Unravelling adjustment mechanisms: adjustment of German expatriates to intercultural interactions, work, and living conditions in the People’s Republic of China

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.


Additional Information:

- This article was published in the journal, International journal of cross cultural management [© Sage Publications]. The definitive version is available at: http://intl-ccm.sagepub.com/

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/3086

Publisher: © Sage Publications

Please cite the published version.
Unravelling adjustment mechanisms: Adjustment of German Expatriates to Intercultural Interactions, Work, and Living Conditions in the People’s Republic of China

Dr. Angelika Zimmermann
Lecturer in International Business and Strategy
Business School, Loughborough University
Leicestershire LE11 3TU
United Kingdom
E-Mail: a.zimmermann@lboro.ac.uk
Tel.: +44 (0)1509 228848

Dr. David Holman
Institute of Work Psychology,
Mushroom Lane,
Sheffield, S10 2TN
United Kingdom
Tel: 0044 114 2223277
E-Mail: D.Holman@sheffield.ac.uk
Fax: 0044 114 2727206

Prof. Paul Sparrow
Manchester Business School,
Booth Street West, Manchester, M15 6PB,
United Kingdom
Tel: 0044 161 2756564
E-Mail: paul.sparrow@mbs.ac.uk
Fax: +44 (0)161 2756598
Unravelling adjustment mechanisms: Adjustment of German Expatriates to Intercultural Interactions, Work, and Living Conditions in the People’s Republic of China

Abstract

Expatriate adjustment has been a prominent theme in international management research. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of adjustment have rarely been investigated. This paper addresses the issue by introducing a conceptual framework, which integrates the theoretical notion of adjustment ‘modes’ used in expatriation research with empirical descriptions of adjustment behaviours from the literature on intercultural management. The paper further reports on a qualitative, in-depth study of German expatriates in the People’s Republic of China. Participants detailed the differences they perceived in the new environment, as well as ways of adjusting to them. These included changes of expatriates’ norms of interaction, the implementation of new working methods in the Chinese workplace, and the acquisition of new living habits. Perceived environmental conditions and adjustment behaviours were contingent upon a number of factors, such as education and job level of Chinese colleagues. Conclusions are drawn and implications for organisational practice and future research are made.

Key words: Adjustment, expatriate, mechanisms, modes, China

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the People’s Republic of China has become one of the world’s fastest growing markets and seen an explosion of foreign investment (Child, 1991; Selmer, 1998; 1999). The success of foreign enterprises in China is often dependent on expatriate assignments. However, expatriates can fail to adjust to the specific challenges of interacting, working, and living in the Chinese environment, leading to underperformance or early return of the expatriate, and to high direct and indirect costs for the international enterprise (Aycan, 1997; Black, 1988).

Accordingly, expatriate adjustment has been prominent in international management research (e.g., Child, 1994; Selmer, 1999). This research often refers to models which describe adjustment in terms of the three components: ‘factors’, ‘mechanisms’, and ‘outcomes’. Factors are the determinants of adjustment, such as individual and organisational characteristics. Mechanisms are generally defined as the means by which particular adjustment outcomes are achieved. Adjustment mechanisms have been conceptualised in terms of learning and coping strategies and, on a more general level, by adjustment ‘modes’. ‘Outcomes’ of adjustment refer to the state of being adjusted and can include, for example, mental well-being and successful social interactions (Aycan, 1997). Empirical research has typically focussed on the relationship between factors and outcomes of adjustment. Adjustment mechanisms in terms of modes, however, have rarely been subjected to empirical research. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate adjustment mechanisms empirically in terms of adjustment modes. For this purpose, a conceptual framework is developed from expatriation research and empirical findings on adjustment behaviours from the literature on intercultural management in China. This framework is applied to an in-depth study of the adjustment mechanisms of expatriates in China. The implications of these findings for future research on adjustment is then discussed.

Adjustment research
Empirical studies on expatriate adjustment have typically examined how individual (e.g., traits and competencies, past experience), job (e.g., role clarity), organisational (e.g., training, assistance, socialisation) and non-work environment (e.g., culture distance and spouse adjustment) factors are related to adjustment outcomes (Aycan, 1997; Black et al., 1991). These outcomes include ‘performance outcomes, measures of stress, work attitudes and intentions to stay (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1991; Clarke and Hammer, 1995; Feldman, 1997; Feldman and Thomas, 1991; Janssens, 1995; Selmer, 1998; Tung, 1982). Many studies also use Black's (1988) scale of adjustment, which measures the self-reported degree of being adjusted and thus assesses the resulting state of adjustment (Black, 1990; Black & Stephens, 1989; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). While offering insight into adjustment, these studies are problematic. First, commonly used outcome measures of adjustment can be poor indicators of actual adjustment, as adjustment outcomes can be caused by several factors other than adjustment per se. For example, improved career options or a lack of employment alternatives may affect ‘well-being’ and the ‘intent to stay’ (Braun, 1998; Gregersen et al., 1990). The expatriate may feel satisfied with the assignment and may wish to remain longer without being truly adjusted. Second, these studies fail to illuminate the mechanisms by which factors lead to adjustment outcomes. Furthermore, such studies do not explain how specific external conditions lead to adjustment. For example, German expatriates in China will have to use different behaviours to adjust to the challenges in their environment than expatriates in other countries. Adjustment mechanisms, however, have rarely been subjected to empirical research. The aim of this study is therefore to investigate adjustment mechanisms empirically.

Adjustment Mechanisms

Adjustment mechanisms are the means by which particular adjustment outcomes are achieved and are predominantly understood to be the behaviours that individuals use to increase the ‘fit’ and reduce conflicts between environmental demands and personal inclinations1 (Berry, 1982). From this perspective, the adjustment process is defined in terms of person-environment fit models (Kaplan, 1966).

Two main mechanisms of adjustment have been identified (Searle and Ward, 1990)1. The first mechanism is concerned with the coping process, the strategies and behaviours that are used to cope with the foreign environment to achieve psychological well-being (e.g., Feinstein & Ward, 1990; Stahl, 2000). The assumption is that the discrepancies between self and environment cause stress, leading to ‘efforts…to manage environmental and internal demands, and conflicts among them, which tax or exceed a person’s resources’ (Lazarus & Launier, 1978, p.311; cf. Stahl, 2000). Coping strategies can therefore be seen as those adjustment behaviours which serve to achieve a fit between self and environment with regard to stressors and feelings of stress. Such behaviours typically include symptom-focused and emotion-focused strategies. The second mechanism focuses on the learning process and in particular on an individual’s ability to ‘fit in’ and negotiate new aspects of the new culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Studies of the learning process assume that the expatriate has to acquire new information and behaviour repertoires in order to function in the foreign environment. Again, these can be seen as specific kinds of adjustment behaviours serving to reduce the gap between self and environment. For example, Black et al.’s (1991; 1999) model of expatriate adjustment is based on the notion of adjustment as a cognitive and behavioural process of social learning, which is led by the aim of reducing uncertainty in the new environment. Expatriates are seen to adjust through a process of becoming aware of

---

1 Other approaches draw on theories of operant conditioning or ‘culture shock’ (Church, 1982).
behaviours of locals in certain situations, developing a cognitive map of behaviours that seem appropriate in the new environment, enacting the new behaviours, and accommodating them according to positive or negative experiences.

