

**Understanding the Adjustment of
Chinese Business Expatriates: A Grounded Theory Study**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of DBA

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

2023

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

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Acknowledgements

I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors whose guidance has been invaluable both academically and intellectually. Their mentorship and inspiration have pushed me to think critically about my research and ensure that I conduct it in an ethical and responsible manner. Professor Annette Fillery-Travis, my lead supervisor, has always been approachable, and her smile, encouragement, patience, demonstrations, and inspiration have eased my anxieties and motivated me to stay focused on my research goals and keep moving forward. My second supervisor, Dr Caroline Jawad, is compassionate and caring towards her students and rigorous in her class and mentorship. She has provided me with immense support both inside and outside the classroom. I am forever grateful for their guidance and help.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the staff who have helped me over the past five years. Special thanks go to Dr Gareth Hughes, who has always been helpful during my time studying in the UK. He has always been willing to spare some time to engage in interesting conversations and discussions on various topics, providing excellent opportunities for me to reflect and grow. I would also like to thank my classmates who have been with me throughout this journey. We have supported and helped each other, faced difficulties and challenges, and propelled each other's growth. They are not just my classmates but also

irreplaceable friends.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family. They have provided me with unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their trust and understanding have allowed me to focus on my studies and overcome various obstacles. Without their support, I cannot imagine myself being able to complete my study.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to all the people who have offered me help and support. Although I have not listed every person who has helped me, I cherish and remember the contributions and assistance of each of you. Thank you!

Abstract

The number of Chinese expatriates has vastly expanded with an increase of 240% to more than 1.4 million during the last decade (MOFCOM, 2021; 2010). However, little attention has been paid to them and their adjustment experiences in academic circle. Currently, the majority of research of expatriate adjustment is western-specific, and almost all theories and models in this field are developed from western perspective and naturally lack a consideration of non-western situational factors. This research focuses on the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates and aims to explore the factors influencing their adjustment and develop a framework of adjustment thus to help better understand and guide the practice of Chinese expatriates.

The research adopts grounded theory research and attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge on adjustment of Chinese expatriates and construct an explanatory theory that reveals the inherent process of expatriation. The findings identify four major themes influencing the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates: expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, supporting resources and adjustment strategies. On that basis, this research develops a framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates, which reflects the influence of Chinese context and represents a new perspective of describing the adjustment process of them.

As grounded in the practice of Chinese business expatriates, this research makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field. As an innovation and redevelopment of existing cross-cultural adjustment research, it describes and explains the expatriation practice and adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. It also serves as a reference for human resource managers and expatriates and guides them on how to recognise and cope with the issue of expatriate adjustment. Some suggestions have been put forward

for relevant organisations to improve expatriates' adjustment according to the research findings.

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List of Abbreviations

AE	Assigned Expatriate
GT	Grounded Theory
HCN	Host Country National
IB	International Business
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
OFDI	Outward Foreign Direct Investment
P	Participant
PSA	Psychology; Sociology; Anthropology
SIE	Self-initiated Expatriate
TCN	Third Country National

Chapter 1 Introduction to the research

1.1 Introduction

This research seeks to advance the understanding of the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. This introduction chapter first presents the research motivation, followed by a description of the background to this research through a brief introduction to expatriation and presenting a trend of it and then providing the significance of expatriate adjustment. It then explains the necessity of conducting this research, presents the research questions, aims, and objectives, provides a brief overview of the research method, and discusses the significance and potential theoretical and practical contributions of this study. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the thesis structure.

1.2 Research motivation

For more than twenty years, I have been studying and working with English language in mainland China. As a college English teacher with two overseas study experiences (one in the UK studying for a doctorate degree, the other in the US as a visiting scholar), I have had many opportunities to communicate with different kinds of people from different countries and cities. I am used to the situation that people have different interpretations of a same particular sentence, or event, and that, in a bigger sense, how they make meanings and construct their own world through their own language. Through these intercultural communications, I sense and perceive ubiquitous differences and common values between cultures and individuals, and this enables me to see and interpret the world from a more inclusive and open perspective.

I pay due respect to and hold empathy for every person from different places, countries and cultures, and feel disappointed to a world that falls into anger and fear as I think people, no matter who is taking a temporary lead, are all

constructing, living in and trapped in their own world with their unique and specific conditions. I then believe that effective dialogues between cultures is the source of progress of human civilizations, which cannot be attained easily just by some scratch rather than through a deep, authentic and sincere interaction. For this reason, I came to the UK for my doctoral study.

As a DBA student, I was very excited about learning in business management field. I enjoyed being out in a different environment, and business management particularly interested me because of the opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills which I could apply within my further career as perhaps an educational manager.

However, my experience of studying and living in the UK has witnessed not only about the excitement and joys of pursuing knowledge and experiencing new lifestyle, but also involved with anxiety and pains due to my cross-cultural adjustment. I identified there was real difficulty in coming from a very different culture, and this really impacted on people's ability to fulfil their potential. I deeply felt that cross-cultural adjustment is a great challenge even though I had a certain understanding of British culture and language, and my adjustment level and quality undoubtedly influenced my learning outcome explicitly and implicitly.

Interestingly, my background enables me to reflect on my personal adjustment and gradually develops and promotes my curiosity and interest in the topic of cross-cultural adjustment. If I, as a relatively culturally prepared "expatriate", faced and suffered from this cross-cultural adjustment, then what about the other Chinese overseas? This question naturally led me to the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates, a general topic which connects both cross-cultural adjustment and business administration. What difficulties do they encounter? How do they adjust? Apart from my curiosity and interest, I also expected to present a picture of Chinese business expatriates from a non-western perspective and promote better understandings between different

culture groups.

1.3 Research background

1.3.1 Expatriation in change

Multinational corporations (MNCs) rely on expatriate employees to improve their competitiveness in the global market (Kraimer et al., 2016). Since WW2, and in particular this past generation, the world has witnessed the continued acceleration of economic globalization and an increasing rise in labour mobility (Baruch et al., 2016). Common reasons for organisations to use expatriates are control and coordination, knowledge transfer and learning development between parent company and host subsidiaries (Baruch et al., 2016). However, this trend has been interrupted by the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic, which challenges many assumptions about work and life, and decreases global mobility (Lazarova et al., 2022). MNCs defer all or part of their international assignments, with many international assignees working in countries different from the original host country (Mercer, 2021). At the same time, more than half of expatriates have to return home to continue working. More companies are forecasting decreases in the short term rather than increases in numbers for most assignment types compared to their pre-pandemic plan (ECA International, 2020). However, industry reports remain optimistic about the eventual return of international assignments. MNCs largely view such restrictions as temporary, with a majority (86%) of global mobility leaders noting that they are only delaying - not eliminating - new international assignments (PwC Mobility, 2020).

Having the right person in the right place at the right time is always crucial, and global mobility has demonstrated extraordinary value by helping maintain business continuity in turbulent times of employee turnover and border closures (Deloitte, 2021). Almost all (98%) business leaders believe that their global mobile professionals are essential to the implementation of the strategy

(Santa Fe Relocation, 2021), which is consistent with the view of multinational corporations (MNCs) relying on expatriates to improve their competitiveness in the global market before the pandemic (Kraimer et al., 2016).

1.3.2 The significance of expatriate adjustment

IB field has long known that expatriates will experience stress when they are in a novel or uncertain environment (Gudykunst, 2005; Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005) and has been working on cross-cultural adjustment (Okpara and Kabongo, 2022). Literature shows that expatriates' adjustment is closely related to their performance (Uddin et al., 2020; Jyoti and Kour, 2015), and the consequence of failure in adjustment can be overwhelming to both expatriates and their organisation.

The cost of international assignments remains high in both financial and nonfinancial aspects (Sarkiunaite and Rocke, 2015). In terms of financial cost, it is estimated that unsuccessful expatriates cost between 2.5 to 10 times the rate of a local hire (Ditchburn and Brook, 2015). Nonfinancial consequences for the company include reputational damage, loss in relationships with government, business partner and customers, loss of business opportunities, and morale loss in local organisation (Shi and Franklin, 2014). Difficulties in expatriate adjustment can mean psychological stress for the individual, reduction in performance and failure to integrate (Sambasivan et al, 2017), expatriate burnout and wasted talent (Gibson et al, 2015). A failed expatriation also causes loss of self-confidence, strained family relationships, and career disruption (Gibson et al., 2015). In addition, expatriates' poor adjustment and performance may lead to negative behaviors like excessive absences, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, aggression toward others and possible early termination of assignments (Rosenbusch et al, 2015). It is estimated that as many as 40% of employees return home early due to an inability to adjust (Kim and Slocum, 2008). Therefore, expatriates' adjustment becomes a key factor

in the success of the international assignment.

It is on the basis of the significance of expatriate adjustment that a number of theoretical summaries and frameworks have been developed in the past three decades (e.g., Black et al. 1991; Takeuchi, 2010; Haslberger et al., 2013) which have deepened understanding of expatriate adjustment and have effectively guided expatriation practice. However, the understanding of expatriate adjustment keeps changing with time and international situations. The past decade saw a stalled globalization, though not collapsed, with more protectionist measures. Political deglobalization has advanced much further, and there is likely to be more intense conflict over trade and financial regulation in the future, and resistance to immigration will grow stronger (James, 2018). In addition, the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 has increased the uncertainty of expatriation and expatriate adjustment. Caligiuri et al (2020) find that there are fewer foreigners living abroad, and those sent abroad need to achieve greater success faster than previous generations of expatriates, because the risk of expatriation seems to be higher, and their adjustment speed will be crucial. Employees may prefer to stay wherever they feel most comfortable, fulfilled and safe (Prudential, 2021), which in turn may limit the supply of employees who are willing to accept international assignments (Collins and Sheeran, 2020). As a result, improving expatriates' experience has increasingly become an important means to improve expatriation efficiency (Airinc, 2021).

It is indeed that norms for expatriation and global mobility are changing as a result of the pandemic, with uncertainty and virtual work playing a larger role in the management of foreign assignments (Végh et al., 2023). However, only 3% of the company interviewed have a formal policy for virtual assignment when 40% are considering of it (Airinc, 2023), which indicates that virtual assignment will not necessarily replace existing assignment types. "Living and working abroad", contributing to a range of international skills, a global perspective, and

intercultural competence, along with a “global mindset” to lead and facilitate effective work and communication, is still one of the key reasons that individuals choose and HR departments encourage international assignments (Végh et al., 2023). Therefore, the research on expatriate adjustment will be of greater practical and theoretical significance in such a new era of global mobility with new context, a mix of assignment types, and a changing employee experience.

1.4 The need for this study

1.4.1 A large, rapidly growing and under-researched Chinese expatriate group

In the past two decades, China’s global presence has expanded, and more and more Chinese managers have been sent to work abroad to accomplish organisational goals (Lin et al., 2018). As the largest emerging economy, China’s fast-growing Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) has attracted the attention of many scholars (Fan et al., 2013). By 2020, China’s outward FDI net flows reached \$153.71 billion and the accumulated outward FDI net stock reached \$ 2.58 trillion (table 1.1), accounting for 20.2% and 6.6% of the

Table 1.1: China’s Annual Outward FDI Flows and Stock since 2010 (adapted from MOFCOM, 2021)

(Billions of US Dollars)

Year	Flows			Stock	
	Amount	Global Ranking	Share in World	Amount	Global Ranking
2010	68.81	5	5.2 %	317.21	17
2011	74.65	6	4.4 %	424.78	13
2012	87.80	3	6.3 %	531.94	13
2013	107.84	3	7.6 %	660.48	11
2014	123.12	3	9.1 %	882.64	8
2015	145.67	2	9.9 %	1097.86	8
2016	196.15	2	13.5 %	1357.39	6
2017	158.29	3	11.1 %	1809.04	2
2018	143.04	2	14.1 %	1982.27	3
2019	136.91	2	10.4 %	2198.88	3
2020	153.71	1	20.2 %	2580.66	3

global total respectively and ranking first among all countries (regions) in terms of outward FDI flows and third in terms of stock. There are 28 thousand Chinese domestic investors had established 45 thousand overseas enterprises in 189 countries (regions) around the world. At the end of the year, the total number of employees was 3.613 million, including 2.188 million foreign employees and 1.425 million expatriates, accounting for 60.6% and 39.4 of the total respectively (MOFCOM, 2021). Compared to 2010 data, the growth of China's OFDI stock rose from 17th to third place, with an increase of 713.3%, the number of overseas enterprises with an increase of 181%, the number of foreign employees with an increase of 179% (table 1.2), the number of Chinese expatriates with an increase of 240% (MOFCOM, 2021; 2010).

Table 1.2: Change of the number of investors, overseas enterprises, employees in 2010 and 2020 (adapted from MOFCOM, 2010; 2021)

	2010	2020	Increase
Number of Investors	13000	28000	115 %
Number of Overseas Enterprises	16000	45000	181 %
Number of Countries	178	189	+11
Total Employees	1.103 million	3.613 million	228 %
Foreign Employees	0.784 million	2.188 million	179 %
Expatriates	0.419 million	1.425 million	240 %

Clearly, China's growing outward investment and large Chinese expatriate group deserve intensive academic attention. However, most of the existing literature focuses on European and American samples, with little attention paid to Chinese overseas enterprises and Chinese expatriates (Yao, 2014).

1.4.2 Expatriate adjustment with Chinese characteristics

National culture impacts the practice of management, and management is different around the world (Hofstede, 2001). There is no universal theory to guide the support of expatriation practice because of the complexity of the

factors that influence expatriation experience (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015). Wood and Mansour (2010) also point out that many theoretical frameworks and measurement tools have been found to be culturally binding. China's specific national and cultural situation may make expatriates' adjustment different from those of western counterparts, therefore, the existing research which mainly focus on the western samples cannot fully explain and guide the Chinese expatriate practice.

Chinese overseas enterprises are still in the early stage of internationalization and are less efficient in international human resource management. Rui et al. (2016) point out that the expatriation management system of Chinese MNCs is characterised by a combination of material and spiritual incentives, centralised control, and collective support, and due to the competitive advantages of their employees such as low cost, high efficiency, and hard-working attitude, a large number of expatriates are sent overseas to help the company develop markets, complete projects or help facilitate the flow of resources and information between parent and subsidiary companies. The proportion of Chinese expatriates in Chinese overseas enterprises is much higher than that of western expatriates (He, 2019), and the success rate of Chinese expatriates is "not high" (Wang and Niu, 2018).

In terms of culture, the obligations to the family or the group are highly valued in Chinese society, and there are distinct boundaries between the members in and out of the group, community, and organisation (Pun et al., 2000). In addition, the institutional environment in China is different from that in other countries (Li and Scullion, 2010), such as paternalistic leadership in business management, the influence of Confucian culture and social norms based on Guanxi (Farh and Cheng, 2000). On the contrary, the western interpersonal relationship is based on individual rather than collective interests (Chuang et al., 2015). The great differences between cultures challenge Chinese expatriate managers (Choo et al., 2009). Lack of understanding of Chinese

expatriates' adjustment will not only affect the performance of Chinese enterprises and expatriates, but also lead to difficulties in cross-cultural communication. Rui et al.'s (2017) fieldwork revealed that sometimes the isolation of Chinese expatriates was perceived as indifferent, drawing criticism from local officials and residents, and that this attitude negatively affected their chances of securing future contracts. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply analyze the characteristics of adjustment of Chinese expatriates and build a culturally specific framework, so as to better understand the adjustment of Chinese expatriates and better guide the practice.

1.4.3 Paucity in research and the need for this study

As mentioned in previous sections, some theoretical summaries and frameworks of expatriate adjustment have been developed in the past decades (e.g., Black et al. 1991; Takeuchi, 2010; Haslberger et al., 2013) which have deepened understanding of expatriate adjustment and have effectively guided expatriation practice. However, most of the research is western-specific, developed from western perspective, and naturally lack a consideration of non-western situational factors. They focus on samples from more developed countries and areas such as European and American, with little attention paid to Chinese overseas enterprises and Chinese expatriates (Yao, 2014), which does not match the large and rapidly growing Chinese expatriate group.

There do exist a limited yet growing body of literature in academia that has begun to focus on and examine the Chinese expatriates and their adjustment issues (e.g., Okpara et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020; Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018; Wang et al., 2017). However, the majority of these studies of Chinese expatriates have relied on existing Western-based research and theoretical frameworks, with a scarcity of empirical research that fails to fully reveal the impact of the Chinese context on expatriates and their adjustment. There is

also a lack of a new theoretical framework for expatriate adjustment constructed from Chinese perspective.

China's unique ethnic and cultural environment and the distinctive characteristics of expatriates it shapes result in significant differences in the adjustment of Chinese expatriate employees compared to Western cases (e.g. Lin et al., 2018; Jaw et al., 2007). Given the fact that there severely lacks in-depth revelation and interpretation of the Chinese context, the existing theories are insufficient to fully explain and guide the practice of Chinese expatriation. Therefore, innovative exploration of the adjustment mechanisms of Chinese business expatriates and the construction of adjustment theories based on the Chinese context is conducive to addressing the current research deficiencies in this field, as well as the insufficiency in theoretical and practical guidance.

1.5 Research questions, aim, and objectives

1.5.1 Research questions

My background and interest led me to the topic of expatriate adjustment, and finally I decided to turn it into an empirical study. The initial research question was "how do Chinese expatriates adjust to the new environment". As the study proceeded, the research questions evolved and were specified and made more operational for the study, listing as follows.

Research question 1: What are the factors that influence the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates?

Research question 2: What adjustment processes are experienced by Chinese business expatriates?

Research question 3: What is the connection between the research-based findings and the existing literature relating to expatriate adjustment?

1.5.2 Research aim and objectives

The aim and objectives of this study are closely related to the original research questions, which in turn contributed to the evolution of the original questions. The aim of this research is to develop a framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates thus to help better understand and guide the practice of Chinese expatriates. The objectives of this research are as follows:

Objective 1: To explore the perceptions of Chinese business expatriates pertaining to the specific factors influencing their adjustment, and to identify these factors using grounded theory methodology.

Objective 2: To explore the adjustment processes experienced by Chinese business expatriates by identifying the potential relationships between those influencing factors.

Objective 3: To develop a framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates.

1.6 A brief introduction to the research method: the constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory (GT) is a structured but flexible methodology, and it works when little is known about a phenomenon and aims to produce or construct an explanatory theory that reveals the processes inherent in the focused substantive field (Birks and Mills, 2015; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In management research, it has a strength in creating theories relevant to practitioners and exploiting micromanagement processes in complex situations (Jones and Noble, 2007). Given the lack of the understanding of Chinese business expatriates' adjustment and the aim of this research is to develop a framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates thus to help better understand and guide the practice of Chinese expatriates, GT is highly consistent with the exploratory nature of this research and the purpose of developing a specific theory (see more in chapter 3.6).

This study is guided by interpretivism (see more in chapter 3.3) which holds

that human actions create meaning, and reality is multiple as different cultures, environments, times, and people create and experience different meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The purpose of interpretivism research is to create new and richer understandings and explanations of the social world. This research adopts the constructivist grounded theory to guide the data collection and analysis (see more in chapter 3.7.1 and chapter 3.7.2). The constructivist GT recognizes the subjective nature of reality, emphasizes that knowledge is socially constructed, and acknowledges that individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences based on their unique perspectives (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019). Therefore, participants in this study are viewed as coresearchers, experts in the field, and their voices are made to the most. The method not only aligns with a constructivist worldview but also emphasizes emergent and flexible coding strategies, allowing for a more dynamic and adaptable analysis of the data. Unlike more rigidly structured approaches, it encourages an open attitude toward early literature review (see more in chapter 2.2), fostering a more organic and iterative research process (Charmaz, 2014). Its flexibility and emphasis on emergence allow for a more nuanced exploration of the data and, consequently, a more nuanced theoretical development, which is highly consistent with the nature of this study.

1.7 Significance of conducting this research

1.7.1 Theoretical significance

Deepening and broadening the perspective of understanding expatriation is a feature of current academic research (Baruch et al., 2016). The existing literature has contributed considerably in creating and constantly enriching the field of business expatriates' adjustment. However, as it mainly focuses on western expatriates, or expatriates from developed economies (Peltokorpi, 2008), the field lacks understanding of Chinese expatriates and their

adjustment (Yao, 2014; He, 2019). This study focuses on Chinese business expatriates and their adjustment during their assignments, which were neglected and under-researched by academic field. By adopting a grounded theory approach, it probes into the concerned topic in the specific context and aims to explore the factors influencing the adjustment and the adjustment process and thus to construct a specific conceptual model of the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates.

In addition, it further fills the research gap in terms of the research subjects (Chinese business expatriates) and the expansion of research content (context-specific adjustment processes) and enriches the existing cross-cultural adjustment research. Therefore, this study represents a contribution to the creation of new knowledge in a previously neglected context.

1.7.2 Practical significance

This study is of practical significance to concerned expatriates, their organisations, and in a broad sense, communication and understanding in the process of globalization.

Through in-depth interviews with the participants (Chinese business expatriates), this study provides a detailed description of the factors influencing their adjustment and presenting a picture of their adjustment process, which will help develop a deeper understanding of the Chinese business expatriation. As for Chinese business expatriates, the findings will help them make their decisions whether to relocate, get more prepared for the difficulties they are likely to face, what resources they can use to deal with those difficulties, hence better achieve their comprehensive goals of expatriation.

This study provides implications for the overseas enterprises. The findings of the adjustment process will help overseas enterprises better understand their

assignees and the factors influencing their work and life in the host country, based on which they can make targeted management of expatriation that is conducive to the sustainable development of both expatriates and overseas enterprises.

Moreover, this study will help promote communication and understanding between Chinese expatriate and other relevant cultural groups. In the frontline of cross-cultural communication, Chinese business expatriates subject to tremendous cross-cultural adjustment pressure, and their behavior may cause misunderstandings, even resentment. The description of the adjustment process of Chinese expatriates not only helps themselves be more culture-aware, but also helps other cultural groups and stakeholders better understand this group and thus to promote mutual understanding, respect and cooperation.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters, described below.

Chapter one provides a brief introduction to the research. It first presents the research motivation and then the research background, including the changing expatriation practice and research and the significance of expatriate adjustment. Next, the need for this study is explained. It also presents the research questions, aims, and objectives, provides a brief overview of the research methodology, discusses the significance of conducting this research. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the thesis structure.

Chapter two mainly provides an initial review which helps to understand the extant knowledge, find out the possible research gaps, and justify the research topic. It first introduces the literature review strategy of this research, and then two key concepts of the study, expatriate and expatriate adjustment, are reviewed and defined thus to set boundaries and guide the subsequent study. It then reviews and focuses mainly on some influential theories and

frameworks on cross-culture adjustment from PSA field (psychology, sociology, anthropology) and IB field (the international business). A brief review of specific relevant studies within the field of expatriate adjustment is then conducted, followed by a discussion on the research gap arising from the evolving context of Chinese business expatriates.

Chapter three first introduces the framework of research design, and then mainly describes and justifies the research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, research strategy, techniques and procedures adopted. Interpretivism is presented as the research philosophy to guide the research and the inductive and qualitative method are adopted. A general discussion of the grounded theory is then provided and justified. Then presented is the data collection process including a description of the sampling criterion, sampling method and sample size, and semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, followed by the description of data analysis process with explanation on coding process, the use of memo, diagrams and the research software NVivo. The quality of the research is then discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion and reflection on ethical considerations in the research process.

Chapter four describes the main findings of this research. Identified through the application of grounded theory data analysis process, four main themes, including expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and expatriation adjustment strategies are presented, and their general forming process and their key subthemes are introduced and explained. These main themes are subsequently used in chapter 5 to develop a context-specific adjustment framework for Chinese business expatriates.

Chapter five further discusses and interpret the main findings presented in chapter four in a way that answers the research questions thus to meet the research aims and objectives. The framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates is developed and explained. It then discusses the

connection between the research-based framework and the existing literature by comparing and contrasting it with the existing literature from both theoretical level and theme level, which also serves as a justification for the new framework.

Chapter six concludes the whole research project mainly with a presentation of the conclusions from the research. It presents three major research outcomes and discusses the achievement of the research objectives. It then discusses the research contributions from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The limitations of this study are also discussed, and it concludes with implications to the practice and a reflection to the research journey.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter first discusses the literature review strategy of this grounded theory research. It adopts an open and flexible attitude by admitting the significant role of initial literature review and reviewing whenever it is needed through the whole research process. The arrangement of the literature review is also explained briefly. Next it defines two key concepts, expatriate and expatriate adjustment based on existing literature. It then reviews both the literature on cross-culture adjustment from PSA field (psychology, sociology, anthropology) and IB field (the international business) and focuses mainly on some influential theories and frameworks, which help identify the extant knowledge and lay a solid foundation for this research. Subsequently, a brief review of specific relevant studies within the field of expatriate adjustment is conducted, followed by a discussion on the research gap arising from the evolving context of Chinese business expatriates. The concluding summary highlights the relevant research gaps and briefly discusses the necessity of this study.

2.2 Literature review strategy

The place of the literature review in grounded theory research has long been both disputed and misunderstood (Charmaz, 2014). The dynamic interplay of data collection and data analysis makes it difficult to decide how and when should literature review be conducted (Payne, 2007).

In their seminal work on grounded theory, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Glaser and Strauss makes it clear that an effective strategy is to ignore the theoretical and factual literature of the field under study in order to ensure that the emergence of the themes will not be contaminated by concepts that are more appropriate to other fields. However, they respectively offer new and different perspectives and understandings

from their initial idea on the literature review as the grounded theory research develops.

Glaser (1978) points out that the literature review should be conducted only after the emerging theory has been sufficiently developed. Because the emerged core concepts will guide researchers to the specific literature and help expand and surpass the initial theory developed. Strauss and Corbin (1994) argue that Glaser overestimates the impact of researchers' prior academic training and knowledge on theory development.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) make literature reading an essential part prior to the research. They divide the literature into "technical literature"^① and "non-technical literature",^② and they argue that literature can be read at all stages of research. However, literature is read to stimulate thinking, clarify research questions, and develop rooted theories, not to form hypotheses and test them, as is the case in quantitative research. Therefore, they repeatedly caution that one must not become a prisoner of the literature but should place a higher value on the researcher's own first-hand resources.

Glaser (1992) disagrees with Strauss and Corbin and argues that the fact of borrowing certain existing related concepts and theories to help produce new theory is no longer a grounded theory but a forced one. Glaser argues that reading the literature is not about validation, but rather about integrating differences and expanding theories through successive comparisons. Glaser seems to ignore the accumulative feature of knowledge and believe in a pure grounded theory that can always provide creative and exciting knowledge.

Many scholars have strongly questioned Glaser's claim. Charmaz (2009)

^① Technical literature: Reports of research studies and theoretical or philosophical papers characteristic of professional and disciplinary writing that can serve as background materials against which one compares findings from actual data.

^② Nontechnical literature: Biographies, diaries, documents, manuscripts, records, reports, catalogs, and other materials that can be used as primary data, to supplement interviews and field observations, or to stimulate thinking about properties and dimensions of concepts emerging from data.

argues that an open mind is not the same as an empty mind, and prior conception not necessarily lead to preconception (Dey, 1999). The rigid forcing of the information will not happen if the researchers maintain a critical attitude when doing literature review, remain reflective and avoid being influenced by existing research and preconceived ideas (McGhee, et. al, 2007; Ramalho, et.al, 2015). Charmaz (2007), in her own advocacy of constructivist grounded theory, greatly highlights the role of literature review, arguing that it should not only be a separate chapter of the dissertation, but should also be used throughout the study.

In general, this study takes full advantage of both views on literature review within the grounded theory and adopts a more open and flexible attitude. On one hand, this study admits the important role of the initial literature review while keeping Glaser's warning in mind that not to fall into the trap of "preconceptions forcing theoretical outputs". In fact, the literature review work at the beginning of the study was intentionally reduced to help boost the possibilities of forming original theoretical frameworks and creative themes. On the other hand, the study agrees with Charmaz's view that literature should be used throughout the study whenever it is needed.

The literature review of this study has generally been divided into two phases in terms of both time course and chapter presentation. An initial work of literature search and review is included in chapter 2, where some theories and theoretical frameworks of cross-cultural adjustment are reviewed in order to better understand and guide the study at the theoretical level, and a deeper and detailed exploration of the expatriate adjustment literature is conducted in accordance with the emerged subthemes and themes, which is presented in chapter 5. These two parts are intertwined and cannot be clearly separated. For example, a very broad search and review of the literature of expatriate adjustment were conducted in the first stage, and some theories of acculturation and expatriate adjustment were reviewed during the second

stage. However, in order to make a clearer presentation, the work of literature reviewing is presented as it is in chapter 2 and 5.

Generally, the first stage of the literature review identified that the majority of current expatriate studies are based on western theoretical frameworks, western expatriates and their practices, and there are few studies on Chinese expatriates, let alone the context-specific frameworks on their expatriation. The second stage focused on the theories and literature relevant to the emerged themes, providing insights into and laying a solid foundation for theory forming through comparison and contrast.

2.3 Definition of two key concepts

Hasty and imprecise definitions threaten the structural validity of the concept of expatriate study (McNulty and Brewster, 2017). The measures used in the empirical study may not accurately represent the concepts being tested (Cappelli, 2012), which makes it difficult to draw precise inferences from studies and to assess and compare findings (Bono and McNamara, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to develop a definition with structural clarity to overcome the confusion of concepts of global mobility. As this study focuses on Chinese expatriates and their adjustment, the key concepts are “expatriate” and “expatriate adjustment”. The following two sections will have discussions on these two concepts and make research-specific definitions of them.

2.3.1 Expatriate

Few scholars in expatriate studies have dedicated their articles to properly defining this academic term, and it seems that everyone understands the concept (He, 2019), however, the definition remains controversial (McNulty and Brewster, 2017).

From a very broad perspective, expatriate is “a person living in a country that is not their own” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2022), or “someone who is living in

a country which is not their own (Collins Dictionary, 2022). Therefore, it is used broadly to describe all kinds of movers (McNulty and Brewster, 2017), and its number may be more than 200 million worldwide (Clarke et al., 2017). Ward et al. (2001) consider expatriate as a type of “sojourners”, a temporary resident who volunteers to live abroad for a period of time (usually 6 months to 5 years), usually with a specific mission or contract. McNulty and Brewster (2017, p23) define it on the basis of the previous literature as “a person who lives outside their native country, and is physically mobile across international borders, whether for professional or personal reasons, whether for short or long periods of time, whether organisationally sponsored or not, and regardless as to whether one is crossing an ocean or moving across land”. Guided by this definition, expatriate group may include different types, such as business expatriate, military expatriates (Fisher, 2017), religious expatriates (Oberholster and Doss, 2017), expatriate academics (Selmer et al.2017), sports expatriates (Dolles and Egilsson, 2017).

This study focuses on business expatriates in IB field. The definition of business expatriates is also varied. Aycan and Kanungo (1997) consider business expatriates as employees of commercial organisations sent to another country to complete a job or organisation-related objective for a pre-planned period (usually between 6 months to 5 years). Harrison et al. (2004) put forward that expatriates are citizens of the home country or nationals of a third country appointed by the parent company to work in subsidiaries of the host country. Andresen et al. (2014) and McNulty and Selmer (2017) divide it into Assigned Expatriate (AE) and Self-initiated Expatriate (SIE). He (2019) divides expatriates into three different types: traditional, non-traditional and self-initiated expatriates. The traditional expatriate is typically a Western male executive, aged 40-50, sent overseas on a corporate assignment and accompanied by his wife and children. Non-traditional expatriates are those assigned employees different from the

traditional ones, such as females, those younger than 30 or older than 60, singles, LGBTIs. Self-initiated expatriates are generally professionals or knowledge workers who are actively seeking employment abroad, as independent global workers but not assigned individuals.

The definition of expatriate varies and develops over time. This conceptual ambiguity can still create confusion for learners and practitioners in the field and be problematic for the study itself. Therefore, building on the efforts of previous studies and the common practice of Chinese expatriates, this study defines “business expatriates” and uses it as a basis for data collection and analysis.

Based on existing research and the consideration of the specific situation of Chinese expatriates, this study defines Chinese business expatriates from five perspectives: space, time, purpose, individual characteristics (place of origin, nationality), and the job position. From the perspective of space, this study agrees with McNulty and Brewster (2017) that expatriates physically cross international boundaries. In terms of time, previous studies have mentioned the planned period differently, such as six months to five years (Aycan and Kanungo, 1997), less than three months to one year and two to five years (McNulty and Brewster, 2017). As this short-term (usually less than one year) is always related to confused terminologies, such as flexpatriates who work abroad for a period of between one and two months, international business travelers for a period of between one to three weeks (Andresen and Bergdolt, 2016). Unlike long-term expatriates, these short-term ones are not bound to one place and are able to work flexibly in different cultures and places, and that means different cost, different management of their global workers for organisations, and that their families don’t relocate because of the short time period (Mäkelä et al., 2017). As a result, expatriates will experience very differently due to the length of expatriation period. What is more, this study finds that the expatriation period of Chinese business expatriates is usually

more than one year from the initial exploration. Therefore, this study holds that the time business expatriates engaged in the host country should be at least one year.

As for the purpose of expatriation, this study holds an open attitude considering both organisational and individual needs. One of the main characteristics of Chinese business expatriates is being employed by a business organisation, which means expatriates can be sent by a domestic business organisation for work, or voluntarily sent to the host country and employed by the local business organisation. This includes both AEs and SIEs.

In terms of individual characteristics, the business expatriates being studied are from mainland China, excluding Chinese who study and live in foreign countries all year round and go directly to work in the host countries and Chinese from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and overseas. Because these places outside mainland China have different development process and different social characteristics, and that inevitably causes the differences between expatriates from these places. Therefore, this study focuses on the business expatriates from mainland China.

In terms of job positions, the traditional western business expatriates are usually senior managers. However, the Chinese expatriate group are very large and complex due to its specific context. Therefore, this study is not limited to senior managers but to cover a wide range, including expatriates in different positions but excluding those supporting groups like labour workers, cooks and drivers.

In conclusion, in this study “Chinese business expatriate” is defined as: a Chinese from mainland China who is sent abroad by a commercial organisation or is spontaneously expatriated and employed by a commercial organisation in the host country, usually working as a management role or professionals for more than one year.

2.3.2 Expatriate adjustment

In different studies on cross-cultural contact, various terms are used, such as acculturation, adjustment, adaptation, inter/cross-cultural adjustment / adaptation, which caused confusion and misunderstanding. The term acculturation is more commonly used in the psychology, sociology, anthropology (PSA) field, which focuses on exploring the social context to which immigrants and sojourners adapt (e.g., Berry, 1997; Ward et. al., 2001). Adjustment is an important concept in the literature of acculturation, but there are definition problems in the literatures (Church, 1982). Adjustment and adaptation have been interchangeably used to refer to the same point (Aycan, 1997; Searle and Ward, 1990), such as the feeling of satisfaction and acceptance and a state without mental health problems (Berry and Kim, 1988). To some researchers, intercultural adaptation / adjustment are the same concepts (e.g., Chen,2012; Hippler et al. 2017). Matsumoto et. al., (2007) make a distinction between adaptation and adjustment. They think adaptation is based in the socio-cultural domain and define it as the process of changing one's behavior or cognition in different environments in order to better interact with the environment and achieve the desired end goal. In contrast, adjustment is defined as the subjective experiences associated with and result from adaptation. Kim (1995, 2001) attributes the confusion or inconsistent definitions of the concepts to the overlap in meaning between them and uses the term cross-cultural adaptation to cover these similar concepts and make it a more general expression.

Researchers engaged in international business (IB) field which focuses on business expatriates seem to ignore the subtle differences among these terms, and especially after Black et al.'s (1991) international adjustment framework became popular and gradually took dominance, there is almost a consensus of the use of "adjustment" (e.g., Black et. al., 1991; Aycan,1997; Takeuchi, 2010; Okpara and kabongo, 2011; Maertz et. al., 2016; Hippler et al. 2017; Peltokorpi

and Zhang, 2020; Miocevic and Mikulic, 2021) which considers both adjustment to the specific work environment and a broader social-cultural environment.

However, definition of “expatriate adjustment” varies even in the IB field. In general, the literatures witness an evolved and increasingly open route when defining the term. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) take adjustment as the ongoing process of expatriates establishing and maintaining a mutually responsive and harmonious relationship with the work environment. The individual strives to achieve satisfaction with the work environment, while the work environment works to find satisfactoriness with the individual. Black et al. (1991) proceed the adjustment research by providing a multidimensional model which consider adjustment as the perceived level of psychological comfort. Many researchers agree and follow Black et al.’s (1991) definition, such as Aycan (1997), Caligiuri (2000), Takeuchi et al. (2002) and Takeuchi (2010) who consider cross-cultural adjustment as the psychological adjustment of an individual to a changing environment that allows him or her to reduce conflict and stress and to increase psychological comfort and ease in the work or non-work environment. Gudykunst (2005) and Matsumoto et al. (2007) also consider adjustment from psychological perspective. For Goodkunst, feeling comfortable in the host culture, communicating effectively and behaving appropriately are the keys to cross-cultural adjustment, and managing uncertainty and anxiety is the key to adjustment. For Matsumoto et al. (2007), adjustment is psychological outcome associated with adaptation.

Berry (1992) views adjustment differently from the previous researchers. Successful adjustment is a state of “homeostasis” that the individual maintains a balanced mental state that leads to effective functioning (Torbiorn, 1982). He defines adjustment as “a state whereby changes occur in the individual in a direction of increased fit and reduced conflict between the environmental demands and the individual attitudinal and behavioral inclinations”.

Based on the perspective of fitness between person and environment (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984) and of psychological comfort (Black et al., 1991), Hippler et al. (2017) define expatriate adjustment as the combined results of domain-specific change processes in the behavioral, cognitive and affective dimensions assessed by the expatriate and the new environment which leads to the individual's subjective well-being and social functioning in the new environment.

The definition keeps updated and becomes more comprehensive. However, that may be not enough to cover a culturally specific context. Based on the previous studies and the practices and characteristics of Chinese expatriates, this study works to describe the adjustment of Chinese expatriates and make a specific definition. It considers adjustment as an issue derived from the cross-cultural contact and the changes by all its related influences because of the international assignment and agrees with Black et al.'s (1991) "psychological comfort" perspective, Berry's (1992) view of "effective functioning on a balanced mental state", and Hippler et al.'s (2017) integrated view of "combined results leading to both subjective well-being and social functioning". Hence this study defines expatriate adjustment as the combined results of expatriates' interaction with all the factors in the whole expatriation as well as the process by which the expatriates continuously seek a balanced mental state. This definition considers expatriate adjustment as both a process and an outcome. It holds a multi-stakeholder perspective but meanwhile expatriate oriented as it is just these expatriate individuals who keep interacting with the stakeholders and are the final bearer of all results and consequences. Therefore, expatriates strive for psychological balance and develop an overall positive appraisal of their assignment thus to ultimately complete the set task and achieve the individuals' comprehensive goals.

2.4 A review of theories and frameworks of cross-cultural adjustment

As this study focuses on the adjustment issue of Chinese expatriates, with a purpose to construct a specific adjustment framework, a review on the theories and frameworks of cross-cultural adjustment becomes essential and vital.

There are mainly two streams of literature that have been exploring cross-cultural adjustment (Gonzalez et al., 2015). One is the acculturation from PSA field (psychology, sociology, anthropology) that focuses on immigrants to a new country and their degree of adaptation (e.g., Berry, 1997; Ward et. al., 2001), and the other is international assignee adjustment from the IB field (the international business) which focuses on the relocation of employees to a new country and their relative success in their work assignment (e.g., Black et. al., 1991; Aycan, 1997; Takeuchi, 2010; Okpara and kabongo, 2011; Maertz et. al., 2016; Peltokorpi and Zhang, 2020; Miocevic and Mikulic, 2021). PSA and IB research, with the previous one paying attention to the social and cultural environment and the latter to organisation or work environment, use different methods and frameworks. However, the two streams recently begun to overlap and show that cross-cultural adjustment is necessary for both immigrants and expatriates, whose success have the focus on the host country environment and their ability to adapt (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

Obviously, expatriates working in different cultural environments are not only in a working environment but are also exposed to and have to contact with the local social, political, cultural, and economic life. Hence, the study of expatriate adjustment should be based on the integration of PSA and IB fields and thus to develop a more comprehensive understanding on Chinese expatriates and their adjustment.

Therefore, in order to put this study (whose purpose is to build an adjustment framework based on Chinese expatriates) into the developing research system and lay a good foundation for the theory construction, both the literature on acculturation from PSA field and international assignee adjustment from IB

field were reviewed, with the initial stage focusing on some influential theories and frameworks.

It also should be noted that different terms referring to cross-cultural adjustment used in these different literatures, such as acculturation (e.g., Berry, 1997; Ward et. al., 2001), adaptation (e.g., Kim 2001) and adjustment (e.g., Black et al. 1991; Aycan, 1997; Takeuchi, 2010; Haslberger et al., 2013; Martez, 2016). Generally, researchers engaged in IB field seem to ignore the subtle differences among these terms and there is a consensus of the use of “adjustment” which considers both adjustment to the specific work environment and a broader social-cultural environment. Therefore, the term cross-cultural adjustment is used in the subheadings for the consistency.

2.5 Some cross-cultural adjustment theories and frameworks in PSA field

This section reviews some popular theories and frameworks of cross-cultural adjustment in PSA field from the perspectives of stages, strategies, process and communication.

2.5.1 Cross-cultural adjustment: from the perspective of stages

Scholars engaged in cross-cultural research divide the process of cross-cultural adjustment into different stages from the psychological perspective. The earliest relevant research is Lysgaard’s (1955) U-shaped curve. Based on a survey of 200 Norwegian Fulbright scholars in the United States, Lysgaard finds the process of cross-cultural adjustment usually goes through three stages: initial adjustment, crisis, and regained adjustment. That is, the sojourners experienced from the novelty and happiness at the initial contact with the foreign culture, then a decline of satisfaction to depression, and finally to the recovery of emotions. By describing the contact-depression-adjustment process, he puts forward U-shaped curve assumption. However, this assumption lacks solid theoretical support and empirical data (Furnham,1988), and subsequent scholars have raised some

questions about this assumption, arguing that the process of cross-cultural adjustment does not completely conform to the U-shaped curve (e.g., Ward et al., 1998; An and Chiang, 2015).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) propose the W-shaped curve model based on the U-shaped curve. They consider the reentry stage and believe that the expatriates who have adapted to the new cultural environment often need to readapt to the home culture after returning home. This means a new round of cross-cultural adjustment, which is not essentially different from the cross-cultural adjustment in the host country. Therefore, on the extended time axis, the two U-shaped curves form a W-shaped curve.

Oberg (1960) first put forward the concept of “culture shock”. He describes the cross-cultural adjustment into four stages: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. This is consistent with the basic view of the U-shaped model, that is, when a person travels in other cultures, the traveler must go through some difficult times to achieve the comfort and normalcy he feels before traveling. However, the concept of cultural shock implies too much emphasis on the psychological pressure and negative impact of the interaction of two different cultural systems on the sojourners, and to some extent ignores the sojourners’ response to new problems and the successful adjustment process to the new environment. Therefore, Berry et al. (1987) proposed to replace the concept of “cultural shock” with “acculturative stress”. Ward (2001) also points out it is one-sided that sojourners are often seen as passive victim in need of outside help and suggests that the term acculturation be used as a replacement for the term “culture shock”.

Adler (1975) expands the concept of “cultural shock” and divides transitional experience into five stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy and independence.^③ He believes that in a sense, cultural shock is a kind of

^③ According to Adler, “contact” refers to individual’s initial contact with a second culture which is marked by the excitement and euphoria of new experience; “disintegration” happens when

alienation most often associated with negative consequences, such as feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured, or disregarded. However, in another sense, it means trying to understand, survive and grow in a second culture. Although culture shock is usually associated with negative consequences, it is an important aspect of cultural learning, self-development and personal growth. And in the whole transitional period, an individual can gain new experience and knowledge by understanding the root of his or her own ethnocentrism and gaining new ideas on the essence of culture. Adler's exposition enriches the concept of cultural shock and emphasises the important role of individual learning and growth in cross-cultural adjustment.

Theories and research from the perspective of stages have contributed to the study of cross-cultural adjustment, and help stakeholders understand the cross-cultural adjustment easily and quickly. However, most of them are only conceptual descriptions, lacking support from empirical research. They are one-dimensional and mainly from the perspective of psychological adjustment, which is of limited help to fully understand the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

Interestingly, based on the "U-shaped curve" and the concept of "culture shock", Wood and Mansour (2010) put forward a multidimensional framework (figure 2.1) which inherits the classic stage perspective and meanwhile integrates the three facets of expatriate adjustment.

Though the multidimensional framework makes a progress by describing how

bewilderment, alienation, depression, and withdrawal give rise to disintegration of personality as confusion over individual identity in the new culture increase; "reintegration" refers to a phase characterised by strong rejection of the second culture through stereotyping, generalization, evaluation, and judgmental behavior and attitude; "autonomy" is a phase marked by a rising sensitivity and by the acquisition of both skill and understanding of the second culture; "independence" refers to a phase when the individual is fully able to accept and draw nourishment from cultural differences and similarities, is capable of giving as well as eliciting a high degree of trust and sensitivity and is able to view both him- or herself and others as individual human beings that are influenced by culture and upbringing.

U-curve adjustment framework and the multidimensional adjustment framework by Black et al. (1991), it is conceptual and lacks empirical research. Moreover, the theoretical basis and the previous research are mostly based on western perspectives, which means a possible lack of power in explaining Chinese expatriates.

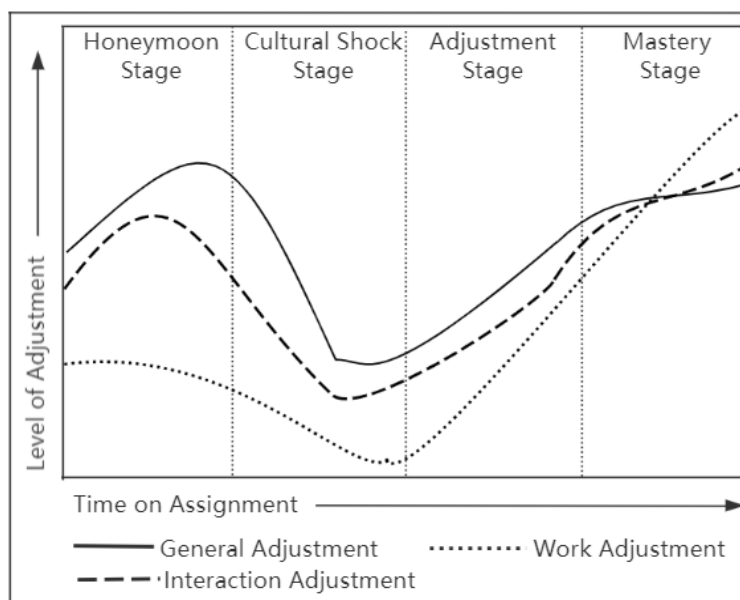


Figure 2.1: Multidimensional concept of adjustment along the U-curve adjustment framework (Wood and Mansour, 2010)

2.5.2 Cross-cultural adjustment: from the perspective of strategies

Cross-cultural adjustment is regarded as a stressful event that needs to be dealt with. How to deal with the new pressure in the new environment is undoubtedly one of the focuses of academic circles and practitioners. Therefore, stress-coping becomes an important research path in the field of cross-cultural adjustment (Ward, 2001). Among all those studies on coping strategies, Berry's work is one of the most representative.

Based on the distinction between two basic issues facing all acculturating peoples, namely a relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity and a relative preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethnocultural groups, Berry (2005) classifies immigrants' acculturation strategies as integration, separation,

assimilation, and marginalization, from the point of view of non-dominant groups. When acculturating individuals adopt integration strategy, they not only attach importance to the original culture, but also pay attention to communication with other groups. As for assimilation strategy, individuals give up their original culture and become absorbed into the dominant society. If they value their heritage culture and avoid communication with other groups, the separation strategy is defined. If they prefer to ignore both their heritage culture and dominant culture, then marginalization strategy is defined.

The model has been supported by some empirical evidence (Ma and Xia, 2021; Schmitz and Berry, 2011), and it has had an important impact on public opinion, ethnic minority and immigration policies, and multicultural policies. But, in many cases, groups or individuals are not free to choose acculturation strategies, and dominant cultural groups also play an important role in acculturation process. Therefore, Berry (2001) adds a third dimension, that of the powerful influence of dominant group on the acculturation, to the original two-dimensional mode, and puts forward four strategies from the perspective of the dominant group (figure 2.2).

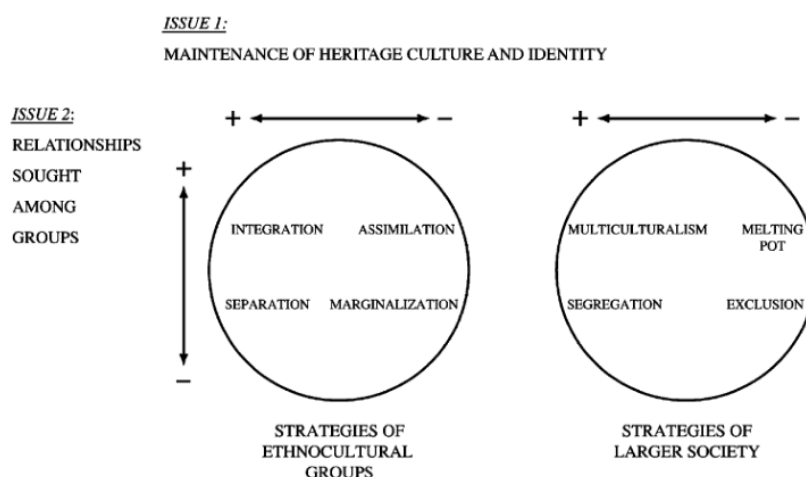


Figure 2.2: Four acculturation strategies based upon two issues, in ethnocultural groups, and the larger society (Berry, 2005)

If the dominant society seeks assimilation by acculturating people, the strategy of “melting pot” is defined. If the dominant society forces separation, that is “segregation”. “Exclusion” refers to marginalization imposed by the dominant

society. Integration is called “multiculturalism” when diversity is an accepted feature of the society, including all the various ethnocultural groups.

