



“Living in the bubble”

The role of communication for Swedish expatriates adjustment in China

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ABSTRACT

Increasing number of Swedish companies expands their businesses in the Mainland of China, accompanying with increasing need of expatriating Swedish experienced employees to Chinese subsidiaries. The study aims to collect experiences of Swedish expatriate managers and technical experts' experiences to identify the propositions explaining Swedish expatriate adjustment to the host Chinese culture. For this purpose, ten in-depth interviews with Swedish expatriates and two with spouses of Swedish expats are conducted. Analysis of the qualitative data is done through abduction approach which provides the opportunity to make comparisons between thirteen literature-reviewed propositions and fifteen empirical-data-based propositions. Features of adjustment pattern, their existing barriers in acculturation, and the vital role of communication are presented, then the suggestion of taking initiative in intercultural communication is introduced as a possible strategy for Swedish expats to adjust in Chinese society.

Keywords: intercultural communication; expatriate; international adjustment; acculturation; overseas assignment; China; Sweden.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of the study presents a niche area in the research field of expatriate adjustment with regard to increasing intercultural business communication between Sweden and China. Based on a previous research finding of the delayed culture shock pattern on western expatriate business managers, three constructive research questions are articulated comparatively. Then, the aim of study is clarified. Lastly, the chapter is summarized by presentation of a disposition of the thesis paper, including the structure of chapters and a brief content overview.

1.1 A Niche Area - Swedish Expatriate Adjustment in China

Due to globalization and the booming Chinese economy, nowadays more and more foreign companies establish subsidiaries in the Mainland of China, thus, many foreign businesspeople are assigned overseas, resulting in a surge of expatriates or sojourners in China. However, from a Western perspective, “China often is seen as the most foreign of all foreign places”¹, which makes China be regarded as a challenging destination by Western business expatriates.

Many peer-reviewed papers² have shown the existence of culture shock³ occurs to total immersion in another culture⁴, especially in overseas assignments. There are several versions to describe the graphic illustration of culture shock stages: U-curve model⁵, and it is widely agreed that sojourners are expected to go through the following stages: 1) Honeymoon, 2) Grief, 2) Re-integration, 4) Adjustment, and 5) Independence. The stage of Adjustment is regarded as breakthrough, and the topic of foreign expats adjustment has been popular in academic field for quite long time⁶. Although the relevant research on joint venture expatriate management in the Mainland of China appears since the 1980s, and it is not until late 1990s that the relevant researches involve business expatriates from Nordic countries⁷. Up till now, there is no existing qualitative research conducted specifically on Swedish expatriates in the Mainland of China.

Nevertheless, there is huge culture difference between Swedish culture and Chinese culture from academic perspectives. Analyzing on the basis of the well-known Hofstede’s Culture Taxonomy⁸, Chinese culture and Swedish culture are far diverse in terms of power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation. In addition, Chinese culture is categorized as

¹ Chen, 2001:17

² see Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991, for a review

³ Oberg, 1960

⁴ Lustig & Koester, 2009

⁵ see Lysgaard, 1995; Adler, 1975; Pedersen, 1994

⁶ Selmer, 1999

⁷ Selmer, 1998

⁸ see Lustig & Koester, 2009; <http://geert-hofstede.com/>



Confucian Asian culture, whereas, Swedish culture belongs to the cluster of Nordic European culture⁹. Hence, it is meaningful to conduct this specific study to find out the peculiar Swedish sojourners' adjustment strategies to exotic expatriate life in mainland of China, which can be deemed as satisfying the niche area with intercultural communication awareness.

1.2 Research Question

The previous researches regarding international adjustment of expatriates present a similar pattern, see the following chapter for more detailed literature review, which is in accordance with the classical U-curve pattern; however, citing an induction from the a quantitative research conducted in the niche area: "... our results concerning WEBMs assigned to the Chinese mainland seem to differ from the few other studies that have identified a culture shock phase"¹⁰, which displays a contradictory speculation in the area of western expatriates adjustment in the host Chinese culture. Taking the contradictory research inductions and the Sino-Swedish business prosperity into consideration, main research questions of the thesis are articulated.

Thus, the foremost question of this study is:

RQ1: Is the U-curve culture shock pattern applicable to Swedish expatriates living in China?

As it is predictable to answer the question with either Yes or No, there is a following-up question comparatively. If the answer is negative, which is in accordance with the previous quantitative research, thus identifying the exact obstacles is meaningful:

RQ2a: What existing barriers prevent Swedish expatriates from acculturation in Mainland of China?

If the data collected provided support for the applicable culture pattern, then it is valuable to consider:

RQ2b: What strategies can Swedish expatriates utilize for overcoming culture shock occurred in China?

In addition, as a study with a special focus on intercultural communication, one more following up question is proposed:

RQ3: What is the role of communication in the process of Swedish expatriate adjustment to Chinese culture?

1.3 Aim of Study

⁹ Lustig and Koester, 2009

¹⁰ Selmer, 1999:526; WEBM stands for Western Expatriate Business Manager



The aim of study is to provide qualitative compensational contents for recognizing the applicableness of a classical U-curve pattern for Swedish expatriates living in China, which will be the foundation for any other academic discussion in the international adjustment area. More specifically, this study aims to identify propositions explaining Swedish expatriates adjustment to the Chinese culture.

1.4 Disposition

The thesis consists of six chapters, divided into several sub sections according to the main topics of the discussed issues. The first chapter “Introduction” includes a niche area for introducing the problematic area, followed by three specific research questions and the aim of study. The second chapter “Previous Research and Theoretical Framework” consists of two main parts: previous research, in which abundant relevant literature is reviewed and various theoretical terms are defined in the study’s academic field, and theoretical framework of this study is formed by a set of literature-based propositions. The third chapter “Method” is composed of the motivation for choosing interview as the method for this qualitative research and other precise aspects for qualifying the study. The fourth chapter “Results” presents the transcription in categories based on the codes derived from the integrated international adjustment model, followed by the analytical “Discussion” in chapter five, in which comparison between literature-based propositions and empirical-data-based propositions are made for blueprinting the role of communication for Swedish expats in China. The last chapter “Conclusion” is composed of both conclusive remarks that highlight the contribution of the study and recommendations for future further studies; meanwhile limitations are also taken into consideration.



2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH and THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter is composed of both literature review and the theoretical framework. For reviewing previous researches, academic platform ProQuest is utilized as main searching engine for literature review, and keywords - “culture shock” “international adjustment” “Sweden or Swedish” “China or Chinese” - lead to the most relevant peer-reviewed published papers for reference, which then formed by the author as guideline for the study. More specifically, the previous research part consist of research regarding the myth which inspires the formation of research question 1 (RQ1), definitions of central terms in the context of the thesis, and the comprehensive model of determinants of international adjustment, which later to be the basis of the theoretical framework. Then, after reviewing the comprehensive model, in the section of theoretical framework, several propositions are suggested to frame the categories for presenting the results and for preparing the discussion of findings.

2.1 Previous Research

2.1.1 Myth – the applicableness of U-curve pattern of Western expats in China

International adjustment has been discussed for decades; however, the target research group is always shifting according to the latest business activities’ involvers. China is Sweden’s main trading partner in Asia. According to the 2010 Situation Report on Swedish Industrial Corporations in China¹¹ that Swedish MNCs not only expand sales organizations and manufacturing facilities in China, but also expanding their business into comprehensive local or regional sourcing as well as product development, which represents their eagerness to meet Chinese customers’ demands and local standards. The research is inspired from one of statistical findings of a quantitative research on WEBMs’ culture shock in China:

“...WEBMs assigned to the Chinese mainland seem to differ from the few other studies that have identified a culture shock phase...the expatriates did not start to experience any culture shock until after 17-18 months, indicating a delayed effect when on assignment on the Chinese mainland”¹².

Though an inductive explanation was given, *“many WEBMs on the Chinese mainland are to a certain degree barred from sociocultural interactions with host nationals, thus delaying their culture shock”¹³*, there is still lack of evidence to contribute a conclusive remark, which contributes to the formation of RQ1.

Whereas, compared with answering a theoretical question in terms of applicableness of cultural shock pattern for the context of Swedish expatriates in China, the consequence of

¹¹ Association of Swedish Engineering Industries, 2010; MNC stands for Multi-national Corporation/Company

¹² Selmer, 1999:526-527

¹³ Selmer, 1999:527



such a phenomenon is more meaningful no matter with economic concern or with academic awareness.

2.1.2 Defining Central Terms

Culture Shock and U-curve Pattern

Culture shock received scholarly attention as early as the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Lysgaard, Oberg and Gullahorn and Gullahorn were the first to present the phenomenon qualitatively as intercultural adjustment¹⁴. The definition of culture shock is developing with the times, and here Adler's definition is presented:

*“Culture shock is primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It may encompass feelings of helplessness, irritability, and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded”*¹⁵,

which is psychologically more descriptive and explanatory for understanding the term.

Moving to a host country, 15% to 25% of all newcomers suffer severe culture shock¹⁶, and it has been found that the more ethnocentric the one is, the more difficult process of adaptation to a new culture s/he will encounter¹⁷. Another affecting factor in adaptation is personality, if the sojourner's personality is in accordance with the local norms and would like to take initiative to interact with the locals, and then adjustment is not an obvious obstacle¹⁸.

As long as culture shock occurs, the consequence of which is also identified, which forms the illustrative **U-curve pattern**. In 1955, Lysgaard firstly proposed:

*“Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shape curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a ‘crisis’ in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign country.”*¹⁹

Based on Lysgaard's hypothesis, an illustrative U-curve model extended by Oberg has become popular since 1960s and kept being on trial for over 50 years. Oberg described four stages (see Figure 1): (1) honeymoon, which is characterized by fascination, elation, and optimism lasting from a few days to 6 months depending on how soon real everyday coping and communication with the new culture must begin; (2) grief, which is

¹⁴ Gaw, 2000; see Lysgaard, 1955, Oberg, 1960, and Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963

¹⁵ Adler, 1975:13

¹⁶ Mooradian, 2004

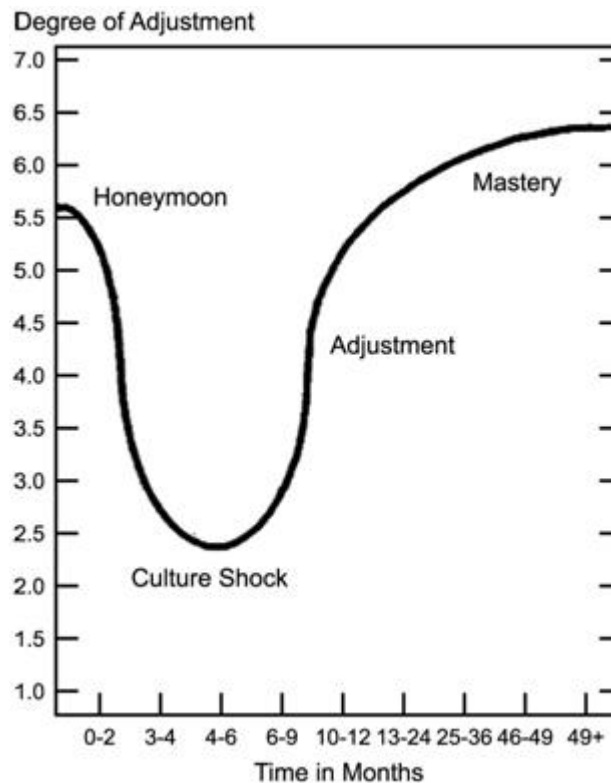
¹⁷ Church, 1982

¹⁸ Rohrlich and Martin, 1991

¹⁹ Lysgaard, 1955:51

characterized by hostile and emotionally stereotyped attitudes toward the host country and increased association with fellow sojourners; (3) recovery, which is characterized by increased language knowledge and ability to get around in the host country, a superior attitude towards the host nationals, and an increased sense of humor; (4) mastery, which means adjustment is about as complete as possible, anxiety is largely gone, and new conventions are accepted and enjoyed.

