

# 'Collaborating for Success': project outline and findings from Australia

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**Murdoch**  
UNIVERSITY



## Aim of today's session



Collaborating for Success

- To introduce you to the project and some of our research findings
- Project overview and student views about study abroad: Christine Daymon
- Teaching and Learning in Australia: Yu Haixia
- Learning in Australia: two key issues and how to deal with them: Lindy Norris

# Collaborating for Success: Enhancing the Transition of Chinese Media and Communication Students into Australian Postgraduate Education



- Project is funded by Australian Government
- Two year project
- Led by Murdoch University in partnership with CUC and Victoria University
- Involves five universities in Australia



Today's presentation focuses on:



Collaborating for Success

- How can teachers in China and Australia most effectively prepare Chinese students for postgraduate learning in Australia?
- How are media and communication students taught in China and how does this compare with Australia?
- **What does it mean to be a successful student in China and how does that compare with Australia?**
- **What challenges do Chinese students experience transitioning from study in China to postgraduate coursework in Australia?**



## Note



Collaborating for Success

- The project is NOT a comparison of Chinese students with other international students in Australia
- We seek to understand the experiences of Chinese students in Australia only, their challenges and why
- Focus is on postgraduate students
- **Project IS a comparison of Chinese and English-speaking teaching and learning systems and styles – especially Australian**

# Our approach



Collaborative and reflective (Shi-xu 2005, 2009) – learning from each other

## 1. Qualitative research

- Interviews with students and staff + classroom observations
  - In China and Australia
- Plus reviews of published studies on experiences of Chinese students in UK, USA and Australia - From English and Chinese articles
- Informed by Western education theory



# Our approach



## 2. Development of learning materials and teaching strategies

- Materials for students prior to leaving China, and after arriving in Australia
- Teaching strategies and resources for Australian academics
- Teaching strategies and resources for Chinese academics





# Our approach

## 3. Using, evaluating and revising materials

## 4. Publication:

- of materials and strategies
- of articles based on our research, the process of developing and trialling materials, and of working collaboratively





# What we know from a review of the Chinese and English literature



- Chinese students studying in the UK, USA and Australia face distinct challenges in their studies, especially when they arrive
  - e.g. Durkin 2011; Gu and Maley 2008; Huang 2008; Li 2012; Wang & Sha 2007; Zhou and Todman 2009
- Issues concerning both language and adjusting to a different learning environment

# Key findings presented today



Based on interviews with Chinese students in universities in Australia

From a range of Chinese universities including CUC



## Key findings: Independent learning

‘Even though I’m in Australia now, I still have a habit of being dependent on my teachers and my supervisors. Sometimes it’s hard to change.’

‘I was expecting the teacher would tell me what to do, which book to read, which paragraph you should remember to pass the exam, and that’s the failure. After I come to Australia, the teacher tells you: ‘you have to read this, this, this, and this – and maybe one of them will be in the exam, maybe not’, so sometimes I feel very confused.’

Requirement in Australia to be **independent** learners





# Key findings: Reliance on Student's Own Understanding and Viewpoint

- Students in Australia are expected to learn actively = asking questions and interacting in class
- Notetaking is important
- Remembering has a different role in Australia: application/understanding

‘My old way was just listening, not writing anything. And now I know writing’s important. Before I always had confidence to listen and then I could remember but [here] you can’t remember everything so writing is very important... In Australia, **you go beyond the textbook** so you have to extend the knowledge.’



## Key findings: Class discussions

'If I have got questions, I feel ashamed.'

'We have the **habit** of being passive when listening to lectures. So even though I'm here, I'm not actively engaged... It makes me feel uncomfortable ... [because] even if I know the answer I just keep silent.'

### **Not just language issue:**

Habit of needing to give the 'right' answer

Habit of not wanting to contradict





# Our findings: Critical Thinking

## Critical Reading

'I think that we lack this kind of critical literacy. I think that this is one significant fact that will have an impact on my present study – that is to read something critically... before I just accepted what I was taught because I think they are right. What the teacher says, what the textbook tells us... When we read something, we just read it, but without thinking about it critically.'

- unused to engaging from their own point of view

## Discussing Critically

'In China, we don't need to prepare questions, we only need to accept what the teacher taught us. So the first time the lecturer asked us to think critically, we just could not understand what rule it is.'

## Writing Critically



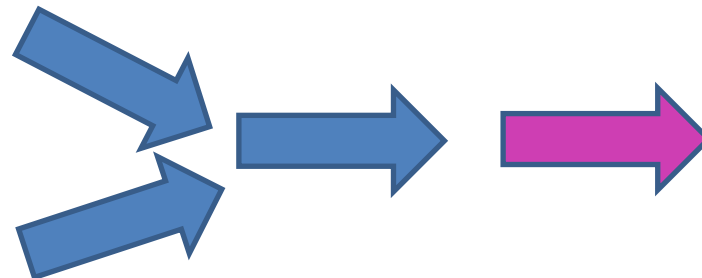
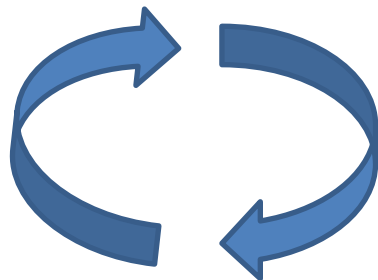
# Key findings: Assessment

- Students rarely understand marking criteria and feedback



- Hard work DOES NOT NECESSARILY EQUAL success
- Challenge to write a structured argument stating own stance

‘The Chinese people write articles with a very different structure. We sometimes talk about things in circles and maybe don’t hit the target so sometimes I write an article that way in English and have a problem.’



