with which they could develop from immature to mature writers. In contrast, those with negative attitudes to plagiarism do not accept academic misconduct and argue for serious punishment. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university or loss of a job, not to mention a writer's loss of credibility and professional standing.

Lack of Language Proficiency vs. Lack of Critical Thinking Ability

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Some studies attribute plagiarism to the effects of such intervening factors as limited language proficiency, task/text difficulty, and lack of familiarity with the topic (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Campbell, 1990; Shi, 2004). In other studies, respecting authority and lack of critical thinking are interpreted as cultural characteristics of Asians which legitimize the act of plagiarism in Asian societies (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Non-native English speakers were considered more likely to engage in plagiarism because they had little experience of coursework in their undergraduate education (Howard, 1993). Phan Le ha (2006) argued that limited training could be used to explain EFL students' plagiarizing behaviour. Here he observed that because IELTS tests did not require students to develop their arguments based on any reading references, they "are not taught at all about citation" (Phan Le ha, 2006, p.

77).

Research Questions

The above-mentioned debates indicate the complexity of issues around plagiarism and the need to exercise caution over simple accusations of plagiarism among EFL students (Pennycook, 1996). However, there is general agreement that plagiarism in academic writing is unacceptable no matter what the context. It cannot be excused on the grounds that the writers come from another culture or that they are learning to write in an academic format. Buranen (1999), for example, worried about the possible consequences that might result from so easily excusing plagiarism as a mere cultural difference. At the same time, it is evident that lack of knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism, rather than cultural acceptance, is the key driving force for EFL students (Wheeler, 2009). As most research on plagiarism has been carried out in Western contexts, questions such as the following need to be asked in Chinese contexts:

1. How do Chinese students incorporate the source material into their own writing?
2. What are their attitudes toward plagiaristic practices in the EFL writing process?
3. What are the factors that influence their writing process when they have to face the different writing conventions?

METHODS

This study seeks to examine the writing process of EFL students, in particular observing how they incorporate words borrowed from other sources in their English academic writing. Their perceptions of plagiarism and the factors influencing the EFL writing process are also explored.

Qualitative methods are appropriate for a deeper understanding of the increasingly rife use of plagiarism in China. All participants voluntarily joined the interview and the questionnaire survey without the investigator's intervention. In what follows, data collection and data analysis are explained in detail.

Data Collection

Data were collected during semester one 2008, from the senior students majoring in English who attended the course "An Introductory Course of Stylistics" at a Shanghai university. The subject introduced some general knowledge about stylistics. The students were required to hand in a course term paper of about 3000 words in English at the end of the semester. This group of students reported that they had never written such a long paper in their past academic experience. However, during the lectures, the teacher had explained the expected format of the term paper writing and provided some model papers before they started the assignment. The students were asked to email their drafts to the teacher so that they could get some suggestions to revise their papers more appropriately. The data collected included the participants' papers and information through the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview.

Questionnaire

Survey questions (see the appendix) were sent by email to each of the 82 students who attended the course and 34 students responded. They were not obliged to reply because it was assumed that those who were willing to respond would be serious with their answers. Thus, the data collected from these students would be more reliable. The survey was carried out a month after the students' papers were scored so that concerns about their grades were less likely to affect their willingness to participate.

Semi-structured Interview

Ten interviewees were selected from the students who responded to the questionnaire survey (see the appendix), including five males and five females. All of them had completed the stylistic paper and the questionnaire survey. To protect their privacy, these participants remained anonymous in this paper. The survey questions formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews as they focus on individual perceptions of plagiarism and cultural differences. However, the interviews were not limited to the survey questions. Interviews were intended to last approximately 40 minutes, but some ran longer due to lengthy responses. Interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, students' papers, interview transcriptions and survey responses were examined. As the internet was the major source for the students' references, their writing was put into google.com and if plagiarism had taken place, the original source would appear to show how much the students had copied. An initial reading of interview transcripts gave a general impression of responses. Interviews were then coded using the N*Vivo computer software program, which allows rich text documents to be coded and to make comparisons across transcripts. Patterns of responses may emerge which are then coded as nodes or themes across texts. Evidence from the students' papers and the survey responses was triangulated with their comments in the interviews. In the following sections, the results and discussions are organized by answering the three research questions proposed earlier in this paper.

RESULTS

Patterns to Use Source Material into Students' Writing

In this section the strategies the students used to incorporate the borrowed text in their writing are presented. Comparisons were then made between what the students said in the interviews and what they wrote.

