

# Perceived Organisational Support, Cultural Intelligence, Psychological Resilience, and Cultural Adjustment of Chinese Expatriates Living in Malaysia

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## Abstract

With the increasing trend of internationalization and innovation of Chinese enterprises, expatriates have gradually become an important support force for multinational enterprises to improve their innovation capability, and whether expatriates can give full play to their innovative roles has a direct impact on the realization of their innovative performance. Therefore, selecting suitable expatriates and encouraging and supporting their cross-cultural adjustment can ultimately contribute to the realization of the strategic goal of upgrading the enterprise's global value system. From the perspectives of social cognitive theory and cross-cultural adjustment integration theory, this study constructs a model framework of perceived organizational support, cultural intelligence- psychological resilience- cross-cultural adjustment, explores the positive effects of perceived organizational support and cultural intelligence on cross-cultural adjustment, and investigates the mediating role of psychological resilience. This paper summarizes the impact of several factors on the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate employees and provides a useful reference for Chinese multinational enterprises in the management of expatriate employees.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Adjustment, Perceived Organizational Support, Cultural Intelligence, Psychological Resilience, Expatriates.

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, with the rapid development of information technology and the steady progress of economic development in the world, more and more enterprises have begun to engage in globalized transnational business operations, making use of resources globally, combining their own capital, technology, management skills, market contacts, research and development, etc., with the advantages of human resources, natural resources and even market size of the host country, so as to achieve complementarity of advantages on a global scale.

Just as there is a “hybridization advantage” in agriculture, there is also a cultural “heterosis” - cross-cultural advantage - in multinational enterprises (MNEs). In this context, the internationalization trend of multinational corporations will gradually become more apparent, and the phenomenon of expatriation of enterprise personnel will emerge and gradually increase.

According to the Statistical Bulletin on China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment in 2022, jointly released by the Ministry of Commerce, the National Bureau of Statistics and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, at the end of 2022, Chinese domestic investors had set up a total of 47,000 offshore enterprises in 190 countries and regions around the world, of which nearly 60 per cent were located in Asia, 13 percent in North America and 10.2 percent in Europe. Among them, 16,000 overseas enterprises have been set up in the “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” countries. At the same time, by the end of 2022, the total number of employees of overseas enterprises will exceed 4.1 million, of which nearly 2.5 million will be foreign employees and about 1.6 million will be Chinese employees. In comparison, by the end of 2021, the total number of employees of overseas enterprises will be 3.95 million, of which nearly 2.394 million will be foreign employees.

Chinese MNEs use a large number of expatriates, with the proportion of expatriates exceeding 50 percent, which is much higher than the proportion of Western expatriates (Oki, 2013). Compared with Western expatriates in China, Chinese expatriates going overseas will face cultural and economic trade deficit effects, and their cross-cultural adjustment experiences will inevitably be different. Therefore, in-depth research on Chinese expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment is of great practical significance. China is still in the primary stage of internationalization, and most overseas enterprises are still in the early stage of development, and most of them lack management methods for expatriates, a special human resource. The expatriate problems faced by foreign enterprises still exist in the process of Chinese multinational enterprises' overseas expansion

In the face of turbulent and unfamiliar foreign work environments, cross-cultural adjustment of overseas employees is critical to the success of an expatriate assignment and has long been recognized as one of the greatest challenges facing international human resource management in companies (Setti, 2022).

According to the control point perspective (Galvin et al., 2018), employees' causal orientations greatly influence their work attitudes, behavioral tendencies, and career decisions. Specifically, Internal Control Points refers to an individual's belief that behaviors and competencies will lead to personal success or failure (Gifford et al., 2006). In contrast, individuals with high external control tend to attribute the outcome of any event to external forces beyond their control, such as organizational behaviors (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Prior research has found that expatriates' causal orientation may be a key determinant of their stay in the host country, by influencing their cross-cultural adjustment, i.e., the learning process of adapting to a different cultural context (Leung & Morris, 2015).

