A Nested Model of Academic Writing Approaches:
Chinese International Graduate Students' Views of English Academic Writing

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Abstract

Adopting Lea and Street's (1998) three models of academic writing (i.e., the study skills, academic socialization, and academic literacies), this qualitative study explored 10 Chinese international graduate (CIG) students' perceptions of differing literacy practices in a different academic milieu and in various disciplines at a Canadian university. The findings reveal how different epistemologies in different cultures and disciplines have impacted these CIG students' English academic writing. This paper acknowledges the limitations of the exclusive use of study skills and academic socialisation orientations in writing support for international students. It recommends a nested model of writing support, which is more inclusive and transformative in nature.

Introduction

"The reason why I chose the Master's program of Western history in China was that I didn't want to touch on some research areas related to sensitive political issues. In China, there are many areas we cannot touch upon…. But here in Canada, I can do anything I want. When I came here, I finally found the true feeling of academic freedom." --- Shi (a Chinese international PhD student in the History program)

"I'll adapt myself to the Canadian way (of writing). Well, in the academic world, there is only one way, I think, i.e., the mainstream one. It's the American, or Canadian, or North American way. That's the mainstream. Maybe, in our field, Chinese and European scholars are different, but they have to follow the North American styles." --- Jun (a Chinese international PhD student in the Business program)

A "hankering" after "academic freedom" in Canadian academia partially influenced Shi's decision to discontinue her Master's study in mainland China, and start a new journey in Canada. Jun's frankness resonated with me, as a Chinese international graduate (CIG) student myself. It is probably because we shared an "insatiable" desire to be upwardly mobile and were willing to board the bandwagon of the mainstream culture. I have appreciated the uniqueness of every participant's voice in my research. When I listened to their narratives, scenarios in my own journey of "honing" my English writing skills in Canadian academia were brought into the forefront in my mind. There were numerous times when I could not help wondering: How many CIG students come to Canada cherishing the ideal of pursuing academic freedom in Canada as Shi did? How many of them would be engaged in

acculturating themselves to the mainstream like Jun and me? What if Jun was right in that we CIG students have had no choice because the only "legitimate" way to approach academic writing is the North American mainstream way? As members of a minority group in Canadian academia, what kind of academic autonomy are we CIG students pursuing? To negotiate or to be acculturated?: that is the question.

According to *The National Report on International Students in Canada 2002* (The Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2005), from 2001-02, the People's Republic of China (with 10,091 Chinese international students) was ranked third among the top source countries for all levels of international students in Canada. Among them, there were 1,835 Chinese international graduate students enrolled in Canadian's graduate programs. The People's Republic of China was ranked first in the list of top source countries for international graduate students in Canada. From 2000-01 to 2001-02, the largest percentage increases in international graduate students were also from China. The growing population of Chinese graduate students in Canada calls for studies on CIG students' overseas experiences and pedagogies that would optimize their learning experience in Canadian tertiary education which is characterized by increasing cultural and linguistic diversity.

Considering the growing diversity in the globalized world, the New London Group (1996) has called for a broader view of literacy – a multiple literacies perspective. Even though much has been written on minority children's experiences of multiliteracies in Canada (Cummins, 2001; Phillipson, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988), especially concerning students at the primary and secondary education levels, Chinese international graduate students' literacy experiences have been under-researched. There are some studies related to CIG students and the problems they face in their academic life (Hu, 2003; Li, 2001; Jiao, 2006; Mah, 1995; Zhu, 1992). However, a limited number of systematic studies are situated in a multiple literacies framework and a few of them explore a wide spectrum of meaning-making practices across graduate programs. The epistemological challenges that CIG students have encountered in academic writing are another much neglected area. Little research addresses the differences in the epistemologies in which CIG students have been trained in China and the conventional epistemologies prescribed by Canadian academic institutions in academic writing.

Drawing on CIG students' conceptions of writing, knowledge, and identity, this paper identifies some of hidden assumptions embedded in academic writing. It adopts an academic literacies perspective (Lea & Street, 1998), which is situated in the multiliteracies framework (e.g., Cummins, 2006; New London Group, 1996). This paper also explores CIG students' views of differing literacy practices within a number of academic disciplines, and most importantly, how different epistemologies in different cultures and disciplines might impact CIG students' perceptions of academic writing. Accordingly, three research questions guided the study:

1. What are CIG students' views of different academic writing practices in various disciplines at the Canadian university under investigation?
2. What are CIG students' understandings of learning to write English academic papers within the Canadian academia?
3. What are CIG students' views of English academic writing support at the Canadian university?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literacy theorists in the new literacies studies have drawn a distinction between autonomous and ideological views of literacy (e.g., Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Adopting an asocial and ahistorical lens, the autonomous model conceptualizes literacy as decontextualized technical skills in the individual. This model sees the uses of literacy as being universal and neutral. Street (1984) contended that the autonomous model has been explicit in academic literature and prevalent amongst teachers and students. Against the autonomous model of literacy, the New Literacy Studies scholars posed an ideological model, which conceives of literacy as a socially situated practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Street, 1984, 2003). This view foregrounds the embeddedness of literacy in history, ideology, and socio-cultural structures and is thus named as the ideological view of literacy. This model highlights how a wide spectrum of literacies is associated with and patterned by different communities, sociocultural origins, domains of life, social institutions, and power relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004).

Street's (1984) demarcation of two views of literacy highlights the necessity to explore cross-cultural patterns of literacy and patterns of power relations embedded in literacy development. As Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis, and Cummins (2006) argued, the differentiation between "autonomous" and "ideological" orientations to literacy is "one of constant critical dialog where school-based literacy practices are pushed to locate themselves in relation to societal power relations" (p. 443).

