

The Imperial Examination System and Its Influences:

The Issue of Chinese Students' Plagiarism from A Historical Perspective

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科挙試験制度とその影響：

歴史的視点から見た中国学生の盗用問題

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論文要旨

現在英語教育界では、学術ライティングにおける著作権コンセプトや引用の規則などは西洋から導入されたものであると一般的に認識されている。一説によると、中国の文化においてはそれらに関する意識が薄いため、英語ライティングにおいて盗用や剽窃行為が比較的に起こりやすいという。実際特に欧米の異文化間教育環境の中では、中国からの学生による盗用行為が多いといわれている。その一方では、剽窃行為において「文化差異」の存在を否定する学者もいる。本論文の目的は歴史的な視点から、中国の科挙試験制度を中心研究対象とし、中国のライティング及び剽窃に関する文化伝統を考察することである。本論文では、科挙試験制度の形成、発展そして廃止という順で、本制度が、中国のライティング伝統、ライティングの教授法や学習過程、及び中国人の引用と剽窃に対する認識に与えた影響について論述した。またこれらに基づき、異文化間教育環境における中国学生に対するライティングの教え方、盗用の防止及び将来同じ分野でのさらなる研究に関するアイデアも提案した。

キーワード：盗用、英語ライティング、異文化間教育、教室倫理、試験制度

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1. Introduction

The frequent occurrences of Chinese students' plagiarizing practices in intercultural contexts have been attracting the attention of many educators and researchers for a long time. A focal as well as controversial point in a certain amount of previous studies on this issue is the "cultural difference" theory. Some claim that cultural differences do exist in understanding and explaining frequent plagiarizing practices of students from certain countries, while others believe that it is only an "urban legend" (Buranen, 1999).

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there are historically unique cultural influences that contribute to the frequent occurrences of Chinese students' plagiarizing practices in English writing classes. There are multiple areas that can be examined in order to uncover whether there are Chinese concepts equal or similar to the Western concept of "authorship". This study will concentrate

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on the unique imperial examination system and its powerful and lingering influences on the writing traditions, methods of teaching, and the process of learning writing in China.

2. Literature review

Concerning the issue of Chinese students' plagiarism in intercultural contexts, the "cultural difference" theory is raised and supported by many researchers. It is understandable and natural that this idea would arise when an educator finds in her/his classes Chinese students plagiarize more frequently than others. It is interesting that most of these researchers tend to adopt an understanding and considerate stance instead of simple criticism. For example, Currie (1998) summarizes Pennycook and Scollon and points out that "...the traditional view of plagiarism is ideological: it unjustifiably elevates a Western concept to the status of norm (Pennycook, 1994, 1996; Scollon, 1995) and privileges a 'concept of the person established within the European Enlightenment' (Scollon, 1995)". Currie also suggests that college educators should be "aware of the different cultural attitudes toward textual ownership and textual borrowing" in order to deal with cases of plagiarism "from a perspective of inter-cultural understanding" (Currie, 1998). It should be noted that even researchers who are in agreement with the idea of "cultural differences" do not simply assert that "it's OK to plagiarize in Chinese" (Pennycook, 1996). Take Pennycook's well-known research on this issue as an example. He emphasizes that his aim is not to construct an "exotic Other" but to explore "ways of understanding learning in a Chinese context" (Pennycook, 1996). He discusses the cultures of memory and educational contexts in Hong Kong. However, although his study is valuable for educators to understand Chinese students' plagiarizing practices from more profound perspectives, some aspects may be untrue of all Chinese students in that the historical, political and therefore educational background of Hong Kong is different from that of mainland China. One example is his description of some students' hostility toward English out of the feeling that English is "a language of colonialism" (Pennycook, 1996). As a native Chinese who received my education in mainland China until entering graduate school, I also remember my "anger at the imposition of English" (Pennycook, 1996) in my life. However, it has nothing to do with colonialism but simply because of my failure to understand why everybody is forced to study a foreign language without being asked whether they like it or if they want to get jobs using English. What I want to point out is that although I do not think Pennycook's points of view are applicable to all Chinese students, I agree there is a whole complexity in understanding the reasons for students' plagiarism, especially in inter-cultural contexts.

