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When do host country nationals help expatriates? The roles of identification with the multinational enterprise and career development support by the subsidiary



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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine the roles of the host country nationals (HCNs)' identification with the MNE and perceptions of subsidiary's career development support as key factors in explaining the HCNs' decisions to provide help to expatriates. Using data collected in four countries (Australia, China, India, and Singapore), we show that HCNs' identification with the MNE and subsidiary's career development support are positively related to their extra-role helping behavior toward the expatriates. Further, the positive relationship between MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior becomes stronger when HCNs perceive that their career development is well supported by the subsidiary. We also provide post-hoc analyses to explore the potential differences of the four host countries in these relations.

1. Introduction

Host country nationals (HCNs), or local staff members in foreign subsidiaries of multinational enterprises (MNEs), are one of the major local actors in corporate expatriates' social networks in the assignment location (Bonache et al., 2016; Peltokorpi, 2020). Research on expatriate management has established that HCNs are a valuable source of informational and social support for assigned expatriates (Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016; Van Bakel et al., 2017). HCNs are an important source of local knowledge that help the expatriates adjust to the host country environment, leading to the expatriates' better assignment performance (Horak and Yang, 2016; Mahajan and Toh, 2014), higher job satisfaction, and lower withdrawal cognitions on the assignment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). It is generally recognized that MNEs should seek ways in which the HCNs help assigned expatriates' adjustment and better job performance, which ultimately enable the MNEs to better control and coordinate foreign subsidiaries (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016; Kostova et al., 2016).

Despite its importance, the HCNs' help is often not forthcoming because HCNs tend to regard assigned expatriates as outgroup members arising from various divides that exist between the HCNs and the expatriates. Based on social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), previous research on expatriate-HCN relations proposed that national differences of various kinds, such as societal culture and languages, are prominent sources of divide that could lead HCNs to stereotype the expatriates both positively and negatively (Bonache et al., 2016; Pichler et al., 2012). The differences between the HCNs' and assigned expatriates'

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statuses and career outlook, including salaries and compensations, can also be sources of divide that may cause a sense of unfairness among HCNs (Chen et al., 2002; Hon and Lu, 2010; Oltra et al., 2013; Toh and DeNisi, 2003). Although there are now a growing number of HCNs holding a managerial position, when it comes to the expatriate-HCN relationship, assigned expatriates are still likely to hold a supervisory position to the HCNs (Hon and Lu, 2010). These divides can create a sense of relative deprivation among the HCNs that should be addressed in order to bridge the expatriate-HCN divisions. Therefore, it is important to improve our understanding of what MNEs can do to motivate the HCNs to transcend such divides and help assigned expatriates (Kang and Shen, 2018). Indeed, there is a call for research on the HCNs' perceptions about their organizations and organizational practices that influence the HCNs' willingness to help assigned expatriates as most SIT-based research treated the expatriate-HCN relations as an intergroup phenomenon and focused on HCNs' personal characteristics or their perceptions about the expatriates as predictors of their helping behaviors (Shen et al., 2018).

Based on social identity (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and social exchange (Blau, 1964) perspectives, we propose a model in which HCNs' perceived relationship with their organizations tap into their relationship with the expatriates, resulting in their extra-role helping behavior toward the expatriates. To develop the model, we also refer to the literature on indirect social influence or trickle effects (Wo et al., 2019) and propose that HCNs may reciprocate the benefit received from the organization to their expatriate coworkers. We focus on the HCNs' extra-role helping behavior because such behavior may not necessarily be a core part of the HCNs' job requirements (Toh and DeNisi, 2003, 2007) and, hence, is an extra-role that is voluntary, and above and beyond their job responsibilities and requirements (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). This kind of behavior is hard for the organization to induce but is nonetheless seen valuable for the expatriates. Drawing on SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), we suggest that HCNs' identification with the MNE, a perception that derives from the HCNs' relationship with the organization, is critical for overcoming the divides between the HCNs and expatriates. Furthermore, drawing on social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964), we highlight subsidiary's career development support of HCNs as another important perception of the HCNs based on their relationship with the organization that may reduce the expatriate-HCN divides and increase HCN help to expatriates.

We test our model on 572 HCNs who work with expatriates based in the top four host countries of inward FDI in the Asia Pacific region – Australia, China, India, and Singapore (UNCTAD, n.d.). With a high volume of international trade, particularly with the United States, the Asia Pacific region has attracted a large number of US businesses (World Bank, 2017). In addition, intraregional trade in which Chinese, Japanese, and Korean MNEs has been the driving forces has also been active (World Bank, 2017). Also, Australia, India, and Singapore maintain socioeconomic ties within the region particularly through the Commonwealth, or the voluntary association of countries comprising the former British Empire (The Commonwealth, 2019). The four host countries represent a dynamic and diverse nature of the Asia Pacific region in general and varying perspectives of HCNs who work for MNEs in this region. Respondents worked in local subsidiaries of foreign MNEs and regularly interacted with assigned expatriates at the time of the survey and were recruited through a research company that had access to potential respondents in the four countries.

The current study makes several contributions to the literature on the expatriate-HCN relations. First, we extend SIT-based research on HCNs' willingness to help expatriates by exploring the HCNs' perceptions of their relationship with the organization that drives HCNs to help expatriates. SIT, a major theory used to understand expatriate-HCN relations, suggests that one's sense of who they are derives from a group membership and that group identity becomes a basis for one's interpersonal and intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In previous studies, the HCNs' categorization of assigned expatriates as either ingroup or outgroup is seen as determinants of the HCNs' willingness to help the expatriates (Bonache et al., 2016; Hitotsuyanagi-Hansel et al., 2016; Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016; Toh and DeNisi, 2007; Varma et al., 2011; Wang and Fang, 2014). These studies typically focused on the HCNs' or expatriates' personal traits and/or HCNs' perceptions on the expatriates as factors that matter to HCN-expatriate relationship. We extend this SIT-based understanding of the HCNs' willingness to help expatriates by suggesting that the superordinate identity of the HCNs at the MNE-level (i.e. MNE identification) is also an important factor. Our focus on the HCNs' relationship with the organization at the superordinate level is distinct and is an extension to the existing SIT-based research on HCNs' willingness to help expatriates.

Second, we highlight career development support from the subsidiary experienced by the HCNs as another relevant factor for the HCNs representing their relationship with their organizations to extend their help to expatriates. Despite calls for such research, there has been insufficient studies carried out on HCNs and their careers, compared with their expatriate counterparts (Moeller and Harvey, 2018; Takeuchi, 2010). In the current era of talent shortage, a focus on career development support for the HCNs is particularly important especially as a means to retain a qualified workforce (Tlaiss Hayfaa et al., 2017). In a foreign subsidiary setting, comparisons between the HCNs and expatriates may often cause the HCNs concern about their career development and progression opportunities and potentially resentment that could discourage cooperation with expatriates (Oltra et al., 2013; Toh and DeNisi, 2003). SET suggests that social interactions create a sense of obligation for those who are involved in the social exchange to reciprocate the deeds to their exchange counterpart (Emerson, 1976). Drawing on SET (Blau, 1964) and the literature on indirect social influence (Wo et al., 2019), we provide theoretical explanation and empirical evidence that when the HCNs see that the organizations care about their careers, the HCNs may show greater willingness to help expatriates in a form of reciprocation to the organization.

