

Adapting to a workplace in a foreign country

A case study on the cultural adaptation processes of Chinese expats on the Dutch
workfloor

Thesis

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Introduction

“Especially I think that Dutch people are more like the ice cube, you have to first melt them before you can do something with them. So it’s not so handy if you are more shy or if you are too enthusiastic. You need to take it at the right speed sometimes” (R5).

This funny quote from one of my respondents illustrates the many different cultural challenges that Chinese expats navigate here in The Netherlands. People who start working in a different culture have to adapt to circumstances like a new language, different social norms and a different dynamic with colleagues. However, even though there are many challenges, the migration flow of highly educated people across the globe is growing.

In the modern western knowledge economy there is a scarcity of talented highly educated employees on the labor market. Countries compete in attracting foreign talents, and the Netherlands currently attracts relatively few highly skilled migrants compared to other countries. It is therefore important for the Netherlands to focus more on attracting and retaining expats (Raspe et al., 2014: pp. 6-7; Groot, et al., 2013 in Sebo & Sleurink, 2016: pp. 3-4). Highly educated migrants or expats can be great assets to an organization because they bring knowledge and expertise. However, an expat who has not been able to settle properly in the new circumstances is a major cost item (Jhutti, 2007: p.7, Wood & El Mansour, 2010: p.196). It is therefore relevant to study which challenges and circumstances expats face when they try to adapt in the Netherlands.

The main question of this thesis is: *which factors contribute to adaptation processes of Chinese expats in Dutch companies?* I will try to answer this question by doing 13 qualitative interviews with Chinese expats working in the Netherlands, asking them about their experience. The questions ask about organizational and cultural factors in their adaptation process, personal ability and the support they received from their social network.

The thesis is structured as follows: the first chapter will provide context by discussing expats, providing a definition and diving into the labor market for expats in the Netherlands. A history of the ‘multicultural society’ and relevant Dutch integration policy that today applies to Chinese expats will also be described. How expats adapt to a foreign culture according to the u-curved model that Black & Mendenhall (1991) discuss, culture shock and which factors are important for a decision to stay is discussed in the second chapter. In the third chapter the Chinese labor market and its brain drain is described, as well as the social context for Chinese knowledge

migrants or expats. This is followed by previous research on Chinese expats and adaptation processes. Chapter four describes research questions, methods and the strategies of the research. Chapter five dives into the analysis of the results from the research. First the specific personal abilities that play a role in the adaptation process for Chinese expats are explained. Second, how important is the social network, culture shock and co-worker support? Last but not least, it is shown that company culture and company support that can have a considerable influence on a Chinese expat's cultural adjustment.

1. Expats and the labor market in The Netherlands

In this chapter we will discuss the definition of 'expats' and the broader societal context and history of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands. Relevant Dutch policy on migration like the 'work agreement' and the civic integration exam is then explained.

1.1. Expats in the Netherlands: a definition

'Expat', derived from 'expatriate', comes from Latin: 'ex' (out) and 'patria' (homeland).

In some academic literature the terms 'expat' and 'highly educated' or 'highly skilled' migrant are used interchangeably (Gatti, 2009; Sebo & Sleurink, 2016;), while others state that an expat is sent by a multinational company for a specific amount of time after which they return to their home country (Woods & El Mansour, 2010). In this thesis, expats are defined as highly educated migrants that move or have moved to a country other than their own, for a job.

A recent OECD report shows that in 2025 the Netherlands will have a shortage of highly skilled workers on the labor market. The demand is expected to increase with 2.4 million, while the labour supply according to estimates, will grow only 1 million (OECD, 2016). This is why the Netherlands has made different strategies to attract and retain foreign professionals.

In the Netherlands a collaboration of the government, top-sector companies and education institutions, are working together to promote the Netherlands as an attractive country to work and live in. This is part of the Human Capital Agenda, that wants companies to attract human capital in the form of foreign knowledge workers (Sebo & Sleurink, 2016: p.8). One of the three biggest groups of foreign knowledge migrants in the Netherlands is from China (Raspe et al., 2014: 8, Sleutjes & Boterman, 2014; Obradovic, 2013: p.32). It would be relevant for the strategies that the Dutch government put in place to know more about Chinese expats and what makes the Netherlands attractive or unattractive to them. More on this will be discussed in chapter three. Another strategy to retain expats, is an exemption from certain parts of Dutch integration policy, as I will explain in the next paragraph.

1.2. Integration policy in the Netherlands

Integration has been a loaded subject in Dutch politics since the end of the seventies. Before that, migrants would only come to work in the Netherlands and go back to their country of origin eventually. Then, big streams of immigrants from Morocco came to the Netherlands with

the goal to stay. This was the start of minority policy, which later became integration policy. Minority policy entailed the 'multicultural society' that the Netherlands have. Minorities are encouraged to keep their own language and culture. Between the end of the seventies and now, from time to time debates about the negative effects of immigration have flared up. Subjects like fear of 'islamization', were raised. This led to integration policy, which is more about the integration of minorities into Dutch culture, less about keeping their own (Slegers, 2007:pp. 9-19).

In 1996 integration policy was created. Immigrants now have to take Dutch language classes and pass a civic integration examination. This should test their knowledge of Dutch language and culture, even though the level of difficulty and questions asked have been contested (Kamerman & Boon, 2018). The Dutch government website states that 'in order to participate in Dutch society, it is important to learn the language, and know what the core values of Dutch society are. Core values are freedom of expression, solidarity and freedom of religion.' (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

There is a distinction between refugees, immigrants from Europe or the U.S., and highly educated migrants. The last two groups get an exception from integration policy, they do not have to learn the language or take the civic integration exam (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

1.3. Chinese expats in the Netherlands

According to The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) 71,500 Chinese migrants and their descendants come from the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong (Gijsberts et al., 2011: p11). Chinese migrants have started to come to the Netherlands to live and work more than a hundred years ago. In the fifties there were Chinese mainly selling peanuts, in the sixties, seventies and eighties Chinese migrants opened restaurants (van Pinxteren & Pieke, 2017: p.13). They are the fifth largest non-western group in the Netherlands.

The 'wok agreement' was established in 2014. The Dutch government and the Asian catering industry signed the 'wok agreement' in 2014. There was a shortage of chefs in Asian restaurants in the Netherlands, and Dutch cooks did not have the experience or affinity to work with Asian dishes. The wok agreement allowed Asian restaurants to hire chefs from Asia to work in the Netherlands. The first half year of the agreement 900 Asian cooks came to the Netherlands. After that, the number reduced (Ritzen, 2016). The cooks had to learn Dutch and get a catering industry certification in the Netherlands (Asscher, 2016). Chinese migrants from the People's Republic increasingly dominate the Sino-Indian restaurant sector (van Pinxteren & Pieke, 2017:

p. 103).

Chinese highly skilled migrants and students started to come to the Netherlands at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They are the fastest growing group of Chinese in the Netherlands, and they define the presence of China in a different way than before (van Pinxteren & Pieke, 2017: p.13, 20). The growth of Chinese migration to the Netherlands is not a solitary phenomenon. Increased internationalization of companies on a global level and China's increased importance as a global power do have influence as wider societal processes (Hong, et. al., 2017: p.5).

In official Dutch newspapers and research publications the Chinese people in the Netherlands are described as a 'hard working and closed community' (Gijsberts, et.al., 2011: p.9). 'The Chinese work hard, complain little and solve setbacks in their own circle - that was pretty much the picture' (olde Hanhof, 2018). It is commonly acknowledged that the Chinese community makes an important contribution to the economy and society. However, the Chinese are different, outside ordinary Dutch society (van Pinxteren & Pieke, 2017: p.15). Gijsberts et. al. writes that this applies to the first generation of Chinese migrants. The second generation is less in their own Chinese circle, and more open to Dutch society. They do well in education, have contact with native Dutch and are modern in their views (Gijsberts et al., 2011: p.9). According to van Pinxteren & Pieke, Chinese see themselves as 'invisible', temporary and unobtrusive guests as well. The reason for this is that it is the best guarantee against harassment and discrimination (2017:p.15).

2. Adaptation processes

Culture is not an unambiguous concept, and should be examined as little as possible in a simplistic or generalized way (Ras, 2011: p. 11). What 'Chinese culture' or 'Dutch culture' means, or what 'Chinese' or 'Dutch' people often do is therefore difficult to make statements about. I will avoid this, and focus on their adaptation process. In this chapter, I will discuss theories and concepts from the academic literature concerning expatriate adaptation.

2.1. The expatriate adaptation process

When expats start working abroad they have to deal with a different (company) culture, ways of working and behaving. For a company it is very important that an expat can adapt well to the new situation; cultural adaptation has a direct influence on how an expat functions and whether they can continue to do their job (Wood & El Mansour, 2010: p. 196; Zhang, 2013: p.8; Wong, 2015). If the adaptation process fails, the expat does not function properly and can end up wanting to return to their home country. This makes it relevant to know which factors play a role in an expatriate's adaptation process and how these can be adjusted to help the expat as much as possible (Zhang, 2013: p.8). It is important to mention here that 'the reasons why someone remains in a position are not the opposite reasons why someone leaves their position' (George, 2015: p.103 in Sebo & Sleurink, 2016: p.64). This section discusses the three dimensions of adaptation processes, including more extensively culture shock; retention factors that contribute to the expat's decision to stay in their host country; and psychological contracts.