Lea and Street (1998) suggested three models for academic writing in higher education: the study skills model, the academic socialisation model, and the academic literacies model. The study skills model focuses on students' deficits and regards the purpose of writing support as to fix students' problems. Emphasis is given to atomized skills, surface language, grammar, and spelling. The autonomous perspective of literacy is salient in the study skills model since it regards learners' knowledge of literacy and writing as automatically transferable from one context to another.

In the academic socialisation model, students work hard to adapt their writing styles to mainstream academic discourses. The purpose of writing support is to acculturate students into a specific academic discourse. Even though the academic socialisation model recognizes that there are different genres and discourses for different subject areas and disciplines, it regards knowledge of writing as relatively stable. It also perceives students as capable of reproducing a particular academic discourse without difficulty after social interaction and participation. In this sense, the academic socialisation model still adopts the autonomous view of literacy. It seems like "the academy is a relatively homogenous culture, whose norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution" (Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999, p. xxi).

In contrast, according to Lea and Street (2006), the academic literacies approach provides different insights into students' academic literacy practices. The academic literacies approach demands students to "develop and challenge a variety of differing repertoires for writing as well as identities appropriate to diverse modes of discourse and relations" (Cumming, 2006, p. 15).

Cadman (1997) investigated how international students' identities have been rooted in different epistemologies in which they have been trained regarding thesis writing. Jones et al. (1999) also elaborated on a reconceptualization of academic writing by arguing that higher education academic

writing should not simply be grounded on skills and effectiveness. First, it should rather be about epistemology - what counts as knowledge and who has authority over it. Second, it should be about identity - the relations between writing and the constitution of self and agency. Third, higher education academic writing should be about power, i.e., to question how ideological positions and claims are presented as neutral and as given in the writing requirements and the norms of academic writing evaluation. To put it briefly, the academic literacies model is concerned about epistemological issues of writing, identity, and power relations. It portrays students as active agents (Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, & Donahue, 2009), who engage themselves in the negotiation of conflicting power relations and different literacy practices. Lea and Street (2006) contended that the academic literacies perspective sees writing as a social practice, which varies with genre, context, and culture. They noted that the academic literacies perspective does not only see literacy practices as associated with different subject areas and disciplines but also with "broader institutional discourses and genres" (p. 368), or even with "national contexts" (Jones, et al., p. xvi). This perspective highlights the wide spectrum of "genres, modes, shifts, transformation, representations, meaning-making processes, and identities" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 376) that are involved in academic writing. Instead of seeing students as having deficits, the academic literacies model accentuates "the variety and specificity of institutional practices, and students' struggles to make sense of these" (p. 376).

Lea and Street (1998) contended that the three models of study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies are not mutually exclusive, but each "successively encapsulates the other" (p. 158). Similar to the rationale of Skourtou et al.'s (2006) nested pedagogical orientations of literacy, Figure 1 illustrates the nested relationship of the three approaches of academic writing.
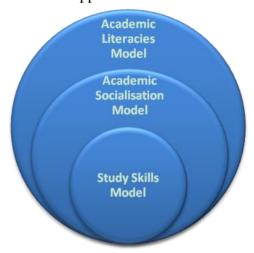

Figure 1. A Nested Model of Academic Writing Approaches.

Even though these three models are overlapping, they are situated in different theoretical paradigms (Lea & Street, 2006). The study skills model pays little attention to the sociocultural and historical contexts of academic literacy and is implicitly impacted by autonomous theories of learning situated in the cognitive paradigm. As Street (1984) contended, autonomous views of literacy are more concerned with imparting knowledge. Recognizing the diversity of disciplinary genres and discourses, the academic socialisation model is well situated in discourse analysis, genre theory, and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory of language learning. The central theme of the academic

socialisation model is not the ability to read and write linguistic symbols, but rather the ability to do so in a culturally appropriate manner in particular social contexts (Currie & Cray, 2004; Pérez, 1998). In contrast, highlighting power relationships, authority, agency, and identity, the academic literacies approach is associated with social and critical linguistics and the recent critiques of the sociocultural theory of language learning. This broader view sees students' writing as closely associated with epistemologies and identities instead of skills or a process of socialisation. It challenges the neutral concepts of writing and the discourses in which writing is embedded. As Jones et al. (1999) contended, the academic literacies approach conceives of institutions, where academic practices take place, as sites of discourse and power.

Methodology and Participant Profile

The current paper draws on data collected for a Master of Education study. Viewing literacy as a socially situated practice, the study explored the sociocultural factors that have impacted Mainland Chinese international students' English academic writing. The original study consisted of classroom observations of two writing classes targeting international students and interviews with Chinese international graduate (CIG) students, Chinese international undergraduate students, and two Canadian writing instructors. Considering the fact that there are very few studies specifically focusing on Chinese international graduate students' development of multiple literacies associated with various disciplines and culturally different epistemologies, the current exploratory study focuses on CIG students' voices and perspectives of how differing epistemologies in various cultures and disciplines might have impacted CIG students' perceptions of academic writing.

Purposive sampling was employed to choose student participants. Purposive sampling is an appropriate choice when "most of the random sample may be largely ignorant of particular issues and unable to comment on matters of interest to the researcher" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 115). I approached the graduate offices of eight departments and faculties on the main campus of a mid-sized Canadian university to recruit student participants. A center serving international students helped to send out the Letter of Information to all the international students on the main campus on my behalf. I also used convenience method (Cohen et al., 2007, p.113). After some participants granted permission to participate in the study, they also contacted other CIG students who would like to be interviewed.