On the other hand, some researchers have found that the persons involved, such as Chinese students themselves, do not really believe in cultural differences. Buranen mentions her own experience that "no one I talked to had heard directly from an Asian student that his copying from the text was a form of respect for the received wisdom of his ancestors...but many seemed to have a 'friend of a friend' who had" (Buranen, 1999). She therefore calls it an "urban legend" (Buranen, 1999), which also seems to be meaningful for some other researchers.

In Liu's article rebutting the "culture difference" theory, he points out that:

In fact, even in ancient China...people were required to credit their sources. For instance, if one quoted Confucius, one had to say 'Zi [a short name for Confucius] yue [said]...' , and if one quoted from a poem, one had to say 'Shi [a poem] yun [read or said]...' (Thus the claim that Chinese

usually quote Confucius or other famous scholars without mentioning their source is inaccurate.) Again, I am not suggesting that Chinese always cite their sources in such cases. They do not, yet do English speakers sometimes not do the same when they cite in their speeches well-known quotes such as J. F. Kennedy's 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask..., ' Churchill's 'blood, sweat, and tears,' and many of Benjamin Franklin's axioms? (Liu, D., 2005)

Before making any comments on Liu's study, I also want to mention Shi's 2005 study. She arranged two tasks for a group of North American college students and a group of Chinese students. In the summary task Chinese students copied more language from the sources than North American students did. However, in the opinion task there were almost no differences between the two groups (both used less borrowed language). In both tasks Chinese students used sources "mostly without citing references" (Shi, 2005). She then indicates that "both task and first language had an effect on the amount of words borrowed" (Shi, 2005). However, she also points out that "L2 writers imitated and reproduced large segments of others' words with no apparent intention to steal and cheat". It is interesting that in her experiment, on the one hand, Chinese students tend to use less borrowed language in the opinion task than in the summary task. This seems to indicate that Chinese culture does not necessarily encourage students to copy, at least when writing something to express their own opinions, while on the other hand, when Chinese students use sources they tend to not give the references. The seemingly contradictory case, however, can be explained by Liu's opinion to some extent. That is to say, if the source is known, there seems to be little need to cite references. Liu's examples are about famous quotes, while in cases like Shi's summary task, it is natural for Chinese students to consider the given article as "known" since the target audience of their writing is nobody else but the professor who has assigned the article herself. Therefore, if it is impossible to pretend that the copied parts are their own words since the source is already "known", they may feel no need to give credit. When I talked with several Chinese students who have been caught copying sources without crediting (all the cases are like Shi's summary tasks), all of them seemed to feel no need to credit sources because, as one student said, "I am talking about the exact article! And the professor knows it. Why should I repeat again and again the author's name?" Moreover, in their opinions, this kind of summary task may be no more than a "task", in which using original words is no problem if they are more effective and precise. On the other hand, Shi's opinion task might more likely to be seen by Chinese students as a composition or writing exercise which requires more originality and creativity than a mere summary.

Therefore, it seems that I am in agreement with the "cultural difference" theory. However, my aim is not to discuss simply whether "cultural differences" exist or not. As the previous studies mentioned in this section show, there is a whole variety of understanding and explanation of Chinese students' plagiarizing practices even from the same cultural aspect. What I want to point out is that historical perspective cannot be neglected in talking about Chinese culture or the Chinese way of writing. If we stopped at examining this issue only at the L2 level, there would be no meaning in talking about "cultural difference" since a certain culture's tradition and way of writing are embedded in the history of its L1 writing and relevant aspects. However, there is still not enough information in this field although Liu (2005) and others have touched on some points. I therefore would like to examine Chinese academic writing, imperial examinations, punishment for plagiarism and some typical cases from a historical perspective.

3. The Keju system, its influences on writing traditions and plagiarism

As we can imagine, plagiarism cannot exist independent of school education and examinations. When we talk about English education or L2 writing, it seems natural to presuppose a modern school environment. However, the fact is plagiarism existed even in ancient times when there might have been no comprehensive education system as nowadays. In ancient China, not surprisingly, many problems concerning plagiarism existed in school education and the examination system. Therefore, some knowledge of the Keju system will help us understand its influences on Chinese people's writing traditions and their attitudes toward plagiarism. Table 1 below shows the main characteristics of the Keju system over time. It will be explained in detail later. My focus will be on those aspects of Keju that are relevant to writing and plagiarism.

