

# ***The Influence of Teacher Feedback on the Identity Construction of Chinese International Students***

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the dynamic interplay between teacher feedback and the identity-construction process of Chinese international students who experience different educational environments. Drawing on cultural, educational, and academic discourse socialization perspectives, the study examines how the distinctiveness of teacher feedback practices in different countries contributes to shaping the identities of Chinese students. Using a case study approach, the study selected two typical Chinese international students to be interviewed to understand Chinese students' experiences and perceptions of teacher feedback. The main findings highlight the differences between the Chinese and Western education systems in terms of teacher feedback practices, communication styles, and cultural values, and further analyze how these different feedback dynamics affect the construction of students' identities, including self-perceptions, motivation to learn, and the development of a sense of belonging in the educational environment. This study has important implications for Chinese international students as well as for educational institutions working to improve the academic performance of Chinese international students. By understanding the intricate relationship between teacher feedback and identity construction, students can adapt more quickly to studying abroad, while educators can implement culturally sensitive approaches to create positive and inclusive learning environments for Chinese international students.

**Keywords:** academic discourse socialization, Chinese international student, teacher feedback

## **1. Introduction**

Since the emergence of research on the socialization of academic discourse, the explanation of teacher feedback has gradually changed from unidirectional authoritative advice to a process of teacher-student interaction [1]. Academic discourse socialization refers to the process in which learners are instructed in areas of expertise, ideology, values, and identity by interacting with others who are more experienced [2]. This definition emphasizes the influence of the professional on identity construction in novices' learning. In 2015, Zappa-Hollman and Duff introduced a concept called “individual network of practice (INoP)”, which can be used as a language socialization research approach that focuses on the learner while also considering the rest of those who interact with them [3]. Teacher feedback, while not interaction in the traditional sense, serves as additional complementary data sources in INoP and affects students' learning process and participation in the academic community.

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of investment and its relationship with individual identities has figured prominently in research on second language development [4]. The identities in this

conversation are fluid as a learner's understanding of oneself can be influenced by interactions with communities and social networks. Teacher feedback, as a guide to stimulate students' emotions and allow them to use it to regulate their own identities [5], plays an important role in the process of Chinese international students' identity formation, thus helping them to better adapt to the new environment.

To begin with, teacher feedback is an essential part of Chinese international students' social and linguistic resources, it is one of the effective ways for students to get professional guidance and recognition of self-orientation. By analyzing the relevant experiences of two Chinese ESL students at a university in the UK. Li and Han found that the students received feedback from their instructors on various drafts of each essay and were informed that they could always get further oral or written feedback during Q&A sessions, tutorials, or emails [6]. Additionally, Xu and Hu, through a case study of five Chinese international doctoral students in the Faculty of Education at a New Zealand university, illustrated that these doctoral students need teacher feedback to help them progressively master the subject knowledge and enter the academic community until they can complete their research independently [7].

Furthermore, Chinese international students tend to (re)construct their identities under the guidance of teacher feedback. Sue, one of the two Chinese international students in Li and Han's article, informed that she stayed doubtful about her identity because, through teacher feedback, she realized that there was a gap between her learning ability and expectations [6]. Not meeting the standards required by the feedback even made her feel afraid. Moreover, Wang and Li pointed out that students absorb feedback to varying degrees to become who they want to be [8]. Specifically, they aim to become legitimate members of society by fulfilling the teacher's requirements in the feedback and achieving disciplinary acculturation. More importantly, they indicate that Chinese international students are more likely to shape their identities based on teacher feedback because nearly every interviewee in the research project mentioned that in Chinese education, it is customary to obey authority and respect the teacher, so Chinese students can be extra dependent on teacher feedback.

By analyzing special connections between teacher feedback and Chinese international students, this study aims to argue for the non-absolute authority of teacher feedback and the importance of student emotions and attitudes in the process of shaping student identity through this feedback. To help Chinese students who are going to study abroad for higher education to better adapt to the academic community abroad.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Framework**

New insights can be derived from looking at the impact of faculty feedback on the investment of international students from the perspective of the socialization of academic discourse [9]. Few studies have focused on the direct connection between teacher feedback and international student identity construction, especially for a group such as Chinese international students whose past educational systems and experiences differ significantly from their new environments. This paper is guided by three questions:

- 1) What role does teacher feedback play in academic discourse socialization?
- 2) How do Chinese students' attitudes toward teacher feedback change after studying abroad?
- 3) How should Chinese international students make use of teacher feedback properly?

Previous studies have based their criteria for selection on the relationship between feedback and language socialization [10].

## 2.2. Recruitment

This paper took a case study approach and analyzed two Educational Linguistics (ELX) Chinese international graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, which involved a detailed and contextualized understanding of the effort they took to reach the expectations of the academic community concerning feedback experiences. These two Chinese international students had no experience studying abroad prior to graduate school, and Table 1 will give their specific background information.

Table 1: Participants' Information

Name	Age	Sex	Degree in China	English Proficiency	Participation in the Graduate Program
Henry	22	M	BA in Business English	TOEFL (writing): 28	Medium
Stephanie	23	F	BA in English Literature	IELTS (writing): 7.0	Low

## 2.3. Data Collection

These two cases contribute to the study of teacher feedback and student identity construction and use primarily retrospective interviews to gather the feedback of main ELX writing projects from students' academic experiences growing up and their understandings in response to them. Inspired by Zappa-Hollman and Duff's research approach, the data collected for this study was not limited to formal feedback in the classroom and on the instructional system, but also included feedback (written and oral) received by students from instructors during out-of-class communication and email exchanges [3]. Table 2 presents the schedule of interviews.