Berry’s research breaks through the one-way and linear cross-cultural adjustment model and developing from two-dimensional model to three-dimensional model, which reveals the multidimensional and complex acculturation process. As it focuses more on the acculturation of a cultural group into the host culture society, less on the individual, and considering the different nature between international business expatriates and other sojourners and immigrants, Berry’s theory does lay a useful foundation but that guiding significance for expatriate adjustment research is limited.

2.5.3 Cross-cultural adjustment: from the perspective of process

Based on the previous cross-cultural adjustment research, the acculturation process framework was first put forward by Ward (1996) and improved subsequently. Ward et al. (2001) comprehensively describe the acculturation process and present a refined model (figure 2.3).

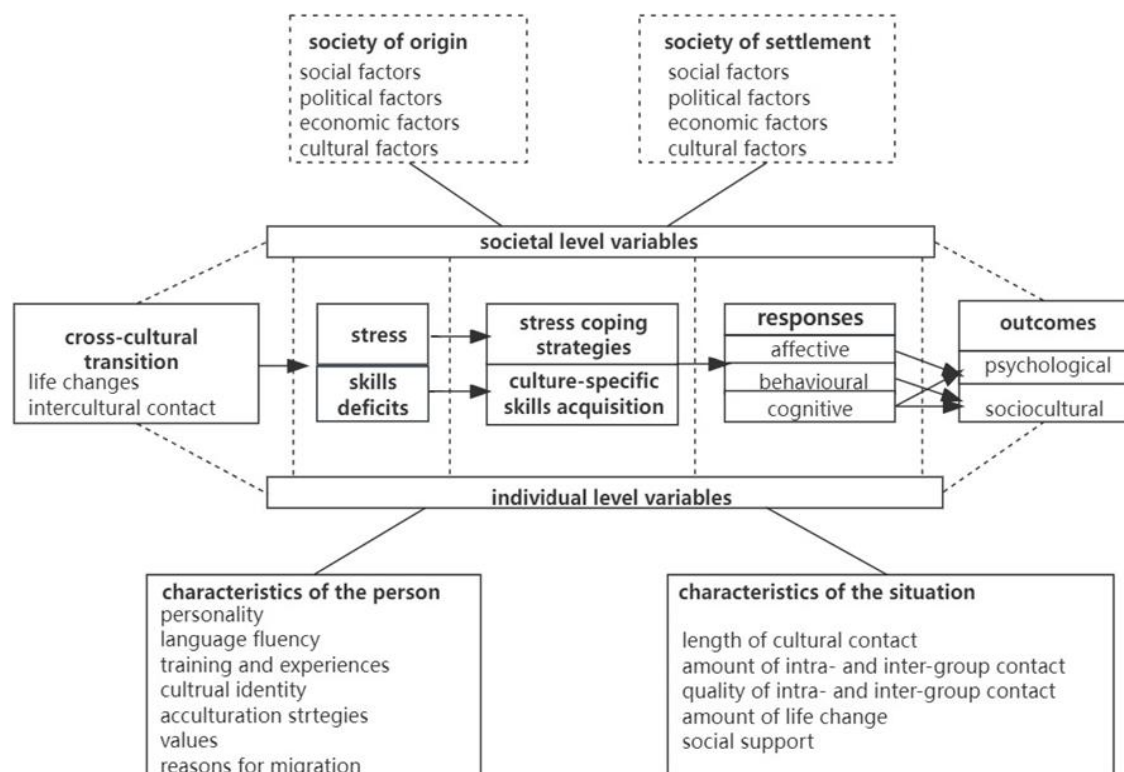


Figure 2.3: The acculturation process (Ward et al., 2001)

They perceive cross-cultural transformation as a major life event, involving unaccustomed changes and new forms of cross-cultural contact. In the initial stage of cross-cultural contact, individuals do not have the ability to effectively respond to situational requirements and new and unfamiliar ways of social communication, which can be described by debilitating stress or social skills defects. In any case, as Ward points out, individuals need to respond to stress management and the acquisition of social and cultural skills from affective, behavioral and cognitive aspects. The response, or evaluation and action, and the final acculturation will be influenced by many factors at the individual level and the social level. Social level variables come from the society of origin and society of settlement, including social factors, political factors, economic factors and cultural factors. Individual level variables contain characteristics of the persons and characteristics of the situation.

The framework synthesises opinions from stress-coping and culture-learning perspectives, classifies acculturation into psychological and social cultural aspects, and incorporates a series of micro and macro variables, thus comprehensively describes the process of acculturation. As Ward et al. (2001) makes it explicit that international business expatriates have made a large part of the sojourner community, the bi-dimensional division of psychology and social culture and the specific variables considered in both societal and individual level provide a strong reference to the life and psychological adjustment of expatriates. However, that reference is too general and lack a work focus.

2.5.4 Cross-cultural adjustment: from the perspective of communication

Kim (2001) integrates an Asian perspective into the western-led and dominant cross-cultural adjustment research and put forward an integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaption, which involves three core concepts: cross-cultural adaptation, communication and strangers. On the

basis of previous concepts, she defines “cross-cultural adaptation” in a more generic and overarching manner as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim,2001, p.31). “Communication” refers to “all activities of message exchange between an individual and the environment” and “stranger” is used to “consolidate and represent a wide range of individuals crossing cultures and resettling in alien cultural environments” (Ibid, p.32). The stranger’s cross-cultural adaptation journey is changing gradually from an outsider to an insider after experiencing the pressure of interacting with the new environment, which involves a dynamic spiral adaptation process (figure 2.4).

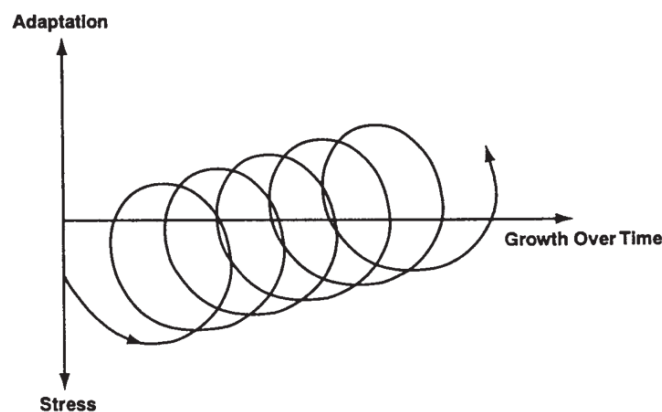
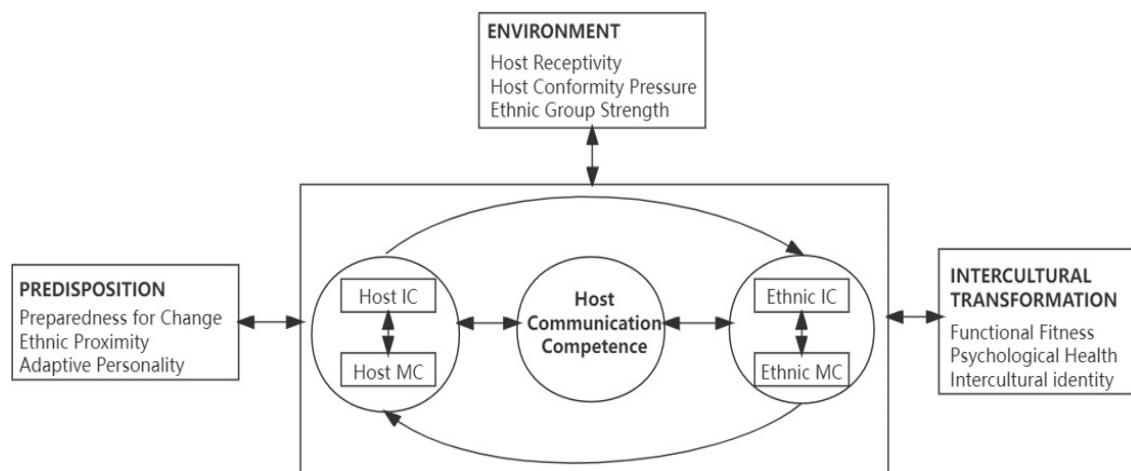


Figure 2.4: The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic: A Process Model (Kim, 2001, p57)

Kim’s integrative theory views the cross-cultural adaptation as a communication process, and cross-cultural adaptation occurs when the individual is interacting with the host society. This communication-based and interactive conception surpasses most of the previous models with a linear-reductionist assumption. Different from the previous theories on culture shock in which the new environment and its pressure are regarded as a disease, she sees stress as the driving force for strangers to overcome difficulties and actively participate in new culture learning. In terms of

influencing factors, micro-and macro-level factors of cultural adaptation are incorporated in the structural model of cross-cultural adaptation (figure 2.5).



Note: IC = interpersonal communication; MC = mass communication

Figure 2.5: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Structural Model (Kim, 2001, p57)

When the cross-cultural research was still dominated by the western perspectives, it then had specific scope of application and may not be suitable for non-Western cultures (Koester and Lustig,1991), and Dai (2019) sharply criticised its eurocentrism tendency. Kim's integrative theory, which pay special attention to the whole adaptation process and individual's relationship with the ethnic group members and host society, becomes an important component and representative in the era of the rise of non-Western perspectives and theoretical pluralism in cross-cultural adaptation research. As one of the most comprehensive theory, Kim's integrative perspective will undoubtedly have a positive reference significance for Chinese expatriate groups.

2.6 Cross-cultural adjustment theories and frameworks in IB field

The previous section reviews some theories related to cross-cultural adjustment in PSA field, which provides a solid theoretical basis for a more comprehensive understanding of the process and results of cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese expatriates and thus for building a culture-specific framework. However, it is also important to recognise that there are still some

significant differences between adjustment issue in IB field and PSA field. Firstly, the research context is different, as PSA focuses on immigrants and explores the social environment in which they adapt, while IB focuses on expatriates, and besides emphasizing the social environment, it needs to pay more attention to the organisational and work environment. Secondly, the cross-cultural adaptation experiences are different. Immigrants tend to move to the host country permanently, while expatriates usually move only temporarily and thus face a relatively light cross-cultural adaptation problem. Third, the research methods and basic theories are different. Although PSA and IB studies both show that cross-cultural adaptation is necessary for immigrants and expatriates, they use different methods and research frameworks (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al.,2015).

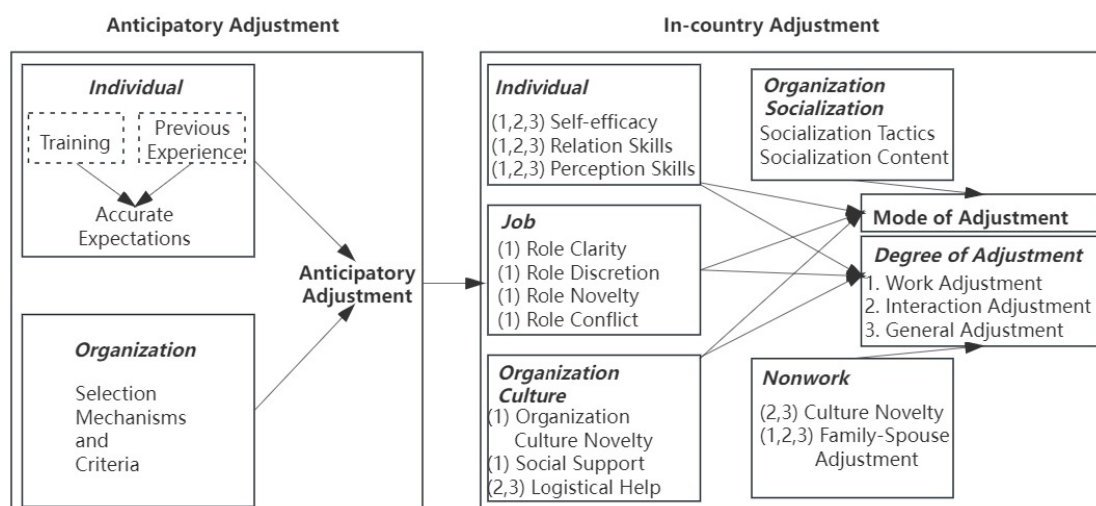
Therefore, based on the previous review of cross-cultural adjustment in PAS field, the following section reviews some of the main guiding theories and research of cross-cultural adjustment in the IB field (mainly for business expatriate).

2.6.1 Black's international adjustment framework

Black et al. (1991) reviewed the domestic and international literature on role transition and adjustment to develop an international adjustment model based on the stress theory and the person-environment fitting theory and put forward a highly testable theoretical model to predict their previously verified expatriate adaptation constructs. Apparently, Black and his colleagues (1991) jump-started the international adjustment research by publishing an exemplary conceptual article (Kraimer, 2016).

The model (figure 2.6), viewing adjustment as the degree of perceived psychological comfort, divides the international adjustment into two phases, namely the anticipatory adjustment before departure and the in-country adjustment. Anticipatory adjustment, a response to the expectations of the job,

the host country nationals and the quality of matching between individual and the job requirement, is influenced by both individual factors (training and previous experience) and organisational factors (selection mechanisms and criteria). In-country adjustment takes place after the arrival as the unfamiliar environment disrupts the old conventions and intensifies the psychological uncertainty. It integrates and further the previous research by incorporating three specific aspects into adjustment degree: work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment, which termed as “degree of adjustment”. Meanwhile, the model also takes a consideration of mode of adjustment, which refers to the way in which an individual adapts to the new environment or seeks to change it to suit his/her needs and abilities (Nicholson, 1984). Different antecedents may have different influences on these three aspects, such as factors of individual (self-efficacy, relation skills and perception skills), job (role clarity, role discretion, role novelty and role conflict), organisation culture (organisation culture novelty, social support and logistic help). In addition, nonwork factors (culture novelty and family-spouse adjustment) influences the degree of adjustment while organisation socialization has an impact on the mode of adjustment.



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the numbered facet(s) of adjustment to which the specific variable is expected to relate.

Figure 2.6: Framework of international adjustment (Black et al., 1991)

The model has been dominating the business research on expatriation since it

was introduced and influenced the subsequent research and triggered many studies (such as He, 2019; Bhaskar Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 1999). Kraimer et al. (2016) include three reasons contributing to the dominating role of the model. First, it represents the first theoretical framework to guide empirical research, as the research before it were largely atheoretical.

Secondly, the propositions derived from their model include structures that are easy to measure (e.g., previous international experience, self-efficacy) and specified simple bivariate relationships, making the model suitable for testing in field research. Third, all structures can be effectively evaluated through self-reported data, which greatly reduces the time and cost of collecting international survey data at that time.

The model is a breakthrough as it suggests that there are at least three specific facets of international adjustment which surpass the traditional single facet perspective. However, with the continuous advancement of follow-up research and theory, the three facets have begun to be questioned and challenged. In addition, the framework gives no consideration to repatriation. At the same time, the model's dominance has stifled other theoretical perspectives on expatriate adjustment, which makes the field seem dull and lack new ideas.

In addition, the three-dimension-scale developed by Black et al. (1991), although its validity and reliability have been widely verified, is limited by its research context which is based on Western cultural background and focuses on expatriates from developed countries. Therefore, the applicability of the international adjustment framework and the scale on Chinese expatriation practices remains to be checked and tested.

2.6.2 Aycan's conceptual model of expatriate adjustment

Aycan (1997) absorbs and synthesises three aspects of adjustment, psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment (Searle and Ward, 1990),

and work adjustment (task effectiveness) (Aycan and Berry, 1996), and develops a conceptual model of expatriate adjustment (figure 2.7). She divides the cross-culture adjustment into general adjustment (including psychological and socio-cultural adjustment) and work adjustment, and numerous factors affecting expatriate adjustment are presented in terms of pre-departure/post-arrival period and employee/organisational characteristics.

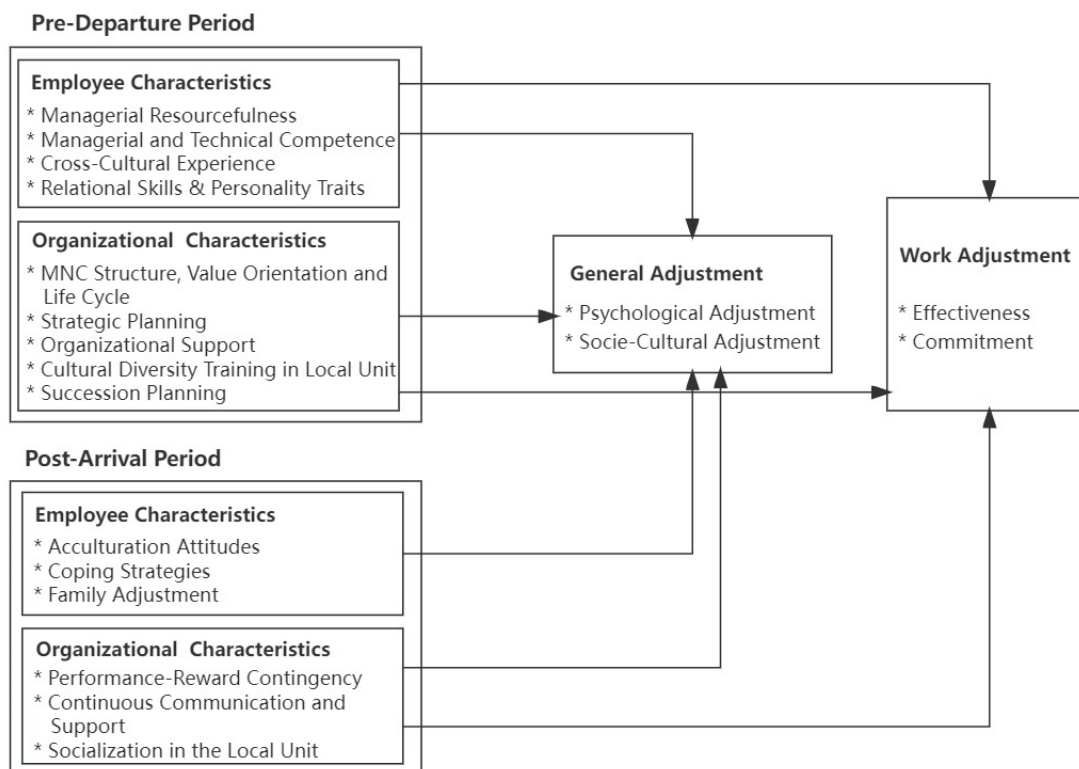


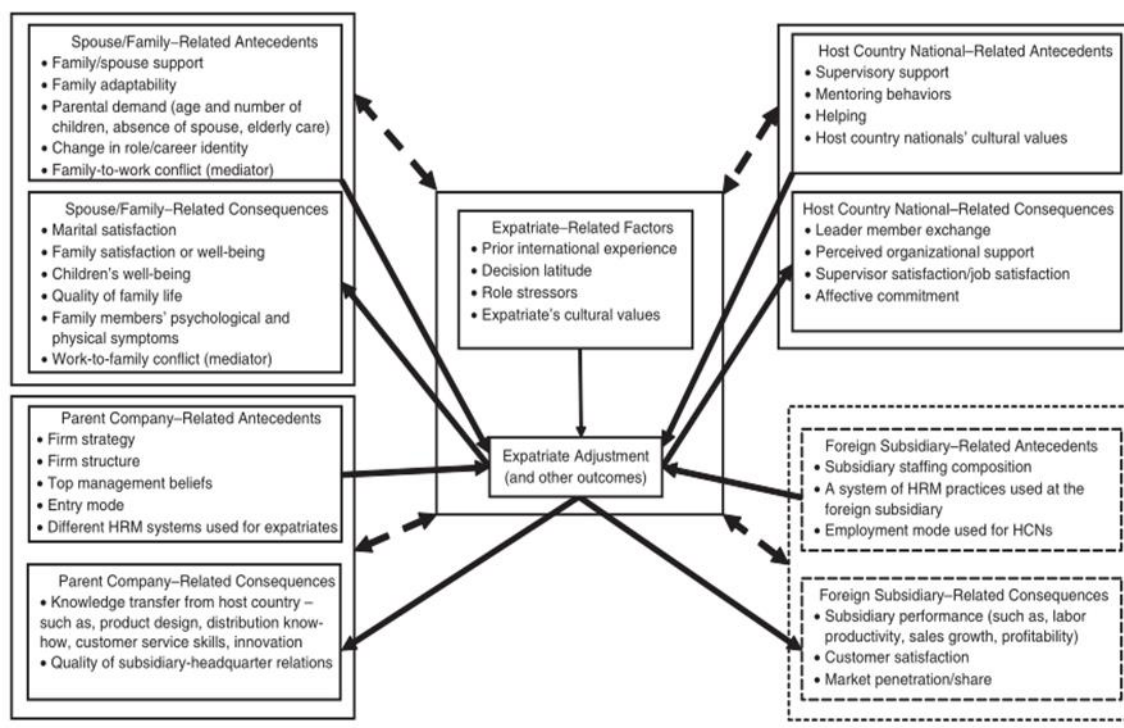
Figure 2.7: A conceptual model of expatriate adjustment (Aycan, 1997)

In the expatriate literature, Black and Stephens (1989) identifies three facets of adjustment: work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment, which are similar to Aycan's concept of work adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, and psychological adjustment respectively. Compared to Black et al.'s model, Aycan's model better integrates research in the field of acculturation and international business, and proposes new dimensions of adjustment, with particular emphasis on the psychological dimension of adjustment. It predicts that general adjustment, consisting of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, is the most direct antecedent of work adjustment. In addition, her model identifies many factors (e.g., acculturation attitudes,

managerial resourcefulness, cultural-diversity training in the local unit, planning for succession in the local unit) that were neglected in Black et al. (1991), with specific focus on the role of organisational factors (e.g., MNCs' structure, value orientation and life cycle, strategic planning) in host country operations. However, due to the lack of empirical measurement tools, the application of Aycan's framework is clearly inadequate compared to Black's model.

2.6.3 Takeuchi's integrative, interactionist framework of multiple stakeholder view of expatriate

Takeuchi (2010) provides a comprehensive framework (figure 2.8) based on a review of the literature, highlighting the various assumptions inherent in many, if not most, studies on expatriates and the importance of adopting an innovative, multi-stakeholder perspective approach to the study of expatriate adjustment and performance.



Notes: The dotted lines are used to indicate *potential* for interaction or moderating effects between a variable included for a stakeholder and expatriate-related factors. The dotted box is for a potential extension of this framework. HRM = human resource management.

Figure 2.8: An integrative, interactionist framework of multiple stakeholder view of expatriate

adjustment (Takeuchi, 2010)

The framework considers three key stakeholders (family, host country nationals, and parent company) that influence expatriate adjustment, and thus divides them into three domains (figure 2.9) and focuses on how they interact and influence each other by integrating a work-family conflict perspective at the expatriate-family member interface, a strategic human resource management perspective at the expatriate-parent organisation interface, and a social exchange theory perspective at the expatriate-host country national interface. In addition, as a fourth perspective, the human-situation interaction theory perspective is applied to each of the three interfaces.

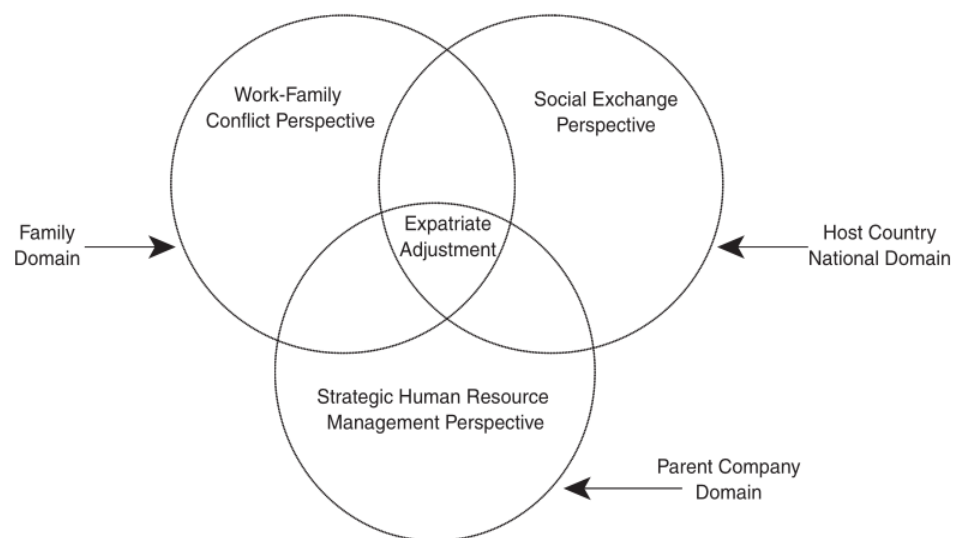


Figure 2.9: Multiple Stakeholder View of Expatriate Adjustment (Takeuchi, 2010)

This framework is intended to explain the potential direction of expatriate research in a rather general way and emphasises the importance of interactionism and other theoretical viewpoints in studying these interfaces, instead of assuming specific relationships. It absorbs the core content of Black et al. (1991), and more carefully and comprehensively summarises the antecedents and outcomes of expatriate adjustment. The framework also differs itself from the previous expatriate-centred research by emphasizing the importance of multiple stakeholders, which is of positive significance for expatriate practice. However, as Takeuchi's (2010) framework is complicated, there are rare empirical research on it. In addition, the three domains of

stakeholders may not be in line with the specific situation of Chinese expatriates.

2.6.4 Haslberger, Brewster and Hippler's revised and extended framework of international adjustment

Expatriate adjustment is related to psychological comfort in a new country (Black and Gregersen, 1990; 1991), but it is also obvious that expatriates and their families do not simply adapt to their new environment or not.

Work adjustment is the ongoing process of establishing and maintaining a mutually responsive and harmonious relationship with the work environment. The individual strives to achieve satisfaction with the work environment, while the work environment keeps finding satisfactoriness with the individual (Davis and Lofquist, 1984). Haslberger et al. (2013) builds on the aforementioned research and proposes the Revised and Extended Framework of International Adjustment (figure 2.10). They argue that adjustment occurs first in different dimensions, including cognitive, affective and behavioral factors. In each case,

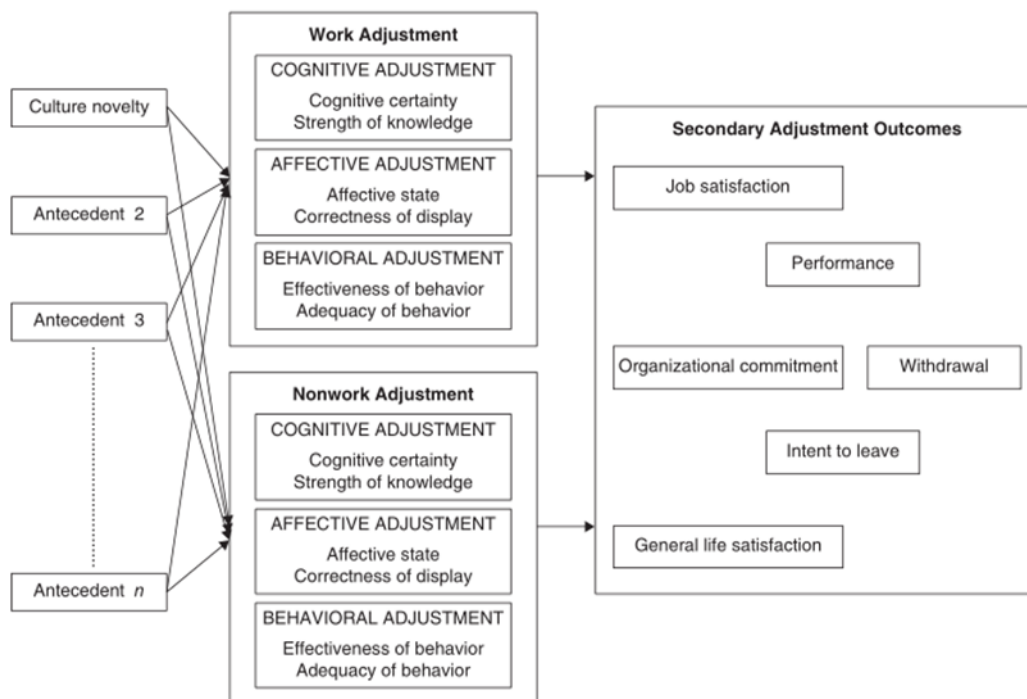


Figure 2.10: Revised and Extended Framework of International Adjustment (Haslberger et. al., 2013)

the adequacy criteria will be set by the external environment and the individual. The emotional (feeling) part is important, but the cognitive (knowledge) and behavioral aspects are also important. Second, the environment can be divided into different domains, from macro to micro. For example, expatriates will have to adjust to the host country's environmental factors, such as political and governmental system, work, economic sphere, social relations, family relations, and general worldview, with increasing difficulties.

Expatriate adjustment is dynamic, and it happens over time (Hippler et al., 2015). Actually, expatriate will adjust at different rates, with varying degrees of success in each area. A Person-Environment relationship will be "harmonious" if a person is functioning socially at an acceptable level, e.g., meeting the demands of the environment to the expected degree, and is satisfied with the level of psychological comfort they have achieved.

The framework divides adjustment into two dimensions as work and non-work, which is simple and direct and in line with the expatriate practices. As the reason that expatriates are assigned is to complete a task but not to adjust (Sinangil and Ones, 1997). Though cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors are considered within the two domains respectively, and the complexity of expatriate adjustment is examined comprehensively, some scholars still believe that the framework lacks a comprehensive understanding of the domains of expatriate adjustment (Harrison et al., 2004; Haslberger, 2005; Hippler, 2006; Thomas and Lazarova, 2006), and a refined structuring of domains need to be incorporated to the framework.

In terms of secondary adjustment outcomes, five of the six aspects are work-related, including job satisfaction, performance, organisational commitment, withdrawal, intent to leave, and only one outcome related to the personal life: general life satisfaction. The framework is more work-oriented and provides a new perspective for expatriate adjustment.

2.7 A brief survey of the research gaps

2.7.1 Expatriate adjustment research concerning influencing factors, motivations and consequences

Expatriate adjustment is a complex process involving multiple factors, and existing research in this field primarily focuses on the influencing factors of expatriate adjustment, motivations for expatriation, and the outcomes of adjustment.

Previous studies have identified numerous factors influencing expatriate adjustment, including individual characteristics, work-related factors, and non-work-related factors. Individual factors such as personality, motivation, and international experience significantly impact adjustment (e.g., Shaffer, et al., 1999; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012). Work-related factors, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and novelty, are closely associated with work adjustment (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Takeuchi, et al., 2008). Organizational elements like selection mechanisms, cross-cultural training, and organizational support play crucial roles in cross-cultural adjustment (e.g., Waxin and Panaccio, 2005). Additionally, non-work factors such as spousal adjustment and cultural novelty have shown inconsistent conclusions regarding their impact on expatriate adjustment (e.g., Jenkins and Mockaitis, 2010).

Recently, factors such as pandemics (Lazarova et al., 2022), career development, higher income (Rui et al., 2017), broadened perspectives (Selmer and Luring, 2012), personality dimensions and socio-psychological skills (Richardson et al., 2018), family factors (Lo et al., 2018), work difficulties (Bader et al., 2016), laws and regulations (Greppin et al., 2017), life challenges, hostile environments (Bader et al., 2018), and family conflicts (McNulty, 2015) have also been incorporated into research. However, empirical results indicate that expatriate adjustment is heavily influenced by specific cultural contexts, leading to inconsistent conclusions.

The literature also extensively covers the motivations and reasons for

expatriation. Expatriation motivations are typically aligned with organizational strategic needs and individual career development goals. Common reasons for organizations to use expatriates include control and coordination, knowledge transfer, and learning development between parent company and host subsidiaries (Baruch et al., 2016). Individuals may accept expatriation assignments for career advancement (Crowley-Henry and Collins, 2017; Brewster et al., 2014), seeking new challenges and horizon expansion (Selmer and Luring, 2012), higher income and improving their quality of life (Rui et al., 2017; Armstrong, 2014). The phenomenon of self-Initiated expatriates (SIEs) reflects a trend where individuals proactively seek international work experience to enhance their career competitiveness (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2012).

Successful expatriate adjustment is typically measured by work performance, psychological well-being, and social integration. Studies indicate that well-adjusted expatriates often exhibit higher job satisfaction, better job performance, and improved interpersonal relationships (Uddin et al., 2020). Conversely, adjustment difficulties can result in lower job performance, increased stress, and the risk of premature termination of the expatriation assignment. It is estimated that the cost of unsuccessful expatriates is 2.5 to 10 times higher than that of local employees (Ditchburn and Brook, 2015). Non-financial consequences for companies include damaged reputation, loss of relationships with governments, business partners, and customers, loss of business opportunities, and decreased morale within the local organization (Shi and Franklin, 2014). Difficulties in expatriate adjustment can lead to individual psychological stress, decreased performance, inability to integrate (Sambasivan et al., 2017), expatriate burnout, and talent waste (Gibson et al., 2015). Expatriate failure can also cause a loss of self-confidence, strained family relationships, and career interruptions (Gibson et al., 2015). It is estimated that approximately 40% of expatriates return home early due to an

inability to adapt to the host country culture (Kim and Slocum, 2008).

Existing literature also examines the support resources and strategies organizations provide to enhance expatriate adjustment success rates. Effective cross-cultural training can enhance expatriates' understanding and adjustment to the host country culture (Waxin and Panaccio, 2005). Mentorship and social support are important resources that facilitate better integration into both professional and personal lives (Zhuang et al., 2012; Lee and Van Vorst, 2010). Family support also plays an important role throughout the expatriation period, and its influence on adjustment has long been discussed and proved (e.g., Lo et al., 2018; Fineman, 2014; Andreason, 2003). Emotional support (showing love, care, concern and sympathy) and companionship provided by family members are important components of social support for expatriates (Van der Laken et al., 2018; Ong and Ward, 2005). Shaffer and Harrison (1998) found that overall spousal satisfaction positively correlates with work adjustment. Bonsiep et al. (2003) indicated that expatriates' work adjustment aligns with the adjustment of their families in the host country.

2.7.2 Research gaps arising from the evolving context of Chinese business expatriates

From the discussions in this chapter, it is evident that expatriate adjustment research has a long history and a wealth of findings. However, it also reflects that the vast majority of literature focuses on expatriates from developed countries, lacking consideration of non-Western contextual factors (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015; Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018). This mismatch with the evolving expatriation practices is highlighted by the rapidly growing group of Chinese expatriates and the emerging theoretical and practical needs that arise from it. Compared to 2010 data, the number of Chinese overseas enterprises has increased by 181% over the past decade, while the number of Chinese expatriates has grown by 240% (MOFCOM, 2021; 2010). In contrast,

little attention has been paid to Chinese overseas enterprises and Chinese expatriates (Yao, 2014).

We have observed a limited but steadily increasing number of studies focusing on Chinese expatriates and their adjustment issues in recent years (e.g., Okpara et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020; Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018; Wang et al., 2017). However, these studies predominantly rely on existing Western-based research and theoretical frameworks, lacking in-depth analysis of the cross-cultural adjustment characteristics of Chinese multinational enterprises and their expatriates. Moreover, empirical research on expatriate adjustment is relatively scarce, making it difficult to fully reveal the impact of the Chinese context on expatriates and their adjustment. Attempts to construct new theoretical frameworks of expatriate adjustment from a Chinese perspective are even rarer.

While the existing theories and studies on expatriate adjustment undoubtedly provide valuable reference points for studying the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates, China's unique ethnic and cultural environment, along with the distinctive characteristics of its expatriates, result in significant differences in expatriate adjustment compared to Western cases (e.g., Lin et al., 2018; Jaw et al., 2007). For instance, Chinese expatriates are typically assigned alone, without family members. Another example is that Chinese expatriates often have more companions, making group expatriation more common and providing conditions for building a simulated home in the host country. The concepts of "guanxi" (relationships), Confucian cultural traditions, and collectivism in Chinese culture impose context-specific requirements on expatriates, which inevitably influence their sense of responsibilities and affect expatriate decisions and adjustment strategies differently. Whether and how these differences impact cross-cultural adjustment cannot be adequately addressed by the current Western-based expatriate research.

Therefore, the exploration of Chinese business expatriates presents a valuable

opportunity to introduce a novel perspective on expatriate adjustment, thereby enriching the existing body of literature in this field. By investigating the adjustment mechanisms specific to Chinese business expatriates and developing an adjustment framework grounded in the Chinese context, it is conducive to addressing current research gap comprehensively and enhancing theoretical and practical understandings of Chinese business expatriates.

2.8 Summary

This chapter presents and discusses the literature review strategy of this grounded theory research and defines the two key concepts, expatriate and expatriate adjustment. It then mainly reviews some of the influential theories and frameworks of adjustment in both PSA field and IB field, which help to develop a more comprehensive understanding of business expatriates as they not only have to adjust to the working environment, but also as humans living in the host country and have to interact with its social, political, economic, cultural aspect. Therefore, the review not only provides a broad and quick grasp of cross-cultural adjustment from two different perspectives but also suggesting an integrated attitude toward the expatriate adjustment research.

Though cross-cultural adjustment research in different fields have provided a solid foundation and theoretical support for expatriate adjustment research, there are still some gaps identified. The first issue is the limited research perspective in expatriate adjustment research. The Black et al.'s (1991) model and its influence have been dominating the field, and there have been few exciting breakthroughs although subsequent researchers have put forward some new ideas (e.g., Aycan, 1997; Takeuchi, 2010) but with rare empirical studies. The second issue is that the expatriate adjustment research and its related theoretical framework lack an integrated attitude toward expatriate adjustment research in PSA and IB field. Generally, the two literature streams use different methods and research frameworks, but they now pay similar

attention to the cultural differences, adaptability and subsequent job success in the host society (Gonzalez et al., 2015). The third issue is that the vast majority of research is western-specific. All models in this field are constructed from western perspective that they focus on expatriates from developed countries and naturally lack the consideration of non-western situational factors. Actually, there is few studies and models for the adjustment issue of Chinese expatriates. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply analyze the characteristics of adjustment of Chinese expatriates and build a culturally specific framework, so as to better understand the adjustment of Chinese expatriates and better guide the practice.

The next chapter will discuss the methodology through explaining and justifying the research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, research strategy, techniques and procedures of this research. Research quality and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter first introduces the framework of research design, which includes elements of research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, research strategy, techniques and procedures, and then followed by a full description and justification of these elements of the research design and explain how they are closely interrelated. It begins with a general discussion of research philosophy and then explains and justifies the philosophical assumptions of interpretivism. Next it discusses and justifies the inductive approach and qualitative method to theory development. Then, a general discussion of the grounded theory is provided and followed by why it is highly consistent with this research. Then the data collection and analysis process are presented. The criteria for research quality are then discussed and the quality of this research is explained from four perspectives of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The chapter concludes with a discussion and reflection on ethical considerations in the research process.

3.2 Research design framework

Research design is the plan for addressing the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Suggestions for design vary between researchers (for example, Maxwell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019; Creswell, 2013; Tuli, 2010; Crotty, 1998). This study adopts Saunders' design framework, referred to as the research onion (figure 3.1), for business and management research, considering the fact that this study is a DBA study with a goal to contribute to both knowledge and practice (Banerjee and Morley, 2013). According to Saunders et al. (2019), the research design includes six layers from the outside to the inside, namely, philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, strategies, time horizon, techniques and procedures. The remainder of this chapter will follow the guidance of the research onion thus to provide a

comprehensive and systematic explanation and justification of the specific choice for this research.

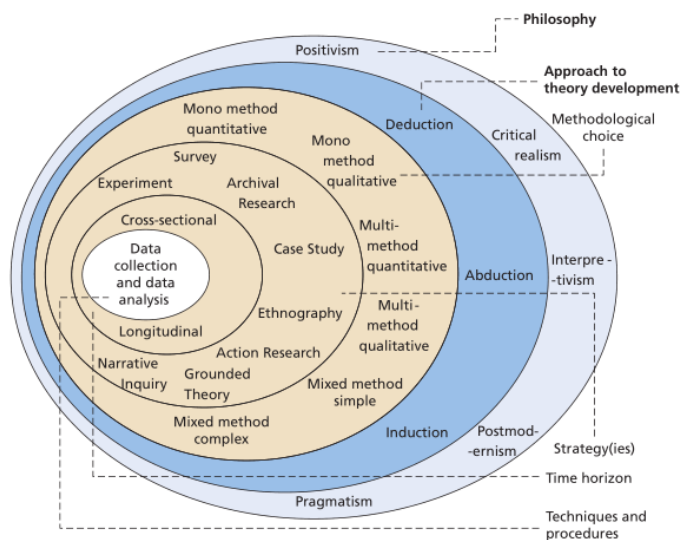


Figure 3.1: The research onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

3.3 Research philosophy

3.3.1 Five major philosophies

Research philosophy represents a system of beliefs and assumptions about knowledge development (Saunders et al., 2019; Guba and Lincoln, 2005), “a view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view” (Birks, 2014). Therefore, it can be regarded as the basis of research.

Positivists believe that reality is stable and can be observed, described, and explained from an objective perspective without interfering with the phenomenon under study (Sarantakos, 2012). “Positivism relates to the philosophical stance of the natural scientist and entails working with an observable social reality to produce law-like generalizations.” (Saunders, et al., 2019, p144). Critical realists believe that reality is external and independent, and our perception of reality is the result of social conditions. What we experience is our sensations which are the manifestations of the things in the real world rather than the actual things (Reed, 2005). They focus on the

fundamental causes and mechanisms that shape social and organisational life through searching for deep social structures that provide explanations for observed organisational events. Postmodernism emphasises the role of language and of power relations (Saunders, et al., 2019). It attempts to question and expose the power relations that maintain the dominant reality (Calás and Smircich, 1997) through “deconstructing” the reality (Derrida, 2016) into its underpinning ideology and power relations, and expresses another marginal point of view. Pragmatists are not confined to a specific belief and assumption. They are more concerned with research to provide practical solutions and guidance for future practice. The research problem and the research question will be the key determinant of research design (Saunders, et al., 2019). Interpretivism holds that human actions create meaning, and reality is multiple as different cultures, environments, times, and people create and experience different meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The purpose of interpretivism research is to create new and richer understandings and explanations of the social world.

Interpretivism guides this research. The assumption of multiple realities supports the idea that meanings created and experienced by Chinese expatriates are different as well as significant thus this research will create new understandings and explanations of expatriate adjustment. In addition, participants’ understandings of adjustment, which needs to be reconstructed, are based on their own varied experiences. Therefore, interpretivism is consistent with this research.

3.3.2 Interpretivism assumption

3.3.2.1 Interpretivist philosophical assumptions

This research holds a relativism ontology and constructivism epistemology. Ontology, as the study of being, deals with “what is”, the nature of existence, and the structure of reality (Crotty, 1998). Relativist ontology holds that reality

is everyone's subjective experience and is equivalent to human experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Realities are changeable as they are interpretations influenced by specific history and culture and there are different interpretations of the same phenomenon at different times and in different places (Crotty, 1998). That means, reality is relative and depends on each individual who experience it in different context (Moon and Blackman, 2014). I agree with the relativist ontology, which is typically person-centred (Brown 2003) and holds that there is no single reality or truth but only multiple realities. and this is consistent with my work and life experience and the values and beliefs I have developed.

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibilities, scope, and general basis (Hamlyn, 1995) and provides a philosophical basis for understanding knowledge, just as Crotty put it as "a way of understanding and explaining how I know what I know" (Crotty, 1998, p3). Constructivist epistemology holds that there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered, as truth, or meaning, exists in and comes from our contact with the reality of the world. From this perspective, meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998). I am comfortable with constructionism epistemology that people construct their own meanings so that they in a sense contribute to creating the multiple reality which make this world colorful and diverse.

3.3.2.2 Interpretivism justification

As I mentioned previously (chapter 1.2), my work and study experiences allow me to sense and perceive ubiquitous differences and common values between cultures and individuals, which enables me to see and interpret the world from a more inclusive and open perspective.

This research adopts interpretivist philosophy which Saunders, et al. (2019) suggest as appropriate in business and management studies. Business situations reflecting a specific set of situations and interactions are complex

and unique, at least in context. Interpretivism, with assumption of multiple realities and constructing meaning, will contribute to developing a new understanding and building a new theory on a same topic with different contexts.

This research aims to explore the adjustment of Chinese expatriates and develop a new adjustment framework while the extant theories and frameworks on the topic are mostly based on western samples. By rebuilding the self-understanding of the actors involved in specific actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), it attempts to understand the topic from a new perspective combining the specific Chinese contexts. Therefore, interpretivism is highly consistent with this research.

3.4 Approach to theory development

3.4.1 Inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning

Research project involves the use of theory, whether theory testing or theory building. Saunders, et al. (2019) put forward three approaches: inductive, deductive and abductive reasoning (figure3.2).

	Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory

Figure 3.2: Deduction, induction and abduction: from reason to research (Saunders, et al. 2019)

Deduction is a scientific method that emphasises structure, quantification, generality, and testable hypotheses. It has the following three characteristics:

seeking the causal relationship between concepts and variables; concepts need to be measured, usually quantitatively; generalization. Therefore, the deductive approach is most likely to be supported by positivist research philosophy.

Induction, as a more flexible approach than deduction, tends to develop a different understanding of the researched phenomenon by paying special attention to the context in which such incidents occur and more likely using qualitative data collected by a variety of methods. It has a connection to the humanities and emphasises subjective interpretation, therefore, it is consistent with interpretivism.

Abduction, sometimes called “retroduction”, starts by observing a “surprising fact” (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010), combines deduction and induction effectively and move back and forth (Suddaby, 2006), and promotes theoretical development. A well-developed abduction is more likely to be supported by pragmatism, postmodernism, as well as critical realism (Saunders, et al. 2019).

3.4.2 Inductive approach justification

This research adopts inductive approach. Its purpose to explore the adjustment of Chinese expatriate and to bring new understandings to expatriate adjustment theory which is currently based mainly on western expatriate samples is consistent with the inductive approach that focuses on the specific context. Compared with the large sample required by deductive approach, the inductive approach takes the deep-digged small sample more appropriate, which provides support for the data collection from a small sample by using in-depth interview method in this study. The induction work will help organise the data collected into more and more abstract information units, and develop patterns, themes and themes from bottom to top. By working back and forth between data and analysis, researchers develop a comprehensive series

of themes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the research purpose and its relevant theory building process is consistent with inductive approach underpinned by interpretivist philosophy.

3.5 Methodological choice

3.5.1 Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods

Quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed method research represent three approaches to inquiry (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders, 2019). Qualitative and quantitative methods should not be seen as rigid, polar opposites or dichotomies but the different ends of a continuum (figure 3.3). Mixed method research, combining elements of qualitative and quantitative methods, lies in the middle of this continuum (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

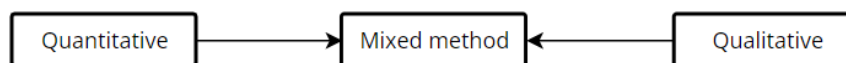


Figure 3.3: Continuum of inquiring approaches (adapted from Creswell and Creswell, 2018)

Qualitative research is usually associated with interpretivist philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Using non-probabilistic sampling techniques, unstructured or semi-structured, it collects non-standardised qualitative data and mainly uses inductive approach to develop theories closely related to its research background (Saunders, 2019; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Charmaz, 2014).

3.5.2 Qualitative method justification

This research adopts qualitative method. According to Morse (1991), qualitative research is appropriate when: (a) the concept is immature because of a lack of research and theory; (b) the extant theories maybe viewed as biased, inappropriate, or incorrect; (c) there is a need to explore the phenomenon and develop a theory; (d) the phenomenon is not suitable for quantitative method. One key assumption of this study is that the existing theory of expatriate adjustment developed mainly on western expatriate

samples may not properly and accurately cover the Chinese expatriates. As stated above that adjustment of Chinese expatriate is an under-researched topic, therefore, this research needs a method paying more attention to the background and the meaning of Chinese expatriates to explore and describe the specific phenomena of Chinese expatriates' adjustment and develop a new theory of expatriate adjustment. Qualitative methods are exploratory in nature (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Inductive approach and qualitative research based on in-depth interviews are suitable for capturing participants' perspectives on key characteristics of a given situation, and it is advantageous in being sensitive to and organizing the multiple meanings and realities held by participants, thereby aiding in a better understanding of an understudied phenomenon and constructing research findings based on a specific context (Creswell, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, this study employs a qualitative research method, as it provides the most relevant approach and aligns closely with the interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach that support this study, as well as with the research aim and objectives of this study.

3.6 Research strategy

3.6.1 Grounded theory overview

This research adopts grounded theory (GT) as its research strategy. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose GT in their seminal publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* which challenges the dominant quantitative research paradigm of the time and provides a method to present qualitative research as rigorous and valid (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). After that, GT keeps attracting growing attention and developing in diverse ideas and expressions.

Birks and Mills (2015) divide GT into three major genres: traditional GT associated with Glaser, evolved GT associated with Clark, Strauss and Corbin, and the constructivist GT associated with Charmaz. The traditional GT emphasizes the emergence of theory directly from data without preconceived

hypotheses (Glaser, 1992). In contrast, the evolved GT introduces a more structured approach to coding and analysis, incorporating axial coding to identify relationships between categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Constructivist GT, proposed by Charmaz, integrates constructivist epistemology, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2006). This evolution reflects GT's adaptability to different research contexts and philosophical underpinnings, allowing researchers to tailor their approach to their specific needs and epistemological beliefs (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019).