Dynasty	Characteristics of the Keju system
Han (202 B.C.-220)	First written examinations (165 B. C.) For emperors to select officials Based on recommendation Not open to common people
Sui (581-618)	Foundation of the Keju system (in narrow sense) Development of contents and style of essay writing Emphasis on the technique of imitation
Tang (618-907)	Unified examination system Open to all Held on regular basis Countermeasures against plagiarism (e.g. special examination hall)
Song (960-1279)	The formation of Keju society People's status was largely determined by their examination results. Unprecedented number of examinees Establishment of a local examination-retrial-final examination system A set of systemic countermeasures were taken to prevent fraud and plagiarism
Ming (1368-1644)	Eight-legged essay style More serious fraud and plagiarism problems More strict measures undertaken (e.g. body search)
Qing (1636-1911)	Common practice of taking cheat sheets Serious corruption and fraud cases Abolishment of the eight-legged essay style in 1901 Abolishment of the Keju system in 1905

Table 1. Characteristics of the Keju system over time

3.1 The early form of the Keju system

Keju was a system to select officials and scholars through examinations in ancient China. While the system of examinations did not exist in the West until the 18th to 19th century, its early form appeared in China as early as the Han dynasty. The first person who clearly proposed the necessity of human source selection was Confucius¹ in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.). This proposal was supported and developed by other famous philosophers and educators like Mencius, Hsun Tzu and Micius. Their theories became the cultural origin and the theoretical frame for the Keju system.

As Table 1 shows, the first written examinations in the real sense began in 165 B.C. (The History of the Han Dynasty, Chapter 49). The examination adopted a question-and-answer form. A question

concerning political policy was asked and attendees were supposed to express their own opinions by writing an essay. The emperor himself would read the answers and promote the most outstanding ones to be his officials. Although it was not an open examination system since only those who were recommended by appointed officials in the court could take part in the examination, it is generally considered as the early form of the Keju system. It is worth our notice that since then the essay-writing form of examination has been used for more than 2000 years in China. We certainly cannot equate this to “academic writing”. However, concerning the fact that the language used was different from the spoken style and common writing style, and the aim was to select officials (and scholars as well after the complete Keju system was established later), we can still consider it as a kind of “academic writing” in ancient China.

This system continued to develop in the following years of the Han dynasty. There appeared more disciplines like Confucianism, legislation, local administration and so on. Examination contents differed according to the purpose of the examination. For example, Confucianists were supposed to answer questions and write essays about Confucian scriptures, while prospective officials were required to write their opinions on political issues. In any case, writing was the most important and almost the only mode of examinations.

In the early 4th century, Ge Hong first proposed the necessity of unified examinations and ways to reform the current examination system which had been inherited from the Han dynasty. He clearly pointed out that a person’s language level and skills are basically in accordance with his ability and educational level. Therefore, using examinations was better than other ways of promoting qualified personnel for the country, although he also admitted that not all the persons selected from examinations might be qualified. He further pointed out that unified examinations with unified criteria should be adopted, and what was more, there was a necessity to establish a system to prevent cheating and plagiarism². We can easily infer from his book that as early as in the 4th century, plagiarism was already morally disapproved of, in at least academic and official areas. His ideas were realized later in the Tang dynasty and had a great influence on the development of the Keju system.

By the end of the Han Dynasty, the basic framework and theoretical basis for the Keju system were established although there were still many insufficiencies. For example, examinations were not held on a regular basis, they were not open to all, the form and contents of examinations were still not mature, and too much emphasis was placed on Confucian scriptures.

3.2 The foundation and development of the Keju system

China welcomed the coming of the Keju era during the Sui dynasty (581-618). In the short period of less than four decades of the Sui dynasty, two events of historical significance occurred. The first was the separation of education from religion. Following that, the contents and style of essay writing in examinations were also developed. More originality was emphasized rather than concentrating on Confucian scriptures only. The second event was the establishment of a new category of recommended candidates for the mandarinates in the imperial examination system. The latter event is generally considered as the beginning of the Keju system in a narrow sense (see Table 1). Subsequently, the Keju system became more and more complete and important in the following Tang dynasty. Before moving to the Tang dynasty, some problems that arose in this period may deserve our attention.