Cultural intelligence (CQ) represents an interesting variable because it is a malleable ability that can be developed through cross-cultural experiences and specific training. Individuals with high levels of CQ are better at adapting to foreign cultures and are more

inclined to change behavioral patterns in the original culture to adapt to the new cultural environment, while individuals with low levels of CQ are more passive in adapting to foreign cultures (Lin et al., 2012). CQ serves as an internal belief that helps employees use their abilities and skills to accomplish challenging tasks.

In contrast, Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is a motivator of employee career behavior and planning that externally determines employee behavior and career decisions (Deci et al., 2017). Therefore, both CQ and POS may largely influence the motivational processes of expatriate employees and thus the experience of cross-cultural adjustment. Bandura argues that individuals in an organization form self-perceptions about the behavior of others and its outcomes, and trigger personal motivation to learn, with the possible result of bringing about changes in psychological structure and external behavior.

Psychological resilience (PR) is a positive psychological energy that drives individuals to adapt and make changes in a positive way, but it requires certain arousal conditions, which mainly include risk and protective factors, and the positive behaviors of individuals and organizations are important influences. Thus, psychological resilience may be a mediating factor influencing internal and external points of control and cross-cultural adjustment.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the cross-cultural adaptation problems faced by Chinese expatriates during their overseas work and life. Under the guidance of social cognitive theory, we take psychological toughness as a mediating variable to analyze the role of employees' cultural intelligence and perceived organizational support on their cross-cultural adjustment, so as to provide certain theoretical and practical insights for Chinese multinational corporations to better achieve internationalization and globalization development.

### **Current Situation**

Cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates is a hot research topic in the Western management academic community, but little attention has been paid to it in Chinese academia and practice (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2016). The engine of globalization has shifted from developed economies to emerging economies, and the latter have become the mainstream of integration and promotion of globalization. However, few existing expatriate adaptation studies have explored emerging economies that are increasingly active in outward investment, such as China. The specificities of China's national context and culture may make the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates very different from that of the foreign expatriate community.

Gonzalez-Loureiro et al (2016), reviewed 389 studies on expatriate adjustment and found that there is no universal theory to guide expatriate practices and that findings are context dependent. What works in the U.S. does not work in other countries, and there is a need to expand the regions and contexts of research. Waxin (2004), found that culture of origin influences the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Due to the complexity of human nature and the cultural boundaries of management (Hofstede, 2007), the applicability of expatriate research findings based on Western contexts to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese expatriate populations remains to be considered.

In addition, Western expatriate studies have considered spouse/family adjustment as an important influence on expatriate adjustment (Erdogan, 2015). However, since ancient times, Chinese businessmen seldom take their families with them when they go abroad, and this has been the case for many years. Yumei and Yanzhen (2014), found that only 3.9 percent of 180 expatriates from Chinese companies brought their families with them. The author's exploratory study also found that few Chinese expatriates have family members accompanying them when they are stationed overseas.

Despite China's increasingly active foreign investment, few studies have been conducted on the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate groups in Chinese MNEs. Although the overseas studies are of some relevance to Chinese enterprises, they lack timeliness in guiding practice, and the specificities of expatriate management in the Chinese context have not been deeply explored. China has a unique social culture (e.g., collectivism, Confucianism, yin-yang philosophy, etc.), and the cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese expatriates may be different from that of Western expatriates due to cultural contextual factors.

Cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates is a continuous and repetitive process of transformation, embedded in complex political, economic, and cultural contexts. Scholars should focus on the characteristics of cross-cultural adjustment of Chinese MNEs and expatriates and add elements of Chinese characteristics to the construction of theories and models. Exploring the cross-cultural adjustment process of Chinese expatriate groups can provide important references for related research fields.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the positive impact of POS on the psychological resilience of Chinese expatriates.
2. To investigate the positive effects of CQ on the psychological resilience of Chinese expatriates.
3. To investigate the mediating role of psychological resilience in POS and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment
4. To investigate the mediating role of psychological resilience in CQ and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment.
5. To investigate the positive impact of psychological resilience on the expatriates' Cross-cultural adjustment.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Social Cognitive Theory*

This study uses Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as a theoretical perspective. SCT is one of the classic theories in education and social psychology, which was proposed by the American psychologist Albert Bandura in the late 1970s, and the main contents are Triadic Reciprocal Determinism, observational learning and self-efficacy, of which the Triadic Reciprocal Determinism is the most central part of the theory.

