

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Self-initiated vs. organization-initiated Chinese expatriates: how social environment (social support) and spousal support influence psychological adjustment and work performance

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how social environmental support and spousal support differentially influence psychological adjustment and work performance between self-initiated expatriates (SIE) and organization-initiated expatriates (OIE) among Chinese international professionals, advancing environmental psychology and social psychology through integration of self-determination theory with cross-cultural adaptation frameworks. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional survey design collected data from 520 Chinese expatriates across Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, and emerging markets. Structural equation modeling examined mediation and moderation relationships, while multi-group analysis compared adaptation mechanisms between expatriate types using bootstrap procedures for robust indirect effects estimation. **Findings:** Psychological adjustment serves as a crucial mediating mechanism linking environmental support to work performance. SIEs demonstrate stronger utilization of social environmental support ($\beta = 0.48$ vs. 0.29) and more efficient translation of psychological adaptation into performance outcomes ($\beta = 0.59$ vs. 0.44), while OIEs show greater reliance on spousal support ($\beta = 0.41$ vs. 0.26). Mediation analysis reveals partial mediation for social environmental support (58% indirect effect) and complete mediation for spousal support (61% indirect effect). **Conclusion:** The study validates differential person-environment interaction mechanisms between expatriate types, demonstrating that adaptation strategies vary according to motivational orientations and resource configurations underlying international mobility decisions. **Practical Implications:** Organizations should develop differentiated expatriate management strategies that enhance social environmental resource access for SIEs while strengthening family support systems for OIEs, recognizing the heterogeneous nature of international assignment experiences and the necessity for tailored intervention programs.

Keywords: Chinese expatriates; work performance; cross-cultural adaptation; social environmental support; psychological adjustment

1. Introduction

Accelerating globalization has transformed global talent flows, with Chinese expatriates emerging as

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major contributors symbolizing both national economic development and the evolving landscape of global career mobility ^[1]. This trend goes beyond conventional organizational assignments to include a rising group of self-initiated expatriates who venture abroad on their own, resulting in a dual expatriate system that requires nuanced theoretical and empirical attention ^[2]. The phenomenon has been further amplified through China's Belt and Road initiatives, which catalyze unprecedented outbound mobility patterns while simultaneously presenting substantial cross-cultural adaptation challenges, particularly in culturally distant contexts including Muslim-majority countries where religious differences and institutional unfamiliarity create complex adjustment demands^[3]. These international assignees' psychological adjustment and job performance have become crucial factors underpinning both individual career success and organizational competitiveness. This importance intensifies as Chinese companies extend their reach across diverse cultural settings, ranging from neighboring Belt and Road emerging markets to established Western markets ^[4]. Traditional expatriate management models have been predominantly developed along the lines of organization-driven expatriation. Self-initiated expatriation challenges many common understandings of support structures, adaptation processes and performance outcomes ^[5].

The theoretical importance of exploring these variant expatriate types relates to an attempt to fill important gaps in cross cultural psychology and international human resource management literature where the implicit assumption of generally homogeneous nature of the expatriate experience has hidden important psychological and behavioral distinctions between self-initiated and organization-initiated assignees^[6]. Even today, throughout existing research, the very idea of expatriate success constitutes a contested construction, with varyingly interested parties interpreting success through diverse paradigms inclusive of psychological health, career progression, and organizational impact ^[7]. Insights from these differences go beyond academic interest to support evidence-based reasoning for multinational firms seeking to improve their global talent management policies and for individuals considering career moves overseas ^[8].

This investigation aims to construct a comprehensive theoretical model elucidating how social environmental factors and spousal support differentially influence psychological adjustment and work performance across expatriate types, contributing to environmental and social psychology through the integration of self-determination theory with cross-cultural adaptation frameworks ^[9]. The anticipated theoretical contributions include advancing understanding of person-environment interactions in international contexts while providing actionable insights for organizational policy development and individual career planning in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

2. Literature review

The theoretical base for expatriate typology has developed considerably as researchers increasingly acknowledge that self-initiated and organization-initiated assignees are fundamentally distinct types of international workers, and empirical studies of expatriate career path that have found the influence of host country environment on career progression varies by initiation mode ^[10]. Self-Initiated Expatriates and Motivation Self-initiated expatriates have unique motivational profiles that are characterized by a strong autonomy orientation and entrepreneurial disposition, which contrasts with the nature of the assignments and the institutional support that organizationally-deployed expatriates receive including pre-departure training and ongoing mentoring ^[11]. This autonomous career construction involves complex identity negotiations wherein self-initiated expatriates actively construct both their professional self and their relationship with the host country place, developing hybrid identities that transcend traditional expatriate-local dichotomies ^[12]. Global crises exposing self-initiated assignees to premature repatriation risks illustrate their unique psychological resource requirements and autonomous management capabilities^[13].

Social support theory represents a comprehensive theoretical framework through its dimensions of emotional, instrumental, and informational support, revealing that self-initiated expatriates differ fundamentally from traditional assignees in their social capital development strategies^[14]. Recent investigations demonstrate that social support operates as a significant moderating mechanism in the relationship between cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adjustment among Chinese expatriates, with culturally intelligent expatriates who access robust social support networks exhibiting superior adjustment trajectories^[15]. The concept of bonding capital (with same cultural strong ties) and bridging capital (weak ties across cultures) is particularly relevant, pointing to the need for a balance between feeling comfortable in one's own culture and the benefits of learning in cross-cultural settings. The multidimensional structure of expatriate well-being reflects in the intricate interplays between various life domains, evident in the lines of thinking of environmental psychology with regard to both formal and informal support mechanisms^[16], with social support demonstrating significant associations with work engagement, psychological resilience, and protection against burnout through adaptability as a mediating pathway^[17]. Cultural intelligence incorporation indicates that performance effecting relies on the strategic development of supportive situational conditions^[18] and cultural distance moderates relationships by directing the availability of supportive environment and the trade-off between local embeddedness and co-cultural group dependence^[19].

Family system dynamics constitute crucial success factors in expatriate adjustment. Spousal support, encompassing emotional sustenance, practical assistance, and professional encouragement, significantly shapes adaptation trajectories^[20]. The theory of family systems describes how individual and collective processes of adaptation are constitutive in complex feedback processes at different chronologic and cultural levels. The COVID-19 crisis shed light on the possibility of resource integration processes/blurred boundaries resulting in increased chances for family integration and conflict management dynamics across different cultures^[21].