The details of the imperial examinations of the Sui dynasty are seldom recorded in history books. The most detailed case of how a candidate called Du Zhengxuan passed the examinations is recorded in "The Book of Sui" and "The History of Northern Dynasties". In 595, Du Zhengxuan was recommended to attend the imperial examinations. The examiner, an official of the court and also a famous scholar and writer, asked him to write more than ten essays by imitating some famous essays written by early eminent writers. He did a very good job and passed the examinations. His younger brother, Du Zhengzang who attended the examinations in the following year was asked to do the same.

These examples show that imitation was not only allowed but also encouraged by the court — if you could not recite famous essays, poems and so on and imitate them, you could not pass the imperial examinations. At this point, if we return to the issue of Chinese students' plagiarizing practices in English writing, the opinion that "it is common sense in Chinese culture that copying can help improve students' writing ability" seems to be true. However, I would suggest we also take the features of Chinese language into account and consider this opinion more carefully.

Different from many world languages, the Chinese language has an ideographic writing system. Even three or five characters (as in innumerable essays and poems of ancient times) can embody a large amount of information and at the same time have a beautiful structure. There are a variety of article types, though for convenience I use "essay" to include most of them here. However, nearly all types of written literature value a brief and succinct style. For this reason, good essays and poems are easy to identify, disseminate, memorize, and study. However, the same reason also makes it difficult for others to copy the language and claim it as their own work. What is more, the Chinese language system has been developing continually since its invention until today. What was valued and widely read in ancient times still makes sense to and is liked by contemporary Chinese people. As Liu (2005) points out, when sometimes Chinese people do not credit authors, that may be because of the cited parts' high popularity, which might be hard to grasp for Westerners. Therefore, the meaning of "imitation" in ancient people's writing practices is different from "text copying". People were encouraged to study and imitate structures, use specific methods to choose and group characters, and so on in order to eventually write good essays by themselves. This is fundamentally different from copying others' language directly and concealing the author with the intent to plagiarize.

Even in contemporary language classes (L1 or L2), especially for beginners, it is still an important method to master language usage by doing imitation drills. I can remember that in Chinese writing classes when I was in junior and senior high school, we were asked to imitate famous essays and poems written in classical Chinese. We were also encouraged to cite some famous lines or verses if necessary because they were supposed to make our essays look more literate, concise, and somehow convincing. As Liu (2005) points out, we may credit the author or not because the cited part is too famous to be suspected of plagiarizing. I must admit that things are different when it comes to English writing. There is a whole complexity of learning a foreign language.

However, if the Chinese tradition of writing does not necessarily encourage improper direct text copying, we at least cannot assert it suddenly does so when we turn to English writing. In fact, I can hardly imagine that any teacher would encourage and be satisfied with students' plagiarized work. I am not implying those students caught plagiarizing are lying in saying that their teachers in China had

encouraged them to imitate others' work in order to improve their own writing ability. The problem is, imitation does not equal plagiarizing. Some of the students might have misunderstood their teachers' instructions. Some might just be trying to find an excuse, and subconsciously misinterpreted "imitation".

On the other hand, despite the features of the Chinese writing system and some writing traditions based on it, we have to admit that imitation itself is valued and encouraged in the history of writing in China. The two cases mentioned above are the earliest detailed records of contents and form of the Keju examinations. Since the examinations also included requirements to write strategies on political and military issues, which were somehow similar every time and easier to predict, some examinees began to recite, imitate and even plagiarize good articles of previous examinees.

Based on Ge Hong's theory of examination reform, some major measures including the establishment of a (very basic) system to prevent plagiarism were taken in the early Tang dynasty. First the Keju system began to adopt a unified examination system, open to everyone; exams were held on a regular basis and many more candidates were allowed to take exams. Following the Tang dynasty, the Keju system gradually became more mature, important, and the only official system of examinations for the selection of prospective officials and scholars. The form and content of examinations was also reformed. One important change was the placing of much more emphasis on writing itself. Only those who had passed an initial writing examination could take the last examination in which political and military strategies would be tested (begun from 681)³. One of the purposes for this change was to prevent plagiarizing practices mentioned above. This indicates that the court was not encouraging improper text copying, but rather a way of improving writing skills by first imitating good essays, and they took countermeasures once they realized plagiarism was a problem. Another effect of the reforms was that writing became more and more important. Many of the officials were at the same time famous poets and writers whose works have been passed down to the present day.