Ten CIG students were thus recruited. All the CIG students partaking in study were from Mainland China. Almost all the CIG students were born around the mid 1970s. They came to Canada to pursue graduate study on their own. They represent diverse disciplinary backgrounds and a defined population, whose first language (L1) is Mandarin and who have been learning English as their second language (L2). None of them were taking any kind of English writing classes in addition to their graduate work during the time the research was conducted. Table 1 illustrates the profile of all the student participants.

Name	Gender	Program	Length of Time Being in Canadian Academy	Length of Time Studying at the University
Shi	Female	Ph.D. of History	3 years	3 years
Jun	Male	Ph.D. of Business	4 years	4 years
Tong	Male	Master of Electronic Engineering	2 years	2 years
Rui	Male	Ph.D. of Mechanical Engineering	1 year	1 year
Dan	Male	MSc. in Psychology (first Master's in China)	1 year and 1 month	1 year and 1 month
Jing	Female	Master of Education	1 month	1 month
Ming	Male	Ph.D. in Electronic and Computer Engineering (first Master's in China and second Master's at the McMaster University)	3 years	8 months
Fu	Male	Ph.D. in Electronic and Computer Engineering	1 year	1 year
Fei	Female	Ph.D. in Education	3 years	3 years
Kun	Male	Ph.D. in Economics	1 year	1 year

Table 1. Profile of CIG Student Participants.

There are 7 male and 3 female participants. Among them, seven are Ph.D. students and three Master's students. All of them completed their undergraduate studies in China. Among the Ph.D. students, four (Dan, Ming, Fu, and Kun) were granted Master's degrees by Chinese universities. One (Shi) had two-year experience in a Master's program in China. She left the program without a degree and came to Canada to pursue her Master's and then Doctoral degrees in history. One (Rui) did his Master's in South Korea. One (Dan) got his first Master's degree in China and was doing the second in Canada at the time of the research study. Two of them (Fei and Ming) completed their Master's study in Canada. Six out of ten were from graduate programs in Social Sciences and four were from various programs in the Department of Engineering.

Each of them was interviewed once at venues that were mutually agreed upon between the participants and the researcher. Interviews were conducted in either English or Chinese depending on the participants' personal preferences. Five of the respondents chose to be interviewed in English (i.e., Jun, Rui, Dan, Fei, and Kun). I translated five Mandarin transcripts into English (i.e., those of Shi, Tong, Jing, Ming, and Fu). Mandarin is my first language. I've been learning and using English for more than twenty years. Plus, I was trained as a professional Chinese-English translator in my first Master's study back in China and have been widely aware of the "translation dilemmas" in qualitative research (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 161). With respect to uncertain terminologies and statements, I asked my respondents to member check the translated transcripts.

Student participants were interviewed for 40 to 60 minutes. CIG students were asked about (See

Appendix A for the Interview Protocol): the types of English academic writing they have been doing, the difficulties they have encountered in English academic writing, their perceptions about socioculturally related differences and similarities between writings they do at the Canadian university and their previous Chinese universities, and the forms of support they have received from faculty members and the writing support center at the university.

Limited qualitative literature on epistemological and ideological impacts upon mainland Chinese international graduate students' English academic writing points to the necessity to conduct "qualitative interviews" (Warren, 2002, p. 84), which would offer insights into students' life worlds and experiences associated with different literacy practices. Considering the practical matters of access, participants' time, and the time frame of my M.Ed. study, I employed an exploratory approach to research CIG students' perceptions on the said topic. According to Babbie (2010), an exploratory approach of research is appropriate when the research topic is relatively new. Exploratory studies point to the way to more-refined studies in the future. Using student interviews as the major methods for data collection, the purpose of this exploratory study is to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive subsequent study.

Findings & Discussion

Difficulties in Writing: Issues of Technical Skills vs. Issues of Epistemology

   Study Skills Model: Perceived difficulties with technical writing skills.

CIG students reported various genres of disciplinary writing since they started their graduate study in Canada. CIG students in engineering departments did not just do lab reports. They wrote research papers, journal papers for publication, and Master's and Doctoral theses based on experimental data and/or critical analysis of current theories (Tong, Rui, Ming, and Fu). CIG students from Social Sciences departments reported a wider spectrum of academic writing in English, i.e., research proposals, weekly critical response papers, annotated bibliography, research papers as part of their course work, papers for journal submission, and Master's and Doctoral theses based on critical analysis of existent literature and/or data from empirical research. Since doctoral students from differing engineering and Social Sciences programs saw papers for journal submission as a key part of their academic writing, I will not limit the following discussion to course-related academic writing.

When asked about their perceived difficulties in various English writing tasks specifically after they started their graduate study in Canada, almost all CIG students referred to difficulties associated with technical writing skills. Most of the students talked about their language challenges in terms of idiomatic ways of expression, word choices, sentence structures, and grammar.

Ming, Fu, Fei, and Jing mentioned word choices as one of their major difficulties. Though having been study successively in three Canadian universities over the past six years, Ming still found that limited vocabulary hindered his improvement in English academic writing, especially when it comes to the use of appropriate words and the nuances of expression. The variety of word choices is another issue with which CIU students struggled. As Jing reflected, "I hate myself using one verb repeatedly in one article".

With regard to sentence structures, Fu commented that the logic of English syntax is quite different from Chinese and it gave him a hard time in English academic writing. Ming noted that in his

field of electronic and computer engineering, Chinese students' frequent use of adjective clauses is problematic. For him, long sentences are not legitimate sentence patterns in English academic writing in his field. In contrast, based on her three-year writing experience at the Faculty of Education, Fei had an impression that writing with complicated sentence structures is more preferable in her area. To quote Fei,

> I can write the sentences correctly in grammar, but the professors, they just changed the whole structure to make it prettier, but I lack the ability to do that. I can only illustrate my ideas in plain sentences. But they always, you know, make the sentences more complicated or more professional.