Triadic Reciprocal Determinism explains a triadic relationship in which an individual's psychological factors, environment, and the behaviors in which the individual engages are determinants that influence each other, but not at the same time (Bandura, 2002). Reciprocal means that there are two-way influences between the factors, but these influences do not

occur instantaneously but take time to become apparent. The fact that different factors show their interactive influences sequentially over different time frames suggests that the process is gradual and time-spanning in nature. From the perspective of cross-cultural research, individuals elicit or activate responses from the environment through their individual subjective characteristics, and responses from different environments also cause changes in individual adaptation levels and strategies. Behavior acts as a mediator between the person and the environment, and is a tool used by the individual to change the environment and adapt to it, and behavior is not only governed by the individual, but also constrained by the environment. Therefore, this paper takes cross-cultural adaptation as an environmental link and adopts the research idea of individual→behavior→environment for subsequent research.

### *Cross-Cultural Adjustment Integration Theory*

Young Yong Kim, a scholar of intercultural communication, began to study the issue of intercultural adjustment in the 1970s, and after more than twenty years of continuous exploration (Kim,1988,2001), she systematically elaborated an integrated theory of intercultural adjustment. According to Kim (2001), when entering a new culture, strangers' usual thinking habits and behaviors lose their effectiveness, and they must learn the new cultural system to cope with this sense of loss of control. This process can lead to psychological stress, but stress is not an affliction; rather, it is a motivation for strangers to overcome their difficulties, learn and adapt to the new culture, and ultimately help them grow. The process is characterized by an upward spiral of dynamic change. Initially, strangers face more difficulties in adapting to a new culture, and therefore the magnitude of change is relatively large. As the stranger's cross-cultural experiences accumulate, the magnitude of change in the stranger's coping with adjustment decreases.

Psychological resilience, as an important psychological resource, can serve as a buffer when facing stress and adversity, reducing the negative impacts. Under the guidance of Cross-Cultural Adjustment Integration Theory, psychological resilience employees play a crucial role in the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

### *Impact of POS on Expatriates Cross-Cultural Adjustment*

Recruitment, training, retention, and career management of international expatriates pose significant challenges for multinational organizations (Hussain & Deery, 2018). Organizational career support is pivotal for expatriates' performance, retention, and career planning (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). This support encompasses various policies aimed at providing expatriates with career development opportunities during and after their assignments (Song et al., 2019).

The availability of appropriate career development opportunities significantly influences expatriates' performance abroad and their ability to adjust to new roles (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). The objective of organizational career support is to enhance expatriates' loyalty, effort, and focus, ultimately benefiting the organization (Mezias & Scandura, 2005).

Stress theory posits that individuals experience stress in unfamiliar environments following job transfers. Organizational support, particularly perceived POS, plays a crucial role

in helping expatriates cope with stress and adapt quickly to new environments, especially in terms of adjustment support (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004c).

Expatriate POS encompasses support from both parent and subsidiary companies, with each contributing to the expatriate's adjustment and success. However, perceptions of foreign national superiority can negatively impact expatriate job adjustment and subsidiary commitment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999)

Furthermore, psychological factors, especially in collectivist cultures like China, influence the relationship between POS and expatriate adjustment (Ling, 2006). Understanding these nuances is essential for multinational organizations to effectively support their expatriate employees and maximize their contributions.

#### *Impact of POS on Psychological Resilience*

After experiencing POS, employees initially develop a sense of psychological well-being, which subsequently influences their work attitudes and behaviors. The stronger the sense of employee's POS, the higher their levels of engagement and dedication, leading to improved job performance (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Research by Meenakshi Aggarwal-Gupta et al. (2010) found a positive correlation between POS and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is positively associated with both affective commitment and normative commitment. Psychological well-being serves as a mediator between perceived organizational support and various other influencing factors. Therefore, the impact of POS on employee psychology is highly significant and deserves attention. Here are several key aspects of how POS affects employee psychology:

#### *Reduction of Work Stress and Job Burnout*

POS effectively reduces employees' stress responses to work pressure (Stamper & Dyne, 2001). Employees with higher POS typically experience lower work pressure, as there is a negative correlation between organizational support and work pressure (Asad & Khan, 2003). In high-pressure work environments, employees with high POS perceive lower stress levels or have a higher acceptance of high-pressure work, resulting in significantly lower psychological or emotional pressure compared to those with lower organizational support. Additionally, POS reduces employees' job burnout (George & James, 1993).

