

## **Plagiarism and students from Asia studying in Australia and New Zealand**

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An increasing number of students from China and other parts of Asia are coming to study in Australia and New Zealand at both tertiary and pre-tertiary levels. Many of these come from a Confucian-heritage background. As well as facing many cultural adjustments in relation to their general living within these host communities, these students also face large differences between the teaching styles and academic expectations in their home cultures and the styles and expectations found in universities and schools in Australia and New Zealand. There has been considerable discussion about different styles of knowledge acquisition (Watkins & Biggs, 1996) and cognitive styles (Fallon, 2003) but little has been written about the specific problem of the cultural issues related to plagiarism faced by these students.

### ***Definition***

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the verb “plagiarise” as to “take and use another person’s (thoughts, writing, inventions, or abs.) as one’s own” (Fowler & Fowler, 1964, p.926). Within the academic context, plagiarism is generally seen as taking two forms. The first occurs when a person, student or lecturer, quotes from an expert or another person’s work without acknowledging the source. The second form, sometimes referred to as “collusion”, involves copying another student’s work. These are sometimes grouped with other forms of cheating such as cheating in an examination, either by copying from other students or by using unauthorized notes and aids. This paper will be concerned only with the two more basic forms of plagiarism.

When these two forms of plagiarism are considered closely it comes evident that a number of issues relating to culturally held values come into play. Both the definitions and these two conceptions of plagiarism are quite culturally-bound.

### ***Cultural Values***

Hofstede (2001, 2005) has identified a number of value areas in which people from different cultures generally adhere to these values to different degrees. Several of the value areas relate directly to plagiarism. The scores and rankings for various countries quoted in the following sections have been taken from longer tables in his most recent book *Cultures and Organization: Software of the Mind* (2005). They come either from his original work with IBM employees or from later, more wide ranging studies that have verified his original work. Within that book, Hofstede defined Confucian-heritage countries as being China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan. I have also included in the tables the countries of Malaysia and Indonesia as a considerable number of ethnic Chinese students come from these

countries to study in Australia. It is difficult to know how much the scores that Hofstede obtained for Malaysia and Indonesia are influenced by the values of people from these ethnic minorities and how much can be attributed to the local Malay and Indonesian majorities. I have also included for comparison purposes the scores and rankings for Australia and New Zealand which are the host countries for study I am considering in this paper.

***Power Distance***

Power Distance is a value defined by Hofstede as the way a culture handles inequality. Inequality exists in all cultures between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the less powerful, and in other ways. Hofstede sees Power Distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p46). It is a value area where considerable differences occur between the countries from which these students come and the countries in which they study. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.  
PDI Scores and Ranks for Countries

Country	PDI Score	Rank (/74)
<i>Malaysia</i>	104	1 – 2
China	80	12 – 14
<i>Indonesia</i>	78	15 – 16
Singapore	74	19
Hong Kong	68	27 – 29
S. Korea	60	41 – 42
Taiwan	58	43 – 44
Japan	54	49 – 50
<b>Australia</b>	36	62
<b>New Zealand</b>	22	71

It can be seen from this table that generally people from the students’ home countries have a high Power Distance Index score, meaning that they expect and accept the these inequalities in power. In contrast, people from Australia and New Zealand do not expect and accept such inequalities in power. Table 2 gives ways in which these differences in attitude are played out in the area of education.

Table 2.  
Power Distance and Education

Small PDI (Aust. & NZ)	Large PDI (Asian Countries)
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Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths	Teachers are gurus who transfer personal knowledge
Teachers treat students as equals	Students are dependent on teachers
Students treat teachers as equals	Students treat teachers with respect, even outside class

The combination of differences in level of respect for teachers and differences in whether material is an impersonal truth or the personal knowledge of a guru has significance for the concept of plagiarism. In the Western cultures of Australia and New Zealand, where all wish to be considered equal but knowledge is seen in the form of impersonal truth, ownership of ideas, intellectual property, becomes very important. In the higher PDI countries, if the knowledge belongs to a guru and everyone knows that this is so because they are a guru, then why does this ownership need to be acknowledged?

