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Chinese university EFL teachers' perceptions of plagiarism

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Although Chinese university students' perceptions of plagiarism have been extensively investigated, those of their teachers have been surprisingly under-researched. This study sought to address this gap by investigating 112 Chinese university English teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards plagiarism. While 57 participating teachers had overseas academic experience, the remaining ones received all their education in mainland China. They completed a Perceptions of Plagiarism survey that elicited their knowledge of several common forms of plagiarism in Anglo-American academia, perceptions of various possible causes of plagiarism, and attitudes towards plagiarism induced by different causes and plagiarism in general. The study found that the teachers reported varying knowledge of different types of transgressive textual practices, variegated perceptions of the different causes of plagiarism, but clearly punitive attitudes towards plagiarism. It also revealed significant differences between teachers with and without overseas academic experience in knowledge of and stances on plagiarism. These findings highlight the complexity of plagiarism as an intertextual phenomenon and point to the important role of cultural practices and academic socialisation in shaping perceptions of it.

Keywords: academic socialisation; academic writing; Chinese university EFL teachers; plagiarism; transgressive intertextuality

Introduction

The accelerating internationalisation of higher education and China's fast growing economy over the past few decades have fueled a surging influx of Chinese students into Anglo-American universities¹. The number of Chinese students studying in the USA alone, for example, reached 235,597 in 2013 (Institute of International Education 2013). Away from the familiar social, cultural, and educational context in their home country, Chinese students studying overseas often experience great challenges or 'learning shocks' in transitioning and adjusting to the academic expectations of the host universities (Gu and Schweisfurth 2006; Hayes and Introna 2005). One pressing challenge for many of them concerns their

¹ In this study, "Anglo-American" is used as an adjective to denote cultural institutions and norms in such English-speaking countries as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA, which have a shared cultural heritage and a common ethnolinguistic identity.

intertextual practice in English academic writing (Gu and Brooks 2008; McGowan and Lightbody 2008; Shen, 1989; Valentine 2006). A number of studies (e.g. Currie 1998; Introna, Hayes, Blair, and Wood 2003; Shi 2004) have found that many Chinese students in overseas institutions tend to engage in transgressive intertextuality that is commonly known as plagiarism. In view of this tendency, several commentators (e.g. Sapp 2002; Sowden 2005) have asserted that Chinese students are prone to transgressive intertextuality because they are accepting of plagiarism. Not surprisingly, Chinese culture and students have drawn considerable attention in recent research on plagiarism (Bloch 2012; Flowerdew and Li 2007b; Hu and Lei 2012).

Much of the extant research on plagiarism has been conducted from a cultural or a socialisation perspective (Bloch 2012; Shi 2006). The cultural perspective views plagiarism as a cultural phenomenon that is conceptualised differently in different cultures. An extreme version of this perspective approaches plagiarism from an essentialist point of view that characterises Anglo-American culture as condemning plagiarism and other cultures, Asian/Chinese culture in particular, as condoning it (e.g. Sapp 2002; Sowden 2005). This view, however, has drawn sharp criticism from researchers (e.g. Flowerdew and Li 2007b; Liu 2005; Phan 2006). In this regard, some researchers (e.g. Bloch 2008) have proposed a tempered version of the cultural perspective, arguing that while different cultures may define what constitutes plagiarism differently, they may not necessarily accept it. In other words, the often observed tendencies in Asian/Chinese students to be tolerant of plagiarism or prone to commit it may have little to do with culturally conditioned attitudes but reflect differing conceptions of what constitutes plagiarism from those found in Anglo-American academia. Recent studies (e.g. Hu and Lei 2012; Wheeler 2009) have lent some support to the tempered cultural perspective on plagiarism. A key finding from these studies has been that although the Asian/Chinese university students had difficulty in identifying practices typically deemed

as plagiarism in Anglo-American academia, they took a clearly punitive attitude towards what they regarded as plagiarism. Another strand of research (e.g. Ehrich, Howard, Mu, and Bokosmaty in press; Rinnert and Kobayashi 2005; Shi 2006) has compared perceptions of plagiarism held by students from different cultural backgrounds, particularly Asian/Chinese versus Anglo-American. This research has revealed varying understandings of plagiarism across cultural backgrounds. Such findings provided insights into Asian/Chinese university students' perceptions of plagiarism. However, compared with our enhanced understanding of Asian/Chinese university students' knowledge of and stances on plagiarism, little is known about their teachers' perceptions of plagiarism.

