Chapter 3
Learning at Half Capacity:
The Academic Acculturation Reality Experienced by Chinese International Students

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ABSTRACT

First, this chapter provides an overview of current research on international students' academic acculturation under the lens of self-determination theory in relation to international students' psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Next, the authors report on a recent study that explored academic acculturation experiences using musically enhanced narrative inquiry, a unique form of arts-based research that produces musical representations of the stories of six international student participants studying at a Canadian university. Lastly, the authors propose future directions for Canadian higher education stakeholders to become more supportive and inclusive of international students on Canadian university campuses.

INTRODUCTION

International student mobility is among the most prominent twenty-first century phenomena that higher education systems experience all around the world (Beech, 2019; Knight, 2012). Many Canadian universities are increasing international student enrollment to cope with challenges presented by the internationalization of Canadian higher education and to enhance their fiscal revenue and global prestige (Zhang & Beck, 2014). However, with the student population in Canadian universities becoming increasingly diversified, acculturation problems faced by international students have become critical, requiring more attention from Canadian higher education policy makers (Du, 2019). Tailoring infrastructure and services

to better support international students' successful academic acculturation has become a vital task for many Canadian higher education stakeholders (Du, 2019).

In Canada, enrolment of post-secondary international students was 435,415 in 2018—a 17% jump from 2017 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2019). The potential benefits for both host institutions and international students are substantial (Elliot, Reid, & Baumfield, 2016). The surge in international student enrollment provides institutions with economic advantages, a more international-ized campus, and a more global institutional impact (Zhang & Beck, 2014). Meanwhile, international students can benefit from better educational opportunities, enriched personal growth, and more promis-ing employment prospects (Elliot, Reid, & Baumfield, 2016). However, international students can also encounter significant challenges (Carter, 2016; Du, 2019).

Acculturating into a foreign academic setting as an international student is a stressful process (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Helping students acculturate successfully into a new academic setting has a significant impact on their subsequent overseas learning experiences (Xing, Bolden, & Hogenkamp, 2019). Studies have consistently demonstrated that international students are psychologically vulnerable during their academic acculturation (e.g., Aubrey, 1991; Gao, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). International students encounter a range of academic acculturation stressors including language challenges, educational and social differences, discrimination, and practical stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The interaction of these stressors often leads to harsh international academic acculturation experiences for international students on Canadian university campuses (Du, 2019; Xing & Bolden, 2019). The challenges of aca-demic acculturation not only contribute to mental health crises, but also raise concerns around equity and inclusion that tax university administrators and faculty (Choy & Alon, 2019; Tannock, 2018).

While many Canadian universities affirm their commitment to educational equity and inclusion, there exists an increasing concern that these institutions have been focusing on the economic benefits brought by international students without allocating adequate resources to support their successful academic acculturation (e.g., Gao, 2019; Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014; Zhang & Beck, 2014). For example, cultural competence training and multilingual counselling services have been identified by international students as important resources that could facilitate their academic acculturation, but were lacking in their host institutions (Kim, 2018; Xing & Bolden, 2019). Lee (2015) suggested that instead of attributing international students' adjustment issues to their lack of coping skills or inability to adapt, host institutions should examine the effectiveness of the services they provide. For instance, many support programs designed to help international students acculturate socially cannot reach international students with limited oral English communication capacity who need the most support because such support pro-grams required a high command of oral English to fully engage and benefit (Xing, 2017). As Canadian universities continue to develop strategies to attract international students (Gopal, 2017), it is incumbent on those institutions to ensure relevant personnel—including administrators, faculty, instructors, and student services staff—have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the academic acculturation realities experienced by post-secondary international students in Canada. Canadian universities need to design support programs and facilitate international students' academic acculturation so that they are able to have the positive Canadian educational experiences the institutions advertise.

Skyrocketing international student enrollment in Canadian universities has been accompanied by a plethora of research studies published on international students in Canada (Du, 2019). However, many of the studies have made use of quantitative research methods, with relatively few qualitative studies that report the realities experienced by international students struggling to acculturate into their host institu-tions (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The authors propose that the use of qualitative methods can provide an

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