Bryant and Charmaz (2019) discuss five types of GT from perspectives of research paradigm, epistemology, coding and theory building process (table 3.1). They stress that different types of GT have the same origins, and it forms a big family consisted of researchers moving in different directions. Different grounded theorist may apply the common basis of GT, such as theoretical sampling, memo writing, coding, comparing method, however, with different opinions in their assumptions for the research and how they will use those guidelines.

Table 3.1: Five types of grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019)

	Glaser and Strauss	Glaser	Strauss and Corbin	Charmaz and Bryant	Clarke
Research Paradigm	Objectivist Realist	Objectivist Realist Positivist	Objectivist Realist Interpretive	Constructivist Interpretivist	Interpretive Situationist, Constructionist
Approach to Coding	Comparisons: Incidents; Incidents to properties; Delimit theory	Substantive coding: Open coding Selective coding Theoretical coding	Open coding Axial coding Selective coding	Initial coding Open coding Focused coding Varied coding strategies Axial coding Theoretical coding	Open coding Axial coding Situational mapping Social Worlds/Arenas mapping Positional mapping
Analytic Tools		Coding families	Conditional matrix	Coding families	

Early Coding	Incidents	Line-by-line	Paragraph-by-paragraph; Phrase-by-phrase; Line-by-line Micro coding (specific strategic words)	Line-by-line Incident-by-incident; Word-by-word	Word-by-word Segment-by-segment
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The primary purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory that is grounded in empirical data. This approach enables researchers to develop theories that are closely linked to the real-world experiences of participants, providing a deep understanding of the phenomena under study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). One of the perceived benefits of GT is its flexibility. It allows for the emergence of new insights and theoretical constructs that may not be anticipated at the outset of the research (Birks and Mills, 2015). Additionally, GT's iterative process of data collection and analysis ensures that the emerging theory is well-substantiated and reflective of the participants' perspectives (Charmaz, 2014). This rigorous approach enhances the credibility and validity of qualitative research findings, making GT a valuable strategy in various disciplines, particularly in social sciences and health research (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007).

Despite its strengths, grounded theory is not without critiques and challenges. One common challenge is the potential for researcher bias, particularly in the interpretive phases of coding and theory development (Bryman, 2012). Critics argue that the subjective nature of qualitative analysis can lead to findings that are overly influenced by the researcher's perspectives and preconceptions. Another challenge is the time-intensive nature of the GT process, which requires extensive data collection, coding, and iterative analysis, making it demanding in terms of both time and resources (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Additionally, the evolving nature of GT, with its multiple variants, can be confusing for novice researchers who may struggle to choose the most

appropriate approach for their study (Birks and Mills, 2015). Thomas and James (2006) argue that new researchers may find the procedure rules of grounded theory attractive, the seemingly “right” and appealing way may take them far away from the best of qualitative inquiry.

3.6.2 Grounded theory justification

The grounded theory methodology is highly consistent with interpretivist philosophy and inductive and qualitative exploration.

As a structured but flexible methodology, GT works when little is known about a phenomenon and aims to produce or construct an explanatory theory that reveals the processes inherent in the focused substantive field (Birks and Mills, 2015; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is highly consistent with the exploratory nature of this research and the purpose of developing a specific theory.

GT provides guidelines thus bring structure and direction to the research. A series of carefully planned steps are conducted to carry out the induction and derive a context-specific theory. Crotty (1998) states it tries to ensure that emerging theory is generated from appropriate data. Distinctive steps of GT, like comparative methods, theoretical sampling, memo and diagram, are not only highly efficient in collecting the proper data but also effective and beneficial to separate the research from the researcher’s preconception.

Moreover, GT is chosen as it is generally related to creativity, originality and significance. Glaser (2010) states that people are more and more dissatisfied with the usual evidentiary and preconceived formulated research because of its inefficiency in producing findings that make business problems better (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019). Jones and Noble (2007) think that the strength of grounded theory in management research lies in its ability to develop new theories, revitalise old ones, create theories relevant to practitioners, and exploit micromanagement processes in complex situations. They point out that

GT is very helpful for practitioners and management researchers, making it especially suitable for DBA thesis.

This study adopts the constructivist GT of Charmaz and Bryant, which advocates a constructivist worldview, more emergent, and more flexible multi-strategy approach to coding, and open attitude to the early review of the literature. It regards GT as a set of principles and practices rather than as prescriptions or packaged procedures. Different from Glaser and Strauss, who hold that theory comes from data that is independent of the observer, constructivist GT argues that neither the data nor the theory is discovered, and we, as part of the world we study and the data we collect, construct the grounded theory through our past and present engagement and interaction with people, perspectives and research practices (Charmaz, 2014). This is compatible with my research philosophy.

In terms of this research, which is conducted under a globalised world where cultural and subcultural differences abound, formulated research and normative preconceptions would be inefficient in such a cultural diversification. In short, grounded theory method is highly consistent with the research philosophy (interpretivism), approach to theory development (inductive method) and method choice (qualitative), and the research purpose and aims of this study.

3.7 Techniques and procedures

The data collection and data analysis of grounded theory are intertwined. They happen almost simultaneously (Holton, 2009). For example, some degree of analysis is inevitable during the interview, whether in the form of field notes or even subconscious ones. Therefore, researchers can respond to the phenomena being studied and make flexible adjustment in their data collection so as to establish a more accurate description of reality (Alberti-Alhtaybat and Al-Hyaybat, 2010). To better illustrate the technical and procedural section,

data collection and data analysis will be discussed separately.

3.7.1 Data collection

3.7.1.1 Basic sample criterion

Before theoretical sampling is introduced to the research, a basic sample criterion has been made according to the research needs. The criteria for research participants are as follows:

- The participants include those sent overseas by Chinese companies from mainland China to work in overseas branches of Chinese companies, and those self-initiated to travel abroad to seek work chances and career development in business organisations in the host country.
- The participants worked in mainland China before their international assignment, excluding those possible candidates from Hongkong, Macau, Taiwan, and other Chinese ethnic groups in southeast Asia.
- The international assignment lasted for at least one year.
- The participants worked in a management role or as professionals of a business organization in the host country.

3.7.1.2 Sampling and sample size

Early participants were selected from the potential participants based on convenience criteria and their willingness to participate. The initial interview data and timely analysis form the initial concepts that drive the theoretical sampling. Subsequent interviews were based on the previous data collection and analysis, and theoretical sampling continued until data saturation. However, it was not clear at the beginning of the study that how many participants were needed to achieve data saturation.

The inductive approach supports the notion that deep excavation of small samples is full of significance (Saunders, 2019). Crouch and McKenzie (2006) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003) put that the appropriate sample size for

qualitative research is usually smaller than that for quantitative research and is usually less than 50 samples. Warren (2002) holds that a qualitative interview study seems to need a minimum of 20 interviews. In a situation with a small sample, Corbin and Strauss (2014) suggest researchers should not worry about consistency too much as there tends to be some consistency when people are telling their stories. The interviews confirm this point, and this contributes to seeking new information and forming new themes with the help of theoretical sampling.

After the fourth interview, the major themes have already emerged, and they become stable after the sixth interview. Shaw (1999) advocates that once the research has reached the point of information saturation and the same common themes run through the interview, further interviews should stop. In this study the interviews ceased after the 11th interview as no new themes and subthemes were emerging.

3.7.1.3 Interview

Intensive qualitative interviewing is perfectly consistent with grounded theory method, with both open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted (Charmaz, 2014), and a central purpose of an intensive interview is process-tracing and conceptual mapping (Hochschild, 2009). Therefore, interview was chosen as the data collection method as it allows exploration and provides rich data for analysis and finally develops a context-specific theory.

3.7.1.3.1 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structure interviews were conducted as it was likely to make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018) and lead to major advances in theoretical understanding of social reality. According to Charmaz (2014), semi-structured interviews collect and focus on qualitative

textual data, revealing rich descriptive data about participants' personal experiences. Under interpretivist philosophy, semi-structured interview offers both initial structure of the interview and enough flexibility (Saunders, 2019), which is highly consistent with theoretical sampling requirement and coding process of grounded theory method.

Question design is a key determinant of a successful interview (Alberti-Alhtaybat and Al-Hyaybat, 2010). Gehrels (2013) suggests that questions should be presented in a way with flexibility that enables participants have the freedom to describe their experiences and with sufficient structure that ensures no major topics are left out.

The first version of interview questions was made after several modifications and tests. In the early interviews, open-ended and broad questions were mainly used to find interesting and useful points as much as possible to ensure the richness of data. As the interviews went on, some new questions were brought into the interview to explore and enrich the themes. The interview process, featuring flexible questions, continued until data saturation was reached.

3.7.1.3.2 Process of data collection

Prior to the formal interview, I made initial contact with potential participants by phone or WeChat to seek their consent to participate in the research. Then the information sheet and the consent form of this study were sent to them to fully inform the participants what is this research about, what they need to do, how the data will be collected, conserved and used, and their rights (included in appendices). After obtaining consent, an agreed interview time was arranged. An interview usually lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Since the possible participants are based in different countries or cities, busy with their work and with a low motivation to take part in this research, it was difficult to find the suitable participants. In addition, intertwined data collection and data analysis kept bringing new requirements to data collection. Therefore, the data collection

phase lasted about 10 months. Appendix C shows the basic information of the participants in this research.

To better communicate with Chinese expatriates, interviews were conducted in Chinese, including offline face-to-face interview and online interview to allow better communication with the Chinese expatriates. Most of the interviews in this study were conducted online because the participants were scattered in different countries and cities, and it was difficult to meet offline due to the pandemic. All interviews were recorded with permission and were transcribed in Microsoft Word documents. The interview recordings and transcripts were repeatedly reviewed and verified to ensure the accuracy of the data.

In the early stages of data collection, interviewees were selected from potential participants based on convenience criteria and their willingness to participate, and semi-structured interviews were then conducted. Data collection and data analysis were subsequently interwoven, driving theoretical sampling and constant comparison, which guided the subsequent interviews. After the fourth interview, some important themes began to emerge, and by the sixth interview, these themes had become stable. Subsequent interviews further enriched these themes and the aspects they encompassed. As no new themes emerged, the interviewing process concluded after the eleventh interview.

There were also some specific challenges during interviews, such as the possible time zone difference increasing the difficulty, network problems resulting in a short interruption of the interview, and the interview interrupted by some unexpected work requirements. The researcher overcame these difficulties by effective communication with the participants, ensuring good preparation for the hardware and software required for the interview, and building good rapport and mutual understanding with the participants.

3.7.2 Data analysis

Although there are different versions, grounded theory includes the following

major components: theoretical sampling, comparative method, memo writing and coding (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019; Goulding and Saren, 2010). Given that the theoretical sampling part is briefly discussed in the data collection section, and that comparative method serves memo writing and coding, this section will discuss coding and memo writing.

3.7.2.1 Coding

Coding is an essential step in data analysis as an iterative process, a key step between data collected and the generating theory that explains it (Charmaz, 2014). Data is broken down, conceptualised, and categorised several times in this process to allow context-specific theory to emerge. It is inseparable from other elements of analysis, such as memo writing and theoretical sampling (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019).

Bryant and Charmaz (2019) present five major coding approaches (table 3.1) and meanwhile stress that they are rather guidelines than rules. This research adopts Charmaz and Bryant coding approach, which is constructivism oriented, more emergent, and more flexible with multi-strategy. It combines some elements of classical grounded theory by Glaser and procedural approach by Strauss and Corbin, which implies an open coding strategy, or not limited to a particular guideline. Figure 3.4 shows the analysis process of grounded theory in this study.

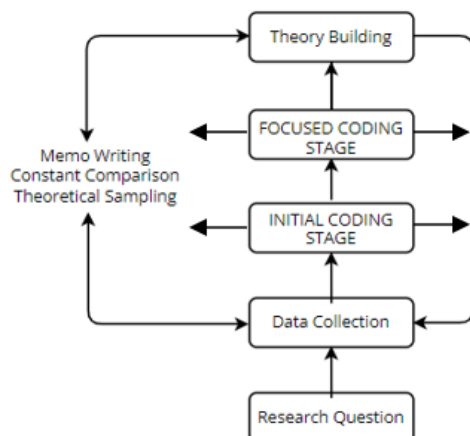


Figure 3.4: The process of Grounded Theory (Adapted from Charmaz, 2014).

The constant comparative method is a core data analysis technique within grounded theory, with the central idea to continuously compare data to gradually generate and refine theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize that through constant comparison, researchers can discover new categories and concepts in the data and compare these categories and concepts with existing data to validate their consistency and comprehensiveness. Strauss and Corbin argued that the constant comparative method is not only applicable during the early stages of data analysis but should be employed throughout the entire data collection and analysis process to ensure the theory generated possesses high internal consistency and external validity (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Charmaz highlighted the key aspects of the constant comparative method as its flexibility and openness, allowing researchers to continuously adjust and improve coding strategies during data analysis. This method not only aids in coding data but also facilitates the generation and validation of theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The constant comparative method in this study encompasses four aspects: comparing incident to incident, concept/category to more incidents, category to category, and external comparison (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The coding process was aided with memos, diagrams (see chapter 3.7.2.2), and software (see chapter 3.7.2.3). Incidents and their similarities and differences are compared to generate code and categories (see chapter 3.7.2.1.1). The formed categories are then compared with one another to generate core categories (see chapter 3.7.2.1.2). These categories are also continually compared with existing literature to facilitate theoretical development. For example, chapter 5.2.2.4 compares the adjustment strategies of Chinese business expatriates identified in this research with those in existing literature.

3.7.2.1.1 Initial / open coding stage

Charmaz's approach includes two stages: initial coding and focused coding

(Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding is like open coding, the first step of Strauss and Corbin’s procedural approach, which breaks data down into pieces and describe them thus to develop initial themes and their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Bryant (2017) advocates starting with open coding (sometimes using the term “initial coding”) and holds that the whole purpose of open (or initial) coding is to produce useful abstractions.

Segment by segment and line by line coding are used to analyze the data, which brings the researcher closer and makes the code more relevant to the data. The first coding stage does not force the use of gerunds as advocated by Charmaz and Bryant. It keeps things open, close to the data, uses constant comparative method, and develops concise codes. Table 3.2 illustrates the opening coding stage using the theme “work difficulties” as an example.

Table 3.2: An illustration of opening coding

Example of quotes	Code	Theme
After all, my job is to sell. But you are not selling products to Chinese people but to foreigners. You are not using Chinese but foreign language to sell.	Work role change	Work Difficulties
When the overseas market is developing fast, some of the company’s system may not be able to keep up with our needs, then the work gets harder.	Insufficient organisational support	
You always feel that local employees can’t keep up with your work. And they are kind of one-track-minded.	Mismatched work pace	
The problem of corruption in Africa, that’s what I can’t stand.	Challenging working environment	

3.7.2.1.2 Focused coding stage

The second stage of constructivist grounded theory is focused coding, which is done at a higher level of abstraction than the first coding stage and used to synthesise large chunks of data. Initial codes are compared in order to select those with the most analytical power, or to identify new code that can capture multiple initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). Bryant (2017) thinks that selective,

focused and theoretical coding are all higher-level coding that none is superior to the rest and agrees on a creative combination of these strategies. Charmaz (2014) also discusses axial coding derived from procedural grounded theory and theoretical coding from Glaser classical grounded theory, suggesting these steps are not mandatory and a flexible coding process according to the complexity and specific needs of the research. Through the focused coding stage, this study has identified the main themes and their relationships. Table 3.3 shows a higher level of abstraction as an example of the focused coding stage.

Table 3.3: An illustration of focused coding

Example of quotes	Codes	Subthemes	Theme
When the overseas market is developing fast, some of the company's system may not be able to keep up with our needs, then the work gets harder.	Insufficient organisational support	Work Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
My daughter is only three years old at that time. It is quite challenging facing the issues such as the impact on the relationship with my wife and who will look after my daughter while I am away.	Family conflict	Life Difficulties	
What are the real pain points? To endure loneliness. It is a must, then you will be a little better.	Loneliness	Psychological Difficulties	
I think the primary issue of expatriation is security, isn't? If you go to some African countries, or even some western countries where guns are very popular at local, personal safety is the top concern.	Safety problems	General Difficulties	

3.7.2.2 Memo and diagram

Memo writing starts at the very early stage of analysis and continue throughout the process, enabling a rich and complete analysis of data and codes (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Charmaz,2014). As a key intermediate step between data collection and draft writing, it helps stimulate thinking and encourages new ways to look at data and code (Charmaz,2014). Strauss and Corbin (1998)

propose three types of memos (table 3.4), namely, code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes. Meanwhile, they emphasise that it is not the form of the memo that matters, it's actually writing it. Table 4.1 (in chapter 4) is an example of memo.

Table 3.4: Three types of memos (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)

Code notes	Memos containing the actual products of the three types of coding: open, focused, and selective
Theoretical notes	Sensitizing and summarizing memos that contain an analyst's thoughts and ideas about theoretical sampling and other issues
Operational notes	Memos containing procedural directions and reminders

Diagrams were also used to aid the analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider it is best to draw frameworks in the form of diagrams rather than text. Lots of diagrams were made during the data analysis stage, which facilitates data abstraction and improve the analysis level. Figure 4.1 is an example of diagrams.

3.7.2.3 NVivo

NVivo 12 was used to aid analysis. NVivo is a powerful tool that, when used properly, can facilitate many aspects of the grounded theory process, from design and early sampling procedures to data analysis, theory development, and results presentation (Hutchinson, et al., 2010). Quinton and Smallbone (2006) argue that this makes the coding process easier and faster and allows more time for in-depth analysis. Though qualitative software may be of great use in organizing and encoding data, they cannot replace data interpretation process, and it is the researcher him/herself has to make the key decision to determine which themes to focus on, where to collect data for the next iteration, and perhaps most importantly, what the units of data mean (Suddaby, 2006). In short, the use of NVivo helps simplify the data analysis process, allows more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the data, and improves the rigor and credibility of the research.

3.8 Research quality

3.8.1 The standards of research quality

It is difficult to specify the quality issue as its elusiveness, just as Seale (2002) puts, “we often feel we know it when we see it. In this respect research is like art rather than science” (p102). Many researchers have offered a variety of practices on qualitative quality (such as Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Tracy, 2010; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2015), which often make followers lost in all those bewildering criteria. In an effort to create a concise set of common standards while considering the complexity of quality research, Tracy (2010) suggests eight key criteria: worth topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Some other leading qualitative scholars oppose a permanent criterion (such as Guba and Lincoln, 2005), and Corbin holds that every method deserves its own set of criteria.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe the researchers can work on an “plausible” explanation on the social world in which they immersed. They prefer the term “credibility” and “applicability” rather than “validity” when assessing the grounded theory. Sufficient detail and description, sufficient evidence on data collection and analysis, and specification of the kinds of data was first suggested as criteria to judge research credibility. Corbin and Strauss (2015) support this point and put more emphasis on the significance of the operation procedure of grounded theory and application value. They put forward the following criteria to assess research quality: fit, applicability or usefulness of findings, concepts, contextualization of concepts, logic, depth, variation, creativity, sensitivity, and evidence of memos.

Charmaz (2015) holds that reliability or validity of a study should be judged first by the researcher and then by the readers and offers a more concise and flexible framework on criteria for grounded theory, including credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. The combination of the first two

enhance the latter two and the following contribution. These four criteria depend mainly on a proper, logic and coherent research and writing process and both researcher and the readers play a role in it. Charmaz' standard of research quality is adopted, and the following section will have a discussion in terms of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

3.8.2 Credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness

3.8.2.1 Credibility

Achieving intimate familiarity with the setting, sufficient data, systematic comparisons, strong logical links between data and analysis, and providing enough evidence to the reader and allow them to form an independent assessment contribute to ensuring and enhancing the credibility of the research. (Charmaz, 2014).

This study is to provide a Chinese perspective and voice for expatriate adjustment research. My education and work background contribute to my advantage to explore this topic, as noted in chapter 1.2 and chapter 1.5.1. My reflection on my role and the whole research, together with the advantage of interrelated steps of grounded theory, better assure that research findings are grounded in data.

Participants are viewed as co-researchers, the experts in their field, not subjects. Therefore, in order to avoid the interference of my preconceptions, open-ended questions, follow-up questions, new and flexible questions with specific needs were provided to allow participants to make their own voice to the most. This contributed to the accuracy and richness of the data and lay a good foundation to the theory building. In addition, GT and its effectively designed and intertwined data collection and analysis processes help to make data collection and analysis more consistent with the research context. The constant comparative method and the flexible use of the interviewing question within the nature of GT help to cover a wider range of the observation and

allow for this opportunity and enhances research credibility.

The interview data were transcribed immediately after each interview, and then recordings and transcripts were checked for accuracy. Meanwhile, in the initial coding stage, I went back to the participants to make sure my initial analysis was consistent with their idea. Comparative method and memo and diagram helped clarify the questions and findings pursued by the research. In addition, development of major themes was presented in the writing with proper-proportioned and detailed supporting data. A few cases and situations not covered by the theme are also presented and discussed. These data and its presentation style provide readers with a comprehensive picture of the adjustment issues faced by Chinese business expatriates, facilitating a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon and enabling them to form their own judgments about the study.

Moreover, sincerity is one of the guiding principles, and research ethics are strictly observed throughout this research. The rigor and credibility of this research are partly improved through its ethical considerations (chapter 3.9).

3.8.2.2 Originality

This research explores the adjustment of Chinese expatriates and constructs a theoretical framework of expatriate adjustment from a Chinese perspective, making it different from and meanwhile adding the richness to the existing theories that are mainly based on western samples and their practices. This research and its framework present the unique experience of Chinese expatriates. Many interesting concepts and themes grounded from the data were proposed for the first time. Therefore, the research has a high originality.

3.8.2.3 Resonance

The achievement of resonance is first supported by the process of ethical participants involvement. All participants in this research are adults and

professional expatriates and thus competent to give consent. The meaning and value of this research is recognised by them after being fully informed about the research purpose and the interview process. It is just because of their interest into this research topic and their willingness to share and help, the expatriates' experiences were fully described and reconstructed through reliable data collection and analysis. This contributes to the development of the themes identified during the research and portraying the fullness of the studied experience. In addition, the iterative process of grounded theory and the feed-back to participants the outcomes and conclusions contributes to making sense to the participants themselves and offering them insights about their experiences.

3.8.2.4 Usefulness

The usefulness of this research lies in its theoretical and practical significance. Focusing on Chinese business expatriates and their adjustment which were neglected and under-researched by academic field, this study explores the factors influencing the adjustment and thus to develop a specific conceptual model of the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates, which deepens and broadens the perspective of understanding the topic. It is also of great practical significance to concerned expatriates, their organisations, and in a broad sense, communication and understanding in the process of globalization through providing research outcomes and practical implications.

3.9 Ethical consideration

3.9.1 Ethical considerations in the research process

According to basic principles of research ethics, every effort must be made not to cause harm and to reduce risk in research (Salmon, 2015). Ethical consideration is not just the ethical requirements and procedural protections of research institutions for research and researchers, but also the embodiment of

the researcher's personal morality and a vital part of research quality. This study strictly adheres to the Research Integrity and Ethics Code of Practice (UWTSD, 2022) of the university.

One of the core ethical considerations is informed consent. All participants in this research are adults over the age of 18 and competent to give consent. Clear research information was provided sincerely and honestly. Prior to the formal interview, I made initial contact with potential participants by phone or WeChat to seek their consent to participate in the research. Then the information sheet and the consent form of this study were sent to them to fully inform the participants. The possible participants know what this research is about, what they need to do, how the data will be collected, conserved and used, and their rights. Based on their own willingness and adequate rationality, I have their consent and then the interview will be arranged.

The rights of participants, especially the right to withdraw from the study at any time, are a focus of informed consent. It is not only written in the information sheet sent to them before the interview, but also be stressed at the very beginning of every interview. The fact is that there was no temporary withdrawal from the study during the interview. However, there were few situations that participants did not want to discuss a specific topic in depth, and this was fully respected. This also proves that the ethical consideration for the participants is honest, effective and successful. In addition, participants were also informed their rights, such as asking questions, complaint and getting a copy of the research findings.

Participants' privacy and the protection of interview data are also key ethical concerns. The participants are looked upon as co-researchers rather than just as subjects. In fact, I realised that if any interesting and meaningful findings this research could make, that must come from the participants' time and energy and their selfless sharing based on trust. I then feel more obliged to conduct interviews and protect their privacy and rights with absolute sincerity

and gratitude. Participants are anonymised and their indicative information does not appear from the very beginning of the research. All data is kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system, the researcher's laptop and USB sticks. Only my supervisors and I have access to these data. Adequate and transparent ethical considerations proved to be effective to reassure participants and helped build trust quickly, which led to their positive engagement and contributed to a quality data collection and research findings.

3.9.2 A reminder for the readers and reflections on the Data

This study faithfully records and shows the voices of the participants which are crucial to the reconstruction of their understanding of the phenomenon. However, their personal evaluations of the expatriation experience, especially as it relates to their understanding of local people and life, are highly personal and subjective. Readers therefore should be aware that it may contain views of possible misunderstandings and stereotypes which are disturbing and upsetting. For example, more than one participant in the interviews described the host country and local employees as “backward” and “lazy”.

During data collection and data analysis process, I have highly respected the views of the participants, which form the basis for a new perspective on expatriate adjustment. It also makes me reflect at the same time on the ethical consideration. On the one hand, this reflects an open and active attitude of the participants, who were honest and truthful in expressing their views, which contributed to the quality of the data collection. On the other hand, almost all participants emphasised the need for a genuine and deep respect for local people and cultures in intercultural interactions (and the specific behaviors they mentioned in the interviews seem to support the idea that they are indeed trying to put this into practice), but intercultural differences and regional imbalances in economic and social development inevitably lead to cognitive

differences and the formation of certain mis-judgements and misunderstandings, reflecting the fact that we as human beings still have a long way to go in terms of a truly high level of intercultural respect and inclusiveness.

3.10 Summary

This chapter first explains how the research question is originated and presents the research aim and objectives. It then discusses the related elements of research design in detail and presents a consistent methodological choice to readers. It explains and justifies the philosophical assumptions of interpretivism which provides a basis for the explanation and justification of inductive approach to theory development and qualitative method.

Grounded theory as the appropriate research strategy and semi-structured in-depth interviews as the most appropriate data collection method are then explained and justified. It also explains and discusses the data collection and analysis processes, research quality, and ethical considerations. The following chapter presents the findings that were generated from the research through the underpinning and processes explained and justified in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings of the fieldwork phase of the study. It presents and discusses four main themes, including expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and expatriation adjustment strategies, which are identified through the application of grounded theory data analysis process. With rich examples illustrating how the themes and subthemes emerged, this chapter also presents the process of how these main themes are developed from the original data.

4.2. Expatriation reasons

The theme expatriation reasons refers to the reasons why Chinese expatriates choose to work abroad. It is a main theme that gradually emerged when analyzing the data on participants describing how they became expatriates. Figure 4.1 shows the overview of the theme expatriation reasons conceptualised from fieldwork data. It includes six sub-themes, namely personal factors, organisational factors, family factors, country level factors, friend factors and internet factors.

In predeparture stage (Black et.al, 1991), or before-expatriation stage, the motivation of potential expatriates is an obvious factor that must be considered. In fact, the code expatriation motivation was naturally identified in open coding and appeared in every different case data. As the analysis went on, more and more detailed or sub-level expatriation influencing factors appeared, including macro and micro factors that determine expatriation, with some were more important influencing factors and some less important. During the focused coding period, this study gradually formed six sub-themes, namely personal factors, organisational factors, family factors, country level factors, friend factors and internet factors, therefore the theme expatriate reasons emerged then.

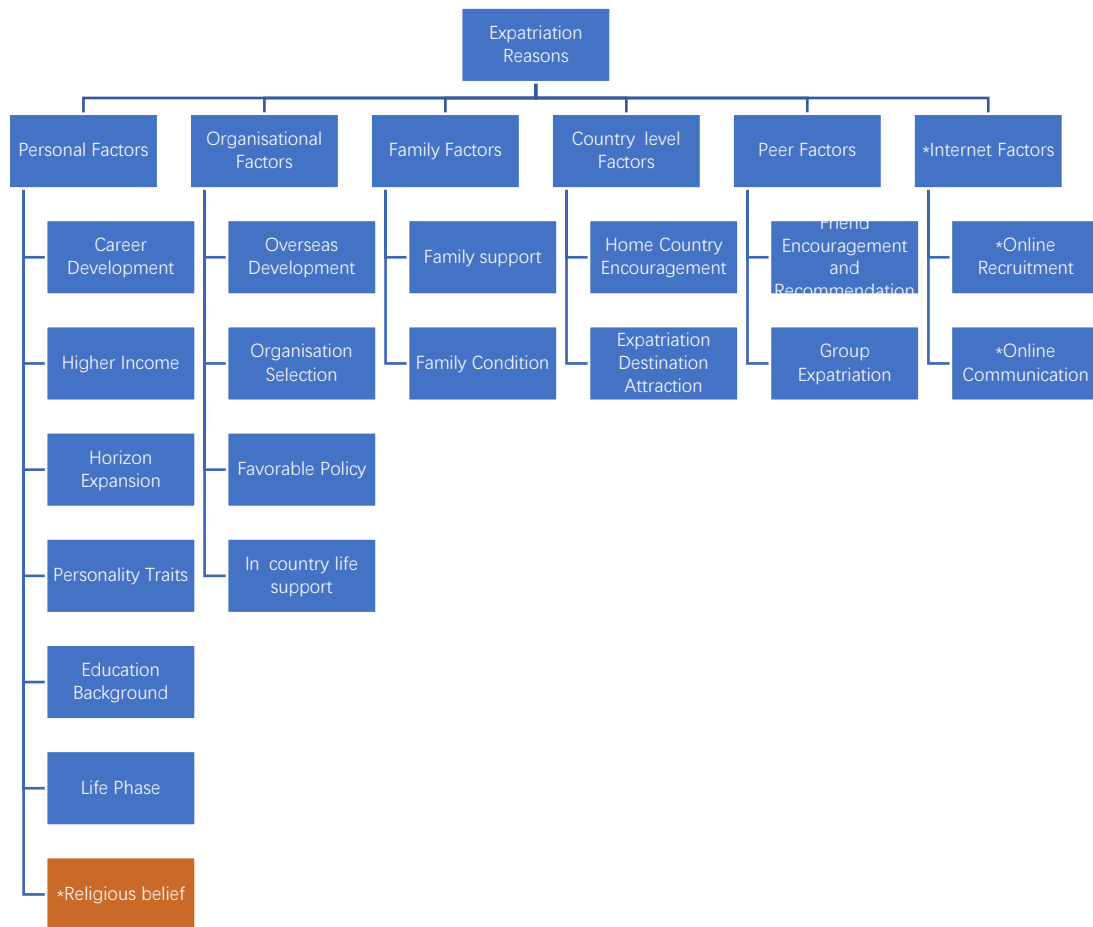


Figure 4.1: The theme expatriation reasons and its main aspects

Note: Codes with * will not be included into the theoretical framework as its low representation. It is listed out just as a reflection of the fieldwork data.

Compared with the code expatriation motivation, expatriation reasons seems to be very plain literally. However, it is still necessary to use it instead of a more academic expression of expatriate motivation. First, expatriation reasons is literally self-explanatory in conveying the meaning of the theme. Secondly, it is more capable in containing more detailed attributes under the theme which describe and summarise more effectively and comprehensively the unique experiences and choices of Chinese expatriates in their special cultural and business environment.

The theme expatriation reasons was formed based on an in-depth analysis of the field work data. In the process of open coding, many codes related to expatriation motivation appeared, and sub-themes were gradually formed. During focused coding, the theme emerged with the help of analysis memos

according to existing data and formed sub-themes. Table 4.1 is the analysis memo on the theme expatriation reasons. Table 4.2 shows the formation process of the theme expatriation reasons, or how the theme was developed from the codes.

Table 4.1: Analysis memo: deciding the heading of the theme-Expatriation Reasons

Memo: The heading of the theme-Expatriation Reasons	2021.5.18
<p>As China increasingly integrates into the international economic division system, more and more Chinese enterprises and their employees go abroad to search for opportunities. For local Chinese employees, expatriation is not a new term. However, in many cases, the decision to relocate internationally is still not taken for granted or comes easy. “Going abroad” means “leaving home” to “the unknown” in Chinese traditional culture. In particular, at present, most of the expatriation destinations of Chinese enterprises are in the third world, the vast number of developing countries, many still full of war and violence. Therefore, the motivation of expatriates naturally becomes a key influencing factor.</p> <p>Motivation is the premise of individual action. To explore the reasons for expatriation, it seems obvious and naturally to put our eyes on the individual motivation. But is the code sufficient enough in this study? As the investigation continues, it has been found that the code “motivation” is merely inadequate. Because motivation reflects more from the perspective of expatriates, it ignores other stakeholders involved in the expatriation especially in China’s such special social and cultural environment, such as the organisation, family, country and individual friend circle. Undoubtedly, Chinese expatriates’ personal motivation is still a dominant factor, in many cases is the very key determinant of an international assignment. However, there are many situations in which expatriates act relatively passively, or even be pushed forward to involving themselves in their oversea market. That is to say, personal will sometime is not necessarily the decisive factor since some other influential factors are playing roles in it. For example, in some cases, the organisation needs and the push comes afterwards are the primary reasons for individual overseas assignment.</p> <p>Therefore, this thesis directly uses “expatriation reasons” as the theme. First of all, “expatriation reasons” is conveys direct and clear message just at a glance, which can more intuitively describe the meaning of the theme — reasons why Chinese expatriates choose to work abroad. It also helps to incorporate more influencing factors of expatriation, fill out the answer bank to the question “how does an expatriate become an expatriate”, and then enrich the connotation of this theme.</p>	

Table 4.2: Illustration of the development of the theme Expatriation Reasons

Code examples	Examples of quotes	Subthemes	Theme
career development	“I think the overseas market has a great prospect and the career path is also bright. So, I applied for this job.”	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons
organisation	“We started in the domestic market, and	Organisational	Expatriation

development in oversea market	then as XX mobile phone gradually began to develop business overseas in 2005 and 2006, we needed to assign domestic personnel to support the overseas market. With the expansion of the overseas market, we went overseas. In fact, we did not expect an international assignment at the beginning.”	factors	reasons
family support	“Because my wife is in the same company with me, she understands the nature of the work in this company, and she also understands our work oversea and that will be of more help to my promotion as there may be fewer opportunities at home.”	Family factors	Expatriation reasons
home country encouragement	“One of our main businesses is overseas engineering contracting, as well as real estate development. Because we were mainly in Africa before, since General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, we began to expand into Southeast Asia.”	Country-level factors	Expatriation reasons
group expatriation	“I didn’t think about it that much. Because at that time, I and a few close colleagues, just like brothers, went out together.”	Peer factors	Expatriation reasons
online recruitment	“It’s just like a recommendation. My friend introduced me and sent my resume to the company, and then the interview, online interview, which lasted for a month or two. In the end I got the offer, and I came.”	Internet factors	Expatriation reasons

In conclusion, the theme expatriation reasons include six sub-themes, namely personal factors, organisational factors, family factors, country level factors, friend factors and internet factors. Each subthemes containing its own main aspects will be discussed in turn below.

4.2.1 Personal factors

As a subtheme, personal factors refers to those parts of expatriation reasons which are closely related to the expatriates themselves, or the individual level reasons.

As the interviews continued, the data were accumulated and analyzed, and

abundant codes were obtained during the open coding stage, such as career development, higher income, horizon expansion, personality traits, life phases, religious belief, then the theme personal factors emerged and finally as a sub-theme of expatriation reasons. Figure 4.2 shows the theme personal factors and its main aspects.

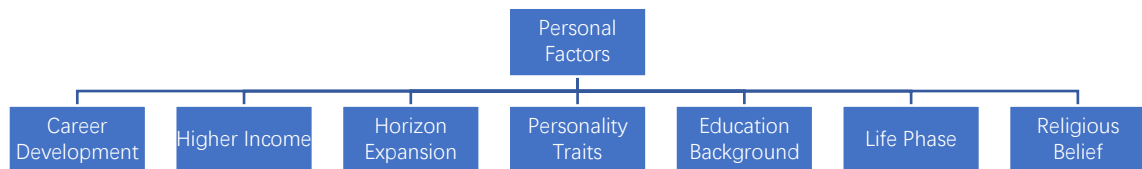


Figure 4.2: The subtheme personal factors and its main aspects

The seven codes within the subtheme personal factors include direct influencing factors, which the expatriate can easily and directly perceive, like those strong and direct motivations. It also contains some hidden factors, those indirect factors at the personal level which cannot be perceived so easily. They can also be divided into major and minor influencing factors according to the importance of the role they play in employees’ decision to relocate. Table 4.3 shows the description of the influence of those seven personal factors on expatriation reasons.

Table 4.3: Description of the influence of seven personal factors

	Major	Minor
Direct	Major and direct influencing factors: Career development Higher income	Direct but minor influencing factors: Horizon expansion Religious belief
Indirect	Major but indirect influencing factors: Personality traits	Minor and indirect influencing factors: Life phases Education background

Among the many personal factors contributing to expatriation, individual’s pursuit for career development and higher income are the most important and direct factors. Among the 11 participants in this study, eight clearly identified career development as a factor while nine considered higher income as a factor. Indeed, P1, P6, P11 directly mentioned career development as the most important while P2, P3, P7 and P8 took higher income as their primary

motivation. Almost all participants' major reason has to do with both factors or at least one of them.

Horizon expansion and religious belief appeared in the open coding process as direct factors. Compared with the two codes mentioned above, these two points seem to have less influence on facilitating international assignment, therefore, they were classified as less important factors, or minor factors. In fact, some participants were almost unaffected by them, especially for the code religious belief. Only one case (participant 4) of self-initiated expatriate believes that her expatriation was partly pushed by her religious belief. It was rare as in the whole data collection process, and no similar story had ever been heard from the other 10 participants. Hence it can be well perceived that this code was underrepresented. Therefore, the code religious belief will not be included in the final theoretical framework.

Personality traits, life phase and education background appeared in the open coding as less obvious and indirect influencing factors. Among them, the code personality traits began to appear in the early stage of data analysis. On one hand, many participants might not expect it as a motive. On the other hand, it was identified repeatedly in the data. Therefore, personality traits were classified to the major and indirect matrix. The code life phase was much more difficult to identify, and it did not begin to emerge until the end of the interview period. In general, life phase and education background have a less important influence on the expatriation decision. In the following sections, each of the seven codes will be discussed.

4.2.1.1 Career development

The pursuit of a brighter career development has a major and direct impact on expatriation decision (table 4.3). The code career development appeared during open coding period (table 4.4). With the formation of the theme expatriation reasons, career development became a factor within personal

level factors.

Table 4.4: The code career development and its relationship with the theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Career development	I think the overseas market has a great prospect and the career path is also bright. So, I applied for this job.	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

The code career development refers to the motivation of an individual who considers embarking on an international assignment full of unknowns as he is in a pursuit for a more promising career. Seeking promotion and gaining more international work experience was a strong motivation across the participants.

“If you want to be promoted, the company will give preference to those who have overseas working experience.” (P5)

“Now it is advocated to become an inter-disciplinary talent. Such as foreign business, you know how to deal with it while others do not. There also may be more opportunities for a promotion in oversea subsidiaries.” (P8)

“If you want to have a better career, generally speaking, expatriation experience is an essential part in a multinational company. From the long run, your long-term career development is bound to be limited if you don’t go through this process.” (P11)

For some expatriates, the pursuit of better career development was the most important reason. As participant 6 mentioned:

“Many people see making money as a necessity in their expatriation. Yes, you will have a good allowance in dollars on your overseas business trip. But this thing is ultimately just a political bargaining chip for promotion, and that’s the most important thing to me.”

This is in contrast to participants who place money in a higher or equal place. Participant 6 put career development in the first place. An additional finding is that participants who prioritised their career needs were often in a relatively good economic condition. They always had a good income, or their family

were in a good economic condition. Therefore, they had the opportunity to focus more on the career development. As participant 8 said:

“Expatriation indeed is about a process of loneliness. I have to say that it’s anti-human... If it’s not for the economic pressure, I certainly will not choose to go out.”

4.2.1.2 Higher income

Higher income, or the expectation of higher income, was identified by nine participants as a reason for expatriation. The code higher income appeared as an open code (table 4.5) in the very beginning of the data analysis, and gradually became an aspect of personal factors when the theme expatriation reasons emerged.

Table 4.5: The code higher income and its relationship with the theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Higher income	The main reason was that it might be easy to find a job inside China, but the overall income level was still relatively low	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

Almost every participant expressed money to be a motivation directly or indirectly.

“At that time, I was young, and my economic situation was not good. So I was considering that I can earn more money abroad. It was mainly for economic reasons.” (P8)

“For one thing, it was the first time I had a job. If I work abroad, the salary will be higher.” (P7)

Some expatriates took the initiative to accept or even request an international assignment to raise income and improve their economic situation.

“In construction industry where expatriates are in high demand, it is a quick and achievable way to get promoted and raise incomes.” (P8)

Higher incomes seemed so natural to the expatriates that a small number of participants ignored this part and put more emphasis on other aspects.

“I thought my income will rise by a good number if I stay outside for two years... But that’s what I thought I could get when I went out.” (P10)

4.2.1.3 Horizon expansion

The individual’s need to get out and broaden their horizons cannot be ignored among those factors. Its impact on individual’s expatriation decision was considered as direct and the code was formed in the open coding stage and becoming an aspect of the theme personal factors in the focused coding stage (table 4.6).

Table 4.6: The code horizon expansion and its relationship with the theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Horizon expansion	I was young at that time and wanted to go out to seek for some chances. It’s nice to have a look at the outside world, isn’t it? And add some life experience.	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

Six of the 11 participants mentioned the important role of horizon expansion directly. Compared with career development and higher income, the importance of expanding horizon as an end has decreased significantly.

“In addition, I think it would be nice to have a look in another country and to expand my life experience.” (P7)

“The first is that the company needs you to go there. Secondly, I also want to go out and have a look. Thirdly, I want to take advantage of the opportunity of being sent abroad as a traveling experience.” (P2)

Some expatriates believed that the very act of going abroad is a success. Like participant 3, he held that the Chinese should come out more to see and understand the world outside.

“I don’t regret coming out, and I think all the young people in China should come out.”

4.2.1.4 Personality traits

The code personality traits appeared in the very early analysis, and it was

confirmed repeatedly in the following interviews. In the focused coding stage, it became one of the personal level factors (table 4.7).

Table 4.7: The code personality traits and its relationship with the theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Personality traits	Because I'm the kind of person who likes to try new things. I also like challenges. So I just can see this, that is, I feel curious about it. Yes, it just has some inside drive in it.	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

From the perspective of personality traits, extroversion (Goldberg,1990) is the most important element in shaping expatriation decisions. The degree of proactiveness in deciding whether to relocate reflects the personality differences of expatriates. Among all the participants in this study, there were 4 individuals (participant 1,3,4,6) who actively searched for the chance to work overseas. Two of them were self-initiated expatriates (participant 3,4), undoubtedly with a strong proactiveness. Two of nine organization-assigned expatriates also demonstrated a high degree of proactiveness (participant 1,6), and 6 of them showed a certain degree of proactiveness while only one of them (participant 10) had a very low initiative.

For example, participant 1 mentioned his strong proactiveness in his interview. Though worried about his family, such as his child and relationship with his wife, he volunteered for an international assignment due to the yearning and pursuit of a larger platform and more challenges and opportunities.

“In my opinion, it is possible to have a bigger platform and enjoy more challenges and opportunities when going abroad. Thus, I decided to go abroad and applied for the post.” (P1)

It is clear that his proactiveness made him different from those expatriates who were being assigned by the company. Participant 1 is clearly on the very active side on the expatriation proactiveness continuum (figure 4.3).

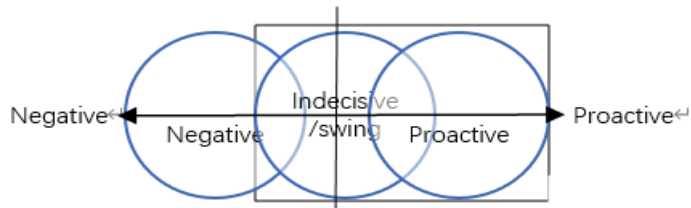


Figure 4.3: Expatriation proactiveness continuum

Note: The box shows the position of expatriates in the expatriation proactiveness continuum

Evidence of extraversion were identified in all the cases that showed a high or relatively high expatriation proactiveness.

For example, participant 1 mentioned he yearned for a bigger platform and greater opportunities and challenges.

Case 6 shows participant's sense of masculinity has a direct and strong impact on expatriation decision.

"As a male, I'm definitely not suitable for that kind of home-based job. My character will make me choose this trade and business post." (P6)

"Because I'm the kind of person who likes to try new things. I also like challenges. So, I just can see this, that is, I feel curious about it. Yes, it just has some inside drive in it." (P4)

"I have been an independent person since I was a child. So my parents didn't rely on me or I rely on them much." (P7)

The proportion of expatriates who actively sought chance to work abroad was not low (4 among 11 proactively pursued a chance to relocate). Other participants also accepted the company's assignments with a certain degree of proactiveness, otherwise the assignment would not be possible. It is safe to say that they differ only slightly in the degree of proactiveness compared to those very active ones and can be classified in the swing area (figure 4.3).

It mainly involves assigned expatriates. Although they did not take the initiative to apply for the international assignment, they quickly found reasons to support and formed a more active attitude to the assignment when they are appointed by the company to fulfill the assignment. For example, participant 2 did not apply for the assignment, but when the company asked him to do so, he told

himself,

“Maybe I can take advantage of this opportunity to go abroad and have a look.”

Participant 10 was a little unusual among all the cases with a little passiveness and reluctance before expatriation.

“There’s a little bit of resistance to this assignment. After all, I had been working for one or two years at that time, and I felt good, and I don’t want to go out.”

Despite this, she still went abroad with the expectation of *“go out to see and learn.”*

Most of the participants showed optimism and confidence about the assignment before their departure, though, in some cases such optimism may be a little blind which were based on unreasonable expectations.

“Because I am an optimistic person, therefore, I am relatively optimistic about this assignment, and I am not worried about it much.” (P8)

“I should admit that there were a little bit worries, but the desire to try outweighs them.” (P9)

To sum up, personality traits (here mainly refers to extroversion) appeared as an important influencing factor in this study. Most expatriates were on the proactive side of the expatriation proactiveness continuum (figure 4.3).

4.2.1.5 Education background

Educational background was an indirect and minor factor to an individual’s decision to relocate. Like the previous codes, it appeared during open coding and became an aspect of personal factor in the focused coding stage (table 4.8).

Table 4.8: The code education background and its relationship with theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Education background	The decision to work overseas is related to our major. We study French, which is a key	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

	major in our school. Many of the teachers have expatriation experience in Africa or studied in France. It may also be influenced by the teachers. Our major is more related to practice, like going to the Africa.		
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Education background here refers especially to university education received by expatriates. China’s university education helps to cultivate a large number of college graduates who have the abilities and potentials to work abroad. Some of them may have the practical consideration of going out to seek chance, especially when the domestic job market turns tight. In addition, as international trade and communication become more frequent, a large number of domestic enterprises go out of China, and employees with a certain educational background are then preferentially sent to overseas market.

“If permitted, you have to pick people who are capable to deal with new environment. Once you send out the wrong people who don’t have the cross-cultural skills you get into a lot of trouble.” (P6)

Educational background also plays a role with an individual’s early career planning.

“Because my major is French, and I always know that I’m going to work overseas.” (P7)

“I studied Spanish language and culture as an undergraduate, so the future employment direction of people like us is nothing more than education, translation and business. As a male, I’m definitely not suitable for that kind of home-based job. My character will make me choose this trade and business post.” (P6)

4.2.1.6 Life phase

Life phase, as an indirect and minor factor, was often mentioned at the end of the interview stage and became an aspect of personal factor in the focused coding stage (table 4.9).

Table 4.9: The code life phase and its relationship with the theme expatriation reasons

Open code	Example of quotes	Subtheme	Theme
Life phase	I was young at that time and wanted to go out to seek for some chances.	Personal factors	Expatriation reasons

Life phase refers to the influence of expatriates' age and marital status on Chinese employees' expatriation decisions, which is indirect and minor.

The Chinese expatriate group is young. Based on the participants in this study, the expatriates were all under 30, unmarried, at their first international assignment (some of the participants had more than one expatriation experience). Quite a few were sent abroad fresh out of university. On the one hand, young people have to face the pressure of the domestic job market and turn to foreign countries to look for opportunities. On the other hand, young people have less obstacles to go for an expatriation task because they are young and unmarried, with a stronger desire to explore and a common feeling of going out. Therefore, it is easier for them to form an assignment decision.

"Because first of all, I didn't have a family and I felt young." (P1)

"When you are young, you should strive for the opportunity to go abroad. Later, you will have more concerns. Then you may have to consider a balance between family and work. It is easier to make the decision in the early days when you have fewer concerns." (P11)

When the potential expatriates are young and single, their expatriation decision comes relatively easy. As the Chinese idiom goes: "if the person is full and the whole family is not hungry." However, as time passes and life evolves, making a family has become a pressing need for these young expatriates. Once they have a family, there are more issues to consider before relocating. In fact, family-related problems are one of the main reasons why some expatriates end their current assignments or reject a second chance to work overseas.

"I had another chance to go abroad later. Mainly for family reasons, I felt that I was not prepared enough at that time, so I gave up." (P11)

4.2.1.7 Religious belief

The code religious belief refers to the fact that an individual decides to relocate because of his or her religious beliefs. It is rare among Chinese young generation. Among all the cases in this study, only one case (participant 4) of self-initiated expatriate thought that religious belief was an important reason for her expatriation.