Psychological adaptation theories, supported by meta-analytic evidence demonstrating that personality characteristics including openness to experience and emotional stability constitute significant antecedents of cross-cultural adjustment^[22], coalesce on the core assumption of SDT that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the universal psychological needs which underlie successful cross-cultural adjustment^[23]. Berry acculturation model similarly offers oppositional model through acculturation with integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization strategies, wherein integration generally led to best outcome, with autonomous orientation and integration strategies serving as crucial moderating mechanisms that buffer negative effects of perceived discrimination on adaptation outcomes^[24]. Cultural intelligence theory conceptualizes adaptive capability based on metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions which manifest into effectiveness^[25]. Manifestations of culture shock and efficacy of social support intervention differ greatly between contexts, thus adaptation theories need to account for cultural specificity^[26]. The effectiveness of cultural intelligence relies on configurational factors that lead to successful work adjustment by means of dynamic stress-coping-growth cycles^[27], and lifestyle variables exerting their influence via cultural intelligence as mediating mechanism^[28].

The antecedents of work performance show differential patterns for expatriate type, with cross-cultural training interventions demonstrating substantial effects wherein both pre-departure and post-arrival programs contribute to enhanced adjustment and subsequent performance improvements^[29], while learning orientation proves particularly important for SIAs who do not receive organizational support^[30]. Performance in the multidimensional scope integrates task performance, contextual performance and adaptive performance, and psychological adaptation acts as an important mediator by passing self-efficacy and work engagement paths. Complicated personality-competence interplays resulted in cumulating effects, whereby culture intelligence,

availability social support and role clarity are major performance drivers^[31]. Emerging crisis context: Cultural intelligence of immigrant entrepreneur in cultural complexities and business uncertainty^[32].

Theoretical integration requires developing models that incorporate pathways from social environment to psychological resources, subsequently affecting adaptation outcomes and work performance dimensions^[33]. Expatriate type moderation becomes evident through differential pathway strengths, where self-initiated expatriates demonstrate stronger personal agency-adaptation relationships, while organization-initiated expatriates show greater institutional support sensitivity. Multicultural leadership experiences enhance communication competence, suggesting development should focus on cross-cultural interaction capabilities rather than knowledge acquisition alone^[34]. Training interventions demonstrate differential temporal effectiveness, with the proposed framework hypothesizing main effects of social support on adaptation, mediation through psychological resources, and moderation by expatriate type across pathway relationships^[35].

3. Methods

3.1. Research design and analytical strategy

This investigation adopts a post-positivist paradigm employing quantitative methods to examine complex relationships between social environmental factors, spousal support, psychological adjustment, and work performance among Chinese expatriates. The cross-sectional survey design incorporates multi-source data collection strategies, drawing upon expatriate self-reports and supervisor evaluations to enhance validity and reduce common method bias while capturing both subjective psychological states and objective behavioral manifestations.

The analytical framework centers on structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine mediation and moderation relationships proposed in the theoretical model. Multi-group analysis enables systematic comparison between self-initiated and organization-initiated expatriates across all hypothesized pathways, while Bootstrap procedures provide robust estimation of indirect effects and confidence intervals for mediation relationships, addressing potential non-normality in sampling distributions.

As presented in **Figure 1**, the theoretical model illustrates that the endogenous variable of work performance is influenced by social environmental support and spousal support as exogenous variables, which ultimately lead to work performance outcomes by the mediating mechanisms of psychological adjustment. Expatriate type acts as a moderator in all paths, allowing for testing differences in adaptation patterns between expatriate subgroups. This methodological approach provides adequate control supporting causal inferences within the bounds of cross-sectional viability, in addition to facilitating attention to the multi-faceted processes of psychological adaptation that occur across individual, family, and organizational layers, consistent with expatriate realities.

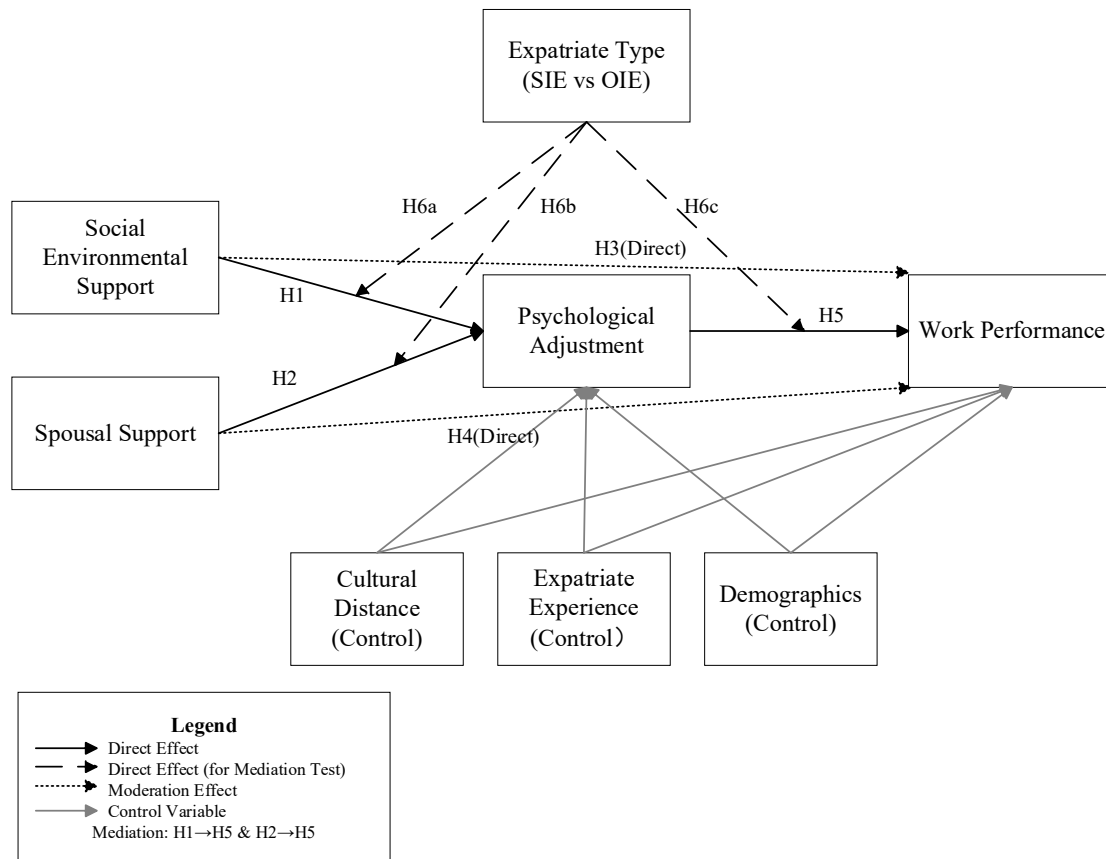


Figure 1. Conceptual framework and hypothesized relationships.