Find Reference and Consult the Teacher

According to the questionnaire survey, 29 out of 34 (85%) students said they used reference sources of information in the target language in order to help them develop new ideas on the writing topic. In the interview, almost all students admitted they had difficulties in writing such a long paper and that this was their first attempt at writing such a lengthy text. What they could do was to find some references and consult the teacher. The most used sources were from the internet even though they had been taught how to consult databases and reference books in the library. When the students' papers were searched in google.com, the sources that they used in their papers were easily found. Since these students selected a section of a short novel for stylistic analysis, they usually introduced the author and the story in the beginning of their papers. These introductions were often adopted from the internet as the following example shows. The similar parts are underlined in the following Table.

TABLE
The Introduction Section of Xiao Liu's Paper and its Sources

Xiao Liu's paper	Sources
	http://en.allexperts.com/e/o/o/o._henry.htm
1. Introduction	
O. Henry was the pen name of American writer William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862–June 5, 1910). His middle name at birth was Sidney, not	O. Henry was the pen name of American writer William Sydney Porter (September 11 1862–June 5 1910), whose clever use of twist endings in his

Sydney; he later changed the spelling of his middle name when he first began writing as a journalist in the 1880s.	stories popularized the term "O. Henry Ending". His middle name at birth was Sidney, not Sydney; he later changed the spelling of his middle name when he first began writing as a journalist in the 1880s.
	http://goabroad.wenda.sogou.com/question/75963064.html
In 1904 his first collection, "King of cabbage" was published. In 1906 "four million" published, including his most famous works – "precious gift" and the masterpiece "The Cop and the Anthem" "Twenty years later", "furnished rooms" These short stories concentrated expression of the EU to caring about the bottom Henry Little People, focusing on describing the character of the people in the novel. O. Henry style of humor and the good use of Puns and novels to the end are surprisingly reasonable. This is the famous European Henri-end.	In 1904 his first collection, "King of cabbage and" publication. 1906 年《四百万》出版，其中包括他最著名的作品《珍贵的礼物》和杰作《警察与赞美诗》、《二十年后》、《带家具出租的房间》，这些短篇小说集中体现了欧·亨利关心社会底层小人物，着重刻画微妙的感情的写作风格。1906 "four million" published, including his most famous works are "precious gift" and the masterpiece "The Cop and the Anthem" "Twenty years later", "furnished rooms" These short stories concentrated expression of the EU to care about the bottom Henry Little People, focusing on the delicate describe the feelings of the writing style. 欧·亨利笔调幽默，善于使用双关语并且小说的结尾都出乎意料而又合乎情理，这就是著名的欧·亨利式结尾。O' Henry style of humor and the good use of Puns and novels to the end and are surprisingly reasonable. This is the famous European Henri-end.

Xiao Liu found two articles from two web pages and integrated them into the introduction section of his paper, but he did not give any reference as indicated in the following investigation with the investigator.

> The investigator: Do you use other writers' work while writing a paper?
> Xiao Liu: Yes, sometimes I do. I would find some papers as reference

> when I have no idea about the topic assigned. I would use some of their unique and innovatory ideas in my own paper without citation. I seldom worry about plagiarism because what I write is only an assignment for the teacher and I do not intend to publish it. I'm sure I would concern about plagiarism if I plan to publish my paper.(from the interview with Xiao Liu)

It is not uncommon for students to search materials with a similar topic to theirs on the internet. They are impressed by these accounts and copy them because they believe those materials are just background information which can be used by anyone. In addition, they copy because they believe what they have completed is just an assignment for the teacher. In other words, from these students' perspectives it is acceptable to plagiarize when completing an assignment.

Summarizing and Paraphrasing

To avoid plagiarism and make use of the references, the participants of the current study reported using such strategies as summarizing and rephrasing. From their perspective, they have blended their own understanding with the reference materials making it unnecessary to give the source of the citation.

> I would reorganize the sentence or substitute some words in it when I borrow other works. I mainly try to understand the sentence and rephrase it in my own words. In this way I would not point out the source of the sentence or idea. Otherwise, I would give the reference when I quote the sentence directly. (from the interview with Xiao Chang)

Therefore, they are not concerned when their writing breaks the rules on plagiarism.

