

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES AND JOB SATISFACTION OF
EXPATRIATES: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Foreign assignments are difficult as there are many intercultural challenges. However, psychological stress as a critical factor in the expatriate's adjustment to the host culture has received less attention from scholars and practitioners. This research adopted data collected from 285 Chinese expatriates working in Thailand to examine the mediating role of positive psychological well-being on the relationship between intercultural com-

petences and job satisfaction. We identify intercultural communication competence and interpersonal skills and intercultural cognition competence as two core dimensions of intercultural competence. The result reveals that intercultural cognitive competence and intercultural communication and interpersonal skill are significantly and positively impact on job satisfaction and positive psychological well-being completely mediates the association between intercultural communication and interpersonal skill and job satisfaction. The current research has a potential to deepen intercultural competence theory, particularly, to confirm the mediating effect of positive psychological well-being between intercultural competences and job satisfaction of expatriates.

Key Words: Intercultural competences, Positive psychological well-being, Job Satisfaction, Structural equation model, Expatriates

Introduction

International human resource management (IHRM) is concerned with the human resource management issues of multinational organizations in foreign subsidiaries. The range of human resource management (HRM) activities are sourcing, hiring, training, rewarding, developing, evaluating, and motivating an organization's workforce (Farndale, Horak, Phillips, and Beamond, 2019), but when organizations go into international assignments, the policies of human resource management will have to adapt to the change in environment.

Sending expatriates to foreign countries is a popular strategy organization uses to enter the international market place or to better manage their existing international business activity. The primary positive outcome of expatriate management is competitive advantage in the international marketplace (Bowman and Meacham, 2000). However, intercultural workplace is dynamic and involve various identities simultaneously and that cultural "often militate against arriving at mutual relational satisfaction" (Martin and Nakayama, 2015). Mean

while, expatriate failures create significant direct and indirect cost for organizations (Wang and Tran, 2012). A failed expatriate assignment may cost companies between \$50,000 and \$150,000 per return on average (Graf, 2004; Shi and Franklin, 2013). Battat and Aykut (2005) reveals that 50% of Chinese expatriate leaders encountered considerable challenges in understanding the culture of the host country.

Previous researches have highlighted that organizationally provided intercultural preparation is an important condition for expatriate job satisfaction (Despotovic, Hutchings, and McPhail, 2015; Wang, Freeman and Zhu, 2013). To enhance expatriate job satisfaction and expatriation success, practitioners and scholars have strived to study the relationship between expatriate effectiveness and cultural adjustment (Tsegaye, Su, Malik, 2019).

Although the experiences of intercultural for expatriates have been well documented in the literature, scholars have mainly focused on the cultural diversity in business, intercultural cooperation, cultural conflicts and how they

can be avoided (Haslberger, Brewster and Hippler, 2013), and few studies have discussed the psychological stress as a critical factor in the expatriate's adjustment to the host culture. Robertson (2012) argued that ignoring psychological well-being of employee limits the benefit that employer hope to attain through initiatives. Moreover, the experience of emerging Thai market expatriates, particularly expatriates from China, has received much less attention (Wang, Freeman and Zhu, 2013). To address this gap, the current research focuses on Chinese expatriates in Thailand.

With the kinship and friendship between China and Thailand, the present research aims to empirically explore the relationship among intercultural competences, positive psychological well-being and job satisfaction, using structural equation modelling approach, in order to deepen intercultural competence theory, as well as achieve the strategic goals of the Chinese companies and promoting mutual understanding between the employees of the two countries.

Theory and Hypotheses

Intercultural competence theory

Intercultural competence scholars have investigated the concept from a variety of disciplinary background for many years, including communication (Henderson and Barker, 2017); Education (Skobba and Bruin, 2016; Leyerpapf and Abma, 2017), business management (Alon, et. al. 2016; Broome, Derk, Razzante, Steiner, Tayloy and Zamora,

2019) , leadership (Deardorff, 2018); Psychology (Wilton and Constantine, 2011).

Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006) defined intercultural competence as "an individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad". Deardorff (2006) also conceptualized intercultural competence as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are effective in intercultural interaction.

Numerous researchers recognize intercultural competence is multidimensional. Byram (1997) designed a five dimensions model of intercultural competence comprising: (1) the attitude dimension refers to value others, (2) knowledge of one's own and others' cultures, (3) skills of interpreting, explaining, and relating, (4) skills of cross-cultural interaction, (5) critical cultural cognition. Li and Tang (2010) proposed a three dimension intercultural competency model for Chinese expatriates, including: (1) high level understanding and deep considerate knowledge of culture; (2) cultural sympathetic competency, such as intercultural sensitivity and stress management ability; (3) intercultural communication competence and interpersonal skills, describe as an appropriate behaviour and respect in any situation.

Current research assumes that effective intercultural communication compe-

tence and interpersonal skills and intercultural cognition competence as two core dimensions of intercultural competence, which can boost expatriates' job satisfaction and, thus, effectiveness of job performance.

The impact of intercultural competence on job satisfaction of expatriate

Effective intercultural competence in the workplace attributed to greater job satisfaction (Kegeyan, 2016). Milhauser and Rahschulte (2010) stated that many international business leaders recognize intercultural communication as a necessary skill for employees entering the current market. Diao and Park (2012) examined the positive relationship between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction among international employees and identified the moderating effect of intercultural communication motivation in the relationship. Shi and Franklin (2013) selected 473 Chinese business expatriates as the survey sample, confirmed the existence of links between intercultural adaptation and job satisfaction.

Intercultural cognitive competence can be described as the mental process of demonstrating knowledge of beliefs, traditions, values and other nonverbal behaviours. It helps reduce the dissatisfaction of expatriates by identifying and understanding cultural differences in the work place (Stone, 2006, Saquib et. cl. 2019). Silbiger, Berger, Barnes and Renwick (2016) examined the relationships between expatriate adjustment and the outcomes of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions via expatriate burnout.

The current research uses the aforementioned to identify the theoretical factors affecting the intercultural competence and job satisfaction of Chinese expatriates in Thailand. Consistent with the objective of research, the proposed hypothesizes for testing are:

H1: Intercultural cognitive competence is positively related to job satisfaction

H2: Intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to job satisfaction

The impact of intercultural competence on positive psychological well-being (PPW)

Intercultural competence can reduce stress and increase productivity at work (Saquib et. cl. 2019). Intercultural cognition competence and communication skill refers to the ability of expatriate to understand employees from different cultures and engage with them effectively. However, the impact of Intercultural competence on positive psychological well-being has received less attention from scholars and practitioners.

Positive psychological well-being can be described as the psychological health components that characterize people who feel positive about life: work, family, community, etc. (Keyes and Annas, 2009). Garcia, Al Nima, and Kjell (2014) defined psychological well-being as the ability to deal with environmental changes. Sandage and Jankowski (2013) stated that personal spiritual wellbeing plays a positive role

in intercultural competence. The proposed hypothesizes for testing are:

H3: Intercultural cognitive competence is positively related to positive psychological well-being

H4: Intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to positive psychological well-being

The impact of positive psychological well-being (PPW) on job satisfaction

PPW plays a significant role in determining job satisfaction as well as job performance in an organization (Kurt and Demirbolat, 2019). PPW is associated with mental health. Wright and Bonett (2007) tested the relationships among psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and employee job performance with employee turnover. The result revealed that job satisfaction was most strongly (and negatively) related to turnover when psychological well-being was low. Nielsen, et al. (2009) proved a positive relationship between leadership levels and job satisfaction and job satisfaction and psychological well-being in healthcare professionals. Nevertheless, some researchers argued that organization should not only pay attention to the training of employee skills and abilities, but also pay attention to employee psychology and mental health. The proposed hypothesizes for testing is:

H5: PPW is positively related to job satisfaction

The mediating effect of positive psychological well-being

The topic of PPW has attracted many researchers' attention in recent years (Chen, 2017; Foster, Roche, Giandinoto and Furness, 2019). The scholars argued that poor leadership can increase levels of employee stress, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms (Densten, 2005; Kelloway, Turner, Barling, and Loughlin, 2012). Other studies focused on how employment patterns affected the life situations of individual and their sense of psychological well-being. Such as, Jong (2013) conducted a research on "externalization motives and temporary versus permanent employee psychological well-being", the study revealed that externalization motives were weakly associated with the temporary employees' psychological well-being.

Foreign assignments are difficult as there are many intercultural challenges. However, positive psychological well-being as a critical factor in the expatriate's adjustment to the host culture has received less attention from scholars and practitioners. Most research has focused on the impact of leadership and work patterns on psychological well-being. Consistent with the objective of research, the proposed hypothesizes for testing are:

H6: PPW has mediating effect to the relationship between intercultural cognitive competence and job satisfaction

H7: PPW has mediating effect to the relationship between intercultural

communication and interpersonal skill and job satisfaction

The hypothesis framework of research (Figure 1) shows causal

direction of the theoretical factors affecting the intercultural competence and job satisfaction of Chinese expatriates in Thailand.

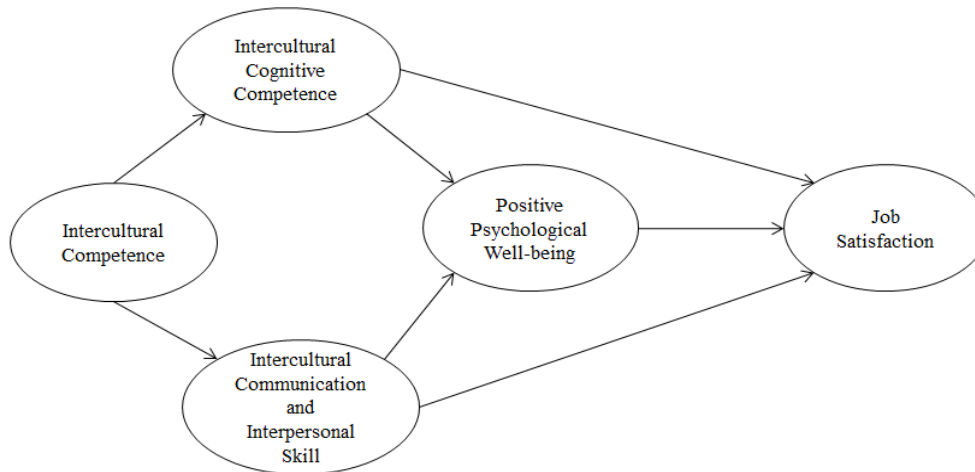


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

Method

Participants and procedures

The participants in the current research consist of 285 Chinese expatriates employed in the Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone, Bang Chan Industrial Estate, and Amata City Industrial Estate of Thailand. The research conducted between 25, February, 2018 to 31 January 2019 yielded a 96 percent response rate. Each variable in the model constructs was measured using previously developed instruments based on 5 Likert scale (from 1=Strongly disagree - 5 =Strongly agree), while the demographic data is measured using ordinal scale.

Independent variables, intercultural cognitive competence were measured by

3-facet items (ICC1 to ICC3), and intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is measured by 3-facet items (ICIS1 to ICIS3). Positive psychological well-being as the mediating variable is measured by 4-facet items (PPW1 to PPW4).

The Minnesota Satisfaction Survey (short form) provided data for the dependent variable. In accordance with Mathieu (1991), our dependent variable measures the means (\bar{x}) working conditions, satisfaction with leadership, sense of responsibility, and external rewards by 4-facet items.