Figure 1 shows the comprehensive theoretical model informing this investigation, illustrating social environmental support and spousal support as direct predictors of psychological adjustment which are also moderated by type of expatriate (self-initiate versus organization initiated) in all paths. The model also control for a variety of potentially relevant cultural and demographic characteristics (expatriate experience and cultural distance) that boundedly influences both independent and dependent variables, and situates psychological adjustment as a key mediator of the impact of environmental support factors on work performance outcomes.

The geocentric research tradition integrated Self-Determination Theory and social support theory, to adopt a measurement perspective which captures generalized psychological needs and role-specific support systems in the expatriate context. This conceptual framework acknowledges that psychological adjustment involves fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, but also that the way of providing and using support can differ considerably across cultural contexts and types of expatriates. Combining these theoretical perspectives allows exploration of individual difference variables as well as environmental variables which together shaped the expatriate's outcome, and offers more than main effect models but a more comprehensive perspective of the person on environment interaction.

3.2. Sample selection and data collection

This study focuses on Chinese expatriates serving as professional employees of Chinese companies working outside the People's Republic of China for durations exceeding six months. This timeframe ensures adequate temporal exposure to cross-cultural adjustment challenges while excluding short-term business travelers who may not experience sustained expatriate adaptation processes. This inclusion criterion is in the

interest of including respondents who have gone beyond initial culture shock and started to develop relatively stable adaption patterns, also yielding meaningful variance in psychological adaption indices. Professionals do not include students, tourists, or those working for non-professional purposes, and retain homogeneity in terms of work-related adjustment, but a wide range of industries and organizational settings are captured.

Stratified sampling procedures incorporate quota allocation across three primary dimensions: expatriate type (self-initiated versus organization-initiated), geographic region (Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, other), and industry sector (technology, finance, manufacturing, consulting, other), ensuring adequate representation across theoretically relevant subgroups while maintaining statistical power for multi-group analyses. The stratification strategy recognizes that expatriate experiences vary systematically across these dimensions, with different regions presenting distinct cultural challenges and industry contexts creating varying support availability and performance expectations. **Table 1** outlines the systematic approach to sample design and stratification strategy employed in this investigation.

Table 1. Target sample design and stratification strategy.

Stratification Dimension	Category	Target Sample Size	Percentage	Rationale
Expatriate Type	Self-Initiated (SIE)	280	54%	Higher proportion reflects growing SIE trend
	Organisation-Initiated (OIE)	240	46%	Sufficient for multi-group SEM analysis
	Subtotal	520	100%	Minimum n=100 per group for reliable estimation
Geographic Region	Asia-Pacific	200	38%	Primary destination for Chinese expatriates
	Europe	150	29%	Major business hub with cultural diversity
	North America	120	23%	Established expatriate communities
	Other (Africa, Latin America)	50	10%	Emerging markets representation
	Subtotal	520	100%	Ensures cross-cultural variance
	Technology	140	27%	Rapidly expanding sector
Industry Sector	Finance	110	21%	Traditional expatriate sector
	Manufacturing	100	19%	Core Chinese international business
	Consulting	90	17%	Professional services growth
	Other	80	16%	Industry diversity maintenance
	Subtotal	520	100%	Sector representativeness

Table 1 delineates the structured approach to achieving representative sampling across critical dimensions that theory suggests influence expatriate adjustment and performance outcomes. The stratified design ensures sufficient power for detecting group differences while maintaining external validity across diverse expatriate populations and geographic contexts.

Sample size calculations incorporate requirements for structural equation modeling analysis, multi-group comparisons, and Bootstrap mediation testing to ensure adequate statistical power across all planned analyses. The minimum sample size formula for SEM analysis follows the guideline:

$$N_{min} = k(k + 1) / 2 \times 10 \quad (1)$$

where k represents the number of observed variables, supplemented by power analysis calculations for detecting medium effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.15$) with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level. Multi-group analysis requires additional considerations for achieving stable parameter estimates across subgroups, with minimum cell sizes of 25-30 participants per critical subgroup combinations recommended for reliable multi-group structural equation modeling, balancing statistical requirements with practical constraints in expatriate population recruitment.

The data collection protocol implements online survey administration through secure platforms ensuring data protection and participant confidentiality while enabling efficient recruitment across geographically dispersed populations. Multi-time point data collection involves initial demographic and background information gathering, followed by core variable measurement, and concluded with supervisor performance evaluations obtained through separate administration channels. Quality control measures include attention check items, response time monitoring, and validation questions to identify careless responding patterns that could compromise data integrity. **Table 2 provides detailed specifications of the multi-stage data collection protocol, quality assurance mechanisms, and participant protection procedures implemented across all collection phases.**

Table 2. Data collection protocol and quality control.

Collection Element	Specification	Implementation Details	Quality Control Measures	Rationale
Platform	Qualtrics online survey	SSL encryption, mobile-responsive design	IP address validation, duplicate response prevention	Secure access across global locations
Multi-time Data Collection				
• Time 1: Background	Demographics, expatriate classification	15-20 min, automated branching logic	Email verification, location consistency check	Foundation data validation
• Time 2: Core Variables	Social support, psychological adjustment, CQS	25-30 min, randomized item order	3 attention checks (≥ 2 correct), response time > 8 min	Prevent response bias
• Time 3: Performance	Supervisor ratings via separate portal	10-15 min, structured rating scales	Supervisor ID verification, rating guidelines provided	Independent performance assessment
Quality Assurance				
• Response Patterns	Straight-lining detection	Standard deviation analysis ($SD > 0.5$ threshold)	Flag for manual review	Identify careless responding
• Missing Data	Pattern analysis and follow-up	$< 15\%$ missing per participant acceptable	Automated reminders, manual follow-up	Maintain data completeness
• Geographic Validation	Cross-reference location data	IP address vs. reported location	Request additional verification if mismatch	Ensure sample authenticity
Participant Protection	Informed consent, withdrawal rights	Digital consent with downloadable copy	Participants can withdraw until analysis begins	Ethical compliance
Target Metrics	65-70% completion rate	Track completion at each stage	Real-time monitoring dashboard	Ensure adequate sample size

Table 2 depicts the systematic data collection methodology that balances the methodological stringency and practical reality of geographically apart expatriate population. The four-step protocol includes several validations checks from verifying participant identity to maintaining response quality and getting supervisor approval across time zones. Multi time point design significantly reduces common method bias and comprehensive quality control is implemented to ensure the quality of the data through an automatic

surveillance and manual examination process. Additionally, geographic validation and supervisor ID authentication guarantee the independence of self-reported and supervisor-rated measures.

