

Determinants of Chinese Expatriates' Work Adjustment in the Context of International Mobility

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Abstract. To gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly economy, both private and public sector organizations essential part of their international human resources management strategy. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues, and support from the home organization), partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience, and clarity in roles on Chinese expatriates adaptation in Morocco. The quantitative approach used structural equation modeling on SMART PLS software version 3.0. The sample is composed of 548 managers, technicians and workers, obtained using convenience sampling technique and collected using a questionnaire composing of a set of ready-made scales used in previous studies. The results show that the success of Chinese expatriates integration into their new position requires a contingent approach taking into account all these factors identified in order to provide managers in charge of managing international staff with additional elements to better assess the adjustment difficulties that Chinese expatriates will encounter and improve expatriate support policies according to their particular needs.

Keywords: Expatriation, Work Adaptation, Creativity, Chinese International Mobility

1. Introduction

With the globalization of trade and the rise of Chinese investments abroad, the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in different countries is becoming a crucial issue for companies and governments. Chinese expatriates, faced with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, must overcome several challenges to fully integrate into their host country. Various recent studies highlight the key factors influencing this adaptation, both internationally and more specifically in countries such as Morocco.

Research in recent years shows that Chinese expats' adaptation is affected by a variety of contextual and individual factors. For example, Zhang and Harzing (2020) highlighted the importance of cultural differences and intercultural training in expatriate adaptation, especially in environments where the cultural gap is significant. This idea is supported by Liu and Lee (2021), who demonstrated that expats' ability to manage culture shocks plays a central role in their professional and social integration.

At the same time, organizational support is also a determining factor for the integration of Chinese expatriates. A study by Wang et al. (2020) reveals that expatriates with prior training and continuous support from their employers adapt better to international environments, in particular thanks to dedicated support programs. Similarly, Chen and Fang (2021) highlight the impact of inclusive organizational policies and accompanying strategies to facilitate adaptation and reduce cultural stress among expatriates.

In an African context, several studies have looked at the adaptation of Chinese expatriates. Hu and Yang (2022) analysed the situation of Chinese workers in sub-Saharan Africa and found that institutional support and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the professional setting promote smoother integration. Moreover, research by Li and Zhang (2021) shows that companies' engagement in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural awareness has positive effects on expats' adaptation to complex multicultural environments.

In Morocco, China-Morocco relations have intensified significantly with the Belt and Road Initiative, which has led to an increase in the number of Chinese expatriates in the country. However, the adaptation of expatriates in this context has its particularities. According to Tang and Xu (2023), the difference between Chinese and Moroccan cultural values, as well as language challenges represent major obstacles for Chinese expats. However, their study highlights that cultural integration initiative, such as language and intercultural training programs, can overcome these barriers. In addition, Zhao and Chen (2022) emphasize the importance of local social and professional networks in the adaptation process. Their research shows that Chinese expats in Morocco integrate more easily when they have local social supports, such as Moroccan mentors or colleagues, which

strengthen their sense of belonging and commitment (Nguyen et al, 2021; Berguig & Abdelbaki, 2021).

In short, recent studies converge to show that the adaptation of Chinese expatriates, both globally and in Morocco, depends on several interrelated factors. This study may lead Chinese multinational companies to develop a new strategy for the expatriation of their employees in the Moroccan context. So the question of our research can be formulated as follows:

What are the factors that influence the adaptation to work of Chinese expatriates working in Morocco?

Such a question engages us in a quantitative research that should allow us to identify these factors through the interrogation of Chinese expatriates who work in Morocco. This article proposes to examine the potential factors through the prism of recent studies, with a particular focus on the Moroccan context.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

The adaptation of expatriates is a major challenge for multinational companies, especially when these expatriates are confronted with cultural and organizational contexts that are very different from their home environment. For Chinese expatriates, especially those operating in Morocco, several determining factors have been identified in recent research, including organizational social support, partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience, and clarity of roles within the organization. These elements play a crucial role in their ability to adapt effectively, both professionally and personally.

