

·邓鹏鸣 著·

# 中国学生

社科博士论文讨论与  
结语章节语体研究

# A Genre-based

Investigation of the

Discussion & Conclusion Sections  
of L2 Chinese Social Science

# Doctoral Theses



WUHAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

武汉大学出版社

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>L2</b>	English as a second language
<b>NNES</b>	non-native English speaking students
<b>NES</b>	native English speaking students
<b>RA</b> s	Research articles
<b>TOEFL</b>	Test of English as a Foreign Language
<b>IELTS</b>	International English Language Testing System
<b>GP</b>	Guided participation
<b>LPP</b>	Legitimate peripheral participation
<b>ZPD</b>	Zone of proximal development
<b>EAP</b>	English for academic purposes
<b>ESP</b>	English for specific purposes



# Preface

It is well-known that writing doctoral dissertation in English is an uphill task for a wide majority of non-native speakers of English; however, it is relatively less well-known that this task is equally arduous and painful for even native speakers of English, or for that matter, speakers of any language. In addition to the linguistic difficulties, most writers of research dissertations often face difficulties of handling conventions of writing these rather longish pieces of research reports.

One of the major problems many of these researchers face is the mismatch between “what they promise” in the introductory sections and “what they deliver” in the final sections of their theses. The research reported in this work deals with this important issue, which is often ignored in most research writing undertakings. It is an issue which is rarely, if ever, explicitly raised, and is often not even implicitly understood by the participants in this scholarly activity. In this respect, this book undertakes to demystify one of the most important issues in doctoral research writing.

The study reported here is informative, comprehensive, and insightful. It focuses on the research writing experiences of a number of Chinese writers of research dissertations, the trials, tribulations, and sometimes rewarding experiences of some of them, including a number of teachers who supervise them. The book, in my view, should be of great value to all those interested in research writing, either as non-initiated novice writers, experienced teachers or supervisors of doctoral work.

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2 March, 2010

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Background

The motivation for the present study on how L2 Chinese doctoral students negotiate the Discussion & Conclusion section<sup>①</sup> as a part-genre of thesis<sup>②</sup> stems from two major concerns: pedagogical and practical needs on the one hand and the limitations of the previous research on the other. The first concern can be elaborated in light of the particular local, historical, and cultural background in which the study is situated. As a part of academic genre practice, writing the Discussion & Conclusion section is assumed to be one of the most difficult parts in doctoral students' thesis writing not just for non-native English-speaking students (NNES) but for native English-speaking students (NES) as well (Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006; Bunton, 2002; Dong, 1998; Dudley-Evans, 1986; Peacock, 2002; Shaw, 1991; Swales and Feak, 2004). This specific thesis part-genre poses particular challenges to non-native English-speaking students (NNES) who are unfamiliar with the Anglo-American academic writing context in which native English-speaking students are generally immersed throughout their institutional learning. This is particularly true of

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① The terminology of “section” and “chapter” is alternatively used in this thesis in line with the literature.

② The genre is simply referred to dissertation in American context. It is interchangeably used with “dissertation” in this thesis.



Chinese mainland L2 doctoral students<sup>①</sup> who are pursuing their postgraduate studies in Hong Kong. Being long exposed to local education, they often do not receive any explicit instruction or training of Anglo-American academic writing norms, which greatly undermines their ability to tackle the daunting thesis writing task (Dong, 1996; 1998). Meanwhile, there has been a fast growing population of doctoral students from mainland China working for doctoral degrees in various disciplines with social sciences as an important concentration in the universities of Hong Kong in recent years. The increase in the population of doctoral students has generated such a big concern among the school administrators, supervisors, and the students themselves as how to make this group of students successfully navigate the demanding academic journey of doctoral thesis writing. As is known, the tertiary educational system of Hong Kong inherits that of UK as the result of the legacy of the British colonial rule. Although it upholds a non-English speaking culture, it places a heavy demand upon postgraduate education which is expected to approximate the standards that are found in Britain in terms of English medium instruction, dissertation writing and other academic research. Dissertation writing is required to be accomplished in accordance with the Anglo-American norms. Simultaneously, in order to make its economy and education more globalized, the government of Hong Kong is increasing its pressure on the postgraduate completion rates of its local universities insomuch that both supervisors and students are pushed to struggle desperately for accomplishing the theses before the deadline for examination. Given such a local, historical, and cultural background, there emerges an urgent need for university teachers and researchers to seek solutions to assist this particular group of doctoral students in wrestling with the most challenging and the longest academic text writing in their life time as they enter their doctoral

