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TOWARD A MODEL OF ADAPTATION OF TAIWANESE EXPATRIATES' SPOUSES IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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An investigation into the factors affecting the adaptation of spouses of Taiwan expatriates allowed for their modes of adaptation to be classified into 'adjustment', 'reaction' and 'withdrawal'. Albeit a sample of 15 spouses were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire, the research findings indicate that if an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having high cultural flexibility, high social orientation, a high degree of willingness to communicate, a high conflict resolution orientation, low ethnocentricity and a high orientation towards knowledge, the overseas adaptation tends to be of the 'adjustment' mode. Research propositions based on case findings and relevant literature are derived here for future more in-depth study.

INTRODUCTION

Not only the high failure rate of expatriation, as witnessed in an expatriate's leaving the subsidiary, returning to parent firms before the end of a term or achieving less than anticipated during expatriation but also expatriate adjustment have been among the key concerns of multinational corporations (MNCs) and academia, (Dowling, Schuler, and Welch, 1994; Kraimer et al., 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999). The return of expatriates to their homelands before the originally scheduled time elevates expenses for MNCs. Though the high failure rate of expatriates is attributed to many factors, which include inappropriate criteria in the selection of expatriates, insufficient training, inadequate abilities on the part of expatriates and unsatisfactory compensation packages, none is more important than the impact of the factors related to an expatriate's spouse/family (Black and Stephens, 1989; Dowling et al., 1994; Harvey, 1985). Poor spousal adjustment, undoubtedly, adversely affects expatriate adjustment (Black and Stephens, 1989; Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, and Bross, 1998; Shaffer et al., 1999), and this has the potential of bringing about negative consequences ranging form psychological withdrawal to lower performance (Takeuchi et al., 2002; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001).

Many MNCs do not consider spouse/family as an important issue when selecting staff for expatriate positions; hence, they may fail to interview an expatriate's family in the recruiting process. Furthermore, a large number of expatriate's training programs do not include the accompanying family (Black and Stephens, 1989; Gowan and Ochoa, 1998; Harvey, 1985). Besides this, with increasing numbers of dual-career couples, career issues have now become a

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critical factor in decisions as to whether or not to accept an international assignment (Pellico and Stroh, 1997). Especially for employed spouses, the impact of expatriation is even more significant. Again, many MNCs tend to overlook an expatriate's spouse and her or his career development, considering it to be the expatriate's own personal affair (Adler, 1986). To illustrate this, Gowan and Ochoa's (1998) found that: (1) up to 93 percent of the companies did not consider the spouses' career plans in the expatriate-selection process; and (2) 97 percent of the companies did not assist the expatriate's spouse in finding jobs or other opportunities in the host country.

Most researchers (Black and Stephens, 1989; Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991; Harvey, 1985; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985) reported that the adaptation of the family and expatriate spouses plays a very important role in whether expatriation is successful. McEvoy and Parker (1995) further pointed out that the problems surrounding family and spouses negatively affect the adaptation of expatriate managers (Takeuchi et al. 2002; Black and Stephens, 1989; Caligiuri et al., 1998) because an expatriate has to take greater time to tend to his/her family. If an expatriate and the spouse cannot adapt successfully, their level of satisfaction with expatriation and the expatriate's job performance might well be seriously affected. Therefore, it is vital to focus on the policy and practices of human resource management when it comes to the adjustment and adaptation of expatriates' spouses (e.g., Pellico and Stroh, 1997; Shaffer and Harrison, 1998).

As part of the dramatically increasing globalization of business, increasing attention is now being paid to Asian MNCs as these firms are fast joining the ranks of the front-runners in the global economy. Since MNCs from developed countries were pioneers venturing into international activities, the adaptation problems connected with a spouse living abroad have caught the attention of researchers and practitioners (e.g., Black and Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001), but the issue has yet to be examined in the Asian context. For this reason, this study focuses on Taiwanese expatriates' spouses to explore these 'forgotten partners' (i.e., spouses adjustment) involved in international assignments for firms from developing countries, such as Taiwan. In this study, all spouses were female, and they and their husbands were all born and raised in Taiwan.

In the past, expatriate spouses' adaptation was not a major problem for Taiwanese firms since there were only a small number of Taiwan expatriates and most of them went without their spouses. But with more intense internationalization and more Taiwanese executives going abroad and taking their families along, the adaptation of family members living abroad has definitely become a key issue to Taiwan firms, just as it is in the case of MNCs. Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the factors affecting an expatriate spouse's adaptation in a host country. Here we develop propositions through case analyses and derive suggestions for Taiwan companies on how to assist in the process of spousal adaptation in an expatriate context. Specifically, the research addresses the following three questions: (1) what are the factors affecting an expatriate's spouse's adaptation? (2) is the home country company support helpful to an expatriate's spouse's adaptation? and (3) is preparation before a foreign assignment helpful for an expatriate's spouse's adaptation?