> I would reorganize the sentence or substitute some words in it when I borrow other works. I mainly try to understand the sentence and rephrase it in my own words. In this way I would not point out the source of the sentence or idea. Otherwise, I would give the reference when I quote the

sentence directly. (from the interview with Xiao Chang)

However, some students are concerned with plagiarism because they know the extent to which they will be punished, that is, the possibility of failing the subject. Yet they regard writing as a learning process and rephrase what they have borrowed to avoid direct copying.

> I'm concerned about plagiarism in my writing, so I would rewrite what I have noted down from the reference. The method I usually use is paraphrasing. After reading those materials again and again, I rephrase the content in my own style. (from the interview with Xiao Song)

The participants adopted a summarizing strategy to avoid plagiarism in the process of using other texts. However, they usually omitted the source of the texts they summarized because they believed that by mixing their words with other people's words made the need to reference redundant. Only when the students copied directly did they deem it necessary to give the source.

Rewriting with New Understandings

The participants reported they would rewrite the borrowed text based on their own understanding of what they had read. In this way they excused themselves from copying directly from others.

> I pay attention to the method of borrowing. I would not borrow the same as the original text. I have my own understanding. The source text I got from the internet is only used as the reference. (from the interview with Xiao Dong)

For example, Xiao Dong rewrote the major plot of the novelette "Necklace" as follows.

> Among Maupassant's short stories, one of the most impressive masterpieces is Necklace. It tells about a young woman, Mathilde Losiel,

> who was very discontented with her life. She suffered ceaselessly feeling herself born to enjoy all delicacies and all daydreaming about being prosperous became a part of her life. One day, her husband came home with an invitation to an upper-class dinner party. Instead of being excited, Mathilde immediately broke down into tears, because she has no suitable dress or jewelry for the dance. Finally, she decided to borrow a beautiful pearl necklace from her wealthy friend Jeanne Forrestier. She was so obsessed by being the spotlight that she didn't notice the necklace was lost. However, she never thought that it was the necklace that led her and her husband to a 10-long-dreadful-year life in the end. And the most ironic scene was, when Mathilde passed by her old friend years later, and she was informed that the pearl necklace she lost was just a replica. In order to deepen the understanding of Maupassant's works, I will make a stylistic analysis of Necklace from the following aspects: (From Xiao Dong's paper)

This paragraph is regarded as having been rewritten because the interviewee reported she was familiar with the novel and she spared little effort to summarize the major content.

Like her, the other participants also reported that they would find the resources and read them again and again. After they understood the texts completely, they rewrote them in their own words and style. However, they seldom gave the sources for these rewritings. In fact, this is also a kind of plagiarism because the students have intentionally used other writers' ideas as their own.

Categorizing Writing

Some participants reported that they categorized their writing into different types, each with a specific purpose or goal. For example, if the purpose or goal of the writing task was to complete an assignment then it was considered acceptable to directly copy somebody else's work. Xiao Fang analyzed his writing purposes as follows.

> I categorize my writings into three kinds: writing for publication, writing

for task's sake and writing for myself. For publication I'm sure not to plagiarize. However, for completing the assignment I would do it as I feel more convenient to do. Of course, I am concerned that the plagiarized part in my paper would be discovered. Since I do it only for completing the task, it may be ok for me if the teacher does not find the problem. I write diaries or only note down some activities in my everyday life and I would not write academic paper for myself, you know. (from the interview with Xiao Fang)

Therefore, just to complete a written assignment he downloaded a paper from the internet and handed it in as his own. As he said, he would not like to spend too much time in writing such an academic paper and he only did it for his own convenience.

Discussion

Plagiarism seems a common phenomenon among these students. Some (e.g. Xiao Fang) just download a paper from internet as their own. This is a typical fraud. As the questionnaire survey indicated, 23 out of 34 (68%) denied that they had been punished severely when they broke the rule on plagiarism. Thus, they have not realised the severity of their academic misconduct. Other students paraphrased and rewrote the resources, but they did not give the source because they thought they were completing an assignment which would be read by the teacher rather than the public. It seems they believed their teacher would excuse their wrong doings.

Campbell (1990) found non-native speakers relied on the background text significantly more than native speakers when beginning to write. In fact, almost all the participants of this study began their papers with an introduction of the background information about the author or the plot of the story. They reported they quoted information from the sources to produce a brief elaborate description within the context of the paper. Otherwise, their writing was restricted to simplistic discourse, a product of limited language ability. However, they felt that the writing they produced in their own words

was too simple to be considered academic discourse. Therefore, they reported that they drew substantially from the resource texts and borrowed paragraphs in order to make their texts look more like academic papers.