The model of Black & Mendenhall (1991)

According to various studies, the expatriate adaptation process leads to a degree of psychological comfort and familiarity among the expats when they are abroad (Black & Stephen, 1989; Brock, Shenkar, Shoham, & Siscovick, 2008; Harrison et al., 2004a; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2005 in Wong, 2015: p. 19). The model most discussed in the literature when describing the expatriate adaptation process is that of Black and Mendenhall (1991; Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: p 249, Zhang, 2013: pp. 8-9).

In this model, expatriate adaptation consists of three dimensions: habituation at work, of interaction with people from the host country, and general habituation to the environment outside work. Habituation or getting used to new work circumstances is about how much the expat feels comfortable that s/he can meet the expectations, values and standards that are asked of them. The habituation of interaction is the degree to which the expat feels at ease with the

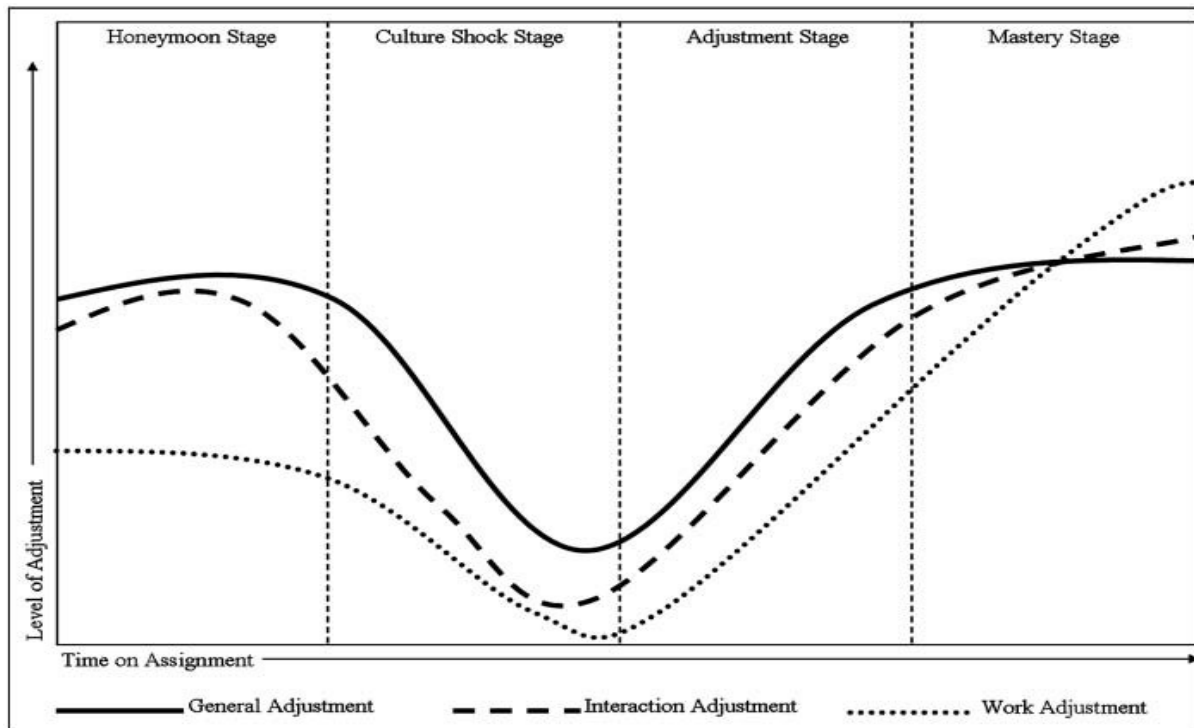
way in which communication takes place in the host country. The third dimension about habituation to the environment outside work concerns food, shopping and other everyday activities. These dimensions are the basis for a lot of research on expatriate adjustment processes (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: p 249; Wood & El Mansour, 2010: p.197, Evans, 2012: pp. 4-5; Zhang, 2013: p 54 -55; Wong, 2015: pp. 20-21). Criticism from various authors on the widely used model of Black and Mendenhall is, among other things, that the amount of 'successful' adaptation on a scale is difficult to conceptualize in Black and Mendenhall's research (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: pp. 250-251). Zhu et al. (2016) disprove the u-curve model, and state that adaptation is more linear over time. In this thesis I accounted for these criticisms in the application of the model.

2.2. Culture shock

In combination with the three-dimensional model, the U-curve model of Lysgaard (1955) is used, although the effectiveness of this model has not been proven conclusively empirically (Thomas & Lazarova 2006: p. 258). The combination of the models of Black, Mendenhall and Lysgaard is visible in Figure 1. In early definitions of the concept of adaptation, the overcoming of the culture shock was seen as the most important, but this has since been extended to several factors (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: p 249). The Lysgaard model describes how expats adapt their knowledge, understanding and acceptance to the culture of the host country in different periods. During the honeymoon period the expat will be enthusiastic about all new experiences and will not yet notice the difficult aspects of the adjustment process. After the expat gets used to the environment and the reality of life in the other culture comes the phase of culture shock (Wood & El Mansour, 2010: pp. 196-197). The culture shock is a familiar concept to many people, which indicates the emotions that an expat feels in response to cultural differences that s/he experiences on a daily basis. These include feelings of loneliness, homesickness, frustration, confusion and anxiety. Expats who have difficulty leaving the culture shock period have a very great chance of not successfully completing the adjustment process (Solomon, 1994: p. 58). After the culture shock phase comes a period in which the expat learns to live with the cultural reality of the host country and is able to function in their job effectively (Wood & El Mansour, 2010: pp. 196-197). In a lot of research this is seen as successfully completing the adjustment process (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: pp. 253-254), however as adaptation is a process without a clear beginning or end, I will refrain from defining 'successful' adaptation processes.

Figure 1. Multidimensional concept or adjustment along the U-curve adjustment

framework (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 198)



2.3. Factors in the adaptation process

There are several factors that contribute to adaptation. First, these factors include the personal qualities of the expat. Language skills, social skills and cultural intelligence are important here (Jhutti, 2007: p.107, Zhang, 2013: p.4). Previous work and travel experience is also personal qualities playing a role in the cultural adaptation of expats (Zhu et al., 2016).

Second, the supportive social network that an expat builds during their adaptation process is crucial (Jhutti, 2007: p.39). New social connections can take the expat to restaurants, cultural events and teach them about crucial aspects of culture. Part of the social network are colleagues in the host country. They, according to Wong (2015: pp. 67, 85), play a major role in the process of adjusting. Colleagues often help in the work environment and give advice on daily things such as where the supermarket is. Lack of support or poor cooperation between colleagues and expats creates a great chance of failure of the adjustment process (Wong, 2015: p. 70). An expat has 'failed' in the adjustment process when he is not functioning properly on the work floor, wants to return to the home country, or has psychological or physical breakdowns (Evans, 2012: p 2).

Third, the support of the organization is also a factor that plays a role in the adjustment process. Company culture, management style, and support from the organization in the form of cultural

training and guidance is directly related to the effectiveness of expats (Wong, 2015: p 24). Formal and informal events contribute to a healthy work environment for expats (Yu, 2016:p.158). I will discuss this more in chapter three.

2.4. Decision to stay

The decision to stay is an inadequate measure to measure a successful adjustment process. A successful adjustment process does not automatically mean that an expat always decides to stay in his position. This is a causal relationship that recurs in many studies (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006: pp. 253-254). A successful adjustment process contributes to a decision to stay, but it may be that an expatriate decides to leave even after successful adjustment. In this study, the process of adjusting expats will be measured on the basis of factors such as how well an expat can adapt in terms of interaction and functioning in the workplace, not on the assumption that the adjustment process should end on a decision to stay

3. Chinese expats and their adaptation to new work environments

Chapter three is about the Chinese expats. Their background, their possible motives and social context that might play a factor in their decision to move to another country. First, migration history, the concept of 'brain drain' and government policy on Chinese highly skilled migrants are discussed. In the second part of the chapter I will give an overview of previous research on Chinese expats and adaptation processes in other countries, focussing on factors such as the influence of cross-cultural training (Wong, 2015; Xu & Du-Babock, 2012; Zhang & Fan, 2014) and personal ability (Wang et al., 2013; Wong, 2015) on cultural adaptation. Finally previous research on Chinese expats in the Netherlands such as cultural distance (Lin, 2016) and cultural values (Yang, 2016) are summarized.

3.1. Chinese expats and their background: the Chinese labor market

This paragraph is about the social context from where Chinese expats might come to the decision to move to another country. Could the social background from which they come play a factor in the decision to move? First I will shortly describe how labor migration has developed, and second comes the concept of 'brain drain' in China in the last two decades until now.

Migration history

Even though saying that China has a 'migration culture' is too simplistic, social and economical changes have led to a universalisation of migration (Pieke & Speelman, 2015: pp. 15-16). In 1979 the hukou registration system that strictly limited where people were allowed to live was reformed. The enormous economic growth after 1978 gave people the opportunity for social and spatial mobility as well. In the thirty years after that, millions of people migrated from rural, inland areas to urban, coastal regions. This probably constitutes the largest labor migration in human history (Ha et al., 2016: p. 324). Because of this development migration was normalized, and the choice for emigration instead of migration might have normalized as well. China's labor market is not only locally experiencing a brain drain, where talent has moved to the big cities. The talent is also moving overseas, as I will discuss later.