Third, we examine the joint effect of MNE identification and career development support from subsidiaries on the HCNs' helping behaviors. This is an important endeavor because we develop theoretical explanation for how HCNs' attitudes and perceptions regarding two entities at different organizational levels (the MNE and the subsidiary) jointly influence their helping behaviors. In doing so, we integrate the two theories (SIT and SET) that have previously been used in isolation to explain employee behaviors in the expatriate management literature. This is important as social identity and exchange is seen to substantially influence employees' experience in the organization (Sluss et al., 2008). Altogether, our study provides new insights into how the role of the HCNs' relationship with the MNE affects their relationship with their expatriate coworkers.

2. Theory and hypothesis

2.1. Social identity theory and organizational identification

SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) indicates that a membership to a group may define one's relationship with others, including other members of the same group (ingroup) and those of another group (outgroup). Generally, individuals link their self-esteem with their group membership, based on which they may become more willing or less so to shape positive attitudes and behaviors toward ingroup members (Turner et al., 1979). Because individuals have multiple identities based on multiple social groups at multiple levels (e.g. gender, job role, organization, ethnicity, nationality), the salience of a certain social group and one's membership to it becomes more important than others depending on the context one is placed (Albert, 1998).

Social identification, derived from SIT and its extension, social categorization theory (Turner et al., 1979), is a concept that goes beyond simply self-acknowledging a group membership. It represents an individual's self-definition based on their belongingness to social groups, including their organization. Based on the concept of social identification, organizational identification is defined as the "perception of oneness with, or belongingness to, an organization where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization in which he or she is a member" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992: 105). Pratt (1998) suggests that individuals identify with the organizations when their own values and beliefs are similar to that of the organizations or when the individuals take organizational beliefs and values into themselves as something which forms a part of their beliefs. Through these identification processes, individuals fulfill their needs for safety, affiliation, self-enhancement, and/or to find meaning in their lives (Pratt, 1998). In general, organizational identification has attitudinal and behavioral implications. It is argued to create an ingroup favoritism, greater cohesion within the organization, an attachment to the organization, and a greater display of behaviors that go beyond one's job role (i.e. extra-role behaviors) (Riketta, 2005).

2.2. MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior

The MNE is a global network of organizational units, i.e., global headquarters and foreign subsidiaries, dispersed across national borders (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990). Previous studies have distinguished between identification with the global headquarters vis-à-vis the subsidiary (Vora and Kostova, 2007). Here, we examine the HCNs' MNE identification, the degree to which HCNs identify themselves with the entire network of units of the same MNE, including the global headquarters and the subsidiary in which the HCNs are located. In line with the organizational identification discussed above, MNE identification is not just about being a member of the MNE. Being a member of the MNE becomes a part of one's identity, through which the HCNs fulfill their needs for safety, affiliation, and self-enhancement. MNE identification develops through socialization, through interpersonal and interunit contact, and through sharing formal and informal organizational processes and practices between different units of the same MNE (Smale et al., 2015).

In the context of an MNE, assigned expatriates who are temporarily placed in a host country unit can often be categorized as outsiders by the HCNs (Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016; Toh and DeNisi, 2007; Varma et al., 2011) and who can then be subject to negative stereotyping (Bonache et al., 2016). HCNs tend to develop a sense of relative deprivation against expatriates (Chen et al., 2002; Toh and DeNisi, 2003) because of multiple divides that exist between the HCNs and expatriates. Consequently, the categorization of expatriates as outgroup leads HCNs to be less willing to provide support to expatriates (Pichler et al., 2012; Varma et al., 2006; see Leonardelli and Toh, 2011, for an exception).

According to SIT, however, this outgroup discrimination can partly be resolved when members identify with a superordinate identity that encompasses both groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Members may recategorize subgroups (i.e. HCN as "us" versus expatriate as "them") into one superordinate category (i.e. "we"), through which intergroup relations may be improved (Gaertner et al., 1993). Therefore, the HCNs' identification with such a superordinate group (i.e. MNE) is significant because the HCNs who identify with their MNE will recognize the expatriate as a superordinate ingroup member (i.e., oneness) even though the expatriate originated outside of the subsidiary to which the HCNs belong (Cialdini et al., 1997). HCNs' recognition of assigned expatriates as superordinate ingroup members will likely lead the HCNs to show positive ingroup bias and show favoritism toward the expatriates and work toward greater cohesion within the subsidiary. Indeed, a qualitative study of Hungarian HCNs suggests that those who strongly embraced the MNE's corporate culture tend to identify with expatriates as well (Caprar, 2011). HCNs with strong MNE identification therefore likely go beyond several divides that exist between them and the expatriates as MNE identification becomes a driving force for them to go beyond their job roles to help the expatriates (Cialdini et al., 1997; Riketta, 2005). Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1. A host country national's MNE identification is positively related to his/her extra-role helping behavior toward expatriates in the subsidiary.

2.3. Social exchange theory and organizational support for development

According to SET, individuals develop exchange relationships over time, characterized by the norm of reciprocity, with social actors including other individuals, groups, and organizations (Emerson, 1976). Unlike economic exchange in which terms are specified and can be bargained, social exchange involves unspecified obligations and expectations of non-negotiated future interactions (Blau, 1964). The social interactions and reciprocity norm that follows can be mutually reinforcing in either a positive or negative

manner (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In other words, if one is treated favorably by an exchange partner, he/she will be obliged to reciprocate in kind toward the partner. Alternatively, if one feels that he/she is mistreated by the exchange partner, he/she will engage in a negative manner toward the partner. SET has been well applied in domestic settings as an explanation for an individual's motivation for positive outcomes, including extra-role behavior (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Based on SET, the literature on perceived organizational support (POS) suggests that employees tend to develop a psychological attachment to the employer if they perceive that the employer values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This psychological attachment becomes a driver for employees to reciprocate the favor to the employer by returning through increased work effort. More recently, research on POS with a particular focus on employee development emerged as an extension to the studies of POS (e.g. Kraimer et al., 2011). Career development activities, including formal developmental programs and informal but positive developmental opportunities to improve employees' technical and managerial skills (Kraimer et al., 2011), send a positive signal to employees, indicating that they are valued and cared for by the employer (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999). Consequently, such developmental activities lead employees to reciprocate the favorable treatment by increasing positive behaviors (e.g. task performance) and reducing their negative behaviors (e.g. turnover) (Kraimer et al., 2011).