A number of researchers highlight both coping and learning mechanisms in their understanding of adjustment. For example, in Aycan’s (1997) model, both coping strategies (problem- versus emotion-focused, active, passive) and learning (e.g., through cross-cultural experience) take part in adjustment. In a similar vein, Anderson (1994), emphasises that adjustment implies (but is not the same as) learning, and involves coping strategies, such as avoidance, active, and emotion-focused strategies. Gudykunst and Hammer (1987) develop an ‘uncertainty reduction based theory of intercultural adaptation’ which claims that adjustment occurs by both increasing knowledge about the host country nationals and passive, active, and interactive strategies to reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Similarly, Mamman (1996) explains adjustment in terms of both acquiring knowledge of the other country (cognitive and social learning), and the use of uncertainty reduction strategies, including active, passive, and interactive strategies.

Adjustment mechanisms have also been described by the notion of adjustment ‘modes’. The concept of modes is useful as it classifies adjustment behaviours according to whether adjustment occurs by changing either one’s own inclinations, the environment, both, or neither. Modes therefore focus on how a person-environment fit is achieved, rather than simply focusing on adjustment behaviours, such as coping and learning. This has the advantage of directly relating adjustment behaviours to the person-environment fit model.

The concept of adjustment ‘modes’ stems from the literature on acculturation attitudes (Berry, 1984). It has also been taken up by the literature on expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1999; Janssens, 1995) and incorporated in two major models of expatriate adjustment (Aycan, 1997; Black et al., 1991; 1999). However, only few empirical studies examine expatriate adjustment in terms of modes. A better understanding of adjustment modes would be not only of academic, but also of practical interest, as it would help expatriates and organisations in facilitating adjustment (Black et al., 1999; Selmer, 1998). Knowledge on the modes by which expatriates can adjust in different cultural environments could help organisations develop more detailed job descriptions and training guidelines. For example, a company could advise new job incumbents more specifically on how they might act to reconcile discrepancies between German and Chinese styles of working, interacting, and living.

Research on adjustment modes

The investigation of adjustment mechanisms in terms of modes can draw on two bodies of research, namely, studies of expatriate adjustment and studies of intercultural management. The former has developed the concept of adjustment ‘modes’ in theory, but has rarely investigated them empirically. It has also provided little insight into specific behaviours by which expatriates adjust. In contrast, the literature on intercultural management has rarely applied the concept of adjustment modes, but has described more specific adjustment behaviours which expatriates can apply in a certain context. Both research streams are therefore integrated to form a framework for the present study.

In the following, the concept of adjustment modes will be explained in more detail. It must be stated that adjustment modes have been conceptualised in a different manner with regard to various ‘facets’ of adjustment. The facets typically described in expatriate adjustment studies are: Adjustment to work, to intercultural interactions with host nationals, and to the non-work environment or living conditions (Black 1988; Black et al., 1999). Adjustment ‘modes’ have so far been described with regard to the two facets of interaction
and work. With regard to adjustment to living conditions, previous research has not yet applied the concept of modes. The present study defines modes for this facet of adjustment as ‘change of own habits of living’ and ‘maintenance of own habits of living’ (See Table 1 for an overview).

- insert table 1 here-

**Interaction adjustment**

The work on interaction adjustment modes is mostly theoretical. Derived from theories of acculturation (Berry et al., 1987; Bochner, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), ‘modes’ of expatriate interaction adjustment have been distinguished by two dimensions, maintenance of one’s own cultural identity and contact with the foreign culture (Janssens, 1995). By combining these dimensions, four modes of interaction adjustment can be conceptualised: ‘Assimilation’ is the mode whereby expatriates adopt the norms of the foreign culture instead of their own. ‘Separation’ occurs if individuals maintain their own cultural identity and reject the foreign culture as alien. ‘Marginalisation’ takes place if norms and values of the two cultures are not compatible and individuals therefore find themselves ‘vacillating’ between the two of them, and ‘Integration’ can be seen if norms and values of the two cultures are synthesised.

On an empirical level, only a small number of studies have investigated modes of adjustment to intercultural interactions. For example, in the research by Black and Mendenhall (1990) and Black (1990), the mode ‘integration’ is viewed in terms of a ‘willingness to communicate’, defined as use of the host country’s norms, such as language and conversational currency. Lee and Larwood (1983) described ‘integration’ as a partial change of own values in the direction of local values. All four modes of interaction adjustment were included in a study by Janssens (1995), who examines the modes in terms of the degree of ‘intercultural contact’ indicated by the amount of expatriates’ knowledge of cultural norms and values of the host culture.

Although adjustment studies address the issue of adjustment mechanisms in terms of adjustment modes, they do not specify the behaviours by which expatriates change or maintain their norms in specific countries, and do not explain in which ways such behaviour is affected by adjustment factors such as organisational support, training, etc.. The studies do not use qualitative methods to obtain in-depth data on adjustment behaviours. Instead, they commonly apply standardised scales assessing adjustment in terms of a priori conceptualisations of adjustment behaviours (e.g., changing one’s values or increasing one’s knowledge of the host country). It is therefore useful to consult the literature on cross-cultural management, which provides more qualitative information on specific cultural factors that expatriates have to adjust to, and on the expatriates’ specific adjustment behaviours. China has become a focus for much of this study.

The literature on cross-cultural management in China does not explicitly categorise adjustment behaviours by each of the adjustment ‘modes’ inherent in the expatriate literature, but such a classification is possible and is attempted here. The four modes are important for adjusting to a range of interaction norms. For example, acquiring knowledge of the Chinese language seems to be a crucial means of enhancing cross-cultural interactions, which means that an adjustment mode of ‘assimilation’ to language norms is recommended (Chapel, 1998). It is seen as more important in China than in the West to stick to the ‘right’ way of communication (e.g., Chapel, 1998; Guenther, 1991). Therefore, it was also found to be necessary to understand and use the underlying values and social rules that govern verbal and non-verbal interactions in China, both by ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’. An example is the need to assimilate to the Chinese emphasis on ‘face’ (Guenther, 1991; King, 1991).
Work adjustment

In order to understand the modes of adjustment to work, we have to turn to theories of work role transitions. These distinguish between two dimensions which can be seen as corresponding to the dimensions of interaction adjustment. The dimensions of work adjustment involve changing one’s own behaviours and attitudes on the one hand and changing the working environment (such as role requirements and expectations) on the other hand (Nicholson, 1984). Four modes of work adjustment are distinguished, and their relevance has been demonstrated in a small number of expatriation studies. 'Replication' is the mode whereby the individual does not change either the new role or own attitudes and behaviours. The mode 'absorption' occurs if an individual adjusts by modifying own behaviours and attitudes to fit the new role, but does not alter the new role. In contrast, the mode 'determination' describes the instance where incumbents adjust by changing the new role, but not themselves, and 'exploration' is the mode where the person modifies both own inclinations and behaviours and the new work role.