In contrast to the cultural perspective, the socialisation perspective approaches plagiarism as a developmental issue and the mastery of legitimate intertextual practices as "an enculturation task" (Ashworth, Freewood, and McDonald 2003, 261; see also Angélil-Carter 2000; Howard 1999). With the exception of a few empirical investigations that adopted longitudinal research designs (e.g. Spack 1997), much of the research informed by this perspective has been cross-sectional and compared the perceptions of teachers and students (e.g. Bacha and Bahous 2010; Flowerdew and Li 2007a; Hard, Conway, and Moran 2006; Kwong, Ng, Mark, and Wong 2010; Li 2007; Pickard 2006; Wilkinson 2009; Yazici, Yazici, and Erdem 2011) or those of students who were at different stages of their academic socialisation (e.g. Chandrasegaran 2000; Deckert 1993; Hu and Lei 2012; Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox, and Payne 2009; Sun 2009; Wheeler 2009).

Research on teacher and student perceptions of plagiarism has focused on three major issues: knowledge of plagiaristic practices, beliefs about causes of student plagiarism, and attitudes towards plagiarism (Lei and Hu 2014). Specifically, research on knowledge of plagiarism has revealed that teachers tend to have more nuanced understandings of plagiarism than students (Bacha and Bahous 2010; Flowerdew and Li 2007a; Gu and Brooks 2008;

Pincus and Schmelkin 2003; Shi 2012). Research on causes of student plagiarism has identified a multitude of potential contributing factors, such as inadequate understanding of citation conventions, insufficient language competence, pressure to get a high grade, pressure to complete too many assignments within a tight timeline, pressure or fear of failing a course, perceived low risk of being caught, and light penalties (Bennett 2005; Devlin and Gray 2007; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead 1995; Park 2003; Song-Turner 2008). An emergent pattern from this research appears to be that while teachers tend to attribute plagiarism to students' inadequate academic ability and slack attitudes, students incline to ascribe their plagiarism to external factors, particularly pressure of various kinds (Bacha and Bahous 2010; Wilkinson 2009; Yazici et al. 2011). Finally, research on teacher and student attitudes to plagiarism has also found differences, with teachers consistently holding harsher attitudes than students (Pincus and Schmelkin 2003; Wilkinson 2009). The former's greater knowledge of plagiarism and experience of dealing with student plagiarism may partly explain their harsher attitudes towards plagiarism.

In contrast to research comparing teachers and students that has consistently shown their varying understandings of plagiarism in several respects, research involving students at different stages of their education has yielded mixed results about the effect of academic socialisation on their perceptions of plagiarism. While studies in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) contexts (e.g. Chandrasegaran 2000; Deckert 1993; Pittam et al. 2009) have consistently found a socialisation effect on understandings of plagiarism, those in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts (e.g. Hu and Lei 2012; Sun 2009; Wheeler 2009) have failed to find similar effects. The discrepant findings might be attributable to differences in exposure to Anglo-American notions of plagiarism between ESL contexts, where English has an institutional role to play (e.g. functioning as a language of daily communication and/or a medium of schooling), and EFL contexts, where English is a foreign language that is not used

for communication but taught and learned only as a school subject.

The studies reviewed above have provided important insights into teacher and student perceptions of plagiarism. However, most of these studies focused on ESL contexts (e.g. Kwong et al. 2010; Pincus and Schmelkin 2003; Shi 2012; Wilkinson 2009), and only a small number of studies were conducted in EFL contexts. Most of these studies involved teachers from disciplines other than English language teaching (e.g. Flowerdew and Li 2007a; Li 2007). As a result, little is known about how university English teachers in EFL contexts perceive plagiarism. However, an understanding of how these university teachers understand plagiarism is important, because they are the ones expected to introduce students in EFL contexts to Anglo-American conventions of academic writing. Further, although an increasing number of university English teachers working in EFL contexts have received academic training in ESL contexts, few studies have investigated how they perceive plagiarism, particularly in comparison with their home-educated counterparts. However, findings from such a study can provide important implications for teacher preparation and institutional policy with respect to plagiarism.

To address the gaps identified above, this study set out to compare how Chinese university teachers with and without overseas academic experience perceive plagiarism. Specifically, it sought to answer the following two research questions.