“One more point, I am a Christian, I feel that this religious belief in some extent has a powerful push for me. So, I tried to confirm again and again whether God wants me to try something new. That gave me a lot of confidence.” (P4)

“It’s not about achieving more for myself, but I think it’s about having an opportunity to practice and grow. From beginning to end, there will always be an interaction with God. I am not 100% certain that’s what God asks me to do, but I just know that the whole interaction deepens my relationship with God. So I’ve been thinking about that for months before I decided to come.” (P4)

Except for case 4, no other evidence of religious factors was found as the driving force of expatriation. And the other participants did not hear of this similar situation in their circle of expatriate friends. It is clear that this code is underrepresented. The participant’s special experience may be the reason. She received university education in Hong Kong and worked there after graduation thus has fewer connections to the mainland China. Therefore, the code religious belief is listed here with a simple description only as a reflection of the empirical data and will not be included in the final theoretical framework for its underrepresentation.

4.2.2 Organisational factors

Organisational factors refer to the reasons for Chinese expatriates’ decision to relocate that are closely related to their organisations, reflecting the role of the

organisation in individuals' expatriation decisions. Therefore, the expatriation decisions of SIE are not relevant to this code. As the interviews continued, the data were accumulated and analyzed, open codes such as overseas development, organisation selection, favorable policy and in-country life support appeared and were integrated to the codes organisation needs and organisation support, and finally evolved to the theme organisational factors which emerged as a subtheme of expatriation reasons in the focused coding. Figure 4.4 shows the main aspects of organisational factors.

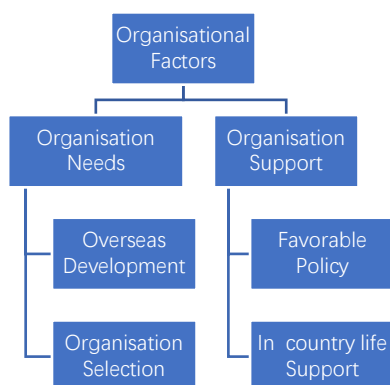


Figure 4.4: The subtheme organisational factors and its main aspects

Table 4.10 shows the influence of four organisation-level factors on the individual's expatriation decision making. Among them, overseas development, organisation selection and favorable policy are major and direct influencing factors on expatriation decision, while in-country life support is indirect and minor.

Table 4.10: Description of the influence of four organisational factors

	Major	Minor
Direct	Overseas development Organisation selection Favorable policy	
Indirect		In-country life support

The vast majority of Chinese expatriates are organisational expatriates, therefore, the influence of organisations on individual expatriates is naturally very huge. In most cases, individuals followed or accepted the organisation's orders and arrangements even if they didn't want to, because they knew their

situation in the company would be difficult if they refused such assignments. Though organisation's favorable policy in terms of income and promotion is a very powerful attraction as it meets the internal motivation for individuals' relocation, the will of the organisation was identified more decisive in some cases of this study.

4.2.2.1 Organisation needs

Organisational needs are the most direct reason for organisational expatriates to relocate overseas. It impacts on potential expatriates through its two aspects — overseas development and organisational selection.

4.2.2.1.1 Overseas development

It refers to organisation needs for domestic human resources as Chinese companies expand their business in overseas markets. Since China's accession to the WTO, more and more Chinese enterprises have gone abroad to seek new growth. Due to some particular features and internationalisation stage and cost-performance considerations for current labour force, Chinese companies are sending their own staff abroad in large numbers.

Participant 2,5,10,11 directly expressed that company needs was an extremely important influencing factor. For example:

"The first is that the company needs you to go." (P2)

In some cases, expatriates had not previously thought about working abroad. In fact, many Chinese expatriates are pushed along by their organisations. That is, their assignments are more out of organisational needs and individual needs give way to organisational needs.

"We started in the domestic market, and then as XX mobile phone gradually began to develop business overseas in 2005 and 2006, we needed to assign domestic personnel to support the overseas market. With the expansion of the overseas market, we went overseas. In fact, we

did not expect an international assignment at the beginning...I was thinking of coming back in two or three years. But later I stayed outside because the company needed it.” (P5)

4.2.2.1.2 Organisation selection

Organisational selection is the process by which an organisation determines the candidate for an international assignment. The organisation assigns personnel according to certain principles and procedures. However, selection is different among organisations in practice due to enterprise size, industries and specific human resources situations. Some companies have explicit regulations and policies regarding the selection of expatriates, while others do not. According to the analysis on interview materials, the selection of expatriates can be roughly divided into two situations (figure 4.5), mainly including organisation designation and individual application. The selection process lies in the either situation.

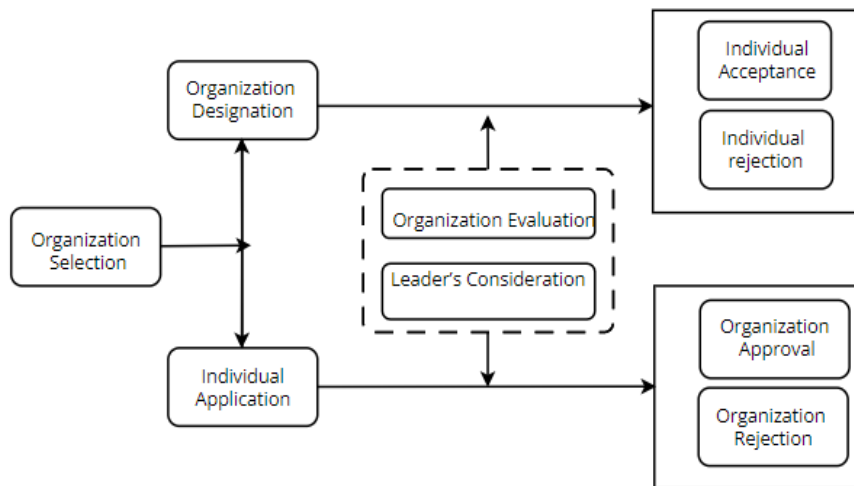


Figure 4.5: The organisation selection process

Note: This figure is derived from the interview data collected in this study.

Organisation designation refers to the situation that the organisation directly designates employees to go for international assignments based on the current needs. For example, participant 2 was designated by the organisation without actively applying for assignment.

“The company received a project abroad, and then needed to organise a group of management personnel to work there. Then the company released the information and at first was the application period. If no one signed up, the company may just take a tough approach, that is, designating some qualified employees. I was selected at that time.” (P2)

Individual application refers to the situation that the individual applies proactively to the organisation for an international assignment.

“In my opinion, it is possible to have a bigger platform and enjoy more challenges and opportunities when going abroad. Thus, I decided to go abroad and applied for the post after the company proposed to move to the Myanmar market...As I have expatriation experience which the company naturally gives priority to, the company approved my application.” (P1)

Some small businesses do not have a detailed selection process. The selection process is casual while the leader plays a decisive role. Especially in state-owned enterprises, leaders need to make decisions about who to send, where to send and even how long the work lasts.

“As for who to be sent out, the first is based on leader’s considerations, and the second is based on individual applications.” (P1)

Generally, and quite naturally, organisations select employees with cross-cultural adaptability as their expatriates. For example, participant 6 mentioned:

“if permitted, enterprises will recruit graduates with overseas study experience, or talents majoring in foreign languages and send them abroad”.

As such people not only have basic foreign language skills, but also have certain cross-cultural knowledge and skills. To some extent, organisation selection helps to provide the chosen one more confidence to face the expatriation as they are recognised and picked according to a certain criteria.

“As a matter of fact, those who are dispatched to foreign countries at that

time, like us, were all excellent employees at home and abroad.” (P5)

Organisational selection is not only a selection process, but also a work arrangement made by the organisation for individual employees. To some extent, it is mandatory. If the individual does not obey the arrangement of the organisation, he/she may not be able to continue to stay in the organisation. That means in such a situation, employees have to accept the task or face a soured relationship with the company.

“At that time, I wanted to go back, but my manager didn’t agree and put me off for various reasons. I can’t and I don’t want to have an open fight with them (in order to keep face). So, I stayed there for another two years. It’s a matter of leaving an option open or leaving myself a way back.” (P8)

In some cases, compliance to expatriation arrangement was written into the contract at the time of recruitment. For example, participant 10 made a legal commitment to agree to any assignment before she had the job. When there came the expatriation needs, she must accept it otherwise it meant leaving the job in breach of contract.

4.2.2.2 Organisation support

The code organisation support was formed in the open coding phase. With the continuous accumulation of interview data and in-depth analysis, codes such as favorable policy, in-country life support, organisational learning support appeared, therefore, organisation support gradually became a higher-level theme. However, only favorable policy and in-country life support have an impact on employees’ expatriation decision (figure 4.4). Among the two codes, favorable policy is a direct and major factor while in-country life support is minor and indirect (table 4.10).

4.2.2.2.1 Favorable policy

Favorable policy refers to organisational incentives for expatriates to

encourage them to accept and complete international assignments well. It mainly includes income improvement and making expatriation experience a necessary condition for promotion, which directly meet their need of career development and higher income and thus a very effective incentive for expatriates to make expatriation decisions.

“Income must be higher than that in China because there are additional subsidies overseas in addition to salary. And in terms of promotion incentives, the company give priority to those who have worked overseas.”
(P5)

“The company gives priority to employees with overseas experience in promotion. After all, they have devoted their youth to the company in a remote area.” (P1)

4.2.2.2 In-country life support

In-country life support refers to a series of supports provided by an organisation in terms of food, clothing, housing and transportation in order to help expatriates better adapt to new environment. It undoubtedly enhances the sense of security of expatriates facing uncertainty in unfamiliar environments. Therefore, it has a certain influence on expatriation decisions.

“We have many colleagues there and there are also many Chinese enterprises. Whether it’s in North Africa with relatively better conditions, or in some other African countries with worse conditions, the state-owned enterprises are more fully equipped and supported for life, and they are also equipped with security guards.” (P9)

However, from the fieldwork data, that impact was indirect and minor, as few of them emphasised its role in before-expatriation period, partly because they took it as a main support in while-expatriation period.

4.2.3 Family factors

As an important stakeholder of expatriation, family always has a strong and long influence on expatriates. This study shows that family factors influence expatriation decision through two aspects — family economic condition and degree of family support. Figure 4.6 shows the main aspects of family factors. In general, those with poor family economic conditions are more motivated to change their family economic status and thus more motivated to choose to go abroad. Expatriates with high family support are more likely to make expatriation decisions. Family factors have a direct impact on individual's decision to relocate.

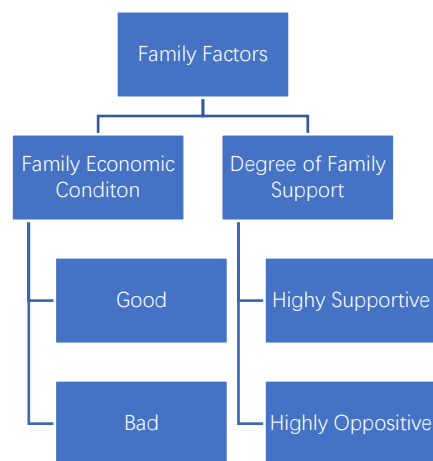


Figure 4.6: The subtheme family factors and its main aspects

4.2.3.1 Family economic condition

The code family economic condition refers to the influence of the potential expatriate's family economic conditions on expatriation decision. Due to the fact that the vast majority of Chinese expatriates are sent to the developing countries, where the working and living environment is less satisfied, usually with greater risks and uncertainties. The poorer the family, the more eager they are to improve their situation. Therefore, the higher income will be more attractive, and it is easier for them to overcome the anxiety caused by the relocation process.

“Then there is the family situation. Because the family economic conditions were not very good, I was just trying to get out as fast as possible and

make some extra money.” (P3)

“Expatriation indeed is about a process of loneliness. I have to say that it’s anti-human... If it’s not for the economic pressure, I certainly will not choose to go out.”

“Nobody comes out to work if his family is not short of money.” (P8)

On the other hand, when family economic condition is good, the incentive to move abroad decreases. As participant 10 and participant 6 complained:

“money is not my major consideration...I am a little resistant to the assignment.” (P10)

“but this thing (expatriation) is ultimately just a political bargaining chip for promotion, and that’s the most important thing to me. One thing is that you should try to reduce your time on international assignments.” (P6)

In summary, family economic condition seems to be a minor factor in expatriation reasons. Only participant 3 and 8 clearly stated that in their interview.

4.2.3.2 Degree of family support

Family support, as an obvious code, was formed in the early stage of open coding. It was easy to identify it in empirical data as the influence and intervention of family on individuals is very profound in Chinese culture. It has a major and direct influence on individual’s expatriation decision. Most of the participants expressed that their families might have many different considerations about their expatriation, but they were more or less supportive. To better distinguish from the theme family support in supporting resources (chapter 4.4.5) and achieve a better code, degree of family support is used here as an aspect of family factors (figure 4.6).

The traditional China of rural society (Fei,1992) still has an impact on individuals, and it takes more courage for people to go abroad to seek chances. The following is a typical concern from a Chinese family:

“My family said you don’t have any friends and don’t know anyone there. If you just go out and nobody knows the situation if there is something wrong.” (P3)

Family support is undoubtedly significant for the individual’s decision to relocate and the whole adjustment process.

“Because my wife is in the same company with me, she understands the nature of the work in this company, and she also understands our work oversea and that will be of more help to my promotion as there may be fewer opportunities at home.” (P8)

Later, participant 8 applied for returning to China because of his long assignment abroad, the narrowing promotion channel, and increasing trivial family affairs, which broke the original balance between family and work. However, he added he would “continue the expatriation if the promotion channel is open and broad” because his family would support that.

Many parents do not support their children to go out, and some even strongly oppose it. As in the expatriation practice, many young people are sent to developing countries in Africa or other regions, where the safety and working environment cannot be compared with that of the home country.

“Some of my classmates had insisted on going out, but their families would not let them go. Finally, they gave in to their families and did not go out.” (P9)

4.2.4 Country-level factors

This code refers to the country-level reasons for relocating. The code country encouragement and host country attraction appeared during open coding. At the later focused coding, country-level factors became a subtheme of expatriation reasons, with home country encouragement and expatriation destination attraction as supporting codes (figure 4.7). To better represent the two different codes, the code country encouragement was changed to home

country encouragement, and host country attraction to expatriation destination attraction. Both influence on expatriation decision is indirect and minor.

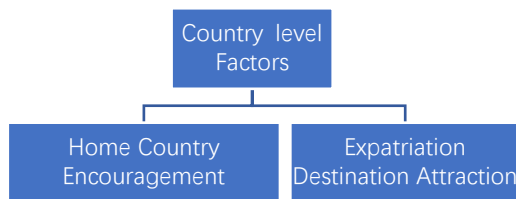


Figure 4.7: The subtheme country level factors and its main aspects

4.2.4.1 Home country encouragement

The code reflects the macro background of enterprises and expatriates before the international assignment. Since its accession to the WTO, China has been vigorously encouraging its enterprises to go abroad and involve more deeply into globalisation. In recent years, China has actively promoted international cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative which aims to foster the ongoing development of China and seek to instigate new era development opportunity for other developing countries (Johnston, 2018). In this context, an increasing number of Chinese enterprises are venturing abroad to seek opportunities.

“One of our main businesses is overseas engineering contracting, as well as real estate development. Because we were mainly in Africa before, since General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, we began to expand into Southeast Asia.” (P1)

“These years, a large number of Chinese enterprises go out, then we have many Chinese companies among our clients.” (P3)

Home country encouragement is a macro background factor for expatriate’s decision making. Chinese expatriates are inevitably shaped by their fast-changing country. However, from personal perspective, the impact of country policy is indirect and minor. Though there were 6 cases of organisational expatriates from state-owned enterprises who have opportunities to go overseas because their enterprises are under this tide of going out, only participant 1 mentioned this point.

4.2.4.2 Expatriation destination attraction

As an open code formed early, host country attraction has an impact in before-expatriation stage on expatriation reasons and while-expatriation stage as a supporting resource. To better distinguish between the different roles in the two phases, host country attraction was changed to expatriation destination attraction in before-expatriation phase.

Expatriation destination attraction refers to the attractiveness of expatriation destination for expatriate candidates. For example, participant 3 became a self-initiated expatriate because of the attractiveness of expatriation destination.

“When we were still in school, Dubai’s publicity in China, including its global publicity, was very good. When it comes to Dubai, people will think it is very rich. So, at that time I thought it would be good to come here for a better development.” (P3)

The opposite is the negative perception of the expatriation destination, such as safety and health condition, living standards and business environment. It has a negative influence on expatriation decision.

“...Africa for example, because of the poor medical and sanitary conditions, I would not consider going to Africa. I’ll only go somewhere with better conditions.” (P1)

For SIEs, the more attractive the destination, the more likely they go there. For AEs, they don’t have much choice when assigned by their organisation. AEs obey the organisation’s arrangement even if their destination is poor and backward area, as if they reject, it may be difficult for them to stay in the company. Therefore, expatriation destination is not a must but an extra gift, a luck.

“I did have some good luck. I went to Latin America. It is good in life, much better than India or Bangladesh or Africa countries with bad conditions, even wars.” (P11)

In summary, the influence of expatriation destination attraction on expatriation decision is minor, though the data shows employees may reject expatriation arrangement because the lack of expatriation destination attraction.

4.2.5 Peer factors

The codes friend encouragement and friend recommendation were formed early in the open coding, mainly from the interview data of SIE cases, and later were combined and listed as friend encouragement / recommendation. With the appearance of the code group expatriation, a higher-level code — peer factors emerged and became a subtheme of expatriation reasons. Figure 4.8 shows the code and its main aspects.

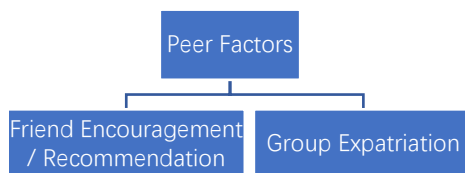


Figure 4.8: The subtheme peer factors and its main aspects

In this study, two participants clearly indicated encouragement and recommendation of friends as an important reason for working overseas, while two stated that having friends go together was one of the reasons for their relocation. However, they are minor factors for expatriation reasons.

4.2.5.1 Friend encouragement / recommendation

As this code came from the case of SIEs, it is more applicable for SIEs. It reflects the role of friends in expatriate candidates' decision to work abroad. For SIEs without any organisational push or support, going out to work is somewhat haphazard. It seems much more difficult for Chinese SIEs to find a job in western world than western SIEs do in China from the perspective of language and market demand. In this case, they need some extra external forces to decide to work abroad. This study identified the code — friend

encouragement and recommendation as an accelerator.

“At a friend’s reminder, I tried to find some jobs abroad (through the internet). Then I came here (Dubai).” (P3)

“During my last job when I worked in Hongkong, I built a good relationship with one of my clients. When I wanted to make a change, he asked me if I wanted to work here (in London), then he recommended me to this company.” (P4)

4.2.5.2 Group expatriation

Group expatriation refers to the situation the expatriate travels with companions, or the situation that there are other expatriates already have been sent to the same destination.

“I didn’t think about it that much. Because at that time, I and a few close colleagues, just like brothers, went out together.” (P5)

It’s understandable that travelling with companions helps to facilitate relocation decision, considering the collectivist cultural and long-term peasant economy. People stick to their small but convenient cozy place, lacking a spirit of exploration and adventure. Therefore, group expatriation helps to reduce expatriates’ anxiety about the uncertainty of the outside world and provide with more psychological and practical support.

“Like large Chinese enterprises, or central government-owned enterprises, we go there with almost everything we need. We have Chinese chef, drivers and vehicles, and work in an independent and separate place. Actually, we Chinese work and live together...So, there’s nothing to worry about.” (P9)

Clearly, group expatriation helps organizations create a living environment similar to that in China, akin to a “home”, where expatriates can maintain their lifestyles and customs from China. On one hand, they develop a shared identity through the common cultural memories of their homeland. On the other

hand, the simulated living environment enables them to adapt more quickly to life abroad (Huang et al., 2020). Therefore, group expatriation facilitates expatriate decision-making.

4.2.6. Internet factors

The Internet is a macro background factor and one of the most important innovation forces since China's reform and opening up, which has brought a huge impact on almost every Chinese. In general, its impact on expatriation decision is almost invisible and minor for AEs while it seems direct and major for SIEs. Figure 4.9 shows the theme and its main aspects.

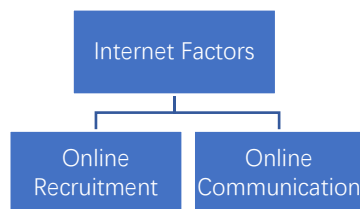


Figure 4.9: The subtheme internet factors and its main aspects

4.2.6.1 Online recruitment

The code online recruitment first appeared in the open coding for the first SIE case, then the data of the second SIE case supported this code. It refers to the fact that the potential expatriates and the related organisation rely on the Internet to complete their recruitment activities.

“My friend introduced me and sent my resume to the company, and then the interview, online interview, which lasted for a month or two. In the end I got the offer, and I came.” (P4)

“I just looked for jobs online at some job searching site, and there I saw one and applied for the post. Then a remote interview and after that I got that job.” (P3)

From these two cases, it is clear that the convenience of Internet promoted SIEs expatriation decision, considering there are much more difficulties in self-initiated expatriation. SIEs take advantage of the Internet and that greatly

reduces the uncertainty and risk of the mission alone. However, online recruitment has no impact on AEs. Since the majority of Chinese expatriates are AEs, the code is under-representation and its influence on expatriation decision is minor and in extremely small scale. Therefore, it is listed out as a reflection of the fieldwork data and will not be included into the theoretical framework.

4.2.6.2 Online communication

The code means expatriates and their families communicate through smart devices. It refers to the expectation of expatriates to get closer with their families far away through online communication thus to strike a balance between work and life.

One of the characteristics of Chinese expatriates is that they relocate without bringing family members with them, as shown from this study and supported by all participants. In other words, when an individual is on assignment, he or she will be separated from family for a long time, which is a huge challenge for expatriates and their families. This has led to some concerns when making expatriation decisions.

“I’m worried that I can’t take care of my family. After all, I’m away from home and it’s not convenient to come back.” (P8)

“I was worrying about the misunderstandings and estrangement caused by time and distance between us.” (P6)

With the rapid development of Internet technology and terminal equipment, particularly the popularity of smart phones, mobile social platforms, video and voice chat technology applications, the distance between expatriates and their families shortens.

“Video chat is also very convenient. That will help us feel better.” (P6)

As another macro background factor, online communication is indirect and minor in before-expatriation phase. Only one participant mentioned it as a

before-expatriation factor. As its low representation, the code is listed out as a reflection of the fieldwork data and will not be included into the final framework.

4.3 Expatriation difficulties

The theme expatriation difficulties refers to the difficulties expatriates encounter when they are working and living in the host country. In the open coding stage, many codes that describe the difficulties faced by Chinese expatriates were identified, such as work role change, mismatched work pace, safety considerations and family conflict. Then, four themes were formed during the focused coding stage, namely, work difficulties, life difficulties, psychological difficulties and general difficulties. Their hierarchical relationships are shown in figure 4.10. It includes four subthemes and sixteen aspects, and each subthemes containing its own main aspects will be discussed in turn below.

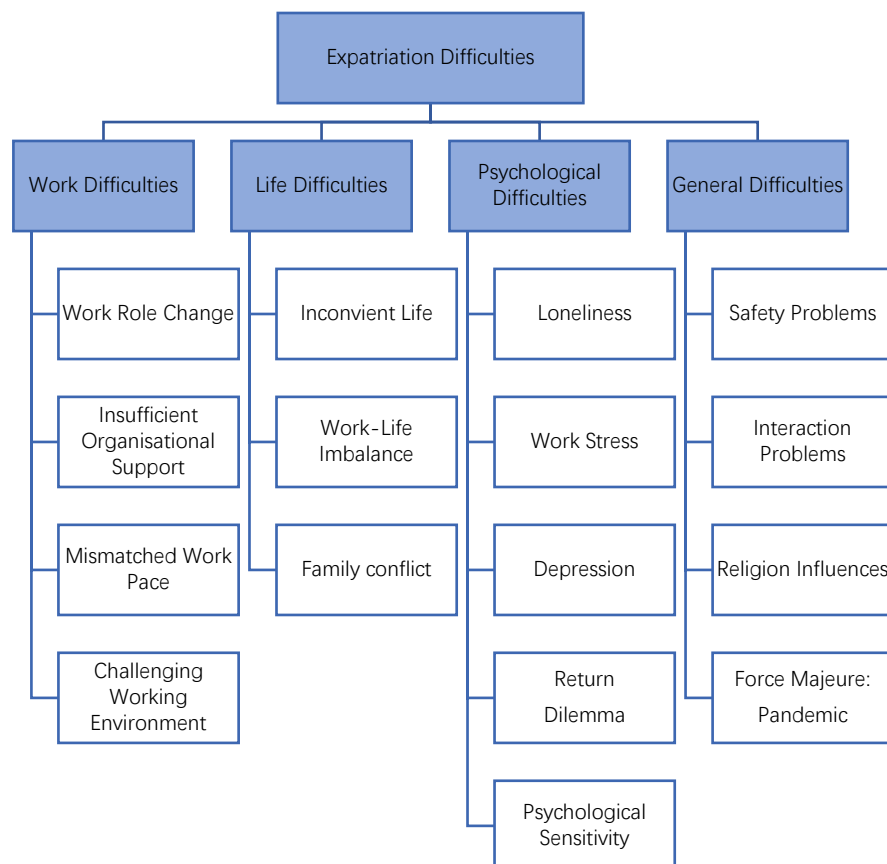


Figure 4.10: The theme expatriation difficulties and its main aspects

Table 4.11 shows how the theme expatriation difficulties developed from the open codes.

Table 4.11: Illustration of the development of the theme expatriation difficulties

Code examples	Examples of quotes	Subthemes	Theme
Work role change	“After all, my job is to sell. But you are not selling products to Chinese people but to foreigners. You are not using Chinese but foreign language to sell.”	Work Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Insufficient organisational support	“The situation is different for each company, and also the development stage. When the overseas market is developing fast, some of the company’s system may not be able to keep up with our needs, then the work gets harder.”	Work Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Mismatched work pace	“You always feel that local employees can’t keep up with your work. And they are kind of one-track-minded. For example, we can do job B along the way while we are doing job A. We can do both lines at the same time. They can’t do this. They will go back to job B only after they finish job A. This is a waste of time and slow things down. In terms of efficiency, for example, we think this can be done very quickly, but it turns out they are very slow.”	Work Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Challenging working environment	“The problem of corruption in Africa, that’s what I can’t stand... The government officials will put things off and that means you must give me something.”	Work Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Inconvenient life	“There are various supplies in China, for example, abundant food. Because there are only few vegetables here in Africa, no more than five. Scarce food choice. We have to go to the capital to buy what we want or grow it ourselves. A lot of mutton and beef here, also the pork. But the pork is not as delicious as Chinese pork. Travelling is another problem. If we go to another city, that basically means hundreds of kilometers.”	Life Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Work-life imbalance	“There’s no life there. Because there’s no family there. Not much entertainment.”	Life Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Family conflict	“My daughter is only three years old at that time. It is quite challenging facing the issues such as the impact on the relationship with my wife and	Life Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties

	who will look after my daughter while I am away.”		
Loneliness	“What are the real pain points? To endure loneliness. It is a must, then you will be a little better.”	Psychological Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Work stress	“Our work is particularly demanding. We are an e-commerce company and we have a lot of requirements. For example, we have KPI and the pressure of sales performance every day.”	Psychological Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Depression	“There is nothing satisfactory. I am too tired with the job and don’t have my own personal life. I am so depressed that I even had problems with my health at that time.”	Psychological Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Return dilemma	“It’s not that they don’t want to come back to China. It’s that they really can’t adapt to China after working overseas for several years.”	Psychological Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Psychological sensitivity	“When I first went abroad, I was actually a little more sensitive. It’s true that I’m not confident at that time.”	Psychological Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Safety problems	“I think the primary issue of expatriation is security, isn’t? If you go to some African countries, or even some western countries where guns are very popular at local, personal safety is the top concern.”	General Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Interaction problems	“Communication between people is very different from that in China. Language is just a tool. Sometimes it’s not just a matter of language. You may not be able to understand the meaning behind that language.”	General Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Religion influences	“Religion has a lot of influences. Like, no alcohol, no pork. If you’re out there drunk, that will be a trouble.”	General Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties
Force majeure: pandemic	“For example, I have a group of very good friends from the church, and we get together every weekend. But now it becomes online communication.”	General Difficulties	Expatriation Difficulties

4.3.1 Work difficulties

When expatriates relocate to a new, sometimes completely new environment, difficulties are inevitable. The overseas assignment is closely related to the needs of the organisation, local working environment and local employees, customers and partners (figure 4.11). Work difficulties generate when

expatriates strive to meet the needs of these stakeholders.

The theme work difficulties has four aspects (figure 4.10), including work role change (chapter 4.3.1.1), insufficient organisational support (chapter 4.3.1.2), mismatched work pace (chapter 4.3.1.3) and challenging working environment (chapter 4.3.1.4). The study also identifies interaction difficulties in work. However, it will not be discussed here because interaction difficulties lie in a much wider range including both expatriates' work and life. Therefore, this study clarifies interaction difficulties into the theme general difficulties, and it will be discussed in chapter 4.3.4.2.

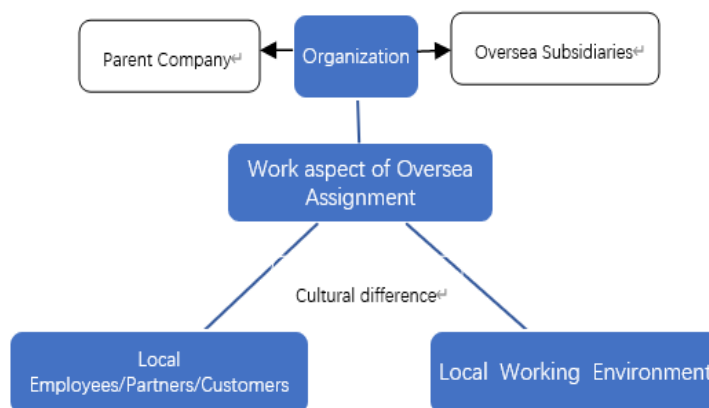


Figure 4.11: Major influencers of work aspect of overseas assignment

4.3.1.1 Work role change

Work role change refers to the difficulty expatriates face when they have to take on new work roles in the host country. It is an open code acquired very early as expatriates will naturally face changes in their job roles, though change degree varies. The change of work demand is mainly reflected in the change of work content.

“After all, my job is to sell. But you are not selling products to Chinese people but to foreigners. You are not using Chinese but foreign language to sell.” (P6)

“The different parts? For example, the financial policies are different, so are the accounting practices and tax practices.” (P8)

While acknowledging the changes in their work roles, the participants were

able to cope with the challenges brought by the work role change.

“In fact, our work here is fine. After all, our internationalization is not high. As for overseas accounting, we have to do both in English and Chinese. English accounting is similar to its Chinese version. So, there is no big difference in work.” (P8)

“The business side is fine, such as the procedures and duties. As it does not change much. (P5)

“In fact, I think it’s just an ordinary job, which is not much different from my job in China. The difference is that if I do something sometimes, I may think later whether they (local employees) will feel unacceptable.” (P7)

The data reflects that work role change does not seem to be necessarily related to expatriates’ job title or industry. For example, participant 8, as an accounting professional, his work only changed a little after he came to the host country, and he did not need to have a lot of contact with local employees during his work. P2, as a staff member of a road construction project, his work content was almost the same except the new environment and new colleagues.

“Local labour workers will carry out orders without questioning them.” (P2)

P5, a senior manager, responsible for the after-sales service in North America, held that work content did not change much. P7, assistant to general manager, the second in charge at a local company, whose job was to coordinate the daily operation, had much more contact with the host country nationals and also argued that there was “no big difference from back home”.

Most participants conveyed a relatively optimistic attitude in work role change. Two mentioned the challenges of it. For example, P3 thought that “it seems no big difference in daily work”, however, when it comes to the cultural aspect of work, there is “big difference in person-to-person communication.”

P11 believed that work role change is a major cause of work difficulties.

“You have a lot to get used to. The English bidding document, the

appropriate way to deal with customers, and to learn and improve how to bid here.”

4.3.1.2 Insufficient organisational support

Insufficient organisational support first emerged as an open code, then became a higher-level code and a subtheme of work difficulties in focused coding. Figure 4.12 shows the main aspects included in this code.

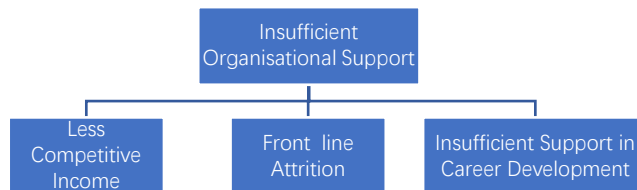


Figure 4.12: The code insufficient organisational support and its main aspects

4.3.1.2.1 Less competitive income

The pursuit for higher incomes is one of the main drivers of expatriation. There are good reasons to think that expatriates have reasonable expectations of their incomes abroad. However, three participants still mentioned their dissatisfaction with their income.

“The salary is not so satisfactory. I wish it was higher.” (P7)

In general, organisation-assigned expatriates reported less dissatisfaction with their pay as they seemed to have a certain level of acceptance to the company’s pay package. While two self-initiated expatriates in this study expressed more obvious and stronger dissatisfaction.

“Although the salary is better than that in China, it is still much lower than that in foreign companies. And then you might want to jump to a higher-paying company.” (P3)

“The salary has always been the same, not much... In fact, the company made a lot of money and went public. But we don’t have many benefits.” (P4)

It’s clear that unsatisfied salary has a direct and strong impact on overseas

assignments. P7 ended her task early and returned home (though money is not the main reason); P4 was not satisfied with her demanding work and was considering changing another job or go back home; P3 was still working hard and trying to hop to another higher-paid job.

4.3.1.2.2 Front-line Attrition

This code refers to a situation that the front-line expatriates will suffer more attrition and thus less efficiency when the company's (either parent company or subsidiaries) system does not keep up with the front-line demand. It is quite reasonable that different development stages of the organization will have different work difficulties, needs and support.

"The situation and the development stage of each company is different. When the overseas market is developing faster, some of the company's system and procedures cannot keep up with our needs, and at this time we overseas front-line staff become more tired." (P5)

"For example, like XXX company (a competitor), because it went out early and have a relatively mature supporting system ... Some colleagues of the parent company, who have not been abroad, take it for granted that something arranged is just another small thing. But in fact, for us in front, what could have been done in an hour, you may need three hours. It is not that we are not good. After all, if you work in XXX company, you can get ready-made data while we have to do it from zero. The efficiency is undoubtedly very low." (P5)

Meanwhile, the parent company's work arrangements with overseas departments are easy to cause dissatisfaction.

"From work perspective, the headquarter should not give new tasks to overseas front-line personnel if it can be done by domestic staff, given the fact that we are short of hands here and the local employees may not be able to help us with many tasks. Then if you keep giving tasks to front-line

personnel, it will actually be a waste.” (P5)

“If the leader wants to have a meeting or listen to a report, those he wants must be in his office immediately. So, we often have to stay in the office on weekends, waiting for a possible call. You must be in the office.” (P10)

Interestingly, only a few expatriates mentioned the attrition caused by the organisation itself. P5 was a typical case and talked about this point more, in a specific and detailed manner. The reason may be that he as a higher management had a comprehensive and insightful view on the daily operations of the company and the work conflicts between the headquarter and the subsidiary.

4.3.1.2.3 Insufficient support in career development

Career development is another major motivation for employees to go abroad. However, it is difficult to satisfy every expatriate with the limited resources of the organisation. From the interview data, it is a common phenomenon that expatriates perceived and complained about a lack of organisational support for their career development.

Career bottleneck

“The key factor (of returning home) is related to the career prospects here. If you can’t see hope, you might as well go home.” (P8)

The support from the company and the leader is one of the key forces of the employee’s career development. Especially in state-owned enterprises, leaders play a more important role in the promotion of individuals. P4,8,10 similarly experienced a low motivation in work and a sense of meaningless due to their blurry career development because of insufficient recognition from their leaders. When the promotion channel becomes narrower, working abroad will lose its original meaning and become stale. Like P8, the stagnation in his career development was unable to balance the evolving conflicts between

expatriation and family need any longer, and this finally led to his early return. In addition, the development of the company overseas also affects the career development of expatriates. If the company is growing fast and in a period of rapid expansion, there is more room for promotion and salary increase, and the space for personal learning and growth is also constantly expanded, and the sense of freshness and achievement can be sustained. For example, P1,5,6,7,11 achieved higher positions and incomes due to the expansion of their organisation. On the contrary, when the development stagnates or promotion channel narrows, employees are likely to suffer a burnout, like P7 told the interviewer that she found her management job in Morocco “boring” as “the job is getting less and less challenging when the company is on a smooth-running track”, and she finally resigned and went back.

Weak repatriation arrangement

“Those with overseas experience will be given a certain priority in promotion. After all, they have paid their youth. But the position is limited, and the salary will remain the same. I don’t get a promotion or salary raise after I came back.” (P2)

The company’s weak repatriation practice caused sustaining dissatisfaction and partly led to P2’s resignation. As an important part of the expatriation adjustment, repatriation adjustment relies heavily on the company’s ability in helping expatriates to resettle. However, given the fact that so many expatriates and less promotion chances, many expatriates do not get the promotion they expected. Some even face difficulties and embarrassment when they apply for a return. For example, when P8 hoped to return, his company was unwilling to arrange new personnel to take over his overseas duties in time and asked him to stay for another two years. P2,7,9,10 found there was no suitable post for them after coming back.

It is clear that weak repatriation arrangement results in a loss of organisation

loyalty and working enthusiasm, and there is high probability that the expatriates will leave the organisation (among the assigned expatriates, P2,7,10 left the company; P8 returned early).

4.3.1.3 Mismatched work pace

The code refers to a mismatch in workload and efficiency between Chinese expatriates and local employees. As one of the major work issues caused by the cultural differences, mismatched work pace may lead to maladjustment, and sometimes even the expatriation failure.

Local employees' low efficiency seems to be common and well supported by the fieldwork data. For example, according to P6, Chinese expatriates are hardworking, work oriented and efficient, while the local employees are less efficient. The mismatched work pace leads to stress and pain at work.

“Local employees are too self-centred...You always feel that local employees can't keep up with your work. And they are kind of one-track-minded. For example, we can do job B along the way while we are doing job A. We can do both lines at the same time. They can't do this. They will go back to job B only after they finish job A. This is a waste of time and slow things down. In terms of efficiency, for example, we think this can be done very quickly, but it turns out they are very slow.” (P6)

“For example, in case of a specific problem, the company may ask you to solve it or reply immediately. Local employees have a poor perception of the time and are without a sense of urgency.” (P11)

In many cases, expatriates must face the “laziness” of local employees.

“I'm not satisfied with their laziness. For example, after receiving their salary today, they won't come to work tomorrow. Then they used up all the money in three days, and then he borrowed money from us.” (P2)

For some participants, the mismatch in work pace was one of the main reasons for ending their assignments.

“I came back from Africa, and I don’t want to deal with them anymore. They are too procrastinating, and that can drive you crazy... their crazy low efficiency will soon lead to my negative emotions.” (P9)

The workload imbalance between expatriates and local employees is also a serious problem.

“So far, we have been taking the burden. Almost everything is solved by the Chinese. As for Moroccan, even the manager, doesn’t deal with the problem...We Chinese work overtime every day, but Moroccans get off work on time.” (P7)

Due to cultural differences and practical difficulties, overseas organisations often lack effective means to better motivate local staff. Firstly, it is very difficult and expensive to get them do more.

“Foreigners won’t work overtime. If he worked overtime too much, he would leave.” (P10)

The second is that local employees sometimes are unable to do more work.

“We are short of hands here and the local employees may not be able to help us with many tasks.” (P5)

“It’s not that he (Moroccan manager) doesn’t want to solve it. It’s that he doesn’t know how to deal with it.” (P7)

On the other side, organisations assign more work to Chinese expatriates, which further increases the workload imbalance between the Chinese and the local employees and hence bring more stress to expatriates.

4.3.1.4 Challenging working environment

Differences in the new working environment may lead to the failure of expatriates’ prior experience, which is one of the main reasons for the working difficulties. It includes macro level factors influencing business environment such as social system, laws and regulations, government management efficiency and corruption level. The micro level refers to the specific condition

of expatriates' workplace.

Different social system means that expatriates have to approach the same problem in a completely different way. When talking about the biggest challenge he had ever experienced in the host country, P2 believed that they would not experience the same difficulty in China because Chinese government has much stronger capacity of resource allocation.

“When we were building a bridge, we needed to use a piece of land. The landlord disagreed to sell it and asked for a very high price. The government has no right to use the land as it is privately owned. The local government negotiated with the landlord for three months, but it didn't work. We bought that land at a high price in the end as we can't afford the delay of the project.” (P2)

Differences in laws and regulations can also create difficulties for overseas organisations and expatriates.

“In China, if you transport a few boxes of goods, the Chinese police will not care about that as long as they are not stolen goods. But in Brazil, if you do the same thing, you must have the invoice with you. Otherwise, the police have the right to confiscate your goods, and you have to pay a fine.” (P5)

Government management efficiency and corruption level also inevitably affect the organisation's operations in the host country as well as expatriates' adjustment. In some countries, organisations face a poor business environment, such as government corruption.

“The problem of corruption in Africa, that's what I can't stand...The government officials will put things off and that means you must give me something.” (P9)

4.3.2 Life difficulties

This theme means the difficulties and challenges Chinese expatriates face in life in the host country. It includes three aspects, namely inconvenient life,

work-life imbalance and family conflict (figure 4.10).

4.3.2.1 Inconvenient life

The open code refers to the inconvenience mainly in food, clothing, shelter and transportation in the host country due to cultural and environmental differences.

“There are various supplies in China, for example, abundant food. Because there are only few vegetables here in Africa, no more than five. Scarce food choice. We have to go to the capital to buy what we want or grow it ourselves. A lot of mutton and beef here, also the pork. But the pork is not as delicious as Chinese pork. Travelling is another problem. If we go to another city, that basically means hundreds of kilometers.” (P2)

Expatriates in poor developing countries have to face poor infrastructure and limited supplies.

“The bus has no doors.” (P1)

“You can’t get what you want. It’s so hard.” (P9)

In fact, expatriates in developed countries also suffer from life inconvenience.

“Payment here is not very convenient... I have to buy a ticket when I am on a bus.” (P4)

“The price is very high. It will cost more than 200 yuan for a meal.” (P10)

Obviously, expatriates will face life inconvenience both in underdeveloped countries, like African countries, and in more developed regions, like in Europe and America. But expatriates will undoubtedly suffer more in those poorer places.

4.3.2.2 Work-life imbalance

The code refers to a state of work-life imbalance of expatriates due to too much emphasis on work and the discomfort in their life in the new environment.

“There is almost no separation between work and life. Our work is life, and our life is work. We often go to office when we have nothing to do, and there is not such a clear boundary.” (P9)

“If I have work to do, I will deal with it even after worktime. For me, it is OK as long as work doesn’t completely occupy my life.” (P7)

The fieldwork data identified a blurry boundary between expatriates’ work and life. It is a common phenomenon that expatriates put more on work and less on life. In some cases, expatriates complained they had no personal life at all.

“Expatriation indeed is about a process of loneliness. Far away from home, without seeing families for a very long period. I have to say that it’s anti-human.” (P8)

“There’s no life there. Because there’s no family there. Not much entertainment.” (P6)

Lack of entertainment is another sign of unbalanced life.

“There’s almost no entertainment, you know? In recent years, with the release of Vision 2030, we have things like cinema. Basically, there are few entertainment places.” (P8)

“We have few entertainments here. No Karaoke and movies. There does have cinemas, but with few films, and most of them are Arabic or French, so we don’t want to watch them. Shopping is not as convenient. There are only small shopping malls here.” (P7)

Interestingly, for some expatriates, shopping in stores or supermarkets was also a leisure activity. In a situation of lacking entertainment and expatriates adopting limited-contact strategy (chapter 4.5.3.2), the entertainment level of shopping or just buying life supplies is magnified.

“Every day, after work, I either stay in the apartment, or go to the supermarket. Basically, there is nothing else to do.” (P7)

“Not much fun, supermarket is the best place to go.” (P5)

4.3.2.3 Family conflict

Family conflict is a common and severe difficulty in expatriates' life. It is almost rare for Chinese expatriates to bring their families with them when they were sent abroad. This study shows that none of the participants traveled with their families. Expatriates and their families live apart for long periods of time and the left-behind spouse has to face various problems alone, such as the caring of the elder and children. The withdrawal of the expatriates' original family role due to the international assignment breaks the family balance and thus cause a series of troubles inside the family.

"There are many challenges. For example, an expatriate has two choices when he relocates, either bring his families or separate from them. Then the separation may not be one or two years, sometimes even more than ten years." (P11)

"I just can't be there when my child is growing up." (P5)

"The biggest pressure comes from family problems. The most important is the growth of children. There are some things I can't go back to deal with in time." (P8)

Family conflict may not only break the family balance but also may tear apart the family.

"I was worrying about the misunderstandings and estrangement caused by time and distance between us." (P6)

"To be honest, no matter how good your work is, you have to serve your family. Don't make that money at the cost of your family." (P6)

4.3.3 Psychological difficulties

Psychological difficulties is a theme emerged in focused coding, including aspects of loneliness, work stress, depression, dilemma and psychological sensitivity (figure 4.10). It mainly comes from work difficulties (work stress), life difficulties (loneliness) and the overlapped and intertwined difficulties

(depression, dilemma and psychological sensitivity) (figure 4.13).

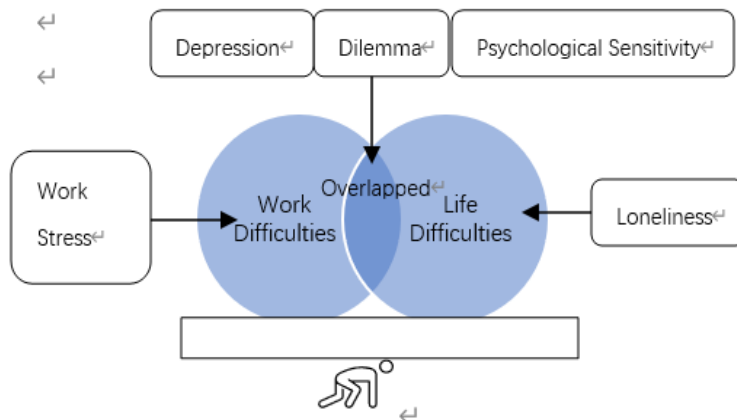


Figure 4.13: Main sources of psychological difficulties

4.3.3.1 Loneliness

None of the participants in this study relocated with their families, and many reported a severe lack of emotional support, which causes a typical psychological difficulty in life — loneliness.

“Because you’re new to a place and you will feel lonely. Well. You don’t know anyone, and then you don’t know what to do.” (P4)

“What are the real pain points? To endure loneliness, must endure loneliness, then you will be a little better.” (P6)

The fieldwork data includes some slightly contradictory statements. Though there were good number of expatriation fellows supporting the expatriate’s life, loneliness was still a commonly seen problem. Like P8, who has many Chinese colleagues at the project site, still suffered a lot from loneliness.

“Expatriation indeed is about a process of loneliness. Far away from home, without seeing families for a very long period. I have to say that it’s anti-human.” (P8)

“The pressure comes from my loneliness. There is no social circle there. First, everyone is busy at work, and it is not easy to broaden social circle there... You basically live in the circle of your colleagues.” (P10)

It is worth mentioning that loneliness, unlike other difficulties such as language

and inconvenient life which can be solved by expatriates' hard work and effective in-country life support, will get worse as the time spent abroad lengthens if without the effective emotional support.

4.3.3.2 Work stress

Work stress here refers to expatriates' negative emotions caused by work difficulties, such as work anxiety, a hot temper at work and frustration. It is an early-formed open code as it is the most common and naturally predictable psychological problem. Different from life stress which are more related to expatriates and their families, work stress is linked to more stakeholders. In addition, the central task of expatriation is work, therefore, work stress is huge for expatriates, which is strongly confirmed by the fieldwork data.

"The biggest pressure comes from work." (P10)

Heavy workload, high work requirements and great difficulty in work are main reasons for work stress.

"Our work is particularly demanding...we have KPI (key performance indicator) every day...then I keep thinking of changing a company if not happy here." (P4)

"Our working atmosphere is quite depressing. To tell the truth, the leaders have very high requirements for my department, and everyone is under great pressure. You cannot afford the mistake in the front line as a small mistake will lead to the loss of hundreds of millions of contracts, even the whole network of this country and the business in the next few years. Therefore, we can't make any mistakes." (P10)

The lack of work recognition by the leaders will aggravate expatriates' work stress.

"Although the workload is very heavy, my work was not recognised by my boss for a long time, and then it would be very frustrating. It is not that you didn't work hard, or you didn't do well, but that you did well and tried your

best.” (P10)

“I feel that my job is difficult to be recognised by the leaders... I am then very depressed.” (P8)

4.3.3.3 Depression

The study identifies a prolonged state of mental tension of expatriates due to a lack of both effective career development support and emotional support when facing work and life difficulties.

“When you have been staying abroad and haven’t seen your families and friends for too long, you are prone to be depressed, and then you will easily lose your temper.” (P7)

“There is nothing satisfactory. I am too tired with the job and don’t have my own personal life. I am so depressed that I even had problems with my health at that time.” (P10)

Depression makes expatriates unable to well adapt to the new environment, and it is highly likely that the organization and the expatriate would face an expatriation failure if no effective support provided to relieve the depression. Just like P10, negative emotions kept accumulating due to the demanding work and the crippled life, and it led to her health problem. She was then determined to end her assignment, even if it meant quitting her hard-won job. P7 who had a similar depression also quit her job.