#### *Uncertainty Avoidance*

Uncertainty Avoidance is described by Hofstede as the tolerance of the ambiguous and the unpredictable. Table 3 shows the Uncertainty Avoidance Index scores and rankings for the countries that we are considering.

Table 3.  
UAI Scores and Rankings for Countries

Country	UAI score	Rank (/74)
Japan	92	11 – 13
S. Korea	85	23 – 25
Taiwan	69	39
<b>Australia</b>	<b>51</b>	55 - 56
<b>New Zealand</b>	49	58 – 59
<i>Indonesia</i>	48	60 – 61
<i>Malaysia</i>	36	65
China	30	68 – 69
Hong Kong	29	70 – 71
Singapore	8	74

In general, people from the countries with high scores such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan feel threatened by ambiguity and unpredictable events. Those from countries with low scores such as China, Hong Kong and Singapore tend to be more tolerant of such ambiguity and unpredictable events. These results point to the fact that students from Asia cannot be considered as a homogeneous group. Knowledge of each student's home country is important in understanding this student's response to such situations. Australia and New Zealand fall to the lower end of the middle of this dimension.

The expressions of values related to Uncertainty Avoidance in Education are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.  
Uncertainty Avoidance and Education

Low UAI	High UAI
Students expect open-ended learning situations and good discussions	Students expect structured learning situations and seek right answers
Teachers may say, “I don’t know”	Teachers are supposed to have all the right answers
Students learn that truth is relative	Students learn that Truth is absolute

The concept that absolute Truth is not owned by one person relates to the concept of authorship and therefore to a person’s understanding of plagiarism. Thus students from countries that are high on either Power Distance or high on Uncertainty Avoidance will not view the ownership of knowledge in the same way as do the students and teachers in countries that have low Power Distance or low Uncertainty Avoidance. Countries that are high or relatively high on Power Distance and high or relatively high on Uncertainty Avoidance e.g. Korea and Taiwan, the perception of Truth as absolute reinforces the authority of the guru. These values relate to the first form of plagiarism, quoting from an expert or another person’s work without acknowledging the source.

*Individualism/Collectivism*

The Individualism/Collectivism dimension relates to the role given by a culture to individuals versus the role given to groups, particularly strong, cohesive in-groups. In an Individualistic culture, ties between individuals are loose, not strong, and each person looks after themselves and their own families. In Collectivist cultures, the in-groups into which a person is born or into which they enter expect loyalty and give mutual protection in return for this loyalty. Table 5 shows the Individualism score and ranking for the countries which we are considering.

Table 5.  
IDV scores and Rankings for Countries

Country	IDV score	Rank (/74)
<b>Australia</b>	90	2
<b>New Zealand</b>	79	7
Japan	46	33 - 35
<i>Malaysia</i>	26	52
Hong Kong	25	53 – 54
China	20	56 – 61

Singapore	20	56 – 61
S. Korea	18	63
Taiwan	17	64
<i>Indonesia</i>	14	68 – 69

From this table it can be seen that Australia and New Zealand very high Individualism scores, while the countries in Asia have low Individualism scores because their cultures are more Collectivist in nature. In Table 6, some of the societal values arising from these differing cultural values are given.

Table 6.  
Individualism/Collectivism and Societal Norms

Low IDV	High IDV
In society, people are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty	In society, everyone is supposed to take care of him- or her-self & his or her immediate family
Value standards differ for in-groups & out-groups	Value standards should apply to all
“Shame” cultures	“Guilt” cultures
Emphasis on belonging	Emphasis on individual initiative & achievement

This cultural dimension relates particularly to the second form of plagiarism, using another student’s work. To a person from a highly individualistic culture, this can mean only one of two things, that the person has stolen the other person’s work without their knowing it or that the two people have schemed together to subvert the system. For students coming from Collectivist cultures, it is their duty to support other students from their in-group, to protect them from failing and from bringing shame to the whole group. Different values standards apply for members of the in-group. What constitutes deliberate cheating is far less clear. Students cannot be expected to immediately abandon all that they have been taught and experienced about this in the past. Students from Collectivist cultures will always hear and read any instructions given to them about plagiarism through the lens of their cultural understanding of in-group responsibility and will therefore not comprehend these instructions in the way that those giving them would expect.