1. What perceptions do Chinese university teachers hold with respect to plagiarism, that is, their knowledge of transgressive intertextuality, their beliefs about potential causes of plagiaristic practices, and their stances on plagiarism?
2. Do their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes concerning plagiarism relate to their educational backgrounds?

Methods

Participants

Participants were 112 Chinese university English teachers. Of the 112 teachers, 86 were females and 26 were males. While 57 were attending an in-service teacher training programme at a university in Singapore, the remaining 55 had no overseas academic experience and were colleagues of the 57 teachers studying in the teacher training programme. Before the in-service training programme, the overseas-trained teachers, like their home-trained colleagues, had no other overseas academic experience, obtained their degrees from universities in China, and were in-service teachers at various universities in China. The home-trained teachers were recruited for this study with the help of the overseas-trained teachers. Specifically, the overseas-trained teachers were each asked to invite one of their colleagues to participate in our study. They were instructed to select colleagues who matched themselves as much as possible in terms of age, academic position, educational attainment, and teaching experience but did not have any overseas academic experience. These requirements were intended to make the two groups of teachers comparable. The results of a series of statistical comparisons between the two groups showed that our recruitment strategy worked well. There were no statistically significant differences in academic titles between the overseas-trained teachers (9 instructors, 44 lecturers, and 4 associated professors) and their home-trained counterparts (3 instructors, 49 lecturers, 2 associate professors, and 1 full professor), $\chi^2(2, N = 111) = 3.86, p = .145$. Nor was any significant difference found in the highest academic degrees obtained between the overseas-trained group (10 BAs; 46 MAs; and 1 PhD) and the home-trained one (7 BAs; 45 MAs; and 3 PhD), $\chi^2(2, N = 112) = 1.51, p = .471$. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in years of teaching experience between the former ($n = 57; M = 7.06; SD = 3.17$) and the latter ($n = 53; M = 8.34; SD = 4.10$), $t(108) = 1.83, p = .069$. These results indicated that the teachers with and without

overseas academic experience had comparable demographical characteristics².

The in-service teacher training programme

The in-service teacher training programme attended by the overseas-trained group of teachers was a one-year postgraduate programme offered specially for Chinese university English lecturers by an English-medium Singaporean university that follows the Anglo-American academic tradition³. At the programme orientation, students were briefed about issues of plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct, and required to sign the university's code of academic conduct. The programme consisted of ten one-semester courses that introduced methodologies for teaching different English language skills, linguistic studies (e.g. pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics), research methods and academic discourse. All the courses required extended written assignments, such as critiques of research or practice, reflective journals, research proposals or short research articles. One course focused specifically on norms and conventions of English academic writing. Students were required to submit all their assignments through *Turnitin* for plagiarism checking and sign a form to declare that their assignments were free of plagiarism and other types of academic misconduct. The declaration form included an official definition of plagiarism and other academic misconduct. At the time of data collection, the participants were a semester and a half into the in-service programme.

Instrument

A Perceptions of Plagiarism (PoP) survey was developed to collect the data needed to address

² Despite our best effort to match the overseas-trained and the home-trained teachers for key demographical characteristics, we could not completely rule out the possibility that prior to their participation in the in-service teacher training programme the overseas-trained teachers differed from their home-trained counterparts in other aspects that might have been relevant to their perceptions of plagiarism.

³ Strictly speaking, Singapore is not an Anglo-American society. Because of its history as a British colony and the dominant status of English as a working language and the medium of instruction, the educational system of the nation-state has been under Anglo-American influences, and its universities follow Anglo-American academic standards and practices.

the research questions, following guidelines for scale development in DeVellis (2003) and Fowler (2009). An initial item pool covering common forms of improper source use in Anglo-American academia, potential causes of plagiarism among Chinese university students, and attitudes towards plagiarism was compiled based on discussions with 16 Chinese university students and published studies on plagiarism (e.g. Bennett 2005; Colnerud and Rosander 2008; Devlin and Gray 2007; Ellery 2008; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead 1995; Marshall and Garry 2005, 2006; McGowan and Lightbody 2008; Newstead et al. 1996; Rinnert and Kobayashi 2005; Selwyn 2008; Song-Turner 2008; Yeo 2007). The resultant list included 116 items, with 47 on various forms of improper source use, 44 on potential causes of student plagiarism, and 25 on possible attitudes towards plagiarism. This 116-item instrument was checked for content validity by five M.A. and three Ph.D. students at an English-medium university in Singapore, who specialised in applied linguistics and had experience of teaching English at universities in China. The instrument was revised based on their feedback and then trialed on the aforementioned 16 students to check for potential problems that might hinder respondents' comprehension and completion of the survey. Following this, the instrument was further revised before it was first subjected to a pilot test with 77 third-year undergraduates from a university in Shaanxi, followed by another pilot test with 178 first-year undergraduates from a university in Hunan, China. Principal Component analyses of the two pilot tests yielded the same component solutions, and the internal consistency estimates, ranging from .65 to .89 for the various components of the survey, were acceptable, thus cross-validating the construct validity of the survey (Hopwood and Donnellan 2010). Table 2 summarises the final 52-item instrument together with sample items and internal consistency estimates computed with the data of this study⁴.