#### *Increase in Job Satisfaction*

POS is positively correlated with job satisfaction (CHOU et al., 2012). POS helps meet employees' socio-emotional needs, such as praise, belonging, and self-esteem, thereby enhancing their job satisfaction. Higher levels of organizational support make employees feel valued and recognized, thereby increasing their sense of happiness and fulfillment at work.

#### *Enhancement of Affective Commitment and Organizational Loyalty*

POS satisfies employees' needs for belonging and self-esteem, enhancing their affective commitment and organizational loyalty (Loi et al., 2006b). When employees perceive support from the organization, they are more likely to develop emotional attachment and exhibit higher organizational loyalty, reducing the likelihood of turnover.



*Reduction of Emotional Exhaustion and Promotion of Positive Emotions*

POS is negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and positively correlated with job satisfaction (CHOU et al., 2012). Strong organizational support reduces employees' emotional exhaustion and emotional dissonance, leading to increased positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction. This reduction in work pressure encourages employees to become more engaged in their work and enhances their satisfaction with both their career and job.

*Decrease in Turnover Intentions*

Empirical research indicates a negative correlation between POS and turnover intentions (Wayne et al., 1997). Employees with higher POS are more likely to stay in the organization due to the support and recognition they receive, reducing turnover.

POS has various positive impacts on employees' psychology, including reducing work stress and job burnout, increasing job satisfaction, enhancing emotional commitment and organizational loyalty, reducing emotional exhaustion, boosting positive emotions, and decreasing turnover intentions. These positive psychological changes not only contribute to employees' personal development but also enhance overall organizational performance and stability.

*Impact of CQ on Psychological Resilience*

Previous research has shown that cross-cultural transitions and adaptation can cause stress, necessitating the use of cultural adaptation strategies to cope, which in turn affects psychological well-being (Berry, 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). Ang et al. (2007) found that CQ is related to cultural adaptation, which subsequently influences mental health. CQ helps individuals handle the uncertainties and demands of migrating, working, and living in a foreign culture (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), and by better understanding cultures, promotes positive and empathetic interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds (Alon & Higgins, 2005).

*Impact of CQ on Expatriates Cross-Cultural Adjustment*

Research on CQ on cross-cultural adjustment is more abundant, and some studies point out that CQ is an important factor in the process of cross-cultural adjustment (Ng & Earley, 2006). Therefore, scholars have conducted relevant research on the relationship between CQ and intercultural adjustment according to different research entry points. Focusing on the four-dimensional model proposed by Ang et al (2006), found that motivational CQ was effective in predicting an individual's work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and general adjustment in a study of 157 expatriate workers. With the deepening of research, the relationship between the four dimensions of CQ and cross-cultural effectiveness has also been proved.

CQ not only helps expatriates adapt to cross-cultural competitiveness, but also demonstrates whether expatriates can achieve better expatriate performance (Johnso, 2006). Kim et al (2006), studied CQ and effectiveness in international work and the results proved that CQ has a significant impact on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. Individuals with higher CQ can cope with the challenges of international assignments more effectively and achieve better performance in different cultures. In addition to direct research on CQ

and cross-cultural adjustment, more and more scholars have begun to focus on how other variables affect their mechanisms of action. For expatriates, whether or not they have overseas experience has always been an important factor in cross-cultural adjustment research. Individual CQ serves as an important predictor of cross-cultural adjustment, and cross-cultural experiences (work and non-work experiences) play a positive moderating role in the relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment, and individuals with high CQ embody higher cross-cultural adjustment, and together with this moderating variable, the effect of CQ on intercultural adjustment is even more pronounced (Lee & Sukoco, 2010).