Table 2: Schedule of Interviews

Schedule	16/12/2023	24/12/2023	26/12/2023	27/12/2023
Topic	//	Received teacher feedback	Response to feedback	Behavior changes
Interview Type	Background interview	Retrospective interview	Retrospective interview	Retrospective interview
Duration	35 min	55 min	55 min	45 min

## 2.4. Data Analysis

According to Patton, before analyzing the content of a case, its data needs to be compiled [11]. Since the data collected for this study were primarily derived from students' self-directed recollections and reflective experiences rather than the specific content of teacher feedback and revisions triggered by the feedback, the data analysis was built on iterative readings and confirmations of respondents' feedback experiences to ensure that the critical feedback made a difference in their emotions, memories, and self-perceptions. Table 3 and Table 4 show specific teacher feedback experiences of the two participants. However, the limitations of this study are the inadequate sample size and the fact that data collection was influenced by the subjective judgment of the participants.

Table 3: Identity, Feedback, and Emotion of Henry

Identities	Feedback	Emotions
Chinese student – tests taker	Direct; knowledge-based	Obey to authority
Chinese undergrad – language learner	Direct; focus on motivational purpose	Expose to different forms of feedback
International student – language learner (in academia)	Multi-channel; focus on academic discourse	Start to realize teacher feedback is an interactive process; try to express disagreement
Second language learner plus user	Multi-channel; focus on academic discourse	Free from the emotional constraints of being a non-native English speaker

Table 4: Identity, Feedback, and Emotion of Stephanie

Identities	Feedback	Emotions
Chinese student	Direct; knowledge-based (vocabulary, grammar...)	Obey to authority
Second language learner	Direct; knowledge-based (ideas, structures...)	Have a broader sense of academic writing
Second language learner (full-time)	Multi-channel; conversation-based	Try to change writing style; still limited by English language proficiency
Second language user (still trying)	Multi-channel; conversation-based	Changing under the guidance of teacher feedback

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Chinese, Obedience, and Direct Feedback

Regardless of the country Chinese international students are studying in, they often have habitual obedience to teacher feedback:

*There are only two ways to get this feedback: homework and tests. Teachers would give us corrections for specific points we mixed up, e.g., on what page of the textbook is the correct concept, which unit in the exercise book is the same type of question...* (Henry)

*Parents are required to read the feedback as well and sign on it, they are the people who most believe teachers are the absolute authority.* (Stephanie)

Obedience to authority is a part of Chinese culture, where teachers and students have a very typical hierarchical relationship [7], and the high social status of teachers makes students and parents believe that they should not question their feedback and decisions. Such thinking makes it necessary for Chinese international students to make a relatively significant shift in values as they begin to be exposed to the Western education system.

#### 3.2. Second Language Learner, Interaction, and Multichannel Feedback

Attitudinal shifts in Chinese students' responses to teacher feedback often begin after the end of nine years of compulsory education, which is the beginning of university study. According to Henry, he took a class from an international teacher during his undergraduate years in China. From her, he was exposed to the idea that learning is not a process of finding the optimal solution, but lies in the collision of thoughts and opinions in the interaction between people. After that, Henry's self-

identification went from knowledge receiver to language learner who adopted both literature-oriented and interaction-oriented strategies. However, Stephanie's identity didn't change significantly at this stage because English proficiency prevented her from comprehending the feedback.

### 3.3. Second Language User, Interaction, and Non-Restriction

After one semester and one year of study abroad respectively, Henry and Stephanie both demonstrated acceptance of interactive teacher feedback and expressed a willingness to add more voices of their own to the conversation.

*As a non-native English speaker, it is important to let go of the obsession with the smallest aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to become a real language user. (Henry)*

*I have begun to subconsciously sift through teacher feedback. (Stephanie)*

Students' tendency to negotiate feedback is triggered by their intention to achieve disciplinary adaptation [12]. China emphasizes collectivism and respect for authority [13]. Teachers serve as the typical authority figures and students are more inclined to accept their feedback without questioning it, thus avoiding conflict. In contrast, most study-abroad target countries encourage independent thinking and questioning authority [14]. Students may be more inclined to question feedback and engage in dialog with the teacher. To fit into the academic community abroad, it is essential for Chinese international students to respond to teacher feedback in their own context.

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that Chinese international students feel obvious cultural and customary differences in facing the foreign education system, therefore, identity (re)construction is necessary. Teacher feedback, as one of the important parts of embodying difference, can provide guidance for Chinese students to achieve academic discourse socialization.

However, the study was limited by the singularity of the sample and the influence of the subjective emotions and personalities of study participants on reactions to teacher feedback. To address the shortcomings of this study, the future directions for development are: first, to expand the scope of the sample study by looking for Chinese international students with different English proficiency, study areas, and adaptive ability to conduct the study, to increase the generalizability of the conclusions. Additionally, refine the research themes, such as how students should judge whether teacher feedback is positive and how to use it as a guide for identity construction.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the lens of academic discourse socialization, this study analyzes the process of attitude change and identity construction of two Chinese international students in response to teacher feedback. It can be found that as the focus of the teacher feedback switched from basic language knowledge to guidance on thinking methods, both students' identities went through a process of transformation from test-taker to language learner and, further, user. More broadly, these two students had developed identities under the influence of Chinese education that prioritizes social expectations and collective harmony. Having experienced different cultures and teaching styles by studying abroad, they were encouraged to explore unique identities, focus on self-expression, and pursue personal goals. Chinese students who are going to study abroad will be facing teacher feedback styles that differ significantly in cultural values, communication styles, and parental involvement from those at home. This finding aims to give previews and advice to Chinese international students on how to utilize teacher feedback to better understand how to integrate more quickly into a new academic community abroad.

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