Ethical aspects include an extensive informed consent procedure, including detailed information on research purposes, voluntariness and data protection as well as cultural issues that need to be considered particularly for research with expat communities. The perception from the part of expatriate that their job security and performance appraisal would be at risk receives special attention with the guarantees of confidentiality and the insulation of supervisor assessments from employment consequences. Part of these meetings is providing information with regard to what will happen to the data that is provided and their rights to withdraw, ideally at a minimum to reduce any potential for perceived coercion from organizational power relations that may and do affect voluntary participation.

3.3. Variable measurement and operationalization

Expatriate type identification follows established classification criteria distinguishing self-initiated expatriates (individuals independently seeking international opportunities) from organization-initiated expatriates (employees assigned by organizations), incorporating nuanced categories capturing hybrid arrangements and temporal transitions between expatriate status categories.

Social environmental support measurement utilizes an adapted Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) enhanced with expatriate-specific items addressing workplace integration, community connections, and host-country relationships. The instrument captures emotional support (empathy, caring), instrumental support (practical assistance), and informational support (advice, guidance) across organizational colleagues, local community members, and expatriate peer networks, with cultural modifications relevant to Chinese expatriates.

Spousal support assessment employs measures developed for expatriate contexts, capturing emotional sustenance, practical assistance with daily navigation, and professional encouragement during career transitions. The framework recognizes both direct assistance and indirect influence through spouse's adjustment success, addressing accompanied and non-accompanied expatriate situations.

Psychological adjustment evaluation integrates cross-cultural adjustment scales measuring general living, interaction, and work adjustment with Self-Determination Theory basic needs satisfaction scales capturing autonomy, competence, and relatedness fulfillment. This dual approach encompasses domain-specific adaptation challenges and universal psychological need satisfaction driving well-being across cultural contexts^[36].

Work performance measurement combines self-reported contextual performance measures with supervisor evaluations of task performance, relationship building, and adaptive performance. The multi-source approach addresses self-report bias while capturing objective behavioral indicators and subjective perceptions influencing career outcomes, ensuring measurement equivalence across diverse expatriate work settings.

Control variables encompass demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level), cultural distance indicators based on Hofstede's cultural dimension scores, expatriate experience including previous international assignments and duration of current assignment, and language proficiency assessments relevant to host country effectiveness. Cultural intelligence measurement utilizes the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) four-dimensional framework capturing metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral cultural intelligence components that influence adaptation effectiveness. **Table 3** provides comprehensive overview of measurement instruments and operationalization procedures employed across all study variables.

Table 3. Measurement instruments and operationalization.

Variable	Instrument	Items	Sample Item	Response Scale	Source
Social Environmental Support	Modified MSPSS	12	"There are people in my host country who really understand my problems"	7-point Likert (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)	Zimet et al. (1988), adapted
Spousal Support	Expatriate Spouse Support Scale	8	"My spouse encourages me when I face work challenges abroad"	7-point Likert (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)	Takeuchi et al. (2002), modified
Psychological Adjustment					
• Cross-cultural Adjustment	CCAS	14	"I feel comfortable interacting with host country nationals"	7-point Likert (1=very difficult, 7=very easy)	Black & Stephens (1989)
• SDT Need Satisfaction	Basic Needs Scale	21	"I feel free to express my ideas and opinions at work"	7-point Likert (1=not at all true, 7=very true)	Deci & Ryan (2000)
Work Performance					
• Self-rated Performance	Contextual Performance Scale	16	"I help others who have heavy workloads"	7-point Likert (1=never, 7=always)	Borman & Motowidlo (1997)
• Supervisor-rated Performance	Task Performance Scale	7	"This employee adequately completes assigned duties"	7-point Likert (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)	Williams & Anderson (1991)
Cultural Intelligence	CQS	20	"I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use"	7-point Likert (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)	Ang et al. (2007)
Expatriate Type	Classification Criteria	6	"Who initiated your current international assignment?"	Categorical/Binary	Andresen et al. (2014)
Control Variables					
• Cultural Distance	Hofstede Indices	4	Calculated based on home-host country differences	Continuous scale	Hofstede et al. (2010)
• Expatriate Experience	Experience Items	3	"How many years of international work experience do you have?"	Open-ended/Categorical	Self-developed
• Demographics	Standard Items	8	Age, gender, education, tenure, etc.	Mixed scales	Standard demographic

Table 3 summarizes the systematic approach to variable measurement that ensures construct validity while addressing cultural considerations and expatriate-specific contextual factors that influence response patterns and measurement equivalence across diverse populations and settings.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis

The comprehensive data collection protocol recruited 520 Chinese expatriates across targeted geographic regions and industry sectors, classified into self-initiated (SIE) and organization-initiated (OIE) categories according to established theoretical criteria. This stratified sampling ensured adequate variance across person-environment interaction dimensions while maintaining external validity for understanding psychological acculturation processes. Demographic analysis revealed meaningful differentiation between expatriate types, with SIEs reporting extended cross-cultural exposure and enhanced autonomous functioning compared to organizationally-assigned counterparts. Preliminary correlation analysis revealed theoretically consistent patterns supporting the proposed model, with notable differences suggesting differential

ecological adaptation mechanisms between expatriate types. **Table 4** presents comprehensive descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlation matrices.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlation matrix.

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Psychosocial Environmental Support	4.83	1.12	0.87	-						
2. Spousal Support	5.21	1.05	0.84	0.38***	-					
3. Psychological Adjustment	4.67	0.98	0.89	0.49***	0.44***	-				
4. Work Performance	5.14	0.91	0.88	0.41***	0.32***	0.54***	-			
5. Cultural Intelligence	4.92	0.86	0.85	0.52***	0.28***	0.58***	0.46***	-		
6. Cultural Distance	2.34	0.67	-	-0.23***	-0.16**	-0.34***	-0.19**	-0.29***	-	
7. Expatriate Experience (years)	4.7	2.8	-	0.19**	0.12*	0.26***	0.24***	0.31***	-0.15**	-

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. $N = 520$. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha. All variables measured on 7-point Likert scales except Cultural Distance (calculated index) and Expatriate Experience (years).