This paper makes two principal contributions to the issue of expatriates' spouses' adaptation: (1) this exploratory study of a spouse's adaptation, especially in an Asian context, sheds some light on the mode of his/her adaptation in host countries and lays the ground work for follow-up studies; and (2) the findings can help firms to design and institute suitable support mechanisms for spouses so that the success rate of expatriation programs can be increased.

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After the introduction, the next section reviews the related literature and presents the research framework of this study; the third section discusses the research methodology and summarizes the case findings; the fourth section introduces the propositions; and the last section presents the conclusions and suggestions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Classifications of Adaptation

Nash (1967) defined 'adaptation' as "changing and reorganizing the sojourner's subjective world, the process being complete when a satisfactory internal balance is restored as characterized by feeling at home in the new environment." Pruitt (1978) viewed adaptation as having two components, one is adjustment and the other is assimilation. The former means, "coping with one's environment sufficiently well to be happy, comfortable and free of problems," whereas the latter means "interacting freely with people from the host country and accepting their culture." Both definitions treat adjustment as a component of adaptation (Hannigan, 1990). After his review of reviewing the definitions of other researchers, Hannigan (1990) postulated that adaptation encompasses cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological changes in an individual who lives in a new or foreign culture; thus, he concluded that "adaptation" is a broad term, which includes both adjustment and assimilation.

Berry (1976) and Berry, Kim, and Boski (1988) classified adaptation into 'adjustment,' 'reaction,' and 'withdrawal.' Adjustment refers to reducing the conflict between one's own behavior and the new environment (i.e., to increase consistency or coordination) as well as changing one's behavior to meet the demands of the new environment; reaction occurs when changing one's behavior to fight against a new environment, and such behavior may cause the environment to change in order to increase the consistency or coordination between behavior and the new environment. As for withdrawal, this is a passive reaction taken to reduce the pressure caused by being in the environment, and it implies that a person withdraws from the arena of adaptation. Berry claimed that both 'reaction' and 'withdrawal' are usually unworkable and that 'adjustment' is the only feasible strategy in the process of adaptation. Because we examined how an individual acted in an unfamiliar environment, we also classified an expatriate spouse's mode of adaptation into 'adjustment', 'reaction,' and 'withdrawal.'

Personal Dimensions and Adaptation

Previous studies have shown that about of 16-40 percent of American expatriates returned home before the end of their contract for employment abroad because of adaptation problems (Tung, 1981), but, in sharp contract, Tung (1988) found out that the expatriate failure rates of Japanese and European firms were lower than 5 percent. Researchers thus hypothesize that personalities may be closely related to the adaptation process. Studies indeed have found that personality does play a crucial role in adaptation (Caligiuri, 2000). Based on Mendenhall and Oddou's (1985) review of dimensions, namely cultural flexibility, social orientation, a willingness to communicate, ethnocentricity, and conflict resolution orientation, of expatriate acculturation and Black's (1990) empirical study of five personal dimensions in cross-cultural adjustment, here we discuss how these five personalities affect the adaptation of expatriates' spouses in foreign countries. Orientation towards knowledge, as suggested by Hannigan (1990), is also included in this study. Thus, the 6 variables analyzed here are cultural flexibility, social orientation, a willingness to communicate, ethnocentricity, conflict resolution orientation, and

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orientation towards knowledge.

Cultural flexibility is commonly thought of as the ability to replace activities enjoyed in one's home country with available, but usually different, activities in the host country (Black, 1990). Because activities enjoyed in one's native culture are often inaccessible in a new culture, feelings of loneliness, isolation, and frustration may result, which obviously contributes to cultural shock and surely inhibits full adjustment or assimilation (Church, 1982). Such conditions may easily cause a person without cultural flexibility to feel lonely, anxious, and frustrated; on the other hand, it is expected that a person with cultural flexibility should be better adapted.

Social orientation essentially focuses on an individual's ability to establish relationships with the host country nationals (Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000; Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999). Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) determined that the importance of this personal dimension is the information and feedback that is provided by host nationals when relationships are developed with them. Once an expatriate's family establishes a good relationship with the people of the host country, it is easier for them to understand which types of behavior are appropriate and which are not. If an individual exhibits behavior consistent with the local cultural norms, it follows that he or she receives more positive feedback and, as a consequence, feels more comfortable and adjusted to the new culture. Earlier empirical studies have also supported the importance of this personal dimension (Morley and Flynn, 2003; Black, 1990; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001).

Willingness to communicate If an expatriate's spouse is unable to effectively communicate with the host country nationals, this results in increased feelings of frustration and anxiety, which obviously nurtures feelings of cultural shock and inhibits adjustment. Thus, we can expect that proficiency in the host country's language will facilitate adjustment (Church, 1982). Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) further suggested that the willingness and the desire to communicate are two important aspects of one's communication skills and one's ability to adjust. As an individual communicates with the host country nationals, he or she begins to gain a better understanding of the host country's culture, and this, in turn, reduces cultural shock and enhances adjustment to the host country (Black, 1990).