4.3.3.4 Return dilemma

The code refers to a dilemma some expatriates face when they are considering whether they should return home. Some cases in this study have strongly supported this code.

“If I leave my current company, I will consider two options: one is to continue to look for a company in the UK, and the other is to go back. It’s not easy to make the decision.” (P4)

“After you stay abroad for a longer period, you keep considering whether to stay at the host country waiting for the order or take the initiative to go back.” (P11)

The study identifies three situations when expatriates get stuck. The first is when expatriates claim they want to return but still stay and work in the host country.

“When considering future development, I think my development abroad may be limited as a Chinese. There would be different situation at home...My root is in China, and I do want to go back.” (P3)

The expatriate swings between going back and staying. Expatriates who have developed their social and work networks in the host country will be more afraid of coming back home and facing the new uncertainty — their possible slim chances in a fast-developing China.

“I don’t regret going out”, P3 also suggested all the young people should “go out and have a look”. However, he also believed that he had paid a certain opportunity cost because there might be more chances in the rapid development of the Chinese market in the past decade.

“If I hadn’t come to Dubai, maybe I’ll do better in China.” (P3)

The second is when the organisation rejects the expatriate’s application of coming back or offers a long waiting period. P8 made a tough decision to end his hopeless expatriation but experienced a more severe dilemma as “my manager didn’t agree and put me off for various reasons”. This is not uncommon as many organisations do not provide an exact but a very broad time period for expatriation. This gives room for a game and bargaining process when the organisation disapproves the return application. The weak side, generally the expatriate, will face a torture. If the expatriate disobeys the headquarter and insists coming back, he/she may resign or face a broken relationship with the leaders. If he/she obeys the order, he/she has to fight the internal dissatisfaction and the stale job.

The third situation is that expatriates find it difficult to adapt to the domestic labour market after returning home, and then relocate again.

“It’s not that they don’t want to come back to China. It’s that they really can’t adapt to China after working overseas for several years.” (P9)

P9 gave two reasons for the dilemma. One was the large reduce in the salary, and the other was that there were not enough right jobs in domestic labour market.

“The pay gap is huge. Take translator as an example, if you work in Africa for more than five years, you may earn 30,000-50,000 yuan a month. If you were back, your expatriation experience would be less valuable unless you find a particularly relevant job, which is almost impossible.” (P9)

4.3.3.5 Psychological sensitivity

The code refers to a psychological response to the possible discrimination, humiliation, or stereotype about Chinese by the host country nationals, either explicit or implicit, and often manifests in anger and a confidence lack.

“When I first went abroad, I was actually a little more sensitive. It’s true that I’m not confident at that time.” (P3)

“When I entered a hotel gate with a Belgian at the same time, the doorman asked me to stop and let the Belgian white man go first and he also took off his hat and bowed 90 degrees. I was very angry as I was closer to the gate. That doorman said that ‘you are Chinese, and they are Europeans’. No fairness at all.” (P9)

This sensitivity stems from the humiliations Chinese people suffered in recent history and a lack of confidence due to the long-term backwardness. When expatriates encounter discrimination or prejudice in the host country, the sensitive state will be activated.

“When I first came here, foreigners asked me where the products from. I told them they were made in China. Some may say, “made in China? No,

it's cheap and the quality is poor. It's an old tune, isn't it? It's quite annoying.” (P3)

“It is like some kind of racial discrimination, or stereotype, but not too explicit. The company will treat Britons and Asians differently. Sometimes it makes us feel very unfair. For example, compared with the European team or the UK team, the company seems has less trust on the Asian team. The top leader of our Asia team can't be promoted to a position as high as other Britons.” (P4)

It has to be noted that not many participants reported this sensitivity in their interviews. Individuals who do not directly encounter discrimination and stereotypes in the host country are less likely to experience such negative psychological states. For example, P5 did not experience such a sensitivity.

“When I worked in the US, I have not experienced discrimination or similar situation.”

Expatriates in Africa seem to have more confidence and less sensitivity as they generally enjoy a high social status there.

“Local people see China as a developed country. They know China can produce everything.” (P2)

4.3.4 General difficulties

After the formation of the themes work difficulties, life difficulties and psychological difficulties, there still were some open codes that cannot be classified to any of the developed themes as they have a wider influence on work, life and psychology. Then, a new theme, general difficulties, emerged in the focused coding stage. It mainly includes safety problems, interaction problems, religion influences and pandemic (figure 4.14).

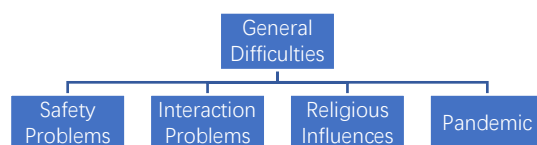


Figure 4.14: The subtheme general difficulties and its main aspects

It is observed that the general difficulties faced by expatriates are highly related to the cultural context of the host country. The extent to which these difficulties manifest varies across different cultural backgrounds. For instance, language barriers may be more pronounced in some cultural settings, while religious influences might be more significant in others. Hence, understanding the cultural context of the host country is crucial for effectively addressing the challenges faced by expatriates.

4.3.4.1 Safety problems

The code refers to any factors that may affect the safety and security of the expatriates. As an open code at first, it was upgraded into a higher-level code in the focused coding stage, including two open codes as its main aspects (figure 4.15).

“Because we are mainly going to Africa. The biggest concern is the health conditions and security there, because Africa seems poor and chaotic, and we feel that there will be a big problem in security.” (P9)

“To tell you the truth, the most important thing is safety... Some places abroad are not very safe. Some places may be safe in the morning, but not in the afternoon, right? So you need to know in advance. Don’t go where it’s not safe.” (P5)

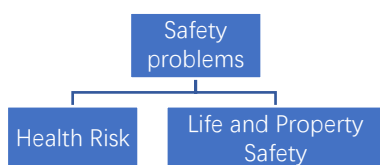


Figure 4.15: The code safety problems and its main aspects

Safety is undoubtedly an individual’s concern, but Chinese expatriates seem to put more weight on that.

“Our boss’s principle is safety first and all other things second.” (P9)

On the one hand, Chinese expatriates are mainly sent to developing countries generally with lower level of economic development, social management and

public security. On the other hand, Chinese have a high sense of security as guns, pornography, gambling and drugs are prohibited in China. Therefore, expatriation means more risks to expatriates and their families and they tend to be more alert to safety issues. However, interviewees sent to the developed regions or a host country with relatively better social and economic conditions reported less safety concerns.

Health risk

One of the most common conditions in host countries is the relatively poor medical and health conditions thus expatriates are exposed to more health risks.

“In Africa, you should be careful of infectious diseases, such as malaria. You should protect yourself from dengue fever in Southeast Asia.” (P5)

Life and property safety

“The bus has no doors. We are shocked.” (P1)

“Some countries I went to are with less social order, and some of my colleagues were robbed there. But luckily, I’ve never been robbed or stolen.” (P5)

“If you go to some African countries, or even some western countries where guns are very popular at local, personal safety is the top concern.” (P2)

Safety issues has a great impact on expatriates’ work, life and psychology. In fact, the concern on safety issues also deeply affects their adjustment strategies (which will be discussed in chapter 4.5.3).

“Don’t be too idealistic. You go to these tough places and work hard. It maybe not easy for you to come back complete and healthy. So in a simple sentence, you should feel lucky that you can both make money there and spend money back home.” (P6)

4.3.4.2 Interaction problems

Interaction problems refer to difficulties arising when expatriates interact with host country nationals or third country nationals (if applicable) during the expatriation. It has a great impact on expatriates' work, life and psychology. It mainly includes language barrier and integration barrier (figure 4.16).

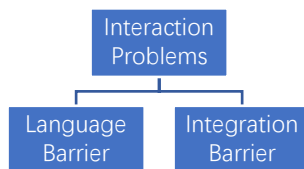


Figure 4.16: The code interaction problems and its main aspects

4.3.4.2.1 Language barrier

Insufficient language ability, a common challenge for expatriates, affects expatriates' work and life in the host country.

“Although I studied French in college, it was very challenging in oral French. I remember particularly that when I first arrived there, I couldn’t understand the French spoken by Africans. Because what we learn in school, the audio played by our teachers was said by French, which was completely different from the French spoken by Africans.” (P9)

“Because it is an Arab country, and their English is heavily accented, and I couldn’t understand the language at first.” (P10)

Though Chinese expatriates are generally highly educated (all participants in this study have a bachelor’s degree or above), and with a certain foreign language skill (foreign language is a compulsory course in Chinese universities), language is still an obvious challenge for them.

“We Chinese have suffered too many losses in the contract. The first reason is the language. For example, there may be dozens of pages in English in the contract. Chinese people are reluctant to read one by one, or they read it, but some may not be so easy to understand.” (P3)

In addition, the language is not only a tool for communication but sometimes

also a carrier of distinguished implicit cultural message, which brings more challenge for expatriates.

“Communication between people is very different from that in China. Language is just a tool. Sometimes it’s not just a matter of language. You may not be able to understand the meaning behind that language.” (P3)

4.3.4.2.2 Integration barrier

It is very rare for expatriates to integrate well into the local community, which may lead to less support from HCNs. One reason is expatriates lack initiative to immerse themselves into the new environment, which partly due to the language barrier and the fact of group expatriation.

“I don’t think we have to integrate into local life. There are less than twenty Chinese in our company. Some large companies may send dozens of people, or hundreds of people. So they don’t have to integrate into the local area. You just have to find a good way to entertain yourself in that place.” (P7)

When talking about the fact that her friends in the host country are almost Chinese, P4 said,

“I think it’s language and culture. You may have more common topics. You’ll feel more relaxed when you are with a Chinese.”

The second reason is expatriates have little incentive to extend social network in life. In fact, many expatriates believed that they can complete their assignments without integration into the local society.

“Assignment time is limited, so focus on the assignment and getting the job done”, “I don’t socialise with people who don’t have anything to do with my work.” (P6)

Thirdly, cultural differences also hinder the integration of expatriates into the host country. For example, the characteristics of HCNs may influences expatriates’ integration.

“It is a relatively conservative country, and it is hard to make friends with local Muslims.” (P10)

“In fact, many British people are very conservative... Not many people are very open to make friends with people from different countries. It depends on each other’s interests.” (P4)

Finally, security concerns also prevent expatriates from integrating more deeply.

“Try not to get in touch with people outside your work. If you are not careful, you may get into trouble.” (P6)

4.3.4.3 Religion influences

Religion influence refers to the influence of religious factors on the expatriation. It may not be an obvious or serious obstacle for Chinese expatriates, but most participants mentioned it in their interviews.

“Sometimes when we go shopping, the shops are close as the locals have to pray at that time, which sometimes causes trouble for us.” (P8)

“Religion has a lot of influences. Like, no alcohol, no pork. If you’re out there drunk, that will be a trouble.” (P3)

Religion factors also have a certain impact on the work aspect.

“We respect other people’s beliefs... We arrange prayer rooms for Saudi employees and Muslim employees. The prayer time is also counted as working time.”

“During Ramadan, work may become less smooth. Local employees’ working hours may be different from ours”. (P8)

It has to be noted that different religions have different effects on expatriates.

“87% of the Myanmar population believe in Buddhism. Therefore, they are more peaceful and patient, and have fewer ideas about efficiency and speed in their minds”. (P1)

On the other hand, a same religion in different countries may have different

effects on expatriates. For example, the Muslim countries mentioned by the participants enjoyed a similar feature in low degree of openness, life convenience and entertainment, however, the situation varies between countries.

“I was in Algeria before, which is a traditional Muslim country where you should dress conservatively... Then I went to Morocco, a country dominated by tourism, its openness is relatively high. You will see many people in cool clothes on the street. You can almost do everything here except eating pork. There also has bars and casinos.” (P7)

4.3.4.4 Force majeure: pandemic

Force majeure is an unexpected influencing power on expatriation practices, a challenge that can hardly be solved by the organisation and its expatriates.

Since the beginning of this study, COVID-19 virus had been ravaging the world, which led to a dramatical drop of business activities and the economy stagnation. It had greatly changed the form of work and life. One point to be noted is there may be some other similar power like local conflict, regional wars and major catastrophes, but none had the same impact of the pandemic in terms of the influencing scale and duration, and there may also be some other global force majeure posing a major challenge to global commerce in the future. Therefore, force majeure is made a subtheme of general difficulties, but only the pandemic will be discussed here.

“I have a group of very good friends from the church, and we get together every weekend. Now it becomes online communication. It was face-to-face contact.” (P4)

Obviously, the epidemic changed the connection between people, making it impossible for people to go out for entertainment or relax as usual, which exacerbated the life difficulties of expatriates. As P7 complained:

“there is nothing else to do”.

The epidemic disrupted the work pace and made work more difficult.

“I can only communicate with the clients through the phone. But the effect is absolutely different from face-to-face communication... I planned to spend a year or two to improve the business here, and then apply to the company for a post in China, but due to the epidemic, a lot of work was not completed last year, and many plans could not be realised.” (P5)

The epidemic also added to the psychological burden of expatriates. For example, it made it a big challenge or impossible for expatriates to return home to visit their families.

“We could go back to China once every four months. Now because of the epidemic, we can’t go back even after seven or eight months, which is too annoying.” (P8)

“Because of this epidemic, I haven’t been home for more than one year. When you have been staying abroad and haven’t seen your families and friends for too long, you are prone to be depressed, and then you will easily lose your temper.” (P7)

4.4 Expatriation supporting resources

This theme refers to the relevant supporting resources available to the expatriate in order to overcome difficulties arising during the expatriation. This study takes all available expatriation supports as resources for expatriation adjustment as all these supports contribute to expatriates’ adjustment, and it identifies six main sources of support, namely, the expatriate himself/herself, Chinese circle, organisation, host country, family and home country. Figure 4.17 shows the overview of the theme. Each subthemes containing its own main aspects will be discussed in turn below.

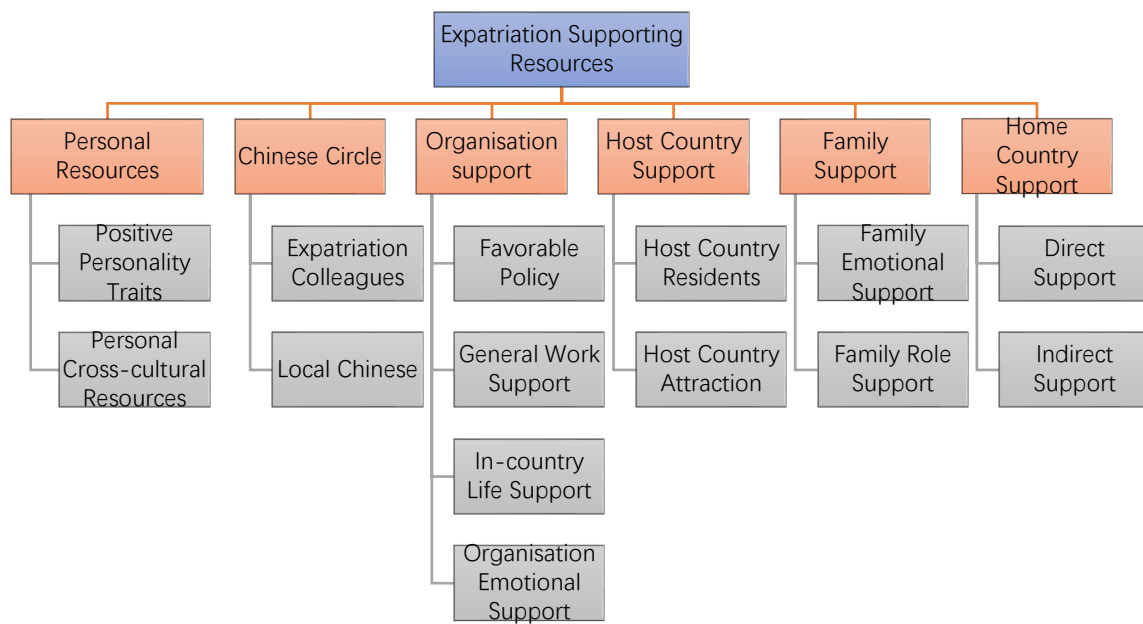


Figure 4.17: The theme expatriation supporting resources and its main aspects

Table 4.12 shows the formation process of the theme expatriation supporting resources, or how the theme was developed from the relevant codes.

Table 4.12: Illustration of the development of the theme expatriation supporting resources

Examples of quotes	Open code examples	Developed / refined codes	Sub-themes	Theme
"No matter your country is strong or not, you should treat foreigners the same. If you are strong, you should not bully others, right? You have to be consistent with people."	Ren/Humanity	Positive personality traits	Personal resources	Expatriation supporting resources
"I have overseas study experience, so there is no problem with the new environment and language."	Overseas experience	Personal cross-cultural resources	Personal resources	Expatriation supporting resources
"You fit into the expatriation group and get along with your colleagues. That's definitely a condition for your adjustment."	Expatriation colleagues	Expatriation colleagues	Chinese circle	Expatriation supporting resources
"We have a good relationship with a local Chinese restaurant and	Local Chinese	Local Chinese	Chinese circle	Expatriation supporting

often eat there. Because the cook is a hometown fellow, the dish tastes quite right, especially in spiciness.”				resources
“As long as individuals can get more projects, the company’s incentives will be in place.”	Favorable policy	Favorable policy support	Organization support	Expatriation supporting resources
“We usually involve the organisational resources in helping to solve difficult problems, like expert resources, leaders’ resources... As we can’t handle it only by a few dozen of us overseas.”	Organisational resources	General work support	Organization support	Expatriation supporting resources
“The company backup is good, such as the accommodation and canteen. You don’t have to worry about those things yourself, so you can focus and just get the job done.”	Life support	In-country life support	Organization support	Expatriation supporting resources
“Our company reimburses three tickets a year for visiting relatives. Accommodation for visiting relatives will also be arranged accordingly.”	Emotional support	Organisational emotional support	Organization support	Expatriation supporting resources
“Before you go out, you might think that Muslims maybe radical, but they are not. The local people are nice, and we respect each other.”	Host country nationals	Host country residents	Host country support	Expatriation supporting resources
“The local ice cream and the Oreo cones are really good. I don’t know why we don’t have it in China.”	Food attraction	Host country attraction	Host country support	Expatriation supporting resources
“When you start business in a strange country, you will inevitably encounter difficulties, setbacks and even slow progress. At this time, you will feel relieved by chatting with your family members and gaining their encouragement and understanding.”	Emotional support	Family emotional support	Family support	Expatriation supporting resources
“With effective family support, the family issues will be less mentally	Family role filling	Family role	Family support	Expatriation supporting

distracting when working outside.”		support		resources
“During the pandemic, it was difficult to vaccinate in the host country. Our government was helping us. It was supposed to be impossible if the country does not have this economic strength.”	Direct country support	Direct country support	Home country support	Expatriation supporting resources
“As China becomes more and more powerful, people will think a little better of you as an individual Chinese. At least they don’t look down on you that easily.”	Indirect country support	Indirect country support	Home country support	Expatriation supporting resources

4.4.1 Personal resources

This subtheme refers to the resources within the expatriates and helpful to expatriate adjustment. It emerged in the focused coding and mainly included positive personality traits and personal cross-cultural resources (figure 4.18). It needs to be noted that physical resources, supposed to be an important part of personal resources, is not well supported by the data. Only P10 mentioned that her health problem partly led to her application to coming back. Therefore, physical condition is not discussed in this section.

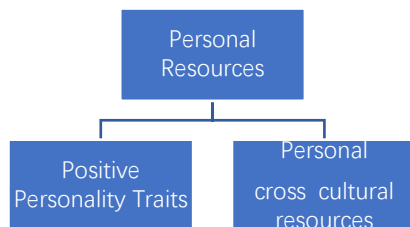


Figure 4.18: The subtheme personal resources and its main aspects

4.4.1.1 Positive personality traits

It refers to those personality traits conducive to expatriate adjustment. The open coding process recorded personality traits like responsibility, patience, confidence, openness that help expatriates to maintain the required degree of adjustment in the host country and complete the assignment. Therefore, these personality traits are considered as positive resources for expatriate adjustment. However, not all of the individuals interviewed exhibited all of the

listed traits. As this study focuses more on the whole broad picture of adjustment, the personality traits are discussed in a limited scope, mainly including Ren/humanity, perseverance, confidence and openness (figure 4.19)

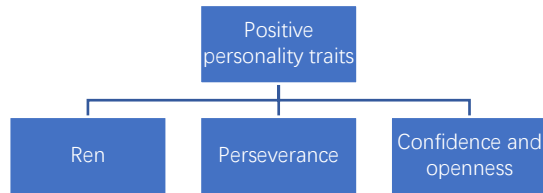


Figure 4.19: The code positive personality traits and its main aspects

4.4.1.1.1 Ren

The word “Ren”^④ is the core morality of Confucianism. It advocates mutual respect, mutual help and friendliness and kindness. It means the training of transcending egocentrism and the consideration for others. Just like Confucius said, “do not impose on others what you yourself do not want others to impose on you.” It has deeply influenced and shaped the personality of Chinese people. As Ren is a very broad term, the following discussed which facilitate expatriate adjustment just reflects part of its meaning.

Ren means consistent respect.

“No matter your country is strong or not, you should treat foreigners the same. If you are strong, you should not bully others, right? You have to be consistent with people.” (P5)

“We respect other people’s beliefs. You may not pray like them, but you must respect them.” (P8)

Ren means affinity, a personality trait that helps bridge the gap between people and make better work situations. P2 lending money to local employee is a sign of affinity, which made the management and the workers closer.

P6 stressed that affinity is very important for cross-cultural communication.

^④ There are different translations of “ren”, like “humanity”, “benevolence” and “ren”. This study adopts the version of “ren”.

“I meet many customers who are descendants of Spanish, and we talk about their grandfathers because a lot of their grandfathers’ stories things of Spain.”

Ren means modesty. Some participants believed that unlike their western counterparts, the Chinese enter the local market with a low profile and more respect. That means thinking more from a local perspective.

“The westerners seem to be more proud and above other people, and that will not bring anyone close.” (P6)

“We should think more of the local’s real expectations, as even the word win-win may be viewed differently by two sides.” (P1)

4.4.1.1.2 Perseverance

The code perseverance is derived from two interrelated open codes — responsibility and endurance. Out of a strong sense of responsibility to the organisation and family, individuals tend to work hard to complete tasks. Expatriates’ quality of high endurance helps them persist even when facing tough alien environment.

Perseverance implies responsibility, a spirit to accomplish tasks. As P2 mentioned:

“I think in terms of time, you are successful when you have completed the whole assignment period. You don’t want to be a deserter... It is also a sense of responsibility that expatriates generally spend enough time on work.”

Perseverance also implies endurance, a tendency of expatriates to keep moving forward in the face of hardships without much complaining. As P7 mentioned:

“there must be things make you feel uncomfortable and unpleasant, as you can’t change it, you have to adapt to it.”

Expatriates’ endurance through the hardships also helps them learn from the

setbacks and adjust to their work. As P3 mentioned:

“there are so many tough times. Once a client slammed the door in my face. These are valuable experiences.”

Given the fact that Chinese expatriates are working in relatively less developed environment, perseverance plays a role in expatriates' in-country adjustment. The field work identifies that the high degree of endurance assures the completion of expatriation.

4.4.1.1.3 Confidence and openness

This code is a combination of two open codes — confidence and openness.

Confidence here refers to individual's confidence in both his/her country and himself/herself, which plays an irreplaceable positive role in the adjustment of Chinese expatriates. It helps alleviate the traumas of more than 100 years of colonial history and enable expatriates to work and communicate with a more professional attitude, which will effectively change the existing stereotype against Chinese people and reshape the image of Chinese people.

“When you are confident and professional, the client will no longer irritate you with stereotypical language such as ‘Chinese products means low quality’. He will get straight to the point and ask what your strengths are. I think we Chinese still need to build up confidence overseas. If you are not confident, things will go wrong.” (P3)

Openness refers to the expatriate taking a more active attitude to integrate into the local thus creating more possibilities.

“To get closer to them, we would go to temples to experience some unique local customs with local friends during festivals or weddings.” (P1)

Openness facilitates adjustment. As P7 mentioned:

“those who are more open will be more active to communicate with local people, even if their language skills are not good. The more local contacts you have, the faster you adjust.”

The fieldwork data shows that the degree of openness of Chinese expatriates is not high. Higher position means higher openness, such as higher management P1, P6 and P7 reported higher openness than other expatriates. However, P5, who was also a senior manager, seemed to be less local. Part of the reason may be his position in after-sales service department and that he made decisions in front of group Chinese expatriates. Compared with organisation-sent expatriates, SIEs, like P3 and P4, reported higher openness.

4.4.1.2 Personal cross-cultural resources

The code refers to the personal resources conducive to better cross-cultural communication. Fieldwork data identifies two resources: personal overseas experience and working language ability (figure 4.20).

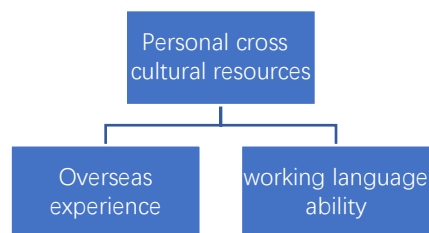


Figure 4.20: The code personal cross-cultural resources and its main aspects

4.4.1.2.1 Personal overseas experience

Overseas experience, such as the previous expatriation and learning experience, contributes to expatriate's adjustment. P1, P2, P5, P6, P7 reported that they had some kinds of overseas experience and that helped them build advantage.

"I have overseas study experience, so there is no problem with the language and my ability to adapt to the new environment." (P6)

"I was sent to Japan before and worked there for three years, so it is not a problem in terms of psychological construction." (P1)

P7 thought that her previous overseas experience enabled her to face the assignment with a more ordinary attitude. Compared with those who are sent

abroad for the first time, she thought that there was nothing to worry about and it was just another piece of work.

It should be noted that expatriate experience is not always supportive. For example, P5 and P6 believed that due to the similar overseas experience, they were accustomed to the cultural and environmental differences and the host country became much less attractive in this respect.

4.4.1.2.2 Working language ability

Expatriates' working language ability has a certain influence on their adjustment. Expatriates with efficient working language ability definitely helps them communicate with their clients and the local more easily, and it is reasonable to think that sufficient working language ability will improve the expatriates' self-confidence and openness.

“In fact, the ability to communicate in this foreign language is the most basic.” (P6)

P6, as a fluent Spanish speaker, successfully carried out his sales work in the local market. P1, who was assigned to Myanmar, was “not too worried about the language problem” as he spoke Japanese and English. Interestingly, during his stay in Myanmar, he also took Burmese language courses at Yangon University of Foreign Studies in his spare time.

Undoubtedly, working language ability is seen as an important personal resource when expatriates decide to go abroad. Compared with AEs, SIEs must rely more on their working language ability.

All expatriates in this study have a certain foreign language foundation due to their high education level (all have a bachelor's degree or above). Among them, P1, P3, P6, P7 and P9 majored in foreign languages in college. P2, P5 had relevant overseas experience and can communicate with their working language. P4 was a fluent English speaker, and she changed her job and went to UK.

4.4.2 Chinese circle

Chinese circle refers to expatriate's social circle mainly composed of Chinese. With a strong collectivism tradition, Chinese people like to live in groups and stay in groups. This phenomenon can still be clearly observed among Chinese expatriates. To most Chinese expatriates, their expatriation colleagues and local Chinese (figure 4.21) are of great help for their adjustment.

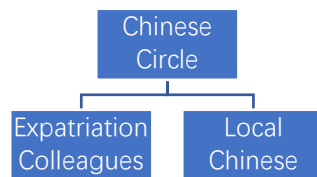


Figure 4.21: The subtheme Chinese circle and its main aspects

4.4.2.1 Expatriation colleagues

The support from expatriation colleagues is an important resource for expatriates' adjustment. Expatriation colleagues effectively support expatriates' life adjustment and emotion adjustment. They as a group offer companionship to all the members within the group, as P2 mentioned:

"We play basketball together. In the evening we play cards and billiards...You fit into the expatriation group and get along with your colleagues. That's definitely a condition for your adjustment." (P2)

"If there are some troubles, I often chat with my colleagues. I know some of them for many years. Just be straightforward." (P5)

Expatriation colleagues also facilitate work adjustment.

"When I first went out, I was with my colleague who had gone abroad a few times. If I have any questions, I can ask him directly." (P7)

"When we encounter intractable problems, we will get together and discuss that." (P11)

4.4.2.2 Local Chinese

Another component of the expatriate's Chinese circle is the local Chinese,

which include Chinese immigrants and other Chinese working and living there. It is quite natural and easy for expatriates to get together with the local Chinese. P4, as a SIE to the UK, was good at English and willing to make British friends. However,

“most of my friends outside of work are BBC (British Born Chinese), but they are all Chinese.”

Other Chinese working in the host country are also a potential support. The Chinese circle first facilitates the exchange and sharing of the information.

“We visit the Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy as well as some of the large Chinese companies in the same industry. Through communication with them, we know better of the local market.” (P1)

Chinese circle facilitates life adjustment. P6 mentioned he would sometimes get together with expatriates from other Chinese companies to eat and brag. P7 took part in the activities organised by the Chinese embassy or Confucius Institute or visits other Chinese companies. However, P6 also held that “it is rare to get together with a local Chinese rival.”

Interestingly, local Chinese restaurants came up in many interviews. It is obvious that Chinese restaurants or Chinese supermarkets are a kind of supporting resource, as it not only satisfies the expatriates’ appetite, but also further confirmed their Chinese identity.

“We have a good relationship with a local Chinese restaurant and often eat there. Because the cook is a hometown fellow, the dish tastes quite right, especially in spiciness.” (P6)

There may also be few expatriates who don’t particularly rely on the Chinese circle. Like P3, who reported a higher openness as a SIE, had more local friends than other participants in this study. Part of the reason may be as what he said, “Dubai’s openness makes it easy for people from different countries to become friends.” Even so, Chinese friends still make up the majority of his life there.

4.4.3 Organisation support

This theme refers to all supports provided by the organisation to the expatriates for the completion of its own overseas goals. It was originally an open code and then developed into a theme. Other related open codes are classified as four main aspects of organisation support, namely, favorable policy support, general work support, in-country life support and emotional support (figure 4.22). Favorable policy provides continued motivation for expatriates to better adjust and complete assignments. General work support plays a vital role in expatriate work adjustment. In-country life support has proved its effectiveness in helping expatriates adjust at a certain extent while it also limits expatriates' further integration into the local environment. Emotional support, an important lubricant for expatriate adjustment, is so important yet so scarce and weak in the expatriation.

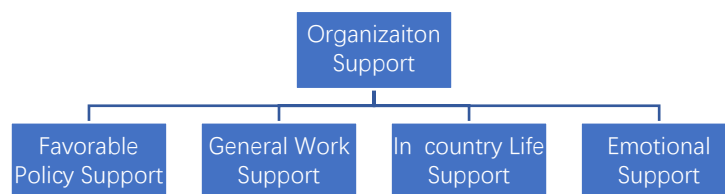


Figure 4.22: The subtheme organisation support and its main aspects

The study finds that the levels of support for expatriates varies between organisations. In general, large state-owned enterprises, or large private enterprises, provide more complete and comprehensive support for expatriates.

*“My suggestion is to go with those large companies, big state-owned companies, but not go with private companies as their support will be less.”
(P9)*

“Some big companies, like Huawei, go abroad early. They have relatively sound support system. But if you are in a small company, you may have to learn to take care of yourself.” (P5)

4.4.3.1 Favorable policy support

Favorable policy refers to organisational incentives for expatriates to encourage them to complete international assignments well. In chapter 4.2.2.2.1, favorable policy is discussed as a key element which effectively promotes the individual's expatriation decision at before-expatriation stage. The fieldwork data proves that it continuously motivates expatriates to better adjust themselves and complete assignments during the while-expatriation stage.

For example, pursuing performance rewards makes expatriates more focused on their work and thus better complete assignments.

“As long as individuals can get more projects, the company's incentives will be in place.” (P1)

P1 mentioned that his career expectation in Myanmar was to win more projects, and it is clear that organisation's favorable policy was a strong guide for him to work and live in the host country. The story of P8 also proved the significance of promotion incentive to expatriate adjustment. As his chance to be promoted did not increase as the time he spent abroad lengthened, he decided to return home.

“If possible, I would rather to stay for a possible promotion. My wife feels the same. As it will make a big difference when you go back with a promotion.” (P8)

Favorable policy is an important reason for expatriates to endure the current difficulties from a long-term perspective. However, it is commonly seen that its marginal utility declines as time passes.

“If I stay overseas, a further promotion will be easier. But I came back. Because I had to come back to get married and settle down.” (P11)

4.4.3.2 General work support

The code refers to some regular supports provided by the organisation in work,

including administrative service, resource support and learning support (figure 4.23).

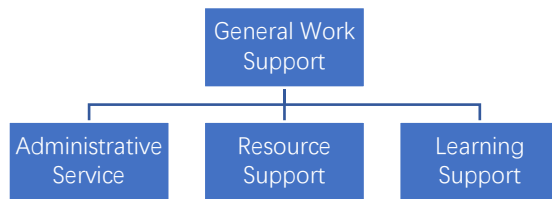


Figure 4.23: The code general work support and its main aspects

4.4.3.2.1 Administrative service

Administrative service refers to organisation's daily operational services for expatriates.

"The company helps us deal with some documents needed to go abroad."

"No need to prepare much as the company system is mature in this respect." (P2)

"I think all the troubles in daily work can be solved as our company has ready-made plans." (P5)

4.4.3.2.2 Resource support

When expatriates are facing work difficulties, it is natural for them to ask parent company for resources support. Organisation may mobilise its internal resources such as personnel and funds, and external resources such as expert resources.

"We usually involve the organisational resources in helping to solve difficult problems, like expert resources, leaders' resources... As we can't handle it only by a few dozen of us overseas." (P10)

P1 and his local branch were new to the Myanmar market. He took advantage of his parent company's network resources, and quickly adapted to the local market.

"We visit the Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy as well as some of the large Chinese companies in the same industry. Through communication with them, we know better of the local market."

One interesting point which is more commonly seen within expatriates of state-owned companies is that they ask for instructions from their leaders and thus obtain their resources. As P8 mentioned:

“You have to ask for instructions from the higher rank leaders. After all, we can’t solve all that on our own. You should make more requests.”

4.4.3.2.3 Learning support

Organisations provide formal and informal learning support to help improve expatriates’ working ability and expect better performance.

The formal learning support mainly refers to formal training organised by the organisation which includes in-company training or training organised by a third-party.

“Before the assignment, I was sent to an external training on finance and English.” (P8)

“Our training is mainly about what you have to pay attention to when you are abroad.” (P6)

Training may also take place online.

“The company arranged some online learning courses, for example, about the culture of that country, what to do to abide by local laws, and asked us to study by ourselves.” (P10)

Informal learning support is mainly about colleagues learning from each other in the organisation. This includes both the sharing and the consultation events arranged by the organisation.

“I used to work in a sales company. Most of the staff were overseas sales. The company will organise some senior and excellent sales to share some experience with us.” (P7)

“We have subsidiaries or offices in more than 30 countries. We will communicate about how to develop a new overseas market. As some offices have been rooted in the local for more than 20 years, therefore,

experience sharing is of great help to those of us who have just been sent abroad.” (P1)

4.4.3.3 In-country life support

In-country life support is provided by the organisation to enable expatriates to have a better life adjustment, which in most cases includes Chinese food, accommodation and transportation.

“No other problems, because the company will help to take care of those life problems.” (P6)

It is interesting and surprising that every organisation-backed expatriate in this study confirmed the dietary support from organisation. There is an old Chinese saying goes, “food is the first necessity of the people”. Having Chinese food overseas is an important support for expatriates. It is common for Chinese companies to provide the right food with their own canteens and chefs or Chinese food outsourcing.

“The company backup is good, such as the accommodation and canteen. You don’t have to worry about those things yourself, so you can focus and just get the job done.” (P5)

In-country life support has proved its effectiveness in helping expatriates adjust at a certain extent while it also limits expatriates’ further integration into the local environment.

P2, P8 and P9 had similar experience in this respect, working in construction industry, with large expatriation teams, independent office and living area, canteen and chef, and drivers. The relatively closed Chinese circle helps them reduce changes in life and work. Most expatriates in the site, except some senior management and translators, are more likely to have a low-level of interaction with the local, as their main task is to complete construction project. In-country life support is also a double-edged sword for other expatriates. P5, P6, P7, P10, P11 reported a problem of a narrow social circle, which was partly

due to those organised life supports.

“The local prices are very high, but there is no extra cost as the company take care of your food and accommodation...When I go back from work at night, I have to rest, so I don’t have my own social circle. In the end, I don’t have my own life.” (P10)

4.4.3.4 Organisation emotional support

Organisation emotional support refers to the support provided by organisations to meet the emotional needs of expatriates, such as welfare on family companion, organised entertainment and team building activities.

“We built basketball court and recreation room. We play basketball together. In the evening we play cards and billiards. It’s a nice way to pass the time.” (P2)

“We can go home for a month a year... then you will feel less keenly the impact of the cultural difference.” (P1)

In general, expatriates are always sent abroad without their families accompanying as few organisations will contribute money and effort to do that. All the participants in this study confirmed this point. Therefore, organisation emotional support becomes an important lubricant for expatriates’ emotional adjustment, especially in the absence of a regular family emotional support.

P6, as a manager, expressed his concern about the emotion issues of expatriates.

“For those who have been away for a long time, the organisation must consider their physical and emotional needs. The organisation should invest more resources to help expatriate families go abroad, or the divorce rate of expatriates may increase. The organisation should have corresponding measures to solve these more private problems.”

Optimizing family visits seems to be a common and reliable support.

“Our company reimburses three tickets a year for visiting relatives.

Accommodation for visiting relatives will also be arranged accordingly.”
(P11)

“We will have two months’ leave with a domestic standard pay if we stay abroad for ten months. Actually, you will find that you become more irritable after staying there in a row for that long... Now many Chinese enterprises are changing their leave policies. One model is that you can return home for one month after three months of work. In some Chinese enterprises, expatriates can return home for one month after six months of work. In the past, they basically came back only once a year. This change is more humane.” (P9)

It is obvious that most organisations need to improve their emotional support for their expatriates. P11 held that Chinese expatriates were much less supported compared with their western counterparts who were supported by a much more comprehensive expatriate package. Both the organisation and the expatriate cannot afford high family expenses overseas.

“European and American companies are more mature, and they send less expatriates with generous pay. We send large number of expatriates, because Chinese labour cost is relatively low, and our industry update very quickly, and expatriates have to do a lot of work to communicate with the headquarters.” (P11)

4.4.4 Host country support

Many factors within the host country have positive effects on expatriate adjustment. This study identifies two main factors, support from host country residents and host country attraction (figure 4.24)

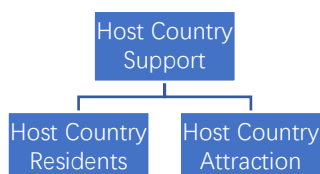


Figure 4.24: The subtheme host country support and its main aspects

4.4.4.1 Host country residents

Host country residents, including HCNs (host country nationals) and TCNs (third country nationals), are closely related to expatriate adjustment. The friendliness and effectiveness of host country residents' communication with expatriates helps expatriates relax and integrate into the local environment. Support from the local people will facilitate life adjustment and help build an overall assessment of the place.

“The local people sometimes put themselves in our shoes and are helpful. For example, when we are purchasing some supplies, they will give priority to us and provide us with a convenient access.” (P2)

“Before you go out, you might think that Muslims maybe radical, but they are not. The local people are nice, and we respect each other.” (P10)

Support from work partners and clients helps work adjustment.

“I have known the agents in the region for years, as well as the local employees. Since we understand each other, our work is smooth.” (P5)

Support from the TCNs also helps expatriates to adjust. Generally, there are considerable amount of TCNs seeking their opportunities in some open and developed regions, like Dubai. P3 thought Dubai as an open melting pot that “people from different countries can easily become friends.”

In general, SIEs rely more on the host country residents compared with AEs due to a lack of organisation support and expatriation colleague support. Like P4, a SIE, mentioned that interesting international colleagues was one reason she stayed at the company. However, one situation is that host country residents is not among the support resources for some AEs because the strong organisation support and effective Chinese circle enable them to reach out to the local residents in a minimum extent.

4.4.4.2 Host country attraction

When expatriates regard the differences in the new environment as negative,

differences may become barriers for adjustment. In contrast, differences may become attractions and play a role as a supporting resource when differences are viewed and evaluated positively.

The novelty of the host country's culture is a common attraction. For example, western culture has a strong attraction worldwide. P4 sent herself to London against all difficulties and challenges and considered her expatriation as an experiencing and learning journey.

Different food culture is easily noticed.

"The food here is safe and healthy, with original flavor." (P6)

"The local ice cream and the Oreo cones are really good. I don't know why we don't have it in China." (P7)

It has to be noted that expatriates' sense of culture novelty is dynamic and often reduces over time.

"At the beginning, we often went out to supermarkets and shopping malls, which then was quite new and interesting to us. Later, I find that it is not interesting anymore." (P8)

Geographical and climatic conditions in host countries are also common supporting factors. P2 mentioned that:

"we used to think of African countries as being very hot, but we actually enjoy very pleasant weather there."

P7 spoke highly of the local environment.

"Morocco is close to the sea, and we live in a room with a perfect sea view. It's not hot in summer and not cold in winter. There are blue sky and white clouds most of the year."

However, it may sometimes be a barrier.

"Qatar is hot with a desert climate. Most of us Chinese will have throat and nose problems, and that situation repeats." (P10)

Other social factors of the country, such as government management ability, social security, also attract expatriates to stay.

“This city is energetic, with good social organisation and government operation, and great international influence. I have been to many countries. I think Dubai’s government management ability is in the first rank.” (P3)

“What I like very much is that the public security there is very good. I don’t know whether it’s because of religion. For example, your bag left on a bench in the mall will always be safe. No one will move or take it.” (P10)

Better protection of employees’ rights and interests could also be a supportive factor.

“I think I can get my due reward for all my efforts... You often have to work overtime in China, right? There are not many holidays all year round. After I came out, I learned that not only Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, but also many countries in the world have such a policy that employees will have one month’s paid leave when they have worked for one year.” (P3)

Each country has its own national condition that may mean differently to different individuals. Therefore, there must be some other attracting aspects but not discussed here. These attractions help expatriates adjust to the new environment by providing positive work and life experience and thus improving their level of satisfaction.

4.4.5 Family support

Family support plays an important role throughout the expatriation period. In this study, family support before expatriation was classified into the theme expatriation reasons while that after departure went to the theme expatriation supporting resources. It has two main aspects for expatriates. The first is emotional support and the second is family role support (figure 4.25).

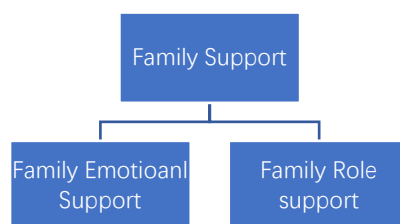


Figure 4.25: The subtheme family support and its main aspects

4.4.5.1 Family emotional support

Though being separated and far apart, family remains an important source of emotional support for expatriates, especially for married expatriates.

P6 held that it is not humane for expatriates sent without families and relevant family subsidies.

“In my spare time, I make a lot of voice and video calls with my family.”

Family emotional support reduces the anxiety and pressure of the expatriate when they are facing the changes in the new environment.

“When you start business in a strange country, you will inevitably encounter difficulties, setbacks and even slow progress. At this time, you will feel relieved by chatting with your family members and gaining their encouragement and understanding.” (P1)

4.4.5.2 Family role support

When the expatriate is sent for the international assignment, the families or the spouse of the expatriate will help to fill a role vacuum left by the expatriate in the family. A strong support in this respect means the expatriate will not suffer from both work pressure and severe family imbalance.

“With family support, you won’t be too distracted when working outside.”
(P8)

“If the families back at home, like children and the elderly, can be taken good care of, we will feel less worried when we are abroad.” (P1)

Family role support in turn enhances expatriates’ responsibility to the family. Expatriates tend to carry on through the hardships thus to repay the family.

“Focus on the job and get the job done. Then we can go home earlier.”
(P6)

For those unmarried expatriates, their perceived level of family support seems to be much lower. One reason is that:

“if their children are working far away from the hometown, then there are

not too many differences for some parents whether they are working in China or abroad.” (P11)

4.4.6 Home country support

The motherland is always a powerful backing for expatriates. A rapidly developing China with growing power has practical meanings for expatriates abroad. This study divides home country support into direct support and indirect support (figure 4.26).

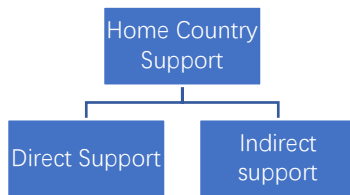


Figure 4.26: The subtheme home country support and its main aspects

4.4.6.1 Direct support

It refers to the support that expatriates receive or feel from their home country. The Chinese embassy actively provides consular protection and assistance to Chinese and Chinese companies overseas. It plays an important role when they are facing some major emergencies, such as the war and the pandemic.

“During the pandemic, it is difficult for us to vaccinate in the local. Our government is helping us deal with these things. If the country does not have the economic capacity and willingness to support, that will not happen.” (P5)

The Chinese Embassy helps companies to better operate and develop in the host country. P1 actively visited the Economic and Commercial Department of the Embassy to seek information support when developing the Myanmar market. The Embassy will also organise some activities in the local, which promotes exchanges between Chinese enterprises and expatriates and helps them better adjust to the local environment.

The embassy also plays a role in mediating corporate disputes.

“If the local government plays as a rogue and does not pay, it is difficult for

enterprises to solve the problem. You then have no choice but to turn to Chinese Embassy to try your luck. Therefore, a strong home country and a good relationship between the two countries will mean something.” (P6)

4.4.6.2 Indirect support

The country provides some indirect support for expatriates in improving their self-confidence and business environment.

“As China becomes more and more powerful, people will think a little better of you as an individual Chinese. At least they don’t look down on you that easily.” (P3)

P3 shared his experience from being sensitive to self-confident. It is quite common for the Chinese people bearing in mind more than one hundred years of humiliation China has gone through in the recent history. As the country becomes stronger and its image improves worldwide, their self-confidence has been improving. The data also implies that expatriates’ pride for the country rises and the ties between the expatriates and the country strengthens.

As China is committed to building good relations between nations and establishing an image of responsible major country, expatriates is enjoying an improving work and live environment in most of the host countries.

“The friendly relationship between the two countries is certainly conducive to the development of our company here. Well, there may be beneficial policies, and it is more likely for us to get more projects here.” (P8)

“In general, Cuba has better relations with Spain, Russia and China, and accordingly, business will be done more smoothly. If it’s Italian, German, or some other countries, things will be a little different.” (P6)

4.5 Adjustment strategies

This study identifies four major strategies adopted by the expatriates: respect and harmony, work orientation, safe space, and long-term orientation. Figure

4.27 shows the overview of the theme. The four subthemes and their ten main aspects will be discussed in turn below.

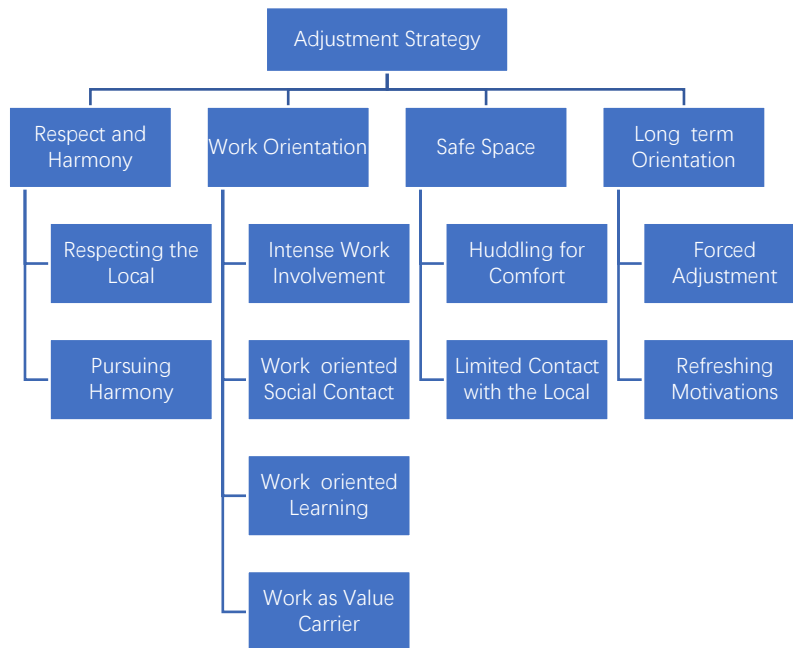


Figure 4.27: The theme adjustment strategy and its main aspects

Table 4.13 shows the formation process of the theme adjustment strategy, or how the theme was developed from the codes.