We note that there is a growing body of research evidence showing that the positive reciprocal obligation may not be returned directly to the exchange partner but instead be given to a third party especially if benefiting the third party ultimately benefits the exchange partner (Wo et al., 2019). For instance, managers who perceived to have received fair treatment by their superiors tend to treat their subordinates or customers more fairly (Masterson, 2001; Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006; Tepper and Taylor, 2003). Wo et al. (2019) called this indirect social influence as trickle effect phenomena. As we will explain in the following section, the current study takes this path and suggests that subsidiary's career development support is a favor that HCNs perceive to receive from their subsidiary, which will indirectly be reciprocated to the subsidiary by offering help to expatriate coworkers in the same subsidiary.

2.4. *Subsidiary's career development support and extra-role helping behavior*

For today's MNEs, it is important to care for the HCNs and especially their careers because MNEs have difficulty retaining qualified HCNs in foreign subsidiaries due to competition for talent acquisition (Farndale et al., 2010; Hitotsuyanagi-Hansel et al., 2016). To retain them, MNEs may try to mitigate HCNs' sense of deprivation relative to their expatriate counterpart deriving from multiple potential divides that exist between the HCNs and expatriates (e.g. cultural, linguistic, compensation and rewards, status within the organization). Indeed, previous research (e.g. Toh and DeNisi, 2005) noted that training programs should be provided to motivate the HCNs to interact with and support assigned expatriates' adjustment and task accomplishment. Another important benefit of providing training to the HCNs is to give them a sense of greater support and respect by their organizations as their organizations look after their welfare and career and professional development (Shen et al., 2018). When HCNs perceive that they receive career development support from their subsidiaries, their socioemotional needs and motivation for career development are likely to be fulfilled (London, 1993). Based on SET, this positive sense of fulfilment of socioemotional needs may then lead the HCNs to reciprocate the subsidiary's investment in them and care for them in a positive manner (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Extra-role behaviors are such a positive behavior that could be reciprocated to the subsidiary by offering expatriates information and knowledge that they need. This argument, in which HCNs' reciprocity toward the subsidiary is targeted at expatriate colleagues, is in line with a growing body of research examining indirect social influence or trickle effects (Wo et al., 2019).

However, extra-role behavior requires extra effort, time, and other psychological resources for the HCNs, which can in turn potentially cost the HCNs' performance on their in-role tasks (Bergeron, 2007). Subsequently, the HCNs may feel uncertain about whether their helping behaviors would benefit their own career success. Such HCNs' sense of uncertainty about helping assigned expatriates is likely to be mitigated when they perceive development support from the subsidiary, thereby making them feel safe in helping expatriates. The development support by the subsidiary may also enable the HCNs to gain competence and perform their job better and more efficiently, thus potentially freeing up time, and boosting the HCNs' confidence to help assigned expatriates. On the other hand, when the HCNs perceive little development support from the subsidiary, they may feel uncertain and insecure about their own career success and ability to help others. They may thus become more motivated to pursue and protect their own career goals and success rather than to use extra physical and psychological resources to help others, including assigned expatriates, beyond what is required as their in-role tasks. We thus hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. A host country national's perceived career development support by the subsidiary is positively related to his/her extra-role helping behavior toward expatriates in the subsidiary.

2.5. *Joint influence of MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support*

Taken together, the two factors – MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support are likely to reinforce each other in such a way that the relationship between an HCN's MNE identification and his/her extra-role behavior, helping the assigned expatriate, is strengthened when the HCN perceives more development support from the subsidiary. In addition to the viewing of expatriates as “one of us” within the context of the MNE when the HCNs identify with the MNE-wide superordinate group based on SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), the HCNs' perceived subsidiary's career development support further motivates them to help the expatriate. Based on SET (Blau, 1964), the HCNs may do so first as a means to reciprocate the subsidiary's investment in themselves, and second because the HCNs feel secure in doing so. We argue that the HCNs, even those who strongly identify with their MNE, are likely to seek information regarding whether their behavior to help expatriates would be instrumental to their own

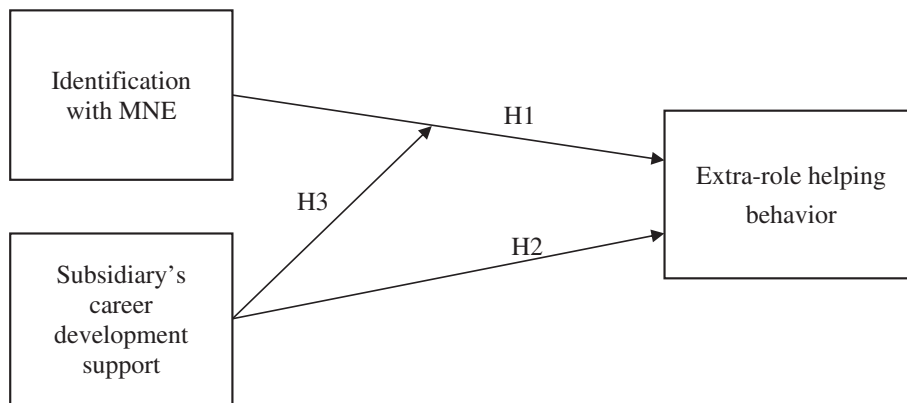


Fig. 1. Hypothesized moderation model.

career success in the subsidiary. This is because helping expatriates is voluntary and extra-role in nature and requires physical and psychological resources that could have been spent on their in-role task completion (Bergeron, 2007). Therefore, we argue that the positive relationship between MNE identification and helping behavior becomes stronger when they feel that the subsidiary cares about the HCNs' career success.

A domestic study on job insecurity indicates that employees facing uncertainty at their workplace engage less in extra-role behavior, but this relationship becomes weaker when the employees perceive they are receiving social support including at their workplace (Schreurs et al., 2012). When the HCNs feel supported by the subsidiary regarding their career development, they are likely to feel more secure and less uncertain as a member of the subsidiary and perceive less deprivation relative to the expatriates. The reduced uncertainty is critical for the HCNs to go the extra miles to help expatriates because the HCNs are less likely to be concerned about whether such helping behavior enhances or hurts their own career success in the subsidiary. Instead, when they feel supported regarding their own career development, they may broaden and build their physical and psychological resources to help the expatriate without serious concern about the potential drawbacks arising from the extra-role behavior. Identifying with the MNE and perceiving care from the subsidiary both motivate the HCNs to help the expatriates who are part of the HCNs' superordinate identity. However, when the HCNs do not feel supported by the subsidiary regarding their career development, they are likely to consistently feel uncertain about their own career development and perceive more deprivation relative to the expatriates. This may have a dampening effect on the HCNs' motivation to help the expatriates even if they identify strongly with the MNE, thus, resulting in a weaker relationship between MNE identification and their extra-role helping behavior. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3. A host country national's perceived career development support by the subsidiary moderates the relationship between the host country national's MNE identification and his/her extra-role helping behavior toward expatriates, such that MNE identification is more strongly and positively related to helping behavior when perceived career development support is high rather than low.

Fig. 1 presents the hypothesized model of this paper.