Ethnocentricity refers to the tendency to view one's own culture, traditions, and patterns of behavior as correct and evaluate different behavior as wrong (Black, 1990). Ethnocentricity prohibits adjustment, while a more tolerant orientation facilitates adjustment (Church, 1982; Stening, 1979). Ethnocentricity is similar to such concepts as cognitive rigidity, dogmatism, and low tolerance for ambiguity (Black, 1990). This is to say that individuals have a fixed 'cognitive map' of what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate and that they make little effort to understand or accept the viewpoints and mindsets of others [see Oddou and Mendenhall (1985) for a review]. If ethnocentric individuals envision their own behavior as the most correct, but in fact it is not appropriate in a given host culture, then they might very well experience negative feedback and increased cultural shock.

Conflict resolution orientation Individuals able to deal with psychological stress should also have the ability to deal with frustration and change (Hannigan, 1990). These individuals should be better equipped to adapt to foreign countries. Both literature review (Andreason, 2003a; Oddou and Mendenhall, 1985) and empirical studies (Hammer et al., 1978) have shown that the primary source of stress, whilst living overseas, is accompanied by interpersonal conflicts. Black (1990) found that conflict resolution orientation has a positive effect on adjustment for Japanese expatriate managers located in the U.S.

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Orientation towards knowledge Ruben and Kealey (1979) believed that sojourners with good adaptation have personalities which encompass empathy, flexibility, tolerance, interest in the local people and culture, social abilities, friendliness, patience, thirst for knowledge, and openness. Hannigan (1990) not only gave further explanations on these characteristics but also suggested orientation towards knowledge is another important personality trait. He then explained that an individual with a relatively low orientation towards knowledge can be thought of as a person with a low level of self-centered orientation, and when this is extended to a cross-cultural setting, an important attitude for successful cross-cultural adaptation is having moderate cultural views (i.e., a lower level of ethnocentricity).

Examining 250 Japanese expatriate managers from 21 industries that had been stationed in the U.S. for three years, Black (1990) found that, except for ethnocentricity, the other five personal characteristics discussed above are positively related to general adaptation, adaptation with regard to interacting with the people of the host country and adaptation with regard to work. As concerns ethnocentricity, this is only related to interactive adaptation, and, as such, there is a negative relationship.

The Effect of Preparation of an Expatriate's Spouse for Adaptation

It is necessary for an expatriate's spouse to prepare before leaving for a foreign country in order for him/her to adapt to life in the host country as early as possible. However, in the literature, few suggestions have been offered for expatriates' spouses. Taking into account the problems that may be encountered by an expatriate's spouse in a host country, here we propose the following to facilitate adaptation.

Collecting host-country information Expatriate families must have the basic knowledge of the host country (e.g., the host country's history, politics, economy, customs, festivities, etc.). The more they know, the better they will foresee the problems that they may face and the more they are prepared for psychological adjustments and contingency measures. Most mal-adaptations in the initial stages of expatriation are probably, in fact, due to the lack of preparation. An expatriate's spouse, therefore, should do his/her "homework" before leaving for a foreign country. One way to become familiar with a host country is to talk to other repatriated employees from the host country or to current expatriates in that country. Direct discussions with these people, along with obtaining/being provided with information from printed sources, will give spouses a better picture of the host country.

Learning the host-country's language Familiarization with the local language is helpful in the adaptation process. Learning the host country's language or dialect can greatly reduce any uncertainties in the cross-cultural adjustment process which increasing confidence in interacting with local nationals (Furnham, 1988). Shaffer and Harrison (2001) have recently found that the greater language fluency an expatriate's spouse has, the easier the adaptation to overseas life is. Thus, once the decision has been made to accept a foreign assignment, all members of an expatriate's family need to start learning the language/dialect of the host country. If language competency is not at the 'survival level,' when a foreign spouse arrives in the host country, he/she will need to actively learn the language. Because spouses often lack someone to practice conversation with, they may be the last member in the family to master the language or dialect of the host country, and therefore, may be the last member to adapt to local life.

Career planning One of the reasons that expatriate spouses may not adapt to a new environment is that they do not have a purpose to stay in a foreign country, other than to be with their families. They might even feel frustrated because they may have given up what they had

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accomplished or achieved by working in their home country. With better career planning, spouses can complement their future plans with their expatriation experience. Simply put, they need to plan what they can do in the host country and actively engage in those activities.

Psychological adjustment Ruben and Kealey (1979) defined psychological adjustment as, "the general psychological well-being, self-satisfaction, contentment, comfort with, and accommodation to a new environment after the initial perturbations that characterized culture shock have passed." Often, the higher the expectations of living in a host country are, the greater are the feelings of cultural shock. This is clearly caused by the gap between expectations and reality. When expatriating, besides the suggestions mentioned above, psychological preparation is also important, as an expatriate needs to understand that it is inevitable that they will encounter setbacks when first arriving in a foreign country. With good psychological preparation before expatriation, a spouse is more likely to face mild frustration than feel incense anger.

