Chapter 9 Discussion and conclusions

9.1. Concluding summary

The aim of this study was to provide a comparative analysis of discursive practices and language use in newspaper commentaries on terrorism produced in China and Australia after 9/11. This study commenced with a literature review of contrastive rhetoric as a field of study. Previous contrastive research on Chinese and English writing was highlighted. The literature review demonstrated how the present study was linked to prior studies and what gaps it attempted to fill. The review revealed that most previous contrastive studies of Chinese and English writing have focused on the linearity/circularity argument. Few studies have attempted to or been able to, in a rigorous way, construct and provide a comparative account of the genre across these two languages and cultures. Chapter 3 reviewed different traditions of genre theories and provided a theoretical framework for the present study. These theories mainly covered new rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) perspectives on the genre. It was argued that these perspectives were complementary rather than contradictory in terms of analytical application. Chapter 4 extended the discussion of genre into other domains of discourse analysis. It reviewed the theoretical frameworks of critical discourse analysis and intertextuality with the aim of establishing further perspectives and analytical techniques for examining the genre under investigation. Specifically, Chapter 4 extended the form-oriented discussion of genre-based discourse analysis in Chapter 3 into the contextualised perspective on genre, which highlighted the necessity of analysing intertextuality and possible underlying socio-cultural factors of genre production and interpretation. This contextualised perspective provided a broader domain of analysis which would enable this study to go beyond the analysis of surface features and structures into other areas of genre analysis.

Chapter 5 described the research methodology employed in the study. This chapter provided the link between the theory and methodology outlined to this point, and the
detailed analyses and interpretation of the genre analysed in the subsequent chapters.

As a cross-cultural and cross-language contrastive genre study, this study explored how Chinese and Australian writers discursively construct newspaper commentaries on terrorism in China and Australia. It was designed as a three-level (textual, intertextual, and contextual) genre study, which, first, examined textual organisational patterns which included examining the micro-genres, generic and rhetorical structures that occurred in the texts, as well as identification of major participants and an appraisal analysis of the texts. Second, it analysed intertextual features of the texts, examining how the writers draw on outside sources to construct their own texts. Third, it explored possible contextual factors, especially the roles of the press and the opinion discourses in these two different socio-political settings, which could contribute to the formation of the commentaries in the two languages and cultures.

The textual analysis was presented in Chapter 6. First, the micro-genre that occurred in each text was identified. This part of the analysis included analysis of the generic and rhetorical structures of the texts. Second, identification of the major participants foregrounded in each text was examined. Finally evaluative stances were explored for understanding the emotional involvement of the Chinese and Australian writers towards terrorism in the texts that they wrote.

In analysing the micro-genres of the texts, it was found that generally the Chinese writers tended to employ the micro-genre of ‘media explanatory exposition’ (20 out of 25 texts) more often than other micro-genres. In terms of the rhetorical structures, however, the Chinese writers showed greater diversity and individuality in organising their texts. The Australian writers tended to use ‘media argumentative exposition’ as the dominant micro-genre (18 out of 25 texts), while the rhetorical structures that they used tended to be convergent and follow some stable patterns, which could be mostly characterised as the conventional three-part English exposition structure.

In tracking the participants focused on in each text, it was found that the Chinese
writers seemed to concentrate on non-human participants (both generic and specific) and avoid human participants while the Australian writers seemed to make a larger range of choices in the use of participants, including both human and non-human, and generic and specific participants.

In terms of attitude and graduation, it was found that both the Chinese and Australian writers shared a negative attitude towards terrorism and terrorists. The Australian writers, however, tended to be more emotional and evaluative oriented than their Chinese counterparts who seemed to take a more distanced approach towards the event of 9/11 and international terrorism.