As Table 1 shows, one scale in the survey assessed participants' knowledge of various

⁴ The instrument is available from the authors upon request.

forms of source use that are typically seen as plagiarism in Anglo-American academia. It consisted of 10 items that fell into three subscales, and asked the participants to indicate on a 5-point likert scale to what extent they felt each case was plagiarism, with a higher score indicating greater knowledge about Anglo-American notions of plagiarism. Another scale tapped into participants' perceived likelihood of various causes of student plagiarism. It comprised 15 statements that fell into four subscales, asking the participants to indicate on a 5-point likert scale how likely they thought each presented cause of plagiarism was for Chinese university students, with a higher score indicating greater perceived likelihood. A third scale in the survey, consisting of the same 15 statements in the aforementioned scale, asked participants to rate the acceptability of student plagiarism induced by various causes on a 5-point likert scale, with a higher score indicating greater acceptability. Finally, the instrument included a scale that elicited participants' attitudes towards plagiarism in general. It included 12 attitudinal statements forming three subscales and required respondents to indicate on a 5-point likert scale to what extent they agreed with each statement, with a higher score indicating greater agreement. The instrument also included a section eliciting bio data, such as gender, years of teaching, highest education, and academic title. As Table 1 shows, the internal consistency estimates for all the scales and subscales were acceptable according to the conventional standard.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Data collection and analysis

The overseas-trained teachers completed a paper-and-pencil version of the PoP in class groups after class. No time limits were set for them, and it took them around 20 minutes to complete the survey. The home-trained teachers answered an electronic version of the survey forwarded to them by their colleagues from the teacher training programme. The survey was emailed to 57 teachers, and 55 of them completed and returned it within two weeks.

To facilitate data analyses, we first computed a scale score for each participant by averaging his/her responses to the items on the scale in question. Next, to examine whether participants with different educational backgrounds differed from each other in their perceptions of plagiarism, we ran a series of independent samples *t*-tests on the scale scores, with educational background as the independent variable in each case. Additionally, we also examined mean scale scores to obtain an overview of how the participants perceived various aspects of plagiarism. The α was set at .05 (2-tailed) for all statistical tests in this study.

Findings

Knowledge of improper source use

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and *t*-test results for the scales that elicited knowledge of improper source use. The *t*-tests revealed statistically significant between-groups differences in the reported knowledge of blatant plagiarism, $t(87.94) = -2.24, p = .028, d = -0.43$; subtle plagiarism, $t(88.56) = -5.04, p < .001, d = -0.96$; and inappropriate referencing, $t(100.57) = -3.07, p = .003, d = -0.59$. Based on Cohen's (1988) widely cited general guidelines for interpreting *d* as an effect size measure (0.2 = small effect; 0.5 = medium effect; 0.8 = large effect), the effect sizes for the above between-groups differences suggested moderate to high practical significance.

<INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

As the mean scores in Table 2 show, both groups of teachers fared well in recognising the various forms of blatant plagiarism targeted by the survey. However, while the overseas-trained teachers demonstrated a good and a moderate knowledge, respectively, about the various forms of subtle plagiarism and inappropriate referencing under investigation, their home-trained counterparts had only a moderate and a limited knowledge of them, respectively. Finally, the overseas-trained teachers as a group were significantly more

successful than the home-trained teachers were in recognising all the three types of plagiarism, especially the various forms of subtle plagiarism and inappropriate referencing.

