



# Negotiating difference through research and teaching strategies in China and Australia



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Presented to University of Canberra, University of Wollongong,  
University of Sydney, Alphacrucis College

March 2015



# The Project



*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.*



# The Project: 'Collaborating for Success'



- Led by Murdoch University
  - With partners Victoria University + Communication University of China
- Other universities involved in:
  - Melbourne, Perth, Wollongong, Sydney
  - Chicago
  - Beijing, Jinan, Kaifeng, Shanghai, Shenyang, Xi'an
  - Input from UK universities



# Context: Mainland China



- 33.25 million students in higher education - 23.91 million at undergraduate level
- Education undergoing reform = Chinese government acknowledges system is outdated'
  - recognise need to improve teaching quality and professional development of lecturers
  - Western models overlaid on traditional teaching practices
  - Some hybrid models, adapted for Chinese context



# Australia's engagement with China



- 40,000 Chinese student at Australian universities = 35% of all international tertiary students
- Set to expand: 2014 signing of Australia-China Free Trade and Higher Education Agreements
- Australia already has a 'mature' relationship with China in education



# Why we instigated the project



- All international students have to negotiate the challenges of transitioning successfully into study in another culture
- Research shows that Chinese postgraduates face distinct challenges
- And so do lecturers as we seek to support them to become successful learners in the Australian academic context



# Project aims



- To enhance the capacity of Australian and Chinese lecturers in intercultural competency, learning support, and international collaboration in order to be able to support Chinese students to:
  - Become proficient at negotiating the transition between academic cultures, and
  - Be successful in postgraduate coursework study in media and communication (and management)



# Some of the intended outcomes



- Changed teaching practices in both Australia and China
  - that incorporate a culturally inclusive approach which includes complementary pedagogical principles, methods and cultural understandings.
- Better prepared students
  - (both pre-departure from China and post-arrival in Australia) for study on masters coursework programs in media and communication (and management) in Australia.





# Questions to focus this session



- What is it, in particular, that makes 'transition' for Chinese students problematic, and why?
- How does an appreciation of the issues students confront impact what we, as lecturers, do?
- How can the project resources support lecturers and thereby benefit students?
- What challenges were associated with the research and with the development of resources?