Chapter 7 presented the intertextual analysis of the study. An analytical model adapted from Bazerman (2004) and White (2002) was developed to examine the nine sample texts chosen for the intertextual analysis. It was found that in the Chinese texts the intertextual practices of the writers differed greatly while in the Australian texts the writers usually worked closely with outside sources for supporting their own views. In the dominant Chinese micro-genre, explanatory exposition, the writers attempted to take the role of presenters of public opinion, in which they tried to keep a distance from their intertextual sources. It seemed that the Chinese writers tended to avoid becoming ‘the principal’ of their texts and evaded responsibility for what had been written by quoting other sources as in ‘it is reported…’, ‘it is said…’ or ‘from other sources…’. It was also found that the Chinese writers did not often indicate endorsement of intertextual sources. In other words, they did not indicate their stance toward the intertextual sources. At the end of their texts, however, the writer usually put forward proposals for dealing with terrorism, which did not seem to be connected to the intertextual sources. Some of the Chinese texts could be seen clearly as mouthpieces of the Chinese government (see e.g. CN 01). In these texts the government’s voices were expressed explicitly. The Chinese writers in this study were extremely cautious in what they wrote, and how they positioned themselves in relation to other sources. In doing this, they were perhaps aiming to create
homogeneous voices rather than attempting to let their individual voices be heard and compete with other voices in the particular social context. In the Chinese explanatory expositions, the writers were ‘the authors’ or ‘the animators’ of the texts rather than ‘principals’. However, in some Chinese texts (see e.g. in Hortatory exposition CN 02, Media challenge CR 08), the writers also made use of the intertextual sources in different ways for constructing their arguments. In these texts the writers seemed to take the role of commentators on the issues under discussion and worked out their own opinions from useful outside sources. In these cases, ‘the author’, ‘the animator’ and ‘the principals’ of the texts produced became one and the same person. It seemed that although there were strong tendencies for the Chinese writers to employ a top-down explanatory and object-centred rhetoric, individualised variations in rhetorical and discursive practices were also apparent in the Chinese texts.

In the Australian texts, intertextual sources were widely used and the writers exploited intertextual sources in various ways to support their positions. The Australian writers usually took public ideas as sources and orientated readers to follow their thinking, and convert them to their positions. Quite often, the outside sources were assimilated into the Australian texts without attribution. The Australian writers did not often attribute these sources to any specific agency, but endorsed them in various ways. That is, they manipulated these sources and either directly or indirectly indicated support for or against them. At the same time, the Australian writers put forward opinions, which could be quite contradictory to those of other writers. The Australian writers worked closely with their intertextual sources and took the role of commentators on the issues under discussion. Their opinions competed with each other for appealing to the readers’ attention in the particular social context. It could be concluded that the Australian writers in this study were generally working as ‘the author’, ‘the animator’ and ‘the principal’ of the texts, as one and the same person.

In an attempt to unravel the complex relationship between the discursive practices and their respective socio-cultural and socio-political contexts, Chapter 8 explored the
roles of the press and opinion discourses in China and Australia. It also explicated how the discourses on terrorism were represented in different themes and topics in the two particular settings. It was observed that China’s mass media was limited by its long-standing role as a mouthpiece of the Party and as a consequence China’s mass media usually adopted a paternalistic top-down approach to presenting issues. It seemed that this top-down explanatory micro-genre which dominated in the Chinese texts fulfilled the social functions of the mass media in ‘educating’ readers about what terrorism was and how the Chinese government proposed to deal with it. It also appeared that the discourses on terrorism in China were generally constituted by three themes in the Chinese commentaries in this study. They were, first, the awareness of the nature and origin of terrorism and the terrorist attack; second, an advocacy for combating terrorism cooperatively under the leadership of the UN; and third, analyses of the possible impacts of this terrorist attack on economies and the world order. These three themes could be argued as ‘high level’ topics that had little connection to the particular happenings in the aftermath of 9/11, such as the US military retaliation. The textual and intertextual practices adopted by the Chinese writers were consonant with the roles that the press and commentaries tended to play in the Chinese society.

In Australia, however, the mass media were more positioned and justified as watchdogs on political institutions and the social processes those institutions created and defended (Cunningham & Turner, 2002). The mass media in Australia were seen as being more commercialised and profit-driven than in China. They also enjoyed much more freedom and independence in news selection and publication (Marshall & Kingsbury, 1996). Moreover, the Australian press served not only as a conduit for information to the public, but also as a guardian of the people’s fundamental right to free expression of opinion (Schultz, 1997, 1998).

In the English language commentaries published in Australia, the discourses on terrorism were depicted under heteroglossic voices and diverse themes, in which two seemingly contradictory logics were foregrounded. These were the logic of ‘us’ versus
‘them’ and the logic of ‘humanitarianism’. Under the logic of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, the writers highlighted the differences between the ‘democratic/civilised’ western world and ‘barbaric/uncivilised’ terrorist states. The writers holding the logic of ‘humanitarianism’ tended to depict terrorists as humans. Thus, writers with different political and ideological perspectives set forth their own arguments by drawing on different textual and intertextual techniques. These discursive practices and positions were also found to be consistent with the role of the press and opinion discourses in Australian society, which tended to be an open forum for the public.