Brain drain

Before I move on to the Chinese case, I will explain the concept of 'brain drain'. The labor force of a country is an important component of the national economy. Highly skilled laborers are rarer than lower skilled laborers, and are seen as a country's human capital. The occupations of highly skilled laborers are, among others; engineers, doctors, scientists, and other professions following a university degree. When many highly skilled laborers emigrate to other countries to be part of the economy there, this is a loss for the country of origin; commonly referred to as a 'brain drain'. Although economists have debated that loss of human capital is bad for the economy, other research shows that the situation is more complicated, and that brain drain also has benefits (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011). The emigration of highly skilled workers can create an incentive for the rest of the (future) labor force to invest in more education. Investment in more education is one of the key determinants for long-term economic growth. The highly skilled migrants also send money back home, creating large cash flows back to the country of origin and returning migrants bring back knowledge and skills (Ha et. al, 2016: p. 322). University students studying abroad is a large part of the brain drain in China, because many settle in the country they study after they graduate. However, gradually more and more students return to China after graduating (Wang, 2012: p. 4).

Brain drain and the Chinese labor market

Chinese students that went to study overseas and come back to China are called 'sea turtles' (Hao & Welch, 2012). In the period after the economic reforms in 1978, highly educated labor was high in demand and an unprecedented amount of students went to study abroad. This amount of people has grown so much, that Chinese students now are the largest group of international students. Two-thirds of the more than two million students who went overseas in the last thirty years decided to stay in the country they went to (Wang, 2012: pp. 4-7). One third returned to China, and the amount of returnees or 'sea turtles' has grown steadily in recent years. Thirty years ago, Chinese students educated overseas who returned home were treated like national treasures. The labour market's attitude towards them now is more selective and mature, because the group to select from is larger (Hao & Welch, 2012; Dai et al., 2015: p. 444).

Chinese graduates returning from an overseas education have an advantage over indigenous graduates. They are more in demand and get a higher starting salary package, and jobs in so-called first-tier cities. Many students that graduated from Chinese universities have a harder time, especially those from local colleges. Graduates from Chinese universities tend to find jobs in smaller emerging cities like Qingdao (Hao & Welch, 2012: p. 249). This might be the

consequence of a shortage of jobs, as nearly half of the labor force that enters the market consists of university graduates. As the number of graduates is rising every year, there is a shortage of employment space (Yan, 2016).

China's talent recruitment policy

China's government has made the recruitment of international highly skilled professionals an important agenda item. Because Chinese companies and organizations are increasingly becoming more global and many multinationals settle in China, there is a big demand for highly skilled employees with experience abroad (Hao & Welch, 2012: p.243-245). The 'Thousand Talent programme' is an example of the projects that aim to attract highly skilled foreigners or Chinese, educated overseas. Most of the people recruited by these programmes are returning Chinese (Hao & Welch, 2012: p. 246; Wang, 2012: p. 10). The Chinese government also tries to attract Chinese professionals overseas by creating subsidies. Subsidies include tax exemptions for imported goods, subsidies for the purchase of a house and education for the returning professional's children (Dai et al., 2015: p. 443).

Even though the number of returning highly skilled professionals has doubled in recent years, these subsidies can also have a negative effect. Dai et al. (2016) find that the return subsidies have motivated more Chinese students to study overseas, after which they return without work experience. When subsidies are provided to a returning migrants with international work experience, this can lead immediate returning migrants to the decision to acquire more work experience abroad. Top talents with a lot of international work experience might choose to stay and work in the foreign country and not to return (Dai et al., 2015: p. 445).

Policy directed at the people that stay abroad and aren't swayed by programmes to recruit them back to China, is described as a 'diaspora option'. This encourages talented Chinese overseas to contribute to help China in various ways. The policy focused on 'serving the country' was started in 2001. This was based on the idea of 'brain circulation', which means that information circulates back to China even if the people do not (Zweig et al., 2008: p.1). Chinese citizens could serve the country by engaging in different types of activities, like engaging in cooperative research in China, running conferences, importing technologies, helping Chinese firms find export markets, or set up enterprises in China (Chinese Education and Society 2003). Zweig et al., (2008: pp.27-28) finds that China's policy is successful in creating diaspora around the world.

3.2. Previous Research on Chinese expats

In order to get a complete picture of both the adaptation and the retention of Chinese expats on the Dutch work floor, factors that are important in the Black, Mendenhall & Oddou model (1991, in Wood & El Mansour, 2010) are used. In addition, the dimensions of the multiple stakeholder analysis of Wong (2015) that builds on this model are integrated in this research. This thesis also builds on the research on the influence of cross-cultural training (Wong, 2015; Xu & Du-Babock, 2012; Zhang & Fan, 2014) and personal ability (Wong, 2015) on Chinese expatriate cultural adaptation processes. Little research has been done on expatriates from China (Wood & El Mansour, 2010: p.194; Wang et al., 2013: p. 3817).

Cross-cultural training

Some research has looked into the role of cross-cultural training in the adaptation processes of Chinese expats (Wong, 2015; Xu & Du-Babock, 2012; Zhang & Fan, 2014). A large part of cultural adaptation is learning. Social learning theory states that learning is a process in which the individual continuously interacts with their environment and gains knowledge and experience (Bandura, 2002). Cross-cultural training then, is a combination of pre- and post-departure training, a continuous process. Inadequate training is said to be the leading cause of expatriate failure even though the exact relationship between training and performance has not been established (Zhang & Fan, 2014: pp. 62-63). Pre-departure training often is focused on language skills (Xu & Du-Babock, 2012), intercultural awareness and cross-cultural skills (Zhang & Fan, 2014: p. 65).

A qualitative study on expatriate training and skill enhancement in Chinese multinationals in Australia was done by Zhang & Fan (2014). They focused on post-arrival training, and found that Chinese expatriate skill training strategies are, among others, learning as belonging. Learning as belonging is a strategy that uses training to build social networks in the new country. Based on existing relationships in the new environment, Chinese expats can join new social groups (Zhang & Fan, 2014: pp. 71-72).

Xu & Du-Babock (2012)'s research is about the impact of English-language proficiency on the adjustment of Chinese expatriates overseas. They did quantitative research, collected through a survey of 190 Chinese expatriates working in a Chinese IT multinational. They found that general English- language proficiency has the strongest correlation with Chinese expatriate adjustment factors. These factors are the ability to cope with stress, relationships with locals and interaction with headquarters. English-language proficiency is most important in the first one or two months overseas (Xu & Du-Babock, 2012: p. 12- 14). Of course cross-cultural training

is not the only determinant of successful expatriate adaptation. Learning and training leads to experience.

Wong (2015) has done research on Chinese expats working in Hong Kong, and used a multiple-stakeholder perspective to analyze their adjustment process. These stakeholders are the family, the expatriate themselves, the home-country colleagues and host-country colleagues. The research shows that support from the family in this research is more crucial than found in earlier research, and support from co-workers in the host country were vital. An expat's personal abilities like job related skills, language and culture awareness skills are also strongly related to expatriate adjustment (Wong, 2015: p.6). So were previous travel experience and work experience (Gupta et al., 2013). In the next part, I will summarize research done on the role of personal skills in Chinese expats' adjustment processes.

Personal skills

According to research, 'hard and soft job skills' (Wong, 2015) are important personal characteristics influencing the cultural adaptation process of Chinese expats in foreign countries. Cross-cultural competence is an important trait that can be obtained with certain personality traits and cultural skills (Wang et al., 2013: p. 3814).

Wong (2015) writes about hard and soft job skills. Hard job skills are business-related, professional qualification, business skills, technical skills and related work experience. These are considered more important by Chinese expats in Hong Kong than soft skills. Soft skills are related to communication, like language skills, culture awareness skills and social skills. While soft skills are important, the study shows that Chinese expats deem the hard job skills as crucial (Wong, 2015: p. 94).

Wang et al., (2013) did a study on personality traits and cross-cultural competence, and researched Chinese expats working in Chinese multinationals in twenty-two host countries. Cross-cultural competence is the way an individual is effective in using resources like knowledge, skills and personal attributes to be able to work together with people from many different national cultural backgrounds (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 530). The study finds that conscientiousness and openness are personality traits that contribute to cross-cultural competence, although it diverges when institutions in host countries differ more from home institutions (Wang et al., 2013: p. 2812). Multinationals can select Chinese expatriate employees on these personality traits, but they also need to compare home and host institutional environments to be aware of institutional challenges in the training of their new employees

(Wang et al., 2013: p. 3827).

Research on Chinese expats in the Netherlands

In this paragraph I will briefly discuss research that has been done on Chinese expats in the Netherlands. Perceptions of values among civil servants is one of them (Yang, 2016), as well as cultural distance between Chinese expats in a leadership position and their Dutch colleagues (Lin, 2016).

Yang (2016) did research on five values that Chinese and Dutch civil servants in the Netherlands prioritize. Interestingly, there are similarities and differences in the values that are prioritized. The study finds that Chinese and Dutch civil servants have different interpretations of loyalty to the political party and the organization. People-orientedness is a value where civil servants 'act to achieve what is in the interest of the common people' (Yang, 2016: p. 79). Chinese and Dutch civil servants perceived this value as important for public interests, but difficult to uphold in practice. Chinese civil servants see people-orientedness as less relevant in daily work, while Dutch civil servants prioritize direct clients. Effectiveness refers to results of government actions and the quality of services offered, and is found more important than efficiency. The way results are acquired, with the costs of time and money included, are thus found less important by both Dutch and Chinese respondents civil servant. This holds implications for codes of conduct, work strategies and schedules on the government workforce (Yang, 2016).