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

The data comprises responses from 572 individuals in Australia, China, India, and Singapore. According to statistics published by UNCTAD, these four countries are among the top five recipients of FDI inflows in the Asia Pacific region and among the top 20 in the world (UNCTAD, n.d.), indicating active presence of MNEs.¹ The data were collected through online surveys. The survey questions were first developed in English to be used in Australia, India, and Singapore. Then, they were translated into Chinese for the survey in China. We took a bilingual approach to translation (Harpaz, 2003) in which two English-Chinese bilinguals independently translated the survey. The two translations were then compared against each other until the two bilinguals reached an agreement.

Survey respondents were recruited through a UK-based market research company that has branches and accesses to potential survey respondents (i.e. online data panels) in Australia, China, India, and Singapore. The use of online data panels was suited to the purpose of our study as it allowed us to gather responses from the HCNs in multiple countries, industry sectors and job categories to

¹ Although Hong Kong is the second largest recipient of FDI inflows in Asia Pacific after China, we decided not to collect data from Hong Kong for two reasons. First, it shares some common features with Singapore, such as its geographic characteristic as an island state with high population density and its heavy reliance on the financial sector. We prioritized Singapore to Hong Kong because of its demographic diversity. Second, as Hong Kong actively promotes itself as a hub for inward FDIs to mainland China (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, 2017), it is expected that a substantial proportion of FDI inflows into Hong Kong is targeted toward doing business in mainland China.

incorporate perceptions of a broad range of individuals. A similar approach has been used in previous research that studied individuals' work-related perceptions (e.g. [Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006](#); [Richards and Schat, 2011](#)). A study also indicates that online panel data overall present similar psychometric properties to conventionally sourced data and are appropriate for testing research questions in the applied psychology ([Walter et al., 2016](#)). Of approximately 6 million panels worldwide, we randomly selected 6724 employed members in Australia, 4542 employed members in China, 3620 employed members in India, and 3865 employed members in Singapore. We invited these members to participate in the survey by sending emails with a link to the survey.

To extract responses from individuals working for MNEs who have regular contact with expatriates, we set two screening questions at the beginning: "Is your workplace a part of an international organizational group that has units (offices, branches or subsidiaries) in two or more countries?"; and "Do you interact with expatriates at work on a regular basis? An expatriate is a co-worker or manager who is sent to your unit from another unit based in another country of the same organizational group worldwide." Excluding the responses of those who did not pass the screening and of those who did not complete the survey even after they cleared the screening questions, we received 249 responses in Australia, 260 responses in China, 272 responses in India, and 287 responses in Singapore.

To limit responses only to individuals who worked at host country offices, we further screened the responses by the functional role of the local unit and excluded responses of those who worked at the global headquarters of MNEs. To limit the responses to those from the HCNs, we also checked respondents' citizenship status and excluded responses of individuals who did not hold the citizenship of each survey location. The remaining sample comprised 133 HCNs from Australia, 182 from China, 121 from India, and 154 from Singapore ($N = 590$).

Of these HCNs, 52.4% were male, and 94.4% were employed full-time. The size of the subsidiary varied between "less than five" to "5000 or more" employees. Approximately 18% of responses were from subsidiaries with "100 to 249" employees and another 18% were from subsidiaries with "1000 to 4999" employees. Of the 29 industry sectors of the subsidiary, the largest number of responses (approximately 10% or more for each) were from the banking/financial/insurance, computing/IT/data processing, and manufacturing (electronics and industrial combined). These responses accounted for approximately 37.5% of the total responses. Of the nine categories of subsidiary role, regional headquarters accounted for more than 36% of the responses in our sample, followed by production (15.3%), sales/marketing (13.1%) and finance (9.7%). We asked respondents to answer each question based on his/her experience with a certain expatriate. The citizenship status of the expatriate extended to 61 countries, with the USA comprising 22.4% of the sample, followed by the UK (11.7%), Australia (11.0%), Japan (5.9%), France (5.3%), Germany (5.1%), and India (4.9%).

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent variable

To measure the HCNs' extra-role helping behavior, we used a five-item measure where we adapted five items of [Williams and Anderson's \(1991\)](#) organizational citizenship behavior scales and applied it to the foreign subsidiary context. We used a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The items include "When s/he has questions, I take extra time to explain regulations or procedures specific to [country name] to the expatriate in detail" and "I introduced the expatriate to my friends and acquaintances who may be of help to him/her" (see [Appendix A](#) for all items).

3.2.2. MNE identification

To measure MNE identification, we used a five-item measure based on [Mael and Ashforth's \(1992\)](#) organizational identification scale. We used a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items include "When someone criticizes the organizational group worldwide, it feels like a personal insult" and "I am interested in what people think about the organizational group worldwide" (see [Appendix A](#) for all items).

3.2.3. Subsidiary's career development support

To measure the subsidiary's career development support, we adopted three items of [Kraimer et al.'s \(2011\)](#) scale for organizational support for development. The three items were "The [country name] unit has programs and policies that help employees to advance in their functional specialization," "The [country name] unit provides programs and policies for employees to develop their managerial skills" and "The [country name] unit has opportunities that help employees to reach higher managerial levels." We used a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.2.4. Control variables

As they may affect respondents' perceptions about their MNE identification, we controlled for several demographic variables including age, sex, the number of years employed in the subsidiary, and international assignment experience. Sex and international assignment experience were measured as categorical variables: sex (male = 0, female = 1) and international assignment experience (no = 0, yes = 1). The age was measured using an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (under 25) to 9 (60 and +) with five-year intervals in between. We also controlled for workplace-related variables, subsidiary size and organizational rank of the expatriate, as these may affect the number of expatriates and their prominence in the unit. The subsidiary size was measured using an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (fewer than 5 employees) to 10 (5000 or more employees). The organizational rank of the expatriate was measured by two dummy variables for three categories (subordinate, peer, and superior; the omitted category was peer). To control for any factors associated with the survey locations, we also included three dummy variables for four countries (Australia, China, India, and Singapore; the omitted category was Singapore).

3.2.5. Testing discriminant validity

As the data were collected using a self-report survey that is prone to common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), we took recommended ex-ante and ex-post measures to eliminate CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2012). First, we designed our survey in which questions leading to independent and dependent variables were separated and were asked in different sections so that respondents could not relate variables under study. Second, we assured the participants that their responses would be anonymous and confidential to reduce their apprehension and social desirability bias. Third, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as an ex-post measure to check for construct and discriminant validity of three variables with multiple items.

We fitted the hypothesized three-factor model (MNE identification, subsidiary's career development support, and extra-role helping behavior) to the data. The CFA results indicated that the hypothesized model of three correlated factors fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 356.61$, $df = 62$; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.95; Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.94; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.10; standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = 0.04). We also compared this model to four alternative models. In Model 1, we created a single-factor model that combined all the three factors together. In Models 2 to 4, we created two-factor models that combined MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support (Model 2), subsidiary's career development support and extra-role helping behavior (Model 3), and MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior (Model 4). As judged by a chi-square difference test, the hypothesized three-factor model fit significantly better than four alternative models; Model 1: $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1889.21$ ($p < .001$); Model 2: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 781.36$ ($p < .001$); Model 3: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1046.76$ ($p < .001$); and Model 4: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1147.44$ ($p < .001$). Thus, these three factors were included in the subsequent analyses to test the hypotheses. All the factor loadings were above 0.75 and significant ($p < .001$). Overall, these results provide evidence for discriminant validity for three distinct theoretical constructs although they do not preclude the possibility of CMV. However, even if CMV does exist, its effect on the moderation results is less likely a matter of concern as it only inflates the main effect (Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Spector, 2006).