9.2. Discussion

9.2.1. Newspaper commentaries on terrorism as social action in China and Australia

As discussed in Chapter 2, newspaper commentaries, together with other newspaper opinion discourses such as editorials and letters to the editor, have received less sustainable theoretical and empirical attention by scholars from different fields of studies than ‘hard’ news (see e.g. Fowler, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1997; van Dijk, 1988; White, 1998). Even in previous contrastive rhetorical research on editorials (e.g. Tirkkonen-Condit, 1988, 1996; Tirkkonen-Condit & Lieflander-Koistinen, 1989), little attention has been given to how to establish a tertium comparationis at different levels of analysis and how to incorporate a contextualised perspective on genre into the studies. Under such a backdrop this study treated newspaper commentaries on the events of 9/11 as social action, and considered different linguistic features and discursive practices that Chinese and Australian writers employed in writing newspaper commentaries to response to the events of 9/11. As observed by Bhatia (2004), this emphasis on social action in genre studies is on the increase, especially in research by scholars from a predominantly socio-cognitive background. This perspective on genre provided a contextualised view that enabled the present study to consider not only structural patterning of the texts, but also intertextual and contextual aspects of the genre under investigation.
Taking the newspaper commentaries on terrorism in the two socio-cultural settings as social action, the study established a comparable platform for the cross-cultural and cross-language analysis. As for the comparability of the genre between the two different social contexts, it can be argued that 9/11 generated simultaneous news reportages in China and Australia under the two countries’ communication and broadcasting systems. Although both China and Australia claimed to take an anti-terrorist stance after September 11, Australia seemed to be much more involved emotionally, politically and even militarily in this issue than China, due to many historical and political factors. This observation has been confirmed by the following findings in the present study.

First, in terms of the amount of newspaper commentaries found in these two different contexts, taking the first three months after the events of 9/11 as the timeframe for data collection, only 43 Chinese newspaper commentaries appeared in 440 core newspapers across China while for the Australian newspaper commentaries 221 pieces from the seven key newspapers in Australia were collected. The striking differences between the numbers of the newspaper commentaries and newspapers indicated that the topic of terrorism could be bearing quite different weights on the peoples in the two countries. In addition, it was also interesting to find that the most important and dominant newspaper in China – the *People’s Daily* – had its first direct commentary (Ref. No. CN01, see Appendix I-1: Data sources for details) on 9/11 on the 3rd November 2001, about two months after the event. Although some relevant commentaries (Ref. No. CN 03, 04, 05) were published in the *People’s Daily* before that, they were not directly related to the events of 9/11, whereas Australian newspapers were filled with various news, editorials and commentaries on the event immediately after 11 September 2001.

Newspaper commentaries are largely seen as reflecting the individual voices of experienced and elite journalists or academics, at least ‘superficially’, while editorials represent the institutional voices. However, it was found that some of the Chinese
commentaries in this study were actually representations of the government’s voices via the individualised form of commentaries. This could be due to the fact the conventional newspaper editorial, which has historically been a landmark outlet of the Party’s voices, has become an obsolete and unpopular newspaper genre in contemporary China (Wu & Liu, 2001). Moreover, this could also be understood as a strategy developed by the Party propaganda system and the press in China to restructure the mouthpiece of the Party to accommodate the ever-changing social and economic context in China. In Australia, however, both newspaper editorials and commentaries were widely found to express diverse opinions and ideas on this international tragedy. There was a clear distinction between newspaper editorials and commentaries in terms of Australian newspaper practices.

In short, in the face of the events of 9/11 the Chinese and Australian presses responded quite differently in terms of the numbers of commentaries published and the ways of representing individual and institutional voices.

9.2.2. Similarities and differences between Chinese and English writing practices

A review of the literature revealed that the field of contrastive rhetoric is well served in terms of a research base, encompassing a rapidly expanding range of studies with the potential to inform language learning and cross-cultural communication. It was found that in contrastive studies between Chinese and English writing, the major focus was still on superficial rhetorical organisation exploring the ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’ structure of texts rather than going deeper to explore how texts are discursively constructed to become coherent pieces. More specifically, if considered from a systemic functional perspective, previous contrastive studies of Chinese and English writing have largely focused on experiential and textual meanings rather than on interpersonal meanings. Most of these studies do not incorporate appraisal analysis and research in new rhetoric genre studies into their works. None of these studies has examined interpersonal and intertextual aspects of discourses in Chinese language. In addition, it was also found that most of these studies focused on just one language:
Chinese texts or ESL writing by Chinese speakers. Few studies included the study of two languages together using the same textual criteria or theoretical framework for the analysis.