Four student participants (Dan, Rui, Jing, and Jun) thought of writing structure or paragraph organization as one of their major problems in English academic writing. For them, English academic writing in their own disciplines has its specific orders/patterns of structuring ideas, such as beginning, middle, and end. Rui noted, Chinese academic writing in his field has looser requirements of structures than English academic writing. For him, English academic papers in the area of mechanical engineering are different from contemporary Chinese academic papers, but very much resemble Chinese Ba-Gu articles (i.e., eight-leg articles--a deserted and notorious form of writing with a strict eight-part pattern in Chinese writing tradition). Rui aired his uncertainty of whose structures or patterns, contemporary Chinese or North American, to choose for his earlier English academic papers. Talking about writing up research papers and journal papers in business, Jun identified writing structure as one of his two existing problems with academic writing. In his eyes, the differences in Chinese and North American ways of organizing articles are resulted from different thought patterns. Back in China, following the accustomed holistic ways of thinking, he often used inductive method in his academic writing. He usually started with facts and details and gradually developed his arguments toward the end of his papers. After he came to the Canadian university, he had to adjust himself to the prevailing deductive approach in his field, i.e., always raising his arguments first and then going on analytically with supporting details.

In terms of academic writing, there are always debates about what forms of writing are legitimate and what problems need to be fixed in students' writing. When asked about their difficulties in English academic writing, most CIG participants identified their surface language problems in deficient terms, such as, "I lack the abilities to…", "My English is not very good", and "I hate myself doing…". Their extensive concerns about their technical language skills in English academic writing to some extent reflect traces of the study skills approach that is prevalent at the Canadian university under research. Some of Fu's instructors put "Bad English" on his assignments. As Fu reported, because of Chinese PhD students' deficiency in English, even when their experiment results were better than those of their Canadian peers, their marks for the lab reports were usually lower than Canadian students. Jun got lower marks for his earlier English papers because of "poor" grammar and structure. The writing support center is the place where CIG students are advised by their faculties or departments to go so as to "fix" their generic problems in English academic writing. Regarding the writing services offered by the writing programs on main campus, CIG students' commented that the sessions seem to be more focused on surface language skills, such as grammar, sentence patterns, and word choices. For students

who had sought help at the writing support center (e.g., Shi and Jing), they found that the technical attention to the generic features of academic writing can hardly meet their discipline-specific and culture-specific needs in English academic writing.

Some Master's and PhD students (e.g., Ming and Tong) in the Engineering programs reported that language is not a focal evaluation aspect in their assignments. As Tong shared, a lot of instructors in his program made it explicit that grammar errors were not included in the evaluation criteria. For example, when marking their reports, instructors evaluated the reports according to the result and the process of calculation or experiment. They did not mark students' reports according to their ways of writing and surface language features. However, when it comes to journal articles for publication in the field of engineering, reviewers' stringent evaluation of language in the manuscripts became doctoral engineering students' major concern even though they were confident with their novel ideas in the papers (e.g., Fu and Rui). Ming was lucky to receive substantial support from his professors who attended to technical language "problems" and appraised his continuous investment into original engineering ideas.

CIG students' "deficit" views of their own writing abilities and the discursive focus on the quality of language rather than the novelty of ideas in the publication arena might keep CIG students further away from the publication process in the Canadian academia. If the study skill approach (a surface approach) (Jones, 1999) continues to prevail and gives priority to the surface language features in the students' writing, it might in turn hinder international students' "conceptual development and the fair representation of their thoughts" (p.41). There is a salient need for an interplay of the surface approach with a "deeper" approach of academic writing where priority is given to: 1) celebrating international students' epistemological strengths which came with them from their prior experience in their home countries, 2) inspiring their conceptual investment in their writing, 3) encouraging a positive constitution of self in their writing, and 4) fostering individual agency to negotiate with the institutional and discursive confinements that are associated with academic writing.

Perceived difficulties with different epistemological conventions in attribution.
Lea and Street (1998) suggested that the "appropriateness" of students' writing in a specific community has more to do with issues of epistemology than with surface features of form. While CIG students in engineering programs posited that there are few epistemological differences in the Chinese and Canadian engineering fields, CIG students in Social Sciences programs reported extensive concerns about how discipline- and culture-specific epistemologies are interfering with their academic writing. Fei, a PhD student from the Faculty of Education, shared her observation of the different philosophical concepts that are prevalent in China and Canada. The major strands of philosophies she had learned in China are limited to Marxism and Maoism, while her Canadian colleagues were more aware of the diverse philosophies associated with education and social sciences. Even when it is about her familiar philosophy--Marxism, there were also challenges. To quote Fei,

> For example, if we (Chinese) mention Marxism, we only know Karl Marx and Engels. But we have never heard about Gramsci. But here in the class, we spent a whole class on Gramsci. It seems that all my classmates knew about Gramsci and they can name his theories. Even though he is also a Marxist, his Marxism is different from Karl Marx's Marxism. I claimed that I grew up in

a socialist country, but I didn't know anything about Gramsci.

The differences in institutional knowledge about Marxism in China and Canada added to Fei's concerns about writing "high-quality" papers. Meanwhile, the epistemological differences in this respect also play a role in shaping her confidence about her professionalism as an academic in the Canadian context; as Hermerschmidt (1999) noted, "when institutional knowledge is being privileged over students' knowledge, students may have a sense of being 'deprofessionalised'" (p. 14).