The first recorded fraud case in the Keju examinations also occurred during the Tang dynasty (663). This was not about plagiarism, but rather a bribery case. An official accepted a bribe and sold examination questions to an examinee. The official was first sentenced to death, but the sentence was changed to exile because of his voluntary surrender⁴. Although this case has nothing to do with plagiarism, it is the first recorded fraud case which indicates the beginning of the establishment of a strict system of preventing and punishing all kinds of fraud including plagiarism. As we can find in Table 1, one of the measures was the establishment of a special examination hall in order to improve seriousness and fairness while at the same time prevent fraud. Another one was the adoption of an evaluation method that is similar to portfolio assessment in current language teaching. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, Wei Zhi, the Director of the Board of Rites, who was in charge of Keju examinations, first invented this method in 742. He thought that judging people by only one examination was not really fair and asked examinees to select and submit representative writings in order to know them better. Candidates were therefore selected by simultaneously examining their scores in examinations and portfolios. This method became widespread and lasted until the late Tang dynasty. Examinees were also allowed to hand in their portfolios to court officials or famous scholars during periods other than the examination session in order to self-appeal. However, its deficiencies also gradually appeared. One deficiency is that many of the examinees plagiarized others' work in their own portfolios. Consequently this evaluation method was officially abolished in the Song dynasty which followed Tang.

3.3 The Keju Society

The Keju system came to its maturity during the Song dynasty (960-1279). From that time China could be called a "Keju society" in that the system had an extremely large influence on most aspects of the state apparatus (see Table 1). People's social status was no longer decided by lineage or class origin but by whether they could pass the Keju examinations and get good results (Qian, 2001; Liu, H. and Li, 2004). There appeared an unprecedented number of examinees. Many major reforms were undertaken, such as the system of preliminary local examination-retrial-final examination in the palace. Measures were also taken to prevent fraud and plagiarism, including sealing examinees' names and transcribing the examination papers before being judged by examiners, treble assessment, establishment of local special examination halls, strict administration rules, and recording all the examination questions in order to avoid setting similar questions which might be predicted by examinees. As Liu and Li state, at the executive level, the whole system could not be carried out as the government wished due to political, economic and other limitations (Liu and Li, 2004). Fraud and plagiarism existed in abundance. Several historical materials record how this phenomenon had been criticized by many officials and scholars of that time. For example, Zhu Xi, one of the most famous and influential Neo-Confucian scholars, pointed out that the Keju system tempted people to forget morality in pursuit of profits. However, Liu and Li also pointed out that although it was difficult to be completely fair, at least the government was making every effort to prevent fraud and plagiarism and promote fairness (Liu and Li, 2004).

As Table 1 shows, within the mature framework formed during the Tang and Song dynasties, the Keju system continued to develop and became more and more complicated during the following dynasties. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), another important change was that the eight-legged essay was officially adopted as the accepted examination writing style. Although there had been a general writing style used in Keju examinations since the late Song dynasty, it was not very rigid, formalistic, or specific. The eight-legged essay, however, had extremely strict limitations and requirements on structure, rhyme schemes, contents, vocabulary and so on. In brief, the essay had to have eight sections (the Opening, Amplification, Preliminary exposition, Initial argument, Central argument, Latter argument, Final argument and Conclusion); examinees had to follow the given topics and imitate the tone that Confucius, Mencius or their disciples used before, the supposed addressee was the emperor, the word number was limited to 300-700 characters, there was also a limitation on sentence numbers in certain sections, and topics were all from such sources as the Four Books and Five Classics⁵.

Although the eight-legged essay style helped to quantify and standardize the examinations and therefore made it easier for examiners to make assessments, its deficiencies were also evident. Since this special and fixed writing style could be mastered by studying and imitating others' work, many intellectuals began to study the essays of former successful candidates. To cater to this need there even appeared edited books that collected model essays. However, despite the initial intention to study and imitate good essays in order to improve one's own writing ability, many people plagiarized others' work in the face of actual benefits. The limited contents and writing style made it easy for examinees to predict topics and plagiarize. This phenomenon became more and more serious to the extent that the court had to take special countermeasures. It was clearly specified in the *Collected Statutes of the (Great) Ming*⁶ that examinees could only enter the examination hall after a strict body search. If cheat sheets or acts of cheating such as hiring an impostor were found, the examinee concerned would be investigated by the department that was in charge of public order and security and forced to do menial

jobs after one month's cangue penalty⁷.