# Some key scholars who have informed our work



Lixian Jin & Martin Cortazzi

Janette Ryan

Kathy Durkin

Mark Heyward

Ai Zhang

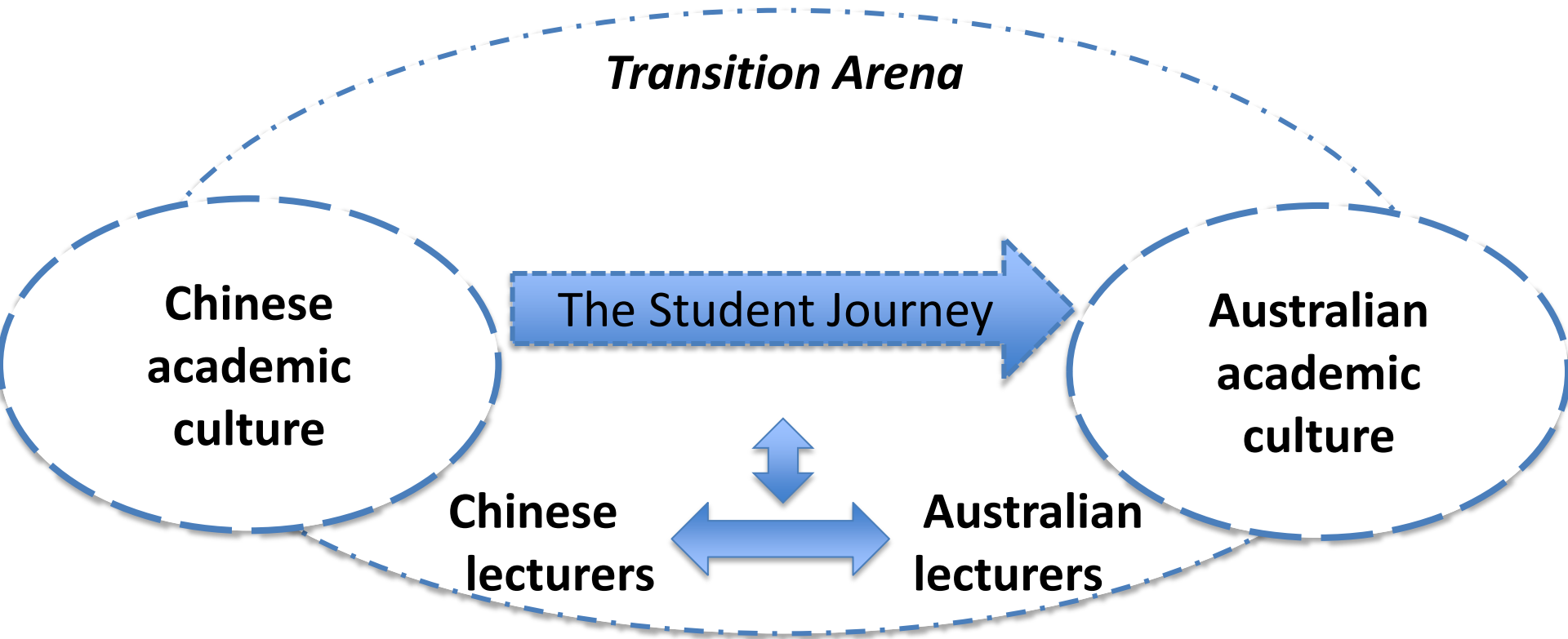
Andy Gao

Andy Kirkpatrick & Zhichang Xu

Ouyang Yu

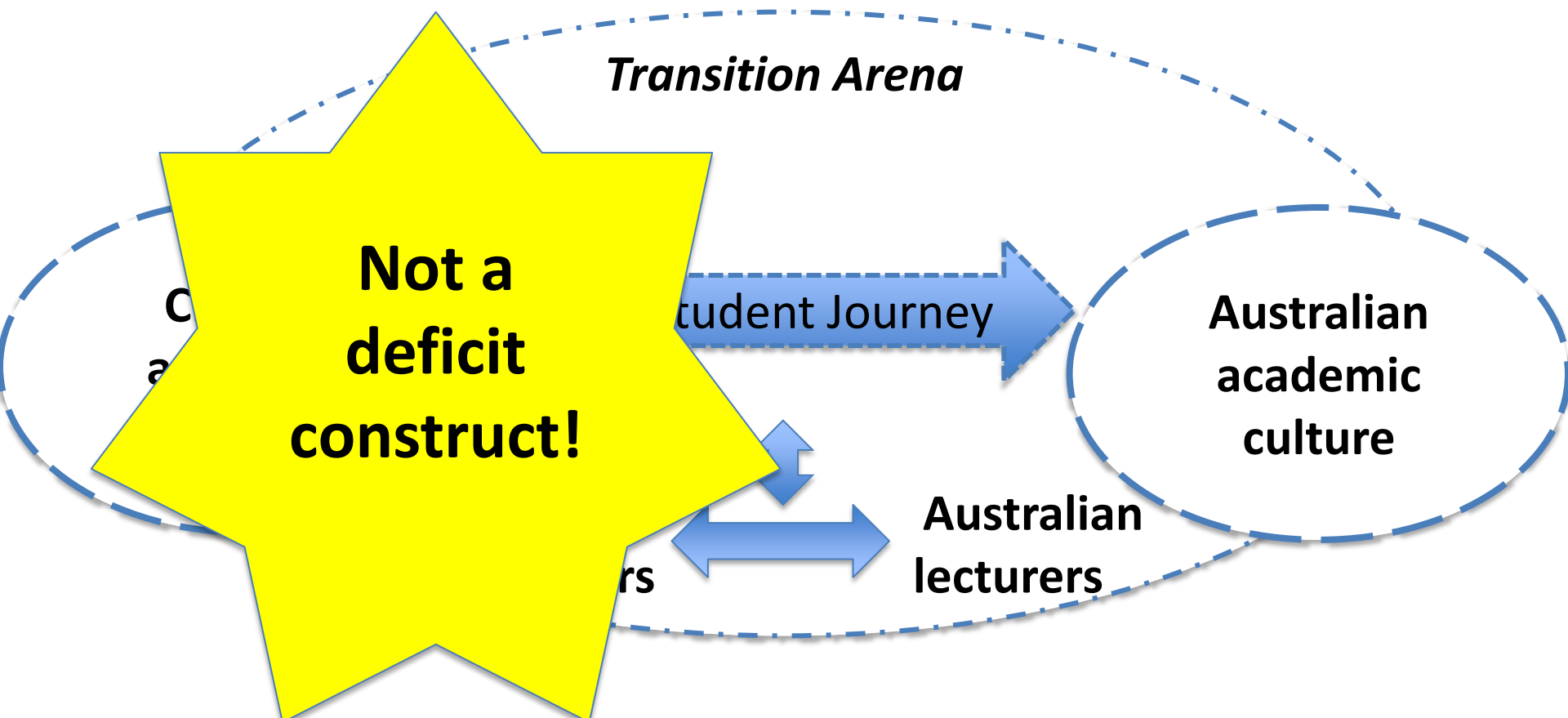


- Limited research on Chinese academic cultures from the perspective of ‘insiders’
- Recognition that there is diversity across China, and also that individuals differ in motivations, interests and abilities
- For purposes of this presentation, we focus on some of the commonalities that our research suggests exist in education in China, and in the experiences of Chinese students in Australia



Adapted from Norris and Tsedendamba 2015

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# Project approach



Based on four key principles:

- **Collaboration** by academics in Australia and China
- **Cultural inclusion**
- **Customisation and embedding** of cultural, study and language skills and materials critical for success into teaching and learning
- **Professional development of lecturers**



# Methodology



- Cross-cultural teams for research and resource development
- Ethnographic research in each others' countries = extended periods
- Research participants: students and staff
  - Participant observation of teaching and learning in both countries
  - Document analysis of T&L documents
  - Literature from both countries
  - Reflective notes by researchers
  - Qualitative questionnaires
- Analysis/translation: thematic/ 'critical intercultural dialogue' (Shi-xu 2006)
- Developed a conceptual framework



# Findings







# Findings

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Collaborating for Success



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**Moveable tables: Eating fast food**



# Movable tables



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# Movable tables



## Physical positioning as a reflection of intellectual positioning

*In China students must be obedient. And teachers are the centre of the teaching, and the centre of the classroom, they are the authority. (Chinese student)*



# Movable tables



## Group work

Three distinct types:

- Group learning in study groups
- Cooperative learning

and then there is

- Collaborative learning



# Moveable tables



## Collaborative learning

*Ever since high school I know how to but the group with European, Indian and South America students it is different...*

(Chinese postgraduate student)

### **Group work that has a constructivist theoretical underpinning**

- Relationships, and one's place within them, are not immediately identifiable.
- Fuzziness and uncertainty in terms of what is expected and how the group will work.