Figure 1. Illustration of U-curve Culture Shock Pattern (Based on Oberg's Model)



Source: <http://thejapans.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/culture-shock-u-curve.jpg>

The U-curve model is so popular that it has been recruited by trainers of intercultural communication in current decade, however, none or less of them has mentioned the danger of directly applying this model to every occasion, which leads to inapplicableness and criticism on the model itself – “*despite its popular and initial appeal, the U-curve model of sojourner adjustment should be rejected*”²⁰, thus there are dangers in using the model²¹ directly, and which have been pointed out are the photocopying effect and triple treat. For the photocopying effect that illustrations of varying complexity often accompanied descriptions of the model, besides, many sources made little or no acknowledgement of the controversy or limitations of the model, which both contributes to an unfortunate result of the desire of many sojourners to have a simple formula for

²⁰ Ward et al., 1998:290

²¹ Berardo, 2006



dealing with culture shock with concrete descriptions and directions, due to the widespread effect of the model, then it is predicted that when they are overseas they find they may not have all the symptoms and stress manifests itself in complex psychological disorders, as the distress does not follow any pattern and they are not sure where they are on the so-called U-curve of adjustment. The resultant confusion adds to their stress and gives them a lack of confidence in their pre-departure training.

However, as a classical model in the field of international adjustment, it is suggested to be presented with ethical recognition²² of (1) the lack of supporting research and dismissal by some theorists; (2) high degree of variability and individuality; (3) variety of patterns possible and documented in studies; (4) variability in the initial period of euphoria; (5) limited applicability to all sojourners; and even (6) what the model does and does not cover.

Cultural Adaptation, Adjustment, or Acculturation

As cultural shock is “*consistently associated with a series of symptoms of discomfort, dislocation, and abnormality*”²³, it is meaningful to figure out effective measures to take for reducing these symptoms, which has been suggested that a more complex set of patterns would be put into efforts for describing the process of adaptation than the U-curve pattern provide²⁴. Terms **cultural adaptation**, **adjustment** and **acculturation** are the three most mentioned synonyms for scholars’ use, and they will alternatively appear in the thesis paper.

There is abundant evidence to suggest that the adaptation process has multiple dimensions of factors associated with it²⁵, and the view develops from one-dimensional to two-dimensional by Colleen Ward and her colleagues: psychological and sociocultural²⁶; while Mitchell R. Hammer and his colleagues put forward the idea of three-dimensional intercultural effectiveness²⁷, including (1) the ability to deal with psychological stress, which is similar to Ward and her colleagues’ first dimension; (2) skill in communicating with others both appropriately and effectively, and (3) proficiency in establishing interpersonal relationships; the latter two of which are similar to the reviewed sociocultural dimension. Despite of the process of adaptation is bi-dimensional or tri-dimensional, the concept of multi-dimensional pattern brings about the direction to scrutinize the distinct factors likely characterize distinct dimension of adaptation.

Expatriate, Expat, or Sojourner

It is necessary to clarify the definition of **expatriate**, as the target group of the study, and **expat** is the abbreviation form synonym; besides, **sojourner** is another recognized

²² Berardo, 2006

²³ Lin, 2006:119

²⁴ Lustig and Koester, 2009

²⁵ Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus, 1989

²⁶ Ward and Kennedy, 1992, 1993, 1999; Ward and Searle, 1991

²⁷ Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978



synonym to be discussed in a lot of relevant papers. Thus, these three terms are deemed as terms with the same indication, and may appear alternatively in the thesis.

There are several definitions of expatriate, and for this thesis, it is preferable to restrict the definition to expats with Swedish origin and come to the Mainland of China. In addition, with the popularity of global talents, expats phenomenon has been widely discussed, thus, there are several characteristics of expats are perceived, and which is helpful to restrict and differentiate the target group of the study.

Referring to the case of high-skilled migrants in Brussels²⁸, expats are perceived as a separate community at both interpersonal and socio-economic level: they are highly skilled and career driven; they usually stay in China for a limited time period; they are thought to hold important professional positions and receive high wages.

In addition, the expats community has also been specific characterized and criticized, as expats communities in the Mainland of China are built artificially apart from the locals, which reveals the attempt to close all expatriates in one neighborhood and maintain the image of a more complex identity reality. In addition, this empirical study also criticizes the sense of membership in the expats community is doubtful, as it functions as a channel for gathering expats together in an unnatural way, whereas it is predicted that people would like to group with people in similar conditions, however, some still strictly hold their personal criteria to choose the company they keep.

2.1.3 A Comprehensive Model of International Adjustment

Black, Mendenhall and Oddou argued that the degree of intercultural adjustment should be treated as a multidimensional concept²⁹, rather than a one-dimensional phenomenon³⁰. Referring to Black, the in-country adjustment can be categorized into three distinct dimensions³¹: (1) general adjustment (i.e., the psychological comfort relating to factors of the host culture environment, such as weather, living conditions and food), (2) work adjustment (i.e., the psychological comfort involving different work values, expectations and standards), and (3) interaction adjustment (i.e., adjustment to varied styles in the foreign country and to socializing with host country nationals).

Later, Black, Mendenhall and Oddou firstly proposed a comprehensive integrated model of international adjustment³² (see Figure 2) that focuses on several major sets of factors that influence these dimensions as determinants of adjustment. This model was accordingly expanded and validated by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (see Figure 3), in which the factors are defined as: 1) job factors, 2) organizational factors, 3) positional

²⁸ Gatti, 2009

²⁹ Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991

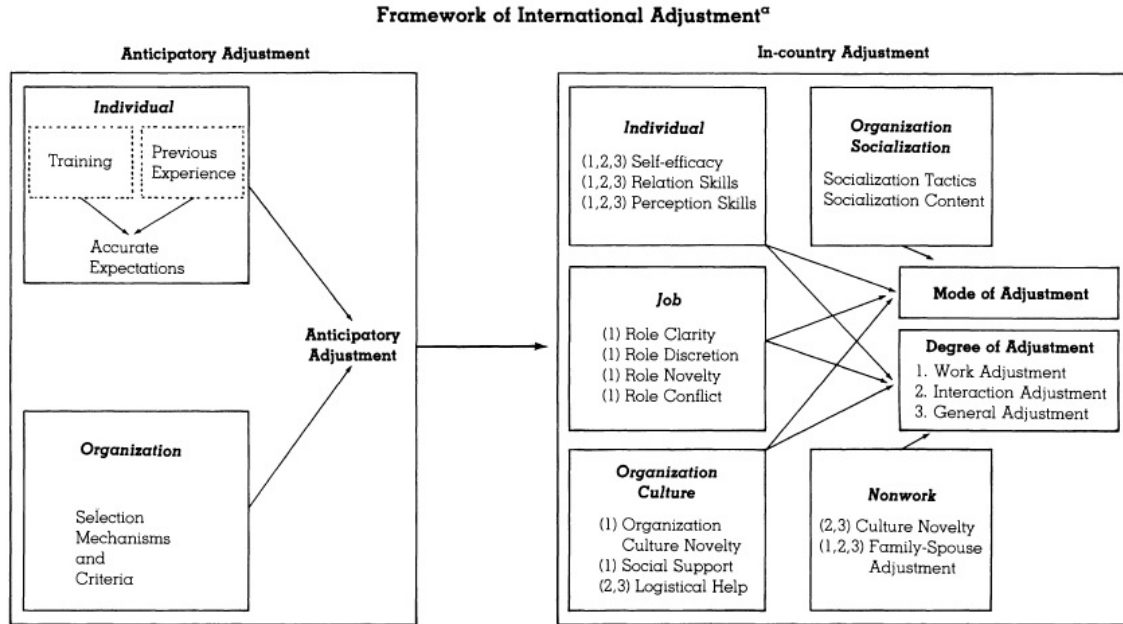
³⁰ see Oberg, 1960; Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963

³¹ Black, 1988

³² Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991

factors, 4) non-work factors, and 5) individual factors³³. Hence, the author takes various versions of explanation of the framework into consideration, and forms this study's theoretical propositions.

Figure 2. Framework of International Adjustment



Organizational factors are unavoidably influencing the expatriate adjustment, and the comprehensive model³⁴ has identified several external factors that are critical for expatriate adjustment at both anticipatory phase and in-country phase. The identified factors are: selection mechanism; logistical support; organization socialization and social support.

Selection mechanism is the first and foremost critical factor for most organizations, as sending the right person to overseas subsidiary brings about large investment, and according to many empirical researches³⁵, unsuccessful expatriation would result in not only financial cost but also talent management problem. For example, it has been argued that the average cost of one failed expat to the company can be two times higher than the domestic salary plus the cost of relocation³⁶ from a longitudinal study among Finnish expats.

The mechanism of expat choosing criteria is continuously developing: it was in the 1990s that U.S. MNCs choose individuals on the basis of domestic job track records, which is the initial one-dimension mechanism; whereas, as many studies have successfully tested that “individuals who have been selected based on a wide array of relevant criteria will

³³ Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999

³⁴ Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991

³⁵ see Suutari and Brewster, 2003; McNutly, De Cieri & Hutchings, 2009

³⁶ Suutari and Brewster, 2003



experience easier and quicker cross-cultural adjustment”³⁷, which highlights the importance of varied selection requirements. However, due to the development of human resources management, it is also suggested to take individuals’ self motivation into consideration, which implies the possible two-way selection mechanism in the expatriate management.

Logistical support, referring to the compensation and benefits packages provided by international corporations to: (1) attract and retain staff, (2) provide an incentive for managers to leave the home country on a foreign assignment, (3) facilitate the transfer to the foreign location, (4) maintain an acceptable standard of living in the foreign location, and (5) provide the expatriate with opportunities for financial advancement through income and/or savings³⁸. Besides, it has been found that logistical support regarding housing, schools, grocery store shopping, and so on, could become a significant aiding factor to the expatriate adjustment³⁹. Though the aids mentioned are more or less non work-related, which used to be assumed as positive factors to general and interaction adjustment; whereas, according to a recent conducted study about Scandinavian expats in U.S.A.⁴⁰, logistical support, which is an extrinsic motivation, has a positive impact on all facets of adjustment, including general, interaction and work adjustment.

Moving into a new work environment, it is believed that culture shock is always accompanying with, although the assigned company is the subsidiary of parent group. As there is fierce discussion to compare the influence of national culture and the organizational culture, up to date it is still cannot be answered definitely, since in the expatriate adjustment case, the organization culture novelty cannot be easily distinguished from the index of general culture novelty in international adjustment⁴¹.

The comprehensive model⁴² has mentioned the focus on the relationship between organizational socialization tactics and role innovation, whereas in the case of expatriate adjustment, another index **social support** has been referred in the followed research evidence that the social support of co-workers can act as a positive factor for expatriate managers in work adjustment⁴³.

Job factors, obviously exerting a great impact on the facet of work adjustment⁴⁴, can be concretely discussed in terms of role clarity, role discretion, role conflict, and role novelty.