2.1. Organizational Social Support

Organizational social support is recognized as a central factor for the adaptation of expatriate, as it helps to reduce the stress and anxiety related to expatriation. A study by Zhang and Liu (2022) demonstrated that Chinese expats enjoy better adaptation when they are surrounded by caring colleagues and receive concrete support from their company. This support is reflected in inclusive policies and support mechanisms, such as access to mentors or resources to overcome cultural challenges. Chen et al. (2021) add that organizational support acts as a shock absorber against cultural integration difficulties, thus strengthening expatriates' job satisfaction and performance.

H1: Support of the superior is positively associated with adaptation to work.

H2: Support from colleagues is positively associated with adaptation to work.

H3: Support from the home organization is positively associated with

adaptation to work.

2.2. Partner Support

The support of partners (spouses or families) is another factor influencing the adaptation of Chinese expatriates. Recent research, including that of Li and Zhao (2023), has shown that expats whose partners or families are well integrated into the host society tend to adapt better. This emotional and family support is crucial for the well-being of expats, reducing their social isolation and improving their work-life balance. Yu and Zhang (2022) confirm that companies that provide support to expatriate families, through orientation services or social networks, greatly facilitate their integration process.

H4: Partner support is positively associated with adaptation to work.

2.3. Intercultural Preparation

Intercultural preparation is a key predictor in the adaptation of expatriates. According to a study by Wang and Xu (2021), prior intercultural training allows expatriates to develop skills in managing cultural diversity and mitigate culture shocks in Morocco. Tang and Chen (2023) highlighted that Chinese expatriates' ability to understand and respect Moroccan social norms and local values, often acquired through intercultural training, significantly improves their ability to integrate into their new professional and social environment. Cross-cultural preparation also promotes more fluid communication with local employees, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts related to cultural differences.

H5: Expatriates who have followed an experimental intercultural preparation and specifically focused on Moroccan culture will adapt better to their work than others.

2.4. Previous International Experience

Previous international experience is a major asset for Chinese expatriates to adapt. Research by Li and Wang (2022) shows that expats who have already had an expatriation experience in similar contexts are better equipped to deal with cross-cultural challenges. This experience allows them to be more resilient in the face of cultural barriers and to adapt more quickly to new environments. In addition, Sun and Lee (2022) indicate that experienced expats are more likely to develop effective coping strategies, such as emotional self-regulation and behavioral flexibility, which promotes successful adaptation.

H6: International experience is positively associated with adaptation to work.

2.5. Clarity in the Role

Clarity in the professional role is another determining factor for the adaptation of Chinese expatriates. The study by Fang and Ma (2021) shows that when expatriate

have a clear vision of their responsibilities and the company's expectations, they adapt more easily to their new professional environment. On the other hand, a lack of clarity in the role can lead to stress and confusion, negatively affecting their performance and engagement. In addition, Zhao and Liu (2022) point out that the precise definition of professional goals and responsibilities, coupled with adequate coaching, allows expatriate to better understand organizational expectations and adjust their actions accordingly, thereby reducing uncertainty related to their position.

H7: Clarity in the role is positively associated with adaptation to work.

The research model was presented as shown below in Fig. 1 based on the previous research presented in the theoretical background.