We also tested measurement invariance models across four different country samples (Vandenberg and Lance, 2000). The configural invariance model – a model to check whether the factor structure and pattern of factor loadings are the same across four countries – fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 705.09$, $df = 248$; CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.90; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.12). When we constrained the factor loadings invariant across the four countries, the model fit was significantly worse ($\chi^2 = 815.27$, $df = 287$; CFI = 0.90; TLI = 0.90; SRMR = 0.16; RMSEA = 0.12); $\Delta\chi^2(39) = 110.18$ ($p < .001$). Hence, we did not find variance across responses gained from the four different countries.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the study variables. We retained a total of 572 responses out of 590 responses for further analyses due to list-wise deletion of missing data.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of respondent data.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age ^a	4.08	1.87	–													
2. Sex ^b	0.47	0.50	–0.08	–												
3. Years employed	7.74	6.27	0.46	–0.01	–											
4. Unit size ^c	7.16	2.13	0.00	–0.09	0.12	–										
5. Australia ^d	0.23	0.42	0.27	0.04	0.14	0.20	–									
6. China ^e	0.30	0.46	–0.18	–0.00	–0.10	–0.10	–0.36	–								
7. India ^f	0.21	0.41	–0.16	–0.06	–0.05	0.12	–0.28	–0.34	–							
8. International assignment experience ^g	0.42	0.49	–0.02	–0.06	–0.05	0.06	–0.04	0.20	–0.03	–						
9. Job level (superior) ^h	0.43	0.50	0.05	0.07	–0.05	–0.04	–0.01	–0.01	–0.08	–0.17	–					
10. Job level (subordinate) ⁱ	0.06	0.23	0.03	–0.01	0.06	–0.00	0.03	0.07	0.00	0.05	–0.22	–				
11. Relationship tenure ^j	3.06	1.23	0.19	–0.02	0.26	0.01	–0.12	0.01	–0.06	0.05	0.17	–0.05	–			
12. MNE identification	5.31	1.07	–0.13	0.01	–0.09	0.03	–0.30	0.21	0.23	0.15	–0.04	–0.05	0.05	0.92		
13. Subsidiary's career development support	5.44	1.09	–0.04	–0.00	0.04	0.17	–0.09	0.12	0.20	0.13	–0.09	–0.00	0.03	0.62	0.93	
14. Extra-role helping behavior	4.58	1.24	–0.12	–0.10	–0.00	0.05	–0.28	0.28	0.22	0.20	–0.22	0.04	0.02	0.54	0.48	0.92

Note. $N = 572$; MNE = multinational enterprise; values on the diagonal are Cronbach's alpha coefficients; the omitted category of the country dummy variable is Singapore; ^a 1 = under 25 years, 2 = 25–29 years, 3 = 30–34 years, 4 = 35–39 years, 5 = 40–44 years, 6 = 45–49 years, 7 = 50–54 years, 8 = 55–59 years, 9 = 60+ years; ^b 0 = male, 1 = female; ^c 1 = fewer than 5 employees, 2 = 5–9 employees, 3 = 10–19 employees, 4 = 20–49 employees, 5 = 50–99 employees, 6 = 100–249 employees, 7 = 250–499 employees, 8 = 500–999 employees, 9 = 1000–4999 employees, 10 = 5000 or more; ^d 0 = India, China, and Singapore, 1 = Australia; ^e 0 = India, Australia, and Singapore, 1 = China; ^f 0 = Australia, China, and Singapore, 1 = India; ^g 0 = no, 1 = yes; ^h 0 = expatriate is peer or subordinate, 1 = expatriate is superior; ⁱ 0 = expatriate is peer or superior, 1 = expatriate is subordinate; ^j Relationship tenure between HCNs and expatriates, 1 = less than 3 months; 2 = 3 months – less than 6 months; 3 = 6 months – less than 1 year; 4 = 1 year – less than 3 years; 5 = 3 years or more; correlations are significant at $p < .05$ if $|r| > 0.08$.

Table 2
Regression results predicting extra-role helping behavior.

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age group ^a	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02
Sex ^b	-0.06	-0.08	-0.08*
Years employed	0.04	0.05	0.05
Unit size ^c	0.04	-0.01	-0.02
Australia ^d	-0.09	-0.06	-0.06
China ^e	0.33***	0.21***	0.19***
India ^f	0.29***	0.15***	0.13**
International assignment experience ^g	0.11**	0.06	0.05
Job level (superior) ^h	-0.17***	-0.15***	-0.16***
Job level (subordinate) ⁱ	-0.02	0.01	0.00
Length of relationship tenure between the HCN and the expatriate ^j	0.03	0.01	0.01
MNE identification		0.31***	-0.32
Subsidiary's career development support		0.20***	-0.23
MNE identification × Development support			0.10**
R ² for step	0.25***	0.17***	0.01**
R ²	0.25***	0.42***	0.43***

^a1 = under 25 years, 2 = 25–29 years, 3 = 30–34 years, 4 = 35–39 years, 5 = 40–44 years, 6 = 45–49 years, 7 = 50–54 years, 8 = 55–59 years, 9 = 60+ years; ^b0 = male, 1 = female; ^c1 = fewer than 5 employees, 2 = 5–9 employees, 3 = 10–19 employees, 4 = 20–49 employees, 5 = 50–99 employees, 6 = 100–249 employees, 7 = 250–499 employees, 8 = 500–999 employees, 9 = 1000–4999 employees, 10 = 5000 employees or more; ^d0 = India, China, and Singapore, 1 = Australia; ^e0 = India, Australia, and Singapore, 1 = China; ^f0 = Australia, China, and Singapore, 1 = India; ^g0 = no, 1 = yes; ^h0 = expatriate is peer or superior, 1 = expatriate is subordinate; ⁱ0 = expatriate is peer or superior, 1 = expatriate is subordinate; ^j1 = less than 3 months; 2 = 3 months – less than 6 months; 3 = 6 months – less than 1 year; 4 = 1 year – less than 3 years; 5 = 3 years or more; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two tailed).

4.1. Hypothesis testing results

Hypotheses were tested using a hierarchical regression analysis. In Step 1, we entered control variables only. In Step 2, we added the two independent variables (MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support). In Step 3, we entered the interaction term between the two independent variables.