Empirical research on work adjustment modes is again scarce and is not specific about adjustment behaviours. Important studies are by Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993), who use standardised scales for the four adjustment modes, and by Black and Porter (1991), who implicitly describe the mode of replication when reporting that US managers in Hong Kong used a very similar management style as their colleagues in the US.

To get more detail on possible adjustment mechanisms, it is again suggested to take into view qualitative studies on management in China and categorise the adjustment behaviours they describe into the four modes of adjustment. Tung’s (1998) study implies that experienced foreign companies in China tend to adjust to ‘guanxi’, which can be translated as ‘relations’ or as ‘networks’ and is still seen to play a crucial role in Chinese society (Worm, 1998). Specific adjustment behaviours are described, such as building guanxi with Chinese counterparts by tendering favours, nurturing long-term mutual benefits, or employing a Chinese intermediary. These adjustment behaviours can be classified into the mode of ‘absorption’, as expatriates should change their own norms of networking rather than those of their environment. The mode of ‘exploration’ has implicitly been recommended with regard to cultural differences in work behaviours in China. A study by the China-European Community Management Institute (CEMI) investigated 30 Sino-foreign joint ventures (Child, 1991; 1994). Important cultural differences were here seen with regard to styles of decision making, achieving a systematic approach, communications, personnel, and training. In order to adjust, experienced managers in joint ventures tried to reconcile and thus integrate the differences in Chinese and Western work behaviours. Adjustment behaviours are described in specific terms. For example, Child outlines how expatriates allowed more time in meetings to adjust to the Chinese style, and on the other hand implemented changes towards more Western, systematic work procedures (Child, 1991).

Adjustment to living conditions

To date, the concept of adjustment ‘modes’ has not been applied to examine the mechanisms of adjusting to the third facet, the non-work environment or living conditions. However, support for the relevance and use of different ‘modes’ of living adjustment comes from studies examining the two dimensions of ‘change’ versus ‘maintenance’ of own norms of living, which are equivalent to the dimensions underlying the other adjustment ‘modes’. Thus, expatriates were found to adjust to living conditions both by changing their previous habits of living and by maintaining such habits. For instance, Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) summarise studies demonstrating that expatriates adjusted by finding substitutes for food and leisure activities (e.g., Brein and David, 1973; Mumford, 1975). It has also been demonstrated
that well-adjusted expatriates maintain ‘stability zones’ in the foreign environment and adhered to old habits, such as writing in diaries or religious worship (Ratiu, 1983). The literature on expatriate management in China, on the other hand, remains relatively silent with regard to the facet of living adjustment. Certain circumstances, such as traffic, pollution, and climate are commonly mentioned as relevant environmental factors that necessitate adjustment, but behaviours of adjusting to these circumstances are not described in detail (Braun, 1998; Selmer, 1998).

Summary and Research Questions

To summarise, although the concept of adjustment ‘modes’ has been developed to capture adjustment mechanisms, few studies have described which specific adjustment behaviours make up the modes. It has also not been clarified how these modes are related to specific environmental conditions and facilitating factors. Such lack of knowledge is disadvantageous for both expatriates and organisations, who would benefit from a framework and database on adjustment modes and behaviours. This study therefore created a conceptual framework by combining the concept of adjustment modes and the literature of international management in China. The framework was used to investigate the following research questions:

1) What are the modes and specific behaviours by which German expatriates in China adjust, i.e. what are the adjustment mechanisms?
2) How are these adjustment mechanisms related to the specific environmental context?
3) How are these adjustment mechanisms influenced by individual and organisational factors?

Method

Rationale

Most previous research on expatriate adjustment has used quantitative, standardised scales to assess adjustment in terms of outcomes (e.g., Black, 1988, Clarke and Hammer, 1995; Janssens, 1995). In contrast, qualitative interviewing was chosen as the method for the present research. Qualitative methods were regarded as more conducive to the aim of this study. Adjustment mechanisms should be examined not only by pre-specified ‘modes’ and adjustment behaviours, but also by an in-depth exploration of the specific adjustment behaviours which expatriates perceived to be important in their particular context.

Qualitative interviews also enabled the researcher to gather expatriates’ descriptions of the modes they used "in order to" adjust and "in order to" achieve certain outcomes, and of factors that "lead" the expatriates to apply these modes. This is to say that the interviews served to elicit direct information on adjustment mechanisms, as opposed to obtaining information on individual and environmental variables separately and only then establishing statistical relationships between them, which is the common practice in quantitative research.

The same argument holds for the investigation of adjustment factors, which had to be examined in their relationship to adjustment behaviours. Questions were asked directly on expatriates’ perceptions of how certain factors influenced their adjustment behaviours, rather than examining this relationship statistically. It was thereby possible to gain specific insight into ways by which the factors facilitated adjustment.

Participants
A heterogeneous group of participants was selected. Participants were obtained via a list of German companies in the province of Guangdong from the German consulate in Guangzhou. About 24 expatriates named on the list were written too. Eighteen German expatriate managers responded and took part in the study.

12 of the interviewees were living and working in Guangzhou, three in Foshan, two in Shenzhen, and one in the smaller city Zhaoqing. Their mean age was 46, with a range from 29 to 58. All interviewees were male (as the vast majority of German expatriates in China). Eleven were senior managers, the others could be classified as middle managers.

In the same vein, a broad range of company branches and sizes was included. The industries included a chemical, an electrical, and a hardware manufacturing plant, an electrical and a technical testing site, representative offices of an electrical and a chemistry company, a customer support office of an airline company, a hardware design and purchase company, a bank, a consultancy, and the coordination office of a Metro building project. The number of the expatriate’s colleagues ranged from 6 (in a representative office) to 1200 (in a manufacturing plant).

Procedure

In the interviews, participants were briefly explained the purpose of the study and given a simple definition of 'adjustment' in terms changing either own attitudes or behaviours the environment in order to match the two. The nature of the interview was then explained to the participants and they were encouraged to mention points that seemed important to them. They were also commended to give many examples or descriptions of critical situations for means of illustration. This was seen as important for gaining information about expatriates’ individual perceptions and circumstances, and thereby for achieving specific descriptions of adjustment mechanisms.