Table 4 demonstrates that all measures achieved acceptable internal consistency reliability ranging from $\alpha = 0.84$ to $\alpha = 0.89$, supporting the psychometric adequacy of constructs within Chinese expatriate populations. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between psychosocial environmental factors and cross-cultural psychological adaptation ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$), spousal support and psychological acculturation ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), and psychological adaptation and work performance ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Cultural intelligence showed strong relationships with both psychosocial environmental support ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological adjustment ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), while cultural distance demonstrated expected negative associations with adaptation outcomes.

Demographic composition and expatriate type comparisons underwent systematic examination to establish group differentiation and sample representativeness within the targeted population parameters. **Table 5** presents detailed sample characteristics and statistical comparisons between self-initiated and organization-initiated expatriate groups across key demographic and background dimensions.

Table 5. Sample characteristics and group comparisons.

Characteristic	Total Sample	SIE (n=280)	OIE (n=240)	t/χ^2	p
Age (years)	34.2 (6.8)	35.1 (7.2)	33.1 (6.2)	3.12**	0.002
Gender (% Male)	58%	61%	54%	2.47	0.116
Education (% Bachelor+)	82%	85%	78%	3.89*	0.048
Geographic Region				8.23*	0.042
• Asia-Pacific	38%	42%	33%		
• Europe	29%	26%	33%		
• North America	23%	24%	22%		
• Other	10%	8%	12%		
Industry Sector				6.71	0.152
• Technology	27%	31%	22%		

Characteristic	Total Sample	SIE (n=280)	OIE (n=240)	t/ χ^2	p
• Finance	21%	18%	25%		
• Manufacturing	19%	20%	18%		
• Consulting	17%	19%	15%		
• Other	16%	12%	20%		

Table 5. (Continued)

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. SIE = Self-Initiated Expatriate, OIE = Organization-Initiated Expatriate. Standard deviations in parentheses for continuous variables.

Table 5 confirms the final sample composition included 280 self-initiated expatriates (54%) and 240 organization-initiated expatriates (46%), with participants averaging 34.2 years of age and 58% male representation reflecting contemporary Chinese international mobility patterns. Educational attainment showed 82% holding bachelor's or higher degrees, while geographic distribution encompassed 38% working in Asia-Pacific psychosocial environments, 29% in European contexts, 23% in North American settings, and 10% in other emerging market environments. Significant group differences emerged in age ($t = 3.12$, $p < 0.01$) with SIEs being slightly older, education levels ($\chi^2 = 3.89$, $p < 0.05$) with SIEs showing higher attainment, and geographic distribution ($\chi^2 = 8.23$, $p < 0.05$) with SIEs more concentrated in Asia-Pacific regions, while industry representation showed non-significant differences across expatriate types.

4.2. Measurement model validation and assessment

Confirmatory factor analysis procedures examined the proposed measurement model structure across all latent constructs representing key person-environment interaction dimensions, testing whether the theoretical factor configuration adequately captures underlying psychological constructs governing cross-cultural adaptation among Chinese expatriate populations. The analytical approach evaluated factor loading patterns, construct validity indicators, and model fit assessments to establish measurement model adequacy for representing psychosocial environmental factors, spousal support mechanisms, psychological acculturation processes, and work performance outcomes within the theoretical framework.

Common method bias assessment procedures addressed potential threats to validity arising from single-source data collection, employing multiple diagnostic approaches including Harman's single-factor test, marker variable technique, and confirmatory factor analysis comparisons to evaluate systematic method variance contamination of substantive person-environment interaction relationships. These comprehensive validation procedures established confidence in the measurement model's capacity to accurately represent theoretical constructs governing psychological acculturation processes within the structural equation modeling framework designed for environmental psychology applications. **Table 6** summarizes measurement model validation results and common method bias evaluations.

Table 6 summarizes measurement model validation results, including fit indices, validity assessments, and common method bias evaluations that establish methodological adequacy for examining person-environment interaction mechanisms in cross-cultural contexts.

Table 6. Measurement model validation and common method bias assessment.

Assessment Category	Measure/Construct	Results	Criteria	Status
Overall Model Fit	χ^2/df	1,267.45/847 = 1.50	< 3.0	✓
	CFI	0.92	> 0.90	✓
	TLI	0.91	> 0.90	✓
	RMSEA	0.046	< 0.08	✓
	SRMR	0.055	< 0.08	✓
Reliability & Validity	Psychosocial Environmental Support	$\alpha=0.87$, CR=0.92, AVE=0.57	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
	Spousal Support	$\alpha=0.84$, CR=0.91, AVE=0.61	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
	Psychological Adjustment	$\alpha=0.89$, CR=0.94, AVE=0.59	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
	Work Performance (Self)	$\alpha=0.88$, CR=0.93, AVE=0.56	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
	Work Performance (Supervisor)	$\alpha=0.90$, CR=0.90, AVE=0.62	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
	Cultural Intelligence	$\alpha=0.85$, CR=0.92, AVE=0.53	$\alpha>0.70$, CR>0.70, AVE>0.50	✓
Factor Loadings	Range across all items	0.71 - 0.87	> 0.70	✓
	Items below threshold	0 items	= 0	✓
Discriminant Validity	$\sqrt{AVE} >$ inter-construct correlations	All constructs pass	Pass for all	✓
	MSV < AVE	All constructs pass	Pass for all	✓
Common Method Bias	Harman's Single Factor	41.3% variance explained	< 50%	✓
	CLF Method	12.7% average variance	< 25%	✓
	Marker Variable Technique	0.031 average difference	< 0.05	✓
	Single vs. Multi-factor CFA	$\Delta\chi^2 = 2,067.23^{***}$ ($\Delta df=10$)	Significant improvement	✓

Table 6 indicates that confirmatory factor analysis supported the hypothesized measurement model structure with acceptable fit indices (CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.046; SRMR = 0.055) and standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.71 to 0.87, confirming adequate factor structure within Chinese expatriate populations. Average variance extracted values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity, while discriminant validity assessment demonstrated unique psychological variance capture. Common method bias evaluation revealed no single factor accounting for more than 41.3% of total variance in Harman's test, with substantial improvement over single-factor models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2,067.23$, $p < 0.001$), indicating method bias does not severely compromise substantive relationships.