³⁷ Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991:307

³⁸ Dowling, Welch, and Schuler, 1999

³⁹ see Baker and Ivancevich, 1971; Copeland and Griggs, 1985; Tung, 1988; Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999

⁴⁰ Gudmundsdottir, 2013

⁴¹ Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999

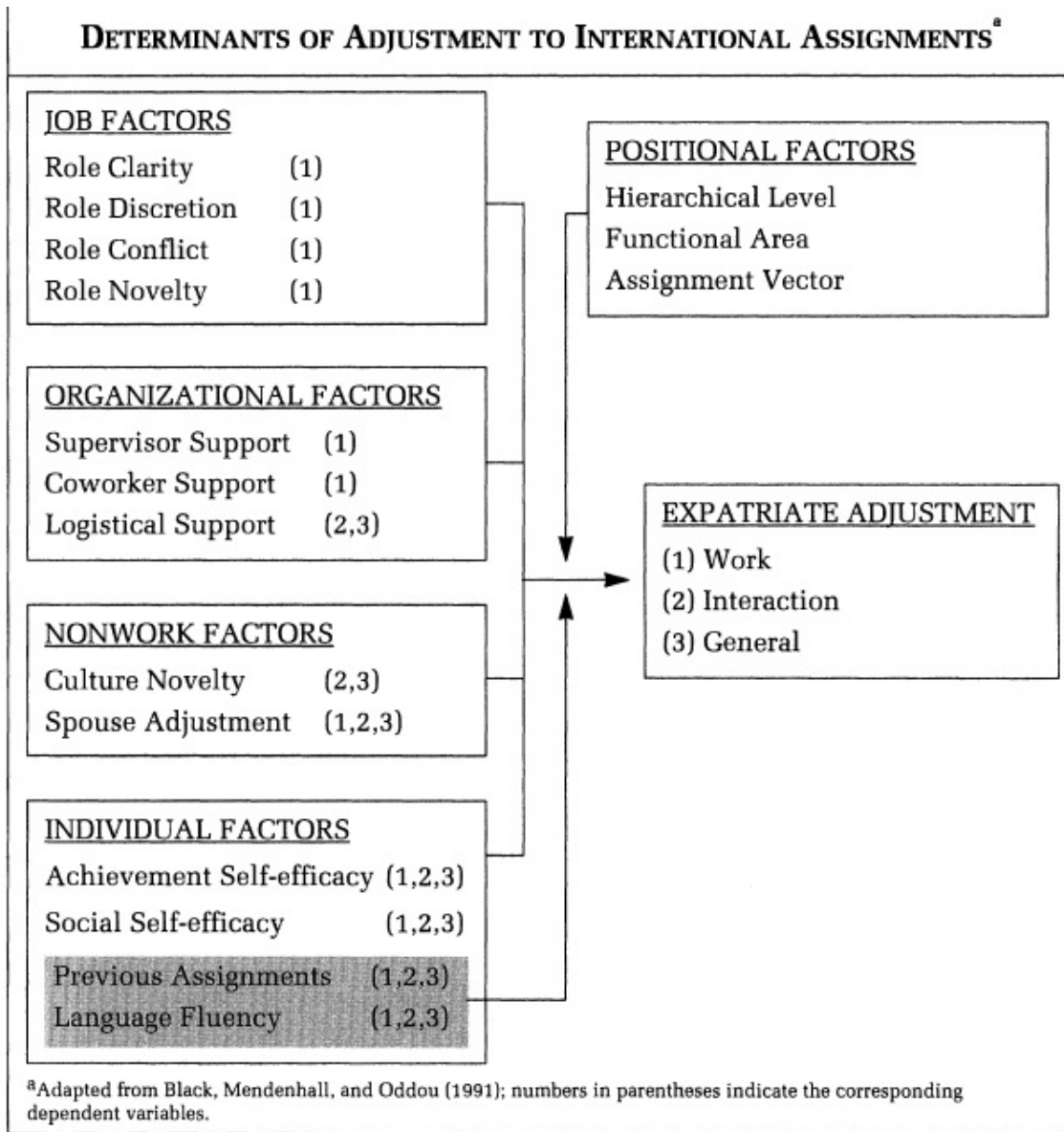
⁴² Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991

⁴³ Cohen and Wills, 1985

⁴⁴ Andreason, 2003

Role clarity, referring to “giving the expatriate manager a clearly defined set of expected behaviors”⁴⁵; **Role discretion**, referring to “allowing expatriates to adapt their work role and setting to themselves rather than adapting themselves to the work situation”. As both role clarity and role discretion represent a clear and active role for the expatriate to act on, thus, they have been deemed to exert positive influence on international adaptation.

Figure 3. Determinants of Adjustment to International Assignments⁴⁶



Role conflict, referring to what is expected of individuals in a new work environment is contrast to the expectation of past role. **Role novelty**, referring to the degree to which the current role is different from past roles. In contrast to the positive influence of role clarity

⁴⁵ Andreason, 2003:46

⁴⁶ Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999:559



and role discretion exerted on work adjustment, it is expected that both role novelty and role conflict have negative relationship with expatriate adjustment⁴⁷, as either new expectation or conflicting function expats are to behave is correlated with uncertainty increase, which is unhelpful for expatriate adjustment.

Positional factors, as a compensation sector of factors belongs to work-related factors, was firstly put forward in a test of the classic international adjustment model⁴⁸, which include: hierarchical level, functional area, and assignment vector.

In the model testing results⁴⁹, **hierarchical level** was found along with several significant interactions at workplace. On the one hand, hierarchical level indicates that job demands force expats to be better adjusted in order to release the stress from the role requirements, which is consistent with job control theory of stress⁵⁰; on the other hand, previous assignment experience was also correlated with expatriates on different hierarchical levels, “for middle level managers, the effect was positive, indicating that previous assignment experience enhanced work adjustment for these managers. For senior-level managers, however, the opposite effect emerged”⁵¹, which was specified as implication for both staffing and training decisions.

Functional area was also proposed as a moderator in varying expatriates’ adjustment to workplace, as their functional area, e.g. technical, managerial, decides the importance of communication with the locals. Specifically speaking, it was pointed that technical expatriates would pursue higher degree of interaction adjustment than expatriates in the managerial role, as they used to transferring knowledge to host country nationals.

Assignment vector exerts influence when MNCs choose expatriate candidates according to their background, and it could be divided into three categories: parent country nationals (PCNs), third-country nationals that are non-PCN immigrants in the host country, and inpatriated employees who are assigned to the parent company from foreign subsidiaries⁵². Due to the increasing communication need between the parent company and foreign subsidiaries, all three kinds of expatriates are becoming common HR management strategy, however, which also brings about the adjustment pattern may vary across the three types of expatriates.

Aside from organization factors, job factors, and the compensational positional factors, another external category of factors, **nonwork factors**, should be laid special emphasis

⁴⁷ see Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987

⁴⁸ see Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999

⁴⁹ see Shafer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999

⁵⁰ Karasek, 1979

⁵¹ Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999:575

⁵² Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999



on to examine expatriates' international adjustment. The most mentioned nonwork factors are culture novelty and spouse/family adjustment.

As mentioned in the job factors, expatriates are to be facing new environment change in both work and living conditions, and novelty of environment was originally divided into role novelty which is closely related to work adjustment and **culture novelty** which is correlated with both general and interaction adjustment⁵³; however, according to empirical studies, most expats cannot perceive the difference between role novelty and culture novelty, thus that culture novelty should be regarded as a unit has been proposed. In addition, culture novelty always co-appears with culture shock⁵⁴, indicating the requirement of more extensive pre-departure training and in-country support.

The notion that **spouse and family adjustment** is highly correlated with expatriate adjustment⁵⁵ has been formulated earlier than the formation of comprehensive model in 1989 on the basis of U.S. expats' adjustment to Pacific Rim region. It is found that the adjustment of the spouse is highly correlated with the adjustment of the expatriate manager and that the children tend to imitate their parents' reactions⁵⁶; besides, it is expected that family members may experience the various stages of culture shock differently and not necessarily undergo each stage simultaneously⁵⁷. However, though it was predicted that the accompanying spouse is more immersed in the local culture, the problem of inability of the spouse to adjust has immersing in recent studies showing the possible reason of the spouse's failure in finding adequate employment in the foreign country⁵⁸. As the expatriate is likely to be buffered from the local environment by the company, and the children immersed in the continuity and routine of school, then the spouse must often function without the familiar network of family and friends, without the adequate language skills or cultural training, and without adequate social support programs to assist him or her in developing an appropriate lifestyle overseas. It has also been pointed out straightforwardly that the impact of the expat's assignment on the spouse's career becomes the first and foremost contributing factor in an unsuccessful expatriation⁵⁹. Several new themes were to be further explored, including how to choose appropriate expat with consideration of the spouse' willingness, how to well reduce the spouse's uncertainty in the foreign country, and how to exert positive influence of family adjustment on the expatriate adjustment, etc.

After reviewing the factors derived from host country culture, organization, family and other external issues, expats' **individual factors** cannot be omitted, as which plays an

⁵³ see Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999; Andreason, 2003

⁵⁴ Black, 1990

⁵⁵ Black and Stephens, 1989

⁵⁶ Black and Stephens, 1989

⁵⁷ Andreason, 2003

⁵⁸ Adler, 1997

⁵⁹ Harvey, 1996



essential role in building healthy psychological persistency in successfully accomplishing overseas assignment. The following set of factors in particular has been the focus of research: abstract indices **self-efficacy** in both achievement and socialization and **relational and perceptual skills**; specific indices **previous international assignments** and **language fluency**.

Self-efficacy in expatriate international adjustment has been recognized as the expatriated individual's ability to adapt himself or herself to a foreign environment⁶⁰, more specifically conceptualized as expatriates' efficient reaction to deal with foreign uncertain issues with full self-confidence⁶¹. In the comprehensive model, it has been proposed to have two dimensions: (1) one focuses on performance achievements, as individuals who with self-efficacy are good at correcting their behavior to better meet expectations in the foreign country, and (2) the other focuses on interpersonal relationship development, as expatriates with self-efficacy are good at asking for feedback, which facilitates the interaction adjustment.

It is supposed that the greater the individuals' **relational and perceptual skills**, the easier it would be for them to interact with host nationals⁶², which is a moderator in interaction adjustment. Whereas, several skills are aware of exerting significant influence on expatriate adjustment, including cultural empathy, adaptability, diplomacy, language ability, a positive attitude, emotional stability and maturity⁶³. However, there are varying measurements of expatriates' relational and perceptual skills found in the existing studies, and the possible reason is that these skills mostly depend on situational variables which also need to be confirmed according to varying conditions, overall, the temporary agreement for measuring the relational and perceptual skills are comparatively tangible measurements of previous international assignment experiences and language fluency of expatriates.

Aside from the intangible measurement of relational and perceptual skills, it was suggested on the basis of a report of international corporations with successful track records that employees who are with the following skills are most possible to be expatriates⁶⁴: (1) a drive to communicate with the host nationals, (2) broad-based sociality in establishing ties with the locals, (3) cultural flexibility, as characterized by a willingness to experiment with different customs, (4) a cosmopolitan orientation, defined as a mind-set which can intuitively understand that different cultural norms have value and meaning to those who practice them, and (5) a collaborative negotiation style, as opposed to one that is confrontational⁶⁵.

It has been proposed that **previous international assignment experience** should

⁶⁰ Bandura, 1977

⁶¹ Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985

⁶² Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985

⁶³ Phatak, 1995

⁶⁴ Andreason, 2003

⁶⁵ see Black and Gregersen, 1999



reduce the expatriate's uncertainty from the perspective of relatively high degree of anticipation for the culture shock; besides, the previous overseas experience makes the expatriate have learned adaptation skills already, thus this index has been regarded as facilitator in expatriate's work adjustment and general adjustment⁶⁶. Whereas, according to the hypothesis derived from the testing research⁶⁷, the significant role of previous international assignment has been expanded as a moderator to all facets of expatriate adjustment, as it was found that the experienced expatriates tend to rely more on on-site management rather than the parent office, compared with the first-time expatriates who are more rely on parent office's network, which is closely related to the interaction adjustment of expatriates. In addition, taking the Western expatriates adjustment to Hong Kong as a case study, it has been found that prior international from the very same place has the strongest positive influence of expatriate adjustment⁶⁸, which indicates the culture similarity is also influencing the prior experience's impact on the present one.

Language fluency used to be ranked top of the barriers for international adjustment⁶⁹, as proficiency in the host country language facilitates expatriate adjustment by providing sufficient opportunity for effective communications with the locals⁷⁰. However, it was argued that whether language proficiency is the sole factor influencing communication between expatriates and the locals, as the role of communication is not only indicating language knowledge but also the communication ability in general, thus it has been found that especially in the foreign subsidiary that general communications skills, rather than specific language skills, are more important for the subsidiary management position⁷¹. As mentioned in the hierarchical position part, it was specific evaluated that technical expatriates are more adapted in terms of interaction adjustment than expats on the managerial level⁷².

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Based on the previous researches and models, the theoretical framework of this study is formed, which is composed of three broad categories: work-related factors, non work-related factors, and individual factors. According to the international adjustment model, several literature-reviewed propositions (LP) are presented for further comparison with collected data that may form empirical-data propositions (EP) in the later chapters.

⁶⁶ Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991

⁶⁷ Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley, 1999

⁶⁸ Selmer, 2002

⁶⁹ Victor, 1992

⁷⁰ Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993

⁷¹ Tung, 1982

⁷² Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999



Work-related Factors

In this study, work-related factors stem from Organizational Factors, Job Factors, and Position Factors in the reviewed literatures. Then, these indices are supposed to be in the specific assignment vector of Swedish expatriates take overseas assignment in the Chinese subsidiary of a Sweden-originated corporation.

LP1: The Swedish individuals who have been selected through a two-way selection mechanism will show higher degree of adjustment to Chinese culture.

LP2: Logistical support from the organization will be positively associated with Swedish expatriates' all facets of international adjustment to Chinese society.