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured schedule. Questions were asked on expatriates’ perceptions of adjustment behaviours and modes and their relationship with environmental conditions and other factors. Questions were asked in an open manner, though at the same time building on previous explanations by the interviewees. The order of the questions was varied according to the individual interviewees' answers. The guideline served only to ensure that all research questions were covered, but, as far as possible, the order should reflect the emphasis participants placed on different points and should follow their line of argument. This was seen as a means of understanding how they weighted the different variables and interrelations between the variables. For example, participants mentioned the importance of previous international experience repeatedly, in the context of different facets of adjustment.

The interviews were transcribed and subjected to template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). An initial codebook was set up comprising the categories obtained from the literature on adjustment modes and behaviours. The categories were then revised in the light of the participants’ key points of views. The key points for each theme were clustered and super- and subordinate relationships between clusters were identified. By this process of 'crystallisation' (King, 1994, p.27), a pattern of arguments on each theme was obtained. After this, the full interview texts were consulted again, to take into account the specific context of each point of view and to analyse in more depth what each expatriate had meant by his comments.

Results

The participants named a range of cultural differences in interaction norms, work behaviours, and living conditions that required adjusting to. The adjustment behaviours and
modes differed with regard to the facets of adjustment. Expatriates also named a range of individual and organisational factors that could facilitate the use of adjustment behaviours. A summary of the results on modes and adjustment behaviours is given in Table 2. Quotes of interviewees are given in Table 3, as indicated by the numbers in brackets throughout the text.

- insert Table 2 here –
- insert Table 3 here –

1. Interaction Adjustment

In line with previous research on expatriation in China (e.g., Selmer, 1998), the interviewees named cultural differences in language, indirect communication, personalised relationships, and the concept of 'face' as important for adjusting to intercultural interactions. They further described a range of adjustment behaviours which could be classified either into the mode of 'assimilation' (i.e., replacing own norms of interaction by Chinese norms) or the mode of 'integration' (i.e., synthesising own and Chinese norms of interaction).

1.1 Language

Unsurprisingly, all interviewees saw the differences in language as the basic problem for adjustment to interactions (See quote 1 in Table 3), especially when working with manual workers and older employees who had not learned English. It was recommended to adjust by learning the language, even to a little extent, i.e. by a mode of 'assimilation'. As an added advantage, this was seen as a means of showing one's effort at intercultural understanding and as a help to build personal relationships with Chinese (See quote 2 in Table 3).

1.2 Face

Another important cultural difference was the concept of 'face'. Face was described mainly in terms of the Chinese emphasis on pride, shame and reputation (See quote 3 in Table 3). For example, Chinese were seen to show less emotions in public and to be more careful not to threaten one another's face, e.g. when uttering criticisms (See quote 4 and 5 in Table 3).

The managers emphasised different ways of adjusting to 'face'. In public, they ensured they behaved in a more polite manner (i.e. they used 'assimilation' as mode of adjustment). At the same time, they explained that Chinese accepted criticism when uttered in private (See quote 6 in Table 3). Constructive, open criticisms and clear statements of opinion were seen as necessary for achieving organisational tasks, and this would be accepted by Chinese (See quote 7 in Table 3). This way of combining own norms of criticising and the Chinese norm of 'face' can be classified as mode of 'integration'. Thus, whether to adjust by assimilation or by integration depended on the degree of privacy of an interaction with the Chinese.

1.3 Indirect style of communication

The reported importance of 'face' and the norms of politeness were associated with a perceived indirect style of Chinese communication (See quote 8 in Table 3). This different way of expressing oneself could lead to misunderstandings, for example when expecting an appointment to be definite and which in Chinese eyes had never been made. However, it was also noted that there is an underlying code to this indirect communication, which Chinese understood and foreigners should learn rather than adhere to the meaning of the direct Western translation. This implies that expatriates used an adjustment mode of 'assimilation'
in the sense of understanding the Chinese norm and making it the base of intercultural communications.

1.4 Personalised work relationships

Personal relationships were seen to have a different meaning for achieving business tasks in China. This was explained in the sense of a less definite distinction between personal and business relationships. Colleagues and business partners were treated more as kinds of friends and it was seen as more relevant to show feelings and concern for them personally to achieve positive business relationships (See quote 9 and 10 in Table 3). In line with these perceptions, expatriates recommended 'assimilation' as mode of adjustment. The main strategy applied was to spend time talking about personal matters, to show personal concern, and to build trust (See quote 11 in Table 3).

2. Work Adjustment

The interviewees stated that the following were issues for adjustment to work: accepting responsibility and taking initiative, the use of systematic procedures, and the norms of ‘guanxi’. Several adjustment behaviours were described. In comparison to the behaviours used for interaction adjustment, they were characterised less by changing own behaviours, i.e. by a mode of ‘absorption’, but more by the mode of ‘determination’ (i.e., changing Chinese behaviours). For the issue of ‘guanxi’, however, 'absorption' and 'exploration' were the primary modes of adjustment.

2.1. Accepting responsibilities and taking initiative

Accepting responsibilities and taking initiative were described as two related issues and were seen by the majority of interviewees as a clear cultural difference in Chinese work attitudes. Expatriates reported their experience of Chinese being less independent in their work decisions and showing little initiative. This was paired with an unwillingness to accept blame if something went wrong (See quote 12-15 in Table 3). These differences were thought to occur both in manual workers and, to a lesser extent, in higher-level employees, such as engineers and Chinese managers. However, it was stressed that taking responsibility and initiative could be found increasingly in recent university graduates. This was attributed to reforms in university teaching, with traditional, authoritative methods being replaced with a stronger emphasis on independent thinking.

To adjust to the different norms of responsibility and initiative, the majority of expatriates described how they had used a mode of ‘determination’, i.e. had tried to change Chinese work behaviours. Greater independence amongst Chinese workers was achieved through explanation and teaching (See quote 16 in Table 3), delegating duties, and to deploying a German structure with a flat hierarchy and a network of self-managing teams. Recent Chinese recruits were socialised into this way of working by Chinese colleagues.

At the same time, however, it was not always seen as possible to change the Chinese norms of responsibility taking and initiative. Therefore, expatriates also explained how they had enforced this behaviour by assuming a management style of closer control and stricter follow-ups (See quote 17 in Table 3).

2.2 Systematic procedures

In accordance with the perceived differences in independent working, about two thirds of the expatriates also reported a difference between Germans and Chinese in the use of systematic procedures. This was described in connection with a variety of tasks. Examples were the unstructured way of writing reports, ordering documents, a lack of setting priorities
for work (See quote 18 in Table 3), insufficient time planning, and a less systematic approach in conducting meetings (See quote 19 in Table 3).