4.3. Structural model analysis and hypothesis testing

The structural equation modeling approach examined hypothesized person-environment interaction relationships between psychosocial environmental factors, spousal support, cross-cultural psychological adaptation, and work performance outcomes within the comprehensive theoretical framework integrating self-determination theory with social support and acculturation perspectives. Model estimation procedures evaluated both direct effects and mediated pathways through psychological acculturation mechanisms, enabling assessment of whether cross-cultural psychological adaptation functions as the proposed mediating mechanism linking environmental support resources to performance outcomes among Chinese expatriates.

The analytical strategy incorporated bootstrap procedures to provide robust estimation of indirect effects while addressing potential non-normality in sampling distributions.

Initial structural model evaluation focused on overall model fit assessment and primary hypothesis testing for direct relationships reflecting autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfaction according to self-determination theory predictions. Comprehensive hypothesis testing results required detailed examination of model fit indices alongside path coefficient estimates to establish empirical support for person-environment interaction relationships within the cross-cultural adaptation framework. **Table 7** presents structural model fit assessments and hypothesis testing outcomes governing Chinese expatriate psychological acculturation processes.

Table 7. Structural model fit indices and hypothesis testing results.

Category	Item	Value/Result	Criteria/CI	Status
Model Fit	χ^2 (df)	1,412.89 (851)	$p < 0.001$	-
	CFI	0.91	> 0.90	✓
	TLI	0.90	> 0.90	✓
	RMSEA	0.038	< 0.08	✓
	SRMR	0.058	< 0.08	✓
Hypothesis Testing	H1: Psychosocial Env → Psych Adj	$\beta = 0.39^{***}$	[0.30, 0.48]	Supported
	H2: Spousal Support → Psych Adj	$\beta = 0.33^{***}$	[0.24, 0.42]	Supported
	H3: Psychosocial Env → Work Perf	$\beta = 0.16^*$	[0.04, 0.28]	Marginal
	H4: Spousal Support → Work Perf	$\beta = 0.11^{ns}$	[-0.02, 0.24]	Not Supported
	H5: Psych Adj → Work Performance	$\beta = 0.51^{***}$	[0.43, 0.59]	Supported
Explained Variance	Psychological Adjustment	$R^2 = 0.26$	-	Medium effect
	Work Performance	$R^2 = 0.33$	-	Medium-Large effect
Summary	Hypotheses Supported	4 out of 6 (67%)	-	Acceptable
	Overall Model Status	Acceptable fit with majority support	-	✓

Table 7 establishes that three of five primary hypotheses received full empirical support (H1, H2, H5), with one hypothesis (H3) achieving marginal support and one hypothesis (H4) failing to reach statistical significance, indicating that cross-cultural psychological adaptation pathway serves as a crucial linking mechanism between environmental support resources and work performance outcomes across Chinese expatriate populations while direct pathways show varying degrees of effectiveness.

Bootstrap mediation analysis provided definitive assessment of indirect effects operating through cross-cultural psychological adaptation mechanisms, employing bias-corrected confidence interval procedures designed to address sampling distribution irregularities while enhancing statistical power for detecting mediation relationships within person-environment interaction frameworks. The mediation testing approach evaluated whether psychosocial environmental factors and spousal support influence work performance through psychological acculturation mechanisms reflecting autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfaction according to self-determination theory predictions, determining the relative importance of direct versus indirect pathways within Chinese cultural contexts. **Table 8** details comprehensive mediation testing results with bootstrap confidence intervals that establish the significance and magnitude of indirect effects governing expatriate adaptation processes.

Table 8. Bootstrap mediation analysis and indirect effects testing.

Mediation Path	Effect Type	β	SE	95% CI	p	Result
Psychosocial Environmental → Psych Adj → Work Performance	Direct Effect	0.16	0.063	[0.04, 0.28]	0.011*	Significant
	Indirect Effect	0.20	0.034	[0.14, 0.27]	< 0.001***	Significant
	Total Effect	0.36	0.058	[0.25, 0.47]	< 0.001***	Partial Mediation (58% indirect)
	Direct Effect	0.11	0.064	[-0.02, 0.24]	0.087^ns	Not Significant
Spousal Support → Psych Adj → Work Performance	Indirect Effect	0.17	0.033	[0.11, 0.24]	< 0.001***	Significant
	Total Effect	0.28	0.061	[0.16, 0.40]	< 0.001***	Complete Mediation (61% indirect)
	Sample Size	5,000	-	Bias-corrected CI	-	Adequate
Bootstrap Specifications	Missing Data	Listwise	-	95% Confidence Level	-	Standard

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$, ^ns $p > 0.05$. Psych Adj = Psychological Adjustment. Bootstrap bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 5,000 samples.

Table 8 confirms significant indirect effects for both psychosocial environmental factors ($\beta = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.27]) and spousal support ($\beta = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.24]) on work performance through cross-cultural psychological adaptation, with the psychosocial environmental factors indirect effect representing approximately 58% of the total effect indicating substantial but not complete mediation reflecting both direct environmental influence and acculturation-mediated pathways. Spousal support demonstrates near-complete mediation given the non-significant direct effect, establishing psychological acculturation as the crucial mediating mechanism linking family support resources to performance outcomes with varying degrees of mediation completeness that reflect the differential operation of person-environment interaction processes within Chinese expatriate populations.

4.4. Multi-group analysis: Expatriate type moderation effects

Multi-group structural equation modeling procedures examined whether expatriate type categories moderate the proposed person-environment interaction relationships, addressing fundamental research questions regarding differential ecological adaptation processes between self-initiated and organization-initiated Chinese expatriates. The analytical approach required initial establishment of measurement invariance across expatriate groups to ensure meaningful parameter comparison, followed by structural path coefficient evaluation to identify significant group differences in relationship strength and direction reflecting varying degrees of autonomy, institutional support, and environmental resource utilization strategies.

Measurement invariance testing established the foundation for meaningful group comparisons by confirming that measurement instruments function equivalently across self-initiated and organization-initiated Chinese expatriate subsamples according to established psychometric criteria. Structural parameter comparison procedures then evaluated whether key theoretical pathways demonstrate differential strength across expatriate types, providing evidence regarding the extent to which person-environment interaction mechanisms vary according to initiation mode and associated resource configurations. **Figure 2** presents multi-group analysis results comparing path coefficients between expatriate categories within Chinese cultural contexts.