LP3: Social support of co-workers and superiors, defined in terms of the sources and quality of helping relationships, can act as a significant positive predictor of Swedish expatriate adjustment, especially adjustment to workplace in China.

LP4: Role clarity and role discretion will be positively associated with Swedish expatriates' international adjustment, especially work adjustment.

LP5: Role conflict and role novelty will be negatively associated with Swedish expatriates' international adjustment, especially work adjustment.

LP6: The Swedish expatriate's hierarchical level within the company will act as a moderator in the process of international adjustment, especially work adjustment.

LP7: The Swedish expatriate's varied functional area within the company will act as a moderator in the process of international adjustment, especially work adjustment.

Non Work-related Factors

Apart from the most-discussed work-related factors, several non work-related factors play critical role in the process of Swedish expatriates' adjustment to Chinese culture.

LP8: High novelty of Chinese culture will be negatively associated with Swedish expatriates' degree of international adjustment, especially interaction and general adjustment.

LP9: The adjustment of Swedish expatriates and their accompanying members, especially partner or spouse adjustment, are highly correlated.

LP9a: General adjustment of spouse will be related to three facets of Swedish expatriates' adjustment.

LP9b: Interaction adjustment of spouse will be only related to the expatriate interaction adjustment.

Individual Factors



LP10: Self-efficacy will have a positive relationship with degree of Swedish expatriate adjustment, especially work adjustment and interaction adjustment.

LP11: Relational and perceptual skills will be positively related to degree of Swedish expatriate adjustment to Chinese culture.

LP12: Previous international assignments will facilitate Swedish expats' all facets of adjustment in China.

LP13: Fluency in mandarin language will facilitate the Swedish expatriate adjustment in the Mainland of China, especially interaction adjustment.



3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter three presents a methodological framework for this study. Based on the features of conducting a qualitative research, central aspects are outlined in detail, including the context of study, study population, participants recruiting procedures, the method for analyzing data, and some ethical considerations.

3.1 Research approach

China is Sweden's main trading partner in Asia. According to the 2010 Situation Report on Swedish Industrial Corporations in China⁷³ that Swedish MNCs not only expand sales organizations and manufacturing facilities in China, but also expanding their business into comprehensive local or regional sourcing as well as product development, which represents their eagerness to meet Chinese customer demands and local standards. Whereas, the empirical studies don't present enough support for the applicableness of existing model in Chinese market, whereas, Swedish expatriates' failure in adaptation to China may trigger serious problem, thus this study aims to display descriptive support for the speculated myth and acts as a connection between the existing international adjustment model and realistic business use for Swedish companies with branches in Chinese market.

In addition, Corbin and Strauss⁷⁴ deny the hazardousness of initialing a research problem from personal and professional experiences, but admit the positive outcome from a potential researcher's experience, which is deemed more valuable than other abstract sources; more straightforwardly, "if you know an area, have some experience... don't tear it out of your head, you can use it"⁷⁵. Thus, the author, as an international student from China, has studied in Sweden for almost two years, and to some extent has similar personal experiences in the field, which helps in conducting the interviews.

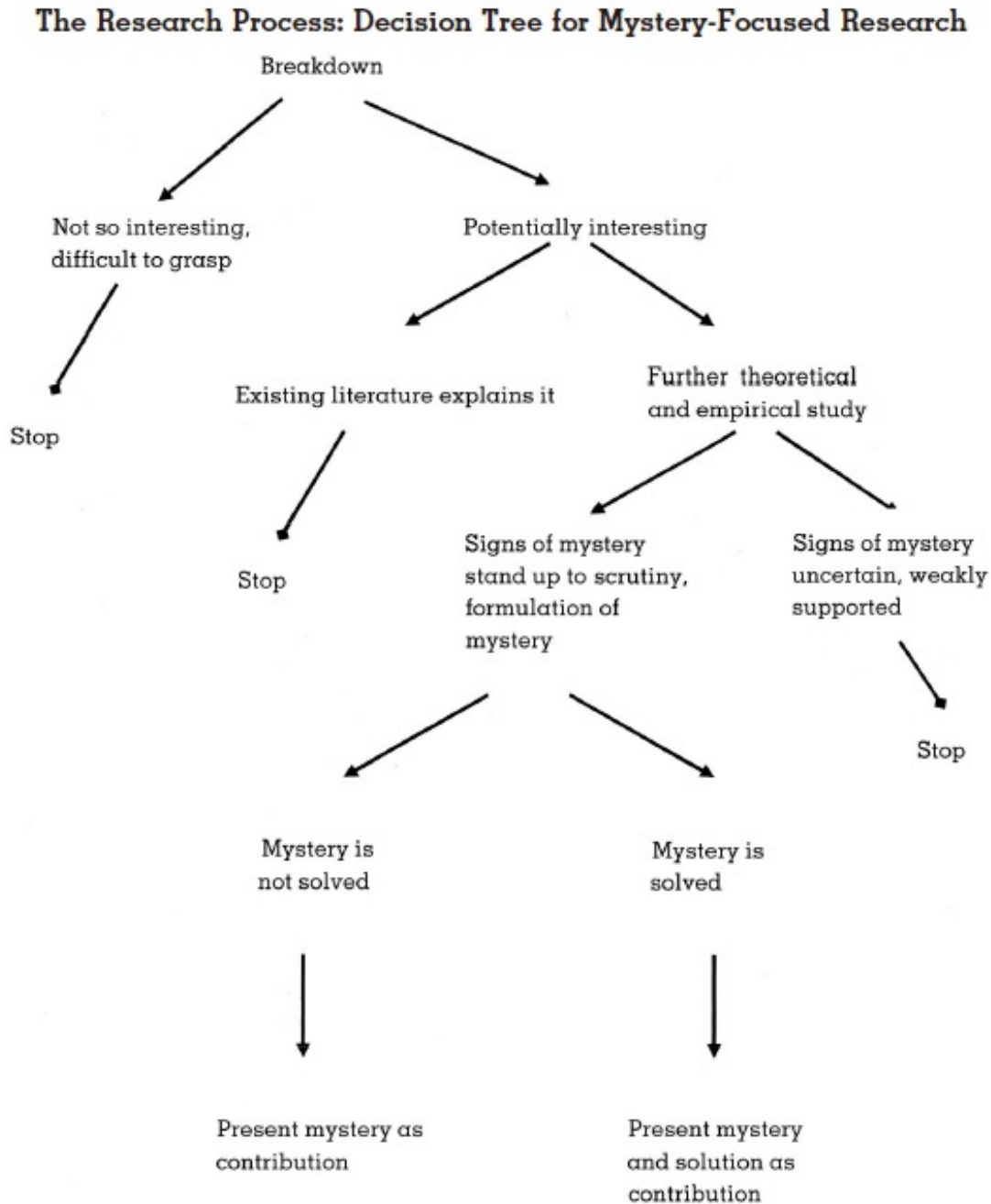
Mystery-Focused Research Process⁷⁶ is recommended as the most appropriate approach to this study, as stated in the inspiring research part, there is a myth of inapplicableness of culture shock pattern for Western expatriates in the Mainland of China, which could be regarded as research "breakdown" in the field of international adjustment; next, due to the promising market reality, plus the academic discussion of expatriate adjustment is simultaneously promising, the topic of study could be deemed as "potentially interesting"; then, there are abundant existing literature explains some relevant speculations, mostly from statistical research findings, which leads to the presented "further empirical study", besides, it also aims to obtain certain and strongly supported "signs of mystery" to ambitiously "solve the mystery", referring to the vivid illustration in Figure 4.

⁷³ Association of Swedish Engineering Industries, 2010; MNC stands for Multi-national Corporation

⁷⁴ Corbin and Strauss, 2008

⁷⁵ Strauss, 1987:84

⁷⁶ Alvesson and Kärreman,, 2007

Figure 4. The Research Process: Decision Tree for Mystery-Focused Research⁷⁷

The research population, consisting of every individual of a type the writer wants to study⁷⁸ of this research, is targeted to all Swedish expatriates in the Mainland of China. However, as an expanding study based on a published quantitative research paper, the target scope of participants should be also on the similar level, hence, more specifically,

⁷⁷ Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007:1271

⁷⁸ Treadwell, 2011



Swedish expats on an advanced level, i.e. skilled manager or engineer, are of the study’s research population.

3.2 Data collection

Conducting semi-structured interviews is the sole and only data collection method in the study. Regarding the number of participants, ten expatriate respondents and two expatriate spouses, twelve participants in total, are recruited in this study (see Table 1 for respondents’ information), as according to empirical findings that the most new information will be gained in the first several sessions, and usually after the fifth, most of information would be repeated, thus, there is little to be obtained from continuing⁷⁹, then it is suggested to conduct more interviews for ensuring the information saturation. It is convinced to get validating results from the twelve conducted interviews.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interview Respondents

No.	Identity	Function Area	Work Base in China	Expat Length
R1	Male	IT	Tianjin	2 years
R2	Male	IT	Jinan/Beijing	1+4.5 years
R2S	Female	Volunteer nurse		
R3	Male	IT	Tianjin	2 years
R3S	Female	Housewife		
R4	Male	Automobile	Shanghai	2 years
R5	Female	Electronics	Beijing	2+1.5 years
R6	Male	Automobile	Shanghai	2 years
R7	Female	Automobile	Shanghai	2 years
R8	Female	IT	Tianjin	2 years
R9	Male	Automobile	Shanghai	2 years
R10	Female	Automobile	Shanghai	2 years

Compared with a structured interview, the semi-structured interview, conducted with a designed interview guide, features with natural opening and closing questions, and the rest questions are mostly designed as open questions in order to lead the interviewees to describe more details.

⁷⁹ Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011



The questions are designed according to the themes of international adjustment: general adjustment and interaction adjustment, in which sub-themes of interaction adjustment are detailed inserted, including previous experiences and language skills, social resources, and social support.

The interview guide is designed on the basis of five themes:

Theme 1. Basic Information acts as a leading part of an interview to recall the interviewee's expats life, in which variables at the anticipatory stage are taken into consideration, e.g. culture favorableness and the basic information.

Theme 2. Culture Shock Occurrence and General Adjustment functions to test the hypothesis of Black and Stephens'⁸⁰ 7-item general adjustment scale.

The following three themes are with regard to the literature-reviewed hypothesis of interaction adjustment:

Theme 3. Experience and Language Fluency is based on the most common factual measurements;

Theme 4. Social Resources is based on the measurement in terms of the quantity and quality of social contact, since frequency is used as a measure of quantity of contact⁸¹ and satisfaction is used as measure of quality of social contact⁸²;

Theme 5. Social Support is on the basis of Ong and Ward's 18-item Index of Sojourner Social Support (ISSS) scale⁸³ as a measure of social support for coping problems.

Regarding the interviewees' recruitment, a combination of network and snowball strategy (also called "chain sampling") was used to invite enough suitable respondents. This study starts with acquainted respondent 1 (R1) in autumn 2013 who had just finished his 2-year single overseas assignment, and then R1 introduced his acquainted colleagues R2, R3 and R4, in addition, the recruitment of R2S and R3S were initiatively proposed by R2 and R3, which adds valuable direct data for examining spouse adjustment for this study. The rest respondents were introduced by the acquaintance from the author's network resource.

3.3 Data Analysis

Since the interviews were recorded and transcribed into texts, and the basic text editing software Word and coding software NVivo were both utilized in the process of compiling codes of transcription. Then the most relevant codes compose the subtitles of the following chapter "Results" used as the data-coding tool, on this coding stage, codes are developed according to the terms appeared in the reviewed literature.

⁸⁰ Black and Stephens, 1989

⁸¹ Caligiuri, 2000

⁸² Serle and Ward, 1990

⁸³ Ong and Ward, 2005



In addition to developing codes, “Data are inextricably fused with theory”⁸⁴, thus **abduction analysis**⁸⁵ is utilized as the approach for analyzing empirical data obtained from interviews. The analyzing process consists of three steps: (1) the application of an established interpretive rule, here several literature-reviewed propositions stem from an integrated model are introduced; (2) the observation of a surprising – in light of the interpretive rule – empirical phenomenon, here several empirical-data-based propositions are supposed to derive from the transcription of interviews; and (3) the imaginative articulation of a new interpretive rule (theory) that resolves the surprise, here the author tries to make comparison between LPs and EPs, and then it is expected to give some propositions are similar to the original ones, some are newly emerged, and some are revised due to the changing times for explaining the specific phenomenon of Swedish expatriates in China.