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① For these doctoral students, English is their foreign language (EFL) or second language (L2/ESL) other than their mother tongue (L1). As the terminology of EFL, ESL, L2 is interchangeably used in the domain of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994), the author takes the term L2 to highlight the language background of this particular group of Chinese doctoral students.



program.

The second concern can be embodied by a brief overview of the limitations of the previous studies on relevant research writing. Although a growing body of studies have examined various aspects of research articles (RAs) such as Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Results in the past two decades, an overwhelming majority of them are directed towards Introduction (e. g. , Anthony, 1999; Holmes, 1997; Ozturk, 2006; Samraj, 2002; Swales, 1981, 1990, 2004) and predominantly deal with the texts produced in natural sciences. Research on the Discussion & Conclusion section is still limited compared to that of the Introduction and even scarce in the case of thesis writing genre for social sciences. As far as thesis genre is concerned, even fewer studies have ever probed into this particular part-genre. Much less attention has been given to it from the process perspective or to how this part-genre can be related to the opening Introduction chapter. The evidence of the limits of the previous research is also manifested in the research site, different backgrounds for NNES students, and research methodology. From a brief overview of the previous studies, it can be noticed that a great many of them are conducted in Anglo-American universities where English is used as the preferred communication medium among the teachers, advisors, and the NNES students who come from heterogeneous language and cultural backgrounds. So far as the research methodology is concerned, most of the studies lack multiple data sources. A main body of them simply adopts textual analysis or survey, or interview, or case study without integrating these methods for triangulated studies. Therefore, the findings of the earlier studies may not be so relevant to the acquisition and development of advanced academic literacy of the Chinese mainland doctoral students who are studying at the universities of Hong Kong where English serves as one of the communication mediums and who share a similar language and culture with the local people (Braine, 2002). Moreover, such an issue still remains underexplored in the existing literature, i. e. , what are the main causes that contribute to the difficulties that NNES postgraduate students face while writing the Discussion & Conclusion section (e. g. , Bazerman, 1984; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). Studies as such are





almost none-existent though working on the Discussion & Conclusion section is viewed as the most challenging task in the whole process of thesis writing (e. g. , Bazerman, 1984; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). Above all, understanding of this part-genre in the thesis at present remains rather limited.

In view of the limitations of previous studies as well as the pedagogical and practical needs, it is important to investigate the specific part-genre of the Discussion & Conclusion section of L2 doctoral students of social sciences within the particular local, historical, and cultural setting.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

Driven by the pedagogical and practical needs and the limitations of previous studies, the present study attempts to explore the nature of the difficulties of the particular Discussion & Conclusion section writing for L2 Chinese doctoral students on the one hand, and examine the ways in which this particular group of doctoral students construct and shape the specific thesis part-genre, on the other. To be more specific, this study will address three research questions:

(1) What are some of the significant problems for L2 Chinese doctoral students of social sciences in composing the Discussion & Conclusion section? Why do they have these problems?

(2) How do L2 Chinese doctoral students of social sciences negotiate the generic conventions in constructing and shaping this particular part-genre?

(3) How do L2 Chinese doctoral students of social sciences construct their writer identities in constructing and shaping this particular part-genre?

These questions will be elaborated and discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively.

## 1.3 The Significance of the Study

The study will employ both a product and process approach to fill in the gap