During the Qing dynasty (1636-1911) examination officials instituted stricter regulations on body search, invigilation, examination hall administration and so on. However, instead of being controlled, the plagiarism problem became more and more serious. Taking cheat sheets became a common practice (see Table 1). A typical case was the Shuntian local examination held in 1744. Emperor Qianlong, who determined to solve the problem of corrupt morals in the Keju system, appointed special officials to search examinees in the Shuntian examination hall. There were more than forty people caught taking in cheat sheets. Furthermore, countless crib notes were found outside of the walls of the examination hall. Concerning this problem, Chen⁸ recorded two episodes about two very influential persons in the Keju history of the Qing dynasty. One episode was of an important statesman and prestigious master of Chinese literature and Confucianism, Ruan Yuan, who had taken a surprising measure to deal with acts of cheating when he was the chief examiner. When he caught an examinee who took cheat sheets into the examination hall, he would read the sheets carefully first in order to find whether the contents were written by the examinee himself or just plagiarized work or copies of classics. If the former, the examinee would be allowed to attend the examinations because taking cheat sheets had become too common a practice to control. This indicates that on one hand, acts of cheating were fairly common at that time, while on the other hand, this kind of practice was considered morally wrong and was officially prohibited. Another episode concerns Zeng Guofan, who was also an extremely important statesman and famous litterateur. Zeng had written to his son to teach him how to write good eight-legged essays. He said that the first important point was rhetoric, and in order to learn flowery language, one had to memorize good classics and contemporary works of different categories and use them as quotations if needed (Chen, 1882).

Although Zeng Guofan was not encouraging plagiarism but rather use of quotations, his words might be easily misinterpreted since even nowadays when authorship and intellectual property rights are unprecedentedly emphasized, it is still not easy for students to distinguish quotation from improper text borrowing. This episode also reflects the fact that in China, memorization, imitation, and quotation have been valued in learning writing through the ages. As mentioned in section 3.2, due to the characteristics of the Chinese language, classical poetry and essays are still relevant to and loved by Chinese people. One highly condensed and elegant verse consisting of only five or seven characters might be more expressive, convincing and beautiful than a long paragraph in modern Chinese while at the same time still understandable. This is why even now in Chinese high school classes, students are still required to memorize and recite famous sentences from classical and contemporary poetry and essays. This skill is even tested on examinations.

However, imitation and quotation have never been equivalent to plagiarism either officially or socially. In the Qing dynasty, serious corruption in the Keju system led not only to the court's various countermeasures but also to much social criticism. For example, the Keju system, especially the eight-legged essay style, was strongly criticized by Gu Yanwu, a great philosopher, philologist and influential social activist. He complained specifically that the examination contents which were all from the Four Books made it easy for examinees to make predictions and plagiarize others' works, and also criticized the plagiarizing practices outside of the Keju system in general, such as some scholars' plagiarizing ancient works. It is interesting that in his masterpiece, *Record of Knowledge Gained Day by Day*, he not only criticized plagiarism and promoted originality in both language and ideas, but

also gave a very good example of citation. We certainly cannot expect a bibliography or reference list after a book exactly the same as in academic books nowadays. However, he credited every minor quotation in the book and clearly stated the importance of originality. Actually as mentioned before, even in ancient China "people were required to credit their sources" (Liu, 2005). What is significant is his consciousness as a scholar and writer, and his rigorous attitude toward citation and originality. The book was revised many times because when he found any contents that were coincidentally similar to any ancient's ideas, he would delete those parts. This indicates that although as some Western scholars have pointed out, Chinese students put much emphasis on recitation and imitation, it is not true that culturally Chinese do not value originality. I would suggest that just as in any other culture, only original work that has good rhetoric, organization, and ideas can be acknowledged in China.

As the deficiencies of the eight-legged essay style and other serious problems in the Keju system gradually became beyond redemption, the court announced the abolishment of the eight-legged essay style in 1901 and finally the abolishment of the Keju system in 1905. Thus, the Keju system that had lasted for more than 1300 years came to an end.