Likely causes of plagiarism

Table 3 summarises descriptive statistics and *t*-test results for the perceived likelihood of different causes of plagiarism among Chinese university students. The *t*-tests detected no statistically significant between-groups differences in the perceived likelihood of inadequate academic ability as a cause of plagiarism, $t(110) = -0.10$, $p = .923$, $d = -0.01$, slack attitudes as a cause of plagiarism, $t(110) = 0.50$, $p = .619$, $d = 0.09$, pressure as a cause of plagiarism, $t(110) = -0.51$, $p = .610$, $d = -0.10$, or the perceived low risk of plagiarising as a cause of plagiarism, $t(110) = -1.53$, $p = .129$, $d = -0.29$. Notably, the effect sizes were generally small according to Cohen's criteria. As indicated by the mean scores in Table 3, the participants as a whole saw inadequate academic ability and slack attitudes as likely causes of plagiarism but were divided or uncertain about pressure and perceived low risk as potential causes.

<INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

Acceptability of plagiarism induced by different causes

Descriptive statistics and *t*-test results for the reported acceptability of plagiarism induced by different causes are presented in Table 4. The *t*-tests found no statistically significant between-groups differences in the reported acceptability of plagiarism induced by inadequate academic ability, $t(110) = -0.06$, $p = .957$, $d = -0.01$; plagiarism induced by slack attitudes, $t(95.68) = 1.77$, $p = .080$, $d = 0.33$; or plagiarism induced by pressure, $t(110) = 0.85$, $p = .397$, $d = 0.17$. However, statistically significant between-groups differences were found in the reported acceptability of plagiarism induced by the perceived low risk of plagiarising, $F(110) = 1.99$, $p = .049$, $d = 0.39$.

<INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE>

As the mean scores in Table 4 show, plagiarism induced by all the four categories of causes was seen as unacceptable by the participants as a whole, and even the least harshly rated type of plagiarism (i.e. plagiarism induced by inadequate academic ability) was perceived to be more or less unacceptable. Moreover, the teachers with overseas academic experience gave lower acceptability ratings of plagiarism induced by slack attitudes, pressure, and perceived low risk than did their counterparts without overseas academic experience, though only the differences in plagiarism induced by the perceived low risk reached statistical significance.

Attitudes towards plagiarism in general

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics and *t*-test results for the reported attitudes towards plagiarism in general scales. The *t*-tests identified statistically significant between-groups differences in the mean scores for condemnatory attitudes towards plagiarism, $t(109) = -2.24$, $p = .027$, $d = -0.42$; for differential treatment of plagiarism, $t(110) = 2.31$, $p = .027$, $d = 0.44$; but no statistically significant between-groups differences were found for non-condemnatory attitudes towards plagiarism, $t(110) = 0.68$, $p = .498$, $d = 0.13$.

<INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE>

As can be seen from the mean scores in Table 5, the teachers with overseas academic experience held more condemnatory attitudes towards plagiarism than the teachers without overseas academic experience. Given this pattern of response, it was no surprise that the teachers with overseas academic experience were markedly less in favor of differential treatments of plagiarism than were their counterparts without overseas academic experience. Finally, both the teachers with and without overseas academic experience disagreed with the various non-condemnatory attitudes investigated in the survey, with the former group demonstrating slightly stronger disagreement. Taken together, these results indicated that the

participants as a whole were negative towards plagiarism in general and that the overseas-trained teachers were more negative than the home-trained teachers were.

Discussion

This study has yielded several clear findings about our participants' understandings of plagiarism. First, it was shown that while both groups of participants demonstrated a good knowledge of blatant plagiarism, their reported knowledge of subtle plagiarism and inappropriate referencing was relatively limited, suggesting that their definitions of transgressive intertextuality, particularly of subtle plagiarism and inappropriate referencing, were considerably different from those of Anglo-American academia. This finding contrasts with the results of previous studies (e.g. Marshal and Garry 2006; Maxwell, Curtis, and Vardanega 2008) which found that Anglo-American undergraduates had little difficulty in identifying such typical forms of plagiarism as copying or paraphrasing without acknowledgement. However, the finding is largely comparable to the findings of those studies involving Asian/Chinese university students (e.g. Chandrasegaran 2000; Hu and Lei 2012; Phan 2006; Rinnert and Kobayashi 2005; Shi 2006; Wheeler 2009), which reported that the Asian/Chinese university students in these studies had problems recognising common forms of plagiarism in Anglo-American academia, particularly subtle ones such as paraphrasing without acknowledgement, and endorsed referencing conventions different from those widely used in Anglo-American academia (e.g. listing sources at the end of an article without citing them in the text). These broad patterns of congruence with and divergence from the previous findings seem to suggest cultural differences in conceptions of plagiarism. Such differences might arise in part from some educational and literacy practices prevalent in Asian/Chinese cultures, such as textbook-based teaching (Hayes and Introna 2005; Shi 2006; Song-Turner 2008) and memorization in literacy learning and practice (Matalene 1985; Pennycook 1996), that foster notions of legitimate and transgressive intertextuality different from those of