Organisations, as an important dependency for expatriate workers abroad, play an important role in their expatriate support for the intercultural adjustment and performance of expatriate employees. CQ, as an important personal trait, interacts with organisational support to influence expatriate workers' intercultural adjustment (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). Notably, among others, metacognition and cognitive CQ negatively moderated the relationship between practice support and intercultural adjustment and performance, while motivational CQ positively reinforced the moderating effect on this. Nowadays, most studies have found the relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment and task performance, but the effect of CQ on psychological changes during cross-cultural processes is rare, which may be due to the fact that the previous studies seldom take into account the psychological changes of the individuals, and therefore they do not deny the role of CQ on psychological adjustment (Chu & Zhu, 2023).

According to the definition of CQ and related research, the mechanism of CQ is based on cultural knowledge reserves, through the analysis of cross-cultural situations and the monitoring of their own behaviour, to determine the cognitive, emotional and behavioural tendencies that should be held to cope with cross-cultural situations, and ultimately to effectively solve the difficulties in cross-cultural situations, dissolve the sources of stress and achieve long-term adjustment. This comprehensive ability to cope with and resolve difficulties and conflicts in cross-cultural situations affects their assessment of the degree of difficulty and available coping resources, determines how they cope with stress and what strategies they use to cope with stress, and ultimately affects the process of cross-cultural adjustment as well as the outcome of the individual.

### **Impact of Psychological Resilience on Expatriates Cross-Cultural Adjustment**

Theories related to psychological resilience have been continuously evolving, with many scholars offering various suggestions. Thomas and Znaniecki proposed a psychological theory of expatriate adjustment in the twentieth century. Psychologists view expatriate adjustment as a psychological adjustment (Graves, 1967). However, psychological adjustment is a conceptual view. Previous studies have not systematically analysed the mechanisms of expatriate adjustment and psychological adjustment.

Through extensive research and studies, psychologist Duckworth found that the most critical factor in determining one's success in coping with stressors is one's ability to persevere in the face of difficulty. This ability is defined in positive psychology as psychological resilience, and refers to a person's ability to recover from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events (Luthans et al., 2007). According to a meta-analysis, 46.1% of workplace



resilience studies define psychological resilience as the ability to positively adapt to adversity (Good, 2021). Notably, it can be developed through training (Luthans, 2002).

The work environment for expatriate employees differs significantly from that of ordinary individuals, presenting enormous challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and unique work settings, all within an international context. Adversity encompasses factors such as cultural differences, unexpected events, setbacks, and other significant life and work pressures. The inability to adjust oneself to a new environment is a key factor in expatriate assignment failure (Wang, 2013). However, cross-cultural adjustment is both challenging and multifaceted. Expatriate employees working in cross-cultural contexts need to adapt to the new position in the subsidiary, to the overall living conditions of the host country such as climate, transportation, and food, as well as to interact frequently with local residents and actively participate in social activities (Black et al., 1991). Poor acclimatization in any of these areas may lead to a chain of adverse effects. Cultural differences between home and host countries may cause expatriate employees to become overwhelmed and experience significant psychological stress, making it difficult for them to fulfil their expatriate mission and possibly returning home early.

Developmental psychologists believe that throughout a person's life, his or her psychology and behaviour are in development, and the process of psychological shaping at each stage is closely related to the environment, especially in the face of significant risks and pressures. Therefore, strong psychological resilience can effectively promote positive adjustment of individuals (Henrich & Norenzayan, 2010). Some scholars have further proposed the psychological resilience development framework, which argues that individuals have different developmental tasks (e.g., learning, socialization, etc.) at each developmental stage, and that outsiders evaluate their possible future achievements based on the individual's performance of positive adjustment to the developmental tasks (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017).

As a stage-specific developmental task, expatriate work is mostly viewed by Chinese MNEs employees as an opportunity for compensation and career development (Shen & Vincen, 2007). Often, they will be prepared to cope with difficulties before departure, and employees who are psychologically resilient are more likely to adapt to the external culture with a positive mindset, promoting individual cross-cultural adjustment. Research has shown that facilitators of psychological resilience, such as stress relief, self-repair, and human capital all play important roles in promoting individual cross-cultural adjustment (Masten, 2015), and that the integration and assimilation types of cultural adjustment styles also rely on the same positive development with psychological well-being, which contributes to an individual's resilience to stress (Samnani & Boekhorst, 2012).