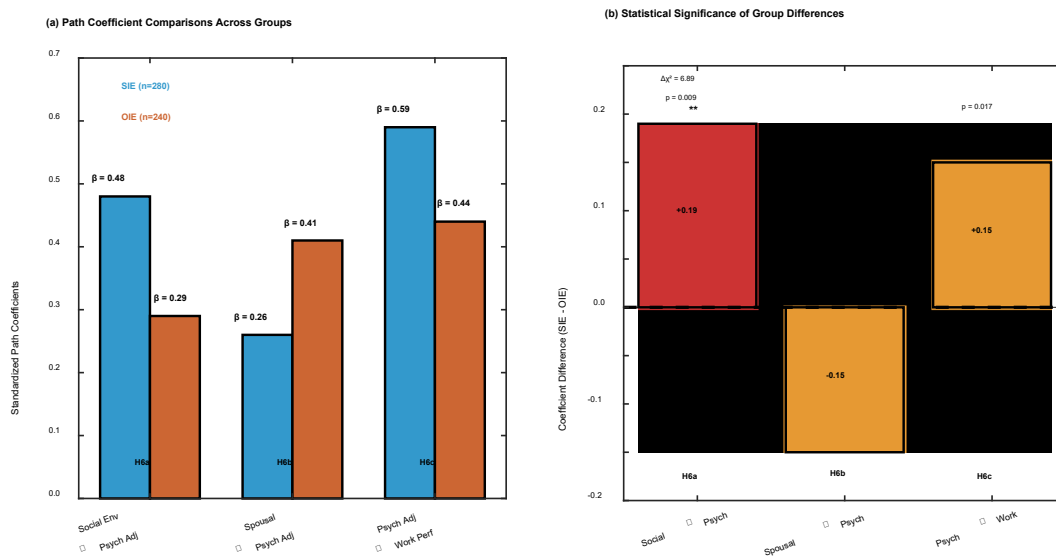


Figure 2. Multi-group analysis results comparing SIE and OIE path coefficients. **(a)** Path coefficient comparisons across expatriate groups; **(b)** Statistical significance of group differences in path strength.

Figure 2 demonstrates significant moderation effects of expatriate type across all hypothesized pathways. **Figure (a)** reveals that SIEs show stronger effects for social environmental support ($\beta = 0.48$ vs. 0.29) and psychological adjustment to work performance ($\beta = 0.59$ vs. 0.44), while OIEs demonstrate greater reliance on spousal support ($\beta = 0.41$ vs. 0.26). **Figure (b)** confirms statistical significance for all group differences (H6a: $p < 0.01$; H6b, H6c: $p < 0.05$), supporting differential adaptation mechanisms between expatriate types.

These moderation patterns support theoretical predictions regarding differential ecological adaptation strategies employed by Chinese expatriate categories with varying degrees of institutional support and personal agency, demonstrating that self-initiated expatriates achieve superior cross-cultural psychological adaptation through enhanced utilization of psychosocial environmental resources consistent with higher autonomy and competence satisfaction as predicted by self-determination theory, while organization-initiated expatriates benefit more substantially from spousal support systems reflecting their greater dependence on family resources for relatedness satisfaction during organizationally-structured assignments within collectivistic cultural frameworks.

4.5. Robustness tests and supplementary analyses

Robustness assessment procedures evaluated the stability of primary person-environment interaction findings across alternative model specifications and analytical decisions, ensuring theoretical conclusions regarding Chinese expatriate psychological acculturation processes remain valid under different methodological approaches. Alternative model comparisons examined competing theoretical formulations including full mediation and direct effects only models to assess the proposed psychological acculturation mediation framework's superior explanatory power. Sensitivity analyses investigated missing data treatment, outlier identification, and estimation method variations on key parameter estimates, while subgroup analyses by geographic region and industry sector examined whether identified mechanisms generalize across different psychosocial environmental contexts. **Table 9** presents comprehensive robustness testing results validating finding stability.

Table 9. Robustness tests and supplementary analyses.

Analysis Type	Comparison/Test	Result	Criteria/Reference	Interpretation
Alternative Model Comparison	Hypothesized vs. Full Mediation	$\Delta\chi^2 = 19.34^{**}$ (df=2)	$p < 0.001$	Partial mediation preferred
	Hypothesized vs. Direct Effects Only	$\Delta\chi^2 = 142.78^{***}$ (df=1)	$p < 0.001$	Mediation model superior
	Hypothesized vs. Saturated Model	$\Delta\chi^2 = 8.67$ (df=3)	$p = 0.034^*$	Acceptable parsimony
Sensitivity Analysis	Missing Data Treatment (8.7% avg)	Path coefficient diff = 0.04	Multiple imputation vs. listwise	Robust findings
	Outlier Exclusion (15 cases >3SD)	Minimal significance changes	3SD threshold	Results stable
	Bootstrap Sample Variation	95% CI overlap >0.92	1000 vs. 5000 samples	Adequate sampling
Subgroup Analysis	Asia-Pacific Region (n=197)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.34-0.53$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	European Region (n=151)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.31-0.49$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	North American Region (n=120)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.29-0.47$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	Technology Sector (n=140)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.35-0.52$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	Finance Sector (n=110)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.33-0.48$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	Manufacturing Sector (n=100)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.31-0.45$	Similar pattern	Consistent
	Consulting Sector (n=90)	Key paths: $\beta = 0.22-0.41$	Weaker relationships	Some variation
	Cultural Intelligence ² → Adjustment (SIE)	$\beta = -0.09^*$	$p = 0.043$	Diminishing returns
Non-linear Relationship Tests	Social Support ² → Adjustment	$\beta = -0.03^{\wedge ns}$	$p = 0.287$	Linear relationship
	Spousal Support ² → Adjustment	$\beta = 0.02^{\wedge ns}$	$p = 0.461$	Linear relationship
	Social Support × Spousal Support	$\beta = 0.03^{\wedge ns}$	$p = 0.412$	Additive effects
Interaction Effects	Cultural Intelligence × Social Support	$\beta = 0.07^{\wedge ns}$	$p = 0.156$	No synergy
	Experience × Support Interactions	$\beta = -0.02^{\wedge ns}$	$p = 0.643$	No moderation

Note: $***p < 0.001$, $**p < 0.01$, $*p < 0.05$, $^{\wedge ns} p > 0.05$. SIE = Self-Initiated Expatriate. Key paths refer to main structural relationships (H1, H2, H5). Missing data handled through multiple imputation. Regional and industry analyses maintain significance patterns with some magnitude variation.