Anglo-American academia. In addition to this culture-based explanation, there is another equally, if not more, plausible explanation. The varying understandings of plagiarism observed in this study and the previous ones might also be attributable to the different amounts of exposure to Anglo-American notions of plagiarism available in EFL and ESL contexts. Indeed, this latter explanation was supported by the clear differences in the reported knowledge of and stances on plagiarism that this study found between the teachers with and without overseas academic experience. These differences will be discussed in greater detail later.

Second, we found that while the participants as a whole saw inadequate academic ability and slack attitudes as likely causes of student plagiarism, they were unsure or ambivalent about pressure and perceived low risk of plagiarising as likely causes of student plagiarism. These results are similar to those found in Wilkinson's (2009) study. While the great majority of the surveyed staff in Wilkinson's study saw inadequate academic ability ("not understanding the rules of referencing", 82%) and slack attitudes ("laziness or bad time management", 78%) as likely causes of student plagiarism, much lower proportions of them saw pressure of various kinds ("wanting to get a better grade", 51%; "too many assignments to do during the session", 31%) and perceived low risk ("not likely to be caught", 63%; "penalties for being caught are too small to be of concern", 31%) as likely causes of student plagiarism. The teachers' high ranking of inadequate academic ability and slack attitudes as causes of student plagiarism might be a function of their pedagogical awareness and working knowledge as language teachers. A teacher can readily gauge plagiarising students' inadequate academic ability and/or slack attitudes from marking their assignments and from his/her day-to-day interactions with them. By the same token, the teachers' ambivalence about pressure and perceived low risk as causes of student plagiarism might have stemmed from a lack of knowledge about their students' actual perceptions of pressure and risk of

being caught. Conceivably, students are unlikely to be open and candid about such sensitive topics.

It is interesting to note that the teachers' perceptions of the likely causes of student plagiarism contrast with student perceptions reported in several previous studies (e.g. Bacha and Bahous 2010; Wilkinson 2009; Yazici et al. 2011), which found that students tended to see pressure of various kinds (e.g. a heavy workload, fear of failure) as more likely causes of plagiarism. The differences in perceptions between the teachers in this study and the students in the aforementioned studies are explainable in terms of attribution theory (Forsyth, Pope, and McMillan 1985). According to the theory, people are more likely to attribute their misconduct to external factors than to internal ones. In this view, it is not surprising that students are more likely to ascribe student plagiarism to external factors (e.g. pressure) than to internal factors (e.g. inadequate academic ability). Another possible explanation for the students' high ranking and our teachers' relatively low ranking of pressure as a cause of plagiarism might have to do with the former's lived experience as undergraduates and the various types of pressure they encountered in the real world, from which the latter might have distanced themselves since their undergraduate years. No matter which explanation captures the reality on the ground, perceptions of the likely causes of plagiarism held by the teacher in our study and the students in investigations cited above call into question institutional policies which take a punitive approach to plagiarism under the assumption that students would plagiarise readily if the risk of being caught and punished is low (Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead 1995). On the contrary, our teachers' ambivalence about the perceived low risk and high ratings of inadequate academic ability as likely causes of plagiarism among Chinese university students suggest a need for policies championing an educative approach rather than a punitive one to intertextual practices.

Third, this study revealed that the participants as a whole held a negative or

condemnatory attitude towards plagiarism induced by all four categories of causes under consideration as well as plagiarism in general. This finding corroborates some of the aforementioned studies conducted in EFL contexts (e.g. Hu and Lei 2012; Wheeler 2009) which found that Asian/Chinese students had different definitions of plagiarism from Anglo-American academia but took a clearly negative attitude towards what they regarded as plagiarism. These findings call for a problematizing of culturally essentialist views of plagiarism (e.g. Sapp 2002; Sowden 2005) that stereotype Asian/Chinese cultures as condoning or even encouraging plagiarism. Thus, the findings of this study regarding the participants' overall perceptions of plagiarism lend support to the tempered cultural perspective on plagiarism, showing that while Chinese university teachers may have different conceptions of what constitutes (il)legitimate intertextual practices, they do not accept or condone plagiarism.