As shown in Table 2, HCNs' MNE identification ($\beta = 0.31, p < .001$) and subsidiary's career development support ($\beta = 0.20, p < .001$), were positively related to the HCNs' extra-role helping behavior toward expatriates; Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Hypothesis 3 predicted that subsidiary's career development support moderates the relationship between MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior. As shown in Table 2, the interaction term was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.10, p < .01$). The relationship between the HCNs' MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior was more strongly and positively associated when subsidiary's career development support was high (coefficient = 0.59; 95% CI = [0.48, 0.71]) than low (coefficient = 0.35; 95% CI = [0.19, 0.50]). Hence, the results indicated that Hypothesis 3 was also supported. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of this interaction.

4.2. Post hoc analyses

Although the results supported all three hypotheses, we conducted additional analyses to examine the differential effects of MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support on extra-role helping behavior by country. This is because we found statistical significance in bivariate correlations of country dummy variables on extra-role helping behavior (see Table 1). Table 3 presents the results and shows three patterns that emerged from the analyses. The first pattern is basically what we expected – both MNE identification and development support were significantly and positively related to extra-role helping behavior. The Australian sample followed this pattern. With the Chinese and Indian samples, the second pattern was observed; only MNE identification was significantly and positively related to extra-role helping behavior. With the Singaporean sample, we discovered the third pattern where only development support predicted extra-role helping behavior.

The differential effects of MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support may be deriving from the level of prominence of MNEs as employers in each economy. We presume that MNEs most likely stand out as employers in China and India where a large proportion of employers are local, such as state-owned companies in China and family-owned conglomerates in India. Scarcity of foreign employers relative to local ones can be inferred from smaller ratios of inward FDI stocks per gross domestic product (GDP) in China and India compared to Australia and Singapore. The inward FDI stock is defined as “the value of foreign investors' equity in and net loans to enterprises resident in the reporting economy” (OECD, 2018). By calculating the ratio of inward FDI stock to national GDP, one can compare the penetration of MNEs' economic activities in a host country.

In 2012 when the data collection for the current study was conducted, China's inward FDI stocks per GDP was 23% and India's was 12%, whereas the world average was 31% (OECD, 2018). Australia's inward FDI stocks per GDP exceeded the world average and was 39% (OECD, 2018). Singapore's exceeded 220% (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2018a, 2018b), showing a similar trend to other small economies such as Belgium (98%), Ireland (170%) and Luxemburg (292%) (OECD, 2018). All these ratios suggested that MNEs'

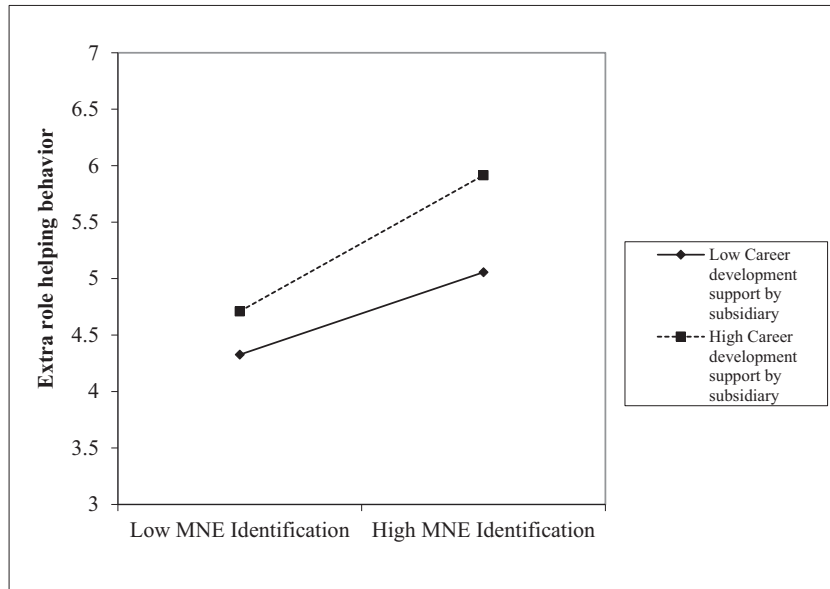


Fig. 2. Subsidiary's career development support as a moderator of the relationship between MNE identification and extra-role helping behavior.

Table 3
Regression results predicting extra-role helping behavior by country.

Variables	Australia	China	India	Singapore
Age group ^a	0.02	0.02	-0.09	-0.01
Sex ^b	-0.16*	0.02	-0.07	-0.17*
Years employed	0.08	0.02	0.14	-0.01
Unit size ^c	0.09	-0.10	0.03	-0.12
International assignment experience ^g	0.02	0.09	0.12	0.10
Job level (superior) ^h	-0.31***	-0.04	-0.14	-0.21*
Job level (subordinate) ⁱ	-0.02	-0.03	0.12	0.01
Length of relationship tenure between the HCN and the expatriate ^j	-0.06	0.01	-0.00	0.03
MNE identification	0.29***	0.48***	0.46***	0.10
Subsidiary's career development support	0.41***	0.14	0.12	0.28**
MNE identification * Development support	0.17	0.16*	0.05	0.13
R ²	0.43***	0.34***	0.36***	0.24**

^a1 = under 25 years, 2 = 25–29 years, 3 = 30–34 years, 4 = 35–39 years, 5 = 40–44 years, 6 = 45–49 years, 7 = 50–54 years, 8 = 55–59 years, 9 = 60+ years; ^b0 = male, 1 = female; ^c1 = fewer than 5 employees, 2 = 5–9 employees, 3 = 10–19 employees, 4 = 20–49 employees, 5 = 50–99 employees, 6 = 100–249 employees, 7 = 250–499 employees, 8 = 500–999 employees, 9 = 1000–4999 employees, 10 = 5000 employees or more; ^d0 = India, China, and Singapore, 1 = Australia; ^e0 = India, Australia, and Singapore, 1 = China; ^f0 = Australia, China, and Singapore, 1 = India; ^g0 = no, 1 = yes; ^h0 = expatriate is peer or superior, 1 = expatriate is subordinate; ⁱ0 = expatriate is peer or superior, 1 = expatriate is subordinate; ^j1 = less than 3 months; 2 = 3 months – less than 6 months; 3 = 6 months – less than 1 year; 4 = 1 year – less than 3 years; 5 = 3 years or more; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two tailed).

economic activities were still limited in China and India relative to the local counterparts, while they were very prominent in Australia and particularly Singapore. Consequently, getting jobs from foreign MNEs for the HCNs in China and India was limited to a small proportion of qualified workforce, whereas that was not the case in Australia and in Singapore where foreign employers were not rare.

In environments such as in China and India where it is less common to be working in foreign MNEs, social identification might be a more important source of motivation for the HCNs to engage in extra-role behaviors. Identifying oneself with a global company that provides someone with a sense of pride in their work might be more important than social exchange-based, reciprocal obligations. Meanwhile, in countries such as Singapore where many MNEs have been operating in the country for decades, the sense of belongingness to a global company is no longer a source of motivation for the HCNs to engage in extra-role behavior. Besides, Singaporean society is less collectivistic than the societies of China and India (House et al., 2004) and hence, personal career development may be more highly sought after than being a part of an organization. Perhaps this kind of country background is conducive to social exchange-based motivation for extra-role behavior where Singaporeans feel more obliged to offer help if they perceive that their subsidiary offers strong career support.