Concurring with existent literature on citation practices related to mainland Chinese students' work (e.g., Bloch & Chi, 1995; Jia, 2008), another key finding in epistemological challenges is related to conventions of incorporating others' research into English academic writing. It is reported that mainland Chinese international students are confused by the differences between Chinese and North American ways of defining fixed knowledge and notions (Zhang, 2008). Some CIG students in this study found it difficult to identify what kinds of knowledge should be attributed and what should not. For instance, Shi, the PhD candidate in History, reported she has been struggling with making attributions, because for ideas that Chinese people conceive of as fixed and widely accepted, Canadian professors require students to give credit to the source of information. Jun, Rui, and Jing noted there were few rules about citation and attribution in their previous Chinese academic writing. When Jing wrote her thesis in China, she was not required to specify the sources she incorporated. CIG students' perceived difficulties in quotations are more or less pertinent to the different epistemological conventions about citation in Chinese and Canadian academia. As Rui shared, for generally accepted facts and theories, Chinese academics in his field would not bother to make attributions or elaborate on the details. Different epistemologies associated with making contributions in China might be accountable for CIG students' difficulties in appreciating the conventions of "citing sources and contextualising quotations" (English, 1999, p. 31) in English academic writing.

Epistemological assumptions of critical thinking.
Though there was no explicit requirement of critical thinking in English academic writings in the engineering programs, CIG engineering students (Tong, Fu, Rui, and Ming) reported the use of critical analysis in their English writing. Ming's quote serves as a typical example as to how engineering graduate students incorporate critical analysis in their writing:

Let me illustrate an example. There are three theories: Theory A, Theory B, and Theory C. After I read all the three theories, I find that when parts of Theory A, B, and C are combined together, I can get Theory D, or say Idea D, which could be very effective in doing something related to engineering. Then I'll try to verify the truth-value of Theory D or Idea D. And after that, I should conduct experiments to verify is effectiveness in its application. After I can verify it in these two ways (i.e., through critical analysis and experiment), then I can say Theory D or Idea D is correct.

All the CIG students in the engineering programs said critical analysis in English writing is not new to them since Chinese academic writing in their field follows a similar logic of critiquing and synthesizing existent theories. In contrast, the epistemological basis of North American assumptions about critical thinking is perceived as a key barrier by CIG students in Social Sciences programs, especially when they just started their graduate programs in Canada. The dominant requirement of critical analysis in academic writing in the graduate programs of Psychology, Business, Education, and

History is quite "nerve-racking" for newcomers. Shi's comments below reveal the extensive demand and pivotal importance of critical analysis in the graduate program of History.

> Actually, for every course, teachers require a proposal before we write a paper. In the proposals, we are required to list all our ideas, our critical ideas. And the proposals usually go through several rounds of revision until the professors think our papers are critical enough.

As a highly valued component in mainstream North American culture and schools, critical thinking is characteristic of U.S. middle-class socialization practices (Atkinson, 1997). An explicit demand for critical analysis in North American universities might challenge North American students (Atkinson, 1997), in whose life implicit or explicit training in critical-thinking skills is not well developed. It might as well challenge individuals from different educational systems or institutions where critical thinking is not endorsed or endorsed differently. After sharing her "painful" experience of critiquing others' works, Jing, an M.Ed. student, reasoned:

> I think it is related to our previous educational experience. Since I was a child, I have been taught that everything you read is right. It is also related to my own personality. Maybe I can find one point with which I disagree, but it is very hard for me to analyze it in depth, or say, to find evidence to support it.

For Jing, to comment on the structure or the language (rhetoric) of an article is "not a big deal", but to share her critical viewpoints is fairly difficult. For CIG students, writing a critical article is more than using appropriate vocabulary and correct surface structures. Instead, it is a matter of gauging variations of epistemology related to critical thinking, which differ in various disciplinary communities and national educational contexts. Most CIG students in Social Sciences programs admitted that it took time for them to grasp the essence of critical analysis in Canadian academia.

Assumptions of critical thinking could differ within disciplines and subject areas, or even within the same graduate program at the Canadian university. As a first-year PhD student specialized in econometrics, Kun expressed his admiration for the history of mathematics and touched upon the different applications of critical ideas to micro-economics and macro-economics,

> … micro-economics is more like mathematics. You know, mathematics has a history of over two hundred years. It's very difficult to find something wrong in the classical theories. If you can find one, maybe it is a very big thing for you in terms of research. An exact way to put this is: for econometrics and micro-economics, it is difficult to find fault with others' research, while it is easier to do so in the field of macro-economics. … Macro-economics is more related to policies or theories, with which you can disagree, because when it comes to policy, nobody knows about the outcomes of the policy because we cannot conduct experiments on it.

Kun's example also reveals the institutional skepticism of subjectivity, where calculation and experiment-based hard evidence is highly valued. Kun's comments bring to the fore the authority of "unquestionable" mathematical logic in his discipline. Fu also talked about the minor importance of critical thinking in writing in the field of Electronic and Computer Engineering because of the "irreproachable" authority of published works.

Jing reported a prevailing concept in Chinese academia of published works as being authoritative bodies of knowledge. She thought such a conception contrasts with the dominating role of critical analysis in examining authoritative texts in Canadian academic contexts. However, Shi's experience shows a disciplinary preference to critical thinking in a Chinese graduate program of History, though the ways of critical analysis are different. Shi said, in her previous graduate program in China, more priority is given to a form of positivism that is unique to their field of History research, i.e., using earlier historical data to verify later historical data. However, in Canada, individual perspectives or interpretations of historical data are given more value. Shi found that what she had learned about critical thinking in her previous program in China can be hardly transferable across cultural and educational contexts. To quote Shi,

> With regard to critical thinking in Canada, we can use different ways and perspectives to interpret almost every theory. We can use our own perspectives and knowledge to interpret a certain theory and then establish our own theoretical framework. But for me, the biggest problem is I don't know which theories are fixed and widely accepted, and which are not here (in the field of history in Canada).