*Long- and Short-Term Orientation*

This cultural dimension was added by Hofstede after Bond had done his work with the Chinese Value Survey using values suggested by people with a Confucian-heritage background (Hofstede, 2005, p 208 -210). Long-Term Orientation refers to the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards such as perseverance and thrift. A person with a Short-Term Orientation, focuses on virtues relating to the past and present such as respect, tradition, preservation of “face”, and fulfilling social

obligations. Table 7 gives the Long-Term Orientation scores and rankings for the countries in which we are interested. As this dimension was not part of Hofstede's original work, score values are not available for all the previous countries, having been obtained in subsequent research, and so the rankings are given for a total of 39 countries rather than for 74 countries as in the previous tables.

Table 7.  
LTO scores and Rankings for Countries

Country	LTO score	Rank (/39)
China	118	1
Hong Kong	96	2
Taiwan	87	3
Japan	80	4 – 5
S. Korea	75	6
Singapore	48	11
<b>Australia</b>	31	25 – 27
<b>New Zealand</b>	30	28 – 30

No data is available for Malaysia and Indonesia. There is again in this cultural dimension a sharp dichotomy between the values of the host countries, Australia and New Zealand, and the values of the countries in Asia from which the students come. The Asian countries are high on Long-Term Orientation and therefore low on Short-Term Orientation and the reverse is true for Australia and New Zealand. Table 8 outlines some societal values associated with Long- and Short Term Orientations.

Table 8.  
Long- & Short-Term Orientations & Societal Values

STO	LTO
Concern with social status and obligations	Willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose
Concern with possessing the Truth	Concerns with respecting the demands of Virtue
There are universal guidelines about what is good and what is evil	What is good and evil depends on the circumstances

All three of these societal values pertain to both forms of plagiarism. The greater concern about social status and obligations found in Western cultures leads to the importance placed on the ownership of ideas by individuals i.e. intellectual property and the need to acknowledge this ownership. This is reinforced in these cultures by

the emphasis on the Truth rather than an emphasis on what is good for the group and the clear understanding of good and evil being absolute rather than dependent on circumstances. From this it can be seen that plagiarism is a concept that sits far more easily in the Australian and New Zealand understanding of the world than it does in the understanding of the students from Asia studying in these countries.

### ***From New Zealand – Research on Moral Obligations.***

Pickering and Hornby (2005) looked at the issue of plagiarism by presenting 6 scenarios about plagiarism to 31 recently-arrived students from China and 63 local New Zealand students commencing their first year at university. The Chinese students were three times more likely to engage the help of a friend to write an essay for them when they themselves were in a crisis. This finding affirms the more Collectivist values held by the students from China as compared to those values held by the New Zealand students. The Chinese students also saw the “cutting and pasting” of an essay from the web as less bad. This was because they saw some merit in the action. The student had done some research, they had made a judgment of the goodness and relevance of the material and they had perhaps recognized that someone else expressed something better than they did. This meshes well with their Long-Term Orientation value of good and evil being not absolute but dependent on the circumstances. The authors asked all the students to rate each of the scenarios as “good” or “bad”. They were surprised at how many students from both cultures rated each of the scenarios as “good”. However they found a clear distinction between the moral judgments of the Chinese students and the moral judgments of the New Zealand students about the acts of plagiarism. For each scenario, fewer Chinese students saw the action as bad and there was a significant difference in these numbers for a majority of the scenarios. However, the number of New Zealand students who classified some of these scenarios as “good” indicates the students’ understanding of plagiarism for both country groups is different from the academic understanding of plagiarism in New Zealand. The authors point to the modern practice of “pirating” music, videos and software from the web as an example of how the boundaries around this concept may be blurring in Western cultures.