5. Discussion

As expatriates carry important missions to internationally coordinate inter-unit operations, their successful assignment completion is vital for MNEs (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016; Kostova et al., 2016). The interpersonal relationship between expatriates and HCNs is valuable, as HCNs can offer local knowledge and social support that can be conducive to expatriates' local adjustment and performance (Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016; Van Bakel et al., 2017). Overall, we respond to the call to investigate HCNs' perceptions on their organization as factors in driving the HCNs to help assigned expatriates (Shen et al., 2018). In doing so, we focused on two constructs that indicate HCNs' relationship with the organization: MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support. We investigated whether and when HCNs' perceptions on these constructs may take effect on their helping behavior targeting expatriates. The results of this study have important implications for research on expatriate-HCN relations and especially on HCNs' helping behavior toward expatriates.

5.1. Implications for theory and research

First, our focus on the HCNs' identification with the MNE as a superordinate social category is conceptually distinct from previous SIT-based studies of the expatriate-HCN relationship. Previous survey-based studies examined the HCNs' categorization of expatriates either as ingroup or outgroup based on HCNs' or expatriates' personal traits and HCNs' relationship with the expatriates (e.g. Pichler et al., 2012; Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016; Varma et al., 2011), whereas the current study focused on the effect of HCNs' perceived relationship with the organizations. We extended the SIT-based research by conceptually proposing and empirically testing that the HCNs' superordinate identity at the MNE-level is related to the HCNs' willingness to help expatriates possibly because expatriates are seen as "one of us" instead of "one of them" within the MNE (Gaertner et al., 1993; Hogg and Terry, 2000). We also suggested that it is a factor that enables the HCNs to reduce, if not completely overcome, multiple divides that are perceived between them and the expatriates (i.e. cultural differences, language barriers, gaps in compensation and rewards, and status differences within the organization). Organizational research has established that employees who identify with the organization tend to engage in more citizenship behaviors toward fellow co-workers and to the organization (Van Dick et al., 2006). However, little has been understood about whether a sense of belongingness toward the organization could then induce the HCNs to help potential outgroup members (see, Peltokorpi, 2020, as an exception). Therefore, our study offers a valuable contribution in this regard.

Second, we showed the importance of the subsidiary's career development support for the HCNs. Subsidiaries are the most proximate entity for the HCNs. Due to the aforementioned divides between the HCNs and expatriates, the HCNs tend to develop a sense of deprivation relative to the expatriates (Chen et al., 2002; Toh and DeNisi, 2003). However, despite its importance, means to overcome such a sense of deprivation has not been thoroughly examined (Shen et al., 2018). Our study addressed the importance of subsidiary's development support offered for the HCNs' careers to mitigate the expatriate-HCN divides. Unfortunately, little research in the literature on foreign subsidiaries has investigated employee management practices targeting HCNs (Peltokorpi, 2015). Our finding offers insights to this area of research with regard to a subsidiary's support for employee development. Notably, our theorization was firmly based on SET and was in line with the burgeoning literature on indirect social influence that examines trickle effects (Wo et al., 2019). When HCNs perceive the benefit (career support) from the subsidiary, their reciprocation is likely to trickle out to helping expatriates. Our results showed that the trickle effect view of social exchange creates an avenue to explore how HCNs' perceptions on their organizations might influence their relationship with their expatriate coworkers.

Third, we also showed that how the subsidiary's development support for the HCNs is perceived is not only a predictor, but also an important boundary condition for the HCNs who identified with their MNE to engage in extra-role helping behaviors. We emphasized that a high-quality social exchange relationship with the subsidiary was important not only because it increased the HCNs' helping behavior, but also because it strengthened the HCNs' tendency to manifest their identity with the MNE into helping behaviors to support the MNE's success. We demonstrated that social identity and social exchange relationships were likely to interact across multiple levels of organizations (e.g. MNEs and subsidiaries). We highlighted that it was important to consider the multifaceted aspect of the HCNs' attitudes toward multiple levels of organizations in explaining their behavioral outcomes.

Fourth, it is worth emphasizing that we investigated the HCNs' *extra-role* helping behavior, a kind of helping behavior that is above and beyond one's formal job role (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998). This kind of behavior requires extra physical and psychological resources from the HCNs (Bergeron, 2007) and, hence, is not always offered by the HCNs despite the fact that it is valuable for the expatriates' adjustment in the host country (Kang and Shen, 2018). To help expatriates to the extent that is above and beyond one's formal job role, an HCN needs to be motivated and feel safe to do so. We theorized that the HCNs' MNE-wide identification led to such motivation and that perceived career development support offered such a sense of safety. Hence, our focus on extra-role behavior offered value to the research on the HCNs' contribution to the MNE's value creation activities, addressing the calls for research on the HCNs' role on expatriates' adjustment (Moeller and Harvey, 2018; Takeuchi, 2010).

Lastly, we conducted post hoc analyses to offer preliminary explanations on country differences and indicated that a cultural values-based explanation may not be the only lens for examining national differences in an individuals' perceptions of their foreign employers. Although we cannot offer a decisive explanation, the four countries that we studied varied significantly in terms of how prominent MNEs' economic activities were and, in particular, how the HCNs may have perceived MNEs as employers. According to our data, the China and India sub-samples showed a similar pattern in which only MNE identification was significantly and positively related to extra-role helping behavior; whereas Singapore, a country often grouped together with China as one of the Confucian East Asian societies (House et al., 2004), presented a different pattern in which only the subsidiary's development support predicted extra-role helping behavior. The Australian sub-sample followed our prediction in which both MNE identification and development support

were significantly and positively related to extra-role helping behavior. These preliminary findings are in line with a call to differentiate country effects from cultural effects (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017) and critique toward overreliance on studying differences between countries as cultural differences (Kirkman et al., 2017). While its importance should be recognized, cultural dimensions may not be the only way to address country differences in international human resource management.

5.2. Implications for practice

This study presented significant implications for practice. Overall, our findings indicated that MNE headquarters should value and promote the HCNs' sense of belongingness to the global network of the organization as a factor that motivates them to become more willing to help other members from other units of the same MNE. Creating an inclusive identity at the MNE level seems key to achieving this goal. There is evidence of leading MNEs based in the Western world committing to global talent management (Farndale et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2016). This kind of global program is an opportunity for MNEs to nurture such an inclusive identity for those who are selected in the talent pool as potential future leaders at the global level. Yet, development of an inclusive and common culture that enhances the HCNs' sense of belongingness to the MNE is also required for those who may not be in the talent pool. Our findings suggested that this could be achieved through offering career support at their subsidiary units. As we discussed, the HCNs who perceive that their subsidiaries offer more developmental support were more willing to go the extra miles to help expatriates when their identification with the MNE was high.

