

**Tracing Chinese International Students' Multilingual and Multimodal Literacy
Practices in and across Translocal Contexts**
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Overview

Extending the emergent mobilities paradigm within literacy studies and social sciences, this project foregrounds how the complex movements of international students across semiotic, geographic, and social borders are reshaping, and shaped by, higher educational institutions (HEI). To accomplish these aims, the project draws on a multisited study of the literacy practices of Chinese international students at a Midwestern state university and a summer program in Guangzhou, China. The study offers a theoretical framework for mapping the complex manner in which this transnational social field (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) is bound up in the circulation of actors, literacies, pedagogies, and practices. Through fine-grained case studies—attending to the complex interplay between lived literacy practices, student mobilities, and internationalization—the project illustrates ways this framework can be enacted and its significance to writing studies. This mobile literacies approach (Leonard, 2013; Nordquist, 2014) focuses on the links between social and physical spaces with attention to who is able to move, how they move, when they are able to move, and to what effect. Challenging national container models that have predominated the field, the framework brings together several key theoretical strands (linking social and geographic spaces) often treated as discrete. Tracing the international students' literate trajectories across contexts, the findings surface how writing practices and programs are embedded in global educscapes, and how globalized power operates through linked scales that connect diverse regions, nations, HEIs. More locally, the study unmask the ways international students' social networks, national affiliations, and home literacies (video gaming, social media, popular media) afford and constrain the construction of their academic, middle class, and cosmopolitan identities. The findings suggest the importance of adopting a less bounded approach in teaching and research and of paying attention to student mobilities, literacies, and identities in the context of transnational higher education.

Abstract

This multi-sited study examines the literacy practices of Chinese international students at Michigan State University (MSU) and at the Sinoway International Education (SIE) Summer School in Guangzhou, China. Based on this study, we are presently engaged in completing a book length manuscript entitled *Inventing the World Grant University: Mobilities, Literacies, and Identities* with a proposal and sample chapters under review at Routledge Press. The manuscript broadly situates multilingual writing within a wider transnational social field. It is argued that tracing the movements of actors (students, administrators, teachers), pedagogies, and practices in and across these networked spaces is key to understanding how the educational landscape is being reconfigured in the context of globalization. More particularly, it is argued that this broader framework is key for locating writing studies in relation to other languages and internationalization. Critically, while most studies of international students are unidirectional (attending to transitions from home to host culture), this project traces the ways that students take up, resist, and transform various literacy practices and identities as they travel back and forth between the U.S. and mainland China. This mapping complicates understandings of the relationship between local literacy practices and wider scales of literate activity (institutional, regional, national).

Summary

To map out the multilingual and multimodal literacy practices of the Chinese international students at MSU and Guangzhou, China, we have been engaged multiple forms of data collection in each of our respective field sites. Adopting a grounded theoretical approach, we have

coordinated our findings as well as developed analytic themes and a wider conceptual framework. In particular, we have identified the following areas of focus in our study.

1. Tracing the students' literate trajectories across space-time, we have uncovered the complex links between the between the reconstruction of their academic, social class, and transnational identities.
2. We have identified complex ways that home languages and local literacy practices afford and constrain student learning.
3. We have identified complex connections between the ways that local literacy practices are linked to shifts in the global landscape (social and geographic).

On the MSU campus, we have been specifically engaged in the following activities.

Classroom Study. In 2014, Dr. Wang conducted a semester-long case study on her writing courses at Michigan State University (Spring 2014), with data gathered through participant-observation, collection of student texts, recordings of in-classroom activities, and analysis of social media practices. Through fine grained analysis, she unmasked ways that the wider tropes related to national identity and the collective mediated the Chinese international students activity; more specifically she unmasked the ways that national and linguistic identities and subjectivities position both the teachers and students. She further uncovered complex ways the social media tools (e.g., WeChat) mediated students' negotiation of assignments as well as their writing and literacy practices in Chinese-English. Her data analysis was refined through transcription of interviews with students and using a grounded theoretical approach with data being iteratively coded. The data and themes from this study were shared and developed in coordination with the other researchers.

Case Studies 2014-2015. Dr. Fraiberg conducted intensive longitudinal case studies of focal participants' literacy practices in and across school and non-school contexts through weekly and bi-weekly meetings (ranging from 1 to 3 hours each). The process entailed the collection of texts and artifacts (e.g., notes, social media texts, homework assignments, essays, creative writing), screen recordings of literacy practices, and elicited interviews (audio and video recorded). One dominant theme dovetailing with the classroom study is the manner in which the students draw on a rich array of "human resources" (digital and face to face) that afford and constrain their learning. These networks are distributed across local and global contexts, with students often drawing on connections at the college, friends located in other cities and towns in the U.S., and friends and family abroad in China, as part of an intricately knotted social web.

To triangulate this analysis, Dr. Fraiberg has collected an array of other data on and off campus through participant-observation at functions and events sponsored by groups such as the Chinese Student and Scholar Association (CSSA), semi-structured interviews, surveys, and collection of artifacts across campus, including data from a popular online student forum sponsored by the CSSA. The analysis of the latter has resulted in a manuscript published in *Computers and Composition* (2016) on the manner in which students' social media practices mediate the construction of communities and academic identities. The analysis is being incorporated into a book length manuscript. Note: this data is continuing to be collected (an extension of funding was requested until June 30, 2016).

International Research. Dr. You collected data from the SIE Summer School from Guangzhou, China in the summer of 2013. Data collection included audio and video recording of activities, field notes, and elicited interviews. He furthermore collected an array of other types of data: documentation of the linguistic landscape, interviews with administrators, rhetorical analysis of institutional texts, and participant-observation at institutional meetings. Since his return he has been engaged in data analysis and produced three chapters of a co-authored book length

manuscript. His findings illustrate the critical role of cosmopolitanism in the construction of students' identities.

The research above has been continually shared and discussed amongst the researchers with key themes identified and triangulated across the data.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Based on our findings, we recommend a more holistic approach to the study of translingual writers that traces literacy practices of social, linguistic, and geographic spaces. This broader mapping is key for understanding the ways that home literacy practices afford and constrain the construction of academic and transnational practices and identities. More particularly, we recommend a closer focus on informal collaborations amongst students outside of school contexts and the ways that this mediates in school activity and learning.