### ***A view from Australia***

Chanock (2005) raises a number of issues relating to plagiarism arising from her experience of supporting international students in their studies at an Australian university. She believes that both Australian and international students can be accused of plagiarism if they follow the practices taught to them in their schools. For international students she sees that there is an additional problem of not “owning” the words that they need or feeling that their words are too plain to be of “university standard”. Some students have indicated to her that, when they quote from an expert in an area, it would be patronizing to remind the reader where the words and ideas came from. Also they do not believe that it unethical to reproduce ideas from a

reading because it shows respect to both the source and the reader. These concepts are congruent with the cultural values of students' home countries but not with the cultural values held within the academic domain of Western cultures. The bridging of this gulf in cultural understanding is not an easy thing to do.

### *A Brief Survey of the Plagiarism Policies of Australian Universities*

The way to bridge this gulf is, of course, through education of these students as to the expectations in this area in a Western academic situation. However, this education is not a simple process given the different lens through which the students will be viewing the information given to them. In all Australian universities, international students are physically given, or given access through the internet to, the plagiarism policy of the particular university in which they are studying. How useful are these policies in educating international students from Asia in this way?

A survey of the plagiarism policies of 6 of 38 universities in Australia was undertaken, looking at them particularly in regard to how well they convey to international students from Asia an understanding of what plagiarism means and how they must act in relation to this issue. The policies were very variable and generally not very friendly to students and particularly not friendly to international students.

#### *Length*

Some of the policies are quite long, a property that would deter many students, in particular international students whose English language ability is still developing, from reading them. Two policies are 4 pages in length, one is 6 pages in length, one is 13 pages, one is 16 pages and one is 3 pages length but readers are pointed to another set of documents which contained all the significant information. Only one policy document contains a clearly separated section for students. In the others, regulations with the processes to be used by staff are intermingled with the material related specifically to students.

#### *Type of language*

Two of these documents are cased in very legal language and started with definitions of terms such as "student", "course", "examination", and "work". A situation that would deter students, particularly international students, and I suspect some staff members also, from reading further. Only three of the policy documents give clear examples of types of plagiarism. If international students are to understand what is expected of them in this situation, at a minimum, clear examples must be given. Some of the language used is quite threatening, assuming deliberate wrong doing in all cases. This is inappropriate when many international students arrive with a different understanding of situation and must be educated to a new way of thinking about the issue.

#### *Acknowledgement of the possibility of inadvertent plagiarism*

Only two policy documents do acknowledge that inadvertent plagiarism could occur. One uses the words "negligent plagiarism" to describe this occurrence.

### *Punitive v. Educative*

Only one policy document describes its approach as educative. For the others the only response to plagiarism is punitive.

### *Putting the onus on the students to inform themselves and understand*

For most of these policy documents the onus is on the students to inform themselves and make sure that they understand everything about the situation. Phrases used are

- 'students will inform themselves ...'
- 'students will become familiar with ...'
- 'students will understand and act ...'

One policy document places great emphasis on a signed statement of compliance.

Only one document says, "Students will be advised ...". There is no indication about how this advice will be given. Are they referred to the university's website? Are they given a very large handout about this among the many other pieces of information that they receive in their first weeks on the country?

It is a very difficult, if not impossible, task to set the students to inform themselves about these matters in the light of the differences that exist in cultural values surrounding this issue.

### *Another cultural issue*

One document referred to "Respect for truth". As has been discussed earlier. This is very culture-laden concept.

### ***Not Considered***

This brief survey has not considered the explanations given about plagiarism to students by teaching staff and staff who are supervising research projects. It also does not take into account explanations given by support staff in places such as Language and Learning Centres and special workshops run especially for international students about this matter. Further research needs to be done in this area to describe and evaluate such programs and the degree to which they take into account the cultural values that relate to this issue in the cultures from which the students come.

### ***Conclusions***

Because of differences that exist in the values held by people in different cultures, students from Asia coming to study in Australia and New Zealand face large challenges in understanding and putting into practice the plagiarism policies of universities in those countries. They need special help to fully understand and relate to these policies. It is unclear to what extent this help is available and how effective such help is. It is not appropriate to automatically characterize such students as being "bad" if they do undertake acts which contravene the plagiarism policy of the university. An educative approach must be undertaken to deal with this situation.

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