The present study not only examined rhetorical ‘surface structures’ of newspaper commentaries on the events of 9/11 in Chinese and English, it also went deeper in its level of analysis. That is, it also examined interpersonal and intertextual features of the texts. The study found that Chinese newspaper commentaries differed greatly from their Australian counterparts. These differences include the micro-genres, the participants, the evaluative stances taken, and the intertextual practices employed by the Chinese and Australian writers.

At the textual level, it was found that most Chinese newspaper commentaries employed a micro-genre of explanatory exposition, which were also ‘object-centred’ and focused on non-human participants in discussing the issues, while the Australian texts predominantly used the micro-genre of argumentative exposition. This finding further confirmed Taylor and Chen’s (1991) opinion that there was a lack of a tradition of disputation in China. Another possible reason for this difference might be socio-cultural factors, such as differences in collectivism and individualism between Chinese and Western cultures (Ho & Chiu, 1994). In Ho and Chiu’s (1994) opinion, Chinese culture tends to be collectivistic. Group identity supersedes individual identity and the collective or common good is generally regarded as more important than the well-being of individuals. To a certain extent, it is often believed that collectivistic cultures tend to maintain a relatively strict social hierarchy so the individuals are kept in their respective places. As a result, conformity to larger social norms is prevalent in collectivistic cultures. The homogenous voices represented in the Chinese commentaries and explanatory expositions used by the writers could be reflections of this tradition. That is, in the explanatory expositions, the Chinese writers set up a kind of social ‘norm’ which they encouraged their readers to follow.

At the interpersonal and intertextual levels, the study found that the Chinese writers
seemed to be emotionally alienated from the topic and tended to construct a homogenous voice for understanding the issue of terrorism in accordance with the government standpoint on this issue. In the Australian newspaper commentaries, diverse themes and heterogenous voices were observed in the texts. The Australian writers seemed to engage in a discussion of the issues and offered different perspectives and opinions on predicting the responses of the American governments and the aftermath of the events of 9/11. The Australian writers also drew on various outside sources to convince their audience that what they were saying was credible. The study suggests that the Chinese and English writing was the product of their respective socio-cultural and political contexts. The study, thus, broadened the scope and depth of contrastive Chinese and English discourse studies by examining how writers manipulated their topic, addressed their audiences and how they drew on outside sources for constructing their own writing.

9.2.3. Research methodologies in contrastive rhetoric and discourse studies

A review of the literature in contrastive rhetoric studies revealed that most research was oriented to textual meaning, concerned with the rhetorical organisations of texts rather than interpersonal, intertextual or other discursive practices of texts. This included contrastive studies on newspaper discourses which explored the relationship between ideology and language use. Studies such as Dantas-Whitney and Grabe (1989), Tirkkonen-Condit (1996), Tirkkonen-Conid and Lieflander-Koistinen (1989), Scollon (2000) and Fang (2001) generally examined how discourse features, such as lexical choices, grammatical elements, thematic structure may be varied or manipulated to fulfill the communicative purposes of texts. Interpersonal and intertextual aspects of discourse were not examined in these studies. In order to develop a better understanding of these aspects of discursive practices of texts, the present study incorporated various analytical frameworks and techniques in discourse and non-discourse analysis, which included rhetorical analysis (e.g. Hoey, 1983, 2000), systemic functional linguistics (e.g. Martin, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003;
Martin & White, 2005), new rhetoric genre studies (e.g. Bazerman, 2004), critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1992a, 1995a), theories in media studies (e.g. Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) and discussions of mass media in mainland China and Australia (e.g. Zhao, 1998; Huang, 2003; Zhang & Fleming, 2005; Schultz, 1997, 1998).

To understand the social contexts in which these texts were produced, principles of critical discourse analysis were drawn on in the study. Moreover, based on Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) discussion of the hierarchy of influences on media content, the roles of the press and opinion discourses in the two socio-cultural and socio-political contexts were recognised as crucial for understanding the formation of the texts. In this way, non-discourse approaches drawn from media studies were incorporated into the study to obtain a deeper understanding of how the mass media in these two socio-cultural and socio-political contexts might have influenced and mediated the construction of the genre under investigation.