3.4 A brief summary of the education and examination system of modern China

After the abolishment of the Keju system, China herself also entered an era of misery. During decades of invasion from Europe and Japan and domestic wars, the whole education and examination system kept changing and developing in chaos. Old-style private Confucian schools and public and private new style (westernized) schools of various kinds existed simultaneously. Contents and methods of entrance examinations and school examinations varied from district to district and from school to school. Foreign language education, which mainly aimed at training translators, technicians and diplomats, also began from the late Qing dynasty. In any kind of school, writing was already not the overwhelmingly important and main examination contents but rather a constituent part. According to Xie and Tang et al., in most new style schools that concentrated on Western science and foreign languages (mainly English), writing was not required on school examinations. Translation between Chinese and English was considered much more important (Xie and Tang, 1995). The new public education system of elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, colleges, graduate schools and technical schools was established in the late Qing dynasty and developed throughout the Republic of China era (1912-1949). The establishment of the first modern university (Tianjin Beiyang Xixue Xuetang, the current Tianjin University) in 1895 is usually considered as the beginning of China's modern general education. Since then English gradually became a very important subject in higher education. For example, English was already one of the two required subjects in the entrance examination of Tsinghua University in 1925 (Xie and Tang et al., 1995). However, although the education system had been undergoing a revolution during the chaos of wars that lasted for more than half a century, higher education had never been popularized to all the levels of Chinese society or all the districts due to special political conditions and continual national-scale wars.

The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. For political reasons Russian was almost the only foreign language taught in high schools and universities from 1952 to 1954. Specialized English education also remained stagnant. There were only nine universities still teaching specialized English by 1953. There was a revival period of English education from 1958 to 1966. The importance of English was recognized and reforms in curriculum, teaching system, and teaching methods were gradually introduced. However, English education as well as the whole education system was

almost destroyed during the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The school education period was shortened. Elementary school education was cut to five years, and junior and senior high school education to two years. Some subjects like Geography and Biology were discontinued. Colleges and universities stopped enrolling students. During the later period of the Great Cultural Revolution, almost all the junior and senior high students were sent to work in the countryside and mountainous areas. The college entrance examination and the normal education system resumed in 1977 and was reformed and developed in a real sense from the middle 1980's.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary

By examining the Keju system in ancient China, this study has intended to reveal the influence of the old imperial examination system on writing traditions and its relationship to plagiarism in China. Instead of simply asserting whether there exist so-called cultural differences in teaching and learning writing (either L1 or L2), I would like to suggest that it is true that on one hand theories and methodologies of English education, school systems, curriculum, assessment methods and so on are highly shared globally and more and more alike in many countries, which seems to help minimize cultural differences; while on the other hand cultural and historical influences on teachers and students' sense of values in academics, ways of teaching and learning and so on should not be neglected either. On the issue of Chinese students' plagiarizing practices, too, we should first admit the whole complexity of their learning environments and conditions, which are not very different from those in any other country, such as academic pressure, motivation and so on. At the same time if we can also pay attention to the following points, it may be helpful for English educators to understand Chinese students' writing habits and attitudes toward plagiarism.

- (1) The Chinese writing system has been in continual use since its invention. Writing traditions and values of writing based on this special writing system may still have influence on contemporary Chinese people.
- (2) The Keju system, which lasted for more than 1300 years until the beginning of the twentieth century, has had a large influence on people's attitudes toward and ways of teaching and learning writing. For example, much importance was and still is attached to recitation and imitation skills in China not only by students, but also by teachers.
- (3) Due to complicated reasons, students of both ancient and contemporary times may consciously or unconsciously substitute plagiarizing for imitating. I would suggest especially to international educators that caution might be needed when Chinese students say that in Chinese culture plagiarism is encouraged in order to improve one's writing ability. The fact is that any acts of cheating have not been permitted since ancient times. Although the Keju system might have caused bad academic practices, plagiarizing has always been disdained and rejected socially and even punished legally.
- (4) Citation with credit and originality in writing, which have been considered lacking in Chinese culture by some Western researchers, was also valued even in ancient China. However, as the case stands, the Keju system and the eight-legged writing style since the Ming dynasty did oppress people's originality in writing. The effects of this ethos have lasted for a long time and may still be reflected in contemporary Chinese students' writing styles nowadays.