Four topics related to the topic of expatriates in human resource management are families with dual income, the education of the children, language, and culture (Copeland, 1995). As for the first to assist families with dual income, firms should help an expatriate's spouse search for suitable employment in the host country, pay the tuition for the spouse's education or professional training, assist the expatriate in managing two household affairs (one in the host country, and one in the home country) or provide an adjustment in salary to compensate for the losses experienced by the dual income expatriated family.

In the area of language, companies provide or pay for language training before and during expatriation for the expatriate and the other family members. Because expatriates and children can learn foreign languages and carry out conversations at the workplace and in schools, unemployed spouses are the ones most often left out. Staying at home limits the spouse's opportunities to listen to or speak the local language, and if he/she is passive, he/she will increasingly feel less a part of the local environment and consequently less adapted. Hence, a company has to be especially careful in this aspect and ensure that expatriate spouses have access to a good environment in which to learn the foreign language and/or dialect.

The Effect of Support from the home-country company for adaptation

Frazee (1996) put forth three suggestions for firms which are intended to support an expatriate's spouse. These are to: (1) provide first-hand information about host countries. The more information an expatriate's spouse has about the host country and its culture, the greater is the possibility that he/she will foresee potential problems that may be encountered. Obviously, this will make it much easier for a spouse to adapt to the local life; (2) become a creative career-planning consultant. In addition to providing expatriates with career planning consultation, a company should offer spouses this kind of support as well (If it is necessary, a company should even cover the expenses for spouses to develop their skills or expertise in foreign countries); (3) provide information about the home country. A firm should use the Internet or other means to provide timely information so that expatriate spouses can keep in touch with developments at home. Marian Stoltz-Loike, Vice President of Windham International Inc, also suggested that a firm can help an expatriate family to find other expatriate families from the same home country in the host country and encourage spouses to form or join clubs so as to be able to share experiences, help each other, and spend special holidays together.

Though many studies have investigated the expatriate issue, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) have noted that less has been done to address the issue of expatriate spouse adaptation. This is no less true for developing countries. Relying on direct linked literature to discuss the factors

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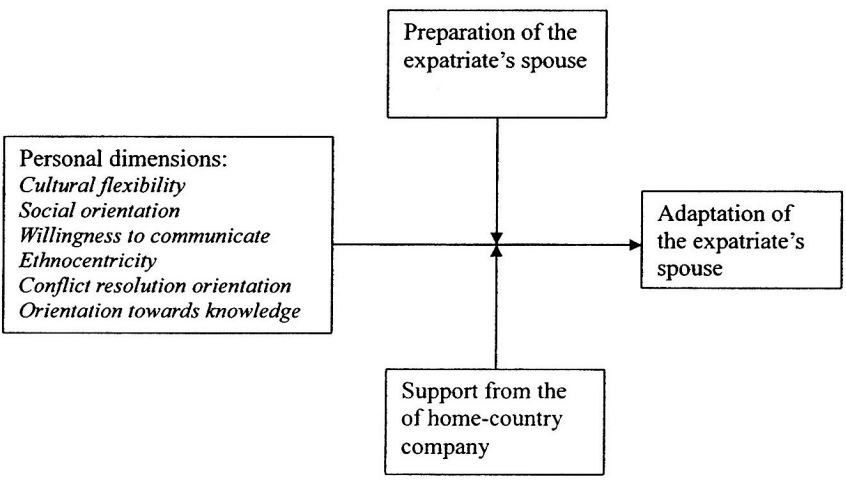
affecting a spouse's adaptation is a limited to studies such as the present one. However, we were inspired by the approaches adopted by Caligiuri et al. (1998, pp. 601-602) and Shaffer and Harrison (2001), who have used the Spillover Theory. The former investigated the linkage between expatriates and families' adaptation and, drawing on the literature regarding expatriate adaptation, the latter derived a framework to address a spouse's adaptation. We believe that, due to our limited understanding of a spouse's adaptation, it is advisable to review the literature related to expatriate adaptation when examining the adaptation of an expatriate's spouse.

A review of the relevant literature has led us to develop a conceptual framework for examining the issue (see Figure 1). It is seen that the adaptation of an expatriate's spouse in a host country is affected by the personality of the spouse, the preparation of the spouse before the relocation and the support of the home country's company. After case analyses, we set forth propositions to define the relationships among these factors.

FIGURE 1

Conceptual framework



METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Although case research methodology is an objective and an in-depth examination of a phenomenon, researchers rarely control the occurrence of these events (Yin, 1994). Yin laid out the important elements in the design of case research methodology, which are research questions, relevant propositions, units of analysis, logical relationships between information and propositions and the theories behind the explanation of the research findings. Eisenhardt (1989)

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suggested the following steps to conduct case research to build up theories: defining problems, selecting cases, preparing tools, conducting interviews, analyzing data, proposing hypotheses (explaining the relationships among variables), comparing with findings in relevant literature and presenting conclusions.