In companies who could determine working procedures, the common mode of adjustment to the less systematic working style was again 'determination', i.e. to change Chinese behaviour. The basic strategy was to explain and teach the use of systematic procedures to Chinese employees. In some cases, it was also found effective to send Chinese managers on management training courses. It was again reported that a complete change was often difficult to achieve and a closer control of working methods was necessary. For example, exact procedures had to be prescribed and followed up (See quote 20 in Table 3).

2.3 Guanxi

The importance of guanxi for an expatriate’s adjustment depended partly on the extent to which the company had to rely on external authorities, customers, suppliers, and other Chinese companies. It was also reported that guanxi with authorities are easier to gain in smaller cities, where authorities have a higher interest in attracting and supporting foreign enterprises.

Guanxi were mostly illustrated with regard to official procedures, which were described as extremely long and unpredictable without guanxi (See quote 21 in Table 3). Due to the perceived importance of guanxi, expatriates adjusted by 'absorption'. The main strategy of adjustment was to tender favours and establish long-term mutual benefits. For example, in the smaller city, an expatriate obtained financial support from the city government and in turn assisted the city in attracting foreign companies by giving public presentations to foreign investors about the advantages of the city's location. Moreover, it was usually recommended to send Chinese employees to build relations to authorities, or to employ Chinese who had such connections. For example, one expatriate had employed the daughter of a former high military officer. Guanxi with customers, on the other hand, were seen as an important means to increase sales. A typical example is the role of the business dinner for business success, which was described as essential by all the ten expatriates who were involved in dealing with customers (See quote 22 in Table 3).

Despite the importance of 'guanxi', some of the participants explicitly set limits to the use of 'guanxi' when it came to extra payments. Thus, these expatriates did use guanxi, but at the same time maintained their own principles. This is to say that they adjusted not only by the mode of 'absorption', i.e. by changing own norms, but also by 'exploration' in the sense of modifying both their own and local norms. Hence, which mode was applied depended on the degree to which the Chinese norm would threaten the expatriate’s own principles.

3. Adjustment to Living Conditions

Participants in the interviews named the following differences in living conditions as issues for adjustment: pollution and climate, food and leisure, and the cleanliness and manners of Chinese in public. The expatriates adjusted both by changing and maintaining their habits.

3.1 Pollution and Climate

All but one expatriate in the bigger cities (Guangzhou, Foshan, Shenzhen) saw traffic, noise, and air pollution, as most problematic - especially when combined with the tropical climate (See quote 23 in Table 3). Expatriates generally adjusted to this condition by a change of attitude, namely by getting used to it and taking it less seriously (See quote 24 in Table 3). Another mode of adjusting was to maintain and satisfy some habits, where it was possible, for example by 'escaping' from the polluted cities to Hong Kong as often as possible (to "catch some fresh air") and to take holidays in other Asian countries or in Europe.
3.2 Food and leisure activities

The great majority were satisfied with Chinese food and restaurants, though most stated that the lack or price of Western foods was a disadvantage of living in China (See quote 25 in Table 3). Visiting Hong Kong to buy and import Western foods or eat in Western restaurants was the prevalent means of adjustment to the lack of Western food.

Opinions varied with regard to leisure activities, depending on an expatriate's personal preferences and prior habits. For those whose habits were not satisfied, the principal mode of adjusting to the perceived lack of leisure possibilities was to change their habits. This was achieved by going out for meals and meeting people more often than before. Others reported having changed their sports, such as giving up mountain-biking for playing squash. Notably, four expatriates in the interviews also named "working more" as a strategy of adjusting to living conditions. On the other hand, habits could, to a certain extent, be maintained by going to Hong Kong as often as possible, for example for shopping or visiting a cinema. In the same vein, many participants used their free time to go on holidays to other places in China and Asia. Hence, whether habits concerning food and leisure activities were maintained or changed seemed to depend on the degree to which habit maintenance was at all possible.

3.3 Cleanliness and Manners of Chinese in Public

Expatriates also mentioned that their personal comfort of living in China was affected by cleanliness and manners of Chinese in public, such a greater dirtiness, the customs of burping and spitting in public, staring at foreigners and closely observing their actions, as well as ‘rude’ behaviour in traffic and public crowds.

The general mode of adjustment was again to both change certain habits and maintain others. Expatriates reported on the one hand being now more tolerant of such conditions and joking about them amongst expatriates (See quote 26 and 27 in Table 3) and, on the other hand, maintaining a private Western sphere at home (See quote 28 in Table 3). Again, the maintenance of previous habits seemed to depend mainly on the degree of control expatriates had over the different spheres of living.

4. Factors facilitating Adjustment

Participants outlined how adjustment was influenced by the following factors: organisational socialisation and social support, previous international experience, and training by the company.

4.1 Organisational socialisation and social support

Organisational socialisation and social support was strongly emphasised by most interviewees. Participants reported that they had not simply adjusted on their own behalf. They had benefitted crucially from the advice on appropriate behaviour by English-speaking Chinese colleagues who had been with the company for a long period of time. Such Chinese had also acted as mediators in the case of conflicts. Furthermore, support by Chinese was described as necessary to establish 'guanxi' and to assist expatriates in changing certain work behaviours of new Chinese employees. These findings imply that support by Chinese colleagues helped expatriates to change their own behaviours and/or the environment, i.e. by the modes of 'absorption', 'determination', and 'exploration'.

Western colleagues and other expatriates had an important function in adjusting to intercultural interactions, work, and living conditions, for example by providing information about differences in norms of social interaction, which would help in changing both Chinese and own behaviours (i.e., both ‘assimilation’ and ‘determination’). Western support would thus facilitate the relevant modes for all facets of adjustment (See quote 29 in Table 3).
4.2 Previous international experience

Previous international experience was seen as a necessary condition for working in China, if the previous assignment had been in a developing country where the conditions were similarly difficult, or in former socialist countries where the state economy had a comparable influence (See quote 30 in Table 3). Expatriates explained that such experiences had made them more inclined to change their own attitudes in order to adapt. It had also taught them that certain behaviours of adjustment were transferable, as well as bringing within them a certain cultural sensitivity. For example, they had learned to observe behaviours and take things in before reacting to them. Thus, previous international experience tended to strengthen one’s adjustment modes of 'assimilation'/'absorption', ‘integration’/‘exploration’, and changing one’s previous habits of living.