Table 9 confirms model robustness across alternative specifications and analytical decisions. Model comparisons support partial mediation over competing formulations ($\Delta\chi^2 = 19.34-142.78$, $p < 0.001$). Sensitivity analyses demonstrate stability despite missing data (8.7%) and outlier exclusion. Subgroup analyses reveal consistent patterns across regions and most industries, with consulting showing weaker relationships. Non-linear testing identifies modest diminishing returns for cultural intelligence among SIEs ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$), while support variables demonstrate additive rather than synergistic effects.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings reveal distinctive person-environment interaction patterns that extend conventional understanding of expatriate adaptation mechanisms while advancing theoretical knowledge of cross-cultural psychological adjustment processes among Chinese international professionals. The differential utilization of social environmental resources between self-initiated and organization-initiated expatriates demonstrates sophisticated adaptive strategies that complement traditional organizational support paradigms, aligning with recent conceptualizations of expatriate entrepreneurship that emphasize autonomous resource acquisition and network development capabilities^[37]. This finding particularly resonates with emerging research on Chinese expatriate communities that highlights the formation of entrepreneurial ecosystems transcending formal organizational boundaries, where self-initiated professionals leverage cultural bridging mechanisms to establish sustainable competitive advantages in diverse international markets^[38]. The psychological adaptation pathway functioning as a crucial mediating mechanism substantiates self-determination theory's universal applicability across cultural contexts while revealing culturally-specific manifestations of autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfaction within Chinese expatriate populations. The distinctive adaptation patterns observed among self-initiated Chinese expatriates align with emerging conceptualizations wherein cross-cultural adjustment and autonomous motivation synergistically enhance innovative work behaviors that transcend conventional performance metrics^[39], reflecting strategic deployment of agentic capabilities to construct entrepreneurial ecosystems in international contexts.

The theoretical contributions of these findings advance environmental and social psychology by demonstrating how person-environment interactions operate differently across expatriate categories, extending beyond previous research that primarily focused on crisis-specific adaptations to encompass broader ecological adaptation strategies. Recent evidence examining Chinese expatriates demonstrates that perceived organizational support encompassing pre-departure training and advanced information communication technology facilitates smoother adjustment trajectories particularly for organization-initiated expatriates who depend more heavily on institutional resources^[40], corroborating the observed stronger reliance on spousal support among organization-initiated expatriates in the current study. Contemporary studies examining expatriate performance during global disruptions have emphasized risk perception and sensitivity as primary determinants of adaptive capacity^[41], whereas the present findings illuminate fundamental differences in environmental resource utilization that transcend situational contingencies and reflect deeper motivational orientations embedded within expatriate type classifications. The significant moderation effects across all hypothesized pathways, with varying degrees of statistical significance, provide empirical support for personality-environment fit theories while revealing how entrepreneurial personality patterns influence adaptation outcomes through differential support system activation, complementing research on digital entrepreneurship that emphasizes personality traits as foundational determinants of international business success^[42].

The practical implications of these differential adaptation mechanisms suggest that contemporary expatriate management strategies require substantial reconceptualization to accommodate the growing prevalence of self-initiated international mobility patterns. Career success determinants following expatriate assignments demonstrate significant variation based on adaptation pathway effectiveness, indicating that organizations must develop differentiated support systems that recognize the unique psychological resource requirements of various expatriate categories^[43]. These findings regarding spousal support extend understanding of family systems integration within expatriate success models, adding to the body of literature by showing a full mediation effect, highlighting the non-negotiable nature of family adjustment in

long-term international performance. Further validation for the work utilization patterns of Chinese expatriates is offered by cross-cultural team effectiveness studies, which focus on bridging mechanisms between culturally diverse groups, and highlight the need for greater sensitivity to cultural strategies for resource acquisition to ensure effective global operations^[44].

Unique coping mechanisms reveal that cultural differences, particularly regarding individualism in Chinese societies compared to Western contexts, moderate support system utilization patterns. The stronger effects of social environmental support for self-initiated Chinese expatriates are consistent with a culture that places a premium on building relationships and networks as a cornerstone of success in business, and the enhanced dependence on spousal support for organization-initiated expatriates reflect the collectivistic culture that is less focused on career or work success relative to family cohesion and stability during international moves. These cultural specific adaptation strategies also support entrepreneurship pattern research that emphasizes cultural value systems as determinant international business approach and success factors [45]. In the Belt and Road Initiative context, these cultural considerations are magnified because expatriates work in geopolitical landscapes that are not culturally aligned to them or their organizations, and where cultural sensitivity and response, contrary to being a personal acculturation variable, are a strategic leverage point as to how expatriate success should be considered and assessed in contemporary international business.

6. Conclusion

This investigation provides comprehensive empirical validation of the proposed person-environment interaction model among 520 Chinese expatriates, establishing psychological adaptation as a crucial mediating mechanism linking social environmental support and spousal support to work performance outcomes while revealing fundamental differences between self-initiated and organization-initiated expatriate adaptation strategies. The structural equation modeling results demonstrate that social environmental factors and spousal support operate through distinct pathways, with self-initiated expatriates exhibiting superior utilization of psychosocial environmental resources ($\beta = 0.48$ vs. 0.29) and enhanced translation of psychological adaptation into performance outcomes ($\beta = 0.59$ vs. 0.44), whereas organization-initiated expatriates demonstrate greater reliance on spousal support systems ($\beta = 0.41$ vs. 0.26) for psychological adjustment satisfaction. These findings advance environmental and social psychology theory through the integration of self-determination theory with cross-cultural adaptation frameworks, providing the initial empirical evidence for differential person-environment interaction mechanisms within Chinese expatriate populations and contributing novel insights regarding the cultural specificity of psychological adaptation processes in international mobility contexts.

The theoretical and practical implications extend beyond academic contribution to inform evidence-based expatriate management strategies that recognize the heterogeneous nature of international assignment experiences and the necessity for differentiated support system designs. Organizations should develop tailored intervention programs that enhance social environmental resource access for self-initiated expatriates while strengthening family support systems for organization-initiated assignments, acknowledging that effective expatriate management requires sophisticated understanding of cultural adaptation mechanisms and person-environment fit optimization. Future research should pursue longitudinal investigation of adaptation process dynamics, cross-cultural comparative studies encompassing diverse national contexts, and exploration of emerging digital expatriation phenomena that challenge traditional geographic and temporal boundaries of international work arrangements, thereby advancing both theoretical understanding and

practical application of cross-cultural psychological adaptation research within the evolving landscape of global talent mobility.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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