The paper used item parcels to model our structural equations. Item parcelling is tool for identifying latent variables and helps ensure our

results are unbiased (Bandalos, 2002; Nasser and Takahashi, 2003).

Descriptive analysis

The age of participants is categorized into five groups in which 28.8% of participants' age are within 20 to 29 year of age group, 43.2% of participants' age are within 30 to 39 year of age group, 15.4% of participants' age are within 40 to 49 year of age group, 11.6% of participants' age are within 50 to 59 year of age group, and only 1.1 % of participants' age are within 60 years up of age group. The participant consisted mainly of males and 74.4% of them are working with electric power industry. 32.6% of the participants have a degree, with more than 3 years expatriate experience in Thailand.

Reliability and validity

The research used SPSS 24 and AMOS 24 software to perform the reliability analyses. Cronbach's coefficients and the composite reliability scores are greater than 0.73 for all variables. The research verified convergent validity with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The values of AVE are greater than 0.52, thus indicating that the constructs possessed high internal consistency. The Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted calculation for each remaining items in the variables for the model are presented in the table 1.

Goodness of fit of Structural Model

With the measurement model passed all the required reliability and validity tests, the hypothesized model

construct in the form of path diagram have been generated using AMOS software and presented as follow (Figure 2).

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

The correlation coefficients for the study variables reveals that gender and job category is significantly negatively correlated with PPW and job satisfaction ($r = -0.125, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.135, p < 0.05$; $r = -0.171, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.173, p < 0.01$); intercultural cognitive competence, intercultural communication and interpersonal skill, and positive psychological well-being is significantly positively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = 0.186, p < 0.01$; $r = .449, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.706, p < 0.01$); and intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is significantly positively correlated with positive psychological well-being ($r = 0.429, p < 0.01$).

Regression analysis

To evaluate the Hypothesis 1-5, the direct impact of the hypothesized model based on standardized regression weights are presented in Table 3. The results revealed that four out of five hypotheses are significant at 95% confidence level: intercultural cognitive competence is positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.107, p = 0.018 < 0.05$); intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.160, p = 0.010 < 0.05$);

Table 1. Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted Analysis Results

Latent Variables	Item Code	α	CR	Standardized Loading	AVE
Intercultural cognitive competence	ICC1	0.88	0.85	0.74	0.65
	ICC2			0.87	
	ICC3			0.81	
Intercultural communication & interpersonal skill	ICIS1	0.73	0.76	0.67	0.52
	ICIS2			0.60	
	ICIS3			0.86	
PPW	PPW1	0.86	0.86	0.70	0.60
	PPW2			0.77	
	PPW3			0.82	
	PPW4			0.81	
Job satisfaction	SWC	0.96	0.93	0.97	0.78
	SL			0.83	
	SR			0.90	
	ER			0.82	

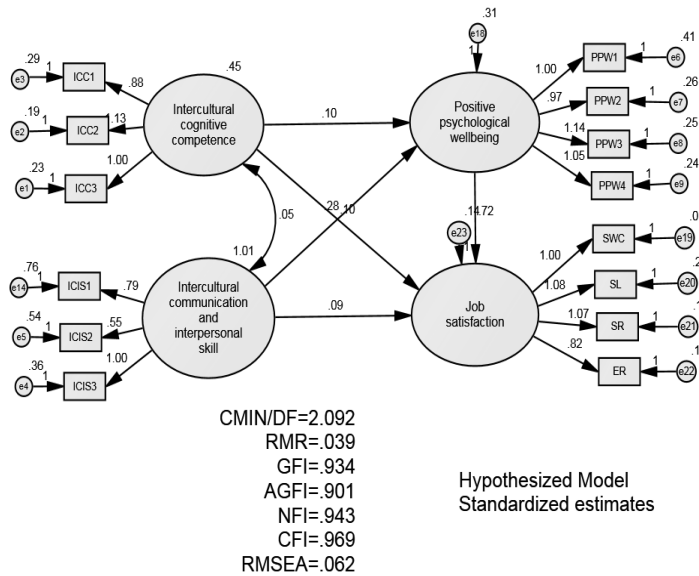


Figure 2. The path of model analysed by AMOS

intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to positive psychological well-being ($\beta=0.518$, $p<0.001$); and positive psychological well-being is positively related to job satisfaction ($\beta=0.689$, $p<0.001$).