4.3 Preparatory Training

About two thirds of the participants had received cross-cultural training, typically lasting for a couple of days and including seminars, films, and role plays. However, most of these expatriates emphasised that the training had been far less important for adjustment than previous international experience and learning on the assignment. Moreover, interviewees thought such training would be helpful, especially at the beginning of the assignment. It would serve to understand certain customs, such as business dinners, and to be told certain rules of how to behave in such situations. Thus, cross-cultural training would help in adjusting one’s own behaviours to the situation, i.e. it would facilitate 'assimilation'/'absorption', ‘integration’/‘exploration’, and changing one’s previous habits of living to certain degrees.

A high emphasis was also placed on language training, which was often described as the major improvement that could have been made to their preparation. A 2-3 weeks crash course in Chinese was seen as useful, even if it just provided a base for "ice-breaking" or getting along outside work.
Discussion

The study offers insight into the adjustment mechanisms of German expatriates in a Chinese context by highlighting important cultural differences requiring adjustment and delineating the specific modes and behaviours through which expatriates adjusted to these differences.

With regard to interaction adjustment, the norms of language, ‘face’, an indirect style of communication, and personalised work relationships were regarded as the main issues, which is in accordance with previous research in China (Chapel, 1998; Guenther, 1991; Selmer, 1998; Worm, 1998). In this study, however, it became apparent that the influence of these cultural differences varied with a number of contingencies, such as differences in Chinese employees with regard to generation, education, and job level of Chinese employees.

The reported behaviours of adjustment to these norms generally adhered to the modes ‘assimilation’ or ‘integration’, for example when expatriates learned the language, uttered criticisms more politely, learned the code of indirect communication, and took more time for fostering personal relationships at work to achieve successful co-operation. The expatriates usually described the modes they had applied as successful and recommendable, i.e. in a normative way. These results are therefore congruent with the recommendations given in the literature on cross-cultural management in China (Selmer, 1998). For example, the results add substance to the claims by Black and Mendenhall (1990), Lee and Larwood (1983), and Berry et al. (1987) that foreign norms of interaction should be learned and integrated with own norms.

With regard to work adjustment, the study similarly replicated the main cultural differences reported in previous research (Child, 1991; Tung, 1998). However, the present study again demonstrated that the differences were contingent upon a number of factors, including the company’s dependence on Chinese counterparts, differences in the education level of Chinese employees, etc. Notably, the modes of adjustment to differences in work behaviours were not the same as the modes of adjustment to interactions, as expatriates tended to change the different Chinese behavioural norms rather than adhering to these norms, i.e. they used the modes of ‘determination’ and ‘exploration’. This differential use of adjustment modes for the different facets of adjustment is in accordance with previous observations that it is important to use the ‘right’ way of communicating in order to adjust to interactions in China (Chapel, 1998; Worm, 1998), whereas a modification of work behaviours is necessary in order to achieve work tasks (Child, 1991).

In particular, expatriates achieved a more independent and systematic way of working in Chinese employees by mentoring, deploying a Western, de-centralised structure, as well as being stricter in controlling, prescribing procedures, and following up actions. These work adjustment behaviours were partly different to those detailed in the by Child’s (1991) important research. In particular, expatriates in the present study placed less emphasis on the strategies of ‘spending time for meetings’ and ‘formally authorising Chinese with responsibilities’. With regard to the Chinese norm of ‘guanxi’, the reported adjustment behaviours correspond to those named by Tung (1998), in particular the strategies of building ‘guanxi’ by tendering favours, nurturing mutual benefits, and employing Chinese intermediaries.

With regard to living adjustment, the study demonstrated that expatriates varied in their perceptions of difficulties in the environment, which was apparently due to their different previous preferences. Correspondingly, expatriates had to change or could maintain their previous habits to different degrees. Expatriates adjusted by finding substitutes for prior habits, such as leisure activities. This understanding of living adjustment has in previous research not been elaborated in the same depth. However, the findings correspond to Black &
Mendenhall’s (1990) general report of expatriates having to change their habits. Similarly, the behaviours of maintaining old habits (such as importing Western foods, going on holiday to Hong Kong, and maintaining a Western atmosphere at home) can be seen as specific ways of creating what Ratiu (1983) called ‘stability zones’.

In sum, expatriates commonly adhered to the modes ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’ for adjusting to different norms of interaction, but they tended more to adjust by ‘determination’ with regard to differences in work behaviours. With regard to living conditions, expatriates adjusted both by maintaining and by changing their previous habits.

The study also demonstrated a number of factors that could serve to reinforce the use of adjustment behaviours. These findings are particularly relevant as a basis for organisational interventions to promote the adjustment process. Firstly, it is misleading to assume that the adjustment effort should come from the expatriate alone. In contrast, successful adjustment depends heavily on the support by both other expatriates and Chinese colleagues. Previous job incumbents had the important role of advising their successors on intercultural difficulties with different Chinese employees and on necessary strategies to prevent such difficulties. Where possible, companies should therefore ensure an overlap between assignments of the previous job incumbent and the successor or that they are in close communication. In this manner, successors can be advised on the appropriate modes of adjustment, e.g. when to assimilate to the norms of ‘face’ or ‘guanxi’, and how to determine work practices. It will give expatriates the chance to ‘hear the most horrifying stories…’ (quote 29) in time to prevent them from having own shocking experiences.

Moreover, the function of Chinese employees in teaching appropriate strategies should be taken into account during the recruitment process. Supportive behaviour by Chinese colleagues also goes hand in hand with intercultural interaction. Not only can Chinese act as teachers and mediators to facilitate adjustment to intercultural differences, but promoting intercultural interactions can also reinforce such support. Several organisational interventions are possible. In particular, cross-cultural training in the local unit can promote not only knowledge about possible difficulties in intercultural interactions, but will also promote intercultural interaction itself. This can create the trust which may later be necessary to ask Chinese colleagues for assistance with building guanxi or implementing Western working practices.

Expatriates in China can also benefit strongly from former overseas experience. Such experience can be necessary for becoming sensitive to cultural differences, being able to remain patient in the face of these differences, and for estimating when it is appropriate to alter own behaviours or implement changes in the environment. However, the present study supports previous suggestions that overseas experience facilitates adjustment only if the location bears similar challenges (Black, 1988; Bochner, 1972). In the context of China, Selmer’s (2002) recent study demonstrated that previous postings to non-Asian countries had no effect on expatriates sociocultural or psychological adjustment, as measured in terms of adjustment outcomes. International experience in similar contexts (such as the experience of a ‘mixture between Poland and Rumania’, see quote 30) could be stressed when recruiting and developing managers for the assignment in China.