3.5 Ethical Concerns

In a qualitative research many ethical issues should be continuously kept in the author’s mind, in order to get the research valid, and to strive to offer more beneficence to a wider society⁸⁶.

Firstly, with the consideration of information consensus, all participants were invited on the base of self-willingness, as during the participant recruitment period, the author’s self-introduction and the study’s proposal were provided in the first-contact invitation e-mail, which ensured the replier’s willingness to accept the interview request. Then, after receiving the acceptance from the invitees, the author set appropriate interview time and venue to cater for the interviewee’s convenience.

Secondly, the anonymity issue was informed in both written e-mail and orally before conducting the interview. The recording permission at first was not mentioned in the invitation e-mail, which made some interviewees nervous, then the writer aroused the importance of letting all interviewees be psychologically prepared and feel comfortable for the interview, thus the recording permission was added in the later invitation e-mails.

Lastly, it is necessary to clarify that the use for the data collection is only for academic research, which is appreciated by all participants for voluntarily supporting the writer. As the thesis is supposed to be published on the university portal, all participants are to receive the final work for review, though they have orally agreed upon the use of data.

⁸⁴ Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007:1265

⁸⁵ Peirce, 1978

⁸⁶ Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011

4. RESULTS

In chapter four, the author presents thick descriptive data in a categorized way. The following categories are derived from the codes of transcription and more importantly, the empirical-data-based propositions (EP) will be stemmed from the excerpts of transcription, which builds a fundamental base for comparison between LPs and EPs in the following chapter.

4.1 Expatriation Motivation

As the answer to the motivation for being an expat, respondents' motivation could be divided into self-motivated, applying for the expatriation by his or her own willingness; and assigned, being asked if would like to take the overseas assignment.

As a self-motivated expatriate, R1 expresses his determination to be an expat that when he was really in need of some life change, there was an internal exchange opportunity, and China is the best and most attractive choice for him, compared with the rest choices of Japan and India. Such kind of **culture favorableness** actually played as an incentive in expat candidates' mind, so as R4, who told the interviewee that he was keen on watching Chinese cartoon *Monkey King* when he was a kid, and later his father bought him some Swedish books about China, which left him positive impressions of China, so he admitted that his individual preference was an operator to accept the expat offer, in addition to other career-driven reasons.

More surprisingly, **culture favorableness** could even become the reason to apply for a second expatriation. R10, who was a spouse of expatriate in Singapore and Hong Kong, later shifted the role as an expatriate herself in Shanghai, and she did want to pursue such an opportunity that she even accepted the expat position where she was not specialized.

In addition, one's motivation to take an overseas assignment could shift, as R2 describes his motivation to go to China for the first time: *"I think it's very exciting about a very different culture. The group set a new joint venture in China, and did a lot of promotions, then I asked my wife, and she was also very interested in different cultures"*. Four years after finishing his first expat experience, he initiatively applied for the second opportunity, *"we really like that experience in China, so everyone was very excited in the family, as a new opportunity, to go to China again for a longer period"*. R2S also talks about her overview impression about Chinese: *"Chinese are very friendly, they are curious, but they are friendly. I have never met someone who is not nice"*.

According to interviewees' experience, the expat opportunity is quite exclusive to some extent, in other words, only candidate has been taken into selector's consideration would be informed the opportunity. R9 says so:



“I got the question from the manager building up the office (in Shanghai), he was trying to getting together the person he wants to bring to China. So he asked me if I could apply for doing services in Shanghai? It was a specific task he wanted me to perform, and maybe I was one out of twelve people he asked, and we went to the interview. Then, he mapped us with other tasks that people need to be performed, and he wanted us to be different personalities, then he mapped a team that well-balanced, and I was the one chosen to go.”

Meanwhile, the candidate’s own willingness cannot be omitted, so when R9 got the offer, he struggled: *“I haven’t had any plan before, but when I heard it, I thought if I don’t do it, I’ll regret in 5 years.”* Actually, “don’t want to regret” thinking mode is prevalent among Swedish expats, as R6 describes his motivation: *“In 2010, it was very popular in the group to go to China, so I applied for the vacancy in Shanghai when I saw the job advertisement on the intranet.”*

Overall, the career-driven motivation seems to be the foremost incentive for being a Swedish expat, and simultaneously the self-preferred reason can be an operator for Swedes to take an international assignment in China. Here the author summarizes the following empirical-data-based propositions (EP):

EP1: The more attractive the overseas assignment opportunity is, the more motivated the Swedish expatriates will be.

EP2: The more Swedish expatriates are in favor of the international assignment, the higher will their degree of work adjustment be.

4.2 Relocation Preparation

All respondents’ answer to the possible difficulty in **relocation settlement** surprised the interviewer, as they frankly pointed that the relocation agency assigned by their parent companies was so customer-catering that they didn’t experience any difficulty in choosing apartment, arranging international school for kids, and so on. The relocation procedure is summarized: picking up the expats and/or their family at the airport, sending them to temporary hotel or accommodation, showing them several apartments for choice making, and dealing with expats’ kids school transfer. Respondents described so: *“We have seen many offers, most are in the compound that exclusive for foreign passport holders, so all my neighbors are foreigners.”* Living in the expats compound provides a familiar atmosphere for the Swedes, as R9 said,

“The biggest reason I chose a compound where a lot of Swedish are living in is the school, as one of the absolute best British school in the world is in Shanghai, of course, many Swedish move there...”

On the other side, aside from foreigner neighborhood, Swedish expats also chose living in service apartments, compared with compound, which indicate a sole high-rise building



facilitated with gym and regular cleaning service. However, such a building forms a harder barrier between neighbors, R7 told the interviewer: *“I didn’t know another Swedish expat was also living in the same building until we met in the company.”*

Actually, expats themselves concerned the contradictory condition they were in, as R2 compared his second assignment in Beijing with the previous one in Jinan:

“We have been to China two times actually. So the very first time was in the year 1999, and we live in the house in the middle of the city with a lot of Chinese people living around, not in the same area as the guarded or compound area in Beijing we live. During the night, there were so much noise, and people talked so much, everyone was outside. Very traditional, we really like that kind of experience... In Beijing, I think we live quite different as an expat, there is an expat community, there are a lot of restaurants, and everything you use when you live there as an expat. Where we live, there are many international schools, and it’s almost separate from the local. But you have both, I think”.

More surprisingly, R1 moved away from the so-called expat community, as he found it was impossible to be involved in the local if he still lived in the foreign neighborhood, though some difficulties occurred, he managed to live in a totally Chinese neighborhood and even met his Chinese wife who helped and accelerated his acculturation.

EP3: Relocation service agency creates general-adjustment-free living environment for Swedish expats in China.

In addition to the housing compensation, respondents were also offered all accessible facilities from their organizations, including a private car with driver, an Ayi (Chinese housemaid), and pre-departure training courses.

Regarding the car and driver resources management, the experience of R3, R3S and R8 is a good example: as R3 and R8 were working in the same office and living in the same building, and they were assigned a private car with driver separately. Then they found a good solution to appropriately arrange the car resource - one car for sending R3 and R8 to the office, and the other for sending their kids to the international school.

Not every expat family was served by an Ayi, but it is interesting to find that expats families served with Ayi or not both met some problems. R2S told the interviewer that she is not satisfied with the first Ayi, but she really appreciates the second one who later served R2 family for four years: *“She was really good, and she cooked Chinese food for us,”* though there was language barrier, *“she doesn’t speak English, so we speak Chinese, and pointing...”* Though R3 family was not served by Ayi, R3S still managed to take care of all house chores by herself. However, the pity of not having an Ayi she thought was the opportunity to practice Mandarin language, as she found her kids’ classmates who lived with an Ayi could speak Chinese language better.



EP4: Housekeeping and commuting services provided by company create local contacts for Swedish expat families, which will facilitate their interaction adjustment to China.

As replies to expat pre-departure preparation, almost all respondents mentioned the intensive **pre-departure training courses** arranged by the organization, which lasted for one or two whole workdays, and the expat's spouse was also invited, whereas none of the interviewed expats had attended all classes offered due to their schedule conflict. In addition, some respondents whose kids were too young to have knowledge of English were provided special English language courses, as they would receive education in international schools in China.

However, similar to the relocation agency mentioned above, these culture-awareness training courses are also outsourced to a professional training agency, and the course content is not totally applicable to every expat, taking R9 as an example: *“When I took the training course arranged by the organization, that was a couple of hours with handouts reading, the focus is about management, but I was a technique expert.”*

In addition to the tradition in-class training course, R4 who had also received online culture-awareness course which he really appreciated, as he couldn't attend all in-class course due to his busy schedule, however, he mentioned that the valid on-line course time was assigned according to expats' position level.

Since R9 complained about the irrelevancy of the training course he took, a following-up exploratory question was added to respondents who had taken training courses – “was the course content helpful?” – and surprisingly, most respondents gave the negative answer, as R3S replied so:

“I only attended one-day intensive course, and I learned U-curve pattern in the training course, but I didn't experience the same stages as described. For me, I think the first three months was the most difficult, and later I had adapted...”

Obviously, there are many theoretical contents in the training course, and in contrast, practical tips for living in China seem more useful for Swedish expatriates, as R4 said: *“Thanks to the culture awareness course, my teacher told us don't be surprised if a Chinese ask you how much you earn each month”*, then he did meet the same situation in China and did not feel being defended as he had mentally prepared for being asked such a private question in China.

EP5: Practicality-based pre-departure training course will facilitate Swedish expatriate families' general adjustment in China.

4.3 Workplace Communication: Organizational Culture vs. Host Country Culture

As reply to the socialization in the workplace, all interviewed expats showed their



willingness to communicate with their Chinese colleagues, especially for the pioneering expatriate managers who were assigned to build the Chinese subsidiary from the scratch. Thus R2 thinks there is no culture barrier in workplace:

“For me, it is quite easy to adjust (in work), I don’t need to change so much. In the group, it’s very much of Swedish culture, it’s an open culture. I have been working in the group for over 25 years, so I know the company culture very well. And I am there (in China) as an expert, so I demonstrate the culture to them (Chinese subordinates)”.

However, there is no enough data supports R2’s view of the Swedish organizational culture dominating its Chinese subsidiary, since recent expats seem to be surprised with the organizational culture in the Chinese office. Then, a very Swedish tradition – “fika tid” (coffee break) was taken as an illustrative example in the interviews. Surprisingly, most subsidiaries only have Fika time on Friday afternoon, and the meaning and content of “fika” is totally converted into Chinese style, can you imagine “fika” means eating fried chicken, French fries, chips, fruits; drinking soft drinks; or even enjoying ice cream during summer time in China? R9’s answer about his understanding of Chinese fika seems convincing:

“Here in Sweden, you have fika every day, morning fika, afternoon fika, fika all the time... but it's very short, you just have a cup of coffee and you don't eat anything, 5 or 10 minutes, then you go on...what we talked about are almost work-related items. Actually it's not in the work atmosphere, but you are still talking about work. However, in China, that's a break from work: the table is full of food, and it lasts from 30 minutes to 1 hour, that's why we couldn't have fika everyday.”

Taking the real organizational culture presented in Chinese subsidiaries into consideration, the author proposes:

EP6: Organizational culture novelty is not the deciding factor influencing Swedish expatriate work adjustment.

In addition to the fika example, some interesting examples experienced by the interviewed expat engineer and manager were also valuable to examine the expats adjustment. R7, expatriated as an advanced engineering expert, had no pre-departure training, but did manage to adjustment herself quite well, and she admitted that she got help from two Chinese engineering peer-workers, because they used to be Chinese expats in the Swedish headquarter, which facilitated R7’s adjustment. Besides, R7 told the interviewer that her colleagues even would like to be her free guide during their business trips around China: *“They (Chinese coworkers) are so kind and passionate, they always ask me if I need help, even when sometimes I do want to be alone and have a rest in the hotel.”*



Besides, as R4 mentioned his surprise regarding the possible awkward income question to be asked in China, however, a local HR officer informed him that it is impolite to ask any private question to Chinese candidates during the interview, because:

“I know the candidates have the chance to meet me means they have passed at least two rounds of test, and I know they are good enough, so I want to know more about their personality in the interview. In Sweden, I usually ask them about their family, hobbies, etc., but in China, I should avoid asking their privacy, it is better to stick on the professional topic.”