Attitudes Toward Plagiaristic Practices in the EFL Writing Process

As I mentioned above, what the students did in their academic writing was related to what they believe constitutes plagiarism. In their opinion, plagiarism occurs only if the writing is formally published. If the writing task is simply an assignment to be handed in to the teacher then plagiarism is acceptable in this particular context.

Understanding of Plagiarism

How do the students define plagiarism? In the interview the students presented their understanding of plagiarism. Xiao Liu said: "I personally understand plagiarism as follows: <u>Publishing a paper</u> (underlined by the investigator), I do not point out the source when I use other writers' main idea and classic sentences." This can explain why he copied paragraphs without indicating the source when he wrote the introduction section of his paper. In his opinion, one needs to give the source of the copied paragraphs if they want to publish the paper. However, it is unnecessary to give the reference when writing an assignment paper.

Another point for understanding plagiarism is the quantity of the copy. Xiao Wei thought plagiarism was a problem of quantity and degree. It was plagiarism if a student copied whole paragraphs from the resources and connected these paragraphs with their own words. The student should present his or her own ideas with the assistance of others' theories in the paper. In other words, it is permissible for a student to quote the resource in his or her own words without pointing out the source. Xiao Yang expressed this viewpoint in the interview:

> You should not copy too much from others. For example, it is obviously a plagiarism if 80% of your paper is from others' work. You can borrow some good expressions from other writers. But you have to give the source when you use others' data. In this way you can keep your study scientific. 20% or 30% copying should not be regarded as plagiarism. You cannot copy paragraph by paragraph, but you can borrow or refine what s/he said. (from the interview with Xiao Yang)

He first pointed out that one should not copy too much from other writers. Specifically, 80% is too much. But borrowing 20% or 30% of others' work in one's own writing is permitted if only the source has been given. Xiao Chen also made it clear that the so-called plagiarism referred to copying others' paper paragraph by paragraph without the writer's own interpretation. Therefore, a writer should at least have his or her own opinion, his or her own understanding and his or her own idea about the organization of the paper. These students emphasize that it is important to integrate their own understandings and interpretations into the copied material. They do not think that copying some paragraphs from other writers is problematic.

Understanding of "It is Reasonable to Borrow in Writing"[1]

In the questionnaire survey, 14 out of 34 (41%) students agreed with the viewpoint that it is reasonable to borrow other writers' ideas if one deals with them properly. Another 12 out of 34 (35%) kept a neutral position and 8 out of 34 (24%) disagreed. This indicates that most students held a positive attitude to this. In the interview, Xiao Liu understands that borrowing does not mean copying completely. It is a process of removing the dross while keeping the essence. If only so much is input, a good paper could be produced by using what has been accumulated. Xiao Chen thinks the saying means that one can use others' words when writing so that the whole paper reads logically and coherently. It is different from copying directly. Xiao

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[1] In Chinese, "天下文章一大抄."

Song further suggests:

> When writing a paper, you can output if you have adequate input. This saying does not mean you can copy completely from others; rather you can study their merits. How can you write a good paper if you acquire nothing in your learning? Only if you have read a lot of papers, you could be inspired. Thus, I suggest we understand this saying from a positive perspective. (from the interview with Xiao Song)

These students have realized the importance of using previous work as reference in their academic writing. Xiao Yang said: "I think no writer could just have his own idea without referring to others' work. I understand the saying has positive meaning that a writer should read more and synthesize others' ideas in his or her own writing."

Unacceptable Direct Copy

In the questionnaire survey, 18 out of 34 (53%) students disagreed with borrowing other writers' ideas randomly. 7 out of 34 (21%) kept a neutral position and 9 out of 34 (26%) accepted copying others' work directly. The majority of students believe it is unacceptable to copy directly.