As a cultivatable ability, psychological resilience encompasses aspects of psychology, emotions, cognition, and behaviour, aiding expatriate employees in better integrating into new cultural and social contexts and successfully coping with the challenges of international work. At present, most studies on expatriates have considered psychological adjustment, but there is a lack of systematic analysis on the relationship between expatriate adjustment and psychological resilience.

## Framework

Based on the above theoretical model and literature review, this study proposes that the relationships affecting expatriate employees between POS, CQ, psychological resilience and cross-cultural adjustment are as follows :

1. Expatriate employees' POS and CQ influence cross-cultural adjustment through the mediating role of psychological resilience:

Expatriate employees' POS and CQ can further influence their cross-cultural adjustment by increasing their PR. Specifically, POS and CQ can enhance employees' psychological resilience in the face of cross-cultural challenges, and this enhanced psychological resilience can help them better adjust to the new cultural environment.

2. POS and CQ of expatriate employees have a direct impact on psychological resilience:

POS and CQ directly enhance the psychological resilience of expatriate employees. High POS increases employees' psychological resilience by making them feel cared for and supported by the organisation. Similarly, higher CQ enabled employees to cope more effectively with cross-cultural situations, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience.

3. Expatriate employees' psychological resilience has a direct impact on cross-cultural adjustment:

Psychological resilience is an important factor in expatriate employees' adjustment to cross-cultural environments. Employees with higher psychological resilience are better able to cope with the pressures and challenges of cross-cultural situations and show higher cross-cultural adjustment ability.

Figure-1 illustrates a conceptual framework of these relationships, in which POS and CQ indirectly influence cross-cultural adjustment through psychological resilience, as well as directly influencing psychological resilience, and directly influencing cross-cultural adjustment. The model helps to understand the complex relationships that expatriate employees interact with each other across different dimensions and provides useful insights into enhancing cross-cultural adjustment.

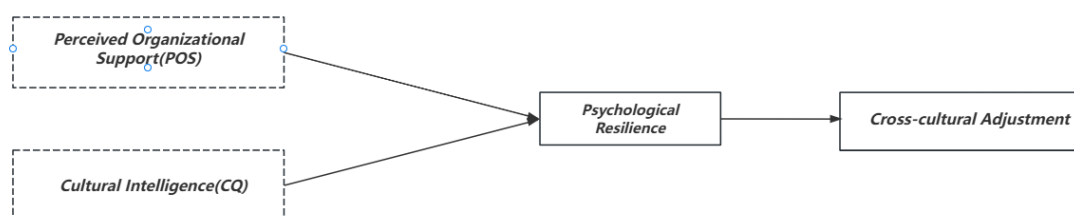


Figure-1 Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

## Conclusion

The main contribution of this study is the construction of an integrative framework to explore cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate employees. The framework combines two theoretical perspectives: social cognitive theory and cross-cultural adaptation integration theory. Through social cognitive theory, we reveal the positive adjustment outcomes that expatriate employees develop in overseas environments. This adjustment is achieved through the influence of internal and external factors on an individual's psychology and behavior, thus facilitating the individual's identification and integration with the new environment. On the other hand, the cross-cultural adaptation integration theory helps us analyze the impact of

psychological factors on expatriates' cross-cultural adaptation. Since expatriate employees often face cultural conflicts, this may trigger negative emotions and hinder their integration into the new cultural environment. Combining these two perspectives, our framework illustrates in detail the internal mechanisms of expatriate employees' cross-cultural adaptation, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the field.

In addition, this paper explores the factors affecting expatriate employees' cross-cultural adjustment from multiple perspectives, including cultural intelligence, perceived organizational support and psychological toughness. Particularly for Chinese expatriates, it explores the relationship between psychological resilience in terms of organizational support and cultural intelligence and its mediating role in cross-cultural adjustment, and further analyzes the formation mechanism of the adjustment mechanism of expatriate employees. This study not only theoretically improves the related research on cross-cultural adjustment, but also provides important guidance for practical management.

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