Cross-cultural training was not emphasised as much as international experience and was not seen as the main source for acquiring intercultural skills. However, if cross-cultural training was conducted in the country, it could provide not just initial guidelines for customary behaviours, but could also encourage Chinese and expatriates to make each other aware of their mutual prejudices and to practice the intercultural training contents immediately. For example, the norms of ‘face’ and personalised relationships could be talked about and learned during the training.
The results of this study were gained by in-depth interviewing. This offered the advantage of clarifying the participants' own understanding of adjustment mechanisms and to relate them to the individual context of each participant. However, this very advantage of the interview method does at the same time represent a possible limitation, as contextualisation of the variables makes it impossible to standardise measures and generalise the data. The generalisability of the present findings is also restricted by the small number of participants within China. Moreover, the use of multiple, both qualitative and quantitative measures would allow for triangulation and avoiding mono-method variance.

It may nevertheless be possible to transfer the findings to other contexts. In this study, the views of the different interviewees could be compared and commonalities could be found even though the experiences were closely tied to individual contexts. In the same vein, it may be possible to obtain comparable statements and descriptions of adjustment mechanisms by expatriates in other job positions, other kinds of organisations, other regions of China, and other countries. It could then be examined which contextual factors determine differences in adjustment behaviours.

An important moderator of expatriate adjustment may be the behaviour of individual host country nationals. This is suggested by the apparent importance of individual differences in host country nationals, depending on education, job level, etc.. For example, Chinese employees who adjusted to Western practices by learning English and training in Western work and management techniques alleviated the adjustment effort on the part of the expatriate. Similarly, Chinese employees could adjust in their turn to the expatriate’s difficulties by acting as teachers and facilitating his adjustment.

It may therefore be necessary to broaden the perspective on expatriate adjustment by conceptualising adjustment as part of a process of mutual adjustment. It may be necessary to conceptualise adjustment not just in terms of one individual achieving a fit with a passive environment, but to take account of the people in the environment who have an active involvement with the expatriate. To elaborate on the mechanisms of expatriate adjustment, it should thus be avoided to examine the expatriate’s adjustment in isolation. It should rather be related to the interactions between expatriates and host country nationals. The adjustment process can then be understood as a dynamic, complex series of reactions and counteractions.

Research on such mutual adjustment processes could be informed by findings and concepts of a number of literatures on the dynamics of intercultural interaction. These would include research on intercultural communication, intercultural interaction, and international teamwork. For example, inquiries on mutual adjustment could take into account the preconditions of successful cross-cultural communication examined by Maznevski (1994) and the mechanisms of integration, synergy and ‘3rd culture building’ which were included in a number of studies of international teamwork (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; Snow et al., 1996; Stumpf & Zeutschel, 2000). Such mechanisms of intercultural interaction are likely to be a part of mutual adjustment processes. Findings on the dynamics of mutual cross-cultural adjustment could further be integrated with the concept of adjustment ‘modes’.

Although there is a body of literature to draw on, mutual intercultural adjustment as such has hardly been investigated. Therefore, researchers could use the previous concepts only to build initial frameworks, and would have to place a greater emphasis on the inductive part of their research. A Grounded Theory approach may thus be recommended. In-depth, qualitative interviews could serve to obtain perceptions of differences and adjustment behaviours from both expatriates and host country nationals. Behaviour observation during work meetings could serve to examine the interactions directly and from an outsiders’ perspective. A longitudinal design would serve to examine mutual adjustment in real time.

Although these recommendations are topical, they are not entirely new. They accord with the critique of research on sojourner adjustment by Church (1982), who pledged
for more research on sojourner-host interactions, not just by means of ‘static, quantitative’ measures, but by ‘naturalistic … observations of actual ongoing dyadic communication between sojourners and their hosts’ (Church, 1982, p.565).

In conclusion, it seems possible to further our understanding of adjustment mechanisms by combining the concepts and findings of adjustment modes and adjustment behaviours. This study suggests that expatriates in China tend to adjust to intercultural adjustment more by acquiring the host country’s norms, whilst they have an inclination to impose their own practices with regard to work, and both change and maintain their own habits of living. Moreover, managers in China may experience different intercultural difficulties depending on a range of contingencies. One of these is the behaviour of the human part of the foreign environment. Therefore, it is fundamentally limiting to focus only on the expatriate’s adjustment and neglect its interactive nature. To achieve a better understanding of such mutual adjustment processes, more in-depth studies of the phenomenon are needed.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
References


Brein, M & David, K.H. (1973) *Improving cross-cultural training and measurement of cross-cultural learning* (Vol 1), Denver: Center for Research and Education.


Mumford, S.J. (1975) *Overseas adjustment as measured by a mixed standard scale*, paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Sacramento.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet of Adjustment</th>
<th>Adjustment Mode</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment to intercultural</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Individuals adopt the norms of the foreign culture instead of their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactions</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Individuals maintain their own cultural identity and reject the foreign culture as alien.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>Individuals find themselves ‘vacillating’ between norms of the two cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Individuals synthesise norms of the two cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Adjustment</td>
<td>Replication</td>
<td>Individuals do not change either the new role or their own attitudes and behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absorption</td>
<td>Individuals modify their own behaviours and attitudes to fit the new role, but do not alter the new role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Individuals change the new role, but not their own attitudes and behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Individuals modify both their own attitudes and behaviours and the new work role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment to Living Conditions</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Individuals change their own habits of living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Individuals maintain their own habits of living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Results on Modes and Adjustment Behaviours for the three facets of adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes</th>
<th>Interaction Adjustment</th>
<th>Work Adjustment</th>
<th>Adjustment to Living Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjustment Behaviours</strong></td>
<td>'Assimilation'/Integration'</td>
<td>'Determination'/Exploration'</td>
<td>'Change of habits'/Maintenance of habits'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning the language</td>
<td>Teaching independent and systematic working methods</td>
<td>Getting used to pollution and climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being more polite, and, at the same time: face-to face criticisms</td>
<td>Delegating duties; deploying a flat hierarchy and self-managing teams</td>
<td>Importing Western products, taking holidays to more Western cities (Hong Kong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning the code of indirect communication</td>
<td>Management training courses</td>
<td>Changing habits of eating and leisure activities (e.g., indoor versus outdoor activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fostering personal relationships at work</td>
<td>Stricter controls, procedures, and follow-ups</td>
<td>Becoming tolerant toward cleanliness and manners of Chinese in public, joking about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building 'guanxi' by tendering favours and long-term mutual benefits, but: setting limits with regard to payments</td>
<td>Maintaining a Western atmosphere at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural difference</td>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Language**        | (1) "... and of course I can hardly control which little tricks they will use... they can play with me, because I don't speak their language and cannot open my ears as widely..."  
(2) "I speak Chinese... then you rise in their esteem. Then they notice: you can understand their culture - their language, and they are immediately more open. ... they think that's absolutely great if you speak three words of Chinese. Then you're their absolute king." |
| **‘Face’**          | (3) "...if they smile, that is not only smiling, but they are just about to cry. Because that's simply a smile of embarrassment. If one falls down the stairs and breaks a leg, then hundred are standing around him and laugh. And the dummy who has broken his leg just laughs with them. … Not to loose one's face, you laugh."  
(4) "A German... is not that offended if he is told off. Has made a mistake, that's it. Chinese think of it a bit longer, if you shout at them."  
(5) "I'm renown for that I'm impulsively loud. … Chinese don't like that. If I get loud, they get embarrassed... because Chinese don't use such a loud language. They discuss loudly, but if someone talks face-to face and gets loud, that means he wants to butcher him, suppress him."  
(6) "It's important not to be too careful about guarding people's face, like it is said back in Europe. The difference between Germany and China is the following: In Germany you may get loud from time to time, without people being cross for too long. This you shouldn't do here.... but if you utter face-to-face criticisms - no problem at all."  
(7) "...so I've learned what I should do, could do, or not do. But sometimes I'm carried away by my temperament, and I do the mistake again. By now, I think, they have noticed here as in Shanghai that I'm just such a type... "...And if I see that they're doing something wrong, taking wrong tools ...the screwdriver instead of the welding torch, for example, then I start to shout ... they'll fly through the window, into the yard. That's no problem at all. ...Well, and you'll see only excellent tools here, now. ... that's an enormous achievement of ours." |
| **Indirect Style of Communication** | (8) "...It seems strange to people who come here for the first time that you'll never hear a clear yes or no. No clear statement of opinions." |
| **Personalised Work Relationships** | (9) "...but he [the customer] has to be in a good mood. …Palaver: spend half a day talking about nothing. How difficult all this is and what great work he is doing. The Chine-ese way. Drink a cup of tea, first a little spirit or a beer …In Germany you wouldn't even talk. Here you have to palaver. ... I have to show my acceptance of his position. In Germany, that's done by shaking hands and: 'Thank you very much', here you simply have to palaver for an hour or two or three."  
(10) "In Germany, the superior is somebody who fixes the salary, ...here in China, the superior is normally also some kind of father ...if a boss doesn't care, he is a bad boss. ...if the boss is a good boss and cares - of course the staff will also care to do the things he wants them to do... The company is something like a family"  
(11) "...have tried to build trust...kept my promises... Sit down, drink tea, how is your wife, how are you, whether he has some little bruise again. Ah, well, nice, nice. So, |
**Taking Responsibility and Initiative**