Table 4.13: Illustration of the development of the theme adjustment strategy

Examples of quotes	Open code examples	Adjusted / Developed codes	Sub-themes	Theme
"You should respect the local people, and the local culture, especially when dealing with the local employees and commercial agents."	Respecting the local	Respecting the local	Respect and harmony	Adjustment strategies
"The company attaches great importance to the complaints from the local employees and hold meetings to discuss it. Generally, the company will satisfy them as much as possible when keeping the bottom line."	Conflict avoidance	Pursuing harmony	Respect and harmony	Adjustment strategies
"We work from Monday to Friday, and the work is tiring. Then due to the time difference, we have meetings with our base. Generally speaking, the only real rest is on Saturday."	Long working time	Intense work involvement	Work orientation	Adjustment strategies
"I don't socialise with people who have nothing to do with my work."	Work-oriented	Work-oriented social	Work orientation	Adjustment strategies

	social contact	contact		
“You don’t know your job well at the beginning. You just follow and learn.”	learning	Work-oriented learning	Work orientation	Adjustment strategies
“We want to present an image of being professional and adding value to the local community. As a Chinese, I also hope to give them a good impression of Chinese people.”	Creating value	Work as value carrier	Work orientation	Adjustment strategies
“There are more common topics in the same culture, and you’ll find communication easier.”	Huddling for comfort	Huddling for comfort	Safe space	Adjustment strategies
“We hang out or travel with the local friends who we think are reliable. We have known them for long and have contacts both in work and life. So basically, there will be no security problems.”	Limited contact with the local	Limited contact with the local	Safe space	Adjustment strategies
“To endure loneliness. It is a must.”	Restraining desires	Forced adjustment	Long-term orientation	Adjustment strategies
“From a long perspective, the experience here will help my resume looks better. I just feel a little unhappy here, but on a more rational level, I learn something here.”	self-persuasion	Refreshing motivations	Long-term orientation	Adjustment strategies

4.5.1 Respect and harmony

Field data identifies two intertwined strategies adopted by the expatriates — respecting the local and pursuing harmony. Respect is the premise of harmony while harmony is the ideal result of respect. Therefore, the two codes are integrated and upgraded to the theme respect and harmony. The theme is consistent with traditional Confucian thoughts which advocates mutual respect, help and be kind to each other. Figure 4.28 shows this subtheme and its main aspects.

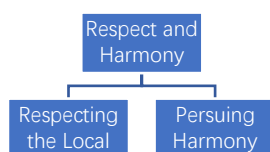


Figure 4.28: The subtheme respect and harmony and its main aspects

4.5.1.1 Respecting the local

As an in-vivo code, respecting the local considers expatriates' respect for the local people and their culture.

"You should respect the local people, and the local culture, especially when dealing with the local employees and commercial agents." (P5)

"We arrange a prayer room for Muslim employees. We respect their religion and won't disturb them when they pray. And prayer hours are counted as working hours." (P8)

Respecting the local means building emotional connections with the local on a truly equal basis. As mentioned by P6: "equality and affinity, that's real respect." P2 confirmed that connection: "we invite local officials and local people to celebrate major festivals."

It means a consistent respect.

"No matter your country is strong or not, you should treat foreigners the same. If you are strong, you should not bully others, right? You have to be consistent with people." (P5)

It means empathy and modesty. The Chinese enter into local market with a low profile and more respect. That means thinking more from a local perspective. P6 thought "the westerners seem to be more proud and above other people, and that will not bring anyone close." P1 believed that listening to the voice of a weaker power is a form of respect. "Listen to the locals is of great importance." It should be noted that "respect" is not merely a requirement of Confusion moral but a practical strategy to some extent.

"The most important thing is to be empathically aware of their likes and needs, especially if we are sales...Always be customer-centred and never touch other people's minefields or sensitive spots." (P6)

"Many large enterprises have a tendency that they must take the lead at everything. Actually, that will not work out." (P1)

4.5.1.2 Pursuing harmony

Expatriates pursue harmony in their interactions with the locals. Pursuing harmony, first as an open code and then an upgraded one, includes four main aspects — presenting a friendly image, conflict avoidance, pursuing mutual benefits, and compromised acceptance (figure 4.29).

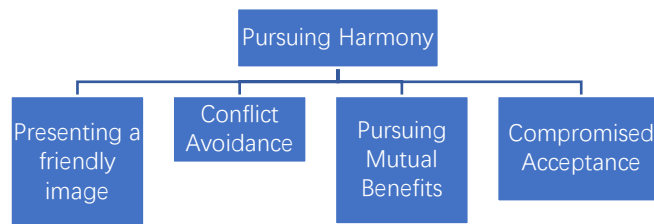


Figure 4.29: The code pursuing harmony and its main aspects

4.5.1.2.1 Presenting a friendly image

“We want to present a friendly image of Chinese people, which is also related to the company’s strategy.” (P8)

There may be some overlap between the code presenting a friendly image and the code respecting the local. The latter is more focused on how to deal with the cultural differences and the premise of all cross-cultural communication, whereas the previous one reflects the pursuit of harmony based on that respect.

Confucianism advocates mutual respect, mutual assistance, friendliness and kindness between people. Both Chinese subsidiaries and their expatriates uphold a principal of presenting friendliness. Chinese enterprises, especially state-owned enterprises, are naturally concerned about China’s image abroad as they think they directly represent the image of the country. Presenting a friendly image to the local and caring for foreign employees, is conducive to establishing a good national and corporate image and improving loyalty and work performance. As individuals from Chinese culture and implementers of the organizations’ friendly policies, those highly educated expatriates naturally present a friendly image.

“We are always working to present a friendly image and do business with the local on an equal basis. I think all Chinese companies uphold that in mind.” (P9)

Besides showing enough goodwill and respect in the interaction with the local, it also includes realizing the organisation’s social responsibility to the local, such as donating money and material and supporting the local government, institutions and individuals.

“We donate money and materials to the local government, and we present blessings and gifts during the Muslim holidays.” (P8)

“There is a local association for the disabled people. Every year we donate.” (P9)

It is interesting that the word “we” was often used by participants in their expressions about presenting a friendly image, showing a similar and consistent strategy of both organisations and expatriates.

4.5.1.2.2 Conflict avoidance

Expatriates have a strong tendency to avoid conflicts or keep it to a small scale when interacting with the local. Conflict avoidance can be seen as an extension of the strategy of presenting a friendly image. In addition to practical interests, maintaining a friendly national image is an important starting point for Chinese organizations and expatriates to deal with disputes and contradictions. To some extent, harmoniously solving problems is the DNA of expatriates’ decision-making.

“The company attaches great importance to the complaints from the local employees and hold meetings to discuss it. Generally, the company will satisfy them as much as possible when keeping the bottom line.” (P2)

The problems or contradictions will be solved quickly and effectively based on the premise of respecting the local.

“After receiving the complaint, we immediately convened a meeting to

discuss that problem and define a solution and timeline. The client will be happy again, right? And nothing bad happens.” (P5)

P3 also shared a case of commercial dispute he handled. In a tripartite business dispute, P3’s company gave priority to presenting the country’s good image, and they pursued a minimal conflict with the local partners through sacrificing part of its own rights and interests.

“After all, as a state-owned enterprise, we have to solve this problem first...we paid our customer first and then claimed compensation from the plant. Very troublesome. As a state-owned enterprise, it is impossible for us to delay solving the problem or cheat others.” (P3)

Conflict avoidance has a close connection with respecting the local. Genuine respect for the local can be seen as a basis for avoiding local conflict. If expatriates think more from the local point of view, there will be less conflict and work will be smoother.

“You have to put yourself in their shoes. To worry what they are worrying about and think what they are thinking about. Naturally there will be no conflicts and the business flies. Such a simple thing...Offending others will cause an immediate result than pleasing them...never touch other people’s minefields or sensitive spots.” (P6)

4.5.1.2.3 Pursuing mutual benefits

Expatriates have a strong desire to pursue mutual benefits, that is, to bring value and benefits to the local while achieving their own goals.

“It is understandable and beyond reproach that we make some money from this project. But we are not purely profit oriented. We are always trying to develop a friend image and bring value to the local.” (P9)

Pursuing mutual benefits contribute to help both sides forming and share a common value thus to effectively overcome the obstacles brought by cultural differences. In other words, enterprises and expatriates try to face and offset

the uncertainty brought by differences with a certainty.

“You must put yourself in the local’s shoes when you come to the local market. You must make your clients feel that you are of one mind.” (P6)

“Try your best to achieve the balance between two sides.” (P11)

Pursuing mutual benefit should not be a slogan but tangible benefits for the local, or the work result will suffer.

“I think we must think more about what the locals really need. The term “win-win” is simple, but we may understand that differently from the locals. For example, we think our “two preferential” project plan is so preferential, but it turns out that the locals don’t take it.” (P1)

In a globalised environment, countries are increasingly interdependent and interconnected, and mutual benefit strategy is the passport to bridging differences. There have not been any reports of actual conflicts resulting from differences. Just as P1 mentioned:

“Any societies you go into, the locals need you to create value. You should know what that value is, and you create that value through your hard work by taking good use of the enterprise’s platform.”

4.5.1.2.4 Compromised acceptance

In practices, expatriates may respect cultural differences while not agreeing on that sometimes. The code contains two parts, one is an acceptance tendency for the local culture which is based on respect, and the other is the compromised part as it is impossible for them to fully accept the cultural differences.

“We respect other people’s beliefs. You may not pray like them, but you must respect them.” (P8)

P6 respected the local, but he did not like the local culture much. He believed that the local hedonism causes the mismatched work pace and resulted in his work stress. As a highly educated person, he was well aware of the cultural

differences, however, he still took it as a “mistake”.

“Unlike the Chinese, when they do something wrong, they don’t know it. They don’t admit it. They don’t correct it. They just follow their own temperament.” (P6)

Compromised acceptance means a practical way of respecting cultural differences and help avoid possible conflicts.

“Most of the locals have little education and earn little. But they don’t care much about the work as long as they can get by. We try to find proper ways to motivate them.” (P7)

4.5.2 Work orientation

“First of all, you have to do your job well. If you are a salesman, be a good salesman. If you are an editor, then be a good editor.” (P3)

Expatriates see work as the core of the expatriation period. Work orientation, first as an open code, was upgraded to be a subtheme, including intense work involvement, work-oriented social contact, work-oriented learning, and work as value carrier (figure 4.30).

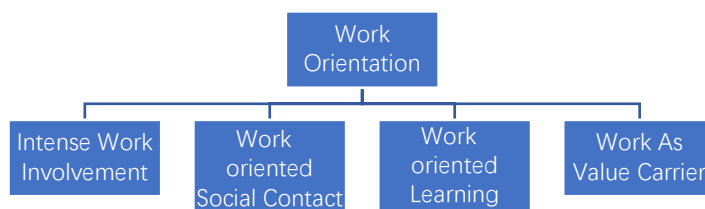


Figure 4.30: The subtheme work orientation and its main aspects

4.5.2.1 Intense work involvement

“Our activities are around our work.” (P6)

Expatriates put much more time and energy into their work than in their life and emotional aspects.

“We work from Monday to Friday, and the work is tiring. Then due to the time difference, we have meetings with our base. Generally speaking, the

only real rest is on Saturday.” (P5)

Intense work involvement means work is the priority, which causes imbalance between expatriates’ work and life. P10 complained that she did not have her own life because of the high work requirement and long work hours. P7 and P9 also mentioned that:

“If I have work to do, I will deal with it even after worktime. For me, it is OK as long as work doesn’t completely occupy my life.” (P7)

“There is almost no separation between work and life. Our work is life, and our life is work. We often go to office when we have nothing to do, and there is not such a clear boundary.” (P9)

4.5.2.2 Work-oriented social contact

Expatriates carry out relevant social activities in the host country around their work. In other words, expatriates interact with the locals basically for the work needs.

For example, P6 made it direct and clear, “I don’t socialise with people who have nothing to do with my work”. Many participants in this study support this point. Such as P9, “generally, we eat with the locals only when we talk about business.”

It is reasonable for expatriates to carry out work-oriented social activities. P11 said there was little interaction with the locals as “we don’t go out to experience exotic life but to fulfill the company’s assignment”.

P1, P5 and P7 directly supported that. Like P7 mentioned:

“most of my interactions with the Moroccans are about work”.

The development stage of the company may have an effect. Like P8 said:

“our company is not currently doing well in internationalization. There are not many interactions between Chinese and foreign employees, and if have some, they are only limited to work.”

4.5.2.3 Work-oriented learning

Expatriates carry out learning activities according to the expatriation work need. Work-oriented learning mainly includes two aspects — professional knowledge learning and foreign language learning.

Professional knowledge learning

Professional knowledge learning is the key as work is considered as the core of the expatriation period. Expatriates improve their work capacity so as to better achieve the organisation and their own goals through professional knowledge learning.

Interestingly, both organisations and expatriates pay little attention to professional learning during the before-expatriation period, and only P1 and P5 mentioned they had done some preparations related to the job itself. Part of the reason maybe that those expatriates selected are basically with high work proficiency.

During the in-country expatriation period, expatriates experienced the difference in a new environment and the changes in their work roles, work-oriented learning became clearer and stronger. For example, P3, emphasised a learning mindset in the interview.

“When I first came, I had nothing. What I can do is to learn from other people.”

He believed that he became more professional through constant learning and reflection, overcame his psychological sensitivity and the state of being unconfident, and gain a foothold in the local. P7 expressed exactly the same view:

“you don’t know your job well at the beginning. You just follow and learn.”

Language learning

Language learning takes place both in before-expatriation period and in-country period.

“Before departure, I prepared for my language ability, mainly about English and the local language, Spanish. I bought some learning tapes and practiced.” (P11)

The main purpose of language learning is to serve the work. “After graduating from university, I worked in China and did not use English for several years. You definitely need to learn it, otherwise you may not know the working condition abroad.” (P5)

Though most expatriates have a certain level of foreign language ability, they still struggle to face the language barriers. Though with good language ability, expatriates make further language study according to the work needs.

“You have to prepare for those professional words and expressions relevant to your product. For example, we sell cars. Then I must know those words of auto parts.” (P6)

P1 speaks Japanese and English. He was “not too worried about the language problem” and he also took Burmese language courses at Yangon University of Foreign Studies in his spare time.

P9 “often practices French with local colleagues or talk actively with the local people in work situations”, as she knew her language ability was inadequate, and it took her about four months to “communicate efficiently with the locals.”

4.5.2.4 Work as value carrier

Expatriates take work as the carrier of values, which includes value to expatriates, their organisations, their families, the mother country, and the local. Therefore, expatriates take the work as the core to realise expatriation value.

“The most important thing is that we complete those projects with quality and speed and build a good image of Chinese speed and thus makes our customer rely on us.” (P8)

Expatriates believe that they help build a good image of the country and the organisation by doing the job efficiently and cost-effectively. That’s why P2 has

taken a punctual delivery of the project extremely seriously.

Some expatriates may attach great importance to professional practice and bringing new value to the local, and it is not only a matter of themselves but a good national profile.

“We want to present an image of being professional and adding value to the local community. As a Chinese, I also hope to give them a good impression of Chinese people.” (P1)

“Sometimes you don’t only represent yourself. You are on behalf of your company or even your country in front of our customers. You must be more professional in everything you do.” (P10)

Expatriates must create value for their organisations. P6 used an old saying to illustrate the point.

“Take his money, share his worry. The organisation invests large amount of money and provides you with good salary. You must create more value for the organisation.”

As for expatriates, work means personal career development and higher income, which are the main expatriation reasons and important supporting resources.

“As long as individuals can get more projects, the company’s incentives will be in place.” (P1)

P1 was satisfied with what his international assignment has given to him. P4 believed that the work makes her stronger as “when you work with people from different cultures, you are expanding your character.”

4.5.3 Safe space

The theme safe space means a social space built by expatriates in order to maintain their psychological security and comfort. Safety considerations are constant for expatriates. During before-expatriation period, safety issue is one of the main contents of organisational training. During in-country period,

expatriates build a safe space through huddling for comfort and limited contact to the local (figure 4.31).

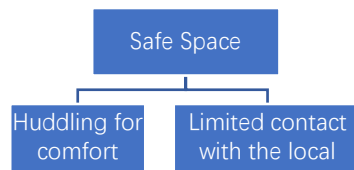


Figure 4.31: The subtheme safe space and its main aspects

4.5.3.1 Huddling for comfort

In order to build a safe space in the host country, expatriates huddle for comfort. They tend to associate mainly with Chinese while group expatriation (chapter 4.2.5.2) and Chinese circle (chapter 4.4.2) have provided proper conditions.

During in-country period, especially in the early part, expatriates face great difficulties and challenges as they have to adapt to the new environment in every aspect, like psychology, physiology, language, and work. Huddling allows expatriates work and live in a familiar way with people from the same tribal group without extra difficulty and burden in communication.

“After all, we have different cultures. Chinese circle is easier for us and that helps keep us from possible troubles.” (P2)

Proficiency in the same language is an important reason to huddling. The social attribute of language helps expatriates find comfort in communicating in their own language. An interesting finding is expatriates have the same tendency to huddle whether they are good at local language or not. P3 and P4, who were good at English, had the same tendency as the other expatriates to associate with people from the same ethnic group.

“There are more common topics in the same culture, and you’ll find communication easier.” (P4)

“I hang out much less with foreigners. It’s not that there isn’t an opportunity. It’s that I prefer to hang out with the Chinese.” (P3)

Expatriates obtain support and a sense of security from members of the Chinese circle and assure their identity. Therefore, the circle is consolidated through huddling and in turn reinforces the huddling strategy.

“I go mountain climbing with my colleagues. We don’t go where there are too many people. There are just us in the wild.” (P5)

“As long as there is one bellwether in the expatriate group, adapting to the new environment will be much easier.” (P6)

4.5.3.2 Limited contact with the local

Expatriates do not interact with or only have very limited interaction with the local community outside their work needs, and do not pursue integration into the local society.

Expatriates tend to be more cautious when dealing with the locals due to safety considerations, work orientation strategy, cultural differences, time and energy. Therefore, they huddle for comfort and have limited contact with the local. P6 suggested that expatriates should not “go out to entertaining places and meet people outside of your work, or you could be in trouble.” He was very cautious in networking. “I don’t make new connections haphazardly.”

Expatriates tend to associate more with those locals they have known for a longer time and regarded as reliable.

“We hang out or travel with the local friends who we think are reliable. We have known them for long and have contacts both in work and life. So basically, there will be no security problems.” (P9)

The Chinese circle and the arranged in-country life support have provided conditions for limited contact with the local. As P7 mentioned:

“first of all, you couldn’t possibly live with a local, could you? You must be living with Chinese or by yourself.”

She also held that “it is not only by contacting more local people that we can understand the local.”

The study finds that expatriates' post and the industry they work in have an impact on the frequency and depth of interaction between expatriates and local people. The more the need of exposure to the host culture, the more contact with the local. Like large number of expatriates working in construction industry, they may have independent working and living area, Chinese canteen and chef, and even drivers. In general, expatriates have a lower level of willingness and opportunity to interact with the local.

On the contrary, senior managers generally are in greater need of interacting with the local than ordinary expatriates. For example, P1, as a pioneer of new overseas branch, actively experienced the local politics, economy and culture so as to better conduct business in the local.

In addition, SIEs are more locally engaged due to their lack of organisation support and a higher level of exposing in the local culture. For example, P3 believed that expatriates should take the initiative to build social networks and combine it with information acquisition and career development.

“Get out of your comfort zone, and make more contact with people, whether they are Chinese or foreigners.” However, he still “prefer to hang out with the Chinese.” (P3)

4.5.4 Long-term orientation

In order to achieve long-term goals, expatriates expressed high tolerance for current difficulties and hardships, and faced the issue with constant actions. The theme includes two aspects — forced adjustment and refreshing motivations (figure 4.32).

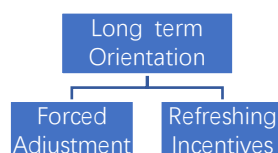


Figure 4.32: The subtheme long-term orientation and its main aspects

4.5.4.1 Forced adjustment

“Even if you are very uncomfortable, you must tell yourself to adjust and get over it.” (P2)

In the face of expatriation difficulties, expatriates tend to restrain their desires and enduring those hardships (figure 4.33). As the code suggests, expatriates nearly force themselves to adapt to tough circumstances. The strategy is closely related to the personality traits, perseverance (chapter 4.4.1.1.2), which is not only originated from group culture but also constantly confirmed and consolidated in the practice of forced adjustment.

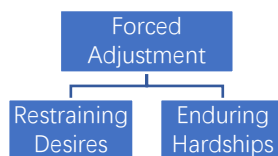


Figure 4.33: The code forced adjustment and its main aspects

4.5.4.1.1 Restraining desires

“We always hold the belief of getting rich through hard work... We are relatively rational and self-controlled.” (P6)

Chinese people have a belief in hard work and tend to delay instant gratification to satisfy a longer term one. Under work-centred and collectivism culture, individuals pay more attention to work and personal development and pay less attention to their emotional needs. Therefore, controlling one’s own desires becomes natural. For example, P6 believed that “to endure loneliness. It is a must”. P8 regarded the long-term expatriation as “anti-human” as it was indeed “a process of loneliness” and “without seeing families for a very long period”. However, he has been restraining his own physical and mental needs and on his assignment for six years.

4.5.4.1.2 Enduring hardships

“Now that I have come to this place, I can’t shrink back because of those

difficulties.” (P9)

In most cases, expatriates are sent to countries and regions with relatively poor economic and living conditions. To endure can be considered as a strategy without much choice as they are trapped by the limited resources and the specific development stage.

“There are few supplies... You definitely want to live a domestic way of life, but you know it’s unrealistic there.” (P9)

“There are things make you uncomfortable, and that’s the way it is in the local area. You can’t change it, and you have to adapt to it.” (P7)

High level of endurance is considered as an important condition to a successful international assignment. Just like P2 mentioned:

“I think in terms of time, you are successful when you have completed the whole assignment period. You don’t want to be a deserter.”

4.5.4.2 Refreshing motivations

Expatriates tend to refresh their motivations thus to provide themselves with internal motivations when facing expatriation difficulties and challenges.

“It definitely takes time to learn something in an international assignment. If you want to come back early, say just three or five months after you arrived there, just because you feel you don’t fit in, then this experience is just a waste of time.” (P10)

P10 believed that she must learn more once she went out. Though she faced great work pressure and suffered from loneliness in the host country, she insisted for a long time before applying for returning home.

“The experience and skills I gained abroad in the past two years is more than I could in ten years working at home.” (P10)

P4 was quite stressful and unhappy about her work and life abroad, however, she had not made up her mind to leave because her inner drive kept giving her strength to overcome the difficulties.

“From a long perspective, the experience here will help my resume looks better. I just feel a little unhappy here, but on a more rational level, I learn something here.” (P4)

Obviously, the stronger and more specific the motivation, the more it will help with expatriates' adjustment. When facing difficulties, especially those really tough moments, expatriates refresh their original motivations and promote their internal power to fight and overcome the difficulties. P1's goal was to “get more projects” as that means more rewards from the company. P8, looking for a further promotion and staying overseas for several years, applied for returning due to family reasons and career bottlenecks. However, when being asked “would you put aside your family issues and stay for longer time if there is enough room for a further promotion”, he responded in the affirmative.

4.6 Summary

This chapter develops and discusses four main themes through the application of grounded theory strategy. It also presents the process how they are developed from those related subthemes and codes which are supported by abundant examples. The next chapter will further discuss and interpret the research findings, and then develop a research-based framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4, the important and relevant emergent themes have been discussed, which helps lay a solid foundation for the framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. This chapter will discuss the findings in chapter 4 in a way that answers the research questions thus to meet the research aims and objectives mentioned in chapter 1. This chapter first presents the framework arising from the findings, followed by an explanation of the influencing factors on Chinese expatriates' adjustment along with an in-depth discussion and interpretation of the main subthemes through comparing them with existing studies. Then it explains the expatriation process of Chinese expatriates identified in this study. Next, the characteristic of the new framework is discussed by comparing the new framework with some classical adjustment frameworks and theories from a theoretical level. All those discussions and comparisons serve not only as a response to research questions but also provide justification for the emerging theory so that they are regarded as significant contributions to new knowledge and are of practical value to stakeholders in the research context. It also needs to be noted that this process of interpretation and explanation is accompanied by literature reviewing process which has been blended into the whole research work (Charmaz, 2014).

5.2 The framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates

5.2.1 The development of the grounded theory model

The themes emerging from the research as described in the previous chapter can be considered as a prototype framework. Specifically, this study has identified four major themes, expatriation reasons (chapter 4.2), expatriation difficulties (chapter 4.3), expatriation supporting resources (chapter 4.4) and adjustment strategies (chapter 4.5), and their subthemes in chapter 4. These

themes describe the factors influencing the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates from different perspectives (chapter 5.2.2) and constitutes their adjustment process (chapter 5.2.3). Figure 5.1 shows the process framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates and the relationship between the themes.

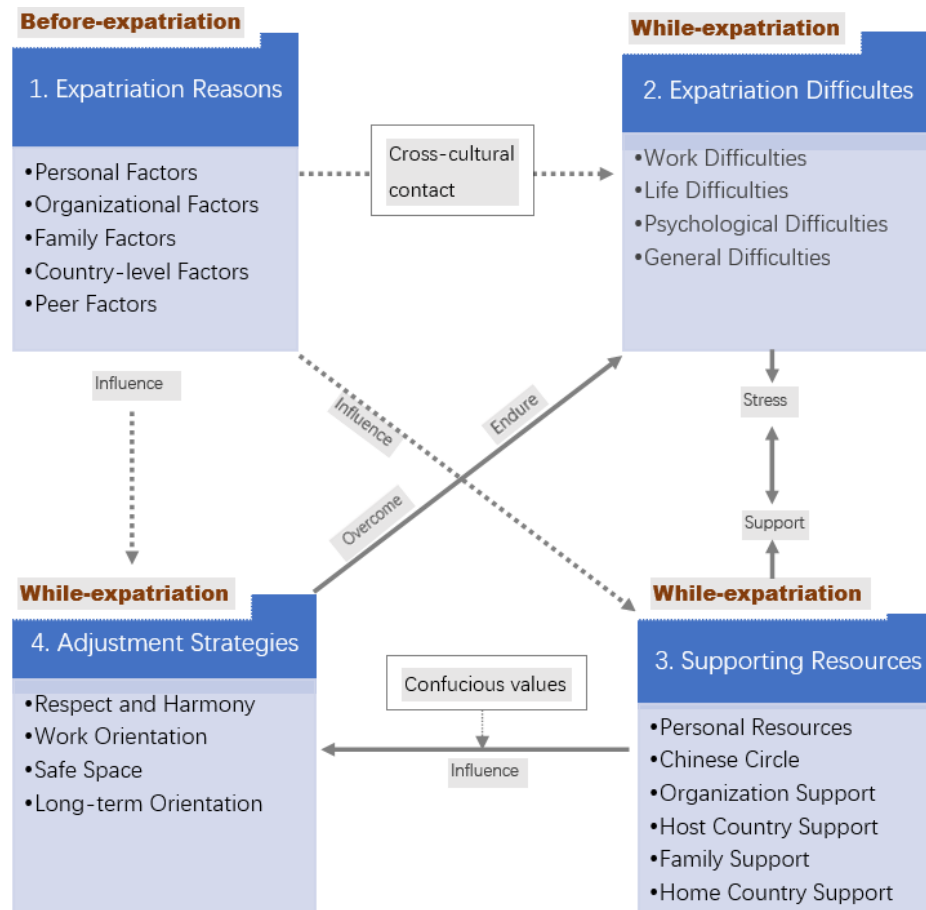


Figure 5.1: The process framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates

5.2.2 An explanation of the research-based framework

This study proposes a process framework (figure 5.1) to understand the process and factors influencing the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. It identifies four major factors (expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, supporting resources, and adjustment strategies) influencing their adjustment and reveals an “expatriation reason - expatriation difficulties - supporting resources - adjustment strategies” process of the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates.

This section will explain the above mentioned four main themes in turn, along with an in-depth discussion and interpretation of the main subthemes by comparing and contrasting them with those of existing studies. It is not only a response to research question 1 (What are the factors that influence the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates?), but also provides justification and support for the development of the research-based new model as well as identifies the strengths and value of the new model constructed based on the Chinese-specific context compared to existing studies.

5.2.2.1 Explanation and comparison of *expatriation reasons*

The theme expatriation reasons (chapter 4.2) refers to the reasons why Chinese expatriates choose to work abroad. It includes five aspects: personal factors (chapter 4.2.1), organisational factors (chapter 4.2.2), family factors (chapter 4.2.3), country level factors (chapter 4.2.4), peer factors (chapter 4.2.5) and internet factors (chapter 4.2.6). It comprehensively points out the stakeholders and motivations of expatriation and describes and summarises effectively and comprehensively the unique experiences and choices of Chinese expatriates in their special cultural and business environment.

It is clear that multiple stakeholders, including the expatriate, organisation, families, countries, friends, have an impact on expatriation reasons. This leads to some active choices for expatriates, or their motivation, such as the expatriate's pursuit of higher income and desire for better career development. Meanwhile, pressure from the multiple stakeholders (such as company arrangement and family financial pressure) can impact upon Chinese expatriates when they are making the expatriation decision.

From the perspective of time scale, this theme is dominant in the pre-departure stage of the expatriation period and has a lasting impact on the other three aspects: expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and adjustment strategies. It contributes to the decision-making of potential

expatriates to work abroad, which directly lead to the follow-up cross-cultural contact and the resulting expatriation difficulties during the in-country stage. The influence of multiple stakeholders also means that expatriates may get varying support from such stakeholders. Therefore, expatriation reasons in the before-expatriation phase could affect the supporting resources that expatriates can get in the while-expatriation phase. In addition, it continues to play a role as a motivation factor throughout the whole assignment stage. Multi-stakeholder-influenced expatriation reasons also means that expatriates have to take on more expectations and responsibilities, which may encourage expatriates to manage to adapt and work harder to complete their assignments, thus affecting expatriates' adjustment strategies during their assignments.

5.2.2.1.1 Personal factors

As identified and presented in chapter 4, personal factors as reasons for expatriation include six aspects, including career development (chapter 4.2.1.1), higher income (chapter 4.2.1.2), horizon expansion (chapter 4.2.1.3), personality traits (chapter 4.2.1.4), education background (chapter 4.2.1.5) and life phases (chapter 4.2.1.6). Most of these findings are consistent with the existing expatriate literature and reflect the common practice of expatriation. Reasons such as career development (Crowley-Henry and Collins, 2017; Brewster et al., 2014; Daily et al., 2000), higher income (Rui et al., 2017; Armstrong, 2014; Tung, 1998), horizon expansion (Selmer and Luring, 2012; Richardson and McKenna, 2002). However, the rest of the personal factors, namely personality traits, education background and life phases, are rarely mentioned as a reason for expatriation.

As for personality traits, the existing literature focus more on the relationship between personality and expatriate adjustment or expatriate performance. Many personality dimensions and psychosocial skills are related to international success (e.g., Richardson et al, 2018; Bhatti et al., 2014). This

study finds that personality traits also have an impact on expatriates' decision to relocate. High extroversion and expatriates' optimism about the future work before departure positively related to their expatriation decision.

Similarly, education background as a reason for expatriation has not been extensively explored in the existing literature. This is also related to China's specific conditions. There are a large number of graduates in China every year, for example, in 2020 the number of graduates in regular higher education institution is 7971991 (MOE, 2021). For one reason, some graduates have practical considerations of going out when the domestic job market cannot provide enough competitive jobs. A more important reason is the increasing need of Chinese companies going out for opportunities. By the end of 2020, 28 thousand Chinese domestic investors had established 45 thousand FDI enterprises overseas in 189 countries (regions) around the world (MOFCOM, 2021). In practice, employees with relevant education backgrounds are given priority to be sent overseas for international assignments. As a matter of fact, specialised majors for oversea jobs are offered in some colleges, with one of the main objectives to train qualified graduates as potential expatriates. Universities also help build the platform for overseas employment for college students, encourage them to work overseas, and add new channels for college students' employment (MOE, 2013). In addition, the education background plays a role with the early career planning of individuals. Some college graduates who are about to enter the job market are already psychologically ready for international assignment, which is confirmed in the interviews.

The field data also shows that life phase is one of the factors that influence the expatriation decision. However, this point has been largely ignored by the existing research literature. The Chinese expatriate group is relatively young. Based on the limited sample in this study, the expatriates were all under 30, unmarried, at their first international assignment (some of the participants have more than one expatriation experience). Some were sent abroad fresh out of

university. On the one hand, young people have to face the pressure of the domestic job market and turn to foreign countries to look for opportunities. On the other hand, young people have less obstacles to go for an expatriation task because they are young and unmarried, with a stronger desire to explore and a common feeling of going out. Therefore, it is easier for them to form an assignment decision. This finding is consistent with Crowley-Henry and Collins (2017) who suggest in their study on millennial expatriates that expatriation of millennial expatriates travelling in an unconventional state without spouses and/or children is less complicated, because employees of this age group generally have no family or children to take care of. Thus, they are unlikely to encounter broader problems related to their families. This supports the finding that life phase influences expatriation decision.

5.2.2.1.2 Organisational factors

This study finds two organisation-related factors in terms of expatriation reasons: organisation needs (chapter 4.2.2.1) (including overseas development and organisation selection) and organisation support (chapter 4.2.2.2) (including favorable policy and in-country life support). These findings are partly supported by the existing literature and also contribute new insights into the expatriate study.

Organisation-driven international assignment is not only the most commonly seen in Chinese context, but also in the existing literature. Expatriates are temporarily sent overseas to complete time-based tasks or achieve organisational goals (Harrison et al., 2004). Spiess and Wittmann (1999) also point out that company's decisions to send senior management abroad is usually an ad hoc decision determined by market forces, rather than as part of employees' career development strategy.

Organisation selection is an important influencing factor. Obligation to obey the organisation's demand is obviously one of the major reasons for relocation

(Rui et al., 2017). The interviews confirm that individuals will obey and accept the orders and arrangements of the organisation in most cases, because they will worry about the potential consequences if they turn down the assignment. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the needs and expectations of the organisation is a significant factor in the decision process. However, although the organisation plays a stronger role in the selection process, the will of the individual is still vital as individuals' unwillingness to accept assignments may affect their adjustment efforts, and their satisfaction with assignments will ultimately affect their intention to quit (Kim and Froese, 2012). Therefore, organisations should pay more attention to motivate the potential expatriates. In addition, this study identifies organisations' favorable policy and in-country life support as contributors to expatriation decision. The favorable policies in terms of income and promotion are very strong attractions, and they are consistent with the two most prominent personal factors — expatriates' pursuit for career development and higher income. The in-country life support of organisation also promotes an expatriation decision because it effectively eliminates some uncertainties caused by the relocation.

5.2.2.1.3 Family factors

As for family factors, the existing literature mainly focus on how family affects expatriate adjustment (e.g., Baruch et al.2016; Takeuchi, 2010; Aycan, 1997), and the relationship between family factors and expatriation decision has not been realised yet. This study finds family economic condition (chapter 4.2.3.1) and degree of family support (chapter 4.2.3.2) influencing the expatriation decision.

In Chinese culture, the influence and intervention of family on individuals is very profound. An important feature of Chinese collectivism is the importance of the family (Tang et al., 2014), and family's wellbeing (including its social prestige) is often considered more important than one's own interests (Yao et

al., 2015). In addition, traditional Chinese rural society (Fei, 1992) still has an impact on individuals, and it takes more courage for people to go abroad to venture and seek opportunities. Therefore, family support has a significant and direct impact on the individual's decision to relocate.

In this context, this study identifies the family economic condition and degree of family support to be influencing factors in at least part of the Chinese business expatriates' decision to work abroad. The poorer the family, the more eager they are to improve their own and their family's situation. Therefore, it is easier for them to overcome the anxiety caused by the relocation. In contrast, the study finds that some potential expatriates are less motivated to move abroad when their families were in a good financial position, and they tend to worry and fear more about the hardships.

Moreover, Lo et al. (2018) point out that parents in Confucian Asia play an important role in a SIE's decision to relocate or return. The higher degree of the family support, the easier and quicker the potential expatriates make their expatriation decisions, and vice versa. Different from western expatriates who are more often accompanied by spouses and family members, Chinese business expatriates always travel without their families as organisations generally provide insufficient support for accompanying families (He, 2019). One possible reason is that expatriate's spouse or family are usually not financially supported by the company to relocate to host countries (Shen and Edwards 2006). As in this study, none of the participants traveled with their spouses and families. Then expatriates' relocation means separation and pain, thus support from the spouse or partner (if applicable) becomes extremely important.

5.2.2.1.4 Country level factors

This study identifies two country-level reasons for relocation: home country encouragement (chapter 4.2.4.1) and expatriation destination attraction

(chapter 4.2.4.2), though with relatively weak influence.

Home country encouragement is proposed as a new factor affecting individual expatriation. Since joining WTO, China has been encouraging its enterprises to go abroad and participate in the globalization process more deeply. In recent years, the Belt and Road Initiative has positively impacted on Chinese OFDI activities (Yu et al., 2019), and the OFDI stock in 2020 is almost five times the number in 2012 (MOFCOM, 2021). That implies China's encouragement represents one of the macro backgrounds and more and more enterprises and expatriates have gone abroad.

As for the attractiveness of the expatriation destination, it is consistent with the existing literature that host country attractiveness influences expatriation decision. Expatriates always prefer to go to places with more developed economy, better living conditions, more attractive culture or other unique attractions. Crowley-Henry and Collins (2017) point out that destination countries are important to millennials when they decide whether to go or not. Relocation for a better environment, or better quality of life will be a practical motivation for international assignment. For example, Lo et al (2018) points out that expatriates' willingness to seek a better working environment is an important factor to promote Confucian Asian SIE to go abroad.

5.2.2.1.5 Peer factors

This study also finds two less important reasons related to peers that may affect expatriates' relocation decision, namely friend encouragement / friend recommendation (chapter 4.2.5.1) and group expatriation (chapter 4.2.5.2).

Friend encouragement / friend recommendation, in more cases, is more applicable for SIEs. Because for SIEs who usually go abroad without any organisational support, friends' help, encouragement and job recommendations provide some certainty when they are facing all those uncertainties, which may trigger their expatriation decision.

Group expatriation, a factor with Chinese characteristics, also promotes the decision of some potential expatriates. Due to various reasons, Chinese enterprises use a large number of expatriates (He, 2019). Generally, expatriates are dispatched together with their expatriate colleagues, or join the local team with most members are Chinese. The interviews show that having companions travel together can help promote relocation decisions. Group expatriation helps reduce expatriates' anxiety about the uncertainty of the external world and provides more psychological and practical support.

5.2.2.2 Explanation and comparison of *expatriation difficulties*

The new environment and culture will undoubtedly bring expatriates a lot of difficulties and great challenges to their adjustment (e.g., Bader et al., 2019; Bader et al, 2018; McNulty, 2015; Black et al. 1991; Berry, 1997; Gudykunst, 2001). This study holds expatriation difficulties as one of the key factors that influence expatriate adjustment because they put expatriates and organisations at risk of failure. Expatriation difficulties, including “work difficulties” (chapter 4.3.1), “life difficulties” (chapter 4.3.2), “psychological difficulties” (chapter 4.3.3) and “general difficulties” (chapter 4.3.4), bring great pressure to expatriates, immediately trigger the issue of expatriate adjustment, and at the same time continuously hinder the successful adjustment of expatriates. This forces expatriates to take appropriate strategies to cope with the expatriation difficulties according to the available expatriation supporting resources.

5.2.2.2.1 Work difficulties

Four work difficulties, including work role change (chapter 4.3.1.1), insufficient organisational support (chapter 4.3.1.2), mismatched work pace (chapter 4.3.1.3) and challenging working environment (chapter 4.3.1.4), are identified to have an impact on the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. The

following will focus more on the first three subthemes as they reflect more Chinese characteristics.

Work role change as a work difficulty is supported by the literature (Bader et al, 2016; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer and Harrison,2001; Black et al., 1991). However, the field data show that Chinese expatriates are generally optimistic about the change of job roles and think that the cultural factors involved in the job are more difficult than the job itself.

Insufficient organisational support is common experience with these participants and within the research literature. However, among those insufficiencies, front-line attrition and insufficient support in career development are more Chinese-specific. Front-line Attrition, the unreasonable work arrangement of the parent company and the failure to keep up with the first-line demand, makes the front-line expatriates suffer more unnecessary losses, thus reducing the work efficiency. Part of the reason may be that these organisations are less experienced in international human resources management practice as they are still in the early stage of internationalization process. The field data also show that complaints related to insufficient support in career development leads to burnout and expatriate failure, which is consistent with the literature (Kraimer et al., 2012; Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2002). However, this study finds organisations often fail to provide enough support, partly because they are always weak in repatriation arrangements. That leads to the loss of organisational loyalty and work ethic, and a high probability of expatriates leaving the organisation. It must be noted that many participants have experienced some degree of career development during or after their assignments. However, it is difficult for the organisation to fully meet the career expectations of all the expatriate when facing such a huge expatriate group.

Mismatched work pace between Chinese expatriates and local employees may also lead to maladjustment, and sometimes even the expatriation failure.

This point has not been ignored in the existing literature. Chinese expatriates tend to work hard and relate that to their responsibilities and success. As hard-working is one of the cores of Confucian work ethic (Rarick, 2007) and people tend to attach value to persistence (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Rui et al. (2017) indicate that compared to host or third country counterparts, Chinese expatriates have the competitive advantage of relatively lower cost, higher productivity and hardship tolerance. Local employees' low efficiency seems to be a common issue in the eyes of Chinese expatriates. In addition, due to cultural differences and practical difficulties, such as different laws and regulations (Greppin et al., 2017), organisations often lack effective tools and ideas to better motivate local employees. This may lead organisations to assign more work to Chinese expatriates, which further increases the workload imbalance between Chinese and local employees and puts more pressure on the expatriates.

5.2.2.2.2 Life difficulties

Another difficulty in the expatriation process is related to the expatriate's life in the host country. This study identifies inconvenient life (chapter 4.3.2.1), work-life imbalance (chapter 4.3.2.2) and family conflict (chapter 4.3.2.3) as the main challenges influencing expatriates' adjustment.

Chinese expatriates' inconveniences in life are related to both cultural distance and economic development level. For example, the participant worked in Myanmar seemed face less life difficulties than the one worked in Democratic Republic of the Congo. This study finds that Chinese expatriates face life inconveniences not only in underdeveloped countries, such as those in Africa (as supported by Li et al., [2015]), but in more developed countries and regions, such as Europe and the America (as supported by Zhang and Fan, [2019]). But there is no doubt that in those poorer areas, expatriates will suffer more in life.

As for work-life imbalance, it has long been mentioned and discussed (e.g., Bader et al., 2018; Kraeh et al., 2015). Family members of western expatriates tend to be more interdependent and accompanying spouse and families can add to the stress of the expatriate (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2002). In this context, expatriates face serious conflicts between their work expectations and their private lives, often leaving the host country before the end of their contracts (Kraeh et al., 2015). Therefore, managing the boundary between work and life is considered to be one of the main challenges related to the international assignment (Bader et al., 2018). However, the work-life imbalance of Chinese business expatriates is different from that of Western expatriates. Given the fact that the majority of Chinese expatriates relocate without the accompanying families (Wood, 2010), the squeeze of work on private life, and expatriates' inability to develop an ideal social network in the host country, they cannot successfully lead a private life similar to that in the home country. This is just like what Bader et al. (2018) mentions that individuals have little control over work-life boundaries. Being away from friends and family back home diminishes the value of private life for some expatriates. Moreover, the study finds that it is less likely for them to build a robust social network to ensure a quality life after work. In some extreme cases among the participants, that leads to spending more time at work.

Family conflict is another common and serious difficulty expatriates must face during their expatriation. As with western expatriates, the risks or problems such as spouse's work and life, children's education, greatly distract the energy and enthusiasm of expatriates, therefore, the adjustment of accompanying families will significantly affect expatriates' work (Baruch et al. 2016; Takeuchi, 2010; Takeuchi et al., 2007; Aycan 1997). In some cases, expatriation leads to serious family conflicts and even divorce (McNulty, 2015). However, family conflict that Chinese business expatriates face has its own characteristics. Chinese business expatriates tend to travel without

accompanying families (He, 2019) and long-term separation from the family leads to many problems. For example, the left-behind spouse must face the family related issues and raise children alone. It is reasonable to think that Chinese expatriates are undergoing a more serious family conflict than western expatriates.

5.2.2.2.3 Psychological difficulties

Expatriates are a highly stressed group as they need to be able to adapt to changes in work and difficulties encountered in an unfamiliar host country environment (Gudykunst, 2005; Carraher et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2001). Five types of psychological difficulties, including loneliness (chapter 4.3.3.1), work stress (chapter 4.3.3.2), depression (chapter 4.3.3.3), return dilemma (chapter 4.3.3.4) and psychological sensitivity (chapter 4.3.3.5), may bring negative influences on the adjustment of Chinese expatriates.

As for loneliness and depression, it is not new to the adjustment literature. Challenging tasks may lead to psychological discomfort or stress, mainly characterised by a decline in mental health, such as anxiety, tension, fatigue and depression (Sam and Berry, 2010), and that will seriously affect psychological well-being and interfere with expatriate work (Baruch et al., 2016). Flynn (2015) finds that expatriates will experience loneliness when they have difficulty integrating into a new environment and finding friends and thus result in a weak support network. According to the literature, loneliness decreases as the duration of the assignment increases (Kim, 2001), and it seems to be more of a problem for the accompanying family members of expatriates (Deresky, 2014). However, it is not the case for what this study has found in the practice of Chinese business expatriates. Loneliness and depression are big problems for Chinese expatriates themselves, and in some cases, loneliness has not been alleviated with the passage of time but has increased. In some of the less adjusted cases, expatriates are in depression

for long when they face serious work and life difficulties and lack effective career development support and emotional support at the same time.

Work stress is consistent with the existing literature. Expatriates usually have greater responsibilities and performance expectations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). Therefore, they are usually under great pressure in the work field (Bader et al., 2016). Stress affects not only individual well-being, but also the task and contextual performance in terms of productivity, workgroup cooperation, and intention to leave before completing the assignment (Takeuchi et al., 2005).

Return dilemma reflects the unique psychological problems faced by Chinese expatriates. This research indicates that return dilemma is manifested in three aspects. Firstly, the contradiction between returning and staying abroad is essentially a painful competition between the traditional idea of returning to one's roots and giving up the social networks and resources developed in the host country. Secondly, in many cases, there is no fixed assignment period. This leads to the confusion of expatriates and the game between expatriates and organisations. Thirdly, the difficulties of repatriation, including the difficulty of adapting to the domestic labour market and the sharp fall in wages, make part of the expatriates hesitate. The first two points reflect more the uniqueness of the Chinese expatriates' practices. The third one is consistent with the existing literature, which is mentioned as reverse culture shock that expatriates have to experience a re-adjustment process to home culture after return (Black and Gregersen, 1991).

Psychological sensitivity is also a context-specific factor which stems from the humiliations Chinese people suffered in recent history and a lack of confidence due to the long-term underdeveloped situation (Zhou, 2012). Both the real or possible discrimination, humiliation, or stereotype about Chinese, either explicit or implicit, in different types, cause and increase expatriates' psychological sensitivity, which decrease their psychological health level.

Though China has been developing fast since its opening and reforming, this sensitivity is still found to exist and has a negative impact on expatriates. However, this study also finds from the interview that all this sensitivity and confidence lack is taking a turn for the better with the fast development of China.

5.2.2.2.4 General difficulties

These include safety problems (chapter 4.3.4.1), interaction problems (chapter 4.3.4.2), religion influences (chapter 4.3.4.3) and force majeure-the pandemic (chapter 4.3.4.4), general difficulties impact adjustment a lot and have a wide influence on work, life and psychology.

Safety problem is one of the common problems faced by expatriates around the world. Many studies support this finding from different perspective. For example, the potential impact of the terrorist threat environment on international human resources (Bader et al., 2015; 2016), specific targets linked to the health and safety (Fee et al., 2011), and discrimination and hostility (Bader et al., 2018; Hutchings et al., 2013). However, this study finds safety problem is one of the fundamental problems Chinese expatriates face and that has a huge impact on their adjustment strategies. Worries and concerns related to safety and security are fundamental among Chinese expatriates, which are mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, Chinese expatriates are mainly sent to developing countries generally with lower level of economic development, social management and public security, hence there is urgent and practical need for them to take care of the safety problems. Secondly, Chinese have a relatively high sense of security. China ranked the third in the Law and Order Index published by Gallup and high majorities of Chinese say they feel safe walking alone in their area at night while people of Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa are least likely to say that (Gallup, 2021). Therefore, expatriates tend to be more alert to safety issues.

Interaction problems are also not new to the field. The existing literature supports that the negative effects of language barriers (chapter 4.3.4.2.1) and integration barriers (chapter 4.3.4.2.2) on expatriate adjustment. Lack of language skills has long been recognised as a major barrier to effective cross-cultural communication (Victor, 1992). There is evidence that fluency in the host language facilitates expatriate adjustment by equipping individuals with more effective communication and perceptual skills (Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993). Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) also point out that language proficiency is significantly and positively related to interaction adjustment, but not to general or job adjustment. On the whole, the study finds that Chinese expatriates lack the initiative to integrate into the new environment, which is partly due to the language barrier and the fact of group expatriation that decrease their needs for the host country nationals.

As for religion influence, it is a common problem faced by Chinese expatriates, but not an obvious or serious obstacle in general. Few studies have investigated the influence of religious factors on expatriates. He (2019) argues that many Chinese expatriates have a strong personal experience regarding the issue of “religious adjustment”, but this issue is not reflected in Black’s expatriate adjustment scale. This may be because religion is not deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, causing Western expatriates to feel less impacted by this aspect when they come to China (He, 2019). China is one of the countries with the lowest proportion of religious believers in the world, with only 10% of adults considering themselves religious (Pew, 2023). Since religious beliefs are more deeply rooted abroad as supported by Pew (2015), Chinese expatriates experience significant visual and perceptual impacts related to religion when they go abroad, naturally making it a new challenge they need to address.