## Key findings: Lack of preparation prior to arrival

- Some students have watched online courses



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the world's best universities







## Key findings: Lack of preparation prior to arrival

- Most choose university/country because of teacher/family recommendation
- Little prior research
- Few understand lecturer expectations



## Key findings: Lack of preparation prior to arrival

- Lecturers in Australia and UK expect students to arrive with certain skills
    - But on arrival many Chinese students lack the competencies to meet the demands of Western postgraduate coursework
    - Few Chinese students make the transition quickly
- => student frustration, stress and sometimes failure

# Supporting students



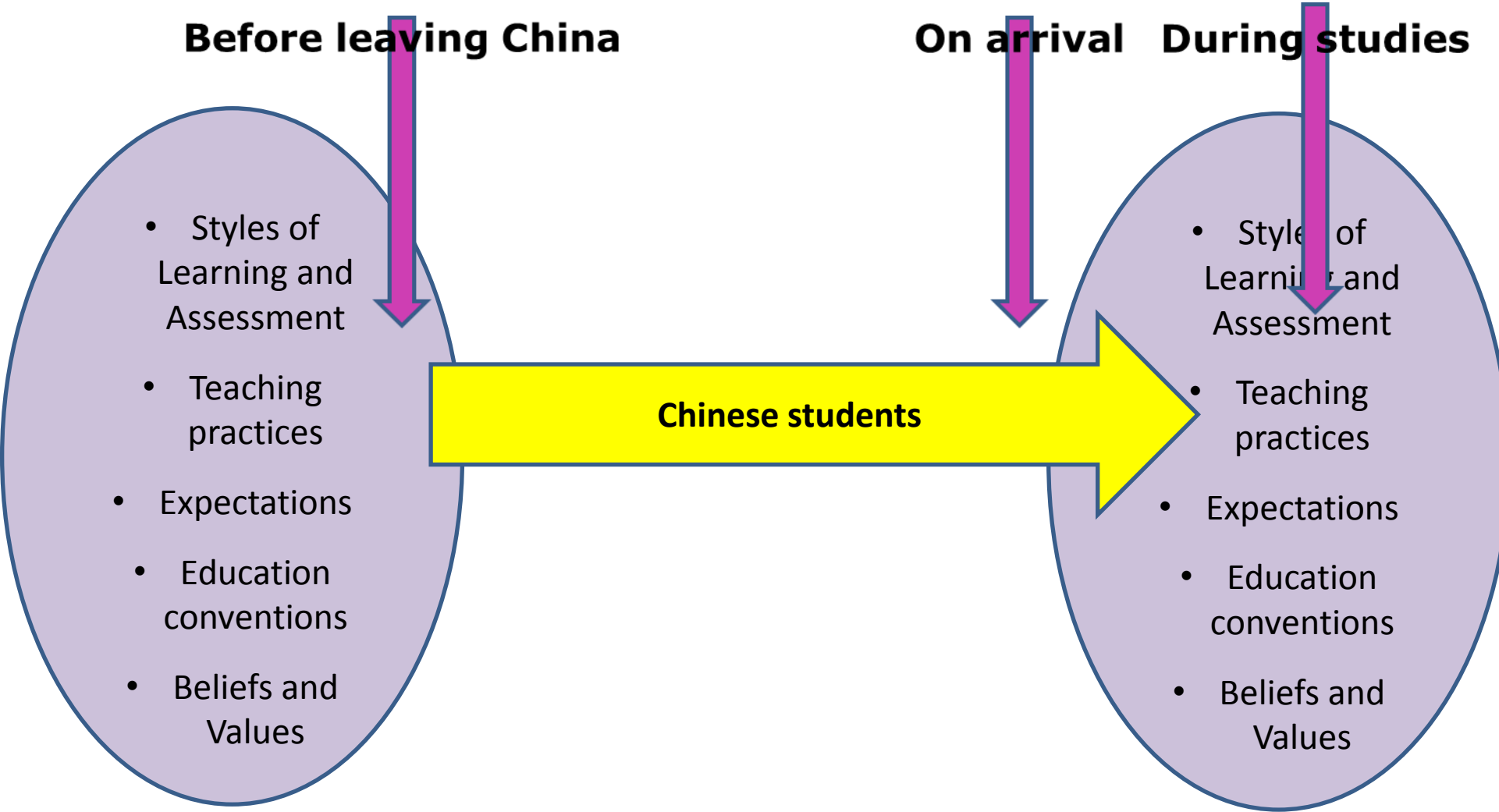
## Before leaving China

- Styles of Learning and Assessment
- Teaching practices
- Expectations
- Education conventions
- Beliefs and Values

## On arrival During studies

- Style of Learning and Assessment
- Teaching practices
- Expectations
- Education conventions
- Beliefs and Values

Chinese students



- *Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.*