To sum up, the requirements for critical thinking varies from one discipline to another because of the different institutional understandings of the legitimacy of published works. CIG students' difficulties in incorporating a critical voice in English writing originate from the authoritative legitimacy of published works in China. Moreover, for students who were required to do critical analysis in China, the epistemological assumptions of being critical might not appear transferable across contexts.

Academic knowledge: The guise of producing neutral information.
Some CIG students shared their perceptions of how legitimate forms of knowledge implicitly or explicitly dictate their research and academic writing in both Chinese and Canadian milieux.

A message from Shi speaks to the guise of academic knowledge as producing neutral information in her field back in China,

> Our theoretical framework is not allowed to advocate democracy or to show any sign that we are talking about any deficiencies of the current party in power or any merits about previous controversial authorities (names of parties deleted by the researcher). I sometimes find it meaningless to do research in China, because I know what I'm saying is nonsense. What I've found from resources is contrary to what I've been told to say.

Shi's comments reveal the politics of knowledge production in the field of history research. However, Shi is the only person who reported censorship associated with knowledge production back in China. The implicit and hidden agendas in knowledge production in both Chinese and North American contexts were hinted but went without critique in some of the interviews. For most of the respondents, knowledge production is more like a neutral process turning out facts, information, and scientific findings.

Both Jun and Fei reported the weight of empirical data in academic papers in their disciplines. According to Jun, sixty to seventy percent of the studies in the field of Business in North America are

drawing on empirical data,

> I wrote a lot of papers in China before and there are only Arguments One, Two, Three, and Four. There is less support (empirical data) for the arguments. But here, if you are doing a study, you must have data or statistics to support the argument. That's pretty much different for me.

Based on my own experience in the Chinese academia as a graduate student and a researcher in applied linguistics for almost 7 years, North America's emphasis on empirism is in contrast with academic writing in the Social Sciences programs in China where theoretical production without empirical support is generally a legitimate form of knowledge construction, especially when it comes to publication. Nevertheless, I have to admit, in recent years, I have seen that the trend of empirism tends to be more prevalent in Chinese academia because of the overwhelming power of North American academic rules. As Ming and Rui noted, in their fields, North American rules are the global rules; North American knowledge systems are the global knowledge systems.

Though quite confident with his progress in English academic writing, Dan, a second-year Master's student in Psychology, underscored his difficulties in abandoning his Chinese holistic ways of thinking and avoiding his "feelings" in academic writing. Instead, he has been trying to adapt himself to the North American ways of using logical and analytical inquiries. For CIG students in the fields of Psychology, Education, and Business, the empirical-analytical method seems like the only approach that has been legitimized as the standard. However, CIG students' familiar holistic ways of thinking and theoretical construction might only result in invalid research outcomes that violate the norm - "the tenability of a theory or hypothesis depends on the nature of the empirical evidence for its support" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 11).

Matthews (1980) posited the standard epistemological question: "what is required in order for an individual to lay claim to knowledge of the world?" (p. 79) In terms of knowledge production, Chinese Social Sciences academia justifies what is in our minds, whereas its Canadian counterpart emphasizes what is out there in the world with a certain degree of wariness about thoughts and subjectivity. Mende (2005) critiqued the doctrine of empiricism that has become entrenched in a number of academic disciplines in North America. The doctrine of empiricism excludes other forms of research as less legitimate, for instance, theoretical research which integrates isolated empirical generalizations into a comprehensive explanatory system. Almost all the CIG students in this study thought North American academic discourses are more advanced and sophisticated than the Chinese academic system because of the salient requirement of empirical data in North America. As an invited reviewer of a key Chinese journal on applied linguistics and English education, I've seen that the global privilege of North American or Anglo-American academia has imposed the authoritative status of empirical research, at least in the field of applied linguistics and second language education in China.

Learning to Write & Writing Support: Conformity vs. Diversification
CIG students differ in their conceptions of learning academic writing in English. Dan reported, "Basically, Psychology in China is lagging behind North America in terms of theories, methodology, and design of psychological experiments. And psychology researchers in China have been trying to replicate everything North American researchers are doing." Dan's position on the "backwardness" of

Psychological research in China was repeated in several CIG students' narratives, such as Jun from the Business program and Ming and Rui from the engineering programs. Awareness of the gaps between Chinese and Canadian academia, in part, prompted them to pursue further study in Canada. However, a critical awareness of the imbalanced power relationship between developed and less developed countries seems to be absent in the CIG students' conjectures.

Talking about ways of judging a good academic paper, Jun frankly admitted,

> I didn't have my own style. Obviously, I came here with a blank mind. I just learn everything (about academic writing) here…. I judge whether a paper is good or not from the Canadian perspective… because in China, there are no rules.

Dan said, "To make my audience satisfied--that's a universal rule". This comment highlights the neutral notions of "audience" or "audience's anticipations" in Canadian academic writing. In the field of academic writing, the concept of "audience" can hardly be excluded from more powerful social groups in the disciplinary or institutional contexts, who socio-politically structure and dictate their preference for one form of literacy practice over others (Ivanič, 2004). Given this position, "audience's anticipations" can be aligned with the interests of powerful social groups who are seen as authorities in their specific fields. Therefore, it can be stated that student writers only have limited freedom to "choose how to represent the world, how to represent themselves, what social role to take, and how to address their readers when they write" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 238).

Talking about departmental support, Dan made very positive comments on his department's efforts trying to incorporate suggestions about academic writing support from all the students. When our dialogue came to support that specifically addresses international students' needs, Dan answered "No" and said,

> So we (Chinese) are a minority, right? I don't say they treat international students in any specific way. I think it is implied that we are not special than others, which means we have to, …. they treat us as well as Canadian students, I think. And I myself don't expect them to treat us differently as well. That's why. The professors know that if you want to prosper in the field, you have to follow, you have to meet the standards here.