Obviously, there are some dos and don'ts in the Chinese workplace though it belongs to the Swedish parent company, and thanks to the help or reminder from Chinese colleagues, Swedish expats adjusted themselves quickly.

EP7: Support from Chinese colleagues, preferably who know Swedish culture well, will accelerate Swedish expats' adjustment to not only workplace but also general life.

4.4 Role Transition and Hierarchical Communication

As answer to the introduction of job titles in China, either “manager” or “director” was given to the interviewer, which indicates the expats' level is above the average and up to middle managerial level of the organization. Most respondents were hundred percent clearly informed to act as a pioneering role in setting up the newly built team in the local office before starting their expatriation.

However, for being a manager in China is totally different from that in Sweden, Swedish expatriate managers feel this kind of difference from the first meeting they hold with Chinese subordinates. As R1 and R4 experienced that when they entered into the meeting room, everyone stood up to show their respect to the new manager, and they were astounded, *“in Sweden, though I am a manager, I never thought I am superior than others”*.

In addition to the extreme respect shock, Swedish expats were not prepared with the no-discussion atmosphere in Chinese office, as R2 said:

“At the very beginning, I ask my team members ‘what do you think?’ And they say that ‘we just agree with you’, and I was a little bit frustrated, because I want them to say, to raise what they thought about this, I want their opinions that help me to make decision... Then I found out that when we were in a large group, no one wants to say in front of me and in front of others, but when I was one-to-one with them, it was very easy to get their opinion”.

It also happened that overlapping roles were expected to act, which added the barrier to expats' adjustment, as R3 said:



“My problem is I have two jobs: I'm a manager here in China for a part, then also a global manager within the group, which means I work till 5pm everyday with my local Chinese management, and I also work globally, so today I'll leave office at 11.30 at night. So I have very very long days, it's different every week.”

In contrary to appearing obstacles when taking double managerial roles, for technical engineering expats, taking over the role as a manager exerts positive influence for their adjustment. According to R9 who firstly worked as a technical consultant and later took over the manager role, he directly pointed out the change he found from himself:

“In Chinese employees' eye, as we were a team of expats there, they regard us as managers. The difference for me is that I only take care of technical stuff rather than recruiting people... Last half year, I took over the manager position, then I have opportunity to chat with team members in private...

During the first year and half, I was the only one in the meeting to speak out: ‘why do we do this or that’... and I observed that my Chinese colleagues are very quiet...then, for the last 6 months, I, as a manager myself, tried to engage my Chinese team members, because I need their arguments...I sensed it's really different...”

Actually, before being promoted as a manager, for R9, it was hard to achieve effective interaction adjustment with local engineers, as he described his good intension to adjust:

“...because we have different managers, they don't need to listen to me... and the problem is that ‘they don't know what they don't know’. Then I developed a course to educate them, before that, I went to every high manager to inform them the course information, and ask them to gather their subordinates, then they realize that ‘I know now that I don't know everything’, I also quote the vice-president's speech: ‘it's ok to make mistakes, but it's not ok to hide’... but I think most of them misbelieve in me, they don't trust me... but I think I managed to convince one here, one there, and then they may spread it to their group.”

It is obvious that there is discrepancy between Chinese line managers and Swedish expats, and one more typical example can be scrutinized from the understanding of fika time. Mentioning the discussion about fika time again, it was complained by several interviewees that this Swedish tradition was ruined by the Chinese hierarchy: *“In the Chinese office, fika means that the ‘lao ban’ (the boss/manager in Chinese pinyin) stands up and shows some Powerpoint”*, said R3. And according to R8, R3's Swedish colleague in the same office, they have communicated with Chinese line managers to introduce the Swedish fika in the Chinese office, but they failed, and now even the Chinese fika time has been cancelled which makes Swedish expats feel disappointed.

EP8: Expansion of role responsibilities will facilitate Swedish expatriates' adjustment to Chinese workplace, especially work and general adjustment.

EP8a: Compared with being a technique expat, expansion of role responsibilities as a



manager will obtain higher degree of interaction adjustment.

EP9: Small-scale discussion, preferably one-to-one communication, with the host nationals will facilitate Swedish expatriates' work and interaction adjustment.

4.5 Social Contacts

During the Interview 1, R1 showed some slides of his expats life reflection, and he talked about his first impression when he was in the elevator in China, he found everyone wanted to press the close button that is seldom seen in Sweden. Besides, he also mentioned his shopping experience in the Chinese grocery store, everyone peeked him and wanted to see what the foreigner bought. Similar situation happened to almost all interviewed expats, and even to Swedish expats' family members, as R3 shared her little son's experience, *"our son was 6 years old when we were in Jinan, his hair color is light blonde, people always want to touch his hair, and they always say to him 'Oh, such a nice boy', so sometimes it was very hard for him"*.

Actually, the curiosity about foreigners whose appearances are different from Chinese only happens in second- or third-tier cities in China, since local people in Beijing and Shanghai are too tired of meeting so many foreigners everyday, such kind of indifference aggravates the barrier for Swedish expatriates to adjust to the local environment. Swedish are characterized with conservative personality, thus it requires encouragement for them to come outside the familiar and comfortable expats community. As R6 admits, *"we feel so comfortable in the compound, so it is unnecessary to go outside"*; the personality is also a factor in getting social contacts, as R9 compared his wife and himself, saying that: *"when we were in the local market, I tried to communicate with sales, I use pinyin translation mobile software plus body language, they laughed at me, so my wife feel uncomfortable, but I don't care"*, in addition, he frankly admitted that he had more social contacts than his wife, as his wife's friends could become his friends, but it's impossible in the reverse.

Similarly, as reply to social contacts in China, most Swedish expats had more contacts with expats friends they knew in the compound where they went to gym and held events together. Besides, there are some Swedish or Nordic communities in China as well; more interestingly, Swedes seem to be patriotic when they are overseas: R3S told the interviewer that she together with her two kids spent a lot of time in practicing songs for the Lucia Day in a Danish community; R10 had an exclusive Midsummer celebration with her Swedish colleagues.

EP10: Expat community interferes Swedish expatriates' interaction adjustment to Chinese society, but facilitates their general adjustment to life in China.



The interviewer also scrutinizes that Swedish expats lack of local contacts, as R10 directly said: *“I have difficulty in getting close friends in China”*, and the only one local frequent contact was her Mandarin teacher, and they sometimes had dinner together. Similarly, such kind of willingness to interact with the locals can be found in the interviews with other respondents, as R3 re-clarified his understanding of “Chinese contacts”:

“How do you mean Chinese contacts? I don't know, this is something I've been thinking about. I've never been home to one of my colleagues', or I've never been invited to one of my colleagues' apartment. We've been out in restaurants, I don't know why, maybe because I'm the manager, maybe because it's awkward.”

However, is “being invited to Chinese contacts’ home” indicating high degree of interaction adjustment? Two interviewees who had been invited to their Chinese contacts’ apartments shared their unforgettable experiences with the interviewer. R2 once went to a Chinese colleague’s birthday party:

“there is a big difference: In Sweden, we separate work peers from friends, I have work peers and colleagues at workplace, but we don't build that strong personal relationship. If you have a birthday party, for instance, you invite yours friends to your house. In China, I got the feeling that you don't separate, you have friends everywhere - you have friends from work and outside work, then when you have a birthday party, you invite all your friends. That's the difference I found, when you build relationship, that's more personal relationship in China.”

R4, volunteered as coach of a youth ice hockey team in Shanghai, was invited to a Chinese friend’s home for lunch, and he found the house was cleaned thoroughly, the kid was well dressed up with a bow, the meal was served perfectly, and later the host even asked his kid to play the piano for the guest, which made R4 felt really embarrassed, then he frankly admitted that he himself felt more comfortable when getting along with his Western friends.

EP11: High frequency and long length of contacts with host nationals will facilitate Swedish expats’ interaction adjustment to Chinese culture.

4.6 Spouse and Family Adjustment

Shifting the interview focus from expatriates to their family, the interviewees all admitted the importance of family accompany during their expatriation abroad, though R1 and R7 were single expatriates. Interestingly, R1 came back with a Chinese wife who played an important role in accelerating his adaptation in China; while, R7 cancelled her intension to extend expatriation contract due to the concern about her mother’s health condition.

The rest respondents moved to China in a family unit, and their varied family condition and backgrounds provided the interviewee with various insights. When being asked to



make comparison between themselves and their partners, only R2 and R3 admitted their wives were more adapted than themselves, which later led to their initial recommendation of inviting their wives as joint interviewees.

R2 admitted, *“my wife speaks Chinese more, so when we were in the market, she could communicate”*, furthermore, though his wife is deemed to support his expat life, but when R2S started her volunteer work as a nurse in a local orphanage, R2 supported her as well: *“it was very rewarding that we could help children, so during some weekends I also stay in the orphanage with them”*.

Similarly, R3 also pointed out that his wife and children’s language proficiency compensated his lack of communication with the locals,

“There're some difficulties in restaurants. My wife understands what we've ordered, even my daughter, who is 8 years old, can correct me and order food. They don't speak fluently, but they can communicate, my wife has to go shopping for groceries and she always goes to the local food market, then she needs to be able to negotiate the price, etc.”

Meanwhile, R3 also pointed that he feels the family is more united in the foreign country:

“But the good thing about being an expat which I realize is - all weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, we are together fully. As we live in an apartment which is very nice, we have no "musts", so to say, in Sweden, we both work, so in weekends, we have to visit people, we have to go to different trainings for the kids, etc. in China, we can focus on going to a museum or go to some lake or go to Beijing, and so on, so we are more like a family, to be honest.”

For more comparison between the degree of spouse adjustment and that of expatriate adjustment, the interviewer also got the answer from expats that it was possible for their spouses to totally avoid adjustment to the local Chinese, like spouses of R5 and R10. R5 stated that her husband used to have long period of overseas work life, and he was up to the age for retiring, so he spent most of his time in enjoying by himself in China, and he volunteered to be R5's driver everyday, as R5 said the traffic jam was terrible in Beijing, but she really enjoyed the time to stay with his husband during the commuting time. Actually in China, the phenomenon of house-husband and work-wife family mode is seldom seen, but for R5, she said in her company there were many such kind of expat families, so they even spontaneously organized a league called “Beijing Boys” to gather all male expats spouses. Similarly, R10's husband, who used to be an expat in Singapore and Hong Kong, also chose to totally relax himself in China, as he had quite intensive work in Sweden, thus he only spent most of the spare time in the apartment, and R10 admitted that as she knew that her husband is not that kind of socializing person, so she just let him to relax as much as he wanted.

Compared with the totally avoidance of adjustment, the rest respondents could not agree that spouse adjustment was better than their own adjustment, as the spouse had no



interaction with the locals, at least the expat him/herself had work contacts. As R4 described his wife's life in Shanghai: "*She used to going shopping, having afternoon tea with other expats' wives, or going to spa for the most of time*", and similar situation occurred to spouses lived in the compound, as R9 analyzed why her wife felt tired of staying in Shanghai: "*she didn't need to care about housework, and the only one boy was in the international school for the most time, and she felt that she was not needed*". However, such kind of boring life as an expat spouse could be changed when an appropriate work opportunity appeared, similar to R2S volunteered to be a nurse, R4's wife also volunteered to be a Swedish teacher in the international school and English teacher in a local school, which facilitated her adjustment to China.

EP12: High degree of spouse adjustment will act as an operator for Swedish expatriates adjustment to Chinese society.

EP12a: Spouse general adjustment will be related to all three facets of Swedish expatriate adjustment.

EP12b: Spouse interaction adjustment will be only related to Swedish expatriate's interaction adjustment.

EP12c: Possible work adjustment of spouse will exert positive effect on all facets of Swedish spouse adjustment in China, and will become moderator in Swedish expatriate's interaction adjustment.

EP13: Expatriation in China will make Swedish expat families to be more family-oriented.

4.7 Previous Expatriate Experience

As mentioned above, the previous expatriate experience in Jinan, Shandong Province, China changed R1's impression of China, which also played a positive role in encouraging him to apply for his second expatriation in Beijing, the capital of China. In addition, R2S admitted her adjustment was better in Beijing than in Jinan,

"My friends are most Swedish, English speaking friends in Jinan, and I only have a couple of Chinese friends. But when I was in Beijing, I have a lot of Chinese friends, because I work, and people are all Chinese working in that orphanage; or even when I don't work, I talk to Ayi (Chinese housemaid), besides, there are many rich Chinese people in the international school".