Lin (2016) investigated the cultural distance between Chinese expats who were in a leadership position in the Netherlands and Dutch employees. This study found that cultural differences had an influence on Sino-Dutch interaction. The interviewed Chinese expats believed that complex knowledge of cultural differences is the best preparation for teamwork in the Netherlands. A difference they mentioned was the hierarchy on the workforce, which is less clear on the Dutch work floor than in Chinese workplaces. There was also a big difference in the separation between work and private life. For Chinese employees it is normal to be flexible when it comes to overtime, while Dutch employees are much stricter about normal working hours. Also noticeable was the speed in which decisions are made. Chinese professionals simply expect that a decision is made at high speed by higher levels. Dutch employees want to know how and why the decision was made and are used to more meetings and consultations where this is discussed (Lin, 2016: 445). This is sometimes frustrating for a Chinese professional. Differences were also noted in the social environment at work. It is customary in China for the manager to take out his team to create a more personal relationship that is not just work-oriented. In the Netherlands, it

is less common to have a personal relationship with a manager from the outset, and as a result of this the Chinese respondents felt less welcome (Lin, 2016: 445).

Finally, Gijsberts et al. (2011) write that the feeling of belonging or feeling at home is lacking in highly educated Chinese in the Netherlands (Gijsberts et al., 2011: p.159). In my research, as much new knowledge as possible will be gathered about Chinese expats in the Dutch workplace. To check if the theories that have been discussed in previous chapters are accurate in the specific case of Chinese expats in The Netherlands, I will also study which challenges the expats encounter and which personal, social and organizational factors play a role in their adaptation process.

4. Methods

4.1. Research strategy

The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of how exactly adjustment processes of Chinese expats working in Dutch organizations function, and which factors influence them. By mapping the challenges and successes that expats encounter in this adjustment process and the role played by the organization, this research hopes to shed light on how a positive business climate for Chinese expats can be created in the work space. In addition, this study hopes to provide an explanation for the relatively poor competitive position that Dutch companies have in attracting and retaining expats.

This research uses a qualitative research method. As a case study I research Chinese expats in Dutch companies. The main question of this research is: *Which factors contribute to adaptation processes of Chinese expats in Dutch companies?*

With the help of this main question I investigate which successes and defects occur in the adjustment processes and to what extent these influence a decision to stay. The question is focused on the future and aims to gather new knowledge.

4.2. Research Questions

The main research question of this research is:

Which factors contribute to adaptation processes of Chinese expats in Dutch companies?

This question is answered by first investigating three sub-questions. The first one is :

Which personal abilities play a role in the expatriate adjustment process of Chinese expats in companies in the Netherlands? Personal factors in the adjustment process are about language skills, the ability to do the work that is assigned, and social skills (Jhutti, 2007: p.107; Xu & Du-Babock, 2012; Zhang, 2013: p.4). 'Hard and soft job skills', are tested here. Hard job skills are business skills, technical skills and related work experience, while soft job skills are an individual's communication, language, social and cultural awareness skills (Wong, 2015: p.94). This includes personal circumstances such as travel experience and previous work experience, which contribute to an individual's cross-cultural competence. Openness and conscientiousness are personality traits that also boost one's cross-cultural competence (Wang et al., 2013: p. 2812).

The next sub-question is: *Which role does social network play in the expatriate adjustment process of Chinese expats in companies in the Netherlands?*

Joining social networks is vital for adapting to a new place (Jhutti, 2007: p.39; Zhang & Fan, 2014: pp. 71-72). One's social network is important when dealing with possible culture shock, which involves feelings of loneliness and homesickness (Solomon, 1994: p, 58). Colleagues play a major role in the adaptation process of expats as well: they can offer support in the area of everyday life, cultural manners and help or render advice on the work floor itself (Wong, 2015: p.70).

The third sub-question is: *Which role does the company play in the expatriate adjustment process of Chinese expats in companies in the Netherlands?*

This second sub-question is tests the role that the organization can play in the process of adjusting expats. This can be about guidance, cultural and language training before or after arrival (Thompson-El, 2013: pp. 36-37; Wong, 2015: p.24; Xu & Du-Babock, 2012; Zhang & Fan, 2014: pp. 62-63). Other ways for the company to support the integration and/or retention of the expats in the company are organizing formal or informal events (Wong, 2015; Yu, 2016: p. 158). The company culture is also tested with this question. This includes manners, customs and values, but also leadership style and management style (de Vos & Meganck, 2008: p.49).

4.3. Methods

The epistemology and ontology that apply to the research question are: interpretivism and constructionism. The social world is a constantly changing concept that is influenced by many actors, and is not seen as a static whole. For this reason the author is constructionist in her ontology. This epistemology and ontology lead to a method that can offer the highest information density and make the research relevant. The research is done in an inductive and iterative way. I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, with the use of interview questions (included in appendix) with various topics. The interviews took 35 minutes to an hour and 10 minutes, varying per person. I have interviewed 13 Chinese expats working in a Dutch company and one Dutch manager from a company that employs Chinese expats.

The interviews mainly ask about possible factors in the adaptation process that Chinese expats encounter when adapting to their new workplace. The interview questions are included in the appendix. The interview questions are based on the research done by Wong (2015) among Chinese expats, but focuses on organizational factors that influence the expatriate adjustment process. They are tested and explained on the basis of three socio-cultural dimensions from the literature: personal adaptation, adaptation at the workplace and social or interactive adaptation, also known as the Expatriate Adjustment Scale (EAS) (Wood & El Mansour, 2010: p.197; Evans, 2012: pp. 4-5; Zhang, 2013: p.54; Wong, 2015: pp. 20-21). The answers from the interview will

later, where possible, be placed in the timeline of the U-curve model of Lysgaard (1955).

4.4. Research population

The research population of this research consists of highly educated Chinese expats and one Dutch manager who works in a companies located in a big city in the Netherlands. The preferred length of stay of the expats will be between 6 months and a maximum of 10 years, because their adjustment process can best be measured within this period. The research population has an age approximately between 21-50 years. A wide range of age and gender is needed for a representative research population. English, Mandarin or Dutch-speaking respondents are recruited.

The Chinese respondents have been recruited through snowball sampling and samples through Facebook, LinkedIn, Iamexpat, Internations, Expat.com; the Expat Centers in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague; the personal network of the researcher; and the alumni network of the Department of China Studies at Leiden University.

The Dutch manager was recruited through convenient sampling on Facebook. It was taken into account that the manager does not work at the same company as other respondents, preventing the research to influence the respondents' professional lives in any way.

4.5. Ethical Concerns

There is a possibility of sample bias, and I will be careful to not select respondents who are friends. Investigator bias should also be avoided. Too much information about the research goals supplied to the respondents may influence their answers. Respondents may feel the urge to reply to interview questions with what they perceive as socially appropriate answers. I will try to avoid this by formulating neutral questions.

4.6. Data analysis

The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves looking at recurring themes in the data that emerged during the analysis. Ultimately the experience of the expats and the perspective of the manager will complete the image. In this study, it is important that the themes the expats themselves indicate as the most important also show up in the analysis. The semi-structured interviews are recorded, transcribed and then encoded. The interview questions (attached in the appendix) are based on themes from the literature.

Coding methods

To analyze the interview transcripts, I used different coding methods. First, I went through the data and looked for recurring themes. Initial coding (Charmaz, 2006: pp. 47-48) is an inductive way of finding new concepts in the data. I also decided to use In Vivo coding, where specific terms or language that are repeatedly mentioned by respondents, because they assume everyone knows the meaning to this language (Charmaz, 2006: p. 55). In the case of 'culture shock', this is a code that signifies the respondent uses this term, and later on I will analyze what meanings are constructed and if they act upon these meanings. I went through the data repeatedly, this time looking for themes from the theory discussed in earlier chapters of this thesis. In the appendix a list with the codes and their meanings is included.

Initial codes

Here I will explain some possibly ambiguous codes that I made after the initial coding process. Some respondents mentioned situations in which where people shouted 'ni hao' on the street, this is coded with 'discrimination' or 'stereotypes', depending on the anecdote. 'Personal development' is coded when the respondent mentions gaining experience in a personal way, outside of work, as part of adaptation process. This is related to 'independence', a code used in similar situations. 'Cultural differences' is a code designated for when a respondent talks about the differences between China and the Netherlands. 'Working overtime' and 'time flexibility' are codes are linked to situations where the respondent mentions having to adapt to a different attitude to the working schedule at their company. They often link this to Dutch culture, but seeing as it differs per respondent and company, this code is used alongside the code 'company culture'. The same applies to 'hierarchy'. 'Chinese bubble' is used when the respondent mentions Chinese expats (or themselves) having almost exclusively Chinese friends in their social network.

In Vivo codes

During the initial coding process I noted that specific terms of language came back in almost all interviews. I decided to code these as they were mentioned, and to analyze their meaning in context. 'Culture shock' was a term that I specifically did not ask interview questions about, because I wanted to study if the respondents would describe situations related to this concept. Except for one or two cases where this did happen, almost all respondents brought the term up themselves. 'Open-mindedness' is coded when being 'open' or 'open-minded' was mentioned, usually in relation to personal skills that are needed to adapt to working in The Netherlands. 'Direct' or directness' is related to a way of communicating and linked to dutch culture.