Since the nature of this study is exploratory, and the relationships depicted in Figure 1 have not been examined in the context of expatriate spouses, a case research approach seemed to be a most reasonable one. By analyzing rich data sets gathered from case studies, we have been able to explore the complicated relationships between the research variables and the various modes of expatriate spouse adaptation.

In this study, two factors made it rather difficult when searching for interviewees. For one, because Taiwanese companies are still in the early stages of internationalization, most expatriates from Taiwan go abroad without their family members. In addition, this study concentrated on families with dual incomes. Hence, as convenient sampling procedures had to be adopted, we established three criteria for selecting interviewees for this study. They were: (1) interviewees who were the spouses of expatriates; (2) interviewees who stayed at least for one term of expatriation with the expatriates in their host countries; and (3) interviewees whose employed spouse had an expatriate term which was longer than one year. Information gathering was done through personal interviews using a structured interview guideline. A total of 15 cases, all of who were former employees' housewives but abroad were studied. The basic information obtained form the interviewees are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Demographics of expatriate spouses

Cases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Demographics															
Current age	31	44	38	33	38	34	34	37	38	35	34	37	37	34	40
Education	U	G	U	U	U	U	U	S	U	U	U	G	G	U	U
Number of accompanying children	2	2	2	0	2	1	1	0	2	0	1	2	2	2	2
Working status	×	×	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	×	○	○	×	○	○
Information regarding expatriation															
Age at expatriation	29	34	33	30	29	32	28	37	34	30	32	35	35	30	36
Working status before expatriation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Prior international experience	○	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	×
Host country language fluency	H	H	H	L	L	□	L	□	□	L	L	H	L	□	□
Host country	N	US	US	V	T	C	US	C	C	J	US	US	I	C	C
Expatriation term (years)	2	6	2	3	6	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	2

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Note : 1. 'Yes' coded as '○' and 'no' coded as '×.'
2.Coding of education: Senior high school=S; College or university=U; and Graduate school=G.
3.Coding of host country: Netherlands= N; U.S.=US; Vietnam=V; Thailand=T; China=C; Japan=J; and Indonesia=I.
4. Coded as 'H' and 'L' when the level is high and low, respectively.
5.When the host country is China, the language is considered the same and is coded as "□."

Measurements

The definitions and measurements of the variables in the conceptual framework are explained below:

Adaptation. Following Berry et al. (1988), this study classified the modes of overseas adaptation of Taiwan expatriate's spouse into 'adjustment', 'reaction' and 'withdrawal.'

Cultural flexibility. To determine whether the interviewees had cultural flexibility or not involved observations as to how they arranged their daily lives in their host countries. For example, in one case, a wife went with her husband to the Netherlands for expatriation. The wife utilized the generous social welfare system of the Netherlands to send her three-year-old child to a government-sponsored kindergarten. In her spare time, she became engaged in floriculture and some outdoor activities such as horseback riding, which were hard to take part in Taiwan. This case is classified into the 'high cultural flexibility' category, (coded as 'H' in Table 2); the reversed scenario is coded as 'L.'

Social orientation. This refers to the ability to establish a good relationship with the people of the host country. 'Good relationship' itself is quite a subjective and abstract concept. In this study, an expatriate spouse's feelings towards local people reflect her social orientation. For example, in one case, an expatriate's spouse who went to Mainland China thought that the locals were very selfish, materialistic and disrespectful of morals. Because of these feelings, she hardly socialized with the locals. Hence, this case is classified into the 'low social orientation' category (coded as 'L').

Willingness to communicate. A willingness to communicate refers in the ease with which one takes the initiative in communicating with the host country's local people. Such interactions naturally lead to a reduction in frustration and anxiety. For example, if an expatriates' spouse stayed in the host country for a long period of time and she was still unwilling to learn the local language, this study classifies this case into the 'low willingness to communicate' category (coded as 'L').

Ethnocentricity. In the case of Taiwan nationals, ethnocentricity is more prevalent if they are in countries which are economically inferior to Taiwan. Conversely, ethnocentricity is less obvious if expatriate spouses are in more developed countries. When a host country is a developing one, such as some of those in Southeast Asia, the possibility of spouses developing ethnocentricity is higher. For example, Taiwanese in Indonesia described the locals as 'sloppy', 'lazy' and 'without good hygiene habits.' This case is classified in the 'high ethnocentricity' category (coded as 'H').

Conflict resolution orientation. This refers to resolving conflicts in a cooperative manner, making efforts to understand the norms and values of another group of people, and trusting others. If conflicts arise because of different cultural values and they are not resolved for a long period of time, an expatriate's spouse is categorized in the 'less conflict resolution orientation' category (coded as 'H'). As an example, in this study, a spouse who stayed in mainland China illustrated good conflict resolution orientation by saying, "*Even though the*

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locals have very different cultural values from ours, and the trust among people is much lower, I still make friends with them after a while because I do see the positive side of the locals."

