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**CROSS-CULTURAL
EDUCATIONAL ADJUSTMENT:
A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY
BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES
OF A GROUP OF
MAINLAND CHINESE
POSTGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of**

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ABSTRACT

This project explored a basic social process experienced by ten Mainland Chinese postgraduate business students: cross-cultural educational adjustment. Over a two-year period, three interviews were held with each student in order to elicit his or her experience of this adaptation process. In addition, toward the end of this period an attestation group with the same student profile was recruited to review the emergent findings.

A qualitative approach termed grounded theory was used for the methodology. Emphasis was placed on: hearing the students' voices; being open to students' experiences; developing a deep understanding of the adaptation process; and determining its theoretical conceptualisation. The initial interview was an inductive enquiry that isolated many aspects of the students' journey; the second interview deductively bent back on the initial data to saturate categories and determine how they were linked; the third interview further saturated categories, if needed, and sought a core category that underpinned the students' adjustment.

In determining a theoretical conceptualisation of this process, a model was developed. This was shared with the original participants and the attestation group to assess their perspective of it. The model depicts that the homogeneity of the students' background produced an externally bounded and culturally harmonised learner identity. When they entered the New Zealand tertiary environment this identity was fractured. However, the resilient nature of the learner identity, the adoption of learning strategies, and the drawing on prime motivators meant a complete fracturing of the identity was prevented. Yet, as a consequence, the learner identity also absorbed new, more internalised elements. Overall, the core concept of a better future impelled students through all aspects of their journey.

The major contributions of this study are that it presents an integrated understanding of cross-cultural educational adjustment and a conceptual picture of that process. The findings of this study, while limited in generalisability, suggest that students would benefit from: pre-departure culture and English language preparation; focused orientation programmes; and study skill support based on the strategies they are likely to employ and build the skills required in the new setting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ideally, I would be able to say that this is the story of ten Mainland Chinese students. Yet, while I acknowledge their much appreciated help, their story has also become, by way of negotiated meanings and educational purpose, my thesis. It is my prayer that their story shines through and that my attempt to theorise does justice to, and does not obscure, their experiences. Personally, it was a joy to relate to these inspiring students over a two year period and I am so grateful that they shared their *Journey to the West* so openly with me. Therefore, this study is dedicated to them.

Confucius famously said: “A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.” The desire to begin this project was driven by observing, from my viewpoint as an international student support worker, the struggles and triumphs of many students engaging in study in a foreign land. Now that this particular journey is complete all I can do is to be thankful for the companions who shared it with me. The group I worked for as the project began encouraged and allowed time for professional development. My subsequent employer, in quite a different field of education, also encouraged, provided time, and even some funds for the project’s continuance. For the support from these two groups I am very grateful.

As so often happens, starting a journey is easier than seeing it through to the end. It is very true to say that this dissertation would not have been completed without the contribution of my supervisors Dr. Penny Haworth and Professor Wayne Edwards. Penny’s careful and thoughtful observations on my text and process and Wayne’s wise experience have provided the necessary signposts, rest stops, and refuelling such a large task demands. As this journey ends I can only, once again, express my profound gratitude for all they have written, said, and done.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABC	Affective Behavioural Cognitive
BAF	Business and Administration Faculty
BSP	Basic Social Problem
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CIC	Conditions Interactions Consequences
EQ	Email Questionnaire
HOF	Head of Faculty
IRB	Institutional Review Boards
LAU	Learning Assistance Unit
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee

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