Theoretical Codes

The other codes that I have not mentioned are all based on the theory, they will be explained further in chapter five and are included in the code list in the appendix.

5. Results

5.1. Research process

As stated in the chapter 4, the goal of the research was to recruit Chinese expats of a wide variety of gender, and Dutch managers working in companies where no other respondents were employed. By posting messages on Wechat, I came into contact with 6 Chinese expats. 2 of them referred me to their friends, who I then also interviewed. Through the Facebookgroup of Chinastudies I was able to contact 2 more, and via friends of friends I met 2 more. Only one Dutch manager was recruited through my personal network, others that were contacted did not agree to an interview. The interviews lasted 35 minutes to an hour and 10 minutes, varying per person. Most interviews took place in public, in cafés, where I treated them to a drink. One interview was conducted through Skype. The Dutch manager is 31 years old, and is manager a European travel agency.

The Chinese respondents have varying ages from 24 to 40, 5 of them are 27. There are 3 male and 10 female Chinese respondents. They have varying occupations, 4 working in sales or marketing, 4 in scientific research, 2 in IT, and the rest work in HR, logistics and freelance. All respondents speak more than 2 languages. 4 respondents have done more than one overseas assignment. 7 respondents originally came to study and found a job, 3 came here to work and 3 came to join a partner or family in the Netherlands. The time period they have been in the Netherlands varies from 6 months to 8 years. 3 Chinese respondents have children, 4 are married and one is divorced. A more detailed description is included in the appendix.

5.2. Personal abilities & expatriate adjustment

The personal qualities important for adapting to life in the Netherlands emerging from the data were language skills, social skills, open-mindedness, communication skills, independence, travel- and work experience.

Language Skills: English & Dutch

The first thing that comes up in every interview when touching upon the subject of challenges faced when the respondents arrived here, is language skills. In particular English is important, even though Dutch becomes an asset or a challenge in everyday life as well.

Many respondents chose the Netherlands in part because a high percentage of Dutch people speaks English. *“For example, for Chinese, Dutch is a checkpoint. For many people, English is a big*

checkpoint. If your English is good, it is not that difficult in the Netherlands, because the Dutch all speak English well. But if you can not speak English, you first have to learn English a period of time before you can adjust. Then your communication problem is very big. But I think you can also learn Dutch in that period to communicate, that is actually more convenient. Only people do not do that often. For me it is not that difficult, I learn languages faster and I just learn Dutch to improve my communication. I think that language is still the biggest obstacle (R13)”.

Many respondents (R1, R4, R8, R,10, R11, R12) had a hard time when they first came here, because their English level wasn't high enough. Others noted that the English level of colleagues was bad, which also made it hard to communicate.

“As foreigners, one of the challenges here for me is about language, because although our colleagues speak English, but for the older colleagues their English isn't that good, and sometimes it's difficult to communicate with them” (R12).

While language is tied to communication, it can also be tied to location. Respondent 8 writes that language was important when choosing a place to live: *“You kinda have to stay in big cities, in smaller towns you can't live, because of the language barrier” (R8).*

Even though learning Dutch does not seem necessary because English is sufficient to communicate in the Netherlands, 5 respondents speak Dutch (R3, R5, R7, R8, R11), and 6 are in the process of learning Dutch (R1, R7, R9, R10, R12, R13). Respondent 11 states that Dutch is useful in everyday life: *“When I started learning I found I could read titles on newspapers, and read what was on labels of products, speaking some basic Dutch with the cashier. And understanding the announcement in the train. Or picking up the phone, I just found myself fitting in more and more. Not completely, but it made me feel better, more part of the society. If I starting this language from the beginning when I came here, I think it might have been better, I might be more fluent now. Now I know more what's going on, and understand what Dutch people are thinking, experience, attitude. It's possible that a lot of people never see this.”*

Language is part of communication and social interaction. Respondent 9 showed this clearly: *“[...] language also, the better your ability the better it is. You should be able to communicate with colleagues, with all people. That's your social skills. If you have social skills, get along with everyone, your language skills will follow.” (R9).*

Social skills

Being able to acquire new relationships and joining new social networks is useful for adaptation (Zhang & Fan, 2014). Social skills has been noted by respondent 9 as important personal abilities in the adaptation process. Other respondents talked about the ability to make friends. This was also then connected to language skills and communication skills, and someone's social network. Respondent 13 showed an interesting insight:

"If you want to make friends, you need to understand their lifestyle. Dutch people like to participate in a lot of volunteer activities, or have part time jobs. Care for animals. I think we can go to these to learn to relate to the dutch, learn what they like to eat, experience their lives, I think that's helpful. "(R11).

Other respondents noted that it is hard to make Dutch friends when they are not able to speak Dutch, because when they are together, the Dutch people in their environment often only speak Dutch with each other, and take less effort to include them (R3, R6, R10, R11). Here again is shown that language skills are intricately connected with language skills.

'Open-mindedness' and 'directness'

When asked what qualities helped in the beginning, when they came to the Netherlands, being 'open' or 'open-minded' was mentioned many times (R1, R2, R3, R5, R8, R9). The meaning of being 'open' is related to 'directer communication', and means 'understanding someone's background and different cultures (R1). It depends on someone's personality, and "[..]if it's a dutch company, if it's a chinese person adapting there, they will be open-minded. "; this also means understanding people from different cultures (R9). Open-mindedness is needed to be a part of the expat community, according to respondent 8. However, it seems that it is a quality someone already possesses:

"I think so, if you want to be a part of the expat community, you are already open up a little bit. But I think it just depends on how, to what extent you are open-minded, how much you have of the pie, that kind of thing. But definitely you would have a pie to start with."(R8)

Dutch 'directness' in communication was raised by almost all respondents. In answer to the same question about personal qualities, respondent 3 connects open-mindedness with extrovertedness and 'being more direct':

"I really noticed that I had to dare to be more direct, to learn to take initiative. So I think extrovertedness and open-mindedness are really important to live in the Netherlands. I notice that I have learned more to say immediately what I mean, and to express my opinion when asked of me. Here in the Netherlands you are expected to have comments in meetings, and if you do things wrong you can just say that. I was not used to that, if I expressed a negative in China that had

consequences, there it was just to not think and just do your work without comments. In the beginning it was quite difficult to hear in a straightforward way what you are doing wrong, I then became uncertain about it. Now I know that nothing bad happens when people tell you something like that, and I think it's useful (R3)."

Here, 'directness' is something that can be learned or at least something that can be adjusted to. This is a sentiment that is raised again and again. Interestingly, respondent 4 connects 'directness' with being better at expressing yourself. It is, according to him, something that can be adapted to.

"Dutch people are better in expressing, that's how people are calling Dutch very direct. Because you know if you like it or you don't like it and that's the way how you do it then you tell. [...] I think that's a bit challenging here, because everyone else expresses their needs, and if you don't, then you'll suffer. For Chinese people we need to adapt ourselves, to learn how to express more directly (R4).

Directness can be good, but also be a challenge. *"Directly communication is good, everyone likes this. But if you did something wrong and you have to admit it in front of everyone, I think people from every background wouldn't feel too happy. This kind of directness is rude or makes it hard to get along with people"*(R9). Respondent 5 calls it 'straightforward', and also connects this trait with telling people if there is something is wrong. or if they did something wrong in their work (R2). 'Saying what you like or you don't like' (R4), or disagreeing with someone, 'if there are problems, or something is wrong in your work, speak it out.' (R2). Directness seems to inherently be about speaking your mind, and taking feelings of the conversation partner less into account.

The Dutch manager gives a different perspective. He said Chinese employees can be 'Dutch-like hard,' which seems to mean being vocal and well-prepared in their opinion, but maybe also harsh:

"It is always said that the Dutch are very direct, but if you have something with these people, a discussion, if you have criticism or questions and then the Asians, or Chinese people are especially very vocal. They therefore prepare very well, they have whole lists. And the Dutch and other Europeans who always come to the meeting a little bit on the fly, they have not prepared anything, and think that when I am sitting there, and someone says something, then I respond and then something comes. That is not the case with Chinese and Koreans, they really come up with lists. And they are Dutch-like hard, you would expect them to be very careful, and not dare to express things, but no. The condition is that they know you well, but they can really be pretty hard in it" (R14).

It is notable that both Chinese and the Dutch respondent seem to have very similar meanings as

to what 'directness' is.

Independence and personal development

Being independent or becoming independent is a rite de passage for most young adults. This is a theme that was not mentioned in the scientific literature, but was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. It is not surprising some Chinese respondents that came to study here describe the importance of becoming independent or being independent as a personal quality (R6, R10, R11, R13). Respondent 6 learned how to cook when she came here, and respondent 7 became more independent since she started working here. Being able to 'just fix it, do things yourself' is an important quality to develop (R10). Respondent 11 describes vividly how her 'adjustment was quicker', because even though *"I didn't have any friends in the beginning, but I wasn't lonely at all, because I had my own room. I could sleep when I wanted, I could cook what I wanted, my parents were not there, I liked it."*(R11).

Travel experience & work experience

The importance of previous travel and work experience was generally deemed important (R3, R8, R10), but not mentioned much. Only respondent 11 expanded on her positive experience with travel, where she developed her independence and organization skills. She connected work experience not to previous overseas assignments, but to other Dutch classmates that had more work experience than her:

"When I went overseas I didn't have work experience. It depends on what you're doing. Dutch classmates did have work experience at 16, work in the supermarket and such. So they already experienced work. They wouldn't be so nervous to talk to clients as me, because they had experience. That wouldn't be possible in China. Sixteen! You can't legally work then. You can only work at 18. I came here at 17. But traveling made me more independent."(R11).