The last subtheme is the pandemic. As data collection of this research were done during the pandemic which has a huge impact on expatriation, it is

undoubtedly identified as a force majeure on the Chinese expatriate community, exceeding all other force majeures such as regional conflicts or some localised major natural disasters because of its scope and duration. COVID-19 pandemic shows that the virus has no national boundaries, and its great uncertainty affects people all over the world (WHO, 2020). It brings major strategic talent problems (Deloitte, 2020), sharply decreases the global mobility (Lazarova et al., 2022), and greatly changes the form of expatriate work (ECA International, 2020). Pandemic viruses may never be ended and will eventually become part of the ecosystem (World Economic Forum, 2022). However, the difficulties caused by the epidemic to Chinese expatriates are different from those brought to western expatriates. Mello and Tomei (2021) find personal life interferes with work and creates work-life conflict during lockdown and expatriates' families has a positive impact on their work-life balance and harmony. Mandatory restrictions during COVID-19 are considered associated with increased time spent by fathers with their children and are somewhat beneficial for work-life balance (Craig and Churchill, 2020). However, for Chinese expatriates who are not accompanied by their families, the pandemic and its related measures have further increased the work and life difficulties, led to the difficulties of visiting relatives or returning home, and increased the psychological pressure.

5.2.2.3 Explanation and comparison of *expatriation supporting resources*

Expatriation supporting resources play a significant role in facilitating expatriate adjustment as those resources provided help expatriates overcome the difficulties that arise during the assignment. This study identifies six main sources of support, namely, the expatriate himself/herself (chapter 4.4.1), Chinese circle (chapter 4.4.2), organisation (chapter 4.4.3), host country (chapter 4.4.4), family (chapter 4.4.5) and home country (chapter 4.4.6), which promote expatriate adjustment from different aspects and in different degrees.

The extent to which expatriates possess these resources will also influence expatriates' adjustment strategies. Among all those supporting resources, in-group support is most important to Chinese expatriates, which help expatriates adjust but to certain extent limit their potential. For example, Chinese circle and organisation support influence the adjustment strategy of safe space (chapter 4.5.3) and limit the expatriates' better integration into the local area.

5.2.2.3.1 Personal resources

This study identifies two resources within the expatriates and helpful to expatriate adjustment, mainly including positive personality traits (chapter 4.4.1.1) and personal cross-cultural resources (chapter 4.4.1.2). As for personal cross-cultural resources, this study identified two factors fully supported by the literature: overseas experience (e.g., Lin et al., 2018; Takeuchi, 2010; Ng et al., 2009) and working language ability (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Victor, 1992).

The other personal resource, personality traits, has long been long been studied as an influencing factor for expatriate adjustment and performance, however, with varied conclusions. Among the various personality traits, extroversion, flexibility (Richardson et al., 2018), sociability (Black, 1990), openness to new experience (Bhatti et al., 2014) are important predictor of cross-cultural adjustment. The existing research typically applied theories with western perspective, such as the Big Five model, which is the most established and cross-culturally validated trait model in modern psychological science (Digman, 1990). This study identifies two specific positive personality traits within Chinese expatriates from the perspective of Chinese culture — ren and perseverance.

Ren is central to Confucian ethics, but with a very broad and not unified notion. It has been translated into different words such as benevolence, love, kindness,

altruism, compassion, charity, magnanimity, human-heartedness, humaneness, perfect virtue, goodness, true manhood, and manhood at its best (Luo, 2012). Considering its deep influence on Chinese people's personality, this study takes "ren" as a positive personality trait with Chinese characteristics, which help expatriates with their interactions in the host country. In this study it means consistent respect, affinity and modesty, which means thinking more from a local perspective and that helps bridge the gap between people and make better work situations. The existing literature supports the link between this personality trait and expatriates' adjustment. Lin et al. (2018) find that Chinese expatriates often show kindness to local employees, including sympathy, interest in staff development and the desire to cultivate a friendly working environment. Caligiuri et al. (2016) have pointed out that expatriates with higher cultural humility can benefit more from the supportive working environment of the host country thus to promote better performance of the task. Research also provides evidence of the link between humility and organisational interests (Ou et al., 2014; Owens and Hekman, 2012).

Perseverance is another Chinese specific positive trait within Chinese expatriates. Perseverance means "responsibility" and "persistence" or "hardship endurance". Chinese are high in Confucian Dynamism values and tend to associate more with the value of persistence which encourages a never-ending commitment to one's goal (Robertson and Hoffman, 2000; Hofstede and Bond, 1988). It also related to the preference of a long-term rather than short term perspective in China's Confucian-based society (Jaw et al., 2007). The finding is also supported by Rui et al. (2017), which indicates that relatively lower cost, higher productivity and hardship tolerance of Chinese expatriates (compared to host or third country counterparts) helps created the competitive advantage. In a word, perseverance makes expatriates keep moving forward in the face of hardships until accomplish the task. Considering the unfavorable situation Chinese expatriates are in, perseverance is a unique,

useful and very important personality traits that help expatriates adjust and complete the task.

5.2.2.3.2 Chinese circle

A Chinese circle composing of Chinese in the host country environment, mainly including expatriation colleagues (chapter 4.4.2.1) and the local Chinese (chapter 4.4.2.2), serve as an important resource for Chinese expatriates. This study finds that expatriation colleagues support the work, life and emotional adjustment of expatriates, while Chinese immigrants and other Chinese who work and live in the local area also provide support to their adjustment.

Social support from colleagues seems to be the most considered and studied variable in expatriate literature and has been found to be an important positive predictor of expatriate adjustment (Bayraktar, 2019; Waxin, 2004; Shaffer et al., 1999). However, the definition of colleague varies, which may refer to expatriation colleagues, HCN (host country national) and TCN (third country national) (Takeuchi, 2010).

The study finds that Chinese expatriation colleagues greatly support expatriates' adjustment, while the support from HCN and TCN is much weaker. This finding is consistent with Bayraktar (2019) who confirms the significant role of home country nationals and compatriots in adjustment. It is also an understandable phenomenon that when a person experiences uncertainty, he or she will seek comparison with others in similar situations (Johnson, 2003; Farh et al., 2010).

One deeper factor is that humans are tribal creatures, and selective pressures have sculpted human minds to be tribal (Clark et al., 2019). Firstly, language barriers may make it difficult for expatriates to develop a meaningful relationship with HCN. Secondly, expatriates who want to deal with challenges in a new cultural environment are likely to be attracted by other

expatriates who have similar experiences. Thirdly, the large number of Chinese expatriates and Chinese citizens and immigrants somehow contribute to the formation of the Chinese circle. That promotes information exchange and sharing, provides living convenience, contributes to identity, and thus supports expatriate adjustment.

5.2.2.3.3 Organisation support

This study has identified four types of organisation support, namely, favorable policy support (chapter 4.4.3.1), general work support (chapter 4.4.3.2), in-country life support (chapter 4.4.3.3) and emotional support (chapter 4.4.3.4). They are not new to and are consistent with the existing literature, however, these research-based new concepts help understand organisation support from different and more detailed dimensions.

Favorable policy provides continued motivation for expatriates to better adjust and complete assignments. This finding is supported by the literature. Assigned expatriates will enjoy better terms and conditions to encourage their relocation, including salary adjustment and extra expenses for accommodation, school education and other living expenses (McNulty and Brewster, 2017). Differing from the western practice, Chinese favorable policy generally includes an overall income package and the promotion policy, in most cases, anyhow, it directly promotes the expatriation decision and continue to serve as an effective incentive during the expatriation.

As for general work support, this study identifies three sub-themes, administrative service, resource support and learning support. This finding is consistent with the literature. Work support from organisation undoubtedly plays an important role in expatriate work adjustment, as “out of sight, out of mind” (once expatriates go overseas, there is an expectation that expatriates will handle the rest by themselves) will not work in expatriation practice (Ayca, 1997). Besides cross-cultural training (Van der Laken et al., 2018), the

organisation has to help its expatriates handle unforeseen problems after relocation (Black et al., 1991), such as systematic organisational job coaching (Salomaa and Mäkelä, 2017).

As for in-country life support, it is the Chinese version of logistical support which contributes to expatriate success (Van der Laken et al., 2018). Black et al. (1991) first uses term logistic help, followed by Aycan (1997) with the term logistical support used to refer to the support provided by the organisation which includes several issues that need to be dealt with, such as housing, schooling, health insurance, legal requirements for entry (e.g., visas, work permits), spousal employment, job transfers. Different from a support system in the form of compensation and welfare programs provided by Western organisations (Andreason, 2003), in-country life support is provided by the organisation to enable expatriates to have a better life adjustment. However, the western style of total package is not suitable in the Chinese context of group expatriation. Chinese organisations tend to build a more practical and economical support system providing unified service to their expatriates, which in most cases include Chinese food, accommodation and transportation supplies and generally without support in schooling and spousal employment. The differences in life support partly stem from the divergent expatriation practices between China and Western countries. Chinese enterprises typically implement group expatriation and maintain a large number of expatriates. According to the Ministry of Commerce of China, the total number of Chinese expatriates had reached 1.425 million by 2020, with a ratio of Chinese expatriates to local employees at 4:6 (MOC, 2021). The group expatriation allows organizations to concentrate resources and provide comprehensive life support for the entire group of expatriates, such as group housing and group health insurance, thereby enhancing expatriates' adjustment and cohesion abroad. It should be note that not every Chinese company send a large number of expatriates, and self-initiated expatriates fall under the category of

individual expatriation, the in-country life support may not apply to these cases. However, while this type of support creates a unique work-place and social environment similar to that of expatriates' home country in the cultural setting of the host country, but it also establishes a cultural barrier, limiting the communication between expatriates and the local people, which is not conducive to the cultural exchange between the two sides, causing cultural clashes and consequently hindering the progress of projects (Huang et al., 2020).

As for organisation emotional support, it is supported by the existing literature. Emotional support is considered to be an important part of social support (Ong and Ward, 2005), which promotes expatriate performance (Bruning et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2010) and is one of the most critical predictors of cross-cultural adjustment (Bayraktar, 2019). However, the emotional support provided by the organisation has not received due attention both in the existing literature and the expatriate management practices. For Chinese expatriates, it is a particularly important resource, especially when they go abroad without their families accompanying and have an unbalanced work-life overseas. Organisation emotional support do play a role in expatriates' adjustment, however, it is weak and insufficient.

5.2.2.3.4 Host country support

As for host country factors, the social support from HCNs (host country nationals) has long been studied (e.g., Bayraktar, 2019; Black et al., 1991). However, this study finds two main host country-related supporting factors, namely host country residents (chapter 4.4.4.1) and host country attraction (chapter 4.4.4.2).

Host country residents, includes not only HCNs(which may include local people, local employee, work partners and clients) and TCNs (which may include third country employees, other foreigners in the host country). The

finding is consistent with the literature. Through interaction with the HCNs, expatriates learn the appropriate cultural norms and behaviors by observing, seeking suggestions and feedback (Mahajan and Toh, 2014). Besides HCNs, foreign expatriates in the expatriates' social network also contribute to the adjustment (Bayraktar, 2019). Though the host country residents contribute to expatriates' adjustment, it has to be noted that its influence is still small in the Chinese practice.

As for host country attraction, this study finds that it is not only a factor facilitating expatriation decision in some cases, but also contribute to expatriate adjustment during the in-country stage. In other words, when differences in a new environment are viewed and evaluated positively, differences then become attractive and function as a supporting resource. It is reasonable and supported by the literature. For example, a better working environment (Lo et al., 2018) and attraction by the host country's cuisine (Miocevic and Mikulic, 2021) help expatriates adapt to the new environment.

5.2.2.3.5 Family support

Family support plays an important role throughout the expatriation period, and its influence on adjustment has long been discussed and proved (e.g., Lo et al., 2018; Fineman, 2014; Andreason, 2003). As to Chinese expatriates, it provides emotional support (chapter 4.4.5.1) and the family role support (chapter 4.4.5.2).

Emotional support (showing love, care, concern and sympathy) and companionship provided by family members are important components of social support for expatriates (Van der Laken et al., 2018; Ong and Ward, 2005). However, Chinese expatriates usually work abroad without the company of any family members and that adds to expatriates' life difficulties in the host country. This study finds that family (especially for expatriates who are married and have children) remains an important source of emotional support

for expatriates though being separated and far apart. The possible reason may be that the expatriate's responsibility for the family and the encouragement from the family strengthen the bond and provide the emotional support.

As for family role support, it is a new finding in this study. Studies have shown that high involvement in work roles can lead to work-family conflicts (Mello and Tomei, 2021; Owens and Kottwitz, 2018). The fact that Chinese expatriates (especially for those who are married and have children) relocating alone means separation from family members and leads to imbalance and reconstruction of the original family structure and function, which poses a constant challenge to expatriates.

Chinese culture values a close and loyal group, usually as a family or extended family, and people tend to cultivate strong relationships in which group members take responsibility for each other (Wood, 2010). In general, the decision to relocate is supported by family members at least to a certain level. Selmer et al. (2003) find that all married Chinese expatriates follow the Chinese tradition, discussing expatriation with their families and seeking their support for expatriation. That implies when the expatriate is sent for the international assignment, the families or the spouse of the expatriate will be responsible and help to fill a role vacuum left by the expatriate in the family, which helps to keep the family in a balanced state as far as possible.

5.2.2.3.6 Home country support

This study finds that home country support, mainly including direct support (chapter 4.4.6.1) and indirect support (chapter 4.4.6.2), is also one of the sources of support for Chinese expatriates to adjust. Though it is reasonable to expect that expatriates' bond with their home country will support their adjustment to some extent, this point is ignored by the existing literature.

The literature supports the finding of home country (China) support to enterprises operating internationally, such as information, resource and

diplomatic assistance (Luo et al., 2010). Support from home country governments can be an enabling factor to enhance the international competitiveness of their MNCs (Han et al., 2018), especially when Chinese government has adopted the “go global” strategy as a strategic path for economic development and has implemented policies, including financial and non-financial support, aimed at facilitating the international expansion of Chinese companies (Lu et al., 2014). Unlike MNCs in developed countries, emerging market firms rely more on government support to build their competitive advantage (Hong et al., 2015).

This study finds that expatriates feel positively about the support from their home country, as they understand not only the positive role of home country support on organisations’ international operations but also on their own life. Considering that China maintains good national relations with a wide range of countries, Chinese government and embassies are likely to have influence and provide strong support and protection for companies and individuals when needed (Han et al., 2018). Expatriates are more likely to sense and feel the support from its home country especially in some difficult situations, such as evacuation mission during the emergencies and arranging vaccination during the pandemic.

5.2.2.4 Explanation and comparison of *adjustment strategies*

Adjustment strategies refer to a set of principles that guide the actions of expatriates according to their own abilities and available supporting resources in the face of expatriation difficulties. Unlike the existing categorization on adjustment strategies (e.g., Berry, 2005; Ward, 2001) which distinguish strategies in different situations, this study focuses on the general strategies that Chinese expatriates have demonstrated and reflecting more of Chinese characteristics. Four main strategies, respect and harmony (chapter 4.5.1), work orientation (chapter 4.5.2), safe space (chapter 4.5.3), and long-term

orientation (chapter 4.5.4) are identified strongly reflecting the influence of Chinese Confucian values on expatriates. An interesting finding is that expatriates have adopted a pragmatic strategy that they focus on solving some problems while avoiding and enduring others rather than the ideally best one according to the existing adjustment theory.

5.2.2.4.1 Respect and harmony

Respect and harmony are identified as a very useful and practical strategy with strong Confucian characteristics. Respecting the local (chapter 4.5.1.1) as a strategy is also intertwined with *ren* (chapter 4.4.1.1.1), which is discussed as a positive personality trait contributing to expatriates' adjustment. On one hand, Chinese expatriates, especially managers, often demonstrate benevolent behaviors to local employees, including sympathy, interest in employee development and desire to cultivate a friendly working environment (supported by Lin et al., 2018). On the other hand, they believe in respect and modesty will bring good response and interaction, thus a practical way to get what they want. Just like Caligiuri et al. (2016) find that expatriates with higher levels of cultural humility can benefit more from a supportive work environment in the host country to promote better performance.

As for harmony, it is interrelated with respect. Confucianism emphasises collective responsibility and harmony at work (Warner, 2013), which often affects management style and employees' attitudes and behaviors (Wong et al., 2010). Pursuing harmony (chapter 4.5.1.2) means to promote respectful interactions between people (Byosiere and Luethge, 2009). Just as Confucius cautions that people should seek harmony not sameness (Ames and Rosemont, 1998). In the context of expatriates, this means avoiding disagreement or conflicts, just like Yao et al. (2015) points out that maintaining order is associated with Confucian conceptions of obligation and esteem. This study goes further in describing "harmony" with four main aspects, presenting

a friendly image (chapter 4.5.1.2.1), conflict avoidance (chapter 4.5.1.2.2), pursuing mutual benefits (chapter 4.5.1.2.3), and compromised acceptance (chapter 4.5.1.2.4). Both Chinese enterprises abroad and their expatriates uphold a principal of presenting friendliness. Expatriates have a strong tendency to avoid conflicts or keep it to a small scale when interacting with the local. Conflict avoidance can be seen as an extension of the strategy of presenting a friendly image. In addition to practical interests, maintaining a friendly national image is an important starting point for enterprises and individuals to deal with disputes and contradictions. Therefore, harmoniously solving problems is the DNA of decision-making. Expatriates have a strong desire to pursue mutual benefits, that is, to bring value and benefits to the local while achieving their own goals. In addition, mutual benefits contribute to help both sides forming and share a common value thus to effectively overcome the obstacles caused by cultural differences. Compromised acceptance, related to “respecting the local” and “conflict avoidance”, means a practical way of respecting cultural differences and help avoid possible conflicts.

5.2.2.4.2 Work orientation

Work orientation as an adjustment strategy is consistent with the existing literature. Expatriation period is becoming shorter, with 70% of assignments lasting less than a year (GMAC, 2004). Employees are sent with a strong work orientation mainly to solve the tasks or problems (Kawai and Mohr, 2015). As companies continue to prioritize agility and adaptability, short-term cross-border mobility which provides companies with a flexible solution to address specific projects, knowledge transfers, is likely to remain a prominent feature of talent management strategies in the years to come (KPMG, 2023). It is safe to conclude that work is the original core of the assignment. The Chinese practice in this study also support this point. However, this study differs from the existing literature by identifying four specific aspects, intense

work involvement (chapter 4.5.2.1), work as value carrier (chapter 4.5.2.4), work oriented social contact (chapter 4.5.2.2) and work-oriented learning (chapter 4.5.2.3). The first two subthemes will be discussed here as they represent unique aspect of Chinese business expatriates and new findings in the expatriate literature.

Intense work involvement shows one of the differences between Chinese and western expatriates. In general, work is considered to be only one aspect of life. Western expatriates expect more of organisational flexibility so that they can handle their work and life responsibilities and activities (Kelan et al., 2009; Meister and Willyerd, 2010). In contrast, Chinese expatriates devote more time and energy to their work than to their lives, which leads to an imbalance between work and life. In a few extreme cases, expatriates have lost their personal life at all. On the one hand, overtime is becoming increasingly common in the Chinese work culture as workers find it an effective mechanism to build credibility and keep their jobs in the face of fierce competition (Wang and Shi, 2009). On the other hand, work life balance is still an under-researched concept in China's management practice (Xiao and Cooke, 2012). Just as Bader et al.'s (2018) description of expatriates in Korea, individuals have little control over work-life boundaries because employers dominate the employees' time. Therefore, it is not surprising that expatriates involve intensely in work during their assignment. In less common situations, expatriates sent to less developing areas with less satisfied living conditions tend to work more or stay in the working site just to fight against boringness and loneliness.

Moreover, Chinese expatriates regard their work as a value carrier. International assignment undoubtedly brings values to expatriates, for example, it offers opportunities to accumulate "symbolic capital" associated with face and social status (Yao, 2013), which is significant not just in the individual sense of developing a marketable reputation but in a more collective

process by enhancing connections within the organisation and in wider social networks (Yao et al., 2015). However, Chinese expatriates tend to add more value to their work, expecting that their work brings value not only to themselves but also to their family, organisation, home country and local area. This is closely related to Confucian work ethic which consists of a belief in the values such as hard work, loyalty to the organisation, thrift, dedication and social harmony (Rarick, 2007). That implies that besides working hard for a better personal life, people still have to hold more social responsibilities. Therefore, Chinese expatriates tend to attach importance to the value of work to all stakeholders.

5.2.2.4.3 Safe space

In order to deal with the anxiety and uncertainty in interaction with strangers (Gudykunst, 2005) and maintain psychological security and comfort, Chinese expatriates build a safe space through huddling for comfort (chapter 4.5.3.1) and limiting contact to the local (chapter 4.5.3.2) during in-country period.

Chinese expatriates tend to adopt a group strategy: huddling for comfort, because group expatriation (chapter 4.2.5.2) and Chinese circle (chapter 4.4.2) have provided proper conditions. Humans are tribal creatures (Clark et al.2019), and expatriates is likely to get more social support from other expatriates or similar roles with the same culture and language and similar experiences (Farh et al.,2010). Therefore, the huddling for comfort strategy is naturally very attractive. The Chinese circle is consolidated through huddling and in turn reinforces the huddling strategy of individuals.

Correspondingly, they have limited contact with the host country residents. Apart from necessary work-oriented social activities, there are few social activities in their private life with host country residents. This strategy is not wise according to the theories, as HCNs is a powerful source of social support (e.g., Bayraktar, 2019; Takeuchi 2010). Aycan (1997) argues that integrationist

attitudes at work and in social life will produce the best adjustment outcomes. Firstly, positive and effective interaction with host nationals is an important source of information about appropriate behavior and its consequences, which will enhance the effectiveness of individuals in their daily contact with others. Secondly, when the expatriate demonstrates to the locals that he/she values and appreciates the new culture and makes an effort to learn their ways, host country nationals will be happy and show greater acceptance and cooperation to the expatriate. However, this study finds Chinese expatriates tend to interact more within the Chinese circle and much less with the locals. In some cases, expatriates demonstrate obvious separatist attitudes. The possible reasons may include the convenient in-country life support by the Chinese circle and organisation, security and safety concerns of both organisations and expatriates about the local environment, time and energy limits, and a sense of language inefficiency. This makes them to some extent isolated from the host community, difficult to understand the host country nationals (Adler, 1991) and unable to better integrate into the local culture (Mohan et al., 2014; Jackson, 2014).

5.2.2.4.4 Long-term orientation

The term long-term orientation is not a creation in this study. As an important dimension of Chinese values (Hofstede, 1991), it is defined as the extent to which employees attach importance to personal, organisational, and industrial prospects (Hou et al., 2014). This study regards long-term orientation as an adjustment strategy. In order to achieve long-term goals, expatriates demonstrate high tolerance for current difficulties and hardships, and face the issue with constant actions. The theme includes two aspects: forced adjustment (chapter 4.5.4.1) and refreshing motivations (chapter 4.5.4.2).

The strategy of forced adjustment has much to do with the Chinese perseverance (chapter 4.4.1.1.2) which is regarded as a supporting source of

expatriate adjustment. It is also one of the sources of competitive advantage of Chinese expatriates (Rui et al., 2017). The core of Confucianism emphasises the importance of controlling for selfish and greedy behaviors on the part of individuals and the importance of social obligations in settings such as communities, institutions and families (Rotundo and Xie, 2008). Moreover, Chinese have a risk-averse tendency that they tend to not leave their jobs in the face of conflict or unpleasant events. Therefore, Chinese expatriates tend to tolerate and persist and force themselves to adapt to tough circumstances. In addition, Chinese expatriates tend to refresh their motivations when things get tough. Social motivation strongly influences the individual-level cost-benefit analysis that employees conduct when deciding to accept an assignment and how they approach the entire experience (Yao et al., 2015). Expatriates often refresh their motivation when faced with the difficulties and challenges of expatriation. By sticking to the original motivation and their possibilities, they persuade themselves to persist, and find rationality for their behavior in the assignment, thus providing them with continuous internal motivation to move on.

5.2.3 The process of expatriate adjustment

In figure 5.1, four major themes are numbered (1. expatriation reasons; 2. expatriation difficulties; 3. expatriation supporting resources; 4. adjustment strategies) showing a time order and connected by arrows, which reflects the relationship between them. In chapter 5.2.2, the four main themes have been briefly described (see more details of these themes in chapter 4). On this basis, the adjustment process of Chinese business expatriates is then described as follows and it answers research question 2: What adjustment process are experienced by Chinese business expatriates?

Expatriate adjustment process identified in this study first begins with multi-stakeholder-influenced expatriation reasons which encourage and push

expatriates to go abroad and complete international missions and lead to the subsequent cross-cultural contact, and it influences expatriation supporting resources and expatriates' adjustment strategies. After expatriates arrived in the host country, they have to face all kinds of expatriation difficulties, which bring great pressure to expatriates, trigger the expatriate adjustment issues, and at the same time continuously hinder the expatriates' successful adjustment. Those difficulties lead to expatriates' reactive measures that they seek for and resort to the supporting resources and then adopt adjustment strategies with Chinese cultural characteristics so as to overcome some difficulties and meantime ignore and endure some, and finally achieve a certain degree of adjustment.

5.3 Discussion of the research-based framework on a theoretical level: A comparison of the research based new framework with existing frameworks

Chapter 5.3 (from theoretical level), together with chapter 5.2.2 (from theme level), serve as a response to question 3: What is the connection between the research-based findings and the existing literature?

Based on grounded data, this study identifies the factors that affect the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates and develop a theoretical framework accordingly (figure 5.1). The research-based framework is undoubtedly different from all the existing models (see more cross-cultural adjustment models in chapter 2) and represents a new perspective and helps better understand the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates. However, this does not mean that the framework is completely independent of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

This study draws on the literature streams in both the PSA and IB fields (chapter 2) of cross-cultural adjustment research and integrates some important existing theoretical perspectives, such as Berry's strategic

perspective, Ward's process perspective, Takeuchi's stakeholder perspective, and Black et al.'s (1991) international expatriate perspective, to develop a framework with Chinese-specific, expatriate-oriented, multi-stakeholder, stress-coping perspective highlighting the adjustment process of Chinese business expatriate. Therefore, it is safe to say this framework is an innovation and redevelopment of existing research on cross-cultural adjustment in the PSA and IB domains, and further enriches the research in the field. As a whole, the links between the present framework and existing theoretical frameworks are manifested in the following points.

5.3.1 Stress-coping perspective

The new framework reflects a stress coping perspective when looking into expatriate adjustment. Ward (2001) argues that stress-coping is an important theoretical path in cross-cultural adjustment research. Earlier theoretical concepts of adjustment research, such as culture shock (e.g., Oberg, 1960) or cross-cultural adjustment stress (Berry et al., 1987), emphasised the negative, adverse effects of the intersection of two different cultural systems on the sojourners.

Ward et al.'s (2001) views the cross-cultural transition as a stressful life event that requires coping and regards stress-coping as the core process of cross-cultural adjustment (chapter 2.5.3). Kim (2001) takes cross-cultural adjustment as a communicative process, but it also reflects a strong stress-coping perspective (chapter 2.5.4). She holds that strangers will have psychological stress when facing all kinds of discomfort in a new culture. However, the stress motivates strangers to respond to environmental changes, gradually adapt to the new cultural environment, and slowly achieve individual growth. Berry (2005) suggests that cross-cultural contact results in both group-level and individual-level changes (chapter 2.5.2). Acculturation strategy is central to the framework and largely influences the outcome of cross-cultural

adaptation, as well as individual-level behavioral shifts and acculturative stress.

The four interrelated four core themes themselves (expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, supporting resources, and adjustment strategies) and the adjustment process reflects directly the stress-coping theoretical perspective. The expatriation difficulties bring great pressure to expatriates, trigger the adjustment problem, and continues to hinder the successful adjustment of expatriates. Then expatriates adopt proper adjustment strategies to face those difficulties. Therefore, the stress of assignment and the process of coping with it constitute the core of the adjustment process, which is in line with the theoretical frameworks described above in terms of stress-coping perspective.

This study distinguishes itself from the above studies by not only identifying the broad theme, such as expatriation difficulties and adjustment strategies, but also grasp the specific aspects of these abstract main themes through grounded theory research, such as what specific difficulties Chinese expatriates usually encounter and what adjustment strategies they usually adopt, which helps to better understand Chinese expatriates' adjustment from both abstract and concrete levels.

5.3.2 Multiple stakeholder perspective

Another connection between this framework and existing research is that it reflects a multi stakeholder perspective. Takeuchi's (2010) integrative, interactionist framework of multiple stakeholder view of expatriate (chapter 2.6.3) considers three key stakeholders (family, host country nationals, and parent company) that influence expatriate adjustment, differing from previous expatriate-centred studies and emphasizing the importance of an innovative, multi-stakeholder perspective on expatriate adjustment and performance, with positive implications for expatriate practice.

The process of adjustment of Chinese expatriate naturally involves more stakeholders. As Confucian culture emphasises collective responsibility and harmony (Warner, 2013), Chinese expatriates attach great importance to the value that work brings to all stakeholders. Expatriate adjustment is not only related to expatriates themselves and organisations, even the families, host country nationals and parent companies mentioned by Takeuchi, but may be a larger group of stakeholders. This study identifies more possible stakeholders, including individuals, organisations, family, friends, countries (home and host), host country residents. Various stakeholders not only influence the expatriates' decision to relocate (expatriation reasons), but also imply more sources of stress (expatriation difficulties) and support (supporting resources) and influence their responding strategies in the face of difficulties (adjustment strategies). This also reflects a Chinese-specific adjustment style.

5.3.3 International adjustment perspective

Expatriate research in IB field attach more attention to relocation of employees to a new country and their relative success in the work assignment (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011), with a focus on the organisation or work environment. Given that work-orientation is one of the most important features of international business assignment (Kawai and Mohr, 2015), the research-based adjustment framework of Chinese business expatriate also highlights the international work attributes.

Black et al.'s (1991) international adjustment framework (chapter 2.6.1), which has dominated expatriation research for the past 30 years (Kraimer 2016), divides the international adjustment process into two key stages: anticipatory adjustment and in-country adjustment, with more attention on the adjustment occurs after expatriates' arrival as the unfamiliar environment disrupts their old practices and brings psychological uncertainty and anxiety. Similar to Black et al. (1991), Aycan's (1997) conceptual model of expatriate adjustment (2.6.2)

divide the expatriation into pre-departure period and post-arrival period. This study supports this two-stage description and divides the adjustment process into before-expatriation stage and while-expatriation stage.

In terms of dimensions of expatriate adjustment, Black et al. (1991) divide adjustment into work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment. Aycan (1997) divided adjustment into work adjustment and general adjustment (including socio-cultural adjustment and psychological adjustment). Haslberger et al.'s (2013) revised and extended framework of international adjustment (chapter 2.6.4) divides it into work adjustment and non-work adjustment, with more attention on work in terms of adjustment outcomes.

Similar to the above theories, this study highlights expatriates' adjustment in work as well as a wide range of aspects outside the work. One difference is that this study does not divide expatriate adjustment into several dimensions as in the above studies, instead, the specific elements related to adjustment in work, life and psychology are embedded into the four main themes: expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and adjustment strategies.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, the framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates is developed and explained. It mainly consists of four major themes, expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and expatriation adjustment strategies, and they are discussed and explained as four major influencing factors and their relationships are then discussed which also serves to present a general process of adjustment. The connection between the research-based framework and the existing research is also discussed through literature comparison. All these discussion and comparison serve to answer the research questions and provide a new perspective to

understand the phenomenon, which lead to the achievement of its original aims and objectives. The next chapter will conclude the thesis with a presentation of the conclusions.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief review of the main research outcomes and discusses the achievement of the research objectives. Then, it evaluates the contribution of this research from both theoretical and practical aspects, and the implication of this study to expatriation practices is highlighted. The limitations of this study are also discussed and then a reflection on this research is presented in the end of this chapter.

6.2 Main outcomes and achievement of the research objectives

This section will briefly summarise the research outcomes from the analysis of grounded data. It will also briefly explain how these outcomes answer the research questions and whether the research objectives have been achieved.

6.2.1 Main outcome 1: Factors influencing the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates

This research has identified four major themes influencing the adjustment: expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and adjustment strategies (chapter 4). Expatriation reasons is the sum of the expatriation driver of Chinese business expatriates, which reflects the influence of different stakeholders on the process of expatriation, mainly including the following factors: personal factors (chapter 4.2.1), organisational factors (chapter 4.2.2), family factors (chapter 4.2.3), country level factors (chapter 4.2.4), peer factors (chapter 4.2.5) and internet factors (chapter 4.2.6). Expatriation difficulties refer to all difficulties faced by expatriates during their stay in the host country, including work difficulties (chapter 4.3.1), life difficulties (chapter 4.3.2), psychological difficulties (chapter 4.3.3) and general difficulties (chapter 4.3.4). It brings great pressure to expatriates, continuously hinder the successful adjustment of expatriates. Expatriation supporting

resources refer to resources that can help expatriates overcome those expatriation difficulties. There are six main sources of support, namely, the expatriate himself/herself (chapter 4.4.1), Chinese circle (chapter 4.4.2), organisation (chapter 4.4.3), host country (chapter 4.4.4), family (chapter 4.4.5) and home country (chapter 4.4.6), which promote expatriate adjustment from different aspects and in different degrees. Adjustment strategies refer to a set of principles that guide the actions of expatriates according to their own abilities and available supporting resources in the face of expatriation difficulties. Four main strategies have been identified, namely, respect and harmony (chapter 4.5.1), work orientation (chapter 4.5.2), safe space (chapter 4.5.3), and long-term orientation (chapter 4.5.4). Through those general strategies, expatriates find a way to adjust at least to a minimum degree.

6.2.2 Main outcome 2: The framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates

The second main outcome is the construction of the research-based framework of adjustment of Chinese business expatriates (figure 5.1), which is discussed in detail in chapter 5.2. The framework is mainly composed of four major themes (expatriation reasons, expatriation difficulties, expatriation supporting resources and adjustment strategies). It shows the chronological order of the four themes and the relationship between them.

In short, multi-stakeholder-influenced expatriation reasons belongs to the pre-departure stage of the expatriation period and it has a lasting impact on the other three aspects. It leads to the subsequent cross-cultural contact that causes expatriation difficulties which bring great pressure to expatriates. Then expatriates use and seek supporting resources to support themselves and then adopt adjustment strategies with Chinese cultural characteristics so as to overcome some difficulties and meantime ignore some, and finally achieve a certain degree of adjustment.

The new framework developed in this study is deeply rooted in the Chinese context and integrates the multi-stakeholder perspective, stress-coping perspective, and international expatriation perspective from cross-cultural adjustment research. It reflects the unique process and style of cross-cultural adjustment experienced by Chinese expatriates. This framework emphasizes the importance of context, particularly understanding cultural differences, in grasping expatriate adjustment. This also supports the significance of this study in aiding the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates and enriching and advancing cross-cultural adjustment research.

6.2.3 Main outcome 3: Relevant recommendations for the supporting of expatriation practice

The third main outcome of this study is a series of recommendations for the supporting of Chinese expatriates based on the fieldwork and new framework. The study finds that organizational support is critical for expatriate adjustment. Though current organizational support facilitates expatriate adjustment, organizations need to do more to support expatriates. This study proposes three key recommendations for enhancing expatriation practice.

Firstly, organizations should highlight and optimize the role of favorable policies. There is a pressing need for robust policy formulation to ensure the expatriation process is successful. Providing competitive income packages and developing flexible and sustainable pay policies is conducive to maintaining the attractiveness of expatriation income and encouraging expatriates to adjust overseas more effectively. In addition, organizations should establish clear connections between overseas experience and career development within the organization to provide expatriates with a sense of certainty about their career progression. Secondly, organizations should enhance work support for expatriates by improving their ability to work across cultures, strengthening support systems, and mitigating work-related

challenges. Clear articulation of related policies, possibly covering all the stages of expatriation, such as a whole-process-training-system, will help set expectations and provide a roadmap for expatriates and thereby reducing work anxiety and improving work performance. Thirdly, organizations should enhance life and emotion support for expatriates. Policies must meet the emotional needs of expatriates, which includes providing sufficient and effective in-country life support and taking measures to help expatriates with their family conflicts. These recommendations underscore the necessity of a holistic approach to expatriate support, integrating organization favorable policies, work-related support, and personal well-being measures to create a more supportive and effective expatriation environment.

6.3 Theoretical contribution

Since the vast majority of research of expatriate adjustment is western-specific, and almost all theories and models in this field are developed from western perspective and naturally lack a consideration of non-western situational factors, this study focuses on the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates using grounded theory. Based on the grounded data, the cross-cultural adjustment process of Chinese business expatriates has been analyzed and a Chinese-specific adjustment framework has been developed. The research-based framework represents a new perspective describing the adjustment process of Chinese business expatriates by showing four major themes influencing adjustment. In addition, each theme contains a series of subthemes, all of which reflect the influence of Chinese context on the adjustment process. The new framework can also be considered as an enhancement of existing cross-cultural adjustment research in the field of PSA and IB (see more in chapter 5.3 and chapter 2), as the findings of this study support existing adjustment research to some extent while further enriching the field.

This study integrates several important existing theoretical perspectives and forms a China-specific and expatriate-oriented framework which reflects multi-stakeholder, stress-coping and international adjustment perspective (see more in chapter 5.3). It makes a significant contribution by generating new knowledge in a previously overlooked context and reflects a unique adjustment style in the Chinese context. For example, unlike previous expatriate-centered research, it emphasizes the importance of an innovative multi-stakeholder perspective in understanding expatriate adjustment. Given that Confucian culture emphasizes collective responsibility and harmony (Warner, 2013), the adjustment process of Chinese business expatriates involves more stakeholders who value the contributions to all parties involved. This study identifies a broader range of possible stakeholders, including individuals, organizations, families, friends, nations (both home and host countries), and host country residents. These stakeholders not only influence the decision to relocate (reasons for expatriation) but also signify more sources of stress (expatriation challenges) and support (support resources), affecting their coping strategies in the face of difficulties (adjustment strategies).

While presenting four major themes illustrating the influencing factors and representing the adjustment process, the study also captures the concrete aspects of these abstract themes through grounded theory research. For example, in terms of expatriation difficulties (chapter 4.3) and adjustment strategies (chapter 4.5), it identifies specific difficulties typically encountered by Chinese business expatriates and the particular adjustment strategies they commonly adopt, highlighting the impact of the Chinese context on expatriates. This contributes to a better understanding of Chinese expatriate adjustment on both abstract and concrete levels.

The study specifies stakeholders and motivations for expatriation in detail and comprehensively describes and summarizes the unique experiences and choices of Chinese expatriates in their specific cultural and business

environments. The theme expatriation reasons reflects numerous factors influencing expatriation decisions from a multi-stakeholder perspective, enriching and updating the motives for expatriation in the existing literature. It deeply explores the difficulties and challenges faced by Chinese business expatriates, identifying a range of unique difficulties they encounter. It also identifies various sources of supports that facilitate expatriate adjustment to different extents from different aspects. The degree to which expatriates possess these resources also influences their adjustment strategies. Among all supporting resources, in-group support is the most crucial for Chinese expatriates. It helps expatriates adjust but also limits their potential to some extent. For example, support from Chinese circle and their organizations influences the adjustment strategy of creating a “safe space” (chapter 4.5.3) and restricts better integration into the local community. Unlike existing classifications of adjustment strategies (e.g., Berry, 2005; Ward, 2001), this study also discovers more China-specific general strategies by Chinese business expatriates. Four strategies, namely respect and harmony (chapter 4.5.1), work orientation (chapter 4.5.2), safe space (chapter 4.5.3), and long-term orientation (chapter 4.5.4), strongly reflects the influence of Confucian values on expatriates. An interesting finding is that expatriates adopt a pragmatic strategy, focusing on solving some issues while avoiding and enduring others, rather than pursuing the ideal optimal strategies suggested by existing adjustment theories.

In summary, the findings of this study partially support existing research on expatriate adjustment while uniquely presenting the influencing factors and adjustment process of expatriate adjustment in the Chinese context. This constitutes an innovation and development in the field of cross-cultural adjustment research, representing a creation of new knowledge and further enriching this area of study.

6.4 Practical implications and recommendations

6.4.1 Practical implications

This study delves into the experiences of Chinese expatriates, providing a detailed picture of the actual adjustment process, which undoubtedly aids overseas organizations and expatriates in better understanding the adjustment process. The proposed framework offers valuable references for HR managers and expatriates, guiding them on how to recognize and address expatriate adjustment issues. This clearly brings practical benefits to both organizations and expatriates, offering a competitive advantage.

Firstly, this study helps to enhance the understanding of expatriate adjustment. It reveals the unique challenges faced by Chinese expatriates and the strategies they employ. Understanding these factors is crucial for Chinese multinational companies as it enables them to develop more customized support systems tailored to the specific needs of their expatriates. By recognizing the unique cultural and contextual factors affecting Chinese expatriates, organizations can implement more effective policies and practices, facilitating smoother transitions and better adjustment. Secondly, the proposed framework offers extensive guidance for HR managers, assisting them in designing and implementing policies that cater to both the professional needs and the personal and emotional needs of expatriates. It emphasizes the critical importance of organizational support in terms of income, career development, and overall well-being for successful expatriation, ensuring a holistic approach to managing expatriates. Thirdly, this study inspires companies to engage in strategic expatriate management to gain a competitive advantage. The findings highlight the necessity of sound policy formulation and clear articulation of company expatriation policies. By emphasizing the development of detailed policies covering all stages of expatriation, it helps set reasonable expectations and provides a roadmap for expatriates, thereby reducing uncertainty and stress. This clarity is vital for ensuring expatriates feel

supported and valued, enhancing their commitment and performance, and consequently, enhancing the global competitiveness of organizations.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are crucial for organizations and expatriates as they offer a detailed and nuanced understanding of expatriate adjustment. By referring to the comprehensive framework and implementing the proposed recommendations, organizations can better support their expatriates, leading to more successful international assignments and stronger competitiveness in the global market.

6.4.2 Recommendations for expatriate management

Though in the previous parts this thesis describes and constructs an expatriate adjustment model from the perspective of the expatriates, this study is obviously highly relevant and of great practical significance for organisations. The vital role of organisational support on the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates has been supported. On the one hand, it greatly facilitates expatriates' adjustment and contributes to the eventual completion of the international assignment. On the other hand, the perceived lack of organisational support by expatriates hinders them from adjusting better and thus increases the risk of failed expatriation. Therefore, there is a practical need for organisations to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the organisation's role in expatriate adjustment and to take targeted measures to help expatriates under extraordinary pressure of adjustment.

6.4.2.1 Highlighting and optimizing the role of organisation's favorable policies

As stated in previous parts, organisational favorable policies (chapter 4.4.3.1) provided for expatriates in terms of income and career development play a powerful role in promoting the decision-making of expatriates and their adjustment in the host country, especially given the fact that most Chinese expatriates are sent without their families and to developing countries and regions with poor working and living conditions.

Pursuing a higher income is the most common reason for international assignments. A less competitive pay may lead the expatriate to return early or move to another role. In terms of the expatriates' pursuit of career development and promotion, the research has shown that the organisations are not giving enough consideration to this. Expatriates may end their assignments ahead of schedule because of concerns about their career development and their organisations seem to have no better ways to deal with it.

Therefore, organisations should pay more attention to the impact of such policies and take measures to actively optimise their existing favorable policies. In most cases organisations are unable to fully meet the needs of expatriates, whether it is a very competitive salary or an attractive incoming promotion. Then it becomes more important for organisations to develop an ideal mix of favorable policies that satisfy employees as much as possible.

In terms of income, the organisation should firstly provide competitive income package to expatriates so as to more directly and efficiently encourage expatriates to adjust overseas. Secondly, organisations should develop more flexible and sustainable pay policies, rather than a static one, to deal with situations when expatriation income loses its attractiveness as the time spent abroad lengthens. To address career development concerns, the organisation should develop explicit regulations making a clear connection between expatriates' oversea experience and their career development within the organisation. This would help expatriates gain a sense certainty about their career develop and promotion rather than relying their hopes on leader's verbal promise or some unwritten rules.

6.4.2.2 Enhancing work support for expatriates

6.4.2.2.1 Improving expatriates' ability to work across cultures

This study reveals that for many Chinese organisations there is a relatively casual attitude in the selection of their expatriate candidates and there is little

attention to the training of expatriates to work across cultures. This may be partly because most of those organisations are still in the early stage of internationalisation and lack of experience and resources in international human resources management. The study indicates that those organisations have a role in helping develop expatriates' ability to work across cultures.

First of all, in the selection part, organisations should take expatriates' proactiveness for their international assignments into consideration, as the study indicates that expatriates with low proactiveness are more likely to experience expatriation failure. Secondly, organisations should develop a whole-process-training-system to support expatriates and their adjustment rather than to have an inappropriate expectation that expatriates will handle the rest by themselves. Some targeted cross-cultural training before departure, including general knowledge such as overseas precautions and cross-cultural communication skills, as well as business training to help employees get a preliminary understanding of overseas work, will help employees establish good anticipatory adjustment. During the in-country stage, organisations should also arrange various forms of learning activities, such as mentoring, business training, cross-cultural learning and experience sharing, to help employees better adapt to work and life overseas and further enhance their cross-cultural working ability, thus contributing to their career development in a more comprehensive manner.

6.4.2.2.2 Enhancing support systems and mitigating work challenges

There are some prominent problems in international assignment. Long working hours, high work pressure and serious work-life imbalance have a lasting negative impact on the adjustment of expatriates. Organisations need to help employees solve their work difficulties and demands in time. It is important to reduce front-line attrition by optimizing the organisational system and workflow and find ways to improve serious work-life imbalance. There was also evidence from the research that organisation should be more agile in decision

making and give proper discretion to their expatriates. The above work-related support will help expatriates better carry out their work, improve their job performance and facilitate work adjustment.

6.4.2.3 Enhancing life and emotion support for expatriates

The study finds that insufficient emotional support by organisations is a common problem faced by expatriates. Under the guidance of the “work-oriented” principle, organisations and expatriates themselves put their emotional needs in a much less important position. Expatriates have to endure many difficulties such as life inconveniences (chapter 4.3.2.1), work-life imbalance (chapter 4.3.2.2) and serious family conflicts (chapter 4.3.2.3). In addition, the problem of loneliness caused by expatriation without their families and work-life imbalance was highlighted. Therefore, the followed suggestions are provided for organisations to deal with these challenges.

6.4.2.3.1 Providing sufficient and effective in-country life support

The study finds that in-country life support provided by the organisation, such as home-country food, accommodation, travel and some other life arrangements, greatly promoted expatriate adjustment. Therefore, organisations should consider how to provide a strong life support because of the direct and efficient role in expatriate support.

Another point is to highlight the role of life support from expatriate colleagues, as this study finds that expatriate colleagues have become one of the most important supporting resources for expatriate adjustment because they have the same cultural background and similar work and life experiences. The indication is that organisations should make more efforts in developing a corporate cultural of friendship and mutual assistance through a variety of activities, such as moral encouragement and various entertaining activities, thus, highlighting the role of emotion and life support from expatriate colleagues in expatriate adjustment.

6.4.2.3.2 Taking measures to help expatriates with their family conflicts

As Chinese expatriates are usually sent without their families for a long time, which leads to various family conflicts, which brings continuous pressure on expatriates' adjustment. Therefore, it is of positive significance for organisations to take necessary measures to help expatriates alleviate their possible family conflicts. In addition to the favorable policies mentioned above which bring direct and lasting benefits to employees and their families, the organisation should bring expatriates' family members into expatriation management and win more support from them. Possible methods may include and should not be limited to the following:

- To encourage and provide enough support to expatriates travelling with their families.

- To develop a more thoughtful and reasonable vacation plan and family visiting plan. The welfare of leave should take into account the time in the host country (e.g., expatriates can return home on vacation once half a year). Meanwhile, organisations should have a considerate family visiting plan which may include reimbursement of air tickets and favorable life support.

- To do more to take care of expatriates' families in the home country. For example, in important Chinese festivals, such as Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival symbolizing family reunion, if possible, organisations pay a warm visit, provide allowance and gifts, and provide some life assistance to the families of those sent far away.

6.5 Limitations of the research

6.4.1 Single information source

One of the research limitations is the single source of information. This study only interviewed expatriates, and the data obtained were only based on expatriates' self-evaluation, which cannot be further confirmed by data from other stakeholders, such as organisation executives, expatriate colleagues, host country nationals. For example, most expatriates interviewed generally

claim that they had a harmonious relationship with local customers and local employees. Considering the time and energy constraints of conducting this doctoral research and the great difficulty of obtaining stakeholder samples associated with expatriates especially in the long period of Covid restrictions, this study took some other measures to compensate for the problem of a single data source, such as managing to develop a good interview relationship with the participant, starting slowly with some broad questions, trying not to miss information that might be crucial as much as possible, and then taking advantage of the grounded theory approach to get more comprehensive data. To address this limitation, future research should incorporate multiple sources of information by including perspectives from various stakeholders such as organizational executives, expatriate colleagues, and host country nationals. This can provide a more holistic and validated view of the expatriate experience. Utilizing mixed-methods approaches or triangulation can also help in cross-verifying the data and enhancing the robustness of the findings.

6.4.2 Sampling issue

The interview sample failed to include extreme cases. According to the sampling strategy, the researcher issued invitations and potential participants voluntarily chose to participate or not. Those who are very dissatisfied with their work and life abroad or who suffer from very severe work-life conflicts may not respond to research invitation. Therefore, the sample may not include extreme cases, such as expatriates with extremely poor mental health and an overall predominantly negative evaluation of the expatriate experience. This has the potential to influence the research results. While this is an important consideration, there is little can be done to it, and it must be acknowledged that this is a drawback of social research involving active participation.

