


Chapter 7


Rewriting the Self With AI: Intersectionality, Resilience, and International Student Narratives in the U.S. Higher Education Context

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how artificial intelligence (AI) tools mediate the identity development, emotional labor, and academic adaptation of international students in U.S. higher education. Framed through the lenses of intersectionality, resilience, and self-authorship, the chapter draws on duoethnography to examine how AI is used not merely as a technical aid but as a scaffold for rewriting the self in unfamiliar academic terrain. While AI offers immediate access to academic conventions, its reliance on dominant linguistic norms often flattens cultural expression and obscures opportunities for deeper growth. Through personal narrative, peer reflection, and theoretical analysis, this chapter interrogates what is gained and what is lost when AI supplements or replaces human-centered support systems. It argues that international student engagement with AI reveals a broader story about survival, belonging, and identity negotiation in an increasingly technologized and globalized university landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

Our shared experiences intersect in struggle and divergence. We come from nations shaped by colonial linguistics, collectivist cultures, and social expectations that shape how we speak, that influence how we speak and how we learn to silence parts of ourselves. Yet AI tools, which appeared at different times in our academic journeys, offered similar functions: survival, structure, and sometimes substitution. Through this duo-ethnography, we trace how AI has become not only a writing tool but a site of identity negotiation, cultural tension, and relational displacement.

This chapter unfolds as a duo-ethnography. We—Sovannak, from Cambodia, and Sri, from Indonesia—reflect on our intertwined yet distinct experiences as international scholars navigating academic identity and AI use in the United States. To begin, I (Sovannak) offer my narrative as the first point of entry into our shared exploration.

In my home context, identity was typically rooted in social structures, such as age, family reputation, and educational achievement. One's role was defined more by relational positioning than individual assertion. I was often introduced as “the one who passed the national exam,” or “the son of Mr. ____.” These layers of identity offered grounding, but they were also bound tightly to stability and tradition. In contrast, my arrival in the United States initiated a destabilization of that identity. In this new academic and cultural terrain, I was quickly categorized as “an Asian student,” “an ESL writer,” and “an international.” My identity became racialized and linguistic in ways I had not previously encountered or needed to navigate. I was no longer seen simply as a student, but as a student marked by difference.

This reconfiguration of identity, though subtle at first, became a defining feature of my academic journey. I began to internalize the way I was perceived through institutional labels and classroom dynamics. In seminars, I hesitated to speak, not only because I lacked full confidence in my spoken English, but also because I began to question the value of my perspective in a predominantly Western intellectual space. I felt, at times, invisible and yet hyper-visible at the same time.

Amidst these negotiations of identity and voice, I discovered artificial intelligence tools. Initially, it was Grammarly, alerting me to articles and syntax. Then QuillBot, offering paraphrased alternatives. Eventually, ChatGPT emerged as a resource that not only corrected but constructed: outlining arguments, proposing thesis statements, and even modelling tone and transition. What began as support quickly evolved into a routine practice, which is an invisible layer in my writing process. AI became a proxy mentor, a linguistic scaffold, and a tireless editor. It responded without judgment, without pause, and without the cultural friction that often characterized my encounters in writing centers or peer review sessions.

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