Orientation towards knowledge. This refers to making an effort to learn the host country's language, to better understand the culture or know the history of the host county. 'High orientation towards knowledge' (H) reflects a spouse's actively seeking knowledge about the host country.

Collecting host-country information. This refers to the efforts to collect relevant information regarding a host country prior to leaving the home country. Typical avenues that were used to find information were libraries, discussions with friends or relatives or with colleagues who had been expatriated to the same country before. If the interviewee engaged in these sorts of activities, the coding is '○' but if the interviewee did not, the coding is '×'.

Learning the host-country's language. Whether the expatriate's spouse is willing to learn the language of the host country before the foreign assignment is an important indicator of the preparation of a spouse. In the present study, the length of time learning the language is not considered as long as the spouse has learned some of it before leaves Taiwan. Learning the foreign language is coded as '○' and '×' otherwise.

Career planning. This refers to whether a spouse integrates expatriation into her career planning or experiences in life. One spouse, who was a freelance writer, illustrated how career planning can be combined with expatriation. After learning that she would be accompanying her husband to the U.S., she started to collect information about graduate programs in mass communications in the host country. She then enrolled in a graduate program while overseas and upon her return to Taiwan, her educational advancement and ultimate career prospects proved that she had made the right choice. The coding is '○' if a spouse tries to take advantage of the expatriation for her own career benefits.

Psychological adjustment. Whether an interviewee objectively examines the culture, and living conditions in the host country and does not make excessive expectations about living in that country reflects the degree of psychological adjustment. In this study, if an interviewee demonstrated obvious anxiety before going abroad, she belongs in the category of "has not yet made psychological adjustment or psychological mal-adjustment" (coded as '×'). On the other hand, if a spouse could face the eventual cultural shock more calmly before going abroad and had been psychologically prepared to accept short-term pains, the code '○' is assigned.

Support from the home-country company. The support from the home company provided to an expatriate's spouse includes the following: (1) firsthand information about a host country; (2) providing foreign language training; (3) career planning consultation; (4) connections to form support networks; (5) supporting local life; (6) arranging for social activities; and (7) support to find jobs.

Summary of Case Analyses

Depending on the nature of the data collected, two different ways of coding were adapted. Information regarding the support from the home company was easy to obtain from interviews and could be directly coded. However, judgments regarding the personalities of the spouse, and the degree of the spouse' prior preparation were not as easy to directly infer from their responses. Based on detailed descriptions of the cases, we made every effort to arrive at objective and unified judgments for these variables. All of the three researchers (The background of the three researchers follows: a professor specialized in the area of International Business; a doctoral student with training in Human Resource Management who has taken courses in International

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Human Resource Management; and a graduate student in Business Administration who has taken courses in Human Resource Management and International Business Management.) have knowledge about international human resource management. We are therefore able to analyze the case materials and make judgments independently. To ensure the consistency of coding, we agreed on the definition for each research variable before assigning the codes [that is, the procedure of conceptualizing the original information (Strauss, 1987)]. The inter-rater reliability of the three researchers exceeded 0.9, and the level of consistency was very high. Among the 15 cases, only one case was classified differently in terms of the mode of adaptation, but a consensus was reached after discussion. Table 2 presents the case materials after coding.

TABLE 2

Summary of cases

Variables \ Cases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Personal dimensions															
Cultural flexibility	H	H	L	L	L	M	L	L	H	H	M	H	L	M	M
Social orientation	H	H	M	L	L	H	L	L	H	H	L	H	L	H	L
Willingness to communicate	H	H	H	L	L	H	L	H	H	H	L	H	L	M	L
Ethnocentricity	□	□	□	H	M	H	□	H	L	□	□	□	H	L	M
Conflict resolution orientation	H	H	H	L	H	M	L	L	H	H	M	M	M	M	H
Orientation towards knowledge	H	H	H	L	L	H	L	L	H	M	L	H	M	H	M
Preparation of spouse															
Collecting host-country information	○	×	○	○	×	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Learning host-country language	○	×	×	×	×	□	○	□	□	×	×	○	○	□	□
Career planning	○	×	×	×	×	○	○	×	×	×	×	×	○	×	×
Psychological adaptation	○	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	○	×	○	○	×
Support from the home-country company															
Providing first-hand information	×	×	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	○	○	×
Foreign language training	×	×	×	×	○	□	×	□	□	×	×	×	○	□	×
Career planning consultation	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Forming social networks	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Supporting local life	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	○	×	×	×	×
Arranging social activities	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Assisting job-search	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	○	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Overall adaptation	A	A	A	W	R	R	W	R	A	A	W	A	W	A	R

Note : 1. 'Yes' coded as '○' and 'no' coded as '×.'