Presentation skills are also mentioned as meaningful work experience by respondent 12. He said *"So I think maybe presenting skills, for asians, is quite important. Sometimes a colleague to my observation, maybe they just made a piece of shit, but they made a beautiful presentation to the manager, hahaha. It's also one of your ability, right. And then the manager thinks he's so hardworking."*(R12).

Respondent 13 describes eloquently that 'all experience is good': which shows her belief that anyone can adapt or change their life.

"The more skills the better. All experience is good, if you've experienced bad times you can still learn from it. If you don't like your work, you have to look at your status, or you can always

improve your education level, or your status, or anything. You can make sure that you're a good package before you begin, but you can change yourself for the better always."

Summary

To answer the question *Which personal abilities play a role in the expatriate adjustment process of Chinese expats in companies in the Netherlands?*

Language skills, social skills and communication are abilities that complement each other; for one skill the others are needed. Xu & Du-Babcock (2012)'s findings that (English) language skills are vital are confirmed by my respondents. Language ability is important, in particular English, but Dutch is useful in everyday life. Being able to deal with 'directness' and people with different cultural backgrounds, or 'open-mindedness' are also skills that play a role in the adjustment of Chinese expats. 'Openness' is a personality trait that boosts one's cross-cultural competence (Wang et al., 2013: p. 2812), this is in line with the findings of this thesis. Contrary to Wong's (2015) findings, in this research 'soft job skills' like communication, language and social skills was given more prominence than 'hard job skills' (p.94). Travel and previous work experience was generally deemed an important personal ability, but as the respondents did not say much about it, I see this as a less important personal trait.

5.3. Social network & expatriate adjustment

The social environment of Chinese expats can play a big role in their experience in the Netherlands. Social network, co-worker support and expat culture were themes from the theory. Some themes emerged during the initial coding process, in this part I will discuss the concepts of the 'Chinese bubble', 'culture shock' and discrimination or stereotypes, as results of interactions or lack thereof within the social network.

Social network

The social network in this case is a very broad concept, designated to the expat's social relations outside of work. Here follows an overview of the main concepts surrounding the social network and its role in the adaptation process.

Friends with different nationalities have different influences in the respondents' life. Dutch friends is more about culture, but also a 'bigger challenge' (R4). Chinese friends can help with practical things (R9). When asked about Chinese and international friends, respondent 4 said:

"I think becoming friends with dutch people is more about local culture, where to go to have fun, and what kind of food you like, these things. And being with chinese friends is very China, like at

home. So I made one or two Dutch friends and then I realized Holland wasn't as boring as I thought, they know how to have a good time. We didn't know only. Making friends is a bigger challenge. But, it slowly but surely gets closer. It doesn't matter if it's Dutch students or international students from Europe, it's all similar. But most of my friends are Chinese and internationals." (R4)

Social relations can also prevent loneliness and homesickness:

"I would definitely say I'm pretty happy now, pretty adjusted. But it's fine if you never adjust. I don't know for other people, but for me, I have more Dutch and non-Chinese friends, but sometimes I really mix talking to someone in Chinese, and in three months I don't say anything in Chinese, you know, that's weird." (R8).

Respondents 4, 5, 8 and 13 have a Dutch partner, and respondent 3, 6 have relationships with a Dutch boyfriend. Respondent 3, 6 and 8 mention how the friends of their boyfriend also became their friends. These relationships can also aid in their adaptation process.

"If I didn't talk with my boyfriend and his mother there wouldn't be anyone to encourage me to speak up more. It's really nice. I need to experience it, and adjust it a little. If I want to adjust myself better, live in the Netherlands more easily I need to make a little more change, and that's good." (R8).

Co-worker support

As respondent 12 mentions, co-workers are a very important part of one's working life, in particular for your working attitude. "For me, they are people that I spend more time with, even than with my wife." (R12). As respondent 3 notes, when asked what role co-workers play in her adjustment:

"A big role, colleagues can mean a lot to you. My colleagues were very willing to help me with the work, but also when I had questions about things outside of work, about how things work in the Netherlands. But I also noticed that there is a clearer division between work and private life here, as I said earlier. It is difficult to find things to talk about, I do not know which questions are too personal and which are not." (R3).

Most respondents are very positive about their co-workers (R1, R2, R5, R7, R8, R9, R10, R12, R13). Their helpfulness, willingness to help and connect are praised. Respondent 5 talks about how she had 'a really nice feeling with the company because people were pretty friendly and colleagues were trying to help as well'

Respondents 4 and 11 talk about the influence of a lack of co-worker support:

“To be honest it’s really difficult for your colleagues to help you .Unless you have a close friend in the company with whom you can speak personally. But if it’s just your colleague, they don’t care. They just do how they feel comfortable. But if you have a good friend, you can share with him or her how you experience it at your work, and then he or she can help you to adjust better. In a company people care more about themselves, why would they care how a Chinese girl thinks in the company, I just want her to do the job well.”(R4).

Respondent 6 also mentions difficulties to connect, when she wanted to add a colleague on Facebook, she was told it was ‘too personal, even though she sits next to me in the office every day’ (R6).

Chinese bubble

This theme emerged from the data, when the habit to mainly have a social network of Chinese friends, living in a Chinese bubble was mentioned. Respondent 6 and 9 talked about this in relation to themselves. Respondent 7 explains the concept:

“ I know there are a lot of Chinese people that stick with other Chinese people, with their own friends. Chinese unions, communities, but they don’t even have contact with other expats, only Chinese. So I think they already have this idea that it’s difficult, that it’s easier to stay with Chinese, people from the same background. So they never tried. So not having a stereotype, I plan myself, to make friends with many people, because you never know what’s going to happen. If you never try then you never know.”(R7).

Respondent 6 describes the phenomenon as well. *“Someone asked me, why Chinese people always in a group, no Dutch, talk Chinese? I didn’t notice that. For me, I prefer to have a lunch with my Chinese friends, talk about things. Most Chinese they really want to get used to life here, and be friends with locals, but Dutch people already have their own friends, it’s a bit difficult. If you want to get a place here, there are Chinese sites to get a place here. I know most Chinese here, they live together.” (R6).*

I conclude from the findings that most respondents have a varied social network with friends from different nationalities. The concept is not represented in the data in this research, although it may play a role in other Chinese expats’ adaptation process.

‘Culture shock’

Almost all respondents mention ‘culture shock’. In this part I want to discuss the varying meanings they attach to this concept. Most respondents did not experience a culture shock, but

respondents 5,6, 8 and 13 describe their 'culture shock' experience.

Respondent 5 describes culture shock as a big reaction to a small instigator, that has underlying reasons. She mentions a lack of insecurity and self esteem:

"Yeah there for sure is, I had a culture shock. Because then you are living in a new country and everything is new for you, you have to adapt to a lot of things, and sometimes just little things that maybe could also happen in your own country, make it extra dramatic in the end because you are new here and you are still more insecure, I think that could also be one thing making the culture shock more exaggerated because when you are feeling insecure you will act bigger to what you are actually experiencing, which you can actually experience as well in your own county, so maybe try to give them more self secure more self esteem and that could help as well."(R5).

Respondent 6 and 11 seem to describe less dramatic incidents, where they perceive cultural differences as culture shock.

"[..] first week here my colleagues asked me to join them for a drink, but they just asked to sit in the sun, to drink and talk. But it was too sunny, and they really enjoyed it. I prefer to sit down to talk, and not in the sun. I was really not used to that. Many things were culture shock for me."(R6).

"They're used to saying what they think, they're not shy. And I couldn't do that, I care a lot about people's opinions, what they think, am I doing this right, am I saying it ok. But I'm more introverted. I don't know if this is culture shock, but it was a difference between me and my Dutch classmates. I don't know if other Chinese students experience it like this. I think my adjustment period was quicker, I wasn't lonely, I liked my classes, I had a very rich life." (R11).

Respondent 8 describes her culture shock as a feeling that 'other people have the chance to go somewhere else, but I don't', as a big change in her personal life.

An anecdote from respondent 13's interview may describe 'culture shock' as in the literature, emotions that an expat feels in response to cultural differences that he or she experiences on a daily basis. These include feelings of loneliness, homesickness, frustration, confusion and anxiety. (Solomon, 1994: p.58). Respondent 11 does not mention the culture shock, describes feeling 'very low', and 'having angry fits against my husband and family' in the first period after her arrival in the Netherlands. After this, she writes about her adjustment experience:

"But maybe I did not know it would be so difficult. It may also be that I grew over it, that I had became more mature. You have to do a lot of things yourself, nobody can do it for you. You have to live, or you die. And slowly but surely, I went on step by step." (R11).

Discrimination/stereotype

Two respondents (R6, R7) described discrimination or negative stereotypes. I thought it important to show the similarities in their experiences. Both descriptions speak for themselves, and mention people calling 'ni hao' at the respondents in public, causing an uncomfortable, unsafe feelings.