- This type of learning is not orderly, and is not quiet.



# Moveable tables



## Interactional use of language

Rehearsal and performance  
in Chinese academic contexts.  
(Project Briefing Note)





# The colon



## Issues associated with ELT in China and impact on English use in Australia

- Grammar
- Reading and Writing



# The colon



## Writing

*We are asked to write 300 words report in a foreign language, which I barely did in my native language, so I found this... sometimes... it's too difficult. ...*

(Chinese postgraduate student)





# The colon



## Writing





# The colon



‘The opening should be as attractive as the head of a phoenix; the body should be as rich as the body of a pig, and the closing should be as forceful and strong as the tail of a leopard.’

Qiao, Gang. 2009. *A New Course on University Writing*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press. Cited in Kirkpatrick & Zhichang Xu. 2012, p.195.



# Eating fast food



## 'Duck filling' and lack of autonomy

*[Students] receive the knowledge in a way of eating fast food.  
They prefer videos to books.*

(English language lecturer in China)





# Eating fast food



## **‘Duck filling’ and lack of autonomy**

*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.*

(Chinese student reflecting on time in Australia)



# So what?



- Chinese beliefs and practices associated with learning and teaching = fundamentally different from Australian
- We need to know these differences and make them explicit to our Chinese students.
- We need to reflect on our own academic cultural beliefs and practices.
- We need to help students negotiate these differences
  - ⇒ their learning and living experiences in Australia are of value for them



# So what?



And don't forget - we also need to appreciate the capacity of this vast country called China

=> Enriches the learning experience of the whole student cohort and lecturers



# Project Resources



- Briefing Notes for lecturers
- Teaching Sessions for media/comm lecturers and support tutors:
  - Developing participation skills
  - Developing reading skills
  - Developing writing and research skills
  - Thinking critically
  - Teaching and learning in Australia
- Videos uploaded mid 2015



# Issues and reflections on the research process



- Transferability of findings and resources
- Cross cultural relationships
- Collaboration versus cooperation
- Timings and improvisation





## Two project websites



- **Information:** <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/Research-capabilities/Collaborating-For-Success/>
- **Resources:**  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>