Mediating effect analysis of model

The mediation model provides an explanation for how the independent variable and dependent variable are related. Bootstrapping has been conducted to be a powerful tool for testing significance of mediation hypotheses (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). There are three steps to evaluate mediating effect: (1) total effect of X on Y not including value 0 inside the confidence intervals; (2) if the indirect effect of X on Y not including the value 0 inside the confidence interval, means mediation is significant and mediation effect is exists; (3) if the direct effect of X on Y not including the value 0 inside the confidence interval, the mediating effect is partial mediator; if the direct effect of X on Y including the value 0 inside the confidence interval, the mediating effect is full mediator (Xu and Yin, 2014). Bootstrapping was used to test the significance of the mediation effects for positive psychological well-being. From the data set (N=285), using random sampling with replacement, 2000 bootstrap samples were generated. The mediating effect analysis of model is as follows (Table 4).

To evaluate hypothesis H6 and H7, the mediating effect analysis model was presented in Table 4-1. With all the boot-

strap samples converging, bootstrapping analysis indicated the effect of intercultural communication and interpersonal skill to job satisfaction through positive psychological well-being (Indirect effect: Bias-Corrected 95% CI: 0.089 ~ 0.263; $p=0.001$; Percentile 95% CI: 0.085~0.251; $p=0.001$) was significant and positive psychological well-being completely mediates the association between intercultural communication and interpersonal skill and job satisfaction, as the direct effect of intercultural communication and interpersonal skill on job satisfaction including the value 0 inside the confidence interval (Bias-Corrected 95% CI: -0.001 ~ 0.128; $p=0.054$; Percentile 95% CI: -0.004~0.125; $p=0.064$). However the effect of intercultural cognitive competence to job satisfaction through positive psychological well-being (Bias-Corrected 95% CI: -0.042 ~ 0.143; $p=0.329$; Percentile 95% CI: -0.040~0.148; $p=0.298$) was insignificant, thus there is no mediation effect between intercultural cognitive competence and job satisfaction.

Discussion and Conclusions

Previous literatures mainly focused on the relationship between intercultural competence and job performance of expatriates (Sheng, 2018). In the current research, the positive psychological well-being was firstly specified as mediator variable between intercultural competences and job satisfaction of Chinese expatriates. According to the findings, intercultural cognitive competence and intercultural communication and interpersonal skill were positively related to job satisfaction and intercultural communication and interpersonal skill

was positively related to positive psychological well-being, confirming the Hypothesis 1, 2, and 4 of the research. To evaluate the Hypothesis 5, the result was consistent with the findings of existing studies which reported a positive relationship between positive psychological well-being and job satisfaction (Robertson, 2012; Keyes and Annas, 2009; Rubin, Stefania, Emina and Anna, 2019). The result also revealed that PPW completely mediates the association between intercultural communication and interpersonal skill and job satisfaction, confirming the Hypothesis 7 of the research. However, PPW positive psychological well-being were insignificant, rejecting the Hypothesis 3 and 6 of the research. The result of the hypothesis models is shown in Table 5.