> I do not think it appropriate to copy others' work directly. We can borrow or learn from others' writing, but we must respect their labour. Therefore, we should write down the source which we have borrowed from. (from the interview with Xiao Fang)

> I think you can borrow others' idea and content, but you should not copy the whole. Because we have no idea in the beginning when we write such a long paper for the first time, we may borrow some from others to initiate our own writing. (from the interview with Xiao Xia)

Although these two students claimed in the interview that copying others' writing was unacceptable, both used the paper or paragraphs downloaded

from the internet as their own. What they said is contradictory to what they did. This may have been a result of not being able to distinguish common knowledge from knowledge attained from the internet. In their eyes, this may be a common practice for everyone. Perhaps the paper from the internet said what they wanted to say, so they just copied it down directly. Xiao Zhu has expressed this idea in the following way:

> I understand the saying means that people may not have much difference in opinions on a similar topic with the same research subject. Thus, it is impressed that different writers seem to copy each other mechanically. I think it unacceptable to copy completely from others, but you can learn from other people. (from the interview with Xiao Zhu)

Discussion

In fact, these students' beliefs on plagiarism were inaccurate because they were not trained in academic writing and lacked knowledge of what actually constitutes plagiarism. On the one hand, they were concerned if they broke the rules on plagiarism. On the other hand, they thought it was acceptable for them to borrow others' writing without respective referencing or acknowledgement because they were just learning how to write. This finding is consistent with Flowerdew's (2001) and Chandrasegaran's (2000) finding that L2 writers would borrow expressions directly from native English writing. The participants in this study were very cautious to avoid slipping into plagiarism when they borrowed information from others' writing. In Chinese culture, plagiarism is immoral. Cheating is regarded as very bad behaviour (Hyland, 1999; Pecorari, 2003). Xiao Xia said she had attempted to write the assignment in her own words, but she found she repeatedly used too many simple words and her writing seemed very strange. Then she had to write it again and directly sorted out the notes from her readings. This supports Hinkel's (2004) finding that L2 writers quote to increase the academic quality of their writing. If they write in their own words, their writing may look too simple in expression and shallow in content. They need

the discourse of their area as Roca de Larios, Murphy and Manchón (1999, p. 13) point out: "it can compensate for the lack of linguistic resources typical of L2 learners, but it can also serve stylistic, ideational, textual and procedural goals."

Factors Inflencing Stndents' Writing When Facing the Different Writing Conventions

Writers educated in different languages and cultures may accept different social values and ideologies. The participants of this study reported their learning experience which may explain what they did in their writing process.

Little Knowledge and Instruction about Academic Writing Conventions

Data in this investigation indicate that the students have little knowledge of academic writing conventions. They do not know what they should do and how they can act to avoid plagiarism. Few teachers advise students of the academic requirements of written university course work. Some students (e.g. Xiao Wei) learn from the internet and become aware that it is inappropriate to copy from others. Other students blame their previous teachers for not paying attention to these issues and/or are not strict enough when plagiarism rules are broken. For example,

> Perhaps previous teachers were not aware of the importance of academic writing conventions and they were not strict with us. I know the concept of plagiarism from my foreign language teachers. (from the interview with Xiao Dong)

Xiao Song admitted knowing little about academic writing conventions and her teachers had never informed her about them. She mentioned that her teachers would ask her to read other people's papers and borrow ideas from them. Borrowing would not be problematic in her opinion. She said it was

acceptable to borrow less than 50% from the resource text. From her perspective, complete copying is inappropriate, but some materials like examples and supporting evidence may be borrowed and incorporated with her own arguments.

Teacher's Encouragement

On the one hand, teachers do not explicitly expound academic writing conventions to the students. On the other hand, teachers implicitly encourage them to borrow good sentences as their own in the writing.

> [indent]The investigator: Does your teacher ask you to memorize some well-written sentences and use them in your own writing?
> Xiao Liu: Sure, this is a common phenomenon. My teacher would ask me to do this no matter whether I write in Chinese or English. This is regarded as a good writing strategy. Teachers expect us to do like this for the purpose of succeeding in the examination. (from the interview with Xiao Liu)

Imitation is emphasised as one of the most important skills in Chinese writing (Gu, 2003). All the students are required to prepare a notepad on which they can write down good sentences when they read a model article. As they write their own work, they can use the sentences as their own in the essay. This is encouraged by the teacher.

> In middle school our teachers ask us to memorise as many good sentences as possible. Once you remember those sentences and use them in your own writing, they have become yours. Especially in the examination our writing could get higher mark if we use the sayings in the writing. (from the interview with Xiao Xia)

Therefore, teachers do not require students to give the source of their quotation. Furthermore, what the students usually write are essays for examinations rather than for coursework. In order to reduce the pressure of

writing in examinations students would memorize texts and include them as their own work. This process was rewarded by higher grades.