Besides, R10 who used to be an expatriate's spouse in Singapore and Hong Kong also admitted the referential value of previous experiences, "*as you have already known what can do and what cannot do*", although she thinks Singapore and Hong Kong are more internationalized than the Mainland of China.

However, contrary to R1's and R10's positive experiences, R4 and R7 who had previous expatriate experiences in European countries gave the opposite answer to the positive



correlation with their acculturation in China. R4 explained that his expatriate in Belgium was only one year, and Belgium is so near that he didn't move with family but came back and forth by himself, so these two periods of experiences were quite different and incomparable. R7 who had been to Belgium, Germany and UK before being an expat in China supported the idea of incomparability, she mentioned that, *“in UK, it's almost impossible to be involved in your local colleagues' friend circle, however, in China, I sometimes feel my Chinese colleagues are too caring about me.”*

EP14: Only previous international assignment experiences in Confucian Asian countries will facilitate Swedish expats' adjustment in China.

4.8 Language Fluency

Answering to the language training course they took, all respondents replied with eagerness to learn a new language, however, the satisfaction of the training course varied according to the course style, length, and content; meanwhile none of the respondents have reached the level to communicate with locals in Mandarin Chinese.

One typical example of language barrier for Swedish expats is to communicate with sales in the supermarket, as there are no English labels on the products and usually sales are not proficient in English, besides, R1 mentioned that he never used the translating software as it was impossible for him to write Chinese character on the mobile phone. Another typical example happens when ordering food: R6 said that they tried a lot of dishes in the restaurant in order to find dishes fit their tastes, as waiters and waitress were lack of English knowledge. One more problem was caused by compound management, as R2 and R4 complained that though the relocation office arranged such a neighborhood with international facilities, the staff are not internationalized, then when they ask for maintenance, there would be a problem, R2 said so:

“I experience some frustrations. Sometimes it's very hard to fully understand how things work, and then when it suddenly doesn't work. Like in the building or in the house we live in China, the people did the maintenance, it's hard to get him know what I meant. And it was hard to see whether they did it in a good way.”

Such similar examples were mentioned by all respondents, and the strategy for most of them to solve is to avoid, then expats only went to imported food market where food price are higher but with English labels. However, actually only one respondent R9 told the interviewer that he would prefer shopping in the Chinese market, as he tried to use translating mobile software with basic knowledge of pinyin (Chinese alphabet), and showed it to local sales to ask for help, though it sounds ridiculous and his wife disliked, but that kind of trying to communicate made him feel to adjust to the locals, whereas, it requires basic knowledge of pinyin, so R9 explained:



“When I apply (for expatriation), at the same time, I started to search for mandarin courses. Then I found one in the group internally, for high-level management. Only absolutely top managers can take these courses, but they don't have much time, so I managed to take one of these vacant seats.”

EP15a: Communication willingness and skills will exert more facilitating effect on Swedish expats adjustment to Chinese locals, compared with the barrier from lack of language.

It has been mentioned that spouses' language proficiency could compensate expats' inability in communicating with non-English speakers in the local. As presented previously that R3S ordered food for R3 in the restaurant, and R2S also connected to people in the local market, though R2 showed his willingness to improve his language proficiency:

“I have Chinese course in my office actually in the morning. For some period, I have it quite frequently, I didn't reach the level that I can use it, that's a pity, and I think I should push myself. But in the beginning, it was too much work, I didn't have enough time, and it's really stressful. It was a lot of work and a lot of things should be done in a very short period of time, so during the first couple of years I postponed it, then I started to study, and I wish to learn more. But my wife speaks more, in the supermarket, she could speak Chinese and connect to people.”

EP15b: Spouse language proficiency will compensate Swedish expats adjustment in China, especially general adjustment.

Actually, the language ability of spouses can only reach so-called Survival Mandarin level, one reason for this is the time limitation: spouses of expats know they will be back Sweden very soon after reaching the basic level; the other practical reason lies in the course fee, as the parent company would like to reimburse a settled hours of training courses, summarized from excerpts of R3S.

4.9 Reflections of Being an Expat

As an open question to conclude each interview, all interviewees preferred giving personal suggestion to possible Swedish expatriates who were going to China, and it was very surprising for the interviewer that their answers were semantically quite similar to some extent.

“To be open-minded” is the most mentioned suggestion for Swedish expats, as many expats realized the way to catch up the fast pace in China, *“we need to consider why China is developing so fast, compared with Sweden, we don't make changes so frequently”*, R5 said so. It seems that Swedish expats still lay emphasis on the difference



between Sweden and China, and such kind of negative thoughts would make expats lose confidence in adjustment, as R6 reflected: *“We are too lazy to go out (of compound), and actually I realize it’s not good to gather with expats, as too much negative comments against Chinese there.”*

Actually, it seems that children could adjust themselves quickly and find a proper way to explain unhappy situations resulted from culture difference, as both R3 and R3S quoted their children’s understanding: *“they (Chinese nationals) are just thinking a little bit different, because this is how they’ve been raised”*, which astounded R3 and R3S, as they complained a lot about the traffic jam in China, but then they realized that complaint is not a solution.

However, is the culture difference really obstructing Swedish expats’ adjustment to Chinese society? R5 mentioned, *“we put too much emphasis on how different we are”*; and R9 compared Swedish norms and beliefs with his real experience, and briefly got his own understanding:

“I read some historical and culture differences (articles), there are a lot comparison between Sweden and U.S., and many Swedish think we are similar to Americans, but I found that we are closer to China than we are to U.S.”

In addition to the discussion regarding self-adjustment in being open-minded, the family issue was restated as a reflection of being an expat in China: *“don’t worry about children, but worry about wife”*, R9 said so. And other expats also consider both family members who went with them to China and who was staying in Sweden. As a Swedish employee who reaches either managerial level or advanced technical expert is usually facing his or her parents’ health problem, and both R7 and R10 considered it as one of their main reasons for not extending expatriation contract in China.

Besides, more concern from both Swedish expats and expat spouses is regarding repatriation, as it was directly pointed out by R9 and R2S. From the Swedish expatriate’s view,

“In Sweden, we both share housework, but after two years’ life in China that we don’t have to do housework then suddenly we come back, we need to seek our roles and responsibilities again, which is more challenging”;

and from the spouse’s perspective, more psychological disappointment was found: *“it was more complicated to come back home than moving to China. I mean people are not interested in my life abroad.”*



5. DISCUSSION

In chapter five, the author lays emphasis on building a bridge between the reviewed literature and the results presented in the previous chapter. By making comparison between the literature-reviewed propositions clarified in the theoretical framework and the empirical-data-based propositions emerged in the collected data, the discussion part is conceptualized to identify some implications of the specific research target group.

5.1 Work-related Factors

Motivation to expatriation (LP1 vs. EP1&2)

First of all, from the perspective of **selection mechanism**, it has been found that for the time being, the overseas assignment opportunity within a Swedish-based group is still exclusive between a senior manager and a list of candidates, whereas, it can also be found that some vacancies are published internally, which indicates a more open platform and a wider talent pool for the selector.

In addition, the code **culture favorableness** has emerged during the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees, as some respondents expressed their preference of Chinese culture, which provided emotional motivation for their possible adjustment, whereas, it is hard in this study to compare the adjustment degree between the ones who are solely career-driven and those who admire both the overseas job opportunity and the host culture. However, it could be presumed that emotional motivation would trigger expats' eagerness to explore more exotic culture in China, which would increase the Swedish expatriates' adjustment.

Taking into consideration both the current organization selection reality and previous expats' choice-making experiences, we compare LP1 with EP1 and EP2 that the incentives stem from both attractive overseas assignment and host culture favorableness would exert positive influence on expats' international adjustment, then we could assume that LP1 is true in this sense, and it is predicted that the human-oriented two-way selection criteria would be the preferred method to be prevalently utilized by most cross-country corporations.

Relocation support (LP2 vs. EP3&4&5)

From the data collected, it can be easily found that the organization provides very attracting logistical support for the expats, which brings about almost luxurious living condition compared with general living standard in the Mainland of China. And it is of course that these material facilities provide expats with extrinsic satisfaction, which definitely reduce or even hide the adjustment difficulty since they live in the completely foreign compound in China. However, for the reality that they are too comfortable to be expats, then they lack the eagerness to get exposure to the local reality, thus, it is



proposed that relocation arrangement agency outsourced by the parent company creates a general-adjustment-free environment for Swedish expatriates. Comparing LP2 with EP3, we may find that the proposed logistic support to facilitate expats' general adjustment is not applicable for the real Swedish expats' living condition in China.

Whereas, the existence of assigned Ayi and driver do become the limited Chinese social contacts for the Swedish expats, aside from the colleagues they know in the workplace. In addition, taking the contact frequency as a critical measurement of socializing effectiveness, they are contacting with the expat families almost everyday, thus comparing LP2 with EP4, we admit that this kind of logistical support from parent company facilitates Swedish expats' interaction adjustment in China.

Compared with none training course offered, it is at least preferred by most expatriates to only take the so-called "culture awareness" courses with their family members, and it is also practical to have little kids' English language training for education in international school in China. However, regarding expatriate training itself, both appreciating and the opposite opinions have been collected, thus it is hard to accurately measure the effectiveness of the training course, whereas, it is possible to put forward the agreed opinion of Swedish expats that survival-based practical course contents are more preferred than the theoretical and unpractical ones, so as EP5.

Broadly speaking, logistical support from parent company is economically generous, which becomes a double-edge factor for the Swedish expatriate adjustment to China.

Workplace social support (LP3 vs. EP7)

The workplace communication between Swedish expats and Chinese colleagues is a very broad topic to explore. Social support was initially recruited as a measuring index for facilitating work adjustment of Swedish expatriates, as proposed in LP3, and its applicableness in China could be apparently supported by the interviewed Swedish expat's experience that support from Chinese colleague could not only provide positive influence on their work adjustment, but also influence general adjustment as it is even possible to have Chinese peer workers as local guides.

In addition to recognizing the positive influence of social support from colleagues in the local office, it is found that there is discrepancy between culture awareness course and real practicality regarding the private issue sensitivity in China, the possible explanation derived from the discussion between the recognized interviewee and the interviewer is that there is huge educational-level difference among Chinese, the Chinese you meet in the workplace who are highly-educated are more sensitive to talk about private things in the professional occasions, in contrast, general Chinese you may meet on the street are fairly curious about foreigners, and the sensitive or private talk are not deemed as taboo due to the Chinese norm of intimacy.

Role transition (LP4&5&6&7 vs. EP8&9)



Role transition, including role clarity, discretion, conflict and novelty, hierarchical level and functional area have been discussed separately as factors influence expats' adjustment, however, in China, they are highly correlated with the ultimate keyword "hierarchy", which is the most appeared word during all interviews.

It is found that all respondents' job responsibilities are more or less expanded and promoted during their stay in China, specifically speaking, their job titles are either "director" or "manager", which indicates a upper layer position in the hierarchical system. Then it is found that due to the high leveled responsibilities Swedish expats are entitled to, they enjoy the intrinsic pleasure to be treated with extreme politeness from Chinese colleagues, which may facilitate their work adjustment in China, as they are entitled with power to make changes or become decision makers to some extent. However, such kind of expanded job responsibilities seems becoming the barrier for their interaction adjustment, as due to the settled hierarchical frame in the Chinese subsidiary, local Chinese subordinates are not dare to put forward their opinions directly in the face of others during the meeting time, which lets Swedish managers feel stressed in the beginning of expatriation, whereas, one-to-one communication, the most effective way for Swedish managers to get feed back from local subordinates, is found after a period of time.

The notion of hierarchy is also correlated with the cross-function interaction, as in the Chinese employees' eye, they are controlled by the direct manger rather pursuing the ultimate goal which will bring benefits for the whole company, then when it comes to communication with Swedish expats who only provide technical guidance, the risk of trust emerges. From this point of view, a training course for Chinese employees seems to be necessary, whereas, it could be presumed that the training course deliverer's role also decides the result of training content, as a deliverer with rich knowledge of organizational culture but lack of hierarchical power could not be as convincing as a superior or acquainted peer worker, thus, one-to-one communication is suggested to facilitate interaction adjustment for both expatriate manager and technical expert.