2. Coded as 'H,' 'M' and 'L' when the level is high, medium and low.

3. When the host country is China, the language is the same and coded as '□.'

4. Coded as 'A' when expatriate spouses' overall adaptation is adjustment, 'R' as reaction, and 'W' as withdraw.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSITIONS

The propositions developed here were made by referring to the literature and the case materials, with reference made to the research framework presented in Figure 1.

Expatriate failures in foreign assignments are due primarily to an inability to adjust to

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foreign cultures (Andreason, 2003b). In a foreign environment, a person without cultural flexibility is more likely to feel lonely and frustrated, which causes mal-adaptation; on the other hand, a person with cultural flexibility has better adaptation (Black and Gregersen, 1999). Out of the fifteen cases, five spouses could be categorized in the 'high cultural flexibility' group, and all of them reportedly adjusted quite well in their host countries (i.e., coded as 'adjustment'). Among the six cases, where spouses were coded as having 'low cultural flexibility,' five adapted in the host countries through 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.' We thus propose that cultural flexibility affects an expatriate spouse's overseas adaptation. Therefore, we proposed that:

Proposition 1-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having high cultural flexibility, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment'.

Proposition 1-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having low cultural flexibility, overseas adaptation tends mode to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal'.

Social orientation refers to the ability to establish good relationships with the people of the host country. When foreigners show appropriate behavior, they gain positive feedback from local people, which lead to better adaptation (Hammer et al., 1978). Seven spouses in the study were placed in the 'high social orientation' group, six of them adapted through 'adjustment,' while only one experienced 'withdrawal.' As for the seven cases with 'low social orientation', all of the mechanisms they used were judged to be of the 'reaction' and 'withdrawal' modes. Thus, we propose that the low social orientation of an expatriate's spouse tends to be associated with the 'reaction' or 'withdrawal' modes of adaptation. Therefore, we proposed that:

Proposition 2-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having high social orientation, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment.'

Proposition 2-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having low social orientation, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal' type.

Church (1982) suggested that if expatriate families can communicate well with the host country's nationals, they experience less frustration, and this of course helps them to adapt. Eight spouses in the study were highly willing to communicate with local nationals and six of them were assessed as having adapted in the 'adjustment' mode. Concerning the six cases with a 'low willingness to communicate,' their adaptations were assessed as 'reaction' (one case) or 'withdrawal' (five cases). Considering expatriate's spouse's willingness to communicate, we proposed that:

Proposition 3-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having a high willingness to communicate, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment.'

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Proposition 3-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having a low willingness to communicate, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.'

Ethnocentricity is the thinking that one's own culture and behavior modes are most appropriate and even better than others. Since ethnocentricity leads to a rigid cognitive map, one cannot judge right from wrong or appropriate from inappropriate. Individuals with high ethnocentricity, by and large, do not make an effort to understand or accept the host country's culture, nor do they modify their behavior accordingly (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Among the fifteen cases, four spouses with 'high ethnocentricity' functioned in the 'reaction' or 'withdrawal' modes, compared with none in the 'adjustment' mode. Regarding the two spouses with 'low ethnocentricity,' their adaptations were judged as being of the 'adjustment' mode. Therefore, we propose that the ethnocentricity of an expatriate's spouse affects her adaptation in a host country.

Proposition 4-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized with low ethnocentricity, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment.'

Proposition 4-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized with high ethnocentricity, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.'

Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) found that for short-term overseas travelers, social conflicts are the main pressure and that they can deal with social conflicts better by trying to understand the norms and values that prevail in the host country. In the fifteen cases, seven spouses had 'high conflict resolution abilities' and five of them adapted in the 'adjustment' mode. Thus, with high conflict resolution abilities, an expatriate's spouse has better overseas adaptation. With regard to spouses with 'low conflict resolution abilities', the adaptations were either of the 'reaction' or 'withdrawal' modes. It can be concluded that low conflict resolution abilities lead to better overseas adaptation. Therefore, we proposed that:

Proposition 5-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having high conflict resolution orientation, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment.'

Proposition 5-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized as having low conflict resolution orientation, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.'

For the seven spouses who had a 'high orientation towards knowledge,' and six adapted by 'adjustment'. When it comes to the five spouses with 'low orientation towards knowledge,' their modes of adaptations were evaluated as either 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.' Thus, for expatriate spouses, orientation towards knowledge is related to overseas adaptation. Therefore, we proposed that:

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Proposition 6-1:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized with a high orientation towards knowledge, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'adjustment.'

Proposition 6-2:
If an expatriate's spouse is characterized with a low orientation towards knowledge, overseas adaptation mode tends to be 'reaction' or 'withdrawal.'