"For me I feel is, some people really have a stereotype in their mind. Not just in the Netherlands, but everywhere. You're Chinese and you're supposed to behave like this, you're supposed to look like this. You do anything they will think 'oh, that's because you're from China'. It's not racism, they don't think it's wrong or anything but it's funny, you do this because you're from China. But I sometimes I'm like this is just me, I don't behave like this for any other reason. Sometimes when I want to congratulate people with their birthday, you do it with kissing. And some Dutch colleagues felt weird because they thought I would be uncomfortable with body-touching, while there was no problem with it for me. I doesn't annoy me that much, but it also depends on the city. But I was in Brabant for a while, and I didn't really feel comfortable there. People in Brabant they are like: we are so famous here for friendliness and hospitality, people from Rotterdam are really rude. But every day we walk on the street there are people calling 'ni hao' or, 'I love Chinese food'. And I felt a bit offended. Like I was just walking in the street, and I walked past a wok to go, and I walked past it, and people were calling to me: I love Chinese food, and I didn't feel comfortable." (R7).

"At new year in the middle of the night I went to the city centre to see the fireworks, on the way home, I was with my other two friends on the bike, and a group of people threw us off the bike, I scraped my knee. They were drunk, and at that time I didn't know I could call the police. They were on a scooter, and they drove very fast. So now I'm very afraid of scooters. Sometimes people say 'nihao' to you, but I don't think they say it in a friendly way. Older men. My friend taught me, that some Chinese women here work as masseuses, not good work, and maybe they see you as that when they say 'nihao'. But every Chinese here has some not good experience. But most of the time it's fine here. Just sometimes it happens. So sometimes I don't feel good to say I'm from China. I don't know why. I'm proud of my country. Most Dutch people have an okay attitude to the diversity. Only some small groups are not good. " (R6).

Conclusion

The next sub-question is: *Which role does social network play in the expatriate adjustment process of Chinese expats in companies in the Netherlands?*

The findings in this section confirm the theory of Jhuttu (2007) and Zhang & Fan (2014), with the data it is possible to conclude that social networks play an important role in expatriate

adjustment. Co-workers are important for the work attitude and environment of most respondents. Lack of co-worker support is felt by some respondents, but does not seem to impede their adaptation process. There is no confirmation that many Chinese expats experience a culture shock, or that social network is important for dealing with this. Most respondents do mention culture shock in context, which shows that they are familiar with the concept, even though they give it varying meanings. Some respondents experienced discrimination or negative cultural stereotypes.

5.4. Organizational & cultural factors in expatriate adjustment

In this paragraph, the role of the company in Chinese expats' adjustment is explored. Themes from the theory that were tested are pre-departure training, post-arrival training, and the role of company culture and company support. Company culture is a more general concept that includes hierarchy, management style is handled. Company support is also a bigger term, which also mentions post-arrival training, formal and informal events, personal trainings and career opportunities.

Jumping into the deep end: pre-departure training

One of the respondents was offered formal pre-departure training: respondent 9 did an official English language test. When asked if they did any preparation, respondents 1, 2, 5, 6, 12 answered they had looked up information on internet, and respondent 6 added that she had looked on Wechat. One mentions no preparation at all:

“No, maybe some other people do really a lot of preparation, but me, I didn’t do any preparation at all! I just finished the application and I got a place where I can stay, and I just didn’t do anything else. Not even about the language. I didn’t know anything when I arrived. (R4)”

When asked if she would do more pre-departure training if she had to do it again, she disagreed:

“Haha I think it was very interesting. Because I didn’t know at all I experience it very differently, it was like a whole new world. I was surprised by everything. For the Netherlands I was maybe a little lazy to look things up. But I think you can’t prepare actually, in advance. The best way to learn it is to experience it.”(R4).

Respondent 9 was satisfied with his preparation, he said: “When you know you’ll go, you should prepare your languages”. Respondent 5 agrees, but noted it depends on the kind of job: “*for example if you are working in a trading company then you are dealing with factories or customers from Asia or China than you have to learn a little bit about the culture in order to let the whole process move and that could be an asset for the companies definitely.*” (R5).

Company culture

Company culture is a very broad term, that encompasses the specific way a company handles management, the relationship with its employees, communication between different departments and the way work has to be handled.

Values of efficiency versus effectiveness, people-orientedness and loyalty Yang (2016) did not come back in the data, except for mentions of efficiency. Some respondents perceived the many meetings as inefficient, and found that there could be less (R4, R6, R12). This is probably dependent on the company where the respondents work, and its size.

Most respondents were positive about the lesser amount of, or lack of hierarchy. This was usually in response to a question about the management style. Being able to speak to a manager, seeing them informally or even being able to speak to the CEO (R8) is seen as a positive.

Here are two examples of this:

“And the hierarchy is not that obvious, and in Asian countries there are a lot of hierarchies. Like manager, senior manager, blablabla, and you cannot talk directly to the people more above your level. But here, the CEO just came to your floor and speak with you directly, and you can shake hands with them and just talk with them. It’s more direct and more flat, the construction of the hierarchy.”(R12).

“It’s pretty good actually, because compared to Asia, the managers or our boss are treating us more equally rather than in Asia we are more likely to have to show a lot of respect to our manager or sometimes even have to buy them breakfast or something like that.”(R5).

Respondents 5 and 12 both are positively surprised by the lack of hierarchy, and feel at ease in their working environment.

Company support

Part of company culture could also be company support, in this part I will dive more into this concept specifically. When asked about post-arrival training, almost no respondents say they had specific training. They describe formal welcoming events (R1) or going out to dinner (R8), but no cultural training. Respondent 5 and 10 mention this would be useful, and would not have to be very expensive. An email with information with, for example, how social security works is already something that would be helpful.

“For the foreigners, if they came directly from abroad, company could give them some help on accomodation, some stuff that is related to daily life. Like social security, insurance, register in the town hall, blablabla, it’s quite complex if you just came to the country for the first time.” (R12).

Many respondents mention getting used to their new work environment with help of the company, mainly because of informal events. On the often mentioned ‘drinks’ or cultural evenings, the respondents can get to know their co-workers better and feel more welcome. Respondent 7 mentions in particular that she likes the events, but does not want to feel judged if she doesn’t go. Respondents 6, 7 and 9 also note that these events often involve drinking alcohol, which they say not every Chinese expat feels comfortable with.

Respondent 12 thinks informal events are ‘good for the morale’, and make it easier to become part of the group. The Dutch manager describes different informal events that the company organizes, which he also sees as a way to help employees that work from home bond with other colleagues. Most respondents see informal events as positive, and even recommend there should be more, or different ones (R7, R5, R12).

Career opportunities like personal training are seen as very positive. Respondents see this as a way to grow and a reason to stay with the company.

“Yes, trainings, is also quite important for me, now for my team, there is a budget in my team for every member. For me, I can spend 3000 euro per year to do trainings that I can choose by myself, related to my work. Because I think maybe for the employees younger than their 30s, they care more about their potential, they don’t care too much about salary, but we care about the future, about potential. So, having more trainings can increase your value, right.” (R12).

Conclusion

On answering the third question about which role the company plays in Chinese expats’ cultural adaptation process, I say that the company can potentially play a big role.

This can be done on many fronts; in pre-departure training, company culture, and company support. According to Xu & Du-Babock (2012), pre-departure training often is focused on language skills. This is only confirmed by one respondent (9), as he is the only one to do formal pre-departure training. Some respondents suggest that pre-departure training could be useful, however, because most of them did not experience it, I can not make any conclusions on this.

Company culture differs per company, but the findings show that the lack of hierarchy is generally viewed as positive by the respondents. Lin (2016) showed in her research that cultural differences such as a different hierarchy in the company their management style can make it harder for Chinese expats to adapt. The findings of this thesis do not confirm this.

Values of effectiveness and efficiency (Yang, 2016) are visible only in how some respondents perceive the many meetings in their company as inefficient, however because the respondents work at very different kinds of companies, nothing can definitively concluded from this.

Company support in form of informal events plays a big role in expatriate adjustment, according to the findings. It creates bonding time with co-workers, and loyalty to the company. Post-arrival training is recommended, many respondents say this would be helpful.

Providing opportunities for personal development through other kinds of training are also seen as very positive. The company can play a very big role in a Chinese expats’ adaptation to the workplace, it depends on how much support they provide. This confirms Wong’s (2015) findings that the company can support the integration of expats by giving guidance and organizing informal events.

6. Conclusion

The main question of this research was 'which factors contribute to the adaptation processes of Chinese expats in Dutch companies?' To answer this question, I will first summarize the findings, divided in three themes: personal abilities, social network and company support.

The first important theme in this thesis is personal abilities, and the role they play in expatriate adaptation. On basis of the interviews with Chinese expats working in Dutch companies, language ability is the first and foremost important personal ability. Social skills are then needed to wield one's language ability in interaction. Being open-minded enables Chinese expats to understand Dutch people. The respondents spoke about cultural challenges that they faced; the well-known Dutch 'directness', and the sometimes lacking language ability of co-workers. For some respondents language was a challenge in the beginning. The findings suggest that learning English as well as Dutch has big benefits for Chinese expats. The results also confirm previous research on the importance of language (Xu & Du-Babock, 2012) and 'openness' is a personality trait that helps cross-cultural competence (Wang, et al., 2013). Contrary to belief in Wong's (2015) research, the findings in this thesis deem 'soft job skills' like language, communication and social skills more important than technical or business skills. Previous travel and work experience can help with adjustment (Zhu et al., 2016), as is confirmed in my findings.