4.2 Implications for teaching English writing to Chinese students

English educators who teach students from various cultural contexts may easily reach a conclusion that students from certain culture(s) tend to plagiarize more frequently than others because of the lack of Western authorship and copyright concepts in their culture(s). Some of them may take a positive stance in trying to understand and solve the problem by showing respect to non-Western cultures. Some may just stick to this overly simplified conclusion, which may in fact become nothing but a prejudice. In the case of Chinese students, I would suggest that English educators first consider the whole complexity of their learning conditions, which are not really different from other students, but with special consideration of their difficulties in writing in another language.

Secondly, it may be helpful if teachers have some knowledge of Chinese traditions in the teaching and learning of writing. As discussed in section 3, imitation skills in the process of learning writing are highly valued. However, this might be taken as equivalent to “plagiarizing improving one’s writing ability” by some students with or without the intention to cheat. It would be helpful for students who lack enough knowledge or training if teachers could explain clearly and emphasize the differences between plagiarism and imitation, the purposes and the aims of imitation, how to imitate in order to master the usage of words, the structure of sentences, and the organization of texts without putting students in danger of plagiarism, in addition to maintaining their originality.

A fact that might not be known to Western educators is that even now in China there are seldom universities who have built academic writing or similar courses into their curriculums. I have conducted a survey of more than three hundred Chinese college students, and have read curriculums of different universities, but found no academic writing classes were offered. I believe improvements are being made throughout the country and postgraduate students can receive thesis supervision, including being taught rules in academic writing. However, for most undergraduate students, there is a high possibility that they have not received any academic training in writing either in L1 or L2. Criticizing them for improper citation might be unfair if writing rules were not taught clearly beforehand. Even if they know that plagiarism is bad, they may have no idea to what extent using sources can become plagiarism. A good example would be the students I talked with concerning this issue in section 2. Their confusion and the judging differences between themselves and the professor show that insufficient knowledge of academic writing rules, instead of the intention to laze away, may constitute a not low portion of all the Chinese students’ plagiarizing cases. Their specific problem was about how to summarize and paraphrase a given article efficiently without risking themselves to be suspected of plagiarizing. Therefore, since writing one’s own article is different from summarizing and paraphrasing others’ work – the latter may be more risky not only to students but also to experienced writers – my suggestion is that in addition to teaching general academic writing rules to students, how to summarize and paraphrase should also be introduced and exercises repeated if necessary.

4.3 Suggestions for further study

This study also raises other questions that may be worth further research. First, in researching the issue of Chinese writing traditions and their effects on current language education in China, in addition to the examination system, the traditional school system can also be a valuable area to research. Second, concerning the discussion of whether Chinese students culturally have weaker authorship and copyright consciousness, ancient and contemporary history of publishing and copyright in China can be studied as well. Third, this study focuses on a cultural and historical perspective of plagiarism.

However, research on connecting cultural elements to classroom practices may also be possible.

It is hoped that this study will shed some light on understanding the frequent plagiarizing practices of Chinese students in intercultural contexts. Taking into consideration the Chinese imperial examination system, its effects on writing traditions and teaching and learning writing, English educators may become more flexible in understanding Chinese students' learning process and writing habits when trying to prevent plagiarism.

Notes

1. See *The Analects*, Chapter 13.
2. Ge Hong's theory mentioned in this study is contained in his masterpiece *The Master Embracing Simplicity*.
3. See *Tang Dazhaoling Ji*, Vol. 106. *Tang Dazhaoling Ji* is a collection of imperial edicts of the Tang dynasty.
4. See *Journal Collection of Fengshi*, chapter 3.
5. Four Books and Five Classics (四书五经) is a generic term for nine authoritative classic Confucian books that have had a profound influence on the whole Chinese culture, society and history.
6. *Collected Statutes of the (Great) Ming*, an official collection of statutes of the Ming dynasty.
7. A punishment used in ancient China. A cangue is a heavy wooden collar enclosing convict's neck and arms. The convict would be confined in the cangue for a sentenced period of time and be led through streets to expose him to public humiliation.
8. See *Langqian's Folk Narrative Collection Vol.3* (郎潜纪闻三笔). Langqian's Folk Narrative Collection series are books of short sketches written by Chen Kangqi in the Qing dynasty. The series contain many primary and secondary historical sources.

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