It should also be noted that how the HCNs perceive organizational practices to support their careers is a key factor leading them to helping expatriates. Such practices include formal developmental programs and informal but positive developmental opportunities to improve an employees' technical and managerial skills. Organizations should not just offer their career support programs and practices but also actively demonstrate the goal and benefit of such programs and practices so that the HCNs will recognize them as a positive sign signaling that they are valued and cared for by the organization. Without their positive perceptions, those development programs may not be appreciated by the HCNs and hence, their effects may be limited. Providing this type of support could also potentially avoid any sense of resentment that the HCNs may develop toward the MNE or expatriates. Providing career support to the HCNs could help in restoring a sense of fairness and esteem, as well as commitment to the MNE, among the HCNs.

Another factor to note is the differences in the host countries' labor market conditions. The extent of importance of the HCNs' sense of belongingness to their MNEs and their perceptions of career support at a local unit may vary in each host country. This is not to say that MNEs should not make an effort in creating an inclusive corporate culture worldwide or not to offer career support at each and every local unit. However, the level of importance of such efforts may differ according to the labor market condition of a host country. As we discussed earlier, obtaining jobs in foreign MNEs may be more novel in certain countries than others (i.e. China and India in the case of this study). In such countries, gaining a sense of pride for being a part of such global companies may be a more important source of motivation for the HCNs to engage in helping behaviors. In countries where an MNE identity is not at all special and is just a simple fact of work life, the HCNs may place less importance in being a part of the global corporate network.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

We acknowledge that our study is not without its limitations. First, although we showed that MNE identification is significantly related to HCNs' helping behavior, our study did not indicate how MNE-level superordinate identification might be fostered among the HCNs. Individual hold multiple identities and a certain identity becomes more salient depending on the context of the social relationship (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). These contexts include HCNs' personality traits (Wang and Fang, 2014), HCNs' and/or expatriates' proficiency in a common language (Tenzer et al., 2017; Varma et al., 2011; Zhang and Lauring, 2018), and HCNs' intercultural competences (Elo et al., 2015). Future research might consider these factors as antecedents of HCNs' superordinate identification. Furthermore, an extension of social identity theory – the group engagement model – suggests that individuals tend to identify with the organization more when they believe that others view their organization as prestigious and that the individual is respected by others within the group (Tyler and Blader, 2002). This prediction remains to be explored in the MNE context and would an interesting avenue for future research.

Second, the survey design was essentially cross-sectional, and the data were collected from a single source (i.e. HCNs). Therefore, our data offered limited support for causal inferences. Future studies may be designed to test the causal relations by, for instance, experiments or longitudinal designs with the HCNs. Future studies would also benefit from collecting multi-source data and/or time-lagged data. For instance, if researchers were able to gain access to organizations to conduct a study, data on extra-role helping behavior could be obtained from expatriates and other data from the HCNs. More refined research approaches like these would necessitate finely grained theorizing to test for individual differences among HCNs' (Caprar, 2011) willingness to help expatriates and those among expatriates' (Langinier and Froehlicher, 2018) to receive support from HCNs. Future research might embed differential motivations of HCNs and expatriates alike to explore expatriate-HCN relationship. Future longitudinal research can extend our understanding by examining the role of time in the expatriate-HCN relationships. How HCNs' helping behaviors and their underlying motivation develop over time and how long the HCNs expect their relationship with the expatriates will be are interesting questions to be explored. As to our use of the cross-sectional data, as noted earlier, CMV might also be an issue. Nevertheless, we designed the survey to alleviate the potential bias for CMV and particularly social desirability bias. We also conducted post-hoc tests to check for CMV, which did not indicate serious bias. In addition, our tests for moderation may not have been affected much by the research

design and the results should still hold (Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Spector, 2006).

Third, we offered just one possible explanation for the differential effects of MNE identification and subsidiary's career development support on extra-role helping behavior in four different countries. One might argue that there are potentially other reasons to explain the differences. Cultural differences might be one factor. To test such hypotheses, data from more countries as in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) is needed and could be a future agenda to further extend the generalizability of the current study. In this vein, it is also noted that culture might be associated with how HCNs define "we" or "us." As noted by the multiple levels of social identity (e.g., Brewer and Gardner, 1996), even though HCNs strongly identify with their MNE, HCNs in different cultures may have different levels of psychological and relational bonds with expatriates and yet still categorize them as "we." This is an interesting avenue for future research to examine the expatriate-HCN relationship at different levels of social identity (e.g. relational vs. collective identity) in more nuanced and deeper ways.

Lastly, there may currently be an overly heavy emphasis in the literature on expatriate-HCN relationship suggesting that the HCNs' support to the expatriates is *always* necessary. There are studies suggesting that this assumption does not always hold due to different contextual factors (Basco, 2017; Savinetti, 2018; Zhang and Luring, 2018). Depending on the assignment location, expatriates may not always require support from HCNs and rather seek support from other expatriates from within or beyond the corporate boundary (Langinier and Froehlicher, 2018). Diversity among HCNs (Caprar, 2011) and their intentions to support expatriates may also be context specific; a study concludes that Chinese HCNs help expatriates not out of voluntary effort, but their view of hierarchy superimposes such behaviors on them (Varma et al., 2011).

The success of MNEs relies on the cooperation of expatriates and the HCNs. Although it is generally regarded that the HCNs' informal support is vital for expatriates' local adjustment and assignment success, what predicts such informal helping that goes beyond the HCNs daily work obligations has not been fully explored. This study speaks to the roles the MNE and the subsidiary can play in encouraging helping that serves both the interests of the expatriate and the MNE as well. We hope that this study provokes more research in this area.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Variable items used in the study

Item number	Item description
Extra-role helping behavior 1	When s/he has questions, I take extra time to explain regulations or procedures specific to [country] to the expatriate in detail.
Extra-role helping behavior 2	When s/he has questions, I take extra time to explain culture or customs specific to [country] to the expatriate in detail.
Extra-role helping behavior 3	To obtain what s/he need, I take the expatriate to places where only locals would know.
Extra-role helping behavior 4	I introduce the expatriate to my friends and acquaintances who may be of help to him/her.
Extra-role helping behavior 5	Even when assistance is not directly requested, I take on extra responsibilities in order to help the expatriate with problems that are specific to doing business in [country].
MNE identification 1	When someone criticizes the organizational group worldwide, it feels like a personal insult.
MNE identification 2	I am very interested in what people think about the organizational group worldwide.
MNE identification 3	When I talk about the organizational group worldwide, I usually say "we" rather than "they".
MNE identification 4	Successes of the organizational group worldwide are my success.
MNE identification 5	When someone makes positive remarks about the organizational group worldwide, it feels like a personal compliment.
Subsidiary's career development support 1	The [country] unit has programs and policies that help employees to advance in their functional specialization.
Subsidiary's career development support 2	The [country] unit provides programs and policies for employees to develop their managerial skills.
Subsidiary's career development support 3	The [country] unit has opportunities that help employees to reach higher managerial levels.

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