Practical implications

Based on the findings of this research, two recommendations can be made for improving the positive psychological well-being and job satisfaction of Chinese expatriates working in Thailand:

(1) Providing training programs such as, intercultural knowledge, language, and problem solving skill for expatriate. This can be effective in reinforcing their in-

tercultural communication and interpersonal skill in Thailand;

(2) Offering expatriate career advancement opportunities which can be effective in reinforcing their positive psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

Table 5. The result of hypothesis models

Hypotheses	Content	Status
H1	Intercultural cognitive competence is positively related to job satisfaction	Accepted
H2	Intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to job satisfaction	Accepted
H3	Intercultural cognitive competence is positively related to positive psychological well-being	Rejected
H4	Intercultural communication and interpersonal skill is positively related to positive psychological well-being	Accepted
H5	Positive psychological well-being is positively related to job satisfaction	Accepted
H6	Positive psychological well-being has mediating effect to the relationship between intercultural cognitive competence and job satisfaction	Rejected
H7	Positive psychological well-being has mediating effect to the relationship between intercultural communication and interpersonal skill and job satisfaction	Accepted

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Table 2. Correlation matrix and reliability results for research variables

Variable	Mean	Std. D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	1.28	0.450	1							
Age	2.13	0.993	-.129*	1						
Job Category	1.63	1.145	-0.009	-0.038	1					
Education	3.63	1.062	.263**	-.168**	0.112	1				
ICC	4.08	0.730	-0.012	0.073	-0.089	-0.055	1			
ICIS	3.52	0.887	0.061	0.001	0.033	0.079	0.075	1		
PPW	4.08	0.711	-.125*	0.103	-.171**	-0.043	0.107	.429**	1	
Job Satisfaction	3.9931	0.662	-.135*	0.086	-.173**	-0.065	.186**	.449**	.706**	1

Note: N=285; ** p<0.01; *p<0.05

Gender-1 for male and 2 for female; Age-1 for 20-29, 2 for 30-39, 3 for 40-49, 4 for 50-59, 5 for 60 up ; Job Category-1 for electric power industry, 2 for food processing industry, 3 for parts manufacturing; 4 for communication manufacturing industry; Education-1 for junior high school degree, 2 for senior high school degree, 3 for 3 years college degree, 4 for bachelor degree, 5 for master degree or above. ICC: Intercultural cognitive competence; ICIS: Intercultural communication and interpersonal skill; PPW: Positive psychological well-being.

Table 3. Direct impact of structural model: Standardized Regression Weights

Hypothesis Model	Endogenous Variable	Exogenous Variable	Standard Estimates	S.E	C.R.	p-value
Model 1	Job Satisfaction	← Intercultural Cognitive Competence	0.107	0.043	2.365	0.018*
Model 2	Job Satisfaction	← Intercultural Communication and Interpersonal Skill	0.160	0.042	2.592	0.010*
Model 3	Positive Psychological Well-being	← Intercultural Cognitive Competence	0.092	0.061	1.423	0.155
Model 4	Positive Psychological Well-being	← Intercultural Communication and Interpersonal Skill	0.518	0.068	5.045	***
Model 5	Job Satisfaction	← Positive Psychological Well-being	0.689	0.071	9.499	***

Note. * < 0.05 , ** < 0.01 , *** < 0.001

Table 4. Mediating Effect Analysis of Model

		Bootstrapping						
		Effect	Bias-Corrected 95% CI			Percentile 95% CI		
			Lower	Upper	Two-tailed Significance	Lower	Upper	Two-tailed Significance
Total Effect								
ICC	→ Job Satisfaction	0.151	0.042	0.267	0.001**	0.041	0.266	0.001**
ICIS	→ Job Satisfaction	0.217	0.126	0.329	0.001**	0.120	0.324	0.001**
Indirect Effect								
ICC	→ Job Satisfaction	0.048	-0.042	0.143	0.329	-0.040	0.148	0.298
ICIS	→ Job Satisfaction	0.157	0.089	0.263	0.001**	0.085	0.251	0.001**
Direct Effect								
ICC	→ Job Satisfaction	0.103	0.021	0.202	0.009	0.018	0.196	0.013
ICIS	→ Job Satisfaction	0.060	-0.001	0.128	0.054	-0.004	0.125	0.064

Note. * < 0.05, ** < 0.01, *** < 0.001