Little Emphasis on Plagiarism in Chinese Culture

The interviewees also discussed plagiarism from the perspective of culture. Xiao Wei does not think that Chinese culture attaches importance to plagiarism:

> It (reference) is not emphasised in Chinese. However, culture is respected in foreign countries. For example, it is reported a web page administered by a Chinese company in the United States was closed by American government because that page provided free-downloaded material. They (American people) understand and respect knowledge. It may be a custom with regard to respecting culture because the sources for quotation must be provided in English. On the contrary, Chinese teachers do not emphasise providing reference. (from the interview with Xiao Wei)

Perhaps it is true that Chinese students who are influenced by Chinese social values find copying several words from other writers not a serious issue. Some students even doubt there are any conventions on plagiarism in Chinese culture.

> Perhaps we do not have this convention. Or perhaps Chinese people do not think it matters to borrow others' work. All writers copy each other. In our Chinese writing we cite some famous sayings to support our own argument when we discuss some issues. I do not think it necessary to point out the source of those quotations because everybody knows who said those words. What's more, we only wrote very short English essay about 100 or 200 words in length in the past. But now it is different in the university. In the beginning of writing this paper I am not so sensitive with the citation and I copy directly from the source. After the teacher instructed us how to do the citation, I became quite careful with the citation. (from the interview with Xiao Chang)

It seems Xiao Chang is confused about using others' text in her own writing. She could not distinguish between what is considered common knowledge and knowledge attained directly from the internet. She was impressed that she could use the resources randomly before she was informed about the academic conduct. Thus, it is obvious that students need to be trained with academic writing conduct explained explicitly and in depth.

Psychological Factor

Many students do not expect that their teachers will detect the plagiarized parts in their writings. They are aware they have plagiarized, but they anticipate that this will not attract the teacher's attention.

> The teacher may not find out the sentences I copy from somewhere else. Perhaps this is because I use them technically so that the teacher does notice. I like to have my own opinions. I would sometimes point out who wrote those words which I appreciate to use in my writing, but usually I omit the citation and regard them as my own. (from the interview with Xiao Chang)

In fact, it is very easy to detect plagiarism in students' writing. It is simply a matter of cutting and pasting part of the students' writings in google.com. This will expose any copied material immediately.

Incapable to Complete the hard Task

The fact that so many students were found to copy paragraphs from the internet indicates that the assigned task may be beyond their ability. Xiao Fang expressed his opinion very explicitly in the interview:

> I do not think I have the ability to write a stylistic paper. It is a deep gap for us. It is impossible for us to complete such a task from aspects such as writing ability and understanding of stylistics. I do not deny that the paper I send you is rubbish. And I bet that most of the papers you receive are

> rubbish. I think it ok for us to learn some basic knowledge about stylistics, but it seems too difficult for us to complete a stylistic paper. (from the interview with Xiao Fang)

Xiao Song also thinks she lacks the ability to write a stylistic paper for two reasons. First, she does not know how to analyse and appreciate literary works. Due to her limited knowledge she could not find adequate references for her study. Second, she does not know how to write such a paper based on the comprehension of literary works. These problems may stem from issues with the course design. Is this course suitable for the students with present limited language foundations? However, many other students admitted they have benefited from this writing experience.

> By reading this story, I also learned a lot of writing skills. From stylistic analysis of the organization and the cohesions of the story, I have communicated with this great master directly. In my opinion, doing this kind of analysis is very helpful for our English major students. By this way, we can enrich our view of knowledge and our ability of comprehension and analysis. I feel I have made a very big progress during these weeks. No matter whether this thesis is good or not, it is a good attempt. I think I will keep trying in the future. (from the interview with Xiao Chen)

Discussion

Previous discussions on plagiarism in ESL/EFL contexts have served to inform researchers and educators on how differences in cultural and ideological backgrounds influence people's understanding of textual appropriation and literacy. This study identified some other factors such as psychological factors and the students' prior learning experience (Yamada, 2003). First of all, inadequate training on academic conduct is the crucial factor for the students' severe plagiarism. Perhaps they know that plagiarism (i.e. direct copy from the resources) is inappropriate behavior, but they do not know what is required of them in academic writing. Furthermore, their past learning experience tells them copying is implicitly permissible because their

teachers had encouraged them to imitate the good expressions and sentences of others (see Pecorari, 2003). In addition, memory is emphasized in Chinese learning and the students are asked to memorize good sentences and phrases, sometimes even long paragraphs. They usually borrowed good sentences or vocabulary from what they read and used them in their writing. They thought it normal to use similar patterns to express different ideas because they found that the sentence patterns used by native writers could express their ideas better. As Kolich (1983) noted, students plagiarize to get the work done because they do not believe they have the ability to complete such hard work. Finally, most of the students who plagiarize in their writing hope that their teachers do not discover their misconduct.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study clearly demonstrates that plagiarism is a serious issue. Clearly, the students in this study have inaccurate beliefs on what constitutes plagiarism per se. They do not know how to reference properly. Their poor language proficiency results in poor production so that they feel compelled to borrow from other writers.

