“Reflective Encounters”

Beyond the Profile of Chinese Graduate Students
Outline

• Context: Current Literature & this Study
  • Problematic Profile of “Chinese students”

• Looking Beyond the Assumptions
  • Student stories & advocate perspectives

• Recommendations
  • Effective support
international
students

graduate
writing
support

academic
socialization
Current Research

- 20 Universities (+ a dozen distantly)
- 200 individuals involved in interviews
  - 40 int’l grad students, 12 Chinese
  - admin, staff, admins, professors, others
- Snowballing, focusing on ”best” practices
- Grounded theory analysis
  - identify themes and use stories to illustrate issues
Persisting Profile

Focus on

• weaknesses & deficits
• language & error
• demographic & generalities
• static views & specialization

(an example)
Stories, Themes, Perspectives

- Ingenuity, “hacking,” resilience...
- Non-linear, multidimensional learning
- Intersectionality of identity, proficiency...
- Rapid transition/change, adaptation
Ingenuity, hacking, resilience...

STORY 1: LC

• Writing thesis proposal
  • started with a model from a senior student
  • went to another student for help
  • professor only gave a lecture about writing it
  • never used the writing center

• Collaborates w/ outsiders

• Uses Grammarly (for writing/proofreading)

• Learned writing by observing local students and from many people, places
Non-linear, multidimensional transition

STORY 2: GY

• MBA student among 90+ of 100 Chinese IGS
• Not worried about writing, never used WC
• Involved in activism (a passion, to improve English, for professional growth)
• Tackled academic challenges as they arose, starting with more advanced skills and piecing together ingredients as feasible
Intersectionality of identities ...

STORY 3: CH

• Studied English literature in China, switched
• Complex identities, intersections, experiences in relation to discipline and society
• Bias, prejudice, double-consciousness
• Membership, leadership, and relationship to dominant culture adds to the intersections
Rapid Transition, Change ...

STORY 4: IC

• Went through many, often rapid changes—
  learning, shifting identity position, finding voice

• Psychology matters -- it is underestimated

• Institutions and people saw her in static terms
An illustration: Graduate-level “Writing”

- Confidence
- Competency in English/language
- Psychological factors
- Composition/Rhetorical skills
- Context (professional, economic, political, social)
- Content (information > argument, position)
Recommendations (effective support)

- Recognize challenges (not gloss over) -- foster agency
  - Work with dispersal of support, conflicting ideology...
- Embrace advocacy -- contribute to support network
  - Involve students in leadership, support, feedback
- Recognize diversity/intersectionality -- start w/ strength
  - View university as crossroads, not a walled community
- Create transition-adaptive support structures
  - Provide multiple entry points, variety of options
Thank You!

“Reflective Encounters”

Shyam Sharma (Writing and Rhetoric, SBU)
The Big picture

5 million students outside home country; 1.7 million are from China; half a million leave China every year now

328,547 Chinese students in the US (2015/16)
45-50 thousand professors

32% US institutions saw a decline in Chinese student application this year (admission: TBD)