The second theme is, of course, social network. This is about what kind of social network a Chinese expat is able to build with aforementioned personal abilities, or lack thereof. The respondents in this research agree that co-worker support plays a role in the cultural adaptation in the work environment, but also outside of that. This confirms Wong' (2015)s findings on co-worker support, and Jhutti (2007: p.39)'s confidence in social networks. Being shown around, helped with setting up the internet and having lunch together; the social networks of the respondents help them with everyday problems. Most respondents have a varied social network, consisting of co-workers, Chinese, Dutch and international friends. 2 respondents have almost exclusively Chinese friends in their circle, or a Chinese bubble, which they did not perceive as a bad thing. 2 other respondents experienced public discrimination, an indicator of deeper societal processes in the Netherlands that I could not touch upon in this research. The findings also showed that 'culture shock' is an interesting and generally known concept. One respondent described an experience that in the scientific literature would be called a culture shock, (Solomon, 1994: p. 58) but did not call it that herself. Overall, the meanings of this term vary for many Chinese expats. From this can be concluded that the culture shock is an interesting concept with cross-culturally shared meanings, but a concept that is experienced by only a few Chinese expats. I would recommend further research on the shared meanings in expat discourse, and possibly longitudinal research on if generally expats experience culture shock.

Lastly, I will summarize the findings on the role of the company in the expatriate adaptation process. Lin's (2016) study showed that it can be difficult to adapt to the difference in hierarchy in Dutch companies, relative to what they're used to. My research shows that most respondents perceive this difference positively and find it a company culture easier to feel at home in. The value of language training pre-departure, as Xu & Du-Babcock (2012) writes about, can not be confirmed nor denied, as it does not show in the data. The biggest support that the company gives the respondents in my research is organizing informal and formal events. Informal and formal events indeed support the Chinese expat on the work floor, create meaningful bonds with co-workers and loyalty to the company (Wong, 2015; Yu, 2016: p.158). I can conclude that the company has the potential to play a big role in the adjustment process of Chinese expats. It of course differs per company how big this role is, and could in many cases be bigger at the present time.

In conclusion, the factors that contribute to adaptation processes of Chinese expats in Dutch companies are personal abilities, social network and company support. These factors are intertwined and interrelated in many ways. How exactly they are related could be subject for further research.

For future research I would recommend a longitudinal study of a more random sample of Chinese expats. This could show in more detail how personal abilities, social networks and company support are developed, which of them are most prominent, and what values are shared with other nationalities. A longitudinal study could better map the adaptation process, and inspect if the U-curve adjustment framework from Black & Mendenhall (1991, p. 198) still fits in reality.

To managers of companies that employ Chinese expats I would recommend the following: play a bigger role in their cultural adjustment. This does not only help them, but also helps the company. Organize events that are not only focused on drinking, communicate with them about the way the company can offer support in post-arrival training, personal training, how to prepare for meetings and how many of them there are. Many of my respondents mentioned a communication training for all of the employees, including the Chinese expats, in how to better communicate with co-workers from different cultures. Try to include employees from different cultural backgrounds in English lunch conversation. Offering support with everyday things like how the town hall works or how one registers for insurance. This information can easily be shared with a leaflet or an email, but would already help in the first few weeks after your new

employee has arrived. As respondent 12 aptly said: “[.] it’s quite complex if you just came to the country for the first time.”

Discussion

What could have gone better in this research? It is a shame that many of these findings can not be generalized because it is not only a small sample, but also skewed in gender. I do not know for certain why I mostly found women as respondents, all approximately my age, but I think it is not a coincidence. It would also have been good to speak to more Dutch managers, to check the findings of the one interview that I did. Unfortunately, due to time constrictions I could not recruit more respondents. I tried to not let an investigator’s bias influence the interview results, but it is hard to say if I succeeded. It may be possible that respondents censored themselves and/or gave socially desirable answers. I would also have liked to better check the U-curve adjustment framework from Black & Mendenhall(1991, p. 198)’s work in this thesis. I expected it would be visible in the results, but it was not. It is possible this invisibility disproves the existence of this model, but I would recommend further research to verify Zhu et al. (2016)’s findings of a different timeline in the adaptation process.

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8.1. Appendix: Respondents

3 men	24:1
10 women	26: 2
1 dutch male	27: 5
	28:1
Age	29:1

31:1
32:1
35:1
40: 1

Children: 5, 9, 13
No Children: 1,2,3,4,6,7,8, 10, 11,12
Married: 8, 9, 12, 13
Unmarried: 1,2, 3,4,6,7,10, 11
Divorced: 5

Speak more languages: all
Speak dutch: 3, 5,7, 8, 11
Wants to learn dutch: 1,7, 9, 10, 12, 13

Has been in NL: 8 years, 6 months, 6.5 years, 2 years, 6 years, 2,5 years, 5 years, 3 years, 8 years, 5 years, 8 years, 3 years, 10 months

First overseas assignment: 1,2,3,4,5, 6,7,11, 12
More overseas assignments: 8, 9, 10, 13

No specific plans to stay: 1, 6, 11

Specific plans to stay: 3, 4 (5 years), 5,7,8,9, 10 (2 years), 12 (5 years), 13
Specific plans to leave: 2, 4

Pre-departure training: internet (1,2,5,6,12), wechat (6)

Came here to study: 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12
Came here to work: 2,3, 6
Came here for partner/family: 5, 8, 13

From province:
Xi' An city (1)
Jinan city, north (2)
Wuhan (4)
Sichuan (5)
Han, middle (6)
East, bit north (7)
Sichuan (8)
Zhejiang (9)
Sichuan (10)
Guangxi (11)
Guangdong (12)
Sichuan & Beijing (13)

Chinese respondents:

Respondent 1. male, 28, software engineer, electricity engineering.

Respondent 2. female, 27, researcher at Confucius institute

Respondent 3. female, 30, freelance translator

Respondent 4. female, 24, marketing intelligence at an education platform for children

Respondent 5. female, 35, Jewelry development

Respondent 6. female, 27, PhD Rotterdam

Respondent 7. female, 26, molecular biology researcher at a biotech company.

Respondent 8. female, 26, game development, sales department

Respondent 9. male, 32, HR department

Respondent 10. female, 27, sales executive at a sales company

Respondent 11. female, 27, sales executive at a food company

Respondent 12. male, 28, ICT department at multinational

Respondent 13. female, 41, logistics

Dutch respondent 14. male, 31, Customer Service Coordinator at an European travel agency

8.2. Appendix: interview questions

(based on Wong, 2015: pp. 123-126).

Part A: Personal Backgrounds

1. What is your age?
2. Which province of China do you come from?
3. What language(s) do you speak (fluently)?
4. What is your marital status?
5. Do you have children?
6. Is this your first overseas assignment?
If no, please also specify how many times?
7. How long have you been in The Netherlands?
8. How long do you expect to stay?
9. What was the reason that you came to The Netherlands?
10. What is your occupation?
11. Based on your experience, what do you see as the main challenges/barriers faced by Mainland Chinese expatriates coming to work in The Netherlands? □

Part B: Organizational & cultural factors in expatriate adjustment

1. Did you do any pre-departure training or preparation before you came to the Netherlands?
• Prompt/follow-up - Did your employer offer assistance with your adjustment to live here? If so, what kind of assistance?
2. Were there any formal activities organized by your company to help you adjust in the workplace after you arrived?
• Prompt/follow-up - For example a training, a welcome activity, anything to help you get acquainted with new colleagues? If so, did you think it was effective in helping you adjust?
3. Did you receive support or guidance from managers to help you adjust to your new work situation?
4. What could be improved at your new work situation and environment?
5. What do you think about the leadership or management style at your workplace?
6. What do you think about the career opportunities at your workplace?

Part C: Adjustment related to Personal Ability

1. Can you please describe what personal abilities (if any) helped you in the beginning, when you came to work in The Netherlands?

- Prompt/follow-up - language, social ability, experience in other countries

2. Which, if any, personal abilities did you need to develop to adjust to living and working in The Netherlands and how did you go about developing them?

3. Were there any abilities you needed to adjust to living and working in The Netherlands?

- Prompt/follow-up – were there time commitments, lack of organizational support etc?

Part D: Adjustment related to host-country co-worker support

1. Which type of support from co-workers was most important at work? How did it help you?

2. Which type of support from co-workers was most important outside of work? How did it help you?

2. Were there any barriers between you and your colleagues?

- Prompt/follow-up – language, cultural, political, conflicts of interest etc?

3. Based on your experience, how could a lack of co-workers support/hinder expat adjustment in The Netherlands?

4. Are you involved in an (expat) community? Do you have friends with different nationalities?

- Prompt/follow-up - Which role do they play in your getting used to living in The Netherlands?

- Prompt/follow-up - how often do you see them? What kind of activities do you do?

5. In summary – Based on your experience, which factors are important for why expats decide to stay in The Netherlands?

- What could the organization do more to make you want to stay in The Netherlands?

- Follow-up: which are important factors for why expats decide to leave their jobs at a Dutch firm?

- Follow-up: and which are factors to decide to leave the Netherlands altogether?

Thank you for your time

8.3. Appendix: Code list

Organizational factors in expatriate adjustment

company culture
working overtime/time flexibility
company support: informal/formal events
management style
post-arrival training
pre-departure training
personal training

Cultural factors in expatriate adjustment

cultural differences
hierarchy
discrimination/stereotype
culture shock

Adjustment related to personal ability

language proficiency
social skills
open-mindedness
independence
directness
personal development
travel experience
(international) work experience

Adjustment related to host-country co-worker support

(lack of) co-worker support
social network
Chinese bubble