The idea of combining different discourse and non-discourse approaches for solving specific research questions is based on the understanding that each approach can produce different knowledge about the social phenomenon under study. The combined application of the approaches is designed both to incorporate the particular form of knowledge each approach contributes and to draw on the explanatory power of the multiperspectival framework as a whole as a social research methodology.

While general tendencies of the rhetorical and discursive preferences of the Chinese and Australian newspaper commentaries have been described, endeavours have also been made to account for individual variation and the heterogeneous discursive practices of individual writers in the study. As Connor (2004) warns, researchers have to be careful that a rigorous approach to genre identification and comparison of genres across cultures should not lead to purely structuralist, received cultural interpretations. In other words, in establishing a tertium comparationis, researchers are often forced to essentialise discourse communities and not take account of individual variation in the
production and reception of the genre studies. Researchers, thus, need to consider reasons for the similarities and differences that they observe (Connor, 2004). These have been attended to in the process of the analysis.

The theoretical and analytical framework employed in this study provides perspectives that may contribute to the development of contrastive rhetoric and discourse studies. This perspective highlights discourse practices from the writers’ point of view. It includes an effort to understand how writers use different language strategies and devices to position themselves, manipulate the topic, and address their audience, and also how the writers draw on other sources to write their own texts. In addition, possible socio-cultural and socio-political factors are explored for further understanding the underlying factors for text production in specific contexts.

9.3. Directions for further research

To understand the textual, intertextual and contextual features, the analytical framework developed in the present study could be implemented in other discourse communities and in other languages for the study of other genres. The integration of a linguistic and non-linguistic framework for genre analysis may provide a way for examining writers’ discursive practices in other socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, many areas and issues of this genre study could also be further investigated. Although the study analysed 50 Chinese and English texts in great detail, further research could be carried out to examine Chinese newspaper commentaries in a larger corpora and also in broader regions and countries, such as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and other countries, in which Chinese newspaper commentaries can be found in local Chinese newspapers. At the same time, similar studies could be carried out in English language newspaper commentaries published in the USA, Britain, Canada and other English speaking countries. As a result, different socio-cultural factors and writing practices that may influence the writing of Chinese and English could be explored and a better picture might then be obtained of textual
choices and reasons for these preferences.

To serve different goals of discourse analysis, the genre under investigation could also be explored by adopting different research approaches. Three different research approaches that could be implemented are, first, a quantitative approach which involves a corpus linguistic analysis; second, an ethnographic approach that explores writers’ behaviours in a specific context; third, a more socially-oriented critical discourse analysis that considers the broader social, political and ideological forces that shape the texts in their respective contexts.

The quantitative approach to discourse analysis could be carried out on a similar type of data for understanding different language use in two different languages. Large corpora could be established to examine the common tendencies of different lexico-grammatical use of texts. This could also gain insights into the core values and beliefs of the practices of the communities. The quantitative approach to discourse analysis usually adopts corpus linguistic methods in which a computer corpus is put together “in a principled way and prepared for computer processing” (Johansson, 1998, p.3). According to Kaplan and Grabe (2002), and Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1994, 1998), corpus analysis provides insights into: (1) specific aspects of language structure and use, (2) the occurrence of features and structures throughout texts, (3) variation across texts in a range of differing contexts and uses, and (4) resources for language awareness in language teaching.

By adopting quantitative approaches, there is potential to analyse issues such as ‘identification’, ‘appreciation’, ‘judgement’ and ‘affect’ by developing softwares to identify the corresponding lexical items in two languages. More revealing statistical significance could be expected through collecting and analysing larger corpora in two languages.

An ethnographic approach to discourse could be carried out to provide further observations and accounts of writers’ behaviours in specific contexts. This approach
may focus on some issues in the context of the typical sites of engagement to examine the physical circumstances that influence the nature and construction of genre. According to Swales (1998) and Bhatia (2004), information that could be achieved through a set of ethnographical procedures may include the following:

- Detached observational accounts of expert behaviour;
- Lived experience of expert members of the community of practice;
- Convergent narrative accounts of first-hand experiences of active professionals;
- Textographies of discursive practices.