A fourth important finding of this study concerns the relationship between the participants' educational background and their knowledge of transgressive intertextuality and stances on plagiaristic practices. Specifically, the overseas-trained teachers displayed significantly more knowledge of blatant plagiarism, subtle plagiarism, and inappropriate referencing than the home-trained teachers. Moreover, the overseas-trained teachers had lower acceptability ratings for plagiarism induced by different causes, particularly plagiarism induced by the perceived low risk, and held significantly stronger condemnatory attitudes towards plagiarism and less support for differential treatments of plagiaristic practices. These results indicated that the overseas-trained teachers had been socialised into more nuanced understandings of plagiarism through their extensive exposure to and practice in English academic writing available in the in-service teacher training programme. This explanation is also supported by previous studies of EFL students studying in Anglo-American contexts (e.g. Gu and Brooks 2008; Song-Turner 2008) which evidenced evolving understandings of

Anglo-American notions of plagiarism in the participating students as they continued to immerse themselves in the English-speaking academic world. For example, in a study of the views of plagiarism held by international students studying in Australia, Song-Turner (2008) found that "the longer students were immersed in the Australian educational environment, the closer their definition moved towards the Western view" (42). Therefore, our findings suggest a significant role of overseas academic experience in shaping nuanced understandings of plagiarism.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how Chinese university English teachers, both with and without overseas academic experience, understood plagiarism, and whether their perceptions of plagiarism differed as a function of their educational background. The study found that the participants as a group understood transgressive intertextuality differently from Anglo-American academia and that the overseas-trained teachers had more fine-grained understandings of transgressive intertextuality than the home-trained teachers. These results constitute new evidence in support of both a cultural and an academic socialisation perspective on plagiarism. Another noteworthy finding of this study is that despite their different conceptions of what constitutes plagiarism, they did not accept or condone plagiarism. This finding calls into question culturally essentialist views that stereotype Chinese culture as accepting of plagiarism.

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution because of its methodological limitations. Like all survey research, although this study was well equipped to uncover broad patterns of the participants' perceptions of plagiarism, it fell short of yielding a richer and more nuanced picture of their understandings of transgressive intertextual practices. Future research should complement the findings of this study, taking a more qualitative approach. For example, in-depth interviews would reveal more textured and

nuanced understandings of plagiarism. In addition, naturalistic approaches that follow EFL teachers studying in ESL contexts have the potential to contribute to a richer and more definitive understanding of how they develop their understandings of plagiarism in ESL contexts and of how their enriched understandings may impact on their pedagogical effort to address plagiarism when they return to their home countries.

Despite the limitations, several useful implications can be derived from the findings of this study. The first implication is related to the finding that despite their differing conceptions of plagiarism from those of Anglo-American academia, the participants took a punitive attitude towards both plagiarism induced by different causes and plagiarism in general. This suggests a need for nuanced understandings of plagiarism that differentiate knowledge and stances regarding plagiarism. Second, the participants' general ambivalence about the perceived low risk of plagiarising and high ratings of inadequate academic ability as likely causes of plagiarism raise concerns about institutional policies centring on punishment. As Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) point out, "it would seem wiser to concentrate on informing students as to what behaviour is deemed to be acceptable, rather than introducing draconian sanctions" (p.170). Third, the finding about a close relationship between the participants' educational background and their understandings of plagiarism suggests a need to approach plagiarism as a developmental issue (Angélil-Carter 2000; Howard 1999; McGowan 2010) and to treat students and, even their teachers, as developing members of an academic community (Ashworth et al. 2003; Howard 1999). Again, this points to the need for an educative rather than a punitive approach to transgressive intertextual practices. Last, given their rather different or limited understandings of subtle plagiaristic practices and inappropriate referencing, there is a clear need to teach citation and referencing practices in teacher training programmes. To this end, we need to focus on the rhetorical functions rather than the mechanical aspects of these practices (Chandrasegaran 2000) and

pay close attention to possible cultural differences in such practices and their functions. In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of the role that both culture and academic socialisation play in shaping perceptions of plagiarism is crucial to addressing plagiarism and fostering an academic culture of integrity at both individual and institutional levels.