5.2 Non Work-related Factors

Culture novelty (LP8 vs. EP6&10&11)

As mentioned above, the influence of organizational culture novelty is highly correlated with the general host culture novelty's impact on Swedish expats adjustment. Summarized from the empirical data, most Swedish expats are limited in the expats community, thus they have no opportunity to know host nationals other than workplace. Then, the culture difference exerts influence in recognizing friends aside from colleagues, as it is confirmed that once Chinese colleague start talking about their private life with the Swedish expat colleague, a possible friendship would be made, whereas, most Swedish expats still hold the Swedish convention of separating friends from colleagues,



which aggravates limited contact between local nationals and Swedish expats.

However, after analyzing the possible contacts made by the two comparatively adjusted interviewees, two elements of getting contacts emerge: frequency and length. As one interviewee had lived in China for over five years, which naturally provided him with sufficient exposure to the locals. For the other interviewee, he continued his hobby in China, and as a coach of a youth ice hockey team, he had regular contact with the locals, thus building friendship would not be as difficult as other expats.

Spouse/Family adjustment (LP9 vs. EP12&13)

It is obviously important to have spouse accompanying during the overseas assignment, which can be referred to the experience from all respondents except R7 who was single all the time, which makes EP12 is to some extent in accordance with LP9.

More specifically, as there are three facets of expatriate adjustment, including general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment, it is found that the same three facets would be applicable to the Swedish spouse adjustment as well, though there has not been found in any previous discussion regarding spouse work adjustment in the literature. For spouse general adjustment, especially for families without Ayi, Swedish spouses acted as an either housewife or househusband role in China, they definitely showed higher degree of general adjustment, and such positive change will naturally influence the Swedish expats adjustment, as it is found that living in China makes Swedish to be more family-united and family-oriented.

The limited expats community is found to be the invisible barrier for spouse interaction adjustment as well, and it is easy to make friends with people in the same situation, hence expats' families became close and frequent contacts naturally, then the possibility is proposed that spouse interaction adjustment will influence Swedish expats interaction adjustment, as it is common and prevalent to make friends in a family unit in China.

Since it is forbidden to work with income as an expat spouse in China, according to the collected empirical data, volunteer work seems to be an alternative work option for spouses. Taking a broad view to scrutinize the spouse schedule, they have the feeling of not being needed, which definitely brings about negative psychological change, and will decrease the degree of adjustment. As it has been found that spouse work adjustment brings much positive effect to the other facets of adjustment, and not every spouse's career is universal, like teacher or nurse in the interviewed cases, it is suggested for spouses of Swedish expats to think about "what I can enrich myself or develop myself" before departure to China.

Overall, it is found that the relationship between spouse international adjustment and expats international adjustment is a one-way moderator, because expats' adjustment cannot change spouses' willingness to adjust themselves to the local, and the personality of spouse is also presumed as a vital factor in the procedure of spouse adjustment.



5.3 Individual Factors

Previous expatriation experiences (LP12 vs. EP14)

The measurement of previous international assignment is deemed to be a facilitating moderator for the Swedish expats in China, and according to the self-comparison presented by the interviewees that the previous international assignment experience could facilitate Swedish expats' adaptation skills in general. However, comparing LP and EP, the culture novelty acts as a changing role in the real setting, as the interviewees' previous experience in the European countries cannot be referential in the setting of China, and thus it is presumed that only the previous experience in China or countries with similar culture could make great difference in facilitating no matter Swedish expats or spouse adjustment in this case.

Language proficiency (LP13 vs. EP15)

Though language barrier has been regarded as a main obstacle for Swedish expats in China in the first impression, especially for those who live outside foreign compounds in China, the willingness and ability to communicate with locals gradually emerges to be possible solution to this problem. Learning a new language in a settled period of time seems to be an impossible mission for Swedish expats, taking their highly intensive workload into consideration, thus it is proposed that compared with obtaining knowledge of Mandarin language, the willingness to communicate with locals will lead to higher degree of adjustment to China.

Though in the expats' eye that spouses' language ability could help them to communicate, however, such kind of language compensation from spouse would exert more negative influence on expats' adjustment from a long-term perspective, as it could be an excuse for expats themselves to lose the motivation to improve their own language proficiency.

Besides, the definition of "language fluency" should be adjusted to survival level, as most Swedish expats are unable to reach proficiency level, including their spouses. For the organization, the investment in providing unlimited language guidance seems to be more sustainable than paying large amount of money to outsourcing relocation companies.

5.4 Implications of Study

The factor of self-efficacy has not been discussed and compared, as it is too objective to recognize one's self-efficacy ability just through one interview. However, it can be perceived from their own reflections of the expatriation experience, and through analyzing the various personal opinions and constructive recommendations for the supposed following up Swedish expatriates, some implications of the study are perceived.

"Being open-minded" is the most mentioned recommendation from interviewees to future



Swedish expats, which implies their experienced feeling that this is the ultimate strategy to adapt to a foreign country where new changes are happening everyday. Though opposite views towards the culture distance between China and Sweden are collected, it is still could be proposed that the culture novelty in general is not a deciding element in Swedish expats' adjustment. In addition, it is found that the attitude towards culture distance will exert either positive or negative influence in expats' psychological changes. Negatively reviewing, many Swedish expats blame the inability to be involved in the Chinese community for the framed thinking mode that they have learnt from both culture awareness courses or other expats who spread complains, thus it is suggested not to presume the inability but to think about independently. Positively thinking, most Swedish expats' children are well adjusted, though they are still immersed in the limited international school environment, then why expats themselves cannot make it?

Another important issue is regarding the family, as many respondents suggest thinking more about their spouse, especially the spouse psychological change under the double change of social role and environment change. For the social role change, it is suggested to pre-consider what can the spouse do under the condition of no worries from house chores and no need to work; for the environment change, it is suggested to encourage the expat spouse to have the awareness of initiatively breaking the bubble of expats exclusive community, which is believed to bring about qualitative change in the process of international adjustment.

Lastly, as a possible extension of the culture adjustment study, since the data shows that some expatriate families encountered more difficult stages when they repatriated than when they were expatriated to China, it is suggested to prepare and predict it before repatriation, as an old Chinese saying goes, "it's easy to go from frugality to extravagance, but difficult to go reversely".



6. CONCLUSION

In chapter six, possible answers of the research questions are summarized in the concluding remarks; besides, for concluding this niche gap-filling qualitative research, the author would like to outline recommendation for possible practical use and suggestions for future research, which may bring about benefits in both business area and academic field. Lastly, several limitations are also taken into consideration.

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

To conclude the thesis, the answers to research question RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 are summarized and restated in the following paragraphs.

Based on the finding, it is not possible to provide definite answer to RQ1. However, it is possible to propose some ideas regarding the stages of Swedish expatriates' adjustment in China, and which is suggested to separate into several categories: (1) for Swedish expats who insist staying in the foreigners' community which is regarded as an artificial bubble in this study will not go through the U-curve pattern in general, thus the culture shock has its least accessibility to this category of Swedish expats; (2) for Swedish expats who has intension to go outside if the compound, there is a delayed culture shock occurrence, which is in accordance with the reviewed literature proposition, however, the delaying time which was suggested 12-18 months cannot be examined in the conducted interviews.

Concerning the answer to RQ2a, several obstacles are found, and it can be divided into external ones and internal ones. For the external obstacles, there are (1) spatial obstacle triggered by the foreigners' community, compound in short name, which actually has been perceived and realized by Swedish expats themselves; and (2) temporal obstacle, the irregular work schedule of Swedish expatriates poses another external barrier for them to make difference of adjustment in the company, though they have lots of Chinese colleagues in the workplace. Besides, internal factors stem from Swedish expatriates themselves are also examined: (1) the lack of motivation to adjust, as it is too comfortable for them to enjoy all arranged facilities which makes them reluctant to go out of the compound; (2) the framed Swedish norm to separate professional contacts and social contacts strictly, which avoids possibility to build network in local; (3) the conservative personality, which prevents them to take intuitive role in communication.

Since the above obstacles have been perceived, it is possible to put forward some constructive suggestions to break the bubble, which can be deemed as the answer to RQ2b from the perspective of improving Swedish expatriates' adjustment in China. As we got the reflection from previous expats, *becoming open-minded* is the recommendation for supposed Swedish expatriates, it is meaningful to figure out more specific methods in this sense, and summarized from the discussions, two tangible indices



are recruited: (1) frequency of contacts with locals, by means of organizing international mingling and encouraging Swedish expatriates to join various hobby clubs; and (2) length of expatriation, by not limiting the length of expatriation contract, which will provide Swedish expats with special favorableness of Chinese culture enough exposure to the local life.

It is complicated to purpose an appropriate explanation of the role of communication in the process of Swedish expatriate adjustment to Chinese culture, so as the answer to RQ3. Whereas, it should not be denied that international adjustment would not happen to Swedish expatriates if there is no communication occurs. Then it is conceivable to blueprint a positive process of a smooth communication flow between Swedish expatriates and Chinese locals that mutual understanding will be reached. In order to obtain such favorable mutual understanding between two nationals, it is suggested to provide enough culture awareness exposure for both nationals, as even if all Swedish expatriates are fully educated with Chinese culture awareness under the situation that Chinese locals have no idea of Swedish culture, smooth communication cannot be achieved. Though it sounds impossible to educate all Chinese nationals, Chinese employees in the subsidiaries are presumed to acquire such ability to learn the parent company' national culture. In brief, communication in the expatriate adjustment should go in both directions between Swedish expats and Chinese hosts.

6.2 Future Research and Limitations

Since defined as a niche study, this thesis could be deemed as a pilot qualitative research for the specific target group – Swedish expatriates in the Mainland of China. There are fifteen empirical propositions are given with the framework of a comprehensive model in international adjustment, and it is necessary to validate them in future researches.

There are several limitations within this paper that we should take into consideration. Firstly, the number of respondents is quite small, which may lead to unrepresentative data and the information saturation degree is also untested. Nevertheless, taking the detailed participant recruitment requirements into consideration, the respondents participated are limited to Swedish expatriates who are on either managerial level or advanced technical level, which may influence the applicableness to all Swedish expats in China.

Secondly, this paper is based on the theoretical framework built under the condition of American expats in Asian Pacific Rim that is not hundred percentages in according to Swedish-Sino culture in this case, and though they are similar in terms of the western parent culture and oriental host culture, and more relevant conceptual and empirical studies are expected to conduct for supporting the statements in the future. Meanwhile, though the writer proposed several empirical-data-based propositions (EPs) in the study, it is still can be questioned from the perspective of quantity, thus it is suggested to be explored and tested in further researches.



Last but not least, as a qualitative research, it is unavoidable to insert some bias during the process of data analysis, though the scientific abduction approach is utilized and the writer has clarified her intension to be as objective as possible.



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APPENDIX Interview Guide

Basic information

May I have your working experience and position in the company?

How long have you been working and living in the subsidiary in China?

How many expatriates are working in the subsidiary? If yes, how many years has this subsidiary been operating in China?

Culture Shock Occurrence & General Adjustment

Is the overseas assignment self motivated? And have you taken any training course?

Before departing to China, what's your impression of China?

Was your impression of China changed after your arrival in China?

Have you met any problem in the following conditions: housing, shopping, food, etc.? If so, could you tell me more examples?

Previous assignment experience & Language Fluency

Do you have previous assignment experience before? If so, in which country, for how long time?

How well can you speak Chinese?

Have you taken some Chinese language courses during your overseas assignment?

Have you occurred any problem initiated by language? How do you cope with?

Social Resources

During your stay in China, do you have contacts both from Sweden and the local?

How often do you have social contact with the local nationals and other expatriates respectively?

How satisfied are you with your social contacts both from Sweden and the local?

Have you perceived any difference between your interaction with contacts from your hometown and the local? Please elaborate with some examples.

Social Support

Do you live alone or with your family during your overseas assignment?

If yes, could you compare yourself and your spouse in terms of adaptation to Chinese culture, who is better involved in?

If no, during your expatriate life, is there someone who would listen and talk with you whenever you feel lonely or depressed? And is there anyone who would explain things to make your condition clearer and easier?

Lastly, could you sum up your expatriate life in China in one sentence? Or do you have any personal suggestion for following Swedish expats who are going to China?