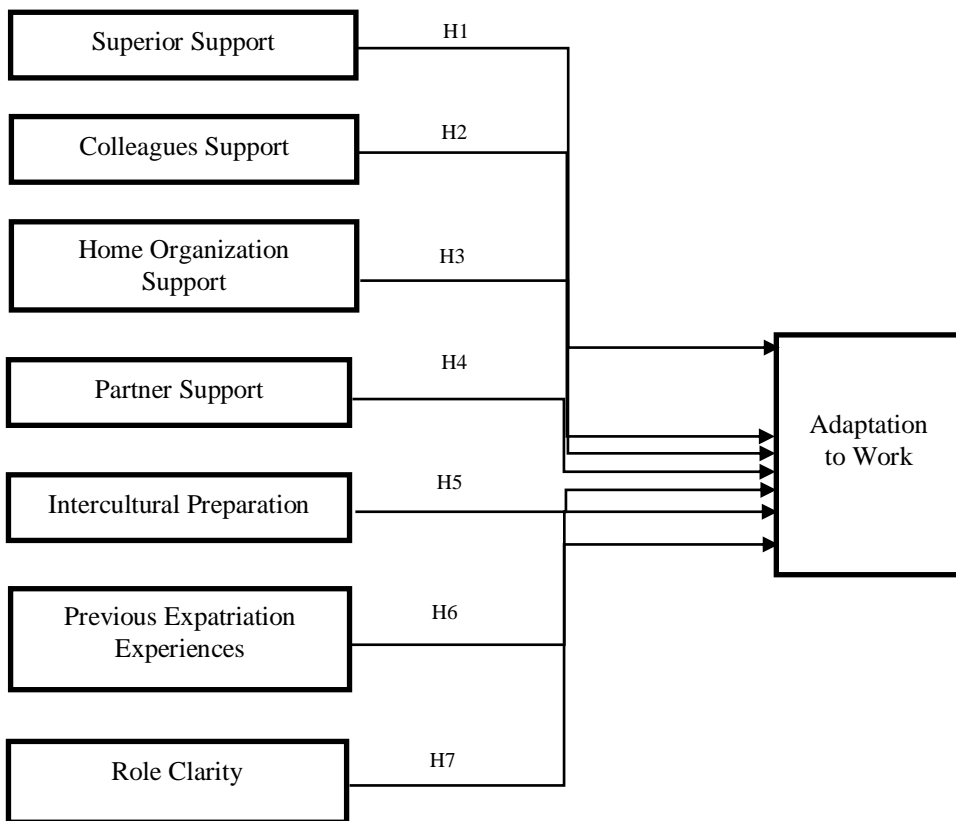


Fig. 1: Research Model

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Operationalization of Variables

Organizational social support: To measure organizational social support, we adapt the scale of House and Wells (1978) and Cerdin (1996) used by Zhang & Liu.

(2022) and Li & Zhao (2021) which breaks down into logistical support and social support provided by the superior (8 items, example: my supervisor is interested in my professional problems), by colleagues (8 items, example: my colleagues are ready to help me and support me in my work) as well as by the organization of origin (11 items, example: the organization is interested in my values and personal goals).

Partner support: Regarding the measure of partner support, we decide to use again the scale proposed by House and Wells (1978) used by Zhang & Liu. (2022) and Chen & Wang (2020). We measure emotional social support using three statements, one focused on the private sphere and two on the professional sphere, tangible social support by two statements and informational social support by one statement. We thus come up with a measure of spouse's support in six statements.

Intercultural preparation: we propose to measure intercultural preparation by an item from our interviews with expatriates: my organization has informed us about all the elements we need to know about the culture of host countries.

Previous international experience: we propose to measure the previous international experience by an item from our interviews with expatriates I can say that my international experience is sufficient to be able to adapt.

Clarity in roles: we take up the scales of Breaught and Colihan (1994) used by Dust & Ziegert (2016) and D'Innocenzo et al. (2016).

Adaptation to work: to measure adaptation to work, we take up the scale created by Black and Gregersen (1999) in three statements used by Chew et al. (2019) and Haslberger et Brewster (2021).

In terms of response modalities, we used the Likert interval scale of 1 to 5, which is commonly used to measure attitudes (Perret et al., 2008, p.136).

With this scale, respondents can express their opinions from a "degree of agreement" with a proposal. Regarding the scale of measurement of adaptation to work was measured on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

3.2. Data Collection

We chose to collect the data necessary for our study by questionnaire translated English in collaboration with language teachers. Indeed, we collected all the data by face-to-face interview. We got 548 valid responses. The questionnaires were administered over two and a half months. We interviewed employees who work in the Chinese companies operating in Morocco for construction of the Noor I, Noor II and Noor III Thermo-solar plants, without any selection.

3.3. Data Analysis

We planned to conduct a descriptive analysis of the data that should allow us to

describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed population.

Using the SPSS version 24 software, we carried out a series of measurements to study the dimensionality and internal coherence of the scales used, namely: The Bartlett sphericity test, the KMO, the eigenvalue criterion, the minimum restitution criterion, the Cattell elbow criterion and the Cronbach alpha calculation.

Based on SMART PLS software version 3.0, we implemented the structural equations method (SEM), in fact, we chose the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to test the research hypotheses. Initially, we estimated the measurement model. Three evaluation criteria were carried out: reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Syaifuddin et al, 2022; Alsakarneh et al, 2022).