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Table 1 *PoP components and internal consistency estimates*

Scale (No. of items)	α	Sample item
Knowledge of Improper Source Use	.85	
Knowledge of blatant plagiarism (4)	.91	Quoting someone's language without acknowledgement
Knowledge of subtle plagiarism (3)	.82	Incorporating someone's ideas into one's own writing without acknowledgement
Knowledge of inappropriate referencing (3)	.68	Listing sources in the reference list, but not acknowledging them in the article
Likelihood of Different Causes of Plagiarism	.76	
Inadequate academic ability (4)	.66	Poor writing ability
Slack attitudes (3)	.68	Unwillingness to think
Pressure (4)	.79	Desire to get high marks
Perceived low risk of plagiarising (4)	.74	Light penalties
Acceptability of Plagiarism Induced by Different Causes	.92	
Acceptability of plagiarism caused by inadequate academic ability (4)	.92	Plagiarism caused by poor writing ability
Acceptability of plagiarism caused by slack attitudes (3)	.93	Plagiarism caused by unwillingness to think
Acceptability of plagiarism caused by pressure (4)	.92	Plagiarism caused by desire to get high marks
Acceptability of plagiarism caused by perceived low risk of plagiarising (4)	.89	Plagiarism caused by light penalties
Attitudes Towards Plagiarism in General	.72	
Condemnatory attitudes (6)	.92	An academic crime
Differential treatment (3)	.72	Depending on the perpetrator's motives
Non-condemnatory attitudes (3)	.73	A learning process

Table 2 *Descriptive statistics and t-test results for reported knowledge of improper source use (n = 55 for T/Wo; n = 57 for T/W)*

Scales	T/Wo		T/W		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Blatant plagiarism	4.51	0.94	4.84	0.56	-2.24*	87.94
Subtle plagiarism	3.47	1.23	4.44	0.75	-5.04***	88.56
Inappropriate referencing	3.12	1.25	3.77	0.95	-3.07**	100.57

Note. T/Wo = Teachers without overseas academic experience, T/W = Teachers with overseas academic experience. 1 = definitively not plagiarism, 2 = probably not plagiarism, 3 = unsure, 4 = probably plagiarism, 5 = definitively plagiarism.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3 *Descriptive statistics and t-test results for perceived likelihood of different causes of plagiarism (n = 55 for T/Wo; n = 57 for T/W)*

Scales	T/Wo		T/W		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Inadequate academic ability	4.13	0.65	4.14	0.76	-0.10	110
Slack attitudes	4.22	0.74	4.15	0.78	0.50	110
Pressure	3.04	0.98	3.13	0.90	-0.51	110
Perceived low risk	2.76	1.01	3.03	0.84	-1.53	110

Note. T/Wo = Teachers without overseas academic experience, T/W = Teachers with overseas academic experience. 1 = probably not a cause, 2 = possibly not a cause, 3 = unsure, 4 = possibly a cause, 5 = probably a cause.

Table 4 *Descriptive statistics and t-test results for perceived acceptability of plagiarism induced by different causes (n = 55 for T/Wo; n = 57 for T/W)*

Scales	T/Wo		T/W		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Inadequate academic ability	2.68	1.10	2.69	1.06	-0.06	110
Slack attitudes	1.59	0.92	1.33	0.64	1.77	95.68
Pressure	1.97	0.90	1.83	0.78	0.85	110
Perceived low risk	1.86	0.94	1.54	0.73	1.99*	110

Note. T/Wo = Teachers without overseas academic experience, T/W = Teachers with overseas academic experience. 1 = completely unacceptable, 2 = largely unacceptable, 3 = neutral, 4 = largely acceptable, 5 = completely acceptable.

* $p < .05$.

Table 5 *Descriptive statistics and t-test results for reported attitudes towards plagiarism in general (n = 55 for T/Wo; n = 57 for T/W)*

Scales	T/Wo		T/W		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Condemnatory attitudes	4.05	0.91	4.41	0.80	-2.24*	109 ^a
Differential treatment	3.32	0.87	2.90	1.05	2.31*	110
Non-condemnatory attitudes	2.48	0.96	2.36	0.95	0.68	110

Note. T/Wo = Teachers without overseas academic experience, T/W = Teachers with overseas academic experience. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

^aThere was one missing value for T/W (n = 56) on the Condemnatory Attitudes scale.

* $p < .05$.