When analyzing the causes for academic misconduct, Ge Jianxiong emphasized in an interview that students had not been taught academic conventions. He perceived that modern academic conventions, which did not exist in Chinese history, particularly in social science and humanities, were from abroad (Zhang, 2010). He said it was normal for Chinese writers not to quote other writers' work when writing a paper. Student writers usually memorized a lot of model articles. Once they had them in their mind, these model articles became their own. Nobody would accuse such behavior as plagiarism because there is no economic profit. Moreover, it was an honor if one's text had been used by other writers, so it was unnecessary to mark the source. According to Ge's explanation, the plagiarized author should feel happy when their texts were used.

It is not easy for novice EFL writers to separate 'imitation' from 'copying' when using texts (Campbell, 1990). They often confuse copying with imitating when using other writers' material. The problem is that writers have the linguistic ability to summarize what they read from native language material in their own words while they have to borrow or learn second language expressions from what they read due to their constrained language proficiency. In Chinese writing, writers seldom give references even though their ideas are borrowed from others because they believe they have used their own words instead of other writers' exact words expressing similar ideas (Deckert, 1993). The participants in this study were mindful of breaking the rules on plagiarism. However, they pointed out that borrowing expressions was not plagiarism when combined with different content or when discussing topics with similar expressions.

The findings from this investigation have substantial implications for the teaching of L2 writing. First of all, a curricular reformation may be initiated in the L2 writing classroom. Chinese students in English writing course are usually assigned a topic and required to complete it within half an hour or an hour in class. Under such circumstance, the students always write short essays with at most 300 words so that they do not have an experience of writing longer papers. In the reformed writing course, the students could be asked to complete different mini-projects. To accomplish those projects the students have to consult a variety of resources such as libraries and teachers. In the practice of incorporating the sources in their writing they might learn how to avoid plagiarism. Secondly, L2 teachers need to explicate English writing conventions explicitly so that the students understand how to borrow other writers' sources in their writing. Thirdly, L2 teachers have to be aware of cultural differences in the classroom. On the one hand, they need to be very strict with the students' correct use of sources and inform the students they will be punished seriously if they plagiarize. On the other hand, L2 students such as Chinese students might be offered a second chance to develop their appropriate use of sources because they do not plagiarize intentionally due to the ignorance of English writing conventions. Finally, the

novice L2 writers must familiarize themselves with the target language writing conventions. They need to find more model papers and study how other writers use citations appropriately.

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APPENDIX
Questionnaire about Plagiarism in Chinese Students' English Writing

The purpose of this survey is to find out what YOU think about plagiarism in English writing. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the items on the questionnaire. So, please, answer and offer your reasons as frankly as you can based on what YOU really think, not on how you think you should answer. You can explain your choice in either English or Chinese. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not have any effect on your grade or on anyone's opinion of you.

In this questionnaire, you will find statements about plagiarism in English writing. Indicate how true each statement is for you by writing a letter besides each statement according to the following scale:

1- I strongly disagree
2- I disagree
3- I neither agree nor disagree
4- I agree
5- I strongly agree

1. I can borrow the other writer's ideas randomly (任意地) because knowledge is the common property of human beings.
2. It is not plagiarism (抄袭) if I paraphrase or change the other writer's sentences in my writing without reference.
3. I consult references for facts and information about my topic.
4. I use reference sources of information in the target language that may help me develop new ideas on the writing topic; for example textbooks, newspapers, sources on web, and prior work.
5. I refer to similar works written about my topic to use them as a model before writing.
6. Writers get ideas by interacting with other people and reading different sources.

7. 天下文章一大抄，就在会抄不会抄 (It is reasonable to borrow some other writers' ideas if only you deal with it properly.)

8. I have been taught to use references properly in my previous writing experience.

9. I have been taught to copy good expressions and sentence from famous works in Chinese writing.

10. I have been punished seriously when I break the rule of plagiarism in my past writing experience.