In a second step we estimated the structural model, to do this, we evaluated on the one hand, the percentage of variance explained R^2 and, on the other hand, the value of the coefficients of the paths. These estimates were analyzed based on statistics generated by the Bootstrap re-sampling procedure under Smart PLS version 3.0 software to test research hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Analysis

The sample consists of 548 Chinese expatriates. It is composed of 121 executives, 263 technicians, and 164 workers, working in 14 Chinese companies operating in the Noor solar complex, for at least 9 months. The participation rate was 90%. The average age of the 80 women and 468 expatriate men who responded was 37 years; 42% of them went to university for more than 4 years. 43% of respondents have lived abroad for more than one year. Their expatriation contract began 19 months ago, and the expected duration of their expatriation contract is on average 3 years.

4.2. Hypotheses Evaluation

After carrying out the set of tests necessary to judge the dimensionality and consistency of the measurement scales used, as well as the evaluation of the measurement model and that of the structural model, we can proceed to the evaluation of the hypotheses.

The structural model highlights the R^2 of 0.83, which means that these variables explain 83% of the variance relative to the dependent variable (adaptation to work). It is above the threshold of 33% that Chin (1998) proposes to consider as a substantial variance.

The correlation coefficients of the structural equation model and the p-value values confirm that the seven causal links between the latent variables are indeed significant. Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 are supported.

Organizational support has a positive and significant effect on work adjustment. The link between the support of the superior is confirmed ($B1=0.241$; $p=0.000$). As

a result, hypothesis H1 is supported. The effect of co-worker support on work adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is in sum significant and positive sign ($B2=0.211$; $p=0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis H2 is supported.

The impact of the Original Organization Support on Work Adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is significant and positive ($B3=0.274$; $p=0.061$). For this, the H3 hypothesis is validated. Similarly, Partner Support has a positive and significant effect on work adjustment. ($B4=0.496$ $p=0.065$). The H4 hypothesis is therefore supported. Similarly, intercultural preparation is positively and meaningfully associated with Work Adjustment. ($B5=0.643$; $p=0.003$). The H5 hypothesis is supported.

As a result, the H6 hypothesis is supported. In the same vein, the effect of previous international experience on Work Adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is in sum significant and negative sign ($B6 = 0.521$ $p = 0.012$). Therefore, hypothesis H7 is supported. Finally, clarity in roles positively and significantly influences ($B7 = 0.191$ $p = 0.043$) Work Adjustment of the interviewed expatriates as part of this research.

Table 1 presents the test results of the research hypotheses

Table 1: Test Results of Research Hypotheses

| Hypotheses | Path Coefficient | P- Value | Hypotheses Validation |
|------------|------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| H1 | 0,241 | 0,000 | Supported |
| H2 | 0,211 | 0,000 | Supported |
| H3 | 0,274 | 0,061 | Supported |
| H4 | 0,496 | 0,065 | Supported |
| H5 | 0,643 | 0,003 | Supported |
| H6 | 0,521 | 0,012 | Supported |
| H7 | 0,191 | 0,043 | Supported |

Source: Personal development, via SmartPLS version (3.0)

5. Discussion

This study presents a model of work adjustment integrating organizational, individual and contextual factors and aims to analyze the impact of organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues, and support from the home organization), partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience, and clarity in roles on the adaptation of the Chinese expatriates. The results show that these factors has a direct effect on Chinese expatriates adaptation to work by explaining 83% of its variance.

The results validate the hypothesis that organizational social support is a critical factor in facilitating the adaptation of Chinese expatriates to Morocco. These ties in with the work of Zhang and Liu (2022), which showed that expats with strong organizational supports adapt faster with dedicated coaching programs and resources. Similarly, Chen et al. (2021) observed that organizational support reduces expatriate-related stress levels, which improves expat engagement and performance.

However, some studies have not found such a strong link between organizational support and expatriate adaptation. For example, Park and Lee's (2021) study of Chinese expatriates in Europe found that, in highly competitive work environments, even high organizational support does not always compensate for the difficulties of adapting due to cultural differences. In this case, expats may feel increased pressure to perform, which limits the effectiveness of the support provided by the organization.