As Swales (1998) explains, textography is a partial ethnography which aims to make visible the beliefs and practices of members of a culture or community. This approach focuses on the forms and formation of the written texts themselves as produced by members of the community through an exploration of their contextually embedded discursive practices. Ethnographic approaches, in other words, may provide thicker pictures of the genre in question. That is, they could illustrate the scenes behind pure linguistics features found from textual analysis. In carrying out an ethnographic procedure, there are no ‘cold’ mathematics and complicated statistics. Instead, there is direct, face-to-face interaction with the people in the setting, in which the genre in question is produced and consumed. More importantly, sometimes they could provide information about individual variations in the production and reception of the genres studied.

A more socially oriented critical discourse analysis could be carried out to consider the broader social, political and ideological forces that shape the texts in their respective contexts. The discussion of discourse in this circumstance could go beyond the language features of the texts per se, or even ignore them totally. This analysis could be concerned with social changes reflected in discourse, relationships of discourse and social structures, patterns of language, ideology and power, and social practices, identities and motives. In these circumstances, the analysis of language use
and discourse strategies are surrendered to the understanding of ideological positioning, power relationship and other socio-political issues. Cross-language and cross-cultural studies of this type could be better called contrastive discourse studies rather than contrastive rhetorical studies since their main concerns are not only linguistic strategies, but, more importantly, the ideological and political practices behind texts. Studies of this type on Chinese could include the work of Fang (2001) and Wang, S. (1993). However, in my view, it may be more likely to make informed judgements about the use of professional discourse by integrating both ‘social’ and ‘textual’ aspects of analysis.

The above-mentioned three different approaches proposed to investigate the genre in question are not conclusive or exhaustive. They simply highlight some of the analytical approaches that could be employed to explore different aspects of the genres in different domains. Different approaches have strengths and weakness in contributing to knowledge about the genre under concern. The specific knowledge generated by any one framework or an integrated framework is only one part of ‘the elephant’ – the genre. The interest on analysing genres may be motivated by a variety of applications within and across disciplinary boundaries in different social contexts. In serving these purposes and aims, an open and constructive premise needs to be maintained. That means researchers need to keep an open mind in appropriating and integrating different research approaches with somewhat different spotlights, specific perspectives, varied applications, and distinct methodological procedures for probing the research questions set for the specific project. It may, therefore, be concluded that contrastive rhetoric and discourse studies could be greatly enhanced by employing a multidimensional view of analysis which has an interest in the integration of different research methodologies and frameworks for analysing discourses and practices in various professional, institutional and social domains.
9.4. Conclusions

This study examined how newspaper commentaries on terrorism are discursively constructed in Chinese and Australian newspapers at three levels of analysis, namely, textual, intertextual and contextual. It examined the textual patterning of the Australian and Chinese commentaries, interpersonal and intertextual features of the texts as well as explored possible contextual factors which contributed to the formation of the newspaper commentaries in the two different languages and cultures.

The study observed that Chinese writers often use explanatory rather than argumentative expositions in newspaper commentaries. They seem to distance themselves from outside sources and seldom indicate endorsement of these sources. Australian writers, on the other hand, predominantly use argumentative expositions to argue their points of view. They integrate and manipulate outside sources in various ways to establish and provide support for the views they express. These textual and intertextual practices are closely related to contextual factors, especially the roles of the media and opinion discourse in contemporary China and Australia.

The study also revealed that the Chinese commentaries focused mainly on explaining what terrorism is, advocating an anti-terrorist battle under the leadership of the UN and discussing the possible impacts of the 9/11 on the world economy. The Australian commentaries on terrorism debated on the rhetoric of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and whether a ‘humanitarian’ approach should be adopted to combat terrorism. These findings are very much consonant with the role of the press in China as the mouthpiece of the government and in Australia mainly as a public forum for discussion.

The study established a framework for contrastive genre studies which moved beyond the text into the context of production and interpretation of the text as a way of exploring reasons for linguistic and rhetorical choices made in the two sets of texts. The study could, of course, be enriched by incorporating other theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches to further explore the genre under investigation. The study has, however, shown how newspaper commentaries on terrorism in China and
Australia are constructed in different ways. It has also shown that many of these differences can be traced back to the different socio-cultural settings in which the texts occur. It has done this by drawing together textual, intertextual and contextual views on the texts under consideration as a way of aiming to understand not only what the writers do, but also why they do what they do.