| (12) | "If I tell him: 'There is a loose screw, tighten it', then he'll tighten it. But if, just next to it, there is another loose screw, he will not tighten that one." |
| (13) | "They can see their area, here they are employed, for this they have responsibility, or even better: queries to those above ...whether the 'yes' comes from above. Otherwise: better not work at all, then nothing will break." |
| (14) | "And that's why you always make sure to get such a sheet of paper from the boss where it says: 'you've got to do it like this and like that', and then it's not the Chinese boss's fault, then it's not his fault, but it's the fault of [...German company]." |
| (15) | "No-one destroys anything. It's only us [The German partner]. Or bad [German] material. And that is then the fight I have with my people:...'Can't you see that you've destroyed it: It's broken off.' - 'Bad material.' |
| (16) | "The behaviour of those who have been with us for 4 years has improved a lot... How that happened: Talk about it again and again, also told them off from time to time if they came every 5 minutes with their questions '-not now, come again in an hour and write everything down.' ...and that worked - they were actually eager to learn." |
| (17) | "In Germany, they now say already: 'Let all expats go'. But if a subsidiary runs without expats, then many things... get neglected... ...My duty here is to walk through the factory every day, to have conversations with each department manager, while passing through to take in the problems that arise at the assembly lines and to discuss them - a control function." |

**Systematic Procedures**

| (18) | "Setting priorities is a problem... Sometimes time is sacrificed for trifles, and then crucial things are simply not done.... everything is treated equally... trivial things are just as important as if the company breaks down." |
| (19) | "I always wondered why the meetings take so long. If a German enters, everything tends to be completed in ten minutes. ...First of all, they always come in gigantic groups, whilst I just come with my translator, and then they always really need two hours for the same problem. ...They're usually totally unstructured ...it's so hard to find out what they are actually discussing... I say something, my translator translates (that already takes three times as long), and then they start talking... never-ending...and then I ask after half an hour: 'what are they talking about, now?' and thus they are talking about a completely different issue. Instead of coming to the point. ...And that question may give them another idea, and that way they just jump around a bit. ... " |
| (20) | "Well, here you need procedures, in principle. For example, in Germany, I would assume that, if I tell people to do something, they will make a plan for themselves.... But over here, somehow, people don't make procedures for themselves  That means at some stage you just have to prescribe something. And even if there are certain instructions, you constantly have to remind people of sticking to them." |

**‘Guanxi’**

| (21) | "...in Germany, you can't imagine such difficulties with authorities. In the first half year, I did not get to work at all. Some weeks, I spent 5 days a week at the authorities ...for example the foreigners office: I had to get a check up. Went there in the morning, came back at three. Next day, I had to get the results. I went there at ten. At 10: 30, there was still non-one there: he won't come, today. So I had to go there again on Friday. The whole week was lost, for nothing. That is much easier now, because the secretary knows people at the authorities... She phones them from time to
(22) "You simply can't go without the business dinner. Someone who does not join the meeting looses chances of doing business. This is not rational from a German perspective, there you could get it done in 5 minutes on the phone. They talk about anything but business. But it is a cultural thing... an important part of the business process."

### Pollution and Climate

(23) "Living Conditions? [laughs] Why don't you have a look out of the window and tell me what you see - from the 21st floor. You can't see the horizon, can you. ... and sometimes it's so - dirty - here that I can't even see that tower building over there."  
(in Guangzhou)

(24) "Well, you just try to convince yourself that it's not really noticeable" (Exp.14)

### Food and Leisure Activities

(25) "I'm not a Chinese. I can't eat rice three times a day. And for the children I need proper milk, cheese, meats."

### Manners and Cleanliness of Chinese in Public

(26) "Knock away all your prejudices - this culture of eating, these sounds, and one of them spits right next to you at the dinner table... that is all normal... and when they stare at you - get rid of your prejudices."

(27) "To joke about them, that's a popular topic: How they behave, that burping and gobbling. Everyone likes to joke about that."

(28) "If I come home, then for me the China-door is shut. Then I don't want to hear any more burping and spitting."

### Social Support

(29) "Then you have to talk to colleagues who have been here for longer... You have to start very carefully: ...listen, collect information ...and listen to the expats... there you ... get to hear the most horrifying stories ...what you can do and may do or simply do, or must do or mustn't do..."

### Previous International Experience

(30) "It depends on the kind of foreign country you've been to. If you've been to Luxembourg for 3 years, that's not being abroad... I explain China to people at home as a kind of mixture between Poland and Rumania."