A strong cultural adaptation personality is demonstrated by high cultural flexibility, high social orientation, a high willingness to communicate, low ethnocentricity, and a high orientation towards knowledge. In contrast, low cultural flexibility, low social orientation, a low willingness to communicate, high ethnocentricity and a low orientation towards knowledge are indicative of a poor cultural adaptation personality. In this study, we classified a spouse who had more than 3 attributes in the personal dimensions, which are favorable for good adaptation in a host country in the category of good cultural adaptation. In all, five spouses adapted by means of 'adjustment' and were not able to evaluate the impact of 'home company support' on their overseas modes of adaptation. However, company support does matter when a spouse has a poor cultural adaptation personality. When a company offers support, the spouse's overseas adaptation tends to take the form of 'reaction' as shown in five cases. The support given by a Taiwanese company often creates an environment similar to that of Taiwan in foreign countries (e.g., living around Taiwanese expatriates). Thus, those spouses who do not adjust easily to foreign cultures still live smoothly without changing their behavior. On the other hand, if a spouse has a poor cultural adaptation personality and the home company does not give any support, the spouse's overseas mode of adaptation tends to be 'withdrawal' (such as cases 4 and 11). Considering the home company's support and expatriate's spouse's adaptation mode, we proposed that:

Proposition 7-1:
Without the support from the home company, a spouse with a strong cultural adaptation personality tends to take on the 'adjustment' mode.

Proposition 7-2:
With the support from the home company, a spouse with a poor cultural adaptation personality tends to take on the 'reaction' mode.

Proposition 7-3:
Without the support from the company, a spouse with a poor cultural adaptation personality tends to take on the 'withdrawal' mode.

Similar to the discussion for proposition 7, five spouses with good cultural adaptation personalities acculturated through 'adjustment,' but the impact of 'preparation before the trip' on the mode of overseas adaptation is not clear. Due to the limited sample size, the impact of the home company's support and the 'preparation of the spouse' on the spouse's degree of overseas adaptation cannot be inferred. Therefore, we proposed that:

Proposition 8:
Regardless of preparation before expatriation, a spouse with a good cultural adaptation

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personality tends to behave in the 'adjustment' mode.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In light of the importance of the adaptation of an expatriate's spouse, we investigated the various factors affecting overseas adaptation by spouses. Three sets of factors, namely the spouse's personality, the preparation of the spouse before relocating, and the support from the home-country company, were identified from the literature and their impact on overseas adaptation are proposed based on the interviews of 15 expatriates' wives.

Because of limited opportunities and the difficulty in getting working visas, expatriate spouses usually do not work in host countries. Previous studies have shown that successful expatriates tend to possess certain kinds of personalities and personal traits (Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000; Church, 1982; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). These characteristics enable expatriates to: (1) accept and learn the norms of new cultures; (2) interact with the host country's nationals and collect cultural information (Caligiuri, 2000); and (3) be better prepared for uncertainties and pressure brought on by exposing to new environments (Black, 1990; Church, 1982; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). From the case interviews, we found that when Taiwan expatriate spouses have high cultural flexibility, high social orientation, a high willingness to communicate, low ethnocentricity, and a high orientation towards knowledge, they tend to interact more with local nationals and adapt to the foreign life more readily. If spouses can not adapt well, two responses might occur: they may form a small social group with other expatriate spouses from the same country and their social activities may very well be with the people in such a group (i.e., 'reaction'); if a social group cannot be formed, they may very well spend most of their time at home, there by restricting the possibility of their coming in contact with external environment (i.e., 'withdrawal').

If a spouse has the ability to easily adapt to different cultures, a company's provision of support evidently does not affect her adaptation. However, a company's support becomes important when a spouse does not have the personality to easily adapt to a host country. In this case, a local support network is helpful in the short run; in the long run, though, it may be harmful. Because these expatriates' spouses will rely heavily on this network, and therefore, not try to connect with the outside world, they may form a small circle to satisfy themselves (i.e., 'reaction'). On the other hand, if a spouse does not have the personality to easily adapt to different cultures and cannot find support, this spouse will likely remain unhappy, showing 'withdrawal', and it is more unlikely that she will stay overseas for a long time.

A small sample, exploratory research like this has several limitations. First, the limited sample size, difficulties in identifying samples and difficulties in seeking the cooperation of corporations and individuals resulted in there only being 15 cases. The external validity of the propositions derived in this study may, consequently, be in doubt. Second, there may be bias on the part of the respondents, the most serious drawback in case interviews. The respondents, due to oversight or distortion, may not provide genuine information. Third, due to the lack of literature on spouses' adaptation, we relied on the literature related to expatriate adaptation to construct our conceptual framework, and we derived the propositions based on the case findings of Taiwanese firms. Again the external validity of the propositions can be questioned. Finally, the coding of the personality of spouses and their modes of adaptations in the host countries were determined by the three researchers; this may have created some biases as well.

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We suggest two directions for future research. First, the measurements of the personal dimensions (e.g., cultural flexibility, social orientation, the willingness to communicate, conflict resolution orientation and ethnocentricity, and so on) that affect overseas adaptation should be developed. This study relied on the subjective evaluations of the researchers. Follow-up research based on more refined measurements can substantiate the findings of this study. Second, empirical studies to examine the propositions set forth in this study will help to build up the theories of expatriate spouses' overseas adaptation.

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