As is mentioned above, almost all of the CIG students in the Social Sciences programs talked about the "illegitimacy" of holistic, theoretical ways of thinking in mainstream North American academia. In this context, academic writing is based on empirical evidence and analytical thinking is considered more valid. Many of the students chose to conform to this institutional norm of North American academic writing. Such witting or unwitting conformism reveals the academic socialisation model which is concerned with students' acculturation into the mainstream disciplinary and institutional discourses.

History PhD program is the only reported institution where Chinese students (though there were only two of them) have been encouraged to negotiate their studies from their own epistemologies. To quote Shi,

> My supervisor's expectation for me is that I can have a thorough understanding of Chinese historical data. … He does not expect me to adopt Western perspectives and ignore Chinese

historical data. He hopes I can do my research from a perfect perspective combining both Chinese and Western aspects. It's very difficult for me. So far I haven't found any clue. He does not expect that I completely discard my Chinese background. He thinks I am a Chinese, so I should confirm my identity: 'First remember you are Chinese, and then do your research'.

My own four-year writing experience at the Faculty of Education (where Jing and Fei were enrolled) reveals traces of the academic literacies model that addresses power, identity, and "legitimate" knowledge. Some of my writings were appraised by professors because of my investment of who I am in the writing, because of my differing perspectives as a Chinese, or even because of the ways that I challenged Western people's assumptions of China. Nevertheless, as Shi unwittingly exposed, being a third-year PhD candidate, she still had little understanding of how to incorporate her Chinese perspectives into her study, despite her supervisor's encouragement. Shi's dilemma exposes a need for pedagogical and policy innovations that aim at supporting the interactions of local and global literacies in academic writing.

CIG students' various conjectures about writing English academic papers might be influenced by their reasons for choosing to study in Canada. For students like Shi who has a "hankering" after academic freedom, they seem to value their own agency in knowledge construction (Matthews, 1980, p. 91). Students (e.g., Tong, Rui, Ming, Dan, and Jun), who came to Canada to "quench their thirst" for "advanced" forms of knowledge, tend to be more skeptical of the undisciplined institutional "standards" in Chinese academic writing. In their eyes, in terms of research and research-based academic literacy, China's standards are not as stringent as those of North America institutions. Many students expressed their willingness to conform to the North American norms. Some of the CIG students thought it is a fair play for Chinese academia to follow the academic literacy norms defined by North American or European academia.

Barton (1994) identified two contradictory trends of world literacy: the globalization of literacy and the diversification of literacy. With regard to globalization, Barton challenged the spread of English as a dominant language, the increasing power of British and North American beliefs about literacy, and certain ways of teaching and evaluating writing that accompany the spread of English. In the regions where English and concepts of English-related literacy practices are exported, it appears that other forms of literacies and epistemologies related with literacies get eclipsed in the process of socialisation and standardization. A vision of diverse academic literacy practices is needed to challenge the dominant, narrow, and functional definition of academic literacy. As Barton depicted, the diversification of academic literacy is more encouraging in that people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are involved in transforming and adapting conceptions of English literacy practices for a wide array of local uses.

Conclusion & Recommendations: A Nested Model of Academic Writing Approaches
CIG students' extensive concerns about their surface language skills in English academic writing reflect traces of the study skills approach that is prevalent at the Canadian university under study. This approach focuses on the surface features of language. This model also considers it necessary to "fix" students' deficits in program design and instructional practices of academic writing programs. CIG students treated their problems in writing as "a kind of pathology" (Jones et al., 1999, p. xxi). In the

meantime, taking an academic socialisation perspective, most CIG students expressed their witting conformism to the North American academic discourses. Most of them regarded their previous ways of academic writing in Chinese academia as problematic and less rigorous. Students also critiqued the attention to surface language issues in writing support programs. Such a critique launches a challenge of the autonomous view of literacy, which regards knowledge of writing as automatically transferable from one context to another. It is worth noting that examples of academic literacies perspectives can also be identified in some programs where faculty members gave due respect to students' agency in developing their own repertoire of identities in academic writing. Looking back at my four-year journey of English academic writing in Canada, there were moments when my own voices were "suffocated" in my writings when I tried hard to be acculturated to the North-American academic writing and do away with my "typical Chinese logic of writing" (one professor's comments on my first term paper at the Canadian university). Later on, thanks to professors' encouragement and reassurance that "typical Chinese logic of writing" is not a bad thing, I started to relate what I have learned in Canada to my previous life and teaching experiences in China. I started to feel comfortable to make my own identities salient in the writings. These professors' endless efforts to refine my language and inspire my identity investment in the writings have helped me grow and restore my confidence and passion in writing.

Lea and Street (1998) contended, the three models of study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies are not mutually exclusive. Each model successively encapsulates the other and supersedes the insights provided by the other. When asked about the success achieved so far in English academic writing, Dan said, "Generally, I'm more familiar with English grammar and sentence structure through reading. And now I give more priority to delivering the meaning rather than focusing on the structure". Dan's comments echo most of the CIG students' growing confidence in English academic writing. Only when they overcome the constantly encountered surface language problems will they be able to go beyond the surface features of language form and delve into the deeper levels of epistemology in their writing.

Considering CIG students' extensive concerns with their English language skills such as grammar issues and language structures, behavioral and cognitive aspects of language acquisition should be included to account for CIG students' difficulties in writing in their L2. However, educational practitioners (including faculties and writing instructors) in the mainstream discourses should be alert to a pathologizing deficit thinking (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005) of CIG students' language skills. With these caveats being carefully attended to, the study skills model in academic writing can potentially help international students to better understand the surface features of English academic texts. The study skills model can thus facilitate CIG students' text production in different languages and epistemologically different academic contexts.