The support of partners was also confirmed as a factor positively influencing the adaptation of Chinese expatriates to Morocco. These findings are consistent with studies by Li and Zhao (2023), who showed that expats' emotional well-being is directly related to their family's social integration into the host society. Yu and Zhang (2022) also pointed out that companies that provide support services to spouses and families see a notable improvement in the adjustment of expatriates.

Nevertheless, discrepancies emerge in some research, including that of Kim and Nguyen (2020), who examined expatriates in Southeast Asia. Their study shows that the impact of partner support can be marginal in countries where social and family support structures are less accessible, making it difficult for expatriate families to integrate into more closed communities.

Intercultural preparation has also been shown to be a key factor in Chinese expatriate' adaptation to Morocco, as highlighted by the work of Wang and Xu (2021), who observed that intercultural prepared expatriate adapt better to local social and professional norms. Tang and Chen (2023) also confirm that cross-cultural training programs promote a better understanding of local cultural behaviors, thus facilitating interactions at work.

However, some studies qualify these conclusions. The study by Green and Black (2022) showed that intercultural training may be insufficient for expats sent to countries with cultures far removed from their own. They found that, in some cases, despite intensive preparation, expatriate continue to experience difficulties in adapting, mainly due to profound differences in social norms and professional practices.

Previous international experience has, unsurprisingly, a positive impact on the adaptation of Chinese expatriates to Morocco. This finding is in line with studies by Li and Wang (2022), which demonstrated that expatriate with international

experience are better prepared to overcome intercultural challenges, due to their increased ability to cope with multicultural environments. Sun and Lee (2022) also pointed out that experienced expats develop greater resilience and behavioral flexibility, allowing them to adjust more quickly.

However, some studies show that international experience is not always a reliable predictor of good adaptation. According to Nguyen and Smith (2020), experienced expatriate may sometimes adopt overconfidence strategies, underestimating cultural differences in new contexts, which can lead to clumsiness or unexpected adjustment difficulties.

Finally, role clarity has also been validated as a factor facilitating the adaptation of Chinese expatriates, thus joining the findings of Fang and Ma (2021), who showed that expatriates with a clear definition of their professional responsibilities integrate more easily into their new roles. Zhao and Liu (2022) also confirmed that clear job expectations reduce uncertainty and increase job satisfaction.

However, the study by Rahman and White (2021) showed that, in some cases, even with good clarity of roles, expatriate may still experience adjustment difficulties when there is cultural ambiguity in how roles are perceived and performed within local organizations. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in countries where the hierarchical structures are different from those to which expatriates are accustomed.

In summary, this study confirmed the importance of the five factors studied in the adaptation of Chinese expatriates to Morocco, in line with many recent researches. However, some studies show that the impact of these factors can vary depending on the specific cultural and organizational context of the host country. These results highlight the need to adapt accompaniment and support strategies to better respond to the specific challenges faced by expatriates in complex environments such as Morocco's.

6. Conclusion

This research sought to identify the factors influencing the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in a context of international mobility. As a first step, thanks to a literature review, we were able to identify five factors most cited by the researchers. These are organizational support, partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience and clarity in roles. Second, having carried out the set of tests necessary to judge the dimensionality and consistency of the scales of measurements used, as well as the evaluation of the measurement model and that of the structural model, through a quantitative study, we evaluated the influences of the factors identified on the expatriate work adjustment in the Moroccan context.

We found through the testing of hypotheses that organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues and support from the home organization),

partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience and clarity in roles have a positive and significant effect on the adaptation of the expatriates interviewed to the level of the Moroccan context.

These results suggest that companies cannot just manage all expats the same way. The success of their integration into their new position requires a contingent approach taking into account the country of origin and the country of assignment of the expatriate. First, such studies highlighting the most important adaptation factors according to the country of origin provide managers in charge of managing international staff with additional elements to better assess the adjustment difficulties that expatriates will encounter and improve expatriate support policies according to their particular needs relating to their culture of origin. The limit of this research work is the size of the sample. Indeed, only one nationality was examined. In addition, the number of respondents does not allow the results to be generalized throughout the national territory. Subsequent research will need to include more countries of origin and more respondents.

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