Future studies should aim to include a broader range of participants, including those who might be experiencing extreme dissatisfaction or severe work-life

conflicts. Strategies such as targeted sampling, anonymous surveys, or incentivizing participation might help in capturing a wider array of experiences. Longitudinal studies could also provide insights into how expatriate experiences evolve over time, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the adjustment process.

6.6 Research reflection

As I reflect on my research process, I recall my research journey as the most challenging yet rewarding experience in my life which is filled with moments of frustration, hard work, progress, and joy. I am still struck by the complexity and depth of the work, as well as the many lessons I have learned along the way.

My research experience with my two supervisors is proved to be invaluable to me, not only academically but also cognitively. Their guidance and instructions have pushed me to think deeply and critically about my research and to ensure that my research is conducted in an ethical and responsible manner. Their support and encouragement have motivated me to persist through the difficult moments and to remain focused on my research goals.

I am glad that I had expatriate adjustment as my research topic at the very beginning of the study which fits well with my background and my interests. That proves to be extremely important for my subsequent long research process as that interest and responsibility drive me to constantly overcome various challenges and problems along the way and keep moving forward. I find it important managing to think and work alone, but it's also critical to share and develop ideas with others. In my experience, the keys to completing a qualitative study like this are careful planning, responsible research practices, persistence, hard work, good time management, and inspiration.

One rewarding aspect of my research journey worth mentioning is the opportunity to engage in ethical considerations. I was aware of the need to consider ethical issues throughout the research process, and I took great care

to ensure that these considerations were addressed throughout the research process. This not only serves for the compliance with the university regulations but also serves as a practical class on how to better respect people from different cultures and helped me improve my understanding of diversity and inclusion. I also learned that research is a collaborative process that requires the support and input of many individuals, including participants, stakeholders, and colleagues. Through this process, I have gained a deep appreciation for the value of research and the many challenges and rewards that come with it. Although the formation of my thesis has been a slow and sometimes frustrating process, I can still say that I have really enjoyed my research journey. It has helped me to grow as a researcher and to develop a deeper understanding of the research area — adjustment of Chinese expatriate. I am happy that I can help people get to know the Chinese expatriate community better and am excited to explore this area further in the future and to work towards greater mutual understanding between different cultural groups.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

This information sheet was translated into the local language for the actual interviews.

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title

Understanding the Adjustment of Chinese Business Expatriates: A Grounded Theory Study

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the factors that influence the adjustment of Chinese business expatriates and construct a framework of expatriate adjustment.

Invitation

Hi, my name is Jiajun Hong. I am doing a doctoral research at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. In fulfilment of this degree, I would like to conduct interviews with a group of Chinese business expatriates. You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study ***Understanding the Adjustment of Chinese Business Expatriates: A Grounded Theory Study***. This research is under the auspices of UWTSD.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why your help matters?

You have been chosen because you got rich expatriation experiences and we would like to hear your story. Your kind participation will definitely help us gain a better understanding of Chinese expatriates and their adjustment and improve the efficiency of both expatriates and organisations they work for. I am interested in hearing the story of your experience of being an expatriate.

What will you have to do and how long will it take?

You will have to answer some questions, including necessary demographic questions. The interview will last about 50 minutes. It will cover both your thoughts about your personal experience and your insights being an expatriate.

In a face-to-face interview, you will be provided the information sheet and a consent form. The researcher will ensure that you understand the ethical issues relating to the research and your consent to participate. In an online interview, the electronic version of information sheet and consent form will be sent to you beforehand. Then a question

asking for your consent to take part in the research will be made. When you provide positive answer which will act as a consent, the interview will then be an informal exploration of your experience and I look forward to hearing it.

If possible, a second interview may be conducted only when the researcher gains your permission. I will be appreciated if you want to share voluntarily with me your view and experience after the interview.

What will happen to the information collected?

The personal information will be conducted anonymously. All data will be stored on the University cloud — One Drive and the researcher’s personal laptop protected by passwords—which will not be shared. Only the researcher and his supervisors have access to the data generated by the research activity. The information collected will be used by the researcher to write a research report for the credit of doctoral degree. It is possible that a doctoral thesis, articles, and presentations may be the outcome of the research.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the survey, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the interview before completion.
- Ask any further questions via email about the interview that occurs to you during your participation.
- Be given access to a summary of report findings when it is concluded.

Who’s responsible?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Researcher	Supervisor	Lead Supervisor
Jiajun Hong	Doctor Caroline Jawad	Pro. Annette Fillery-Travis
1806581@student.uwtsd.ac.uk	caroline.jawad@uwtsd.ac.uk	a.fillery-travis@uwtsd.ac.uk

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

This consent form was translated into the local language for the actual interviews.



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: An Enquiry into Adjustment of Chinese Expatriates

Name and contact details of researcher:

Name: JIAJUN HONG

Email: 1806581@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Please tick box if you agree with the statement.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
3. I agree to take part in this study.
4. I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.
5. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
6. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects.
7. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.

Name of participant: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix C: Participant General Characteristics

Participant Code	Gender	Qualification	Age Group	Position	Host Country	Duration	Marital Status	Children	Bring Families
P1	Male	Bachelor	35-40	General Manager	Myanmar	3 years	Married	1	No
P2	Male	Bachelor	31-35	Manager	Zambia	3 years	Single	0	No
P3	Male	Bachelor	30-35	Sales Manager	UAE	10 years	Single	0	No
P4	Female	Master	26-30	Designer	UK	2 years	Single	0	No
P5	Male	Bachelor	36-40	Manager of Latin American Region	Mexico	More than 10 years	Married	2	No
P6	Male	Bachelor	31-35	Sales Manager	Cuba	5 years	Married	1	No
P7	Female	Bachelor	26-30	Manager	Morocco	3 years	Single	0	No
P8	Male	Bachelor	31-35	Director of Finance Department	Saudi Arabia	8 years	Married	1	No
P9	Female	Bachelor	21-25	Translator	The Democratic Republic of the Congo	3 years	Single	0	No
P10	Female	Bachelor	21-25	Sales	Qatar	2 years	Single	0	No
P11	Male	Bachelor	26-30	Sales Manager	Colombia	7 years	Single	0	No

Appendix D: Sample of interview questions

These questions were translated into Chinese for the actual interviews.

Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you become an expatriate?2. What did you do to prepare for the international assignment?3. What arrangements did the organisation make before leave?4. What surprise you when you were in that country?5. What image would you prefer to present in that country?6. What did you do in your spare time?7. What did you enjoy about working in that country?8. What make you feel uncomfortable in that country?9. How did you deal with it?10. Can you recall the most difficult and challenging situation?11. How did you respond to it?12. What differences did you sense after returning home compared with before going abroad?13. Have you ever thought about giving up, quitting or job hopping?14. Which aspect do you think needed to be worked on to achieve better adjustment?15. In retrospect, how do you evaluate this experience?16. Do you think whether you will accept another international assignment?

Appendix E: Sample of memo

The following is a sample of a case-based memo which is consisted of several small memos.

Memo 1: General view on the interview process

Before the first interview of this study, I was full of anxiety and expectation. It's not only because I have little experience with in-depth interviews, but also because I'm worried that I don't have enough control over the interview process, so I can't get the desired information. So for the first participant, I decided to start with a "closer" candidate. First, it can ease the tension in the interview process and better conduct the interview. Second, if the first interview information collection is not in place, you can go back to carry out the second interview. Therefore, I chose a candidate recommended by my good friend, who is also a younger alumnus. We soon reached an agreement on the time and place of the interview.

The first interview was held on December 5, 2020, in a classroom of the No. 2 teaching building in the old campus of our alma mater – A Normal University. It was a fine day. The sun came in from the window, and the light and shadow were shining on the desk and the platform. Outside the window was one of the landmarks of the normal university in the student age - Red Square and the auditorium, which quickly brought people back to the student age. The participant and I were relaxed, exchanged greetings, and started the interview. The whole interview lasted 50 minutes, and the process was easy and natural. Because I forgot to bring water to the interview site, the participant was thirsty because he spoke a lot.

Because the interview is conducted on the spot, there are no technical problems with online interviews and information transmission issues. Because the interview was recorded, I was able to put my energy into listening and interviewing, which also made the interview process smoother. It can be said that the participant also has a good interview experience and may be more easily aware of the participant's ability and self-confidence, which in turn further promotes the interview. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the recording and did not miss any important information.

Participant 1 is a very good participant, with strong language ability, rich expatriate experience and learning ability, good at summarizing, and he answered questions actively. He gave a lot of useful information. I think I gained a lot from the first interview. But to be honest, there are also some regrets. I tried to comfort myself that the operation procedure of grounded theory will help to make up for these regrets, and this is only the first interview. I can think that some shortcomings are acceptable.

Due to my lack of interview experience, I interrupted the participants out of curiosity or conducted some inappropriate questioning during the interview, which blocked the information flow. Another problem associated with interviewing acquaintances is that the participant mainly talked about some positive feedback and rarely mentioned negative events or emotions. When

asked about “sharing a difficult and challenging experience,” participants chose to avoid the question. Because they are alumni and have common friends, the participant will instinctively show his image of “doing well” and avoid painful or tragic experiences. I think there are some reasons resulting to that situation. First, because of the lack of interview skills, some questions are too direct, not euphemistic, directly leading to the other party choosing to avoid the problem. In addition, due to the lack of psychological preparation for the failure of such problems in the first interview, the communication before the interview is insufficient in self-exposure and brings empathy for the pressure and difficulties in work. Second, because of the distance from the participant, although it brings a positive side, such as smooth communication, at the same time, I am also wondering if participant 1 is a stranger to me, would I explore some issues more deeply?

Memo 2: Possible codes and directions for further study

1. Expatriate intention — active/passive

When the expatriate process starts, in fact, whether the expatriate candidate actively chooses or passively accepts to perform overseas missions, the living environment of the expatriate candidate has already begun to change. The adjustment process begins.

Participant 1 mentioned his initiative in the process. Although he worried about some family factors, such as children and husband-wife relationship, he still takes the initiative to apply for the assignment, considering his previous international experience, the pursuit of bigger platforms and more challenges and opportunities, the organisational support of the company in expatriate work, such as the promotion and remuneration policy, as well as the comprehensive understanding of the host country, such as medical and health care and economic conditions. In case of the need of the organisation. Unlike being assigned by the company, participant 1 is obviously on the active side of the continuum. In addition, it is natural to think that there are those who choose to send abroad actively, and there are those who choose to send abroad relatively passively. But this need to be confirmed in future interviews.

What I want to make clear here is that the expatriate’s consideration includes the motivation for expatriation and some other concerns mentioned in this interview. Many factors have been shown to have a clear effect on adjustment. What is the specific relationship between expatriate adjustment and the active/passive dimension of expatriate consideration? It is reasonable to speculate that the initiative of expatriates will help to adapt, however, this is not the focus of this study.

2. Expatriate selection

The participant mentioned that his process of becoming an expatriate was mainly based on three stages: “individual application”, “organisation selection”, and “leader’s consideration”, which makes the concept of “expatriate selection” appear (perhaps the English translation is not quite accurate). In my opinion, the words used by participant 1 are very concise and

powerful in generalization, which is attributed to the participant's personal language ability and summarization ability. Given that he comes from a state-owned company, his perspective is naturally that of an expatriate with an organised background. This raises a potential factor to consider in future interviews, which is to consider that there are some expatriates who are not attached to any organisation and take the risk of performing overseas missions independently. These are spontaneous expatriates (self-initiated). There are good reasons to believe that the motivations and adaptations of spontaneous expatriates are different from those of expatriates with organisational support.

3. Organisational support systems (formal and informal?)

(1) Myanmar market is a new market for the participant's company. Before he was sent to Myanmar, the company sent people to investigate the feasibility of the project and laid a foundation for the network construction. For example, it contacted the business office of the Chinese Embassy, some big local companies, and some other Chinese enterprises in the local market to establish some contacts and obtain some information. (2) the company gives preferential treatment to the employees "going out"; (3) The company has subsidiaries or offices in more than 30 foreign countries and will share and communicate with each other on how to develop a new overseas market. Based on the extensive experience of our predecessors, for example, some offices have been in their area for more than 20 years, sharing our experience on how to integrate and develop new business as quickly as possible. That can be very helpful for those of us who have just moved out. From the above three points, they are all participants' descriptions of the company's resources. Therefore, I summarise them as "organisational support system". Some of these are informal, such as the participant and colleagues in other stations of the company asking for advice on expatriate experience, and some are formal, such as the company's policy support, which gives certain preferential policies to expatriates. Therefore, I do not attribute it directly to "organisational support," a more common term. I use the term "organisational support system" in order to include all the factors that are formal and informal, obvious and hidden.

Is there any training before departure? There is no mention of pre-departure training, but in common sense, training is clearly a known and proven way to help with adaptation. One idea is that perhaps some Chinese companies provide training when they send their employees abroad, but the form and content of the training will vary. Such as culture training? Training in professional competence? Safety in production? Health? Intercultural communication? Or comprehensive training?

It should be noted that organisational support is also involved in the topic of "Expatriate's consideration." However, it is necessary to list "organisational support system" separately. The first reason is that although the expatriates take into account the factors of organisational support when they decide to be sent abroad, it only plays a part in the role in "expatriate's consideration" which works in the pre-departure phase. After departure, expatriation involves

specific work and long-term adjustment to the new environment, and the role of organisation support has room to function all along the way.

4. Concept of expatriation success

Participant 1 mentioned the starting point of the action in the host country and the understanding of the success of the overseas assignment, and the gains of the overseas assignment. In my opinion, all of them are the manifestation of different perspectives on what is the success of the overseas assignment (this can be compared with the existing concept of the success of the overseas assignment). Therefore, I categorise it as “concept of expatriation success”. Participants mentioned a few key points: “Show professionalism”; “Create local value”; “Get the project” (get the project, means to create value for the enterprise, which also means the enterprise’s reward to the individual); “Self-development”; “country image”. (The point of “getting projects” which belongs to the “concept of success” may be adjusted to “creating value”, which can be divided into “enterprise”, “local” and “individual”.) Although all these concepts seem to be nothing new, except that the concept of “national image” seems to send a different message. It might be worth digging a little deeper into this point to highlight some cultural peculiarities of Chinese expatriates. In addition, how do these points rank in importance? How much do they account for? Do you need to consider it? I don’t think that’s the task of this study. Because this study mainly discusses the factors influencing the adaptation of Chinese expatriates, it is not necessary to explore the specific proportion. The empirical work can be left to the later quantitative research.

5. Organisational loyalty — turnover intention?

When talking about whether they have turnover intention, the participant expressed in a very positive tone that they would not consider this point. First, he mentioned the specific conditions in which a person enters middle age, and the word “life stage” came to my mind. Considering the middle-aged people in the “have to support old and young” stage, anti-risk ability and willingness have declined unless there is a clearly better opportunity, otherwise, they will not easily consider resigning. Second, he mentioned “long stays and deep feelings in the unit”. This is a common expression in the context of Chinese organisational culture over the past few decades. The word “unit” is a word with special feelings for Chinese people. In the past, due to the nature of enterprises, the unit was a lifelong affiliation of an employee. With the deepening of reform and opening up and the rapid evolution of China’s business culture, the meaning of the word “unit” has changed a lot. But because there are still huge government units, agencies, and state-owned enterprises, the word “unit” still has its life. Thirdly, in the interview, he mentioned that the company had “not bad conditions in all aspects”, which revealed a kind of recognition of the company’s status. For example, in the face of economic uncertainty, it is “certain” that state support for enterprises is a priority. This idea is very close to the concept of “employer brand,” which I would use. In addition, he seems happy with his salary and the company’s incentive policy.

In summing up this topic, the words “turnover intention”, “organisational loyalty” and “psychological contract” come to mind. Considering Chinese people’s traditional culture and word usage habits, it seems that people are more willing to use the term “organisational loyalty”. Because only the existence of organisational loyalty can produce a psychological contract. It also affects turnover intention. Due to the political system and the collectivist society, people have a high degree of identification with organisations. They work all their lives in a unit, which is the rice bowl, the social relationship, and closely related to face and social relationship, so organisational loyalty is common, and its influence is still lasting.

6. Expectation

Generally speaking, expatriates arrive in the host country with certain expectations. Black also mentions pre-assignment expectations in his classic expatriate adjustment model. According to the person-environment matching theory, it is reasonable to believe that if the individual’s expectation is inconsistent with the specific environment, or even a significant deviation, it will have an impact on the adaptation of the expatriate (the grounded theory requires that it be kept out of the existing theory?). In the interview, the participant first expressed disappointment that the project taken was not as many as expected. According to the above, it meant that the value created by the assignment was not high enough, no matter for the enterprise, the individual, or the local area. Therefore, “value creation”, one of the expected child nodes, came into my mind.

Second, the participants’ knowledge and understanding of the local area is not enough. I used the concept of “ expectations for the local “. Expectations of “landing one or two two-preferential projects” have come to nothing, as local interest in the two projects has not been as strong as he expected. This is where I get confused. So much so that the participant later said “to really understand the local needs”. In addition, local companies are competitive, which makes him feel real pressure to adjust and change his thinking more.

Third, participants mentioned that although the project offered by China is cost-effective, some people believe that the quality of developed countries, such as Japan, maybe better even though their offer is higher. Obviously, the participants thought this was an unfair assessment. So I use the term “fair evaluation” here. Of course, this point may just be the participant’s personal feelings or a biased idea, but it is impossible to verify right now. Given that this does affect the participants, although it is impossible to tell how much influence there is, it is reasonable to take it into account as a method of grounded theory.

Participants also mentioned the influence of national relationships on their local projects. Although on the whole, the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries is in a relatively stable state, it may fluctuate due to factors such as political path, territorial issues, economic interests, and world patterns. As a state-owned enterprise, it is understandable to be affected locally.

7. Environmental difference? Perceived difference?

When an expatriate arrives in a host country, the environment and culture may be greatly different from that of their home country. There is no doubt that causes some level of shock, whether it is surprise, appreciation or discomfort, or a specific difficulty in a specific job. In the interview, the participants mentioned the local people and religion and expressed positive comments on it. Environmental factors related to work, such as institutional differences, local unions, strikes, and the competitiveness of similar local enterprises. Obviously, the above factors can be summarised by the concept of cultural differences. In the interview, participants also mentioned specific objective environmental factors such as city appearance and local climate.

On this point, the first thing I thought of the concept of “cultural differences”, but given that “what is culture” is still unable to agree, and expatriates in the host country facing everything, hard and soft environment of culture, can be regarded as the background of the work life, so I use “environmental differences” to summarise the description of the participants in this respect. What is lacking is a description of the style and performance of local people at work. How the participants describe these behaviors and how they deal with them is not reflected in the interview. I should explore this in future interviews if in need. If I upgrade this into a “stimulus”, or a “stressor”, it may take more work and can easily fall into the conventional “stress-responding” theory.

8. Impact of environmental differences (positive/negative)

The impact of environmental differences on expatriates is self-evident. The participant said the difference made him think. This enables him to better understand cultural diversity and have more “inclusiveness”, and “world outlook is supplemented and improved”. It can be seen that this is the positive influence that difference brings to the participant. Differences bring him “personal growth”. At the same time, differences are bound to bring about negative effects. For example, the phenomena mentioned by the participant, such as “policies unimplemented”, unreasonable strikes by the labour union, and invalid function of government, reflect the pressure brought by the lack of a “business environment” and the lack of “government functions”.

9. Individual-specific practices (need to be further refined)

The participants kept a positive attitude when talking about how individuals cope with the new environment. He talked about the importance of mindset, “keep the passion” and “don’t give up easily”; Always “reflect and think”; “Listen and respect”, such as “overcome the big country mentality”, “truly understand the local needs” and “create local value”; The three points above are summed up as “personal qualities”.

We should conduct work in a methodical way, such as “understanding the local through multiple channels”, “innovating working ideas” and “taking full advantage of the platform”. Corresponding to the above “personal quality”, I summarise it as “professional development”.

At this point, the participants didn’t seem to mention any negative emotions or specific ways to

deal with bad situations. The participant also directly avoided the relevant questions. It is reasonable to suggest that the participant may have had a bad time, which he seems unwilling to mention. Perhaps because it's an acquaintance, bringing up negative moments hurts the face. So this is an area that needs to be explored.

10. Social Network

Participants rely on social networks to conduct their work and life in the host country. It can be found from the interviews that the participants experience local politics, economy, and culture in a very active way and immerse themselves in it through various channels. For example, the two social circles of the participants that emerged in the interview are the "Chinese circle" and the "official circle". There is a lot of overlap, of course. Through "official related activities" and "private activities" as the carrier, he connected himself and the company he worked for with "national institution - embassy business office", "local government and officials", "local enterprises", "brother enterprises", "local people" and "Chinese people in Myanmar". It is inferred from the experiences of participants that some expats, or at least some of them, do not take the initiative to adapt and integrate into the local. This is also a factor for future interviews in order to expand more dimensions.

11. After expatriation adjustment

Participants face readjustment problems when they return from their assignments. Participant 1 continued his consistent positive style, believing that returning to office caused no extra trouble for him. He mentioned the gap between Myanmar and China, and the comfort of moving from a backward place to a more developed one. Therefore, I believe that the "development gap" is one of the factors that affect the readjustment. Economic strength between home and host countries, as well as the move direction (from low to high or high to low), can affect the readjustment. The participant mentioned in the interview that he felt less comfortable when he returned to China from Japan ten years ago, which supports the idea.

Company support continues to play an important role in this segment. Participants mentioned support in terms of leave policy and promotion and remuneration policy. The leave policy keeps expatriates from being too far away and unfamiliar with their home countries, and the company support policy encourages expatriates to complete their tasks. Although the participant did not move up in rank after returning home and said the relationship between expatriate experience and promotion was there but weak, a matter more of luck. But I suspect that for many of the returnees who did not get any promotion or extra attention, corporate support means nothing more than blank words.

In addition, because Myanmar is in Southeast Asia, and China is its neighbour, the cultural distance is close. The participant also mentioned, for example, "the food is very similar to Yunnan." Obviously, "cultural distance" is an important factor.

Memo 3: Theory sampling: a few things to consider in the upcoming interviews

1. Participants:

(1) should be the Chinese business expatriates who have grown up in mainland China and has an inner link with the Chinese culture, not someone grown up in some other culture who may not be a real representative of the typical Chinese and Chinese expatriates and may be better or worse adapted to the assignment of expatriates because of their upbringing and experience and awareness of cultural differences.

(2) Naturally, participant 1 answered from the perspective of an expatriate with an organised background. This raises a potential factor to consider in future interviews, which is to consider that there are some expatriates who are not attached to any organisation and take the risk of performing overseas missions independently. These are self-initiated expatriates. There are good reasons to believe that their motivations and adjustment are different from those of expatriates with organisational support.

(3) It should be noted that participant 1 majored in Japanese in college. After graduation, he joined the company and was immediately sent to Japan to work for three years, so he accumulated certain overseas experience. There is reason to believe that his educational background and his first expatriation had a positive impact on his experience in Myanmar. In addition, he has worked in the company for a long time and accumulated certain work experience and contacts, which are of positive significance to his work in the second assignment. All these may have strengthened his adjustment in the assignment stage in Myanmar. Of course, it's just a thought in my head at the moment. Considering that the research objects of this study are expatriate managers who theoretically have relevant management experience in domestic companies, this may not be an element of theoretical sampling.

(4) In terms of "expatriate's consideration", there are dimensions of "active" and "passive". On the active and passive continuum, participant 1 is clearly on the rather active side. In addition, it is natural to think that there are those who choose to go abroad actively and those who go passively. But this needs to be confirmed in future interviews.

2. Cultural distance? As a part of the theoretical sampling, another issue I would like to consider is that participant 1 has been sent abroad for two long periods, but both of them are in Asian countries. One is Japan, a developed country, and the other is Myanmar, a Southeast Asian developing country, which is related to his university learning experience and major (Japanese). There is reason to believe that Chinese expatriates can adapt more easily to Asian countries where they are geographically and culturally close to each other than to countries on other continents where they are culturally distant from each other. Therefore, it is necessary to find a country outside the above-mentioned countries where they are sent, especially a country with a greater cultural distance. I look forward to the next participant who can provide a different and more nuanced perspective on the adjustment of Chinese expatriates.

3. The industry types of Chinese expatriates can play a role in the theoretical sampling to some extent, but since the interview work has just begun, it is still too early to consider this point, which is just the budding of an idea. Unless something more obvious and substantive comes up in a future interview, there will be no pressure on this point now.

Appendix F: A list of codes, subthemes and themes

Theme 1: Expatriation reasons				
Code examples	Quote examples	Higher level codes / Subthemes		
Career development	I think the overseas market has a great prospect and the career path is also bright. So, I applied for this job.	1.1 Personal factors		
Higher income	The main reason was that it might be easy to find a job inside China, but the overall income level was still relatively low.			
Horizon expansion	I was young at that time and wanted to go out to seek for some chances. It's nice to have a look at the outside world, isn't it? And add some life experience.			
Personality traits	Because I'm the kind of person who likes to try new things. I also like challenges. So I just can see this, that is, I feel curious about it. Yes, it just has some inside drive in it.			
Education background	The decision to work overseas is related to our major. We study French, which is a key major in our school. Many of the teachers have expatriation experience in Africa or studied in France. It may also be influenced by the teachers. Our major is more related to practice, like going to the Africa.			
Life phase	I was young at that time and wanted to go out to seek for some chances.			
Religious belief	One more point, I am a Christian, I feel that this religious belief in some extent has a powerful push for me. So, I tried to confirm again and again whether God wants me to try something new. That gave me a lot of confidence.			
Overseas development	First of all, the company needs you to go.			1.2 Organizational factors
Organisation selection	The company received a project abroad, and then needed to organise a group of management personnel to work there. Then the company released the information and at first was the application period. If no one signed up, the company may just take a tough approach, that is, designating some qualified employees. I was selected at that time.	1.2.1 Organisation needs		
Favorable policy	And in terms of promotion incentives, the company give priority to those who have worked overseas.	1.2.2 Organisation support		
In-country life support	We have many colleagues there and there are also many Chinese enterprises. Whether it's in North Africa with relatively better conditions, or in some other African			

	countries with worse conditions, the state-owned enterprises are more fully equipped and supported for life, and they are also equipped with security guards.		
Family economic condition	Expatriation indeed is about a process of loneliness. I have to say that it's anti-human... If it's not for the economic pressure, I certainly will not choose to go out.	1.3 Family factors	
Degree of family support	Some of my classmates had insisted on going out, but their families would not let them go. Finally, they gave in to their families and did not go out.		
Home country encouragement	One of our main businesses is overseas engineering contracting, as well as real estate development. Because we were mainly in Africa before, since General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, we began to expand into Southeast Asia.	1.4 Country-level factors	
Expatriation destination attraction	When we were still in school, Dubai's publicity in China, including its global publicity, was very good. When it comes to Dubai, people will think it is very rich. So, at that time I thought it would be good to come here for a better development.		
Friend encouragement / recommendation	During my last job when I worked in Hongkong, I built a good relationship with one of my clients. When I wanted to make a change, he asked me if I wanted to work here (in London), then he recommended me to this company.	1.5 Peer factors	
Group expatriation	I didn't think about it that much. Because at that time, I, and a few close colleagues, just like brothers, went out together.		
Online recruitment	I just looked for jobs online at some job searching site, and there I saw one and applied for the post. Then a remote interview and after that I got that job.	1.6 Internet factors	
Online communication	Video chat is also very convenient. That will help us feel better.		
Theme 2: Expatriation difficulties			
Work role change	After all, my job is to sell. But you are not selling products to Chinese people but to foreigners. You are not using Chinese but foreign language to sell.	2.1 Work Difficulties	
Insufficient organisational support	The situation is different for each company, and also the development stage. When the overseas market is developing fast, some of the company's system may not be able to keep up with our needs, then the work gets harder.		
Mismatched work pace	You always feel that local employees can't keep up with your work. And they are kind of one-track-minded. For example, we can do job B along the way while we are		

	doing job A. We can do both lines at the same time. They can't do this. They will go back to job B only after they finish job A. This is a waste of time and slow things down. In terms of efficiency, for example, we think this can be done very quickly, but it turns out they are very slow.	
Challenging working environment	The problem of corruption in Africa, that's what I can't stand... The government officials will put things off and that means you must give me something.	
Inconvenient life	There are various supplies in China, for example, abundant food. Because there are only few vegetables here in Africa, no more than five. Scarce food choice. We have to go to the capital to buy what we want or grow it ourselves. A lot of mutton and beef here, also the pork. But the pork is not as delicious as Chinese pork. Travelling is another problem. If we go to another city, that basically means hundreds of kilometers.	2.2 Life Difficulties
Work-life imbalance	There's no life there. Because there's no family there. Not much entertainment.	
Family conflict	My daughter is only three years old at that time. It is quite challenging facing the issues such as the impact on the relationship with my wife and who will look after my daughter while I am away.	
Loneliness	What are the real pain points? To endure loneliness. It is a must, then you will be a little better.	
Work stress	Our work is particularly demanding. We are an e-commerce company and we have a lot of requirements. For example, we have KPI and the pressure of sales performance every day.	2.3 Psychological Difficulties
Depression	There is nothing satisfactory. I am too tired with the job and don't have my own personal life. I am so depressed that I even had problems with my health at that time.	
Return dilemma	It's not that they don't want to come back to China. It's that they really can't adapt to China after working overseas for several years	
Psychological sensitivity	When I first went abroad, I was actually a little more sensitive. It's true that I'm not confident at that time.	
Safety problems	I think the primary issue of expatriation is security, isn't? If you go to some African countries, or even some western countries where guns are very popular at local, personal safety is the top concern.	2.4 General Difficulties
Interaction problems	Communication between people is very different from that in China. Language is just a tool. Sometimes it's not just a matter of language. You may not be able to understand the meaning behind that language.	

Religion influences	Religion has a lot of influences. Like, no alcohol, no pork. If you're out there drunk, that will be a trouble.		
Force majeure: pandemic	For example, I have a group of very good friends from the church, and we get together every weekend. But now it becomes online communication.		
Theme 3: Expatriation supporting resources			
Ren/Humanity	No matter your country is strong or not, you should treat foreigners the same. If you are strong, you should not bully others, right? You have to be consistent with people.	3.1.1 Positive personality traits	3.1 Personal resources
Perseverance	I think in terms of time, you are successful when you have completed the whole assignment period. You don't want to be a deserter. It is also a sense of responsibility that expatriates generally spend enough time on work."		
Confidence and openness	Those who are more open will be more active to communicate with local people, even if their language skills are not good. The more local contacts you have, the faster you adjust.		
Overseas experience	I have overseas study experience, so there is no problem with the new environment and language.	3.1.2 Personal cross-cultural resources	
Working language ability	In fact, the ability to communicate in this foreign language is the most basic.		
Expatriation colleagues	You fit into the expatriation group and get along with your colleagues. That's definitely a condition for your adjustment.	3.2 Chinese circle	
Local Chinese	We have a good relationship with a local Chinese restaurant and often eat there. Because the cook is a hometown fellow, the dish tastes quite right, especially in spiciness.		
Favorable policy	As long as individuals can get more projects, the company's incentives will be in place.	3.3.1 Favorable policy support	3.3 Organisation support
Administrative service	The company helps us deal with some documents needed to go abroad.	3.3.2 General work support	
Resource support	We usually involve the organisational resources in helping to solve difficult problems, like expert resources, leaders' resources... As we can't handle it only by a few dozen of us overseas.		
Learning support	The company arranged some online learning courses, for example, about the culture of that country, what to do to abide by local laws, and asked us to study by ourselves.		
In-country life support	The company backup is good, such as the accommodation and canteen. You don't have to worry about those things yourself, so you can focus and just get the job done.	3.3 Organisation support	

Emotional support	Our company reimburses three tickets a year for visiting relatives. Accommodation for visiting relatives will also be arranged accordingly.		
Host country residents	Before you go out, you might think that Muslims maybe radical, but they are not. The local people are nice, and we respect each other.	3.4 Host country support	
Host country attraction	The local ice cream and the Oreo cones are really good. I don't know why we don't have it in China.		
Family emotional support	When you start business in a strange country, you will inevitably encounter difficulties, setbacks and even slow progress. At this time, you will feel relieved by chatting with your family members and gaining their encouragement and understanding	3.5 Family support	
Family role support	With effective family support, the family issues will be less mentally distracting when working outside		
Direct country support	During the pandemic, it was difficult to vaccinate in the host country. Our government was helping us. It was supposed to be impossible if the country does not have this economic strength.	3.6 Home country support	
Indirect country support	As China becomes more and more powerful, people will think a little better of you as an individual Chinese. At least they don't look down on you that easily.		
Theme 4: Adjustment strategies			
Respecting the local	You should respect the local people, and the local culture, especially when dealing with the local employees and commercial agents.	4.1.1 Respecting the local	4.1 Respect and harmony
Presenting a friendly image	We donate money and materials to the local government, and we present blessings and gifts during the Muslim holidays.	4.1.2 Pursuing harmony	
Conflict avoidance	The company attaches great importance to the complaints from the local employees and hold meetings to discuss it. Generally, the company will satisfy them as much as possible when keeping the bottom line.		
Pursuing mutual benefits	You must put yourself in the local's shoes when you come to the local market. You must make your clients feel that you are of one mind.		
Compromised acceptance	Unlike the Chinese, when they do something wrong, they don't know it. They don't admit it. They don't correct it. They just follow their own temperament.		
Intense work involvement	We work from Monday to Friday, and the work is tiring. Then due to the time difference, we have meetings with our base. Generally speaking, the only real rest is on Saturday.		

Work-oriented social contact	I don't socialise with people who have nothing to do with my work.	4.2 Work orientation	
Work-oriented learning	You don't know your job well at the beginning. You just follow and learn.		
Work as value carrier	We want to present an image of being professional and adding value to the local community. As a Chinese, I also hope to give them a good impression of Chinese people.		
Huddling for comfort	There are more common topics in the same culture, and you'll find communication easier.	4.3 Safe space	
Limited contact with the local	We hang out or travel with the local friends who we think are reliable. We have known them for long and have contacts both in work and life. So basically, there will be no security problems.		
Restraining desires	We always hold the belief of getting rich through hard work... We are relatively rational and self-controlled.	4.4.1 Forced adjustment	4.4 Long-term orientation
Enduring hardships	I think in terms of time, you are successful when you have completed the whole assignment period. You don't want to be a deserter.		
Refreshing motivations	From a long perspective, the experience here will help my resume looks better. I just feel a little unhappy here, but on a more rational level, I learn something here.	4.4 Long-term orientation	

Appendix G: A Sample of interview transcript

This transcript was translated into English by the researcher.

Participant code: P2

Position: Manager

Date: 12/19/2020

Duration: 50 minutes

P=Participant

I=Interviewer

I: Now we're going to start. You just read the informed sheet and the consent form. You've signed and checked all the information. Do you have any other questions? If not, we'll start.

P: No. let's start now.

I: How did you become an expatriate?

P: At that time, there were several reasons. The first is that the company needs you to go there. Secondly, I also want to go out and have a look. Thirdly, I want to take advantage of being sent abroad as a traveling experience. That's the meaning and purpose of going abroad.

I: When you were making the decision, were there some different voices at that time?

P: Well, almost everyone agreed. No one would say no or show that you were not allowed to go out. Basically, they all agreed.

I: Do you mean that you made the decision smoothly?

P: Yes, yes.

I: Then you were going to be sent to Africa. Have you done anything to prepare for that?

P: First, find out where the place is in Africa. Secondly, I need to understand some local customs, such as food and culture. We also need to know about the local public security situation because the first thing to consider is personal security, right? There should be security. I've learned these in advance.

I: Well, in the process of becoming an expatriate, can you think of some other things? Tell me more.

P: The process, right? At that time, a company in Guangzhou got a project abroad, and then the Chinese side needed to send a manager to work there. Then the unit (the company) released this job information. At first, it would be voluntary registration. If no one signed up for the post at that time, the company would adopt a hard approach, that is, to choose and appoint one from the personnel. That's it. I was picked at that time. Then the company asked you if you wanted to go there. I thought it was OK, so I went there.

I: Did the organisation do anything to prepare for this international assignment?

P: Well, yes. First of all, the company helps us deal with some documents needed to go

abroad.

They helped me apply for the health certificate and visa, work permit, which they needed to provide. I have to apply for the Passport myself.

I: In addition, what else would the organisation do to make you feel good?

P: Let me think. At that time, I thought it was important to arrange for you to get a vaccine at that time because some African countries have some diseases, such as yellow fever. It means helping you prepare ahead of time. At that time, the company also arranged a lecture on how to prevent Malaria.

I: What about other aspects? Such as training, remuneration, and incentive?

P: Yes, we have all these.

I: Did you feel satisfied with that?

P: It is not bad.

I: what surprised you when you arrived in the host country?

P: Er, first of all, when we go from a familiar environment to a strange environment, it first makes you feel a visual shock that everything in front of you is different from what you saw before. Right? The experience is the same, isn't it? It's very rare and unusual. You can imagine that the African continent stretched to the horizon, and you can see very few people along the way. And then, when you drive on the road, it's all that wilderness and jungle. You know.

I: Anything else?

P: And what impressed me most? After getting off the plane, the first thing you see is that country's airport. It's not very developed. A National Airport is just like ours, equivalent to our third-tier cities. Then the environment and architecture of the capital which is equivalent to that of China in the 1970s and 1980s. Well, maybe even worse. When I came to the site from the airport, I saw a lot of wild animals on that journey. There were too many wild animals in Africa, giraffes, and zebras. I saw a lot of zebras and elephants on that road.

I: What image did you want to show when you were managing there?

P: The first is the image of our country, and the second is the company's image. Then, personal image, right? There are three aspects. Right. First of all, we have to do this project well, right? And then get on well with the local people, right? To safeguard China's interests. And try not to disturb the residents and make some contribution to the local people.

I: Can you expand on the three points you just mentioned?

P: As for the country, China and African countries are friendly with each other. Based on traditional friendship, we should further deepen our connections with the local people. We should cultivate a good image of China in their hearts and make it more prominent. Secondly, for the company, is to build and make our company's brand in this country, and thus to develop rapidly in this hot land. We have to maintain the company's image there, so as to lay a certain foundation for the future development, or to undertake more projects in this place. Then, personally, that is to say, we should try our best to maintain a good relationship with the local

government and the local people to pave the way for future work.

I: Maintaining a good relationship. Can you give more details?

P: For example, we would invite local officials and local people to celebrate major festivals. The company attaches great importance to the complaints from the local employees and holds meetings to discuss them. Generally, the company will satisfy them as much as possible when keeping the bottom line.

I: What do you usually do in your spare time?

P: In our spare time, we sometimes visit the local people's house, the indigenous people. It is a thatched cottage. A lot of thatched cottages. I will send you some pictures of that. We went to see how the local people live, what they eat. We can learn about it. I've also been to the local National Park, where there are all kinds of wild animals. Secondly, we would arrange staff to communicate with the local people. To visit their homes, bring some small gifts, get in touch with each other and make deep connections.

I: Do you feel that the local people are sincere with you?

P: Yeah, they are simple people.

I: It's a long time working in the host country. What do you think are the happy aspects of your work? Or aspects you feel satisfied or comfortable with.

P: Generally speaking, working there is satisfying, but to be specific, let me think about it. For example, the chief of the tribe or local mayor sometimes invites us Chinese personnel, Chinese construction personnel to go to their schools or some local institutions to participate in their activities, and then organise a dinner party after the activities. Then we enjoy the time together.

I: Is there anything else? For example, in work, life, or in other aspects, this job brings you something that makes you feel good.

P: The locals sometimes put themselves in our shoes and are helpful. For example, when we are purchasing some supplies, they will give priority to us and provide us with a convenient access.

I: Good relationship. Can you think of anything else?

P: When getting along with them, I found that they are not one-track mind as I thought. Let me think about how to explain that. That is to say, some of the working habits of the local people are very suitable for our situation. Local labour workers will carry out orders without questioning them. It's a good match. And we communicate or do something else with them in a relatively relaxed state, not nervous or tense.

I: I learned from some reports that many people in Africa are not quite hard-working. What do you think?

P: Yeah, lazy. I just didn't mention that.

I: OK. Now let's talk about what you are not so satisfied with. I guess that it can't all be satisfactory.

P: I'm not satisfied with their laziness. For example, after receiving their salary today, they won't come to work tomorrow. Then they used up all the money in three days, and then he borrowed money from us. We would lend money to them, and sometimes someone didn't pay it back.

I: Did you feel embarrassed to ask him to pay back? Or they are deliberately unwilling to pay back?

P: They then put it off until next month, month after month. One main reason is that they are short of goods. Then they need everything here, such as worn clothes, old clothes and old socks. They can sell them for money.

I: What else makes you feel less satisfied?

P: What's more, sometimes they do make you feel a headache when they are understanding your points. For example, you mean this, and they do that.

I: Why? Didn't the order come out clearly?

P: No, no, No. Because the local people receive little education. Most people are illiterate.

I: Does the language lead to the problem?

P: They speak English.

I: Is English the official language?

P: The official language is English, but many of them speak their native language, called Bemba, which I still remember.

I: Anything else that makes you feel uncomfortable? It can be expanded to factors in life, family, and so on, in any way.

P: Because of the long-time span of expatriation, you know, and you are allowed to go back home only once a year. That's hard to accept, you know. Come back once a year. This is one of them. Then, because many aspects in the host country are not as good as that in China. There are various supplies in China, for example, abundant food. Because there are only a few vegetables here in Africa, no more than five. Scarce food choice. We have to go to the capital to buy what we want or grow it ourselves. A lot of mutton and beef here, and also pork. But the pork is not as delicious as Chinese pork. Travelling is another problem. If we go to another city, that basically means hundreds of kilometers. It was three or four hundred kilometers from Mombara to Casama. If we don't have our own vehicles, it will be very inconvenient to travel. You must have your own car. Accommodation is OK. We live on our own, you know. The climate is very good, so it's OK in terms of housing.

I: Anything else?

P: Well, let me think.

I: You can extend to anything that make you feel uncomfortable.

P: I know. The money, the money we received, for example, we helped the local government do so many things, right? But we have to wait for long to get the money, you know? To the company...

I: Is the government deliberately delaying payment?

P: The country itself is poor. They don't have money.

I: No money? I heard that our country has established Two Preferential Projects. Have you successfully launched that project?

P: Yes, some of them have two preferential projects. But that are national projects, China provides loans to them. If you are completing that kind of projects, it is easy to get your money. But for the local projects which are paid by the local government, it's very difficult to get the money.

I: Did your company have this kind of project?

P: Yes, we have that.

I: Is it easy?

P: That's right. For that kind of project, you will not wait long to get money.

I: Why not focus on this kind of program?

P: But the problem is that there are not many such programs. If the local government invests in a project, their budget will be low. But it is not easy to get this government preferential projects because so many businesses are there, right? Then the country sets an amount of money every year, and then companies apply for that project. Those companies rank on the list and wait for the approval.

I: Would you please share an impressive challenge you have experienced in your work and then how did you solve it?

P: Let me think about it. A difficult thing. For example, at that time, we encountered a problem at that time when we were building a bridge. We needed to use a piece of land. The landlord disagreed to sell it and asked for a very high price. The government has no right to use the land as it is privately owned. The local government negotiated with the landlord for three months, but it didn't work. We bought that land at a high price in the end as we can't afford the delay of the project."

I: It's settled anyway. Did it put a lot of pressure on you at that time? What's your reaction?

P: A lot of pressure. First of all, because you know that if the construction cannot be carried out, the impact on our project schedule will be huge. If the construction period is delayed for one day, the completion will be delayed by one day, right? If he didn't move away for one day, the completion of the project will be delayed for one day, which will have a great impact on our entire contract period at that time. Therefore, we were under great pressure, and finally, we bought it at a high price.

I: What's changed for you personally after you have worked abroad for three years?

P: After coming back, first of all, I have opened my eyes. The second is to be more open-minded. And then, I'm more confident, right? And more enlightened. Because these are developed in the work, ability that comes from practice, right? The feeling is like, basically, I can solve things well when I encounter such problems again.

I: In terms of work after return, has your work demand changed? For example, do you feel any change in your work expectation? Like your position in the company, salary, life, and so on?

P: Yes, yes. After coming back, if I go abroad again, all aspects will change, at least for the remuneration.

I: Well, anything else?

P: Considering family factors (the participant getting married), if I go abroad again, I may have to come back several times a year.

I: In the whole process of your assignment, including making preparations before going out, were there any moments you wanted to give up, resign, or change jobs?

P: Yes, I thought about it at that time. Why? Because it was in Africa, wasn't it? First of all, the situation was not good there. The environment is not very good, so there must be a gap with China, right? Although the natural environment is very good, there is still a huge difference between the local environment and the domestic environment in terms of food and housing. I had this idea at that time. But as time went on, I felt I got used to it and fit into it. Later, this idea of quitting gradually became less and less. That's it.

I: Have you ever considered resigning or job-hopping later?

P: What to consider later is that after you have a family, you have to consider family factors. You can't stay out of home for a long time, right? Expatriation means being outside all year round.

I: You just mentioned that you gradually adapted to the host country. What do you think helped you fit into the local?

P: First of all, I gradually got used to the local food and environment, and I feel my ability grew and were able to fit into it. So the idea of resigning becomes rare.

I: If you look back, which aspect should you put more effort in to better adjust?

P: First of all, if you want to really adjust to it, first of all, you have to think about how to adjust your mental state, right? This is very important. Whenever you are in a strange place, the state of mind is very important. If you cannot adjust your state of mind, you cannot fit into the local environment anyway. So first of all, you should develop a mindset that you should overcome the difficulties confronting you, such as eating and housing issues, right? As long as you have that mindset, you can gradually adjust to it.

I: Even if you feel bad, you still tell yourself to overcome and adjust.

P: Yes, yes. Even if you are very uncomfortable, you must tell yourself to adjust and get over it.

I: Force yourself to overcome?

P: Yes, yes.

I: What else?

P: One more point. I learned more about the local people as we communicate more with the local people. It also makes you feel that it is relatively easy to communicate with the local people.

I: Well, anything else?

P: It's also related to the expatriation team. Right? You're part of the team, right? You have maintained a good relationship with the team. I fit into the expatriation group and get along with my colleagues. That's definitely a condition for my adjustment. We built a basketball court and recreation room. We play basketball together. In the evening we play cards and billiards.

I: Does the relationship with the local people help?

P: Yes, yes.

I: What do you think is a successful expatriate?

P: First of all, you didn't quit in the middle of your assignment. I think in terms of time, you are successful when you have completed the whole assignment period. You don't want to be a deserter. It is also a sense of responsibility that expatriates generally spend more time on work. If you have completed the whole assignment period, it is a success.

I: Stay there and finish the work, then it is the success. Hold on straight to the end?

P: Yes.

I: What if you really want to come back?

P: Then I don't think it's a success.

I: Anything else? What about the other factors relating to the success?

P: And your ability has been improved during your work, right? In addition, your vision has been opened, and your communication skills and language skills have been greatly improved. I think from this aspect it is also a success. Right?

I: Well, anything else?

P: And the achievement we have left for the local.

I: Is this point important?

P: Yes, yes, this is one point. For example, we have finished the project from the very beginning to the end, right? I deliver a good product to the local people, right? They saw it, and they recognised our efforts, right? I think this is also a success.

I: How would you evaluate your expatriation experience?

P: Let me use a few words. First, resistance from the beginning. Then I gradually accept it. Then I began to enjoy it. Finally, excitement. Four words, resistance, acceptance, joy and excitement.

I: How do joy and excitement come from?

P: You are happy when you feel that the local people recognise your contribution, right? Then the last word, excitement. When we were leaving the place, there were so many people to see you off. It was that moment. We thought it was worth our efforts.

I: As you mentioned, it is a great growth for you. Do you think it is possible for you to consider your next international assignment?

P: Maybe not in recent years.

I: Do you mean that is impossible? or that depends?

P: Maybe not in recent years. Not to consider it anyway.

I: What are your concerns? Work? life? family?

P: Yes, mainly family.

I: Let me ask another question. Is there any Western enterprise (from developed countries) carrying out projects there?

P: Yes, there are.

I: Do you think that in the local people's view, Chinese companies are different from Western ones? As they are from developed countries, while we are still developing countries? If yes, does this difference have any effect on your adjustment there?

P: Basically, there's no impact. Local people see China as a developed country. They know China can produce everything.

I: Any differences?

P: Yes. For example, I think Chinese people are easier to deal with than Westerners.

I: Why?

P: Because they think that we Chinese really come for the local infrastructure.

I: You mean Westerners come only to make money? Or maybe they think the Chinese are more sincere in helping them?

I: Yes, yes.

I: Are there any other aspects that are not involved in this interview about expatriate adjustment? Or anything you are very impressed with? Anything else you want to say or add?

P: let me think about it. I think the primary issue of expatriation is security, isn't it? If you go to some African countries or even some Western countries where guns are very popular at local, personal safety is the top concern.

I: Anything else?

P: One more thing, which is beyond my expectation. African countries are a little different from our impression of them. We used to think of African countries as being very hot, but we actually enjoy very pleasant weather there.

I: You must have a lot of comrades (friends) when working there, right?

P: Yes. yes.

I: Were there any impressive things happen to them?

P: I haven't heard anything too negative.

I: It doesn't need to be too negative. Any impressive things or anecdotes of feelings people share in relation to work, or family, or any aspect.

P: I heard one thing. Sometimes Chinese people don't know the local laws, right? They may run out to the farmer's land to hunt. Because the farmer's land is so large. I heard that the local people killed the Chinese.

I: For what?

P: Because the land is privatised, you can't carry a gun into other people's private territory, you

know. They didn't know it at first. They thought it was just hunting.

I: Do you guys thought about integrating into local life?

P: No. After all, we have different cultures. Chinese circle is easier for us, and that helps keep us from possible troubles.

I: Anything else you want to add?

P: No.

I: OK, that's all for this interview. Thank you very much!