In the academic socialisation approach, students acquire meaning-making practices and disciplinary genres that typify members in a specific community. However, in this model, students are, or are assumed to be, individuals who willingly adapt to the value and knowledge systems of the dominant context with little resistance or negotiation. When proposing a more strident socio-cultural approach, Hickey (2003) contended, "individual learner co-constructs the standards and values by participating in the learning context and then becomes attuned to them" (p.410). Different from

harmonization, such an attunement does not intend to standardize the mainstream norms. Such an attunement is built upon students' engaged participation. It also accentuates students' agency in co-constructing the values and standards in the dominant discourses.

Rizvi (2007) advocated a more critical understanding of global interdependence in the backdrop of international education, which might result in international students' full consciousness of the situatedness of their knowledge and their unique positionality. Specific to the context of academic writing, Ivanič (2004) called for a critical examination of why particular genres are the way they are and the historical and political factors which have shaped both the discourses and the patterns of privileging among them.

As English (1999) contended, in the process of negotiation with mainstream faculty members, students might not only learn more about the mainstream institutional conventions, but also start to understand how the conventions can be used to represent and construct students' own meanings.

Similar to Skourtou et al.'s (2006) framework of pedagogical orientations, the nested model of academic writing does not discard the utility of traditional approaches that highlight technical skills of academic writing and aim at imparting genres abiding by the mainstream norms. Instead, the nested model highlights the importance of expanding the study skills and academic socialisation orientations into academic literacies orientations, which are more inclusive and transformative in nature. Different from Skourtou et al.'s framework, the nested model of academic writing does not assume a pedagogically uni-directional expansion from a traditional cognitive-skill-based approach, through a social constructivist approach, to a more transformative approach. Instead, this model underscores the overlapping structure of these three models, because it acknowledges the limitations of any exclusive use of study skills and academic socialisation models. After all, for international students as English language learners (ELLs) in higher education contexts, enhanced use of language might to some extent help reflect their quality of thinking (e.g., Jones, 1999). Moreover, improving the cognitive skills of academic English writing is a key way for them to better employ this language tool to mediate with the academic surroundings and to negotiate identities and practices of meaning-making through engagement and participation. Plus, for international students, who might belong to socially marginalized groups, being equipped with the mainstream norms and genres of academic writing, they will be better prepared to adopt a critical lens and "read between the lines of societal discourses" (Cummins, 2006, p. 55).

Given the scarcity of research on CIG students' literacy practices in Canadian academic contexts, the nested model of academic writing orientations might contribute to a better understanding of international students' multiple literacies development in graduate programs. Lea and Street (2006) argued, so far at the university level, it is the study skills and academic socialisation models that have guided curriculum development and instructional practices in academic writing. The nested model as a design framework may also offer insights into curriculum development and pedagogical practices for higher educational institutions that are keen on more inclusive and transformative modes of education.

Pursuing an exploratory study on CIG students' multiple academic literacies, I am cautious of providing definitive conclusions due to its limited representativeness (Babbie, 2010). CIG students interviewed in this study, though from different disciplines, may not be typical of a larger population in their specific disciplines. CIG students' perceptions of the impacts of differing cultural and disciplinary

epistemologies upon their writing might only hint the crucial differences in their actual literacy practices. Nevertheless, the current exploratory study pursued primarily via student interviews highlighted the necessity to conduct a more extensive study in the future and pointed to appropriate methods for my subsequent studies focusing on students' actual academic literacy practices. To name a few, investigating writing processes and samples of CIG students' disciplinary writing tasks and comparing these processes and samples. The focus will be geared to examining the discipline- and culture-specific epistemologies as embedded in actual literacy practices in the Canadian academia, which boasts of inclusive intercultural interactions between diverse student populations and their professors.

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Author Biography

Zheng Zhang is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Ontario. She has extensive research interests including English academic writing, multimodal pedagogy, multiliteracies pedagogy in culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and curriculum studies of international education and transnational education.

Appendix A
Interview Protocol for CIG Students

I. Participant's Profile Information
Name_____

Program & Duration of Program _____

Length of time you have been in Canadian academy _____

Length of time you have been at this Canadian university _____

II. Introductory questions
1. Do you still remember the first time you wrote an English academic paper after you started your graduate study in Canada?
2. What problems or difficulties do you experience in writing academic papers?

III. Specific areas for follow-up questions
CIG students' understandings of the culture- and discipline-specific epistemologies or ideologies that might have influenced respondent's English academic writing.
3. What are the sociocultural factors that might have influenced your English academic writing?
4. How is the English academic writing in Canada different or similar to what you did in your previous Chinese university?
5. What are the sociocultural factors that might have incurred the difficulties that you just mentioned?
6. What types of English academic writing you have been doing in your discipline in Canada? How are they different or similar to your disciplinary writing experience in your previous Chinese universities?
7. What differences or similarities between the rules of Western academic writing, and those of your prior knowledge and value systems?
8. How have you addressed those differences?
9. In your opinion, what constitutes "good writing" in your discipline?
10. In your opinion, what are your instructors' or professors' expectations of your English academic writing?

CIG students' views of English academic writing support at the Canadian university?
11. What kinds of support have you received from your instructors, professors, or your faculty?
12. Have you been to the writing support center? If yes, what kind of experience did you have there? To what extent are they helpful?
13. To what extent are the writing services specifically addressing international students' needs?

III. Final Questions
14. What are your suggestions for the university with respect